Reflections on Ecotextuality from India

Reflections on Ecotextuality from India:

Greening Literature Anew

Edited by

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and Mathew John Kokkatt

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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This book first published 2023

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-0446-8
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-0446-2

For all those who had to so struggle for their survival that they forgot to regret the exploitation of nature that it involved
and
To the future generations for whom the earth might be a lost paradise

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express our gratitude to the University Grants Commission and the Periyar Foundation, Thekkady, which facilitated the National Seminar in 2005, out of which this volume emerged, the Departments of English, German, and Botany at St Thomas College, Palai, which organised the event, and the contributors to this volume. Thanks to them, we can feel the gratification of accomplishment in bringing out this volume as an authentic expression of scholarly responses to a situation hazardous to life on our planet.

PREFACE

The claim that theory is in crisis is one of the commonplaces of contemporary debates in literary-critical circles. Pronouncements about its death are galore. But, paradoxically, the death of theory signals the generation of new epistemological frameworks. Death of theory spooks it, and this engenders spectrality. This spectrality invigorates knowledge and dissolves the sclerosis, the hardening of doxa, which has occurred in theory. The world thus created – the world of post-theory – entails simultaneously a retrieval of the referent that got repressed by textuality in theory and a reclaiming of the impasse that theory failed to retain. It is in this context that systems of knowledge have begun making inquiries into the systems that sustain these systems. The modernist schism with nature goes under thorough scrutiny here. The new knowledge thus generated marks a quest after the truth of nature and the nature of truth. This necessitates a radical rewriting of the compartmentalisation of knowledge. Attempts at knowing nature confront their stalemates when pursued under the umbrella of some discipline in the ("hard") sciences, social sciences, or the humanities. A more comprehensive and eclectic approach is required to tackle the issue of man's relationship with nature. Biocentrism, ecocentrism, ecocriticism, resourcism, Green Studies, ecosophy, ecopsychology, and a plethora of other emerging fields of reading the wilderness vis-à-vis man's infiltrations into it are in fact the result of the birth of truly multidisciplinary knowledges. These are the products of the realisation that particularised reading strategies are absolutely incapable of resolving the ontological enigma of nature.

The science of knowing nature is naturally coupled with the art of representing that knowledge. Hence, ecological studies can never be dissociated from aesthetic and textual concerns. By its textuality, the text reveals itself to be entangled in ever-widening networks of meaning, ineluctably transcending itself and shifting to larger and larger horizons – a pattern that may be analogously sought in man's non-utilitarian, self-transcending approach to nature. Theories of textuality are engaged in efforts to analyse the nature of representation. In a world of gene-splicing, the yearning for a nature unmediated by man-made systems and knowledges is going to remain an unrealisable dream. Establishing a binary opposition with pristine nature on the one hand and human culture

on the other is as untenable as the extreme positions of valorising either 'pure' nature or 'great' culture. It is in this context that the ensemble of texts that share the common ground of "Greening Literature" assumes significance in a world where the greening of knowledge signifies the interventions made by knowledge to prevent itself and nature from extinction.

A search for alternative conceptual methodologies that can successfully counter the hegemony of Eurocentric theory prompts one to validate some of the deviant versions of Sanskrit poetics as post-theory. The indeterminate voyages into nature can be visualised as an aesthetic enterprise. The 'beauty of nature' functions as a pointer to truth. But this is not an unproblematic formulation. If the aesthetic rapture of knowing nature is designated *haritarasa*, then its *sthāyibhāva* has to be located as *prakrti* itself. *Prakrti* is the site where we place our assumptions of the relative stability of the universe. The myriad forms that we see around us are its *vyabhicārin*-s or changing manifestations. Following Bhoja's line of thinking, the relationship between *rasa* and *bhāva* can be deciphered as one of undecidability. They are mutually productive and always in process. This makes knowledge adventures into nature a never-ending text.

Nine out of the twelve chapters of *Reflections on Ecotextuality from India: Greening Literature Anew* are revised versions of research papers presented at the national seminar on greening knowledge jointly organised by St Thomas College, Palai and The Thekkady Foundation, in the Indian state of Kerala. The twelve essays included here are as diverse as chapters of a volume can be, traversing the terrains of science, literature, theory, and spirituality. Herein lies their legitimacy also, because in a mutually deconstructive fashion they challenge all monolithic and univocal notions regarding the apprehension and conservation of nature. The seemingly incompatible views held by these chapters jell together to produce a depth-vision of the biosphere. Issues such as nature, culture (although many items in the inventory of what was traditionally considered nature have been recategorised as culture now, we consider the distinction still heuristically viable), gender, environmental literary theory, green responses in poetry, ecoperformativity and drama, fictional topographics and green thoughts, film theory and visual outscapes, the economics of global warming, the science of sustainable technological interventions in nature, and a whole gamut of related concerns occupy the arena of discussion here.

