

War-Afflicted Beings: Myth-Ecological Discourse of the Play *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* by Rajiv Joseph

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Abstract

Every war has grave repercussions for both the human and non-human elements in the geographical location where it erupts. Dramatic productions like Rajiv Joseph's *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* (2009) highlight the consequences of war on the ecosystem of the conflict-stricken vicinity of Baghdad city. In the play, the chaotic world portrayed is an ecocentric site where the ghost of a tiger talks and the destruction of the garden, of Baghdad city and of human values are lamented. To illustrate the hazards of human conflict, Joseph incorporates ancient myths with the tragedy of the Iraq war to raise issues related to Eco-theology, Zoo-criticism, Speciesism, Green Criticism, Eco-Feminism and Environmental Racism against the backdrop of the Iraq War. The author integrates Grail legends, Greek mythology and monotheistic religious texts in the play's structure to draw attention to the impending environmental doom. For example, the garden in the play reminds us of Biblical gardens, the assault of a virgin brings to mind Ovid's story of Philomela's rape, and the quest for a golden toilet seat in the desert is a clear indication of the Grail motif in the play's narrative. All these instances insinuate the embedded mythical patterns and the current era's indifference to the safety of our fellow species. Moreover, the play does not only hint at war crimes, but also refers to the overall structure of the world as an outcome of human negligence and insensitivity towards the environment. In short, the play is a myth-ecological narrative of the dilapidated ecology of the contemporary world.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, ecology, ecotheology, green criticism, Iraq, myth, Post-9/11, war, zoocriticism.

Resumen

Toda guerra tiene graves repercusiones para los elementos humanos y no humanos de la ubicación geográfica en la que estalla. *Tigre de Bengala en el Zoológico de Bagdad* (2009), de Rajiv Joseph, es una obra de teatro en la que se destacan las consecuencias de la guerra en el ecosistema de las zonas afectadas por conflictos en la ciudad de Bagdad. El mundo caótico retratado es un sitio ecocéntrico en el que habla el fantasma de un tigre, y en el que se lamentan la destrucción del jardín, la ciudad de Bagdad y los valores humanos. Joseph incorpora los mitos antiguos a la tragedia de la guerra de Irak para plantear temas relacionados con la ecoteología, la zoología, la crítica verde, el ecofeminismo y el racismo ambiental en el contexto de la guerra de Irak. El autor integra las leyendas del Grial, la mitología griega y textos religiosos monoteístas en la estructura de la obra con el fin de llamar la atención sobre el inminente apocalipsis ambiental. Por ejemplo, el jardín de la obra nos recuerda a los jardines bíblicos; el asalto de una virgen en la obra nos hace recordar la historia de la violación de Filomela, narrada por Ovidio; y la búsqueda de un inodoro dorado en el desierto es una clara alusión al motivo del Grial en la narrativa de la obra. Todos estos ejemplos insinúan los modelos míticos incrustados en la obra, y la indiferencia de la era actual hacia la seguridad de los demás seres humanos. La obra no solo insinúa crímenes de guerra, sino que también se refiere a la estructura general del mundo como resultado de la negligencia humana y la

insensibilidad hacia el medio ambiente. En resumen, la obra es una narración mito-ecológica sobre la ecología dilapidada del mundo contemporáneo.

Palabras clave: Ecofeminismo, ecología, ecoteología, crítica verde, Irak, mito, post-9/11, guerra, zoocrítica.

We are homesick for Eden. We're nostalgic for what is implanted in our hearts. It's built into us, perhaps even at a genetic level. We long for what the first man and woman once enjoyed—a perfect and beautiful home with free and untainted relationship with God, each other, animals, and our environment. (Alcorn 77)

Contemporary humanity is mired in chaos after the fall of the Twin Towers, just as prehistoric humanity had been after Biblical fall. Incessant conflicts and the war on terrorism have divided the world in two: the Muslims and the rest of the world. As depicted in the play *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo (BTBZ)*, there is no harmony among human beings, animals and their environment. All of Joseph's characters in *BTBZ* want a perfectly coordinated life with their fellow species, but instead, all they see is chaos, destruction and a life out of harmony.

