The Disposition of Nature

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Environmental Crisis and World Literature

Jennifer Wenzel

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This European opulence is literally scandalous, as it has been founded on slavery, it has been nourished with the blood of slaves and it comes directly from the soil and subsoil of that underdeveloped world. . . . Perhaps it is necessary to begin everything all over again . . . to re-examine the soil and mineral resources, the rivers, and—why not?—the sun's productivity.

—Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

INTRODUCTION

Reading for the Planet

Reading for the planet?

How nonsensical is it to think that reading might help "save the earth"? Or that literature can address the many environmental challenges confronting the world today?

Narratives of limitless growth, premised upon access to cheap energy and inexhaustible resources, underwrite the predicaments of the present. As an alternative to such obsolete futures, new modes of imagining might begin to chart a path beyond impasse and inertia. This book considers the role that literature and other kinds of cultural imagining play in shaping our understanding of the world and the planet, with a view toward forging new modes of relation among humans and with nonhuman nature. My guiding assumption in *The Disposition of Nature* is that things like climate change, fossil-fuel dependence, and resource depletion are not merely technological, economic, or political problems but also narrative problems and problems of the imagination. Beyond "literature" as conventionally defined, I attend to other media like film and photography and to the broader workings of the imagination, for better and for worse, in and on the world. This book traces notions of *world-imagining*, by which I mean imagining

a world and one's place in it, at scales ranging from the cells of our bodies to the earth as a whole.

I write as both a citizen of the United States and a literary critic trained in postcolonial studies. While the forms of intelligence and habits of mind that shape this book are informed by that scholarly training, my fundamental affiliation is as a human animal concerned about my planetary home and the fates and futures of my fellow creatures. With "reading for the planet," I have several things in mind. One is to consider whether and how the literary can be part of an environmentalist praxis: reading for the sake of the earth. Another is to understand "the planet" (or world or globe) as an interpretive rubric that raises questions of totality and scale. This means reading for images of the world entire: as a conceptual, social, or planetary whole. But it also means reading for traffic lines of power and modes of inequality that conjoin and divide those wholes. It means charting a moral economy of distance that can obscure relationships between sites and subjects thousands of miles apart. Reading for the planet is not disembodied "global," cosmopolitan, or universalist reading from nowhere, as in the bird's-eye view or "God trick" (Haraway 1988, 582), but reading from near to there: between specific sites, across multiple divides, at more than one scale. This multiscalar reading practice shuttles between the microscopically specific and the world-historical, in four dimensions, across space and time—reading (and rereading) as a dynamic process of *rescaling*.

I will say more about reading, but I want to observe now how suddenly the humanities have embraced thinking at the totalizing scale of the world, globe, or planet. The arguments and speculations in this book are located at the intersections of several academic disciplines. With regard to literary studies, this book thinks together two recent developments: first, the rise of environmental humanities, Anthropocene anxiety, and the material turn that thinks in new ways about matter, things, and objects, and about nature and the human; and second, the rivalry between postcolonial studies and world literature as frameworks for literary analysis. In the twenty-first century, a revived conversation about world literature seeks to reframe literary comparison in terms of the globe rather than the nation-state, at the same time that scholars are beginning to understand modernity and European imperialism as a radical (and radically uneven) remaking of nature and the planet itself. At a moment when literary studies dares to envision a "world literature" capacious enough to be worthy of the name, environmental studies sees a planet in crisis. Yet, this new conversation about world literature has said relatively little about the earth or the planet.[1] How, then, can we understand contemporary concerns about planetary

environmental crisis in terms of postcolonial studies' interest in histories of political, economic, social, and epistemological inequality, as well as world literature's interest in readers without borders? How can we think among these terms—globe, world, earth, and planet—to calibrate the *globe* in globalization with the *world* in world literature or the earth/planet at risk in environmental crisis?

These expansive questions indicate that the disciplinary questions in literary studies outlined earlier are *only one instance* of the dynamic of world-imagining that is the central concern of this book. Such imagining is at work everywhere, all the time: beyond narrow disciplinary debates, yet informed by modes of thought and cultural logics that the tools of literary analysis can elucidate. To answer these questions also demands engagement with other disciplines—including history, anthropology, geography, political ecology, science and technology studies, and law—for their insights about colonialism and imperialism, globalization, and struggles among humans over nonhuman nature. In turn, this book demonstrates how a supple understanding of cultural imagining and narrative logics—a facility with the literary—has import beyond the discipline of literary studies, to foster more robust accounts of the past, present, and future of global inequality, in order to energize movements for justice and livable futures. This multivalent traffic between matter and ideas is the crux of *the disposition of nature*, by which I mean both what kind of thing nature is or is understood to be, and how humans arrange, control, and distribute nonhuman nature, often as "natural resources." This book traces relationships between these two senses of disposition: assumptions about what nature is are mutually constituted with contests over how it is used.

Anthropologist Anna Tsing observes that, as with any scale, the global is not simply out there, preformed and available to thought, but must be constructed in particular situations (2005, 57–58). We are living through one such situation now. The premise of Ursula Heise's *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (2008) was that environmental thought since the mid-twentieth century had been so invested in the local and place-based as to obstruct analysis at the global scale Heise dubbed "eco-cosmopolitanism." Over the past decade, *environmental* and *planetary* have come to function as near synonyms; it is easy to forget that ecology was not long ago taken to task for having no account of the global. This shift is due partly to looming challenges posed by global warming: both the rapid dissemination of Anthropocene talk across the disciplines, in the wake of interventions like Dipesh Chakrabarty's 2009 essay "The Climate of History," as well as the increasing frequency of

extreme droughts, storms, and floods that used to be called once-in-a-century events.[2] (By "Anthropocene talk," I mean both the proposed new epoch in geological history, characterized by the effects of human actions on the Earth system, and reflections on its implications for various disciplines.) As elaborated later, climate change and the Anthropocene could be understood to demand the ultimate rescaling of attention and concern: beyond the local or national, beyond the human or anthropocentric, and beyond modernity itself.

The Disposition of Nature is not about the Anthropocene per se but has been written under its ever-expanding shadow. One aim of this book is to situate this paradigm shift (and epochal transition) in terms of genealogies of environmental concern and instances of environmental injustice that precede or exceed this emergent framework. Not every environmental crisis is most intelligible or tractable through the Anthropocene lens, and *Anthropocene* is not a synonym for global warming. Instead, the Anthropocene involves multiple, human-induced changes to the Earth system resulting from rearrangements of molecules and life forms across the planet, associated with the burning of wood and fossil fuels, industrial chemistry, planned and accidental discharges of nuclear material, and global trade and migration.[3]

In one sense, this book is about what contemporary neoliberal globalization means for literary and environmental studies and for imagining a more just future for all in the face of deepening inequalities, old and new. In a broader sense, this book is about what *globalization* means, period. How do we understand the continuities and disjunctures between "globalization" as an account of the present, on the one hand, and the earth-spanning, globe-mapping, world-creating, lifeworld-destroying effects of European imperialism and the transatlantic slave trade over the past five hundred years, on the other? The textures and tempos of lived experience tell us that the present world is unrecognizable when viewed through the lens of shipborne empires and their rise and fall, even as the traffic lines of power, plenty, and privilege in the twenty-first century reinscribe many of the same old divisions and debts from centuries past, albeit sometimes in new forms.

For example, climate injustice—the unevenly distributed causes and effects of global warming—is the most recent example of the Global South subsidizing the development of the Global North.[4] For decades, we have heard that the nation-state is withering away, while in many countries the state has been *repurposed* to facilitate intensified extraction of natural resources by multinational corporations and the diversion of wealth to

national and international elites. The nation-state plays a crucial role in this contemporary version of what anthropologist Fernando Coronil called the "international division of nature," which he saw Marxian analysis having neglected in its attention to the international division of labor (1997, 29). Tracking continuities and shifts in this disposition of nature over the past half millennium, Coronil argued, can clarify what is new, and what is quite old, in contemporary neoliberal globalization. But it is not only the nature, labor, and markets of the formerly colonized world that subsidized the development of Europe and the United States. Industrialization and consumer capitalism in the Global North have made outsized use of the earth's atmosphere and oceans as "sinks" for waste products like carbon dioxide (CO_2).

This disproportionate using up of the planet's capacity to regulate itself within the biophysical parameters that support human life is a borrowing against—even theft of—other people's futures. These uneven histories of extraction, combustion, and emission shape the present and future in *material* form, and these processes have intensified since World War II.[5] Indeed, if globalization is construed in molecular terms, something qualitatively new happens when wartime advances in chemistry and nuclear technology rearrange the postwar world at a molecular level, along with the Great Acceleration in CO_2 emissions associated with the energy intensification of agricultural and manufacturing supply chains and transport. Like persistent organic pollutants (POPs)—synthetic chemicals that do not easily break down into less toxic compounds but disperse and accumulate in the food chain—the effects of such histories persist in bodies, biomes, and built environments, not to mention cultural imaginaries and horizons of expectation.

The implications of this perspective are twofold. First, one cannot tell this expanded story of globalization without acknowledging the environment as its condition of possibility and its product. Second, the formerly colonized world is indispensable, not marginal, to this history. Notice how words mislead, how *marginal* or *peripheral* in a geographic sense comes to mean *unimportant* or even *immaterial*, when precisely these flows of valuable or harmful matter are at stake. This occlusion is the logic of what economists call *externalization*—displacing costs (and acknowledgment of costs) elsewhere in space or time. In the history of European colonialism, this logic works partly through diffusionist narratives that posit the West as the origin from which all blessings flow toward the rest of the world. These narratives transpose and redescribe Europe's material debts to and dependencies upon the colonized world as beneficent "gifts" of civilization, Christianity, modernity—or environmental concern. The urgent challenge

that postcolonial studies poses in the twenty-first century is this: how to understand the import of imperialism for the present, with regard to these histories and ideologies of exploiting humans and nonhuman nature? To that end, each chapter of this book juxtaposes different historical moments to consider how capitalism/colonialism and globalization function through continuity and rupture.

This intertwined sense of old and new ways of imagining and acting upon the world also underwrites the account of world literature in Aamir Mufti's *Forget English!* (2016). Mufti observes that the revival of interest in World Literature began during the years of this new century preceding the 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent Great Recession (6–7). (I use the capitalized form World Literature to mark the twenty-first century scholarly, curricular, and publishing project.) Indeed, one can draw a sharp dividing line in the new World Literature scholarship. Consider its seminal statements: David Damrosch's *What Is World Literature?* (2003), Franco Moretti's *Maps, Graphs, and Trees* (2007) and "Conjectures" and "More Conjectures" on World Literature (2000, 2003), and Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* (2004). These texts are enthusiastic about taking the transnational movement of texts and genres as a framework for literary analysis. Monographs published after the economic crash and the disappointments following the Arab Spring—for example, Emily Apter's *Against World Literature* (2013), the Warwick Research Collective's (WReC) *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (2015), and Pheng Cheah's *What Is a World*? (2016)—are more skeptical of the World Literature project.

This trajectory indicates that World Literature's turn toward the global slightly predates the shift toward the planetary in environmental humanities discourse.[6] And yet, as with climate justice and the international division of nature, everything old is new again, or at least still with us; here too, the specter of empires past haunts the horizon of the present. Among scholars of World Literature, Mufti is peerless in tracing historical continuities and complicities between, on the one hand, the acquisitive impulses of European imperialism and its Orientalist literary projects, and on the other hand, the recent rush to remap (and reanthologize) the world according to World Literature. Instead of positing World Literature as an arriviste claimant to the intellectual and curricular space claimed by postcolonial studies in the late twentieth century, Mufti makes it possible to understand this enterprise as the work of latter-day emperors in new clothes. He connects the historical dots between nineteenth-century Orientalists dreaming of a world library and the World Literature impresa-

rios Emily Apter derides for their "entrepreneurial, bulimic drive to anthologize and curricularize the world's cultural resources" (2013, 3). Troping on Marx's classic formulation, we might say that the tragedy of Orientalism repeats as the farce of World Literature. The Orientalist knowledge/power project and the broader history of European imperialism are World Literature's condition of possibility. Yet the disciplinary push to claim the world for World Literature maintains that empire and postcoloniality are "over": outmoded and inadequate to make sense of world literary space. Thus, many influential voices on both environmental and literary questions assert that it's high time to *forget empire* (to trope on Mufti's title) while having forgotten (or never recognized to begin with) their imbrication within its enduring histories.