Green Studies is one of the most provocative fields of contemporary knowledge that merits prime attention in academic discourse. Human life and thinking have to be truly pro-environment because of the

cultural ramifications of the perception of nature. The muddled dialectics of nature and culture invites us to participate fruitfully in the polemics engendered by modernisation and the consequent authorisation of man's hegemony over nature. Different forms of knowledge respond differently to these issues. A compilation of these multifarious perspectives is what the present paradigms of discursive formation demand. This volume, we legitimately hope, has done justice to this imperative.

Textuality is the fundamental issue in any mode of thinking. The textuality of nature and its multitudinous representations are foregrounded in the chapters of this volume. Worthwhile interventions in the ecocrises of today are always bound to assume textuality of some sort. The possibilities of intellectual transactions in this field are unlimited. Upon some accounts, holding a romantic awe towards nature will certainly delimit the potential avenues to be charted out for man's synergetic and symbiotic existence with nature. Alternative demographic and cartographic possession of the globe is a heavily value-loaded and ideological problem. In the context of recognitions that stem from this, global polity has to be considered an ecosystem. As a corollary, all the ideologies of society, which get reflected in texts of literature, need to be located within the framework of ecology and related conceptual grids. If existence is a natural occurrence, then its truth lies in its nurturing substrata. If life in nature has to be of significance and value, the coherence of these frameworks cannot be disregarded. Along with these come the hierarchical power structures of social formation and the resultant encroachment of the augmenting mechanisms of nature. A brief scrutiny of the chapters will bear testimony to how this volume fruitfully grapples with these and similar key concerns of our time.

Much has been written on the environmental crises of the Anthropocene (See the chapter written by Sangeetha Puthiyedath in this volume), and therefore we do not intend to recapitulate the scholarship in this regard. But the contemporary significance of the reflections included in this volume on other counts should be clear to the reader. Today, the world is in the vice-like grip of a pandemic. Among the myriad reflections that humanity has been compelled to undertake, perhaps under duress, are those touching an ecological ethic, or a renewed understanding of such an ethic in the face of a new crisis.[1] We are forced to ponder violence to the non-human part of nature and reflect on violations of the sacred unity of the web of life. Pictures of the 'wet market' in Wuhan, China are a

[1] See Jibu Mathew George, "Stocktaking in the Time of a Pandemic: Atypical Philosophical, Theological, and Other Observations," *Journal of Dharma: Dharmaram Journal of Religions and Philosophies* 45.2 (2020): 259-278.

reminder of such human violations. Microorganisms that were harmless in animals' bodies have gained a fatal potency in the human bodies to which they were transmitted. When human avarice destroyed animal habitats and/or brought remote species into contact with humans, these microorganisms found new abodes. Has nature, already red in tooth and claw, turned vengeful towards humanity for all that has been done to it? Is what we are witnessing now the tragic climax of what Frankfurt School theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2002) call "instrumental reason" (228), a critical concept that could be helpful for a re-engagement with the earth and its non-human components. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, rationality generates an imperialistic desire to dominate everything and everyone. There is nothing that is not subject to the court of judgement of egoistic instrumentality. With regard to nature, its motto is 'learn, use, and dominate.' Enlightenment reason gave the final legitimacy and ultimate scientific tools for complete domination over nature: "To dominate nature boundlessly, to turn the cosmos into an endless hunting ground, has been the dream of millennia.... It was the purpose of reason, on which man prided himself" (206). Propensity to self-aggrandisement and egoistic calculation uses everything up. Francis Bacon, who was a proponent of exploitative scientism, and a proleptic figure for the Enlightenment's instrumental rationality, in the erotic idiom of sexual conquest (an early and primal manifestation of the dictum 'knowledge is power'), wanted nature to be "hounded in her wanderings," "bound into service," and made a "slave." The aim of Baconian empirical science was to "torture nature's secrets from her [the patriarchal gendering of nature is quite old]." The natural world has no other meaning except in terms of human mastery over it. Can ecocriticism and ecotextuality provide us with an alternative world view, the calculi of a new engagement? We believe so.

Ecocriticism endeavours to add an environmental dimension not only to literary phenomena but, being an interdisciplinary field of study, also to the concerns of the disciplinary spectrum whose insights and methods it draws upon. It sets natural environment as the very horizon of human ideation and imagination. Apropos literary studies itself, as Cheryll Glotfelty, co-founder of Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) and the first professor of literature and environment in the United States, and Harold Fromm (1996) lucidly put it, "Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of models of production and economic class to its reading of text, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies" (xviii).

Experientially, we know that the last evinces an engagement that is more fundamental but often taken for granted.

Reflections on Ecotextuality from India: Greening Literature Anew consists of chapters that engage with multiple facets of the intricate relationship between literature and ecology, covering texts, genres, and contexts spanning a long period of historical time and a variety of milieus. The question of man being a perceiving subject in nature has epistemological connotations, although this applies to any subject perceiving any object. The question also has aesthetic dimensions, which became particularly evident during the time of European Romanticism. Its ecological, psychoanalytic, and hermeneutic dimensions evolved in the course of the developments that followed Romanticism. In the opening chapter of the volume, Mathew John Kokkatt examines the four standpoints in a sequential way with regard to a wanderer's perspective of nature: that is, the first one providing a basic perspective and the rest built upon the former. The psychoanalytic and hermeneutic perspectives here are based on the concept of the 'unconscious' as articulated by Jacques Lacan. What provides the connecting link among the four standpoints is the subjectivity of the perceiver whose need to perceive and cognise nature and express her/his experience is within the possibilities and limitations of her/his 'conscious' as well as 'unconscious' understanding.