BTBZ narrates the annihilation of the city of Baghdad, including its vegetation, animals, human beings, minerals and common resources. It highlights issues related to eco-theology, which deals with various "facets of theology" associated with "environment and humanity's relationship with the natural world" (Deane-Drummond x). The play's narrative also touches on the area of zoo-criticism and issues related to animal rights. Moreover, green criticism issues are raised through subtle hints about the need to preserve land, plants, water and soil (Coup 4). Furthermore, effects of environmental racism emanating from "racial discrimination during environmental policy making" (Chavis Jr. 3) are also illustrated. Lastly, concerns related to ecofeminism are depicted and imply similarity between the treatment of women and of non-human natural sources (Warren xi).

Interestingly, the mythological criticism devised by Northrop Frye in his book *Anatomy of Criticism* happens to highlight the same ecological issues as Lovejoy's *The Great Chain of Being*. Frye contends that the exploration of divine, human, animal, vegetal, mineral and water worlds in a literary work can help in making a comprehensive analysis of a text's aesthetic value. Considering the affinities between the major concerns of ecocriticism and Frye's myth criticism concept, this paper will sequentially explore the various tiers of Divine, Human, Animal, Mineral and Water worlds proposed by Frye in order to discuss how ancient myths incorporated in the play's narrative raise ecological concerns rampant in the post-9/11 scenario.

According to the framework proposed by Frye, the play is a tragedy in its thematic mode, as it is an elegy for the Iraq war. This paper contends that the play is a bio-centric narrative of the Iraq war because the character Kev's shooting of another character—Tiger—sets the play in motion; it starts in a ravaged zoo and ends in a burnt garden. The action in the play starts in the first scene when Tom tries to feed Tiger, and

instead, Tiger eats Tom's hand. Kev reacts by shooting Tiger, whose ghost then haunts Kev until he ultimately commits suicide. Meanwhile, Musa is a gardener who has been transformed into an interpreter. Musa later kills Tom, thus becoming a murderer. Musa's character hints at humanity's archetypal responsibility towards animals and plants which humans have now given up. Interestingly, Musa does not actually know why he has killed Tom, although we, as the audience, realise that Tom's misbehaviour towards Musa and his discriminatory remarks throughout the play could certainly serve as a possible reason. The fact that Tom is an American who has invaded and plundered Musa's country may be another reason. Additionally, Musa sees the shadow of Uday Hussein in Tom, the latter having also mistreated a teenage girl in the same way Uday assaulted Musa's teenage sister, Hadia.

In the aftermath of the American invasion, the zoo is totally bombarded, the garden is burnt and human rights are violated. In short, the play is an apocalyptic version of the universe in chaos. The play depicts war; indeed, Latour asserts that "one of the undervalued contexts of the anthropocene is war" (63). Similarly, Beakley argues that ecological crisis is an "established part of the post-modern condition" (51). Hence, Joseph has tried to refashion certain myths to mould them into a structure suitable for the post-9/11 milieu. These mythical structures have been used to convey the prevailing eco-critical dilemmas of the violation of human, animal and environmental rights.

Every author chooses a certain image at a specific point in time to depict the world. The choice of image depends "on the unconscious need of the poet and of the society for which he writes" (Foster 567). Similarly, *BTBZ* was inspired by a real event at Baghdad Zoo in 2003 during the American invasion of Iraq, when a US army officer actually killed a Bengal Tiger at the bombarded Baghdad Zoo. Due to American bombardment, some zoo animals were killed, some escaped, and the rest languished in their cages (D. Armstrong n.p.). Joseph picked up this real-life event and spun a beautifully tragic tale of human cruelty out of it. The play gives a mythic quality to our era because Joseph has dug out the most relevant images "from deepest unconsciousness" and brought them into "relation with conscious values ... until [they] can be accepted by his contemporaries" (Foster 568). In addition, the ancient myths in this play are the "central informing power" (Frye, "The Archetypes" 1452) as they have been used to highlight the suffering of multiple ecospheres. Thus, the entire world portrayed by Joseph is a depiction of ecological pandemonium.

This study will explore the role of the physical setting of war-ridden Iraq and the ecological wisdom values inculcated in the play's narrative. Many critics have already concluded that the themes discussed in *BTBZ* are universally applicable to the post-9/11 world because the play raises questions about war, violence and the "assumptions we make about people and nations" (Myatt 1). Moreover, Girard maintains that although "it has a very specific setting—Baghdad, 2003—its ideas and themes are universal" (5). Consequently, the play is a "microcosmic apocalyptic version of the world" (Liaqat 234) and Joseph portrays Baghdad as a space of "environmental disaster" (130), as Hiltner calls it. In addition, the play employs historical, archetypal, Greek and Arthurian legends to raise awareness about environmental hazards. Since every literary work is a

mythopoeia of its own times (Bell 123), this play is also an eco-mythopoeia of the contemporary which highlights crucial environmental issues by connecting them with ancient myths. This play is indeed an attempt to fashion a mythical world applicable to the chaotic post-9/11 world.