There are urgent reasons to be able to think at a planetary scale and to read any version of "the world" in terms of its historical conditions of possibility. As Lee Medovoi wrote in 2009, "What the media typically call the 'environmental crisis' is better understood as the current face of politics itself, namely the many different kinds of geopolitical struggle to reshape the circuits of power that flow between planetary life and accumulation on a global scale" (123–24). This connection between environment and geopolitics makes the discipline of political ecology relevant to *The Disposition of Nature*. By "political ecology," I mean not only (and not even primarily) the "new materialist" speculations of theorists like Bruno Latour, Michel Serres, and Jane Bennett about what a more-than-human politics might look like, but also (and more pointedly) the analysis of particular social movements and political struggles whose contested terrain is nature itself: how nature is understood, valued, inhabited, and distributed among humans. Both versions of political ecology inform this study. The new materialists taught me to be alert to the constitutive, coproducing role of nonhuman entities and forces, while the radical geographers and anthropologists make me wary that such notions of distributed agency will give cover to humans and corporations seeking to evade responsibility for harm. David Harvey (2003) describes the accumulation of capital—often by force or other means of dispossession—as an ongoing project, not merely a catalyzing (or "primitive") moment at the birth of capitalism when laborers were first alienated (or "freed") from their means of livelihood. The Anthropocene paradigm demands that we understand how this ongoing accumulation of capital is entangled with the accumulation of CO_2 in the earth's atmosphere and oceans (Anderson 2012). At its most incisive, literary criticism can demonstrate how the accumulation of capital and carbon is entangled with the accumulation of cultural capital. Literary imagining

can make legible the discrepancies between statist, gridded "abstract space" and "lived space" that political ecologists Peter Vandergeest and Nancy Peluso identify as a major source of conflict and instability as states seek to manage territorial relations between people and natural resources (1995, 387–89). The rivalry between postcolonial theory and World Literature is legible, in Medovoi's terms, as part of a geopolitical struggle to reshape circuits of power at a global scale.

This book puts into productive tension the relationships through which writers, readers, and literary infrastructures constitute World Literature and those through which human actions are imbricated with nonhuman nature at scales ranging from the body and the household to the planet. The chapters frame "world literature" capaciously—juxtaposing global bestsellers (often dismissed as "airport literature") and visual culture with more conventionally literary texts from Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, India, and the United States—to consider how different kinds of texts foster and complicate the work of world-imagining and reading across geographic and experiential divides. This approach is contrapuntal, seeing one place always as imbricated with another. It involves *distant reading* of another sort than the computer-assisted quantitative approach spearheaded by Franco Moretti—but also *close reading* attentive to form, rhetoric, and mediation. While I draw on World Literature's interest in world-systems, transnational circulation, translatability, and the politics of literary prestige (or "consecration"), I also confront the limits of these approaches: They often imagine a world of circulation without friction, where unresolved histories of economic, ecological, and epistemological violence are elided, naturalized, or euphemized.

I understand literature and cultural imagining as a mesh of relations in which the liberatory and immiserating implications of globalizations—old and new—are knit and can be laid bare. The excavation of the politics of knowledge that is among postcolonial theory's most transformative achievements can reveal the lines of force that shape what counts as literature, nature, or crisis. (This line of analysis is among the signal contributions of postcolonial ecocriticism, discussed later.) Reading for the planet undertakes a mapping of difference and distance, even within a single site: People can inhabit the same space without living in the same world. As the feminist philosopher Kelly Oliver asks, "Can we learn to share the earth with those with whom we do not even share a world?" (2015, 206).

Several concerns and concepts recur throughout this book. One is the multinational corporation and its predecessor, the colonial charter company. Each chapter considers the corporation from some angle: as a vector

of globalization; a legal person desirous of the rights of citizenship without the responsibilities; a distributor of wealth, risk, and responsibility; a beneficiary of state violence and a proto-state; a producer of knowledge and culture; or a major source of both world imaginings and planetary harm. What is the shape of the world that corporations imagine, and how do those imaginings shape the world we inhabit? This line of analysis extends work in critical corporate studies by scholars like Purnima Bose and Laura Lyons, who take the corporation as a cultural object to be read (2010). It recognizes the importance of the multinational corporation in disposing the postwar, postcolonial world: as Antony Anghie shows, the prospect of newly sovereign nation-states nationalizing (i.e., claiming the right to "dispose freely") their natural resources in the wake of mid-twentieth-century decolonization movements catalyzed a new realm of "transnational" law for arbitrating disputes between postcolonial states and nonstate actors like private companies. Instead of being subject only to national laws, the multinational corporation was elevated to a kind of sovereign status: able to make "'treaties' whose terms were sacrosanct," much as colonial charter companies like the East India Company or Royal Niger Company had done (Anghie 2015, 152). Another reckoning of the force of the multinational corporation as an actor in and on the world is the tabulation of the ninety corporations and municipal entities—not an undifferentiated "humanity" or even the Global North—responsible for the vast majority of greenhouse gas emissions over the past two centuries (Heede 2014). As literary studies confronts the Anthropocene and looks beyond the nation as an organizing framework, the multinational corporation must be an important object, rubric, and scale of analysis.

Another thread woven through this book is the idea that vulnerability to environmental harm is, to borrow postcolonial ecocritic Rob Nixon's phrase, "unevenly universal" (2011, 65): conditioned by biological parameters at a species level, yet inflected by social inequalities. I am concerned with imagining across social divides and breaking through what I call *quarantines of the imagination*. However, gestures toward universality or planetary community that do not grapple with this unevenness can effect a *gentrification* of the imagination, displacing communities and epistemologies in the name of breaking down barriers. Therefore, each chapter of this book considers scenes of *world-imagining from below*, where marginalized characters or documentary subjects situate their precarious local condition within a transnational context. The anthropologist James Ferguson is right to read such moments as urgent appeals for inclusion in modern world society (2006, 174).

For readers and viewers, these claims for inclusion can both elicit and interrupt the readymade responses of uncritical paternalist sympathy or a too-easy sense of solidarity or shared vulnerability. A final recurrent concern, therefore, are *formal strategies that invite reflexivity* from the audience, including scenes of documentary subjects watching film or TV. These scenes of looking and reading are another form of reading for the planet. When texts use reflexive strategies to connect sites of representation with sites of reception, they facilitate transfers of readers' awareness between texts' thematic concerns with environmental crisis or complicity and the range of rhetorical and sociological relationships implied by the consumption of text or image. These moments articulate the unevenness and the universality of environmental vulnerability *at the level of literary form*.

Every Good Thing

> It's like every good thing in the world is dying and the people of the world, they see but do not care.
>
> —INDRA SINHA, *Animal's People*

> I only mind the absence of this admission, this contradiction: perhaps every good thing that stands before us comes at a great cost to someone else.
>
> —JAMAICA KINCAID, *My Garden* (*Book*)

My approach to these issues of universality, unevenness, and interpretation is crystallized in the juxtaposition of the preceding sentences. The first reads as a lament of an ailing planet and an indifferent populace. Read aphoristically and through the lens of eco-apocalypse, Indra Sinha's sentence expresses the impasse of the Anthropocene: inadequate action in the face of mounting evidence of an increasingly inhospitable planet. The second sentence traces an unacknowledged economy of gain and loss: the hidden subsidies, paid by other people, that underwrite every pleasure, marvel, achievement, necessity, sustenance. Jamaica Kincaid resituates at the scale of individual experience Walter Benjamin's dictum: "There is no document of civilization that is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (1969, 256).[7]

Both accounts of "every good thing" are gestures toward reading for the planet; they imagine and make claims about the world entire. The inexact echoes between them reflect divergent accounts of relations among humans, and between humans and nonhuman nature, that are indispensable to my approach in this book. Each is necessary, yet incomplete with-

out the other. By pitting "the people of the world" against "every good thing in the world," Sinha laments a shared human indifference to other life forms and the environmental enmeshment of human life itself. By contrast, Kincaid depicts a dual economy that differentiates among humans by distributing "good things" and "great costs" unevenly among them. Rather than the familiar notion of trade as giving something to get something, Kincaid's account of circulation sounds like theft. She places at the center of exchange the externalities—costs and effects, often negative—which conventional economics deems "external" or irrelevant to the marketplace. Kincaid traces how these costs are displaced elsewhere, to someone other than the recipient or beholder of "every good thing." I understand both forms of harm and disregard—environmental and economic—to be at work in the threat environmental injustice poses to "every good thing" and to those who pay their costs, even as I reckon with the contested modes of valuation through which things are designated as good (or "goods") to begin with.[8]

Reading between these sentences, one can recognize the concerns of each implicit in the other. The good things in the world that are dying could be social or cultural rather than natural or organic; the "someone else" who pays for them could be other-than-human. (Attentive to the legal and ethical distinctions between *human* and *person*, this book contemplates who or what can be regarded as a person—particularly the multinational corporation in Chapters 1 and 4 and nonhuman nature and literary personification in Chapters 2 and 3.) My guiding assumption is that such juxtapositions can yield unexpected insights—here about relations that Nixon has taught us to recognize as forms of violence (2011). Yet the resonances between environmental and economic harm that emerge from juxtaposing these accounts of "every good thing" entail costs of their own, involving a form of force—perhaps even violence—that wrests them from their contexts. What is an epigraph, if not a bon mot: a "good thing that stands before us" on the page, at the risk of being read without regard to, or against the grain of, its textual matrix—the discursive lifeworld where it first emerged?

Within these sentences from Sinha and Kincaid, those prefatory words "It's like" and "perhaps" invoke the metaphorical, the provisional, the possible. They are portals to the realm of the imaginary or counterfactual: the literary. In Sinha's *Animal's People*, "It's like every good thing in the world is dying" is an analogy the protagonist-narrator Animal offers to describe the feeling evoked by *marsiyas*, poetic laments chanted by worshippers during Muharram, which marks the unjust slaying of Imam Hussain,

grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. What Animal appreciates about *marsiyas* is their expression of the mourners' defiance of the indifference to evil evinced by "people of the world" who "see but do not care." As discussed in Chapter 4, Animal is not a Muslim; a survivor of the 1984 Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal still awaiting justice decades later, he finds in *marsiyas* an approximation of what his predicament feels like. Animal's attentiveness to the form of *marsiyas* and the context and effects of their performance finds insights about planetary environmental injustice and its cultural expression in an unlikely place: in texts that aren't "about" the environment at all.

This scene of reading within Sinha's novel encapsulates several aspects of my approach to interpretation and the literary. First, this book builds upon and pushes beyond the first waves of scholarship in postcolonial ecocriticism. As with many emergent fields, one important task for postcolonial ecocritics has been assembling a repertoire (one need not call it a canon) of primary texts in which nature, the environment, and environmental crisis are salient concerns.[9] Reading for the planet is after something more: to attend to subtle aspects of environmental imagining that are occluded when one reads thematically—for the nature bits. This book attends to how literary form, rhetorical address, and (drawing on World Literature studies) the circulation of texts are implicated in the politics and disposition of nature, even in texts ostensibly not "about" environmental crisis—as with Animal's account of *marsiyas*. A text need not announce concerns with the environment in its theme and plot to illuminate relationships among nature, culture, and power. How can we understand the capitalist logic of externalities in relation to aesthetic representation and its fugitive politics: what remains "external" to representation, just outside the frame, or difficult to recognize within it? This mode of analysis depends upon a twofold, reflexive approach to reading and imagination: examining acts of interpretation, spectatorship, and world-imagining undertaken by characters and narrators that are staged diegetically as scenes of reading *within* texts (such as Animal's reading of *marsiyas*), as well as formal and sociological questions of genre, narration, intertextuality, and other aspects of literary mediation that shape how readers like you and me make sense of these texts, the worlds they imagine, and their relation to the worlds we inhabit and those we desire.

This approach to the literary is germane to Kincaid's *My Garden (Book)* (1999), whose title plays upon processes of germination, transplantation, hybridization, cultivation, culling, creative arrangement, and juxtaposition at work in both gardening and writing. A garden can be something like a

commonplace book; a sentence reads and means differently when inscribed in someone else's book than for the person who first wrote it. Kincaid's hypothesis about the uneven distribution of good things and great costs concludes "The Glasshouse," a chapter about the eighteenth-century emergence of modern botany and a worldwide imperial network of botanical gardens—one part of a European-controlled global traffic in plants and people, knowledge and ideas, and money and power. Kincaid shows how commercial imperatives and Linnaean taxonomical classification intertwined in this process, which sorted lifeforms according to their appearance and deemed that "people who look like me" (1999, 157) were lesser humans who could be bought and sold. Kincaid describes being bowled over by "the most beautiful hollyhock I had ever seen" (149) at Kew Gardens, metropolitan anchor of the British empire's garden network. With a Benjaminian jolt, she recognizes that this gorgeous flower standing before her is *Gossypium*, the Linnaean genus name for cotton, the epitome of a good thing that comes at great cost to someone else.

