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The Aesthetics of the Green Postcolonial Novel in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

Abstract I: Sulla scia della convergenza tra ecocritica e postcolonialismo, il mio articolo analizza *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) di Kiran Desai, un romanzo che unisce il senso di perdita umana al degrado ambientale. Si sostiene che l'estetica del *green postcolonial* anima il complesso romanzo di Desai che intreccia narrativa, storia, realismo e immaginazione. Attraverso la descrizione della brutalità umana, di paesaggi dalla vegetazione lussureggiante e di una ricca gamma di flora e fauna, *The Inheritance of Loss* critica le posizioni antropocentriche, sfocando il confine tra umano e non-umano.

Abstract II: Drawing upon the convergence of ecocriticism and postcolonialism, my article explores Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), a novel that bridges human loss and environmental degradation. It is my contention that a green postcolonial aesthetics animates Desai's complex novel that weaves fiction, history, realism and imagination. By staging human violence, gleaming landscapes and a rich ecological wealth of flora and fauna, *The Inheritance of Loss* exposes a critique of the anthropocentric positions, blurring the border between human and non-human.

"In a world obsessed with national boundaries and belonging, as a novelist working with a form also traditionally obsessed with place, it was a journey to come to this thought, that the less structured, the multiple, may be a possible location for fiction, perhaps a more valid ethical location in general" (Rochester 2007). In this interview for the Man Booker, Kiran Desai suggests that the ethical role of a novelist is to provide insights into fluid identities and multiple locations by paying attention to the inequalities that have resulted from globalization and to the effects of environmental degradation. In this regard, Desai's narrative style interrogates realism by staging an ethical component that tackles ideals of sustainability and preservation in postcolonial India. Her debut novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998), revolves around globalization and ecological care in a world affected by the exploitation of natural resources and global warming. In *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), too, environmental concerns are juxtaposed with diasporic displacement and postcolonial conflicts. Desai's second novel, winner of the Man Booker prize, gives a fictional account of the devastating ecological impact of the colonial project in India and, as Jill Didur explains, it provides a form of "counterlandscaping" that "offers an alternative mode for imagining the Himalayan landscape that takes up essentializing colonial tropes and subverts their neutralized status" (Didur 2011: 59).

Desai's lyrical and satiric prose draws the reader's attention to the fact that human loss and environmental degradation are entwined and their convergence entails "the inseparability of current crises of ecological mismanagement from historical legacies of imperialistic exploitation and authoritarian abuse" (Huggan 2004: 702). As Graham Huggan puts it, the critical intersection between ecocriticism and postcolonialism may grapple with a set of theoretical limitations of the two fields¹ and serve as a transformative means "of addressing the social and environmental problems of the present, but also of imagining alternative futures (Huggan 2004: 721). Following the engagement of third wave ecocriticism with postcolonial theory², my article explores how Desai's novel is redolent of conflicts and abuses posed by the British colonial power through a green-aesthetically attuned reading. To do so, I address the hybrid texture of the novel that crosses the borders of fiction, history, realism and imagination. By blending human violence and ecological decay, I claim that the novel challenges human-centred positions and questions the legacies of colonization through an aesthetics of fluid borders between human and non-human, local and outsiders, human and animal, nature and culture. My use of the green postcolonial key discloses Desai's ethical concern with the consequences of economic colonization and environmental venture in a landscape where borders are transgressed, reassessing the importance of sustainability and coexistence beyond anthropocentric positions. The purpose of my analysis is to unveil the complex amalgam of historical fiction, realism, ecological stance and postcolonialism under which Desai's novel is evocative of a mutually constructive dialogue between mankind and environment.