Thomas Koonammakkal explores the work of Ephrem the Syrian, a fourth-century Christian theologian and writer. Koonammakkal's project is to fix a scriptural framework for man's existence in, and preoccupation with, nature. Towards this end, he undertakes an in-depth study of the verses of Ephrem. His initial hypothesis is one that establishes the interconnectedness of nature and religion. Even the archetypal Garden of Eden has a sound basis in man's understanding of the scope and limitations of nature. For Ephrem, two epiphanies are involved in our understanding of Truth: one is of the Book of Nature, and the other is of the Book of Scripture. God is visualised as the Supreme Artist who painted the visible nature of ours. Ephrem's poetry abounds in agricultural imagery. But his verses do not elevate man to a level beyond nature. Koonammakkal surmises that the reason for the disruption of cosmic harmony is the abuse of human free will. The same free will is behind the upsetting and setting aright of the world order. This is the surest indicator of man's ethical responsibility towards nature. In a sense, this offers a reading that may be considered an alternative to the controversial notion of Christianity as being responsible for man's assumption of power over

nature.[2] A creative reading could reveal the Bible as a text wherein pro-environmental ideologies are securely locked. After all, what God grants man in the Book of Genesis (2:15) is not ownership of nature, but its stewardship – to be carried out responsibly.

Linta Baby, in her chapter entitled "Mother Earth: In History and Literature," articulates the framework of cultural and social ecofeminisms. She presents a historical genealogy of the concepts of the maternal and material aspects of Mother Earth and likens the feminine potency of Mother Earth to *Śakti* in Indian thought. *Śakti* is in fact another word for *prakrti*. Baby subjects to scrutiny the ramifications of identifying nature with a woman's body. This link presupposes some biological and sexual similarities on the assumption that both woman and nature have the power of fertility. Upon this view, the subjection of nature also falls within the parameters of patriarchal domination. Baby uses Nikki Giovanni's poem "Ego-Tripping" to pinpoint the evolution of cultural systems of oppression. From the prehistoric black women of Africa to the "civilised" women of ancient Rome, everyone held a potency of universal motherhood. A re-invocation of this concept could prove a mighty safeguard against the oppression of nature and of women.

Gigy Joseph's chapter, based on ecotheology, deals with the issue of "selving and unselving nature." To begin with, Joseph chalks out certain common grounds between ecocriticism and ecotheology. He advocates the need for ecojustice and adjudges literature to be the tool for the construction of such an ideology. He proceeds to analyse some of Gerard Manley Hopkins's poems, in light of these theoretical insights. Hopkins held a sacramental view of nature. His individuation of things or "haecceitas" was a vision in which he saw the Creator in all creations. Joseph refers to the theological concept of *Imago Dei*, which is the process of imaging wholeness and unity, and then presents an extensive analysis of the poetry of Hopkins. The conclusion of the chapter is that Hopkins's ecological concerns are to be viewed as an offshoot of his sense of transcendence in and through nature, a realisation which should serve as an antidote to utilitarianism and consumerism.

Ecopsychology forms the axiomatic basis of Sonia Sebastian's chapter on eco-ego and green behaviour. Sebastian presents an ecological reading of Thomas Harris's psychological horror novel *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988) and its Oscar-winning 1991 film version. Her arguments are based on the ecopsychological ideas propounded by Theodore Roszak and

[2] For instance, in an article entitled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" (1967), Lynn White, Jr., traces the origin of environmental destruction in the modern world to the Judeo-Christian idea of human dominion over nature.

other thinkers. She cites Kate Soper to establish the materiality of nature: nature cannot be simplistically reduced to discourse. But nature, like a text, never achieves closure: it remains a field of possibilities. Sebastian hints at the innumerable ecocides that we, consciously or unconsciously, are part of, and enlists Pablo Neruda in support of her position. Her concerns are chiefly directed towards the evocation of an eco-ego in human consciousness, a self that is more caring and preservative in its responses to nature. In her analysis of *The Silence of the Lambs*, she highlights an aspect that very often gets sidelined in our ecocritical deliberations, that is, carnivorism. She argues that the element of human carnivorism and the "absenting" of other beings from the world throw light on a lot of neglected issues pertaining to green behaviour. She analyses the mind of the heroine, Clarice Starling, and decodes the psychological phenomena that led to her development as a self with a stable eco-ego.