In a startlingly compact series of rhetorical moves, Kincaid uses the history of imperial gardening to articulate an ambivalent stance regarding colonialism, slavery, and their largely unacknowledged presence in the present. Her statement about "every good thing" takes on its full weight in relation to what precedes it:

> I do not mind the glasshouse; I do not mind the botanical garden. This is not so grand a gesture on my part; it is mostly an admission of defeat: to mind it would be completely futile, I cannot do anything about it anyway. I only mind the absence of this admission, this contradiction: perhaps every good thing that stands before us comes at great cost to someone else. (1999, 152)

Kincaid distinguishes the history of empire as fait accompli from the reckoning of the economic, historiographical, and epistemological terms of that "defeat"—the afterlives of its costs and injustices—which has yet to happen. Kincaid's hypothesis about the distribution of good things and great costs aligns with familiar divisions between colonizer and colonized, free and enslaved. But with *Gossypium* standing before her, Kincaid implicates herself within this history of acquisitiveness; she contemplates how her own passion for gardening reflects the desire for possession driving that imperial traffic. It is difficult to decide whether such imperious desire for nature, internalized by those who historically paid its costs, is an additional, ironic aspect of "defeat," or in defiance of it. Kincaid's ambivalence and her staging of it epitomize the capacity of narrative intelligence to tease out

the intersubjective and transhistorical complexities of how "people like me" come to love plants like cotton.[10]

With exquisite, excruciating precision, Kincaid sorts out what she does and does not "mind" about the history and legacy of imperial traffic. She situates her individual reckoning in a broader historical context and its attendant politics of acknowledgement and disregard. The "absence of this admission" regarding the contradictory economy of good things and great costs resonates with the disjuncture between seeing and (not) caring in *Animal's People*. This lack of acknowledgment remarked in both accounts of "every good thing" indexes another important concern in this book: the problematic assumptions that *seeing* is *knowing* and that *knowing* is a catalyst for *caring*, *acknowledging*, or *acting* to rectify suffering or injustice. So much humanities thinking is premised on "the relay of media → empathy → action," in Stephanie LeMenager's formulation (2013, 17), and I share her skepticism about whether narratives and images work in such straight lines.[11] I want to trouble the notion that environmental injustice is best understood as a problem of invisibility, which is premised upon the Enlightenment ideal of bringing things to light as a catalyst for change.

Among the things concealed by the visibility/invisibility dyad are the subtle interplay of invisibility and hypervisibility. Some things that seem invisible are actually hiding in plain sight (or even subject to surveillance); other things that seem spectacularly hypervisible remain for all practical (and political) purposes unregarded and unapprehended. (For Nixon, *apprehension* names the aim of making violence perceptible to the senses so as to be amenable to political action, intervention, and interruption [2011, 14–16].) This book attends to modes of spectatorship where knowledge doesn't necessarily translate into action. Social inequality can manifest as scopic asymmetry: differences of power in relation to seeing and being seen. Looking and seeing are never neutral or innocent. As Nixon asks, "Who gets to see, and from where? When and how does such empowered seeing become normative?" (15). And what does this normative vision obscure or erase? The well-meaning exposure *of* harm can cause additional exposure *to* harm—an unintended precipitate of the uncritical, sympathetic benevolence that often attends the act of looking upon suffering, even and especially through the representational prostheses of photography, film, and print. Nonetheless, a returned gaze can be an invitation to reflexivity and solidarity.

This approach has important implications for literary and cultural texts as technologies of world-imagining, and it entails "reading for the planet" in another sense: thinking in terms of *legibility* and *intelligibility* rather than

visibility. The salient question is not whether environmental injustice can be seen, but under what conditions it can be *read*, understood, and apprehended. (Attentive to modes of interpretation beyond literacy's decoding of letters, I consider how illiterate humans—and nonhuman animals—"read" texts and the world.) This is not to say that visibility and visuality have no place in this book. Photographs and film, along with prose and poetry that confront the politics and costs of looking, are important objects of analysis, in order to tease out what visual culture, as well as literature as conventionally defined, can tell us about imagining, reading, and the work they do in the world.

The Content of the Form

The literary is always-already at work in making sense of the environment, even if unpredictably or unhelpfully so. Just as surely as a walk in the woods, nature becomes known to us in large part through narrative and other patterns of imagining. That is to say, particular literary genres, aesthetic modes, and narrative templates provide the forms through which human understandings of nonhuman nature and its dispositions are forged. Paradoxically, these cultural forms shape our sense of what is natural, or just: these human constructs naturalize nature and its relation to the social. Consider, for example, the casual use of the word *tragedy* to describe an event like the deadly release of poisonous gas at the Union Carbide pesticide factory in Bhopal, India, in 1984. The literary sense of tragedy, with its plot logic of accident intermingled with inevitability, hovers ambiguously over the discussion, further clouding the assessment and adjudication of responsibility that keeps Bhopal survivors waiting for justice.

Many of the words commonly used to describe the environment as problem—not only *tragedy*, but also *crisis* and *catastrophe*—are borrowed from the domain of the literary. As terms for dramatic genres (tragedy) or pivotal moments within the arc of a plot (crisis and catastrophe), they imply particular narrative templates and assume particular modes of causation and relationships between character and setting. These literary implications and assumptions are often of little help, however, in making sense of the environmental problem at hand: The plot logics they entail are not necessarily congruent with the forces (human and nonhuman) at work in the phenomena they are enlisted to describe. "Catastrophe" and "tragedy" are rarely invoked in their technical literary sense; instead, they colloquially name a situation that is *bad*, and extremely so, often for humans who had little role in causing the problem. One partial exception is the "tragedy of

the commons," theorized by ecologist Garrett Hardin, who took his model of tragedy—as the "remorseless working of things" (1968, 1244)—not from Aristotle's anatomy of dramatic plots but from philosopher Alfred North Whitehead. Chapter 3 examines Hardin's faulty assumptions about protagonists, causes, and effects. Of the three terms, *crisis* has been most robustly taken up by other discourses and adapted as a technical term in its own right. Crisis is indispensable to the workings of capitalism and narrative alike; in medicine, *crisis* names a turning point in the course of a disease (Cazdyn 2007).

The broader point is that nature is mediated by the literary in a way that precedes and exceeds representation in any particular text. Rather than positing nature or environmental crisis as "out there" in the world, available to and in need of literary representation (and rescue), I understand cultural logics to be already at work in nature or crisis. This distinction is important for several reasons. It troubles the common sense that takes environmental crisis as "the problem" and literature or ecocriticism as "the solution," as in Richard Kerridge's definition of ecocriticism as an interpretive approach that "evaluates texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis" (Kerridge and Sammells 1998, 5). This desire for utility and responsiveness is compelling, as the ground for an ethic of environmental responsibility. Indeed, to the extent that I identify as an ecocritic, it is not merely intellectual curiosity but also civic concern that motivates my work: the hope that my readerly intelligence might *do something* in the world, as a "force of nature," in Ian Baucom's bold formulation of the postcolonial humanities (2012, 18). "How to offer *one's self*," as Nadine Gordimer wrote about the antiapartheid struggle (1989, 264). The problem, however, is that such commitment and urgency can misrecognize both nature and literature.

We want literature to be on the side of the angels—or on the side of nature.[12] But if literary imagining informs what we talk about when we talk about nature, it also shapes what we don't talk about, and the forms those silences take. There is probably more evidence that literary imagining has been *complicit* in environmental crisis than that it offers robust solutions; this is particularly true with regard to environmental injustice as the uneven distribution of benefits and burdens, the "good things" of nature as well as their "great costs." Drawing on Said's *Orientalism*, David Mazel observes that "what comes to count as the environment is that which matters to the culturally dominant" (1996, 142). Likewise, unequal power relations shape what "comes to count" as environmental crisis: "if we believe that environmental and social justice are intertwined, we need to adjust our un-

derstanding of what an environmental problem is," Deane Curtin writes (2005, 114). This emphasis on how unequal relations among humans intersect with nonhuman nature is fundamental to the environmental justice perspective. The urgent task, then, is not to look to literature as a "solution" but to understand its role in calculating what counts as "nature," "environment," "crisis," or even "human": the social dynamics and cultural logics that not only *cause* crises but also inflect how crises are experienced and recognized as such, by whom. This means recognizing the work that literature and cultural imagining do *all the time* in naturalizing ideas about nature and shaping constituencies of caring and regimes of visibility, as well as their exclusions and occlusions.

In other words, *what counts*? and *who cares*? are environmental questions for which literature provides tacit answers we don't even seek. Global warming, in Medovoi's counterintuitive insight, is occurring not "because capitalism has *ignored* the environment or because nobody *cares* about nature. On the contrary, the point is to stress just *how much* the environment has mattered to capitalism throughout its history, how central a role it has played, precisely because 'environmentality' is the mechanism through which the milieus of life are assessed and transformed, and rendered more productive" (2009, 136–37). An imperative for cultural analysis is probing how this transformation of nature in economic production intersects with the *aesthetic* assessment and transformation of nature in cultural production. These discordant senses of "caring" about nature and how nature "matters" work in tandem, even if they seem to point in opposite directions.

Indeed, capitalism works partly by loosening the relationship between "caring" in the realms of affect and the imaginary and "mattering" in the material sense. The founding myth of capitalist modernity—human liberation from nature—is underwritten by ever more intensive and geographically expansive modes of capturing nature in the form of "natural resources," to keep the engine of this freedom running. Chapter 3 posits nineteenth-century debates about the pathetic fallacy as a cultural "mechanism" for managing the aesthetic and economic rendering of nature at a moment of industrialization and imperial expansion of private property and resource extraction regimes. Both Romantic poetry and Whole Foods demonstrate that sentimental relationships to nature are compatible, even complicit, with ruthless extractivism; like everything else, empathy and "caring" about nature can be commodified. Another powerful example of literature's complicity in modernity's myth of human autonomy from nature is the observation by petro-critic Imre Szeman that literary fiction in

the era of fossil fuels has abetted an ideological "fiction of surplus": the idea that seemingly unlimited access to cheap and easy energy is anything other than an unrepeatable historical accident (Yaeger et al. 2011, 324). By not reckoning with this historical anomaly of abundant energy—not deigning to care about how energy matters or counts as a historical condition of possibility—literature helps entrench the image of fossil-fueled modernity as freedom rather than constraint.

As I wrote this book, I came to understand that one could not grasp the work of imagining in the world without acknowledging its inverse, shadow self: the work of *unimagining*. I noticed that accounts of environmental injustice use the word "unimaginable" to describe suffering or harm so great as to evoke a sense of the sublime; confronting the unimaginable, thought ceases and words fail. But how does a situation *become* unimaginable, beyond the capacity to be imagined? What historical processes *create* situations described as unimaginable? What representational processes, through which images are framed and stories get told, shape and limit the capacity to imagine? What is at stake in describing a situation as "unimaginable" are these transitive acts of unmaking. *Unimagining*, then, names the processes through which something becomes unimaginable. In terms of what "counts" as nature or crisis, we might say that the remainder—that which doesn't count—is *unimagined* in this active, if tacit, sense.

The ethical stakes of unimagining involve the withdrawal of attention that occurs in the guise of paying attention to injustice, harm, and suffering. To label something *unimaginable* is to contain it: to draw a comforting line of distance and difference around it, to pull back from the work of engagement and understanding, of disentangling and finding oneself entangled, that might implicate a person in the network of relations and processes that produced the situation deemed *unimaginable*. This containment effects a quarantine of the imagination: an inability or refusal to imagine across geographic, temporal, or experiential divides. I take such imaginative failures not as an end to thinking, but as a point of departure. How do literature and the intelligence at work in literary imagining make environmental crisis legible, or reinforce habits of mind that render distant crises unimaginable? Unimagining tends to effect its exclusions and immiserations transitively—as an active mode of imagining, not merely as a lack for which *imagining*, or *more imagining*, is the remedy.