"Shadow places", postcolonial pastoral and historical flows

The Inheritance of Loss is a tale of loss of cultures, identities, relations, values and faith, especially attentive to the themes of violence, decay and fragility of both human nature and environment. While the Indian side of the novel is set in the Himalayan region against the backdrop of the 1980s political insurgencies for an independent Gorkhaland, the American storyline centres around the invisible urban world of Manhattan's basement kitchens, where migrants experience "traumas of negated citizenship, humiliation and compete absence of rights" (Concilio 2010: 108). Despite the juxtaposition of the two stories, all the main characters share an inheritance of loss in that they bear the traces of a complex postcolonial legacy. The Indian strand of the narrative features Jemubhai Patel, an old former judge, who lives in

¹ In his seminal article on postcolonial ecocriticism, Huggan discusses some intellectual hurdles between the two critical areas. While he acknowledges that ecocritical analysis may reveal the "historical insufficiencies" (Huggan 2004: 720) of postcolonial discourse, he also comments that the postcolonial commitment to environmental issues opens to the global and the transnational since it offers "a valuable corrective to a variety of universalist ecological claims" (Huggan 2004: 720).

² The first wave of ecocriticism is concerned with the nostalgic evocation of nature in literary texts that "speak for" (Buell 1995: 10) nature. By studying mainly Wordsworth and Thoreau's poetry, early ecocritics see nature and human beings as distinct and opposed to one another. The second wave, which started in the 1990s, promoted a dialogue between human and non-human, challenging the deep ecological stance of the first wave. Buell adopts the metaphor of the wave (Buell 1995: 17) to illustrate the ever-changing movement of the critical field. Accordingly, Scott Slovic proposes a "third wave" of ecocriticism. Not only does he take into account the commitment of the green agenda to postcolonialism, globalization and feminism, he also remarks a "critique from within" (Slovic 2010: 7) that was lacking in the two previous ecocritical waves.

a house in Kalimpong, North India, with a view over the Himalaya. The Anglophile judge, who was educated in Cambridge, shares the house, Cho Oyu, with a cook and with Sai, his westernized Indian granddaughter who is addicted to English novels and has a crush on Gyan, her Muslim-Nepalese mathematics tutor. The American plot, instead, follows the illegal immigration of the cook's son, Biju, from West Bengal to New York, and it zooms in on his miserable living conditions as a cook in the American metropolis. Not only does Desai's novel shuttle between the urban area of New York and the foothills of north-eastern Himalaya, it also oscillates between present and past. A postmodern novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* resorts to most of the ingredients of the genre and, more particularly, it mixes historical realism and chronological disarray.

The interaction of distant landscapes and non-linear chronology with a third-person narrative perspective alters the register of the novel. What appears to be a sad story of loss can be read as a tale of dispossession of a different kind where the Indian environment plays a central role. Despite Desai's realistic portrayal of places and historical events, the novel engages the question of the "aesthetic transformation of the real" that, as Ursula Heise argues, "has a particular potential for reshaping the individual and collective ecosocial imaginary" (Heise 2010: 258). While ecocritics have tended to investigate wild and rural places aiming at valuing "ideas of purity with regard to ecosystems and places" (Heise 2010: 253), postcolonial theory is concerned with an "emphasis on historically varying definitions of the human" (Heise 2010: 253). With such issues in mind, the theoretical interplay between ecocriticism and postcolonialism in *The Inheritance of Loss* offers a counter-narrative to the historical tensions in the area. The ecocritical themes, like the pastoral, embody a material environment that fuses with human displacement in a complex flow between fact and fiction, human and non-human. From the point of view of the fluid rural landscapes, violence has been committed against the local flora and fauna and Desai depicts natural sites as "shadow places" (Plumwood 2008) exploited first for the colonial project, and later for trade and tourism.

Historically, the area around Darjeeling, the Himalayan region where Desai locates the Indian story of the novel, had been run by the Gorkhas³, an ethnic and linguistic enclave between the territories of Nepal and West Bengal. With the treaty of Sugauli, which signed the end of the Anglo-Nepalese War (1814-1816), these lands were passed to the East Indian Company and Darjeeling was annexed to the British Empire. During the British colonization, Darjeeling, a restorative hill station where British elites could enjoy the vista over the Himalaya, was turned into a symbol of "shadow places", areas that are materially altered in order to provide food and resources for non-native people since they are "marred by intensive economic extraction, degradation, and displacement" (Besky 2017: 19)⁴. The legacy of the colonial experience continued with the drawing and redrawing of borders between India

³ The name *Gorkha*, or *Gurkhas*, derives from the toponym of a hill district located in the Kingdom of Nepal which was later annexed to British India in the wake of the Anglo-Nepalese wars.