Myths and legends have been used in various literary genres, and are the most ancient inspirations for the content of literary texts. In addition, mythical patterns in literary works portray humanity as “acutely conscious of living in an age of change and crisis” and in need of “historically-specific archetypes to reflect and to deal with their historical situations” (Levine 185). Some popular post-war literary texts like T.S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland* (1922) and Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (1953) are two ecologically-informed narratives which incorporate multiple strands of myths. In particular, drama is “a genre in which myth has had so vital a function” (Feder 8). Many authors also use theatre for “reviving ancient myth through modern shock” (Cornwell 293). Indeed, Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* (ca. 429 BC), and Shakespeare’s tragedies such as *Macbeth* (1606), *King Lear* (1606) and *Hamlet* (1623) are some classic examples—to name a few—which were inspired by myths and legends of their times. As *BTBZ* incorporates multiple myths into its narrative, this paper uses archetypal criticism to conduct a hermeneutic analysis of the text because myth criticism is “a kind of literary anthropology” (Frye, “The Archetypes” 1452) and analyses “a literary work as a repository of truth, of racial memories” (Douglas 234).

Since the play depicts all human beings, animals, plants, minerals, cities, and deserts as victims of human cruelty and war, it propagates the idea of the “protection of [the] whole chain of ecosystems” (Barkz 144). Similarly, it helps in “consciousness raising” about “a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet’s basic support systems”. Glotfelty correctly argues that human beings affect the physical world around them. Additionally, she states that human beings have not only destroyed much natural beauty, but have also exterminated and tortured countless fellow species in our headlong race towards apocalypse. Taking a cue from Glotfelty’s claim, the play’s entire ecosphere portrays Commoners’ first law of ecology, which states that everything is connected to everything else (123-126). In short, the play is an extended chronicle of how humanity has destroyed the divine, human, animal, vegetal and mineral worlds in its pursuit of wealth and resources.

According to the observations made during this study, the animal, vegetal, divine and human worlds are interconnected in Joseph’s play. Indeed, it is very difficult to separate one strand of ecology from another. The play illustrates this interconnection when Kev says, “We’re broken man. You, me, Tiger. It’s like we fell through a prism that night at the zoo...” (Joseph 215). Similarly, human beings are compared to the animal kingdom. For example, Uday is called “Tiger of the Tigris” (150) and Americans are compared to “piranhas” (192). Taking this point further, and relating to the garden in the play which is burnt during the American invasion, human beings are also portrayed as having plant-like qualities, further blurring the lines between the human and vegetal world. Moreover, the garden is filled with topiary-shaped animals which, yet again, blur

the boundaries between animals and plants. Therefore, the entire cosmos of *BTBZ* is interconnected and interdependent.

Animal World

Concerning the issue of the depiction of animals, the play mentions both real and topiary animals that are in pitiable condition. The play mainly takes a speciesism approach, challenging the human-centred position of the universe portrayed in it (Moore 13). It also emphasizes moral and ethical issues related to the cause of animal rights (Singer, 1995; Regan, 2001 & 2004). The animal world is the central focus of this play as it starts at the ravaged zoo. Various animals like polar bears, lions, monkeys, giraffes, piranhas and ostriches are mentioned throughout the narrative.

In her critique of *BTBZ*, Una Chaudhuri claims that it belongs to “Theatre of Species” which is “produced by engaging deeply with animal alterity” (137). Moreover, the narrative reveals how the very notion “animal” carries “mythopoetic, biological-ecological, socio-historical, and legal-political resonances that are multiplied when human-animal interactions come into view” (Herman 2). Accordingly, the canon of English literature has been animalized by “representations of animals and interspecies encounters” (Parry 5) just like all other literary traditions. As a result, in the eco-poetics of literature, animals appear as motifs, symbols, characters and phantoms; and “literary animals swarm, threaten, serve, nourish, infect, infest, embellish, and hybridise...” (Parry 2). In this respect, Pollock and Rainwater believe that the many myths and folklore about animals are evidence of a human desire to understand non-human animals (1). Given that, all these facets of animal powers are at play in what Derrida calls “the plural and repeatedly folded frontier” between “those who call themselves men and what so-called men ... call the animal” (47). *BTBZ* is a play which has been produced to reflect the animal side of the story and how it interconnects with the human side of wars in our contemporary world.