This perspective has important implications for the claims one can make about literature and reading for the planet as doing something in the world. The texts we read make their most powerful interventions not as empirical evidence of environmental crisis or as ready-made blueprints for action,

but through their literary mediations and the forms of their imagining. The literary does not offer a transparent window on the world; it frames particular views through artifice and convention, not least the conventions that underwrite realism's sly illusion of offering access to reality without mediation. Form has and is content: To grapple with the literary is to recognize that what is said cannot be separated from how it is said. An attentiveness to such mediations (and an awareness of the contested status of "the literary" itself) is an intervention literary critics are uniquely suited to make—while learning from the work of scientists, historians, anthropologists, policymakers, and activists. A desire for critical intervention is best realized by embracing, not disavowing, a concern with literary convention.[13] This concern can be worldly and engaged rather than hygienically formalist: not "close reading" in the New Critics' sense, which invoked the poem's autonomy as a quarantine against Cold War–era politics, but instead a practice of paying careful attention, to measure distances and mark complicities among the world, the text, and the critic.[14]

Attending to literary mediation and formal convention becomes only more important when nature and the planet are behaving in unfamiliar ways. Consider the pressures on representation and interpretation posed not only by phenomena like climate change, but also by influential explanatory rubrics like new materialism's lively objects and hyperobjects, Rob Nixon's slow violence, or Ulrich Beck's risk society. What these analyses share is a potential to disrupt basic assumptions about the building blocks of narrative: plot, character, and setting. What happens to narrative when setting becomes character, plot becomes setting, objects become subjects, and part becomes whole? When agency (the capacity to be a protagonist) is distributed across human and nonhuman entities? When the relationship between cause and effect (the foundation of plot) is dilated across vast spans of space and time (the dimensions of setting)?

Writing in the wake of industrial and nuclear accidents at Seveso, Three Mile Island, Bhopal, and Chernobyl, German sociologist Ulrich Beck theorized forms of harm "no longer tied to their place of origin" that have the potential to "endanger *all* forms of life on this planet" (1992, 22). Particularly confounding for Beck was risk's invisibility: "Those who simply use things, take them as they appear, who only breathe and eat, without an inquiry into the background of the toxic reality, are not only naïve but they also misunderstand the hazards that threaten them, and thus expose themselves to such hazards with no protection" (73). This analysis of the permeation of risk throughout modern industrial society inverts conventional notions of agency. Imperceptible dangers lurk within seemingly

inert and inanimate objects; conversely, human agency dissolves into a "general complicity" of institutions and systems in which "everyone is cause *and* effect, and thus *non*-cause . . . as if one were acting while being personally absent" (33). This account of agentive things and absent people is perhaps akin to Marx's tale of the upside-down world of the commodity fetish; modern spirits are also afoot in Beck's description of an emergent "shadow kingdom" of malignant imperceptible forces "comparable to the realm of the gods and demons in antiquity" (72). Risk therefore disrupts realism, which had displaced the machinations of gods, monsters, spirits, and kings in favor of ordinary human protagonists and plots that obey the laws of physics. In the shadow kingdom of risk, those who accept things in their ordinary appearance are naïve; only those capable of imagining the unseen can understand what may really be going on. This oscillation between the matter-of-fact and the occult feels new, but in a familiar way. It is another chapter in the story of modernity and modernism; as Fredric Jameson writes, "genuine realism . . . is a discovery process" that attends to "the hitherto unreported, unrepresented, and unseen," thereby (like modernism) "subvert[ing] inherited ideas and genres" (2012, 476). The broader point, as explored in Chapters 2 and 3, is that the conventions of literary realism and poetic propriety are contingent upon assumptions about what the "real" is and how it works. Such assumptions are being overwhelmed by new and newly recognized facts on the ground in a world that isn't quite what we thought, which demands, in turn, new narrative templates and modes of imagining.

At the heart of these challenges to narration, representation, and interpretation are dizzying questions of scale. Slow violence only registers as violence from a vantage that considers years, decades, centuries, or even millennia of accretion and persistence, at odds with the default perspective that measures cause and effect, harm and injury, in more direct and proximate terms (Nixon 2011). Writing in the wake of the postwar chemicalization of agriculture, Rachel Carson observed in *Silent Spring* (1962) that "it is not possible to add pesticides to water anywhere without threatening the purity of water everywhere" (42). This "toxic discourse," ecocritic Lawrence Buell observes, must be understood within a longer history of "totalizing images of a world without refuge" dating back to early nineteenth century fears about human-induced climate change (2001, 38–39). (Chapter 3 examines the global network of colonial scientists who observed these changes.) Part dissolves into whole; totalization is back with a vengeance, translated into a register of the everyday. Climate change is the kind of change that changes everything, Naomi Klein (2014) and others

tell us. It "affects everything that rests on that substrate [of modern civilization]: agriculture, land use, transportation, energy, politics, behavior . . . everything. Climate change is not 'a story,' but a background condition for *all future stories*," observes journalist David Roberts (2013, ellipses in original). In other words, climate is fundamental to narrative—and to life. Were "fundamentalism" not an even more troubled word than "totality," one could argue for a climate fundamentalism that could reckon with its bedrock importance for this everything: for every good thing. Unlike the rigid adherence to inerrant and unchanging sacred texts or doctrine in religious or market fundamentalism, climate fundamentalism would grapple with the fragile mutability of its foundation. Indeed, the Anthropocene spells the very erasure of the fundament itself, at least in the geographical sense of *fundament* as "the face of the earth as it existed before the entrance of man into the scene."[15]

What Is the Shape of the World?

> The prevailing world lexicon is incapable of naming and bearing all of our immense nows . . .
>
> —YVONNE OWUOR, "READING OUR RUINS"

World, globe, planet, earth: This book is about big things. It's also about the tricky relay from part to whole, and the partiality, positionality, and provisionality of any version of totality. This is what I mean when I say that reading for the planet involves rescaling: mapping the elastic geographies that shape proximity and distance, reading from near to there. Totality got a bad name in the late twentieth century for its hubris: flying too close to the sun. Indeed, the fate of Icarus on wings of wax offers an apt metaphor for the hegemonic perspective from which the total globe is visualized: not upon the earth, but flying high above it. While the iconic photographs taken by US Apollo missions in the 1960s and '70s now epitomize this mode of world imagining, the Apollonian view emerged as hegemonic long before it became technologically possible to produce images from above the earth.[16] One underremarked aspect of the Apollo 17 *Blue Marble* image—the first photograph of the entire Earth—is that it features the African continent, rather than Europe or North America. Ethnocentrism—putting one's own culture, continent, or worldview at the center of the world—is among the things that gave totality a bad name. Another was the presumption that one aspect of human life and society (say, modes of economic production) was fundamental to all others. One

risks mistaking the shape of the world by misunderstanding relationships between parts and wholes.

What interests me about projects of world-imagining is the shape of the worlds they imagine, which is bound up with the positions of power and interest from which they imagine. One paradox of planetarity is that claims to global community or world citizenship can sound radically different depending on the position from which they are articulated. Salutary though they may be, new imperatives of world-imagining may replicate and reinforce the inequalities and exclusions of earlier universalist projects that posited a unitary globe, from the Roman and British empires to Pax Americana. This is why Mufti asks "*at which locations in the world exactly* such perceptions of the worldwide acquire their aura of transparency," and why he worries that "the ability to think 'the world' itself . . . is hardly distributed evenly across the world" (2016, 8, 10). To pinpoint just where the idea of the "worldwide" becomes self-evident involves a counterintuitive thinking between scales, to map the unevenness and partiality of world-imagining. Notice the contradictions in *partial*, which can mean either incomplete or interested and biased: A partial view in the former sense becomes partial in the latter sense by not recognizing itself as such. It is another quarantine of the imagination, an act of unimagining operating "upon the body, the imagination, and the self," but also in "the way academic disciplines constitute their objects of inquiry." "Without even necessarily knowing it," David Harvey observes, "acceptance of a conventional spatiotemporal frame then amounts to acceptance of existing patterns of social relations" (1996, 290, 266).

Such concerns spurred my interest in scenes of world-imagining from below. These imaginative gestures across geographic borders and experiential divides are staked upon an elastic geography, teasing out multiple answers to the question, how far is a place like Bhopal, or the Niger Delta? What do promises of development and modernization look like from different temporal, geographical, and experiential angles and scales? Belowness involves not only *class position*, in the familiar idiom of subalternity, but *spatial position*: perspective and altitude in a literal sense. Both subaltern and subatmospheric, scenes of world-imagining from below offer glimpses of a counterintuitive planetary subjectivity—grittier than the Apollonian view from high above the earth and the high-minded elite cosmopolitanism associated with that perspective. Privilege tends to be conflated with a capacity for farseeing and perspicacity, as opposed to the "limited horizons" attributed to those who experience and imagine the world from some local, rooted position below, thought to be unable to per-

ceive the whole. The novels, films, and other texts examined in this book reveal some of the problems with that hegemonic view; not only is seeing not necessarily knowing, but it can entail its own forms of blindness in how "big people" see (or don't see) the world, as Bhopal survivor Sajiba Bano wrote in a 1996 letter to Union Carbide CEO Warren Anderson (Hanna, Morehouse, and Sarangi 2005, 115).

World-imagining from below can challenge the reflex suspicion that thinking the world entire necessarily erases difference and elides local agency. It refuses a quarantine to the local. Even if the capacity for world imagining is unevenly distributed, it would be a mistake to cede to capitalism the impulse toward totality or, as Mary Louise Pratt writes, to assume that ideas of the human or universal were "invented only once," in Enlightenment Europe: "Humanity can be totalized from anywhere" (and people do it all the time) (2008, 219). Joseph Slaughter makes a similar point when he upends not only conventional, paternalist notions about reading as training the moral imagination but also the liberal, Eurocentric cartographies of power those models of reading assume. He observes that the seminal act of generous imagining in narratives of suffering is undertaken not by the reader, but by the narrator, who "imagines a reader or listener who will respond to both the injustice of the appellant's suffering and his or her shared humanity" (2008, 105). Slaughter identifies in the rhetoric of humanitarian narratives the sort of gesture I have in mind with world-imagining from below. Rather than conventional notions of sympathy generated by the imaginative identification of reader with sufferer (a metaphoric substitution between otherwise unrelated entities), Slaughter articulates a metonymic relation of "contiguity between one part of humanity and another" from which narratives activate a "claim of belonging to a common community . . . [and] membership in the universal class of humanity from which their suffering has effectively excluded them" (93, 105). Instead of metaphoric sympathy premised on difference, this mode of narrative generates metonymic solidarity—a horizontal or lateral relation appropriate to world-imagining from below.

The uneven universality of vulnerability to environmental harm involves both metonymic contiguity and relative proximity to danger, a relation both spatial and temporal. To assume a map of the world with "strict longitudinal and latitudinal lines of suffering and safety" is to disregard time and history, Slaughter observes, quoting Red Cross founder Henry Dunant: "No man can say with certainty that he is forever safe from the possibility of war" (2008, 104). This perspective on vulnerability across time resonates with Beck's risk category of those "not-yet-affected":

"freedom from risk can turn overnight into irreversible affliction" (1999, 40). For Slaughter, awareness of metonymic contiguity and historical contingency can prompt claims for inclusion in a common human community. In a different political vein, Beck recognizes shared (if unevenly distributed) risk as a ground for "a solidarity of all living things" (74) that may nonetheless be unwanted—a "like-it-or-not interdependence," in Buell's gloss (2001, 54).[17] These notions of unwilling solidarity barely conceal a grimace at the leveling and prospective loss of privilege implicit in metonymy.

How, then, to apprehend the join between unevenness and universality in Nixon's "unevenly universal" vulnerability—the treacherous relay from part to whole, or world to planet? Keeping these tensions in play, Kelly Oliver articulates an "earthbound ethics" that "perhaps" might recognize that "even if we do not share a world, we do share a planet" (2015, 206). This ethics of cohabitation hinges upon a self-consciously literary shuttling between parts and wholes: on the one hand, a sense of "singular ethical responsibility to every living creature *as if* to the world itself—*as if* to the very earth itself," so that the death of any being would be something like "the end of not just *a* world, but of *the* world"; on the other hand, a recognition of the Earth's singularity, as "the only planet that sustains us and every living being." As with Sinha's and Kincaid's accounts of "every good thing," ethical force resides in the capacity to imagine and reimagine. "Perhaps" and "as-if" join a shuttling dance with the hard fact of Earth as the only home to us all. Oliver imagines replacing the will-to-mastery of "political sovereignty" with "poetic sovereignty": a fluid, provisional, and relational "power of interpretation" alive to the "poetry in the codes, rituals, and tracks of each singular living being" (206). This model of interpretation is another way of describing reading for the planet.