⁴ Besky draws upon Val Plumwood who used the phrase "shadow places" to describe sites that in our globalized world serve as "places that produce or are affected by the commodities you consume, places consumers don't know about, don't want to know about, and in a commodity regime don't ever need to know about or take responsibility for" (Plumwood 2008: 146).

and Nepal in the aftermath of the Indian independence in 1947, with thousands of Nepalis expelled from the region despite their ancestral claims to the land. In the wake of Partition, regional separatist parties in Darjeeling district fought for the independence of Gorkhaland, which would comprise the local majority of Indian Nepalis. The agitation culminated in the creation of the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) in the 1980s, a political militarized group whose main aim was not only the protection of the ethnic and linguistic boundaries of the enclave, but also the preservation of the natural resources of the area.

On these foothills bordered by Nepal to the east, Bhutan to the west, Bengal and Bangladesh to the south, and the Indian state of Sikkim to the north, the British modified the mountainous region into an “extractive landscape” (Besky 2017: 22): tea, timber and cinchona plantations were intensified, while forests were replaced by roads and buildings, such as schools and sport clubs. With the creation of botanical gardens, the colonizers introduced new taxonomies of plants: not only did they set up a business with tea plantations, they also remade the Himalayan physical landscape in accordance with their own vision of nature. While tea cultivations, roads and houses stood as a reminder of the colonial presence, the purity of the air contributed to turn Darjeeling into a “space of leisure, good feeling, and relaxation” (Besky 2017: 30) for British administrators and anglicized Indian elites, in line with such basic ecocritical concepts as the pastoral. Darjeeling came to epitomize the quintessential colonial hill station where picturesque mists and lush vegetation coexisted, as we can see in a painting by the famous Victorian illustrator and poet Edward Lear (Fig. 1).

But while the painting portrays Darjeeling as a place of sublime beauty, shadow places, as Besky reminds us, are sites of “danger and anxiety” (Besky 2017: 25) and Desai’s integration of postcolonialism and ecology exposes the condition of ecological fragility of the area.

The Inheritance of Loss is steeped in the representation of fluid spaces with an insistence on shifting borders, hazy landscapes and ecological exploitation. The narrative opens and ends with the description of the Himalaya, specifically of the Kanchenjunga’s peak that, with “its wizard phosphorescence” (Desai 2006: 1), epitomizes the gloomy past buried in the characters’ lives:

All day, the colors had been those of the dusk, mist moving like a water creature across the great flanks of mountains possessed of ocean shadows and depths. Briefly visible above the vapor, Kanchenjunga was a far peak whittled out of ice, gathering the last of the light, a plume of snow blown high by the storms at its summit (1).

In the *incipit*, Desai captures the changing moods of nature. The murky landscape of dense forests, lush vegetation and snow-covered mountains present both the celebratory and minatory manifestations of nature. Away from the chaos of the world, the place serves as a sublime backdrop against which the main characters and the historical tensions are introduced. The mountain, covered with snow, vapour and fog, creates a blurred atmosphere that seems to encompass the whole area, while the mist, “twisting and turning, twisting and turning” (4), gives a “human” (2) halo to the landscape around Cho Oyu. Such a vision of hazy confusion is particularly evident in the highly evocative natural *tableaux* that can truly “raise the human heart to spiritual heights” (12). The physicality of the space is meant to ex-



Fig. 1. *Kanchenjunga from Darjeeling* by Edward Lear (1879)

pose the inner landscapes of the characters, who perceive the place as a site of identification, while the “immensity of the landscape” (36) accentuates the silent and alienated existences of Sai, Patel and the cook.