Michael Jackson's fabulous "Earth Song" is the text chosen by Rahul Narayanan to contextualise his assumptions on green theory. He juxtaposes the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* and its employment in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* as contexts for his analysis. His argument takes off from the hypothesis that environmental crises are a result of humanity's detachment from the natural world, brought about not only by increasing technology but also by a particularisation that fails to recognise the interconnectedness of all things. He endorses a reconnecting of the disciplines that have become sundered through overspecialisation. Narayanan's reading of "Earth Song" uses *The Waste Land* as a point of reference. The protagonist who loiters singing "What about sunrise? What about rain?" is likened to Tiresias, the all-witnessing *sākshi* of cosmic misery in Eliot's poem. Jackson's song, Narayanan argues, is suggestive in its references to human calamities in Croatia and elsewhere. As a solution to the unfolding catastrophe, Narayanan offers the "Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata" message of the Prajapati in the Upaniṣad. Jackson's song foregrounds the manner in which modern humanity has assimilated the three evils, namely human selfishness, diabolic apathy, and the overindulgence in passions as represented by the Devas. Narayanan asserts that the "DA" message embodies an optimistic insight for the human race.

Margaret Atwood's fiction defies easy classification. Her novels weave strands from various modern literary genres as well as myths, fairy tales, popular culture, and even advertisements. The tendency to circumvent classification is further complicated by Atwood's interventions and commentaries on her works. *MaddAddam*, Atwood's trilogy, has been variously classified as dystopian fiction, Sci-fi, ecological novel, Cli-fi,

and even Speculative fiction, a term that Atwood herself advocates. However, this trilogy shares significant markers that locate it as Anthropocene fiction or fiction that is located in a world irreversibly transformed due to human action. Sangeetha Puthiyedath explores *MaddAddam* as Anthropocene fiction while identifying it as a genre distinct from Sci-fi and dystopian fiction. She dwells also on how the three novels of the trilogy, *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013), simultaneously draw upon and destabilise the environmental discourse through the choice of the narrator and the use of satire. This deliberate authorial action appears to confound Atwood's purpose of warning the reader about imminent environmental catastrophe.

C. T. Francis, a scholar in Sanskrit, makes a foray into the ecological concepts in Sanskrit classics. His formulations are solidly founded on the Indian concept of *dharma*. According to Francis, everything that helps not to disturb the equilibrium of nature and the peaceful coexistence of all living beings is *dharma*. Hence a proper ecological awareness is our *dharma*, and the Vedic Rishis knew this. Francis goes to the epics, the Vedas, and the classics of Sanskrit literature to establish his point. In Upanishadic thought, the cosmos is the abode of the Divine. The chapter traces the sanctity ascribed to the *pañcabhūta*-s, the five elements, in Indian thought: water, air, earth, fire, and the sky. The elemental powers need to be preserved for the protection of life in the cosmic space. These elements are the gods of the universe. Francis winds up his argument with a very interesting observation – that even good literature rests on the poise of the ecosystem. If the rivers and mountains do not exist in the world, there will be no fertile mind soaked with the moisture of poetry, he avers.

In his chapter on ecocrisis, Mathew Alapattumedayil suggests a Gandhian course to extricate ourselves from our complicity in reducing the universe to tatters. He enumerates the basic ecological notions of Gandhian philosophy. Indeed Gandhian metaphysics incorporated concepts of *advaita*, *ahiṃsa*, *mokṣa*, *gopūja*, and *aparigraha*. Gandhi's anthropology was cosmocentric. For him, the cow stood for the whole of the subhuman world. He took the message of *anāsakti*, or non-possession, from the *Gita*. He believed in the oneness of all life and strove, and showed humanity the ways, to usher in a world in which this was recognised into being. Gandhian economics is a practical application of his theories. It involves the concepts of Panchayats or self-contained villages, Sarvodaya or the awakening of all, and Swadeshi or belonging to one's own land. Alapattumedayil focuses on the Gandhian distinction between "mass

production" and the "production by the masses," the latter being infinitely more desirable for the sustenance of life on this planet.

An eco-Marxist orientation is the impetus behind Robin Xavier's chapter. Xavier examines the *harita-śyāma* polarity in Girish Karnad's play *The Fire and the Rain*. Outwardly, Karnad's play presents an attempt to disrupt the dominant Brahminism of Indian caste system. But Xavier deftly unravels the latent subtext of the play, which, through an ideological subterfuge, reinstates the hierarchical social structures. His chapter is a plea for carving a niche in society for the marginalised, the subalterns, the aboriginals, and the Dalits. Literature, he argues, should become the locus where their struggles are recorded. He takes recourse to the colour symbolism of green and black, the former standing for nature and the latter, for the decentred sections of the society. He locates a two-fold "lack" in the text: *harita* is marked by its absence, and though black is present in the hunter girl Nittilai it gets appropriated by the Brahminical strain of the text. Thus, *śyāma* is also reduced to a lack. Ultimately, the sacrificial Dalithood works as a metonymic image for the eternal subjection of the peripheries.