It seems to me that projects of world-imagining run aground when they forget this as-if and confuse *a* world for *the* world. This tendency has long been the error of the instance of world-imagining that is world literature, even in the recent endeavor to expand its world beyond Europe. "Efforts to rethink the study of world literature will continue . . . as long as there is a discrepancy between the lively expectations generated by the term 'world' and the pinched reality elicited by conventional approaches": Sarah Lawall's observation from 1994 still rings true (45). What is the shape of the world that World Literature imagines? This question is not new.[18] I concur with recent critics who observe that World Literature's world looks like a market, but I would add that this market-world is nothing like a planet.

The influential trio of critics who relaunched World Literature for the twenty-first century—Pascale Casanova, David Damrosch, and Franco Moretti—imagine the world in terms of "circulatory movements that cut across national-territorial borders"; their analyses trace "the impact of these spatial movements on the production, reception, and interpretation of literary texts" (Cheah 2016, 3). Damrosch (2003) defines world literature as that which gains in translation; in economic terms, the circulation of texts is a value-adding activity. Casanova (2004) charts "world literary space" by tracing the movement of literary texts from "peripheral countries" toward the center, which she locates in Paris. Franco Moretti (2000, 2003, 2007) identifies in literary macrohistory an inverse movement of genres, from Europe out into the world. World Literature's world, Pheng Cheah observes, is conflated with "the globe made by economic globalization" (2016, 37).

Cheah's observation about economic globalization should be read in the historically expansive sense detailed earlier, not least because the "new" World Literature studies grounds itself in seminal nineteenth-century statements by Goethe and Marx and Engels about what the emergent world (market) means for the prospect of a world literature. Goethe envisioned the broader circulation of texts as enabling "universal spiritual commerce," a metaphor that inscribed the market into the logic and landscape of world literature. Marx and Engels address world literature in the *Communist Manifesto* (pause to think on that!), but Casanova, Damrosch, and Moretti tend toward a view of capitalism, markets, and world literature that is more Goethean than Marxian. Because Goethe has no real critique of capitalism, Cheah argues, World Literature offers little more than an uncritical, liberal reflection of global capitalism, vitiating its "worldly force . . . in relation to the world globalization creates" (2016, 43, 28). The bourgeois liberal idealization of the market as a site of free exchange—"the all-too-common assumption of a 'level playing field'" (WReC 2015, 22)—posits a world that's flat and frictionless, *innocent and equal*; anything distasteful or violent is dubbed an externality and dispatched and quarantined elsewhere. Marx and Engels, by contrast, not only understood world literature (in Mufti's phrase) as a "product of the Western European bourgeoisie's drive to create a world market"; they understood that drive to be transforming the colonized world, in Marx's phrase, into "a heap of ruins" (Mufti 2016, 87). World literature is another good thing that comes at great cost to someone else.

One might object that the cheerful account of the world-as-friendly-market underwrites only Damrosch's version of World Literature, since

Moretti takes a Darwinian view of how the "fittest" texts and genres survive and propagate themselves, and Casanova attends in her peculiar way to "violence" and inequality in world literary space (2004, 43). Admittedly, their world may not be quite flat and friendly; nonetheless, its center is unambiguously in Europe and its traffic lines congruent with those of global capitalism. Although the movements they trace run in opposite directions (Moretti tracking centrifugal movements from Europe, Casanova centripetal ones toward Paris), these cartographies are center-centric. Even as they seek a World Literature encompassing a world beyond the European continent, their models reinscribe the familiar centers of European empire.

The forms of agency propelling these movements are also troublesome. Moretti invokes waves and trees as models for the "organic" dissemination of genres; he borrows the evolutionary trees Charles Darwin used to diagram the origin and divergence of species. Natural selection becomes an analogy for "cultural selection"; this literary Darwinism naturalizes the market by construing it as a force of nature.[19] Moretti's evolutionary tree assumes the one-way diffusion of forms from a common origin; the shadow title of his argument could be "a tree grows in Europe." Consider an earlier precedent for Moretti's trees: the family tree that early nineteenth-century British comparative linguists used to map the relationships among Indo-European languages. The family tree visualizes "linear directionality" deriving from a single source, as with Moretti's genres. Anthropologist Bernard Cohn remarks that the Orientalists' "trees always seemed to be northern European ones, like oaks and maples [that branch from a single trunk], and the British never seemed to think of using the most typical South Asian tree, the banyan, which grows up, out, and down at the same time" (1996, 55). The shape of the world reflects the perspective from which it is imagined.

The role of nature in Casanova's account of world literary space is no less problematic. Literature is a "resource" with which regions are "endowed" to a greater or lesser extent; these natural resources flow from "peripheral" countries toward the center (2004). In effect, her model of literary production and consecration is premised upon an extractivist logic that overlaps remarkably with the international division of nature charted by Coronil and Fanon before him. (As I will elaborate, it is a world-systems analysis of World Literature.) Yet the force of her recognition of the "struggle" and "violence" in this process is blunted by her insistence on the "autonomy" of world literary space from geopolitics and the nonidentity between the "independent laws of literature" and political economy (or political

ecology) (86).[20] Consequently, her "international literary law" (12) cannot account for the more troubling reasons why (in Matthew Arnold's phrase) "the best that has been thought and said" by Nigerian writers flows toward European and American literary capitals, like so much sweet and light crude.

Connecting the causal dots between this literary traffic and European empire, Mufti analyzes what we might call (continuing the conjunct Arnoldian/oil metaphor) a process of refinement, where Orientalists transformed "vastly dispersed and heterogeneous writing practices and traditions" from around the world into something called "literature." Mufti names this process "assimilation," which is "*ongoing* . . . repeated constantly in the very forms of circulation that constitute world literature" (2016, 57). He does not note the parallel with Marxian notions of the "primitive" accumulation of capital as an ongoing process, but the point is implicit in his analysis of Orientalism as the condition of possibility for world literature, and European colonialism as the condition of possibility for Orientalism (80). Mufti's account of world literature is therefore more satisfyingly capacious than WReC's demarcation of "world-literature" as literature that "registers" the contradictions of the "modern capitalist world-system": a subset of literary texts from the past two centuries whose "substrate" is capitalism and whose "subject and form" is modernity (2015, 15). These texts (and WReC's readings) are important and instructive, but Mufti makes legible how tales spun across vast spans of time and space—including, say, those about Śakuntalā, Šahrāzād, and Sundiata (or Son-Jara), as well as those by Shakespeare and Spenser—come to register as "literature" in the first place. Mufti closes the circle on this textual traffic by observing that traditions repackaged as "literature" by Orientalists were often exported back to their original sites of production as the foundation for emergent "national" traditions (2016, 102). This counterintuitive insight about the disposition of literature is important for several reasons, among them the implicit parallel with the evangelizing/entrepreneurial projects of twenty-first-century "impresarios" (Apter 2013, 3) who trade upon the cultural capital of elite American universities while spreading the good news of World Literature to rest of the world. More broadly, this long view underscores that nation and world/globe are not in a stadial relation, in which national concerns and literatures give way to globalization and world literature; these scales emerge in dynamic, mutually constitutive relationship to one another.

At stake in these models of world literature is that tricky relay between *a* world and *the* world. The terminology of centers and peripheries

borrows (with varying degrees of explicitness) from sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems analysis. For Wallerstein, "world-systems" are historical networks of socioeconomic relation among geographically dispersed sites that forge "worlds" beyond a single state. Among these is the modern capitalist world-system, whose unceasing expansionist drive allows us to forget that a world-system is not (necessarily) a system of the world: "we are not talking about the (whole) world, but about systems, economies, empires *that are* a world (but quite possibly, and indeed usually, not encompassing the entire globe)" (Wallerstein 2004, 15–16). The "maximally encompassing project" (WReC 2015, 5) of World Literature forges a world-system that mistakes itself for the world.

For me, the urgent question remains how to calibrate the world-system of World Literature with the Earth system remade in the Anthropocene—as well as other vectors of environmental injustice. In his demur to the hegemonic World Literature project, Cheah insists that "the globe is not a world," by which he means a Heideggerian *Welt* of becoming and belonging; the uncritical liberalism of World Literature as world market construes literature as a commodity like any other, rather than a mode of worlding that might (following Goethe and Auerbach) spur the emergence of a "universal humanity" (2016, 42). My concern is that the globe is not a planet. World Literature's "trees" and "natural resources" are metaphors drawn from nature without regard for the living substrate and political ecology of its world, whatever kind of world that might be. Although one could ask why environmentalism's earth should accord with World Literature's world, they do share one important commonality. Maps of both—at least as drawn in the United States and Europe—tend to replicate the Eurocentric distortions of a Mercator projection. In hegemonic strands of Anthropocene discourse, the undifferentiated human species posited as a force in geological history occupies the position of "universal humanity" in Cheah's normative tradition. WReC's historical delimitation of "world-literature" as that which registers the modern capitalist world-system overlaps with one proposed periodization of the Anthropocene that dates its onset to James Watt's 1784 refinement of the steam engine. Both phenomena involve an intensification of fossil energy inputs necessary for economic production. Some critics argue that the Anthropocene is better understood as the "Capitalocene," whose protagonist is not an undifferentiated "human" but the stratifications engendered by capital.

The chief promulgator of the Capitalocene idea, environmental historian Jason W. Moore, returns to key figures in the Marxian tradition to theorize "world-ecology." Following Wallerstein, Moore's world-ecology

is not the ecology of the whole world—not a single planetary ecosystem—but the mutual interpenetration of global capitalism with discrete sites and the increasingly world-historical aspect of so many socioecological situations. Critics including Graeme Macdonald, Sharae Deckard, and Michael Niblett (the first two are members of WReC) have examined the import of Moore's world-ecology for World Literature. Although not as single-mindedly as some of them, I find "world-ecology" helpful for understanding the uneven, unpredictable ways that transnational forces shape local places and for thinking between, say, the Niger Delta and Detroit, North Dakota, or the Mississippi Delta: sites profoundly but disparately shaped by (and indispensable to) oil extraction and hydrocarbon-fueled global capitalism. This is the multiscalar work of reading for the planet, imagining from near to there.

The nagging question I have had to answer for myself in writing this book, given these pitfalls, is: Why write about world literature at all? "The idea of world literature seems to exercise a strange gravitational force on all students of literature, even on those whose primary impulse is to avoid or bypass it entirely, forcing on them involuntary and unwanted changes of course and direction," Mufti writes in his preface, without specifying whether this observation is also a confession (2016, x). One answer is that I became a student of literature *because* of world literature. The most transformative experiences in my undergraduate literary education at Austin College align with the two poles that long characterized world literature pedagogy: appreciating a shared humanity and acquiring knowledge about a particular tradition. The grief of Gilgamesh became my grief, while I took apprentice-expert pleasure in reading Chinese poetry (in translation) in terms of its own poetics. In my first tenure-track position, at Stonehill College, I loved teaching "Introduction to World Literature" for the liberating challenge of not possibly being an expert on everything, and for the strange solace of teaching Paul Celan in the weeks after 9/11.

When the new World Literature project gathered steam in scholarly conversation, however, and when "World Literature in English" and "Global Anglophone" emerged in English departments as hiring and curricular categories to designate literatures other than British or American, my graduate school training as a scholar of Third World literatures and postcolonial theory made me suspicious about this disciplinary landgrab. (In US universities, the World Literature project is something of a hot potato between comparative literature and English.) After the radical epistemological challenge of postcolonial studies in the 1980s and its institutional consolidation in the 1990s, the rise of World Literature augured how quickly

the hegemonic shape of the world could snap right back into place. It is unsurprising that most of the recent skeptical critics of World Literature—WReC, Cheah, Mufti—trained as postcolonialists or built the field, even if through the robust practice of postcolonial autocritique.