The novel opens with Sai’s perspective and the young girl develops a positive connection to the place. A flashback suddenly goes back to Sai’s arrival at Cho Oyu on a dark gloomy day marked by a natural setting where “Kanchenjunga glowed macabre, trees stretched away on either side, trunks pale, leaves black” (19). Even though the narrative conjures up the uncanny beauty of the Himalayan landscape, it is also concerned with stressing the vital force of nature. This feeling is further exemplified by Sai’s evocation of her parents’ love affair that is embedded “in this grassy acre” (26) where cows used to graze near a Mughal tomb. Likewise, the romance between Sai and Gyan takes place in a peaceful pastoral scenario. For Sai, the landscape is a luxuriant space where “dozens of snakes lay roasting on the stones, and flowers bloomed as plushy and perfectly as on a summer outfit” (65). While sitting on the veranda, she enjoys the vista over the Himalaya and the celebratory mood of the landscape. The remote place seems to be indicative of a harmony between man and nature that postcolonial conflicts come to threaten. Depiction of birds, animals, insects, pastoral and georgic life alternate with violence and decay, presenting the minatory manifestations of the natural world. By offering a view of the Himalaya in stark contrast to the colonial

trope of pastoral retreat, the narrator seems to warn his readers against the threatening force of nature which is the consequence of anthropocentric violent activities. While Didur argues that the novel's counterlandscape "displaces normalized notions of the land, garden, and nature" (Didur 2011: 43), I claim that it also moves beyond nostalgia, highlighting a green postcolonial aesthetics where the idea of the pastoral is undermined and endangered by anthropocentric ownership and economic exploitation.

The initial harmony is disrupted by the appearance of the GNLF rebels at Cho Oyu who stop the circulation of cars and upset the natural balance. Though at first sight the Himalayan region seems to reveal an ahistorical and mythical perspective, such a nostalgic view turns away from the pastoral tradition towards a more transformative vision of the place that encompasses a plurality of narratives, traditions, postcolonial legacies and environmental ventures. While Nepalis ask for independence, contesting the borders drawn in India in the aftermath of Partition, the landscape of the region conveys the porous spatial boundaries and the densely multilayered history of the area. Cho Oyu, for instance, located in an area where "lush ferns butted into the windows [...] colored birds swooped and whistled, and the Himalayas rose layer upon layer until those gleaming peaks proved a man to be so small that it made no sense" (Desai 2006: 29), had been built by a Scotsman. The fact that Patel buys the house from a Scotsman explains the vortex of history, imagination and ecology around which the protagonists of the novel gravitate. Desai infuses the pastoral depiction of the land with a note of irony: the Scotsman, who is presented as a passionate reader of the local accounts, epitomises the quintessential image of the coloniser, "wild and brave" (2), who exploits the area for its natural resources such as quinine, sericulture, cardamom and orchids. The judge, by contrast, who has just returned from Cambridge, "was not interested in agricultural possibilities of the land" (28). When Patel buys the house in 1957, he views the place in pastoral terms, feeling he "was entering a sensibility rather than a house" (28). The return of the native, the judge, to his motherland inscribes a new perspective upon the Himalayan landscape. While the Scotsman embodies the colonial project of taming the land, Patel's imaginative vision foregrounds an act of resistance that shifts the focus from colonial abuse to a sense of dwelling that implies "the solace of being a foreigner in his own country" (29), a stance through which Desai hybridises the colonial motif with a native pastoral perspective.