Chandrika Balan (known popularly as Chandramati among the readers of Kerala, she is a well-known Malayalam writer and columnist besides being a Professor of English), true to her creative acumen, presents a congenial and proactive view of nature in the chapter "Women and Nature in Malayalam Fiction: A Selective Case Study." Her position is that of an ecofeminist, but she never indulges in overtly political gestures of hyperactivism. She traces the evolution of human thought, centering her endeavour on the tropology of the Mother. Mother and Matter have the same etymological root. This engenders a double bind since the mother gets killed when reduced to matter for consumption. Balan succinctly presents the cardinal tenets of Deep Ecology, which attempts to transcend the patterns of assessing things based on their utility value to humans. After presenting the case for an eco-restoration, she embarks on a detailed analysis of certain Malayalam texts, in which strands of her argument converge. She shows some of the stories written by P. Valsala and Sarah Joseph as sites of the struggles of the oppressed to preserve the means for their existence on this globe. Gender, class, race, and allied hierarchical structures play pivotal roles in the marginalisation of human beings in nature as well. Balan's reflections highlight the constructive role of woman in nature.

Jomy Augustine's chapter is an attempt at coalescing science and aesthetics. Being a scientist by profession, his preoccupations are primarily objective and empirical. But this does not lead him to overlook the

variegated patterns of beauty in nature. His contemplations are a call for the need to realise the worth and essence of even the minutest microorganism in the cosmos. Man's hubris behind the assumption that he is the "crown of creation" is radically subverted. Augustine calls man the only egocentric creature in the universe – and perhaps the only non-ecocentric one too! He traces the evolution of life on the planet to illustrate how insignificant a part man plays in the chain of existence. Man's intellectual development, or what we call culture, began with agriculture. Now it has degenerated into agribusiness. In the appealing metaphorology of the breast, he traces the extensive defiling of Mother Earth by her progeny. Augustine's concluding point is very pertinent: how can we enjoy nature's beauty if we keep on producing scars on her body day by day?

Though seemingly discrete and dissimilar, these chapters are woven around a single hypothesis – that one must seriously take into account the tragic alienation of man from his habitat. Each chapter is complete in itself but also forms a kind of Derridean supplement for the originary lack which is also the site of plenitude. The dualism implicit in the materiality and the textuality of nature unleashes the overtures for further debates, which are still bound to remain inconclusive. The locus of these debates is nature itself. Nature offers both the site and the subject for the contestation of meanings. It is on these contestatory meanings that we have attempted to lay the substructure of our theory that a cognition of nature rouses the *sthāyibhāva* that can be named *prakrti* and leads to the ultimate *rasa* which is nothing but the *haritarasa*.

SIBY JAMES, JIBU MATHEW GEORGE, AND MATHEW JOHN KOKKATT

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Jomy Augustine is Professor in the Department of Botany at St Thomas College, Palai. He has discovered twenty plant species, and one of them is named after him – Strobilanthes Jomyi. Some of his books are: *Recent Trends in Plant Science Research* (2002; co-author), *Nature India* (2012), and *Strobilanthes of Western Ghats* (2018). He has published over fifty research papers in academic journals. An environmentalist, Augustine was a Research Fellow of the Kerala Forest Department, Periyar Tiger Reserve, Thekkady, from 1 August 1991 to 1 June 1993. From 1 June 1993 to 24 November 1994, he was a Research Fellow in the Kerala Forest Research Institute, Peechi. Since 1994 he has been teaching plant taxonomy, ethnobotany, conservation biology, and biodiversity in the Postgraduate and Research Department of Botany, St Thomas College, Palai. Augustine is a resource person giving training on Biodiversity Assessment under the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) of Government of India, in Nature Camps of Kerala Forest Department, and in biodiversity studies and assessments for India Eco-Development Schemes (Periyar Foundation). He was recognised with National Awards for Best Camera Work and Second Best Educational Film in the year 2006 at the 11th All India Children's Audio-Video Festival organised by the Central Institute of Educational Technology, Government of India, at Bhubaneswar, Orissa. The awarded work, "Kerala, Garden of Eden – Part II: Flowering Plants," consists of television programmes of thirty-minute duration produced through the State Institute of Educational Technology (SIET), Government of Kerala. He received an international award for the best paper presentation in the international seminar on Multidisciplinary Approaches in Angiosperm Systematics held in 2008.

Linta Baby is a postgraduate in English Literature from Loyola College, Chennai. She is currently Assistant Professor in the Department of Communicative English at St Thomas College, Palai. She has presented several research papers in national and international conferences.