The most interesting character is Tiger, who is “on the hazy borderlines between human and non-human” (Clark 192) given Joseph’s use of anthropomorphism to present Tiger in human form on stage. In the play, Tiger is a human-looking entity that can talk to the audience in human language and, most importantly, has an afterlife and can haunt murderers like Kev. Moreover, he philosophizes and tries to fight his carnivorous nature. Interestingly, the tiger had been a recurrent motif in English literature. It is, for example, mentioned as an awe-inspiring being in the poem *The Tyger* by William Blake. In his poem *Gerontion* (177-179), Eliot uses the tiger as a symbol of Christ. On the World Wildlife Fund’s (WWF) Endangered Species list, the fact that Joseph uses a tiger in his play also raises the issue of animal conservation. Accordingly, this research paper aims to analyse the mythopoetic, ecological, historical and political significance of animal representation in the play.

Firstly, animals suffer throughout the play’s narrative. To begin with, they were held in cages because humans wanted them for entertainment. Later, they were bombed during the American invasion of Iraq. The animal world is in mayhem: lions were killed

“two days” (147) prior to the time in which the play is set, monkeys have been “blown up by an IED” (175), Polar Bear commits suicide (152) and Kev shoots Tiger (153). There are topiary animals in the play as well, which Joseph terms, “Vegetal beasts” (175). Carved out of the bushes by Musa, they are all burnt and ruined because of the war. Thus, *BTBZ* illuminates a variety of issues that speak to the question of whether or not “captivity for conservation” (Wolfe ix-xiv) can be an ethically acceptable goal of the modern zoo. Additionally, it becomes a space where the “entanglements of humans and other animals are so intricate and diverse that the making or diffusion of distinctions between them, likewise, take on multiple hues and forms” (Parry 6). As a result, the analysis of animal, vegetal and human worlds as depicted in the play provides multiple shades of interdependence of various ecological elements.

Secondly, the play’s opening scene highlights the issues related to the animals’ captivity in the zoo, with Tiger voicing the caged zoo-animals’ concerns, ranging from homelessness and distress, to death and human teasing of caged animals. In fact, Tiger becomes a mouthpiece for imprisoned animals everywhere in the world when he exclaims: “Zoo is hell. Ask any animal. Rather be shot and eaten than be stuck in a fucking zoo ten thousand miles from where you were supposed to be” (Joseph 152). He also comments on his own homelessness, hankering for his own real home when he exclaims, “When you are this far from home, you know you’re never getting back” (150). According to Tiger, freedom is every “captive’s dream” (153). Additionally, when Tom tries to stick food through Tiger’s cage and poke him—which results in Tiger eating Kev’s hand (153)—it reminds us of the millions of people who go to zoos every day for entertainment and who bother animals with their food offerings and poking. Hence, the play raises many pertinent questions regarding capturing animals either for conservation or entertainment in zoos.

Thirdly, the play raises the issue of animal protection in times of war. Prior to the American invasion, the Baghdad Zoo was considered the largest zoo in the entire Middle East, holding 600 animals (*Discovery Guide* 4). During the US invasion, though, Baghdad Zoo was bombed, and the animals that escaped roamed bewildered through the city. In this regard, Frye asserts: “in the tragic vision the animal world is seen in terms of beasts and birds of prey, wolves, vultures, serpents, dragons and the like” (1456). Therefore, the presence of a carnivorous animal like Tiger reconfirms the play’s tragic vision as lions and tigers are both mentioned in the play more than once.

Taking this point further, as lions and tigers are usually perceived as some of the most powerful and majestic creatures in the animal kingdom, their helpless situation heightens the tragedy of the animals in the play. Similarly, Sax affirms that the tiger is usually a solitary animal, considered an “unequivocally romantic beast”, representative of “untamed forces of nature” like storms or volcanoes (173). Additionally, the author states that the tiger is considered a “ruler of the earth” and the greatest “primordial” power in China. Moreover, Sax claims that, “the tiger is associated with autumn, since it resembles that season in its violence and destruction”. Obviously, if two of the most powerful and venerated animals are in trouble, the rest of the animals have no chance of survival at all. That being the case, the entire animal kingdom in the play is in chaos.