The Inheritance of Loss revolves around the dynamism of colonial entrepreneurship and the feeling of diasporic vulnerability. The Himalayan region discloses its fragility inasmuch as nature pays its debt for the brutality of human actions. The continuous landslides, for example, reflect the greed of human action: while a new law allows for the edification of an extra story for the houses in Darjeeling, "the weight of more concrete pressing downward had spurred the town's lopsided descent and caused more landslides than ever" (197). The collapse of the land stands for the minatory force of nature that tries to resist the effects of commodity-driven, anthropocentric culture. The initial pastoral fantasy, hence, is contradicted by the postcolonial tensions that spoil the sacredness of nature. With their violent assaults, the GNLF rioters turn the sublime natural scenario into a landscape "gouged by termites from within" (233). Kanchenjunga is presented as a metonymic signifier of the wounds inflicted by human beings on nature. When "a report of new dissatisfaction in the Hills, gathering insurgency, men and guns" (9) spreads across the region, the Himalaya re-

veals its vulnerable side and natural harmony is violently undermined by the insurgencies. The narrative resorts to images of decay and destruction that draw the reader's attention to the fragility of the environment: the "garnet lines of fire pouring down the mountain" (45) and the bloodshed imaginary disrupt the tradition of the pastoral setting contributing to the apocalyptic vision of a desecrated land.

Human versus non-human: the pathetic fallacy and natural resilience

In postcolonial India, a variety of overlapping histories are embedded in the construction of places, but their presence is constantly remoulded by the unpredictability of the natural force. *The Inheritance of Loss* amplifies the atrocities inflicted upon the environment by highlighting the binary relationship between nature and culture. Such attentiveness to the active role of the environment chimes with the agenda of postcolonial ecocriticism that should reflect "a complex epistemology that recuperates the alterity of both history and nature, without reducing either to the other" (DeLoughrey & Handley 2011: 4). On the one hand, Desai's Himalayan landscape registers the consequences of the British imperialism; on the other, the environment also positions itself as an entity which undergoes change and acts beyond it. The narrator reveals the overpowering physicality of a place that seems to dominate humankind: across the vapours of the mist and the flames of the insurgencies, "[a]bove was Kanchenjunga, solid, extraordinary, a sight that for centuries had delivered men their freedom and thinned clogged human hearts to joy" (Desai 2006: 277). The prodigious power of the mountain regulates the lives of human beings and seems to eclipse the efforts of mankind, weaving a tale of violence to land and human fragility.

Desai's descriptive prose employs the elements of personification. At times, the mood of the characters is articulated by the natural background which is personified as a character and can be seen interacting with the subjects that populate the story. Desai hybridizes the rural scenario of Kanchenjunga with anthropomorphic creatures that destabilize the peacefulness of the landscape: "the mist charging down like a dragon, dissolving, undoing, making ridiculous the drawing of borders" (Desai 2006: 9). The portrayal of the environment is infused with an ecocritical stance as it represents an untamed landscape where vapours and mists seem to be able to control time and elude colonial domestication. In the novel, the interface between nature and culture, an "urgent and never more pertinent" (Huggan & Tiffin 2015: 6) question in postcolonial ecocriticism, serves as a metaphor for the complex amalgam of human and non-human in the ecosystem. The mist moves like a water body across the flanks of the mountains, while the thick bamboo trees in the forest are personified as "moss-slung giants, bunioned and misshaped, the roots of orchids are compared to tentacles and the "caress of the mist seemed human" (Desai 2006: 2). In the same vein, the Teesta river⁵ "came leaping" (31) like a living body through the invisible lines of the remote valley in North India, throwing back the echoes of its "ssss tseu ts ts seuuu" sounds.

According to Garrard (2012: 36), pathetic fallacy is an old pastoral trope that "wrongly locates feeling (*pathos*) in, say, mountains or trees". The attribution of human features to the

⁵ The Teesta river (192 miles) flows through the border between Sikkim and West Bengal, carving out the Himalayas.

environment, a strategy that John Ruskin first introduced in his *Modern Painters* (1856)⁶, refracts the transgression of the border between human and non-human, thus bridging man with nature. Yet, Desai's personification of the landscape conjures up anthropomorphic entities that try to resist human exploitation, in an echo of Buell's comments on natural personification as an ecocritical strategy where "what counts is the underlying ethical orientation implied in the troping" (Buell 1995: 217). Buell finds that personification and pathetic fallacy are relevant in eco-sustainable writings which speak for an entity that cannot communicate verbally. Desai's novel shows a striking tendency to give voice to the non-human world: the ways in which the banana trees "began to flap their great ears" (Desai 2006: 105), the bamboo trees display a "hollow-knuckled knocking" (34) and the "swollen presence of the forest" (34) dominate the story unveil the author's interest in building a language for nature that borrows the material from the human world.