Chandrika Balan is an Indian writer who has published books in English and Malayalam under the pen name Chandramathi. She is a writer of fiction, translator, and critic in English and Malayalam. She has authored four books in English and twenty in Malayalam, including twelve collections of short stories, an anthology of medieval Malayalam poetry, two collections of essays, two memoirs, and five books translated from English. The Malayalam film *Njandukalude Nattil Oridavela* was based on her book. She has won several prestigious awards for her writing. Her works in English are: *V. K. Krishna Menon* (1990; co-author), *Best-Loved Stories* (1991; co-editor), *The Private Garden: Family in Post-War British Drama* (1993; author), *Critical Spectrum: Responses to Contemporary Literary Theories* (1993; editor), and *Arya and Other Stories* (2014). She teaches at the All Saints' College at Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

C. T. Francis is a Sanskrit scholar and environmentalist. He was awarded doctorate by Guruvayoor Sanskrit Vidyapitham, Kerala, in 1995 for his thesis (Sanskrit) entitled "Bhāvadhwanivimarshakah" (critique of bhāvadhwani). Besides many articles in Malayalam, he has authored two research papers in Sanskrit. He retired as Professor of Sanskrit from St Thomas College, Palai.

Jibu Mathew George is Professor in the Department of English Literature, School of Literary Studies, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India. He holds MA degrees in English Literature, Philosophy and Religion, and Political Science, an MSc degree in Applied Psychology, a PhD on James Joyce, an Advanced Diploma in German, and a Junior Diploma in French. His areas of research include literary modernism, twentieth-century European fiction in translation, twentieth-century literary theory, narratology, philosophy of literature, meta-questions in the humanities, philosophy and history of religion, continental philosophy, philosophy of history, hermeneutics, European intellectual history, lifespan psychology, and Holocaust studies. He is the author of *The Ontology of Gods: An Account of Enchantment, Disenchantment, and Re-Enchantment* (2017), *Ulysses Quotīdiānus: James Joyce's Inverse Histories of the Everyday* (2016), and *Philosophical Meta-Reflections on Literary Studies: Why Do Things with Texts, and What to Do with Them?* (2019). *De Natura Fidei: Rethinking Religion across Disciplinary Boundaries*,

a three-volume international anthology of essays edited by him, was published in 2021. He featured in the Oxford Academic Index of Critics in 2018. He was a Research Fellow at the Zürich James Joyce Foundation in 2008. In the same year he also received a DAAD Scholarship for studies at Technische Universität Dresden. He was awarded an overseas travel grant by the Indian Council of Social Science Research in 2014. He is editor of the literary studies issues of the *English and Foreign Languages Journal* and pre-publication reviewer for Springer, Dordrecht, Routledge, New Delhi, and Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad.

Siby James is Associate Professor and Head, Department of English at St Thomas College, Palai. He has twenty eight years of experience in teaching and research supervision. He was awarded doctorate for his thesis "Historicizing Manipravalam: Textualizing the History of Kerala" (2004). He is the author of *Understanding Manipravalam: The Poetry of Kerala* (2009) and has co-edited *Pearls from the Deep: Literary Selections Crisscrossing the Continents* (2017).

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CHAPTER 1

WANDERING IN NATURE WITH THE INNER SELF: THE SUBJECT EXPERIENCING THE OBJECT

MATHEW JOHN KOKKATT

Introduction

This chapter deals with the perception and cognition of nature as well as its textualisation/medialisation (German: *Medialisierung*) in a *wanderer's perspective*, the perspective of someone wandering through nature. It is argued here that this perspective can be better described and explicated in the light of Lacanian discourse analysis/hermeneutic, rather than in terms of epistemological, romantic-aesthetic, and ecological dimensions. For the epistemological dimension, we have the opposed views of Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Schelling (nineteenth century) before us, the former considering nature as non-self and the latter calling the self as the spirit of nature. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's vision of nature, containing elements of a Romantic cognition (nineteenth century), could be a sum total of his researches in science as well as his poetic creations depicting unity with nature. There is also W. G. Sebald's *Rings of Saturn* (1995), which presents the internal experiences of the history of the world and the universe in the walking experiences of the narrator. The scope of this chapter is, however, limited. It attempts to outline the subtle dynamics involved in the 'meeting' of the perceiver and nature, the perceived. The perceiver's impressions of nature need not be the one s/he may be consciously capturing, and her/his expressions of it may not be the one s/he is aware of. The reason for this is to be found in the difference between the conscious subject of utterance and the 'unconscious' subject of enunciation (articulation) while they deal with one and the same object, that is, nature. This necessitates an examination of the modes of perceiving nature and the awareness of perception by the

perceiving subject. The term "nature" is used in this chapter in the usual sense, but its perception cannot be the same, as its scope can be ever larger, the more an experiencing subject delves into it. The wanderer's perspective is different from that enshrined in poetical concepts and motifs here. I contend that it is about the subject being moulded by its changing perceptions in temporal and spacial dimensions. For this view, I find a statement of Julian Scutts quite relevant: "Through its traditional associations with the classical muses and poetic inspiration, wandering also meant a process of organizing subject matter, including that offered by the archetypal wanderers of old, which came to symbolize modes of consciousness" (Scutts 2017, 5). The archetypal wanderers are the biblical Cain, the Greek epic hero Ulysses, and the various figures that one comes across in the works of poets with a wanderer motif. In this sense of a subjective confrontation with the objective on a continuum, one finds a larger scope for this argument – to ask what constitutes the basis of all subjective perceptions, poetic or artistic. The concept "wanderer's perspective" renders the continuous perception of nature, moving from the peripheral and the surficial to the central and the deeper, as also from plains to heights, in the mind of the subject. Special attention is paid here to perception and its various dimensions – epistemological, aesthetic, and ecological. The act of perception is accompanied by the need for expression of the perceived, which I analyse here using the Lacanian notion of the unconscious, which in turn is examined in the context of the wanderer's perspective.

