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## Nayar, P. K. (2019). *Ecoprecarity: Vulnerable Lives in Literature and Culture*. Routledge.

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The ever-growing awareness of ontological relationality between biotic and abiotic agents is starting to change how humans relate to the non-human world. On the one hand, such an understanding of the inherent interdependence of all things might serve as an invitation towards a more caring, nurturing, and affective turn to the Other, be that human or non-human. On the other hand, the anxieties about the fragility and contingency of life can reinforce the centuries-long belief that “Nature” is an arch-nemesis and a wild entity that needs to be tamed (Merchant 1980, Shiva 1989), often resulting in the over-coding of bio- and geo-engineering manias that produce visions of the future shaped by chemical and technological debris and the subsequent romanticization of the then-moribund “Nature.” Pramod K. Nayar’s *Ecoprecarity: Vulnerable Lives in Literature and Culture* (2019) addresses the latter and closely examines the apprehensions behind the inescapable demand to redefine what it means to be human, if at all, in the troubling times of ecological degradation and the ever-increasing ontological entanglement with technology. How does a parasitic/symbiotic relationship with viruses and prostheses, a precarious life in and of “wilderness,” or the procedures of xenotransplantation and the advents of genomics, unsettle “human” sovereignty and blur the boundary not only between nature and culture but also between nature and technology? What do such transformations mean for the notions of cultural and species identities? And how does capital capitalize on such anxieties?

To respond to these questions, Nayar employs the concept of “ecoprecarity” defined as the “intertwined set of discourses of fragility, vulnerability, power relations across species and imminent extinction” (6). Unlike the narratives that advocate for “environmental human rights” (Leib 2011), he argues that his vision of ecoprecarity moves beyond anthropocentrism and encompasses the vulnerability of non-human species and ecosystems, although he is aware of the caveat that in the literary texts he analyzes “the protagonist/victim/perpetrator is the human lifeform” (15). For that reason, even when Nayar addresses the fragility of non-human life-forms, the underlying question is what the stakes for humans are now that “natural” ecosystems are deteriorating. The only exception is the chapter on “wilderness,” which discusses BBC and National Geographic documentaries where animals are, in fact, protagonists. Besides documentary films, Nayar’s *Ecoprecarity* looks at a broad range of dystopian speculative fiction and authors such as Margaret Atwood, Paolo Bacigalupi, J. G. Ballard, and Kazuo Ishiguro, and couples them with an extensive, transdisciplinary list of texts on ecocriticism, posthumanism, bio-economics, and medical humanities, among others. Nayar also analyzes popular Hollywood films such as *Jurassic Park* (1993), *Invasion* (2007), and *The Jungle Book* (2016). With its focus on the notions of immunity, posthuman

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entanglements, genomics, and cloning, Nayar's book is timely and well conscious of critical issues constituting contemporary ethos.

The book is divided into five chapters and begins with Nayar's situating of ecoprecarity as a condition of the inherent vulnerability of human and non-human lives, and reflecting on how the increasing awareness of such interdependence redefines what it means to be human. Chapter two, "Biosecurity and Invasion in the 'Outbreak Narrative'" examines literary and film representations of cultural and bodily invasion by, for example, aliens, vampires, and viruses, or cloning and xenotransplantation, and addresses the anxieties behind the loss of "human sovereignty" and a communal sense of belonging. In "Dystopias and 'Ecological Uncanny,'" Nayar looks at texts that show how waste culture and technological interventions have led to inhospitable, almost spectral landscapes, or what he calls the "decadent sublime"—depictions of the aftermath of ecocatastrophe where the remnants of the former civilization serve as an index of a failed modernity. The chapter also addresses apprehensions about human extinction and the return of ancient "primitive" lifeforms and somewhat repeats the arguments about the loss of "humanness" made in the previous chapter. Chapter four, "The Wild and Its Feral Biopolitics" first looks at the "wild" as a contested category that stands in binary opposition to materialist "civilization" and simultaneously serves as a locus of a romanticized escape into the healing, "authentic," and "primal Nature" on the one hand, and violent, untamed, and monstrous wilderness on the other. More recently, "wilderness" has served to signal the vanishing "Nature" that must be protected. In the same chapter, he employs the concept of "carnal geographies" to argue that animal documentaries often render animal subjects as objects and symbolic commodities. In terms of the Tarzan-like representations of a feral child, he suggests that the "feral" body is the one that crosses the border between the human and the animal and, as such, has the capacity to blur the problematic dichotomy. The final chapter, "Live Capital, Bioeconomies and Endangered Belonging" examines how life itself is subsumed under capital when it serves as a vehicle for surrogacy, cloning, or organ trafficking. The second part of the chapter analyzes how genomics is often used to trace "genetic citizenship and ancestry" and reinforce racial-biological determinism, but also the hierarchy of the Indian caste system, a tendency that downright disregards the cultural and historical processes integral to racial, class, ethnic ways of belonging.