Rather than ignore the conversation on World Literature, I engage with it in order to challenge the quarantines of the imagination that deform its ambitious attempt to rechart the grounds of literary comparison. This task is all the more urgent now, in seeking ways to construe the worldwide, the global, and the planetary with an eye toward environmental justice. I am inspired by the similar conclusions reached by Mary Louise Pratt (2008) and Fernando Coronil (2001) in essays that are touchstones in my thinking. Having been fierce critics of neoliberal globalization, they each point to globalization's utopian strains and emancipatory promises as a project for the future, to be realized by those who would imagine the world otherwise. Reading for the planet is reading in four dimensions, across both space and time. At a moment of authoritarianism ascending, inequality exploding, and oceans rising, what does the future look like? The next section scrutinizes the temporal politics and generic constraints at work in the shapes of the futures we imagine—as a case study for what reading for the planet can do. Because most of the texts examined in this book aren't "about" the Anthropocene per se, here I contemplate some of the pitfalls of its planetary consciousness.

Evicted from the Future: On Ending Otherwise

> Overcoming the concept of "progress" and overcoming the concept of "period of decline" are two sides of one and the same thing.
>
> —WALTER BENJAMIN, *The Arcades Project*

> I begin by discussing fictions of the end . . . so we begin with apocalypse . . . .
>
> —FRANK KERMODE, *The Sense of an Ending*

The end of the world as we know it offers an obvious point of departure for thinking about environmental crisis on a planetary scale. Global warming and the attendant transformations of the Anthropocene estrange time by destabilizing the straightforward, secular assumption that pasts and presents *have* futures; that things just keep on going; that time and history keep unfolding, for better or worse. As I argue elsewhere with regard to anticolonial movements, one way that history comes to be imbued with meaning is by understanding it as the working out of "past's futures": the

temporal unfolding of dynamic projects of anticipation, which may be refashioned or renounced when the future turns out to be other than what was imagined in the past (Wenzel 2009). This mode of expectation is confounded by the past's future inscribed in carbon, the not yet fully realized effects upon the Earth system of burning fuels that fossilized over millions of years. These effects are expected to endure thousands of years into the future, as the harm the body of the planet remembers. This inexorable past's future of climate change seems to jeopardize, at the scale of human experience, the inexorability of futurity itself. This reconfiguration of past and future posits modernity's progress narratives as confounded once and for all by a future utterly different from that which fossil fuels once promised.

The narrative genre and critical register commonly enlisted to make sense of this unthinkable predicament is eco-apocalypse. Like utopia, eco-apocalypse is premised upon imagining alternative worlds radically different from our own: it aims to imagine the unimaginable. Writing amidst Cold War nuclear anxiety, the escalation of the Vietnam War, and racial strife in the United States, the narrative theorist Frank Kermode observed that every era believes its relationship to futurity to be unique—an observation that begs to be juxtaposed with Edward Said's remark that "every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all the others" (Kermode 1967, 94–96; Said 2003, xxi). One remarkable aspect of the present moment is the imaginative *inertia* of its utopias—or at least those visions of a better world imagined from within what Niger Delta poet Ogaga Ifowodo calls the petroleum-fueled "chain of ease" (2005, 5). Such half-hearted utopianism dreams of nothing so much as a familiar future: life continuing basically as it is now, with all the costs (still) externalized, displaced outside the frame of the narrative, the predicaments of the present transformed only in so far as we won't have had to change very much after all. We don't like thinking about climate change, British novelist John Lanchester wrote in 2007, "because we're worried that if we start we will have no choice but to think about nothing else"; this *not thinking* is connected to the weak, passive utopianism of living as if somehow everything will be fine.

This cognitive inertia is the shadow or leeward side of "ecocatastrophe"—a recurrent motif that Medovoi traces throughout the history of capitalism, from Malthus to the neoliberal present—which "serves as a mechanism for insisting upon biopolitical reform, calculated change to the environment (and/or to the population) before it is too late," and thereby "facilitates some kind of regulatory transition between accumulation regimes" (2009, 136).

As a mode of riding out the periodic waves of crisis and contradiction upon which capitalism thrives, passive utopianism doesn't so much deny the need for reform as imagine that such transitions can be effected without really changing anything (Bellamy and Szeman 2014). Within this banal unthinkingness lurks a horror nonetheless: a "desire for capitalism itself when faced with what this damage portends"—the ominous recognition that we might actually choose the death of nature over the death of capitalism (Medovoi 2010, 143). Such not-thinking is the ultimate externalization.

Either not-thinking, or "think[ing] of nothing else." The latter response aptly describes eco-apocalypse, a narrative form with pitfalls of its own. In a more spectacular way, eco-apocalypse can also shut down the hard work of imagining futurity meaningfully and making the future *apprehensible*, in Nixon's sense. By seizing the imagination, eco-apocalypse can be another mode of unimagining the future, rendering it *still* unimaginable. Both environmentalists and their opponents have worried about the limits of using apocalyptic fears to mobilize change (Enzensberger 1974). Images of our own destruction can generate denial or a literary pleasure of catharsis, neither of which does much to loosen attachments to the status quo. As Frederick Buell remarks, "apocalypse . . . almost seems too easy; with a big bang . . . it and we are over and done with" (2003, 70). I have a different concern about the political liabilities of eco-apocalypse: As the narrative expression of a crisis of futurity, eco-apocalypse can misrecognize the present.

The imaginative lure of eco-apocalypse can obscure attention to the mundane loss of futurity theorized by James Ferguson, who observes that mid-twentieth-century promises of modernization in Africa have been abandoned, and narratives of development disavowed. The industrialized, affluent West was once construed as a possible future for the rest of the world, but now, he argues, the progress narrative of "history" reverts to the stasis of "hierarchy," "behind" returns to "beneath" (2006, 177–93). Inequality endures into an indefinite future of longing for infrastructure. This "crisis of futurity," Pratt writes in a similar vein, looms "all over the planet," among people who "live conscious of their redundancy to a global economic order which is able to make them aware of its existence and their superfluity . . . expelled from [its] narratives of futurity" (2008, 210–11). What does it mean to be evicted from the future in this way: to confront not the "end" of the world, but having been shut out of the temporal horizon of its desires and ends? In Sinha's and Kincaid's terms, it is not that "every good thing in the world is dying," but that the costs of those things, paid by others, have robbed them of a future. A Niger Delta activist inter-

viewed in Sandy Cioffi's documentary *Sweet Crude* (2010) describes the predicament of underdevelopment in terms of its contrast with the good life—that is, American life as depicted on TV. This scene, which I examine Chapter 2, underlines a contradiction of contemporary globalization: The global culture industry circulates images of affluence more effectively than global capitalism distributes wealth. (Or, as Crystal Bartolovich observes, "the relative balance in today's technological advancements make it far easier for images of hunger to be displayed . . . in the North than for starvation in the South to be obliterated" [2010, 56].) What is distinctive about the unevenness of world-imagining in the era of satellite TV, social media, and the Internet is that the excluded tend to have vivid images of what they are excluded from.

How to calibrate these crises of futurity—the future lost to climate change as the belated cost of modernity's chain of ease, as opposed to never having enjoyed the benefits of modernity to begin with? Recall the relation between "accumulating-capital and accumulating-carbon" (Anderson 2012, 6). To understand vulnerability to environmental harm as unevenly universal is to recognize its inflection by histories of unequal relation to both capital and carbon accumulation, in which economic and ecological modes of harm intersect. To focus on the universality of vulnerability at the expense of the unevenness—to move too quickly to ideas of the human as species, or community as planetary—is not so much a quarantine as a gentrification of the imagination, a gesture toward new forms of community that is blind to the displacements it causes. Narratives of eco-apocalypse can effect a gentrification of the imagination, if time and futurity become an axis of difference that displaces or disguises the socioeconomic axis of inequality in the present. The weak utopianism of a future all but unchanged is also a desire for privilege intact. In literary terms, the predominant narrative forms for imagining futurity are inadequate for apprehending the challenges of the present. The shapes of the future imagined in eco-apocalypse can serve as an alibi for persistent histories of inequality, thereby leaving other futures—what the theorist of utopia Ernst Bloch called "real" futures (1986, 1:75)—still unimagined.

As an example of the multiple crises of futurity and histories of accumulation at work in environmental imagining, consider "Postcards from the Future," a photographic collaboration by visual artists Robert Graves and Didier Madoc-Jones. This series of images, exhibited at the Museum of London and the National Theatre in 2010 and 2011, features iconic London views typically featured on postcards but reimagines them as proleptic Kodak moments from a future where the most spectacular effects of climate

change no longer exist solely in the imagination.[21] An aerial view of a watery cityscape visualizes London as Venice. Camels replace horses at the Horse Guards Parade. Rice paddies and water buffaloes appear in front of Parliament Square. Monkeys surveil the city from St. Paul's Cathedral, and laundry hangs from the Gherkin, the financial services skyscraper repurposed as an apartment block for climate migrants who flood the city. Wind turbines and water lilies sprout from an inundated Piccadilly Circus.

These arresting images are not merely memories, but *mementoes* of the future. "Postcards from the Future" recasts the generic conventions of the postcard, which effects a twofold transmission of memory: "wish you were here" consolidates one's memories in the act of sharing them with other people, while reassuring the faraway recipient, "I haven't forgotten you." As a mass-produced cultural form that conveys personal messages through the medium of an open letter, postcards are more effective at the second task of memory than the first; they aren't a great technology for transmitting other people's vacation memories, but they do let us know we haven't been forgotten.

Graves and Madoc-Jones (2010) explain that they seek to "create illusory spaces in which people can explore the issues of a changed world and not reject them as 'stuff that happens to other people.'" But postcards are, by definition, documents of stuff that happens to other people! The power of "Postcards from the Future" must lie in that second task of memory, reminding people that they haven't been forgotten. If we take the project's title literally, "Postcards *from* the Future"—with the Future as sender rather than temporal location—then these postcards are the Future's way of saying to the viewer, "I haven't forgotten you." The implicit, reciprocal question—have you forgotten me? —is explicit in the project's tagline, which transforms the conventional postcard sentiment, "wish you were here," into a question: "wish you were *here*?" And if not, what are you going to do to make sure that you don't arrive here, or that "here" never arrives, that London never becomes what you see here? This recasting of the postcard genre intersects with the rhetorical premise of apocalyptic narratives, whose vivid depictions of grim trajectories aim to inspire change and effect a plot twist, in which their anticipated futures never will have arrived.

What is most disturbing about the eco-apocalyptic aspect of "Postcards from the Future" is its conflation of time and space as axes of difference. In addition to "wish you were *here*?" some of these images also seem to ask, "don't you wish *they* weren't here?"—where "they" are hordes of climate

refugees. In an aerial view of Buckingham Palace hemmed in by thousands of shanties, or a street-level view of Trafalgar Square as crowded bazaar, the density of improvised habitation suggests an Orientalized "Third World" (in the unfortunate, vulgar sense of overpopulation, corruption, and state failure) scaling the white cliffs of Dover that tower a bit less over rising, uncalm seas. These images from 2010–11 are eerily prescient of subsequent climate and migration pressures, yet they are also stubborn vestiges of imperialist temporal imaginaries. The xenophobia unleashed by recent desperate waves of migration to Europe only underscores the racial anxiety at work in "Postcards from the Future," in which the environment is both narrative protagonist and geopolitical threat.

Similar anxieties suffuse "The Coming Anarchy," Robert Kaplan's warning about threats that environmental degradation and resource wars in West Africa and beyond could pose to US national security. The recurrent motif in Kaplan's 1994 *Atlantic Monthly* essay, widely cited during the Clinton years, is a stretch limo gliding through the potholed streets of New York, whose passengers are the United States and Europe. Outside the stretch limo is the "rest of mankind . . . a rundown, crowded planet of skinhead Cossacks and juju warriors, . . . battling over scraps of overused earth in guerrilla conflicts that ripple across continents" (8). (These fevered images, Somali novelist Nuruddin Farah [1996] astutely observes, resemble nothing so much as a mefloquine dream.) Kaplan's coming eco-anarchy is supposed to frighten because, far from progress narratives' certitudes about the developed world offering "to the less developed, the image of its own future," as Marx wrote (1967, 9), Kaplan imagines a dark future anterior, *a future inferior*, in which "Third World problems" (and people) will have arrived in the First World, pounding on the tinted windows of the stretch limo. (Imagine a menacing mob of squeegee men and women, or worse.) Kaplan inverts assumptions about the shape of the future that underwrote developmentalist impulses during and after the era of high imperialism. Despite his travel "by foot, bus, and bush taxi in more than sixty countries" (1994, 13), Kaplan's remains a quarantined imagination: He drums up fears of "Third World" scarcity, disease, and overpopulation as the anarchy coming to America, with hardly a glance at their relationship to the history of European imperialism or the pressures of First World overconsumption.[22] For Kaplan, colonialism was little more than a mapmaking enterprise. Forget empire, indeed.