The Motif of Wandering

The endeavours in this chapter have a remote background – a trip to a seminar on ecotextuality and greening the texts, organised in the Thekkady forests in 2005, with poetry readings and paper presentations. The seminar envisaged a search for experiencing nature as narrated and nurtured in texts and textualisations of all kinds. The immediate premise of this chapter is a *wandering* element in the human subject as evinced in texts related to nature and imagination, going to the object and coming back to the subject and then, inevitably, to the reader. As is clear to any scholar of literary/artistic history, the *wander* motif occurs frequently in Romantic literature and paintings.[1] The 'poetic self' travels to and meets

[1] Poems and novels with the *wander* motif constitute a vast area of literary history. Poets who dealt with this motif are many. The names in English include William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Charlotte Smith, John Clare, Percy Bysshe

strange and exotic places, or 'finds' a place exotic, and this meeting is textualised in poetry or prose.

In modern times, when the camera replaces the pen, as it were, and when videos and documentaries on nature tend to be called a 'poetic work,' in spite of the difference in medium, 'wandering' comes to be interpreted as a transformation of travelling poetic selves in search of nature's beauty. Physical travel by nature lovers includes tours into faraway lands and exploration of remote cultures. Now, nature tourism has become the vogue among many sections of Indians too, due to improved travel conditions and enhanced post-liberalisation prosperity. In earlier times, travel was not a possibility for those who wanted to experience the world at close quarters, and such people included poets who created works looking at the world from another angle, one not necessarily seized by contemporary travellers. Nevertheless, modern travelogues and travel videos are also said to represent a romantic yearning for faraway places and their novelties. This fact is noticeable in the case of many popular YouTube channels, trending travel videos, and vlogs which show distant places and cultures although the vloggers fall short in respect of poetical perspectives and expressions in the conventional sense. Of course, the vloggers are not expected to be poets or their presentations to be poetical even if the general pattern of climbing the heights is symbolically indicative of aspiring to a higher perspective above things that are already known. Nature itself is no pure subject or object of discussion here; it is a latent entity in the pursuit of solo travellers and bikers who set out for unreached destinations. These 'tourists' attempt to convey their perspectives on the objects they encounter through visual media to the viewers, who include people of varied sensibilities. Notwithstanding the limitations of the perceptive and experiential capacity of these tourists, the TV audience and YouTube viewers still get their subjective impressions about the places shown ever refreshed. However, this poses a few questions: What is common for the vloggers and wanderers? Does the common 'human subject' confronting the external world really grasp it? To find a tentative answer, let us assume these vloggers to be embodiments of the 'general human subject' who meditates on nature. Is s/he aware of her/his human capacity for a wide-angle perception of the mystery of nature and the impressions about it, like Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Eichendorff, or Caspar David Friedrich (with his painting *Der Wanderer über dem*

Shelley, John Keats, and Lord Byron. German literature has Joseph Eichendorff, August and Friedrich Schlegels, Georg Philipp Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), Ludwig Uhland, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Ludwig Tieck, Achim von Arnim, and Clemens Brentano.

Nebelmeer/ *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*)? Though such a question might be interpreted as subtextually privileging canonical art over popular cultural endeavours, the question certainly encompasses the presumed depth of awareness on the part of the perceiving 'human subjects' concerning their selves that romantically fall in love with nature and, also, the issue of whether this awareness can indeed be analysed or can only be synthesised from its myriad sources. In short, this raises the issue of subject-object relations in the perception of nature and the different approaches to divulging the mystery of nature in writings, that too, mediated through symbols and signifiers, meanings and semblances. The brief discussion that follows is not intended to take us away from the point of directly approaching nature, but rather to emphasise the perceiver's role in perception and in expression of the perceived. The movement involved in the process of (self) perception of the subject is attributed to wandering also in a figurative sense.

The Philosophical Perspective

The philosophical perspective in the context of our present discussion is, strictly speaking, a basic one, such as the one contained in the Cartesian dictum *Cogito*, *ergo sum*, which is elucidated in René Descartes' (1596-1650) *Discourse on Method* (Descartes 1911, 102). Descartes saw the mind as the surer source of existence that does not need anything else to validate it. A comment by R. C. Pradhan (1996) deserves mention here: "It is in the idea of a thinking substance that Descartes finds the key to the understanding of the natural world and the possibility of the scientific knowledge of the latter. It is precisely because mind is held to be the mirror of Nature" (137). Descartes had a journey of search through mind, soul, and passion on the way to this realisation, which is described in his two works *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations on First Philosophy*. To the extent that the cogito reasoning in Second Meditation on First Philosophy yields certain knowledge that we are thinking and that we exist as thinking beings, this requires a second-order reflection on our first-order thoughts (Simmons 2012, 16). After comparing the perception of wax changing its form in our sight and in imagination and also in his 'self without senses,' Descartes says in the Second Meditation: "I now know that even bodies are not strictly perceived by the senses or the faculty of imagination but by the intellect alone, and that this perception derives not from their being touched or seen but from their being understood … and I can achieve an easier and more evident perception of my own mind than of anything else" (Descartes 1997, 22-23). He also