The Bengali-American author does not merely attribute human traits to the land, she also endows the Himalayan landscape with its own language through which nature can be said to naturalize and mock human beings. Just as the landscape is rendered as a tactile presence, human beings are transfigured as animals or landscape, a solution that subverts the idea that the human is the standard. The old judge, for example, is described as "more lizard than human" (32) and his dog, Mutt, as "more human than dog" (32), a transfer of qualities between human and non-human that may be interpreted as an attempt to set an ecological equilibrium. Mutt is portrayed as a human presence and she is eventually kidnapped by the GNLf insurgents. The silence about the destiny of Patel's pet generates a sense of anxiety in the judge who eventually comes to the awareness that

Human life was stinking, corrupt, and meanwhile there were beautiful creatures who lived with delicacy on the earth without doing anyone any harm. "We should be dying," the judge almost wept. [...] The world had failed Mutt. It had failed beauty; it had failed grace (292).

Patel grieves the loss of his beloved dog, one of the many victims outraged by the conflicts in the area. The novel, hence, defies the negative charges of Ruskin's concept, read-dressing the relevance of the pathetic fallacy as a form of connection between the self and the place. Not only does the formal combination of personification and zoification refuse the perspective that humans are a blueprint for non-humans, it also notably envisions a creative dialogue between mankind and environment.

The emphasis on physicality encourages esteem for all forms of life, both human and non-human. The novel is replete with images reinforcing the interchange between different ethnic cultures and the vibrant wealth of the flora and fauna, like the flowers that are an emblem of the region "for everyone in Kalimpong loved flowers" (254). In an area where people used to live on the natural resources and where food is genuinely made from "fresh

⁶ Ruskin's discussion of the pathetic fallacy explains the distortions between art and emotions. Accordingly, the animation of inanimate objects is "a sign of the incapacity of his human sight or thought to bear what has been revealed to it" (Ruskin 2000: 28).

butter, fresh milk still warm from the buffalo" (103), Desai highlights the convergence of natural beauty and human agency. While natural disasters, storms, thick fog, extreme cold and wet climate contribute to make human life harder, the author also portrays the rich fauna of the place with birds, like bats, eagles, butterflies, and pet animals, such as buffaloes, horses, elephants, donkeys, snakes, and caterpillars, enriching the ecological beauty of a place that "had seemed unreal – so full of fairy tales, of travelers seeking Shangri-la" and that "it had proved all the easier to destroy, therefore" (128). Wounds seem to be embedded in nature whose beauty is clearly scarred by tensions and conflicts:

India had swallowed the jewel-colored kingdom, whose blue hills they could see in the distance, where the wonderful oranges came from and the Black Cat rum that was smuggled to them by Major Aloo. Where monasteries dangled like spiders before Kanchenjunga, so close you'd think the monks could reach out and touch the snow (128).