Thus, the play illustrates the need to protect and preserve animals in the context of war because they are living creatures just like human beings.

Fourthly, Joseph gives Tiger religious connotations. Tiger's resurrection may be analogous to the resurrection of Christ, since Tiger himself says in the play, "What if I'm God.... Maybe I'm Him, maybe Him's me" (223). Moreover, a very interesting thing about Tiger is that he is trying to work out "philosophy about sin and redemption" (197). Furthermore, of all the animals, he is the most eager to find God, saying: "Speak through me, or through her, or through someone, but speak, *God*, speak!" (198). Consequently, Tiger's resurrection and sermons destabilize human beings' sole claim to divinity, the search for God, religiosity and prophet-hood.

Taking this point further, Tiger is a symbol of spiritual decadence and guilt in *BTBZ*. Tiger is shot at the beginning of the play, and his ghost haunts Kev to the point of driving the latter to suicide, reminding us of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, in which the shooting of an albatross haunts the mariner throughout the poem. Given that Tiger is the "animal hero" in the play; his shooting is a "violation of totemic taboo" (Benedict xiii) and goes on to greatly affect both Tom and Kev's lives. Indeed, Tiger's character is a symbolic representation of the spiritual decadence and religious anxiety rampant in the contemporary human world.

In sum, the animal world enhances the tragedy of the situation in the play, with Joseph using animals to reflect on issues of animal protection and conservation, blurring the dialectical boundary between humans and animals and humanity's straddling of religion. Both the imprisoned and bombarded animals at the zoo along with their ghosts in the play portray a world which needs to act when it comes to animal protection and animal rights. The beastly nature of animals is compared to humans' beastly nature, insinuating that human beings are not all that different from animals. The comparison implies that no matter how beastly, dangerous and different animals are from human beings, they nevertheless share certain characteristics with human beings and inhabit the planet alongside humans. They are ecologically connected to various tiers of the chain of being and should therefore be given proper rights and protection.

Vegetal, Mineral and Water World

In this play, the vegetal, mineral and water worlds mentioned in Frye's methodology are tightly-knit. This section will undertake a joint discussion of each of these three tiers of *The Great Chain of Being*.

The vegetal world is a major key to the play's overall meaning. The fact that Baghdad is an ancient city, home to the Biblical Garden of Eden, and that the word 'Baghdad' itself means 'given by God' (*Discovery Guide* 3) gives the play a universal appeal. Many scenes in the play (Act One, Scene Four; Act Two, Scene One) are set in the topiary garden. Not only has the latter been burnt, it reflects Joseph's very intentional choice in the location of Baghdad for his myth-ecological narrative, as it hints at the universal ecological history of humanity. The entire cosmos of the vegetal world in the play is this burnt topiary garden, as the majority of the play's scenes take place in it. At

one level, this refers to the spiritual decadence of human nature. On another level, the burnt garden is an indication of the burning of Iraq through war and the repercussions of war on the vegetal world. It also refers to a lack of creativity, production and reproduction. Moreover, the garden is a depiction of a green apocalypse nightmare against the backdrop of the prevailing phenomenon of the global warming.

In addition, the garden reminds us of the Garden of Eden, naturally alluding to humanity's nostalgia associated with the heavenly garden. The garden's very presence is a major indication of the play's mythical structure. In literary works, a garden is almost always a subtle hint at Eden, which is mentioned in religious texts as a blissful place, overflowing and abundant. Religious texts portray "nature as a source of revelation" (Kearns 472). Moreover, "nature was conceived primarily as a symbolic system through which God speaks to men" (White 44). Gaster accordingly asserts that the garden "stands for the original state of bliss to which, in this vale of tears, man longingly looks back, and which he hopes eventually to regain" (24). Similarly, Harrison claims that the garden stands "at the centre of a human mode of being that stretches between two impossibilities, or two irrevocable losses: nature and God" (47).