In this context, "Postcards from the Future" read as souvenirs of their own obsolescence, when leisure tourism is overshadowed by forced and uncontrolled migration. What is strange about the artists' stated desire to

move past thinking about climate change as "stuff that happens to other people" is that their postcards depict a future where Londoners will live like, and London will look like, people and places in the Global South. Domesticating climate change, the artists Orientalize London—in a way different from, yet related to, colonial-inspired fashions like paisley or peacock feathers, or earlier waves of migration spurred by European imperialism and its afterlives. When time and space as axes of difference merge like this, latitude, not longitude, determines Greenwich Mean Time. The world-imagining in these images plays upon a reverse colonial fear: that the Third World present offers an image of the First World's future.

This dynamic is at work in the production of these images. Photographs from Kenya and Morocco were superimposed over a photo of Trafalgar Square; photographs of ninety shanty homes in Kenya were digitally multiplied to 20 million dwellings and superimposed over an aerial view of Buckingham Palace. This digital superimposition of images of the Third World visualizes the future imposition of climate refugees. These images address global warming's derangement of time through a politically freighted scrambling of space. Depicting London as displaced from its proper latitude, home to populations displaced from elsewhere, it looks like the empire blights back. But as with Kaplan's stretch limo, these images do not necessarily convey the unevenness in the history, present, and projected future of climate injustice, where the effects of emissions by the industrial North will be felt disproportionately by those in in the Global South. To revise the slogan of postcolonial migrants to Britain—"We are here because you were there"—the slogan of climate migrants could be "we are here because your emissions are everywhere." *Like so much else, the future will be unevenly distributed.*

The fears these apocalyptic narratives trade upon aren't just about nature-becoming-unfriendly. They project into the future histories of inequality that remain unacknowledged and unresolved. They offer a fraught version of reading for the planet, described above as reading from near to there, tracing lines of risk and responsibility that link and divide specific sites. But these images depict here *as* there. Their defamiliarizing surprise might elicit aversion and disavowal, solidarity, or something else entirely. Perhaps they reveal that an apocalyptic future is already here, but unevenly distributed, being lived by other people. They also risk naturalizing the privilege of not having to live apocalyptically, yet. In other words, no single politics attaches to the insight that others inhabit a degraded future that has already arrived, that one person's apocalyptic future is another's precarious present. (Every good thing in this world that is dying has come at

a great cost to someone else.) One could read that difference historically and confront the injustice of the present, but one could also see it as natural, civilizational, menacing, and in need of quarantine—a coming anarchy.

This apocalyptic inversion of progress narratives, which posits the Third World as the frightening future of the First, turns upside down the old imperial habit of Europeans denying the coevalness of the colonized, refusing to recognize that everyone inhabits the same moment in time. In the colonial era, European perceptions of people as "backward," "behind" or "beneath" were invoked to justify conquest and civilizing projects. Europe's others were once seen as inhabiting a lesser past; here they are seen as inhabiting its projected future inferior. Temporality again functions as a mode of othering, but the order is reversed.

This new denial of coevalness conjoins the two crises of futurity enumerated earlier: The consequences of carbon accumulation in the future are imagined to look a lot like being on the wrong end of capital accumulation in the present, with little acknowledgment of the shared but uneven history that joins them. This temporal imaginary, newly emergent yet drawing upon longstanding Eurocentric habits of mind, illustrates the necessity of a long view of capitalism's expansion *through the production of inequality and unevenness on a global scale*—a perspective largely elided from World Literature discourse in the Damrosch-Moretti-Casanova vein. It also demonstrates the pertinence of postcolonial critique in the shadow of the Anthropocene. Beginning with "The Climate of History" (2009), Dipesh Chakrabarty's provocations on the Anthropocene broke new discursive ground while effecting foreclosures of their own. The political/postcolonial perspective of his previous historiographical work has given way to a planetary/parametric concern with the boundary conditions within which (human) life is possible—a shift that risks euphemizing the differentiated, yet conjoined histories of carbon and capital. As Anthropocene species-talk gains ground in public conversation, this approach is analogous to seeking explanations for postcolonial misery anywhere but in the history of imperialism and underdevelopment. Climate change becomes one more opportunity to forget colonialism and empire.

One additional example illustrates the brittleness of extant modes of world-imagining in the future tense. "Poison," a short story by Henrietta Rose-Innes, won the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2008; it appeared in *African Pens: New Writing from Southern Africa* (2007), a collection featuring the winners of a competition judged by J. M. Coetzee. "Poison" stands apart from the other stories in *African Pens*, many of them documentary/realist accounts of HIV/AIDS or crime as challenges confronting

South African society in the new century. In a more speculative vein, "Poison" is an eco-apocalypse set in an imagined present, a few days after a massive chemical explosion causes a mass exodus from Cape Town. Its protagonist, Lynn, is a young white woman belatedly fleeing the city who runs out of gas just short of a highway travel stop. The tensions in the story—between the apocalyptic and the ordinary, and between the global and the South African–inflected—are pertinent to the challenge of imagining futurity without reinscribing troubled histories, and to the concerns of World Literature with texts circulating beyond their sites of writing and representation. "Poison" can be read as a generic running-out-of-gas story,[23] its roadside travel stop full of junk food familiar to any driver or passenger who inhabits the consumer end of corporate globalization, encircled within petromodernity's chain of ease. The dead birds and mysterious oily rain falling from the sky are stock images of eco-apocalypse, as are the infrastructural failures following the explosion: The gas station runs out of gas, the electric grid and cell network fizzle out, the toilet stops flushing. The story offers hints of a Robinsonade, when the shipwrecked protagonist at the deserted petrol-pump island takes an inventory of food, potable liquid, and potential tools.

In this generic, could-happen-anywhere-within-a-certain-class-stratum reading of the story, what is striking is the inertia with which Lynn confronts eco-apocalypse. She waits too long to leave the city; she passes up a seat in a gassed-up vehicle because she's certain "rescue services" will arrive, and, besides, where is there to go? (2007, 4). She kicks off her high heels and untucks her tailored shirt, fighting the impulse to curl up and sleep, "nothing . . . required of her except to wait" (4). The only imaginative resources she has to confront the menacing contaminated future, now looming in her car's rearview mirror like the storm of progress that blasts Walter Benjamin's angel of history, are those of an individualized bourgeois discipline and her failings in that regard: "It was typical; she struggled to get things together. . . . She should have kept things cleaner, looked after things better. . . . When this was all over, she was definitely going on a proper detox. Give up all junk food, alcohol. Some time soon" (2, 9, 10). So she resolves at the story's end, opening another bag of chips after three days with no help in sight. Even the comically inadequate gesture of a "proper detox" as a response to a poisoned city is voiced in the indefinite, never-to-arrive future of resolutions not meant to be kept: contained—safely, yet precariously—within the horizon and habits of ordinary time.

This dual sense of the ordinary—as both comforting and discomfiting in its inadequacy—is crucial to the story. The absurdity of wearing high heels to a mass evacuation verges on parody, but the story aims beyond caricature toward a broader crisis of futurity, where people cling to a life they know is unsustainable because there seem to be no alternatives on offer—along the lines of Lauren Berlant's "cruel optimism" (2011).[24] Lynn's body plays a contradictory role in the plot: The disaster's extremity registers physiologically rather than cognitively. At pivotal moments, bouts of nausea and diarrhea conspire with indecisiveness ("delivered her from decision" [5]) and get in the way of her ability to act. This is inertia in both the colloquial sense of immobility and the Newtonian sense of resistance to change in an object's state, even a state of motion: the difficulty of changing the environmental order of things and slowing the momentum of harm.

Lynn could be a surrogate for the rapt but ultimately unmoved reader of apocalyptic narratives, where the future is so unthinkable that the thought grooves of the status quo are impossible to escape. Lynn confronts disaster by not thinking about it, lest she think of nothing else, as Lanchester (2007) fears. "Poison" offers a richly imagined, gently satirical account of a particular quarantine of the imagination: the "gap between knowing and doing, evidence and action" that shapes the impasses of the present (Szeman 2012, 435). This predicament demonstrates the need to shift the terms of engagement from seeing and caring to reading and apprehending. Rose-Innes shows what the inability to act in the face of disaster looks and feels like—even while living and breathing through it, the pores of one's skin seeping its oily black residue, which, Lynn observes, "show[s] up worse" on white people (2).

Indeed, this place being South Africa, other narratives are at work, among them the racialized polarities of automobility, where white people tend to drive passenger cars and black people tend to walk or take minibus taxis. The geographic and historical specificity of this running-out-gas narrative comes into focus when Lynn's "unnerving" sensations of standing on a "road surface not meant to be touched with hands or feet, to be examined too closely or in stillness" give way to "thoughts of the people she'd seen so many times on the side of the highway, walking along verges not designed for human passage, covering incomprehensible distances" (5–6). In a racially charged moment, she declines a seat on a minibus taxi—"it's not that," she insists, refusing to voice the unspoken assumption that middle-class white women don't ride in such vaguely dangerous vehicles, the transport network of the poor and carless (4).

Juxtaposing Kaplan's creepy stretch limo with this minibus taxi, I understand Rose-Innes to be cognizant of histories of social division that inform the experience and imagination of eco-apocalypse, in a way that "The Coming Anarchy" and "Postcards from the Future" are not. The "throat-slitting gesture" (2007, 1) of the gas station attendant signals that the station has run out of gas, but it also evokes white fears of racial apocalypse: white South Africans running out of time. In the explosion's aftermath, clinging to the broken chain of ease, Lynn is uncertainly poised between longing for infrastructure and her previous privileged position of taking infrastructure for granted. Except for Lynn, everyone manages to leave the station in one vehicular arrangement or another; no one else waits for rescue by the state, perhaps because so many South Africans have gotten by *in spite of* the state.

"Poison" is punctuated by a series of grim postcards from the future. Lynn glances back repeatedly at Devil's Peak—a quintessential Cape Town postcard site since the genre's earliest days. The mountain is enshrouded in a terrifying new weather system (some of the most vivid writing in the story): an "oily cloud . . . [its] plume twice as high as the mountain," the air an "alien gel," the "tainted sun . . . a pink bleached disk, like the moon of a different planet" (1, 6). This alien sky offers an Anthropocene imaginary in its multiple aspects, fusing this strange weather with industrial chemistry's rearrangement of molecules across bodies and biomes: these anthropogenic changes have unpredictable, uncontrollable effects that render Earth unhomely. The counterpart to the sinister weather looming over the city behind Lynn is the pastoral promise of the rural landscape before her, "an old two-wire fence . . . holding back the veld," a "stringy cow [with] grassy breath," an avid goat (7). Another intertextual modulation is at work here: a shift from Maureen Smales's embrace of the vast unknown of the bush, at the end of the revolutionary apocalypse imagined in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* (1981),[25] to the South African pastoral of which Coetzee (Rose-Innes's professor at the University of Cape Town) is the Anglophone critic and practitioner par excellence. The will-to-innocence in this variant of the pastoral wishes away the harms of history and the centuries of struggle over land whose trace remains in fences running over the veld like scars (Coetzee 1988; Barnard 2007). Rose-Innes's Anthropocene imaginary broadens the scope and the *kinds* of history the pastoral holds at bay. At the story's end, Lynn turns her back on the catastrophe hanging over Table Mountain: "She wanted to face clear skies, sweet-smelling veld." The sound she longs to hear is no longer the blaring

sirens and reassuring bullhorns of first responders, but the croak of a frog, "just one, starting its evening song beyond the fence" (10).

Rose-Innes offers a new variation on the South African pastoral as an escape from history: not merely colonial conquest and racialized exploitation (which neither protagonist nor author can escape), but also unevenly universal vulnerability to environmental harm. While it is impossible not to want the future Lynn wants—clear skies, frog songs, and better living "when this is all over"—this imagined future bears the poisonous traces of a South African literary history that reveal it to be a retreat into an idealized past. That future is rusted out, like the broken-down car Lynn nests herself into at the story's end, when automobility has run out of gas. She notices that it's the same model as her car, but twenty years older—literalizing almost too neatly the structure of another's degraded past becoming one's degraded future.