states that perception requires the faculty of judgement in mind, and thus a mind also. As we know, perception is meaningful sensation, and operations of the mind are primarily meaning-making exercises. To be conscious is to think; to think is to be conscious. This view is suggested by the following text in the Third Replies: "There are … acts which we call acts of thinking, such as understanding or imagining or sensing, etc., which all fall under the common concept of thought [cogitationis] or perception [perceptionis] or consciousness [conscientiae]" (Simmons 2012, 4). Descartes, while excluding everything else, did not intend to reflect on the order of truth of that excluded matter, but the order of his perception (Descartes 1997, 7). Following this understanding, we can see how Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) has dealt with this topic.

The question posed by Kant is whether the subject or the intellectual and rational self can really grasp the object or the spatiotemporal world. According to Kant, the content of the mind is the spatiotemporal world. The sensibility of human beings (or the forms of our perception) gives the feeling that the world is in an order through time and space. In the context of our main consideration, it may be noted that reflection on nature takes place in two synthetic moments – present and past or present and future. Kant believes that we can perceive only things as they appear in space and time. And there is a thing-in-itself (*Ding-an-sich*) behind the world as it appears to our sensibility, but which cannot be accessed (Kant 1998, 105). Kant uses two terms, *Noumenon* (akin to the thing-in-itself) and *Phenomenon* (appearance), to explicate this: "If we understand a thing by noumenon, so far it is not the object of our sensory perception, in that we abstract from our way of looking at it; so this is a noumenon in the negative mind" (Kant 1998, 361).[2] To qualify an object to the category of noumenon would mean that the perceiver cannot cognise it. On the other hand, what the perceiver can recognise or know is not the real thing in its thing-in-itself aspect, but only a phenomenon, an appearance. Kant says: "Matter is substantial phenomenon. I look for what belongs to her inside in all parts of the space that it occupies, and in all the effects that it exerts, and which, of course, can always only be appearances of external senses" (Kant 1998, 392). The first perception is 'impossible,' and the second is 'insufficient' as the object is only an appearance, as far as Kant's epistemology would tell us. This would necessitate an escape into another realm – that of imagination.

[2] Unless specified, translations of German texts are by the author of this chapter.

The imaginative power of the mind facilitates the synthesis of what it has perceived, to see what is common in external objects. It is the capacity of understanding, which is intimately connected with our power of judgment, to draw conclusions about what lies beyond the limits of sensibility (like time and space). These are necessary requirements for the use of reason in a realm where we can have knowledge (about the world of appearances). Known as Transcendental Idealism, this Kantian principle maintains that only things in appearances can be experienced and things in themselves (*Ding-an-sich*) cannot be known. Indeed there emerged the post-Kantian schools of thought which revised Kant's propositions to an extent.

The Cartesian and Kantian standards in epistemology got overshadowed in the early Romantic period (1797-1802) in Germany, and during more or less the same period in the case of England's Lake Poets. The Romantic period saw the positing of nature as a paradigm of aesthetic experience. Though Kant's *Critique of Judgement* was one of the starting points that triggered the discussion on the experience of beauty, he was accused of a dualistic ideology that could not solve the problem of the real (to be perceived). An emphasis that appears later is that of Nature as the non-self (German: *nicht-ich* = 'non-I') experienced by the self (*ich* = 'I'). Fichte (1762-1814) conceived it as the 'self' envisaging the thing from her/his thinking. This is a kind of idealism, as the starting point is thinking and idea, as Hans Joachim Störig considers it (1999, 507). Experience, according to Fichte, comes from the self. The external force that is experienced is the non-self, and it is felt in the self. Here, producing the non-self is no conscious creation, but a non-caused, unconscious process. This is not a mere process, but an activity of the self, positing the thing or the external object as the non-self.

With Kant as a point of departure, Fichte developed Transcendental Idealism into a "subjective" variety, which he called a practical idealism, by completely eliminating the "thing-in-itself" and deriving the content and form of experience from the "I" (the general, supra-individual subject).[3] For Fichte, the Kantian thing-in-itself was something to be discarded.[4] Mark Kipperman (1984) has observed that Nature in Fichte is a product of the self: "What we call Nature is nothing self-sufficient or existing by itself but only a product of the 'I' or self" (224). We can see the primacy of the self in relation to the external world as thing and nature. In our attempt to fix the problem of the role of the self

[3] See Johann Gottlieb Fichte: https://www.textlog.de/fichte.html (accessed 3 February 2022).
[4] https://www.textlog.de/fichte.html (accessed 3 February 2022).