Despite such pains, the Himalayan region rejects the anthropocentric and colonial attempts of domestication insomuch as the place is portrayed as changing and metamorphic. Desai's invocation of a liquid natural world is also conveyed through what Sai reads in the *National Geographic*. In an old issue of the journal, she learns that giant squids are able to scope the dark of the ocean thanks to their big eyes, but "theirs was a solitude so profound they might never encounter another of their tribe" (2). Sai is an admirer of the immense and sublime manifestations of natural beauty and, after reading about the squid and wondering at the silver phosphorescence of the Himalaya, asks herself "[c]ould fulfilment ever be felt as deeply as loss"? (2). This central question interweaves the various losses Desai's tale stages: economic, political, social, cultural and ecological. Though the novel is also about globalization, terroristic violence and social injustice, ecological concerns connect the various fragilities of the story. Caught within the contradictions of postcolonial histories and ontological fragility, the protagonists of Desai's novel seem to have lost the ability to find pleasure in their lives and they are doomed to a sense of incompleteness and anxiety. In this respect, Kanchenjunga's gleaming peak embodies a timeless beauty that contrasts with the condition of ontological marginality of Sai and the other characters who lose what they used to possess, in a place where the destruction of nature eventually leads to the destruction of man. By echoing Jorge Luis Borges' poem "Boast of Quietness", quoted in an epigraph to the novel, the narrative conveys the universal theme of alienation and displacement. Whilst Borges sees boasting and quietness as antonyms and his poem deals with the universal motif of human homelessness, Desai's tale expands the sense of human loss to the wounded Himalayan nature.

In the conclusion of the novel, however, Desai places the emphasis on the resilience of the natural force. Despite the blood which ignites ethnic tensions on the Bengali-Nepalese border and the identity quest that affects all the main characters, the beauty of the Himalayan region well illustrates how this place may be interpreted as "a contested space where different spatial fantasies and histories are accumulated, and the land is revealed both as a speaking subject and as disputed object of discursive management and material control" (Huggan & Tiffin 2015: 20). Biju returns home, feeling "exhilarated by the immensity of

wilderness" (Desai 2006: 315): the frogs are cracking in the *jhora*, and he realizes that the political upheavals have wreaked havoc with their violence. Yet, the final embrace between Biju and his father occurs under the Kanchenjunga's peak turning golden, "with the kind of luminous light that made you feel, if briefly, that truth was apparent" (324). Symbolically, the gleam of light from the Himalaya seems to illuminate the social and economic divisions between cultures, while the mountainous region, with its golden peaks, sheds light and offers hope in the face of losses. Desai's narrative finally reconciles past and present, men and place, alerting the reader to the deep significance of the connection between the native environment and identity. By readdressing the opposition between men and nature, *The Inheritance of Loss* seems to suggest that one way to survive in a wounded and fragile world is to become aware of the connections between human and non-human. The novel ends on an ambivalent note, echoed by the idea that "truth was apparent" (324). Though nature still provides nourishment with mushrooms, bamboo shoots and pumpkin vines still growing copiously in a place where humans kill each other, the condition of human recuperation seems to be unattainable before the luminous presence of the Kanchenjunga. In the light of this sense of elusiveness, the diaphanous presence of the mountain reflects the way in which the domains of human and non-human intersect.

To conclude, *The Inheritance of Loss* appears to edge towards the aesthetics of the green postcolonial novel in that it echoes Huggan and Tiffin's prescription that there is "no social justice without environmental justice" (2007: 10). As the two scholars point out, the green postcolonial fiction calls for a function of "social and environmental advocacy" (2015:12) that does not exclude the aesthetic qualities of a literary text. In Desai's novel, pastoral and romantic visions of the land are interwoven with the portrayal of historical frictions and diasporic anxieties which contribute to a dynamic interaction between place and displacement. Through the use of pastoral motifs, historical realism, chronological disarray, personification and zooification, Desai depicts a world where social inequities and environmental degradation go hand in hand. Her engagement with the ways in which aesthetic forms may establish an ethical care attuned to global and local questions of justice demonstrates that the novel is a fertile genre for a fruitful allegiance between the two theoretical frameworks. If postcolonial novels can "provide vital perspectives on how we narrate, understand, and respond to environmental conflicts" (Carrigan 2010: 96), *The Inheritance of Loss* exhibits an eco-sustainable mode of writing that enhances restorative potentialities in the shared awareness of living in a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the ecosystem of the planet. Ecological vulnerability and postcolonial loss include and exceed humanity and, as I have argued, this reminds us of the limitations of the anthropocentric view in the face of the non-human world. Confronting a fragile environment, the reader is invited to envisage the creative power of literature that might arise ecological awareness and promote new understandings beyond human-centred positions.

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