The shapes of the futures imagined in "Postcards from the Future" and "Poison" are only fully legible in relation to *histories* of exploitation that endure into the present. These histories are thickly mediated through literary traditions, itineraries of reading, and narrative forms (like eco-apocalypse and pastoral) that accrete in world-ecological, world-systemic fashion; that is, both "global" and national, but also more local than that—as in iconic London sites, or the distinctive topography of the Cape, with which these examples are enmeshed in webs of intertextual relation. Neither World Literature nor Anthropocene discourse can do without postcolonial studies' attention to these multiscalar histories.

In temporal terms, the melancholy lure of eco-apocalypse can be far too easy; the desire to imagine our own destruction, or living on in the aftermath of collapse, distracts attention from the collapse and the alternatives already at work in the present. (In "Poison," Lynn notes that the sunlight is "an end-of-the-world shade of pewter," which "had always been the color of the light in places like this" [2007, 3]). Rather than eco-apocalypse or desires for ending otherwise in the face of a future inferior, we need to cultivate desires for something other than an ending. To imagine change under the sign of hope, or at least something other than apocalypse or business as usual—even while acknowledging the constraints upon life in a more-than-human world. This means being alert and alive to "zones of exclusion" as "social spaces where life is being *lived* otherwise" (Pratt 2008, 212) and to what Frederick Buell describes as "living on through loss . . . ways of living in nature as it is now . . . [with] love of what remains" (2003, 290). Such a capacity to reimagine alternative possibility in the present,

beyond the terms of a postcard politics, might be able to grapple more meaningfully with pasts that aren't even past, and futures—both imagined and unimagined—that may never arrive.

The Shape of Things to Come: Notes for Reading This Book

This book is divided into two parts, "Citizens and Consumers" and "Resource Logics and Risk Logics." The two chapters in the first part examine issues of "choice," agency, and complicity entailed in citizenship and consumerism. They resituate this familiar dyad within a transnational framework to consider the ethical and environmental predicaments of contemporary consumer capitalism as well as ongoing struggles to define and claim the prerogatives of citizenship (whether national or planetary) in sites of resource extraction like the Niger Delta. When these versions of citizenship and consumerism are juxtaposed, world-imaginings and scenes of reading (or spectatorship) begin to limn alternative forms of polity and modes of solidarity. In the book's second section, "Resource Logics and Risk Logics," the two chapters consider forms of world-imagining inherent to global capitalism's disposition of nature, people, and power. By *resource logics*, I mean habits of mind that understand nature as other than human, disposed as a resource for human use, and subject to human control. Resource logic is centripetal, the appropriative dynamic by which capital draws the world to itself, as in processes of enclosure. Risk logic is centrifugal, displacing costs and harms elsewhere in space and time, beyond the pale of responsibility. In risk logics, this externalization can involve *internalization*: the traffic, transit, and trespass of hazardous substances across national borders and the semipermeable membranes of living bodies. Globalization often works through *localizing* risk, harm, or profit—a spatial corollary of neoliberalism's tendency to socialize risk while privatizing profit.

This book also works through localization. Mindful of the danger of mistaking *a* world for *the* world, I do not understand this book as an encyclopedic, exhaustive account of environmental crisis or world literature—or even world literature "about" environmental crisis. Part I draws on African (and Caribbean) examples, while Part II is grounded in India, with contrapuntal gestures toward North America, the United Kingdom, and Vietnam. (This neat geographic division is not entirely by design; citizenship and consumption are obviously pertinent beyond Africa, and resource and risk logics are not unique to India.) The geographic emphases of this study reflect my scholarly expertise and the locations from which I am best

able to read for the planet: to understand how relations of position and power shape *specific* instances and modes of world-imagining. There is a lot of world left out of this book, but its insights are ready to travel.

Another important localization (and limitation) concerns language. Most of the texts examined here were written in English. This is hardly an innocent position, but it is a world-historical one. The disjunctive affinities between the maximalist ambition of the World Literature project and the hegemony of the English language (within World Literature and beyond) only seem ironic or contradictory if one neglects their historical mediation through a third discursive field: Orientalism and empire (Mufti 2016, 158). In its expansiveness, Anglophonia risks forgetting the Babel upon (and within) its borders, the imperial history of its dissemination, and its relations with myriad vernacular traditions. While the textual corpus of this book is largely Anglophone, I seek to undermine Anglocentrism (even in its own language) by insisting that English is not a neutral, transparent medium whose global reach is an ahistorical given. Throughout this book, I attend to instances where inequality and violence manifest as conflicts among multiple languages, stratified registers of language, and the ability to "speak grammar" (Nigerian parlance for Standard English, often connoting obfuscation), in order to demonstrate the cosmopolitan provincialism and political inadequacy of a world (and a world literature) where English is favored as a language of convenience without regard for its multifarious roles in histories of conquest. This line of inquiry is most extensive in Chapter 4, which shows that one cannot make legal or literary sense of Bhopal if one works only in English, even as the inequalities (within literary studies, the law, and beyond) between places like the United States and India foster such monolingual parochialism among the powerful.

Localization is also at work in the varied methodological approaches across the four chapters—a reflection of the problems posed by imagining a world and one's place in it. In two chapters, a specific site of environmental crisis offers a point of entry and organizing logic (the Niger Delta in Chapter 2; Bhopal in Chapter 4). Other chapters focus on a particular genre (documentary film in Chapter 1) or socioecological relation (the enclosure of "waste" land in Chapter 3). Chapters 3 and 4 each constellate their inquiry around a single literary text, but they aim beyond practical criticism or *explication de texte* by shuttling between multiple geographic sites, historical moments, scales, and discourses. Throughout this book, close readings are interwoven with several modes of thick contextualization in order to work out questions of method and articulate concepts whose import

reaches beyond the text at hand. This is what it means to connect the dots from near to there. Attentive to literature's staging of intersubjective encounters (not always between humans) and its singular intelligence, I tease out its capacity for imaginative and political work in the world. The shape of this teasing-out is more looping than linear; the arguments proceed cumulatively, pursuing unexpected associations and insights of the sort opened up by the juxtaposition of Sinha and Kincaid, then circling back to reflect anew on the central questions. Chapter subsections give shape to these constellating arguments, which may veer in surprising directions—a trace of my own reading, and rereading, for the planet. These chapters record what it means to be troubled by a text, with an eye toward making trouble.

Chapter 1, "Consumption for the Common Good? Commodity Biography in an Era of Postconsumerism," considers the limits of disseminating knowledge about the harms of economic globalization as a strategy for creating change. The chapter identifies an emergent genre of world-imagining: documentary films that trace biographies of specific commodities (Jamaican tourism in *Life and Debt*, Nile perch in *Darwin's Nightmare*, and Ethiopian coffee in *Black Gold*). These films aim to change viewers' behavior by implicating them in distant environmental crises, as consumers and citizens. Offering an alternative to the predicament of complicit consumption (where one's life is subsidized by others' suffering), these films urge a shift from overconsumption to green consumption—what I call *postconsumerism*, which privileges products that dare to tell their stories. Imagining itself as capitalism with a difference, postconsumerism works through value-adding narratives that function less as defetishizing knowledge than as new objects of consumerist desire. Nevertheless, moments of reflexivity, in which documentary subjects are depicted as consumers of commodities and/or film, disrupt too-easy binaries of First World consumption vs. Third World production. The chapter situates these films within longer histories of consumption and its ethical conundrums, including the nexus of commodity knowledge and desire in *Moby-Dick*, and lessons in ethical consumption and viewership in Dziga Vertov's experimental films of the 1920s.

Chapter 2, "Hijacking the Imagination: How to Tell the Story of the Niger Delta," constellates texts from a range of genres (Ogaga Ifowodo's poem *The Oil Lamp*; prose fictions by Uwem Akpan, Helon Habila, and Ben Okri; the photo-essay anthology *Curse of the Black Gold*; Sandy Cioffi's documentary film *Sweet Crude*) around a particular site of environmental crisis, the Niger Delta, arguably the most polluted place on earth. Juxtaposing political ecology's analysis of natural resource conflicts with

Benedict Anderson's account of nations as imagined communities, I consider how oil fuels the unimagining of Nigeria and the Niger Delta, and how such quarantines of the imagination might be overcome. What is the state for? To whom do natural resources belong? These questions bear upon national and planetary citizenship in Nigeria and beyond, joining political representation to aesthetic representation. Oil hijacks the imagination, promising wealth without work, progress without the passage of time—a dynamic whose literary manifestation is the mode I call petro-magic-realism. The execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995 galvanized world attention, but I trace the pitfalls of reading across historical, geographical, and experiential distance when Saro-Wiwa's martyrdom continues to hijack the imagination and obstructs understanding the complexity of the Niger Delta today.

Chapter 3, "From Waste Lands to Wasted Lives: Enclosure as Aesthetic Regime and Property Regime," traces relationships between material processes and cultural logics of enclosure. Waste land—land not under cultivation, producing no revenue for the state—was the original raw material of colonial capitalism. *Waste* also names the troublesome byproducts of such transformation: *wasted lands* and *wasted lives*, the waste of the world laid waste. These processes entail ways of seeing and knowing; aesthetic regimes help to naturalize and manufacture consent for property regimes, bringing the beautiful and the profitable into alignment. The personification of nature (as in the pathetic fallacy) is bound up with the objectification of humans: aesthetic renderings of landscape draw upon and reinforce the dehumanizing, anti-commons common sense forged by resource logics. I consider the role of European imperialism in consolidating hegemonic notions about the disposition of nature, thereby situating new materialist attempts to recognize nonhuman agency within a broader historical context. "Dhowli," a short story by the Bengali writer-activist Mahasweta Devi, anchors this chapter's examination of a worldwide history of waste and wasting, which begins (if we follow John Locke) when "all the world was America" and ends (if we follow Devi) at the margins of a remote forest in rural Bihar. "Dhowli" represents forests as sites of imagination, inscription, and interpretation, as well as resource extraction and exploitation; the story offers a counterintuitive, scandalous account of violence, waged against people *through* an indifferent nature, as normative and thus largely invisible, at least at a distance. At a different scale, the depiction of indifferent nature in "Dhowli" offers an Anthropocene allegory *avant la lettre*.

Chapter 4, "How Far Is Bhopal? Inconvenient Forums and Corporate Comparison," considers what it would mean to take the multinational

corporation (rather than the nation-state or empire) as an axis for literary comparison. Charting Dow Chemical's global history of harm, I link Indra Sinha's Bhopal novel *Animal's People* to Agent Orange and the acute silicosis epidemic resulting from Union Carbide's excavation of the Hawk's Nest Tunnel in West Virginia, memorialized in Muriel Rukeyser's book-length poem *The Book of the Dead*. In their decades-long effort to avoid liability for Bhopal, Union Carbide and Dow have invoked the legal doctrine of *forum non conveniens* (or "inconvenient forum"), an inherently comparative doctrine concerned with language, location, and the difficulty of interpreting across geographical and experiential divides, which I juxtapose with the concerns and methods of comparative literature. *Animal's People*'s exuberant multilingualism and dizzying array of intertextual allusions derive from its ambivalence about the possibility of environmental justice and planetary solidarity. Aware of its own circulation in the uneven landscape of world literature, *Animal's People* is caught between the conventionality of a bourgeois marriage plot and a revolutionary, eco-apocalyptic sublime. This formal tension is the novel's solution to the challenge of imagining justice for Bhopal without ignoring the historical fact of justice still undone. The novel reveals the pitfalls of bourgeois sympathy and radical solidarity as responses to the calculations of risk logic and the contradictions among toxic, financial, and media exposure: Universal vulnerability to corporate poisons means "we all live in Bhopal," yet that predicament remains highly uneven.

An epilogue, "Fixing the World," pivots from the 2009 documentary film *The Yes Men Fix the World* (on the culture-jamming satirical pranksters the Yes Men) to Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe's reflections on the difference between "beneficent" and "malignant" fiction in order to reflect upon the kinds of remedy and redress that literature and other counterfactual imagining can offer in the face of environmental injustice. I argue that we should understand all such fictions as *risky*: unpredictable in the workings of cause and effect across time and space. Such risks entail not only exposure to the possibility of harm but also leaps of faith into the unknown and the as yet unrealized, as well as the prospect that the "touch of innocence" (Zinn 1967) that we tend to imagine about ourselves might be countered with a newfound sense of complicity, entanglement, or even self-reflexive solidarity.