The aforementioned chapters draw from Nayar's previously published works, which is the reason why there seems to be a structural discrepancy, stemming from a lack of cohesion between chapters, occasional repetition of arguments, and the impression of multiple critical voices. Each chapter is split into two or more wider topics covering a large body of fictional and theoretical texts, which prevents Nayar from delving deeper into the problems of each. The sheer size of Nayar's repository of eco-fiction is indeed impressive, but the breadth of his reading across texts often comes at the expense of a more nuanced and focused close-reading. Similarly, because he sweeps through complex questions very quickly, the book often lacks clarity. For example, his continued reference to "Nature" does not render it clear enough whether he is indeed moving beyond the binary between nature and culture or merely acknowledging the interdependence and a dialectical relationship between the two.

Along similar lines, Nayar does not seem to sufficiently acknowledge that the category of the "human" is a product of the Western, liberal, Enlightenment discourse, which could be the cause for or a symptom of his lack of engagement with a large corpus of Indigenous and Afro-Futurisms that tell the (hi-)story of eco-disasters from marginalized perspectives (with the exception of Octavia E. Butler, who can hardly be overlooked as she is one of the authors who inaugurated the subgenre



of climate change literature). As opposed to the human whose sovereignty is compromised due to their coalescing with biotic non-human entities such as microbes and viruses, or a variety of technological devices, Nayar employs a universal notion of the human that does not account for how such a transcendental definition was, in fact, contingent on the long histories of racial and colonial violence. Even though Nayar published a book under the title *Posthumanism* (2016), his monolithic understanding of the human is essentially *humanist* as “...there is clear cultural decay when the *humaneness of global humanity* disappears with the erosion of altruism, compassion and *rational thinking*” (68, emphasis added). Such a grounding of the human as a uniform species rather than in terms of Man—white, Western, male, bourgeoisie subject—prevents him from emphasizing that the anxieties about the “end times” often depicted in eco-dystopias are not so much about the end of the human life, or the end of the planet, but are rather symptoms of the crisis of white, neoliberal futurities (Yusoff 2018, Braidotti 2019). Who the subject of his global humanity is becomes clearer when he says, “These set descriptions or portraits become the prehistory of the disaster, but also serve to signal what *we, as biosecure subjects, stand to lose* in the event of the disaster” (25, emphasis in original).

However, this does not mean that he is unaware of the racialized assumptions behind the definition of the “human.” In different chapters, for example, he refers to the arguments made by speculative fiction critics such as Sherryl Vint (2005) and Carter Soles (2013), who emphasize that, in colonial and settler discourses, people of color often belonged to the category of the animal, or the “feral,” but these casual references do not set the groundwork for his overall analysis. The final chapter on genomics and bio-economies obtains a significantly different voice and has racial determinism as the central point of reference. It does not try to problematize the Western legacy behind the notion of the human, but it does criticize the use of scientific tracing of gene origins to justify the “lack of purity,” “authenticity,” and “origin” of certain races and ethnicities.

Overall, the book is rich in insights, observations, and references to a large corpus of theoretical and literary works. It is appropriate for a wide variety of audience—students of speculative fiction, ecocriticism, and posthumanism but also senior researchers who need a more comprehensive set of works that tackle the aforementioned topics. The language also makes it accessible to non-experts interested in dystopian fiction, albeit the fast pace might leave the logic of some analyses unclear. Ultimately, the immensity of compelling and thought-provoking arguments is likely to spark interest in further research along similar lines.

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