The Garden of Eden is described in the Bible (*Book of Genesis*, Chapters 2 & 3) and mentioned in the *Quran*¹ 139 times. It was the heavenly place described in Bible and Quran where God kept Adam and Eve before their expulsion from the Garden (*Genesis*, 3, 23-24). Moreover, in this regard, Harrison maintains that the concept of paradise in the Quran is vividly described as an eternal abode of abundance, moderation, temperance - a reposeful garden promised as a reward for righteous people in their afterlife, while in Christian tradition, the garden is an afterlife dwelling located "halfway between heaven and hell" (137). The play laments the "bucolic sense of paradise lost" (Egan 291); indeed, in the play, the greenery is charred, and there is no hope of the garden's revival and rejuvenation. This sense of paradise lost compels Tiger to revisit the burnt garden in search of God, as he believes it is "God's Garden" and God "likes gardens..." (Joseph 150). In short, the play mourns the spiritual degeneration of the contemporary world which has lost all hope to regain the peaceful and abundant gardens in the afterlife as promised in monotheistic religious traditions.

Taking this point further, according to both the Biblical and Quranic narratives, God spoke to Musa (Moses in English) through a bush. Since garden, greenery and plants are mostly associated with the divinity of nature, the burnt garden has multiple meanings in the play. Because all the monotheistic texts inform us that God spoke to Musa through the burning bush (*Bible*, Exodus Book 3, verse, 1-17 & *Quran*, chapter 20, verse 10), the very mention of a 'bush' in the play's narrative hints at an affiliation between the green side of the world and human life. Additionally, Tiger mentions the "ruined shrub" (198) in the play. Subsequently, Joseph has used the Biblical instance of bushes in the post-9/11 context to express blighted civilization. Moreover, the association of the burning bush becomes more relevant when Tiger asks God to talk to him through anything. Since the bushes in modern times are burnt, God will not speak

¹ For more details:

<http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/index.php?page=showfatwa&Option=Fatwald&Id=31214>

through them, making it impossible for human beings to take any divine light from them, ever again. The metaphoric garden in the play is totally burnt, implying that the green link to God has been scorched and that divine presence can never be felt in this dilapidated land.

More importantly, the burnt garden also portrays the destruction of vegetation during human conflict and war. In the play, while Uday owns the garden, Musa is the one who prunes the plants and shapes the hedges into animals. However, after the US invasion in Baghdad, the vegetal world is burnt. Since the play is performed in the “wilderness” (Frye 1456) of the topiary garden, the zoo and the desert, Baghdad is depicted as a post-war wasteland. In this regard, Karban argues that plants have their own silent language and respond in sophisticated, silent ways which escape human understanding (3). When Tiger—standing in the burnt garden—says: “But cruelty echoes all around me. Even in this ruined garden. And so I wonder if there is any escape” (215), he is also referring to the cruelty inflicted upon plants which has reduced the garden to a scorched and haunting place. Thus, the play’s burnt and ruined garden screams out silently against the cruel wars waged by mankind which destroy the world’s innocent vegetation, along with animal and human lives.

One of the major myths Joseph uses to comment on the vegetal world is that of the Holy Grail. All literary genres are derived from the quest-myth, and it is the central myth of literature (Frye, “The Archetypes” 1453). Grail legends are “tales of the Knights of the Round Table which concern the quest for the Holy Grail” (Coote 99). These legends have two strands: one is Arthurian legend and the other is the “purely archetypal” Fisher King (Pratt 307). According to the ancient grail myths, the Knights of the Round Table used to go to deserts in the search of the Holy Grail to save their lands from plague and famine (Windeatt). However, soldiers like Tom, in a post-9/11 scenario, go on quests for gold toilet seats—mocking the quests of the soldiers in this age.

Even Musa, whose own land is plagued by war, goes to the desert in search of weapons. The situation becomes extremely hilarious when Tom dies for the sake of his ‘grail’, a golden toilet seat. As Tom lies dying, clutching his gold toilet seat ever closer, Kev ironically says, “At least you got your toilet seat” (Joseph 232), which, on a broader scale, serves as a scathing criticism of modern humankind’s wars and quests for monetary pursuits and highlights the need to strive for the wellbeing of human ecospheres, rather than pilfering their material resources.

Another very significant implication of the greenery and its destruction lies in the exploitation of female figure, which is usually associated with the earth, land and vegetation (Merchant 10). In Joseph’s play, the treatment and condition of women at the hands of men hints at humanity’s exploitation of the female body and planet earth alike. While there are many female characters, including three minor female characters—a teenage Iraqi call-girl, an Iraqi woman whose house is raided, and a physically deformed and mutilated leprous woman who appears in the desert—it is Musa’s sister Hadia who is the most prominent.

First of all, Uday exploits Hadia when she comes to see the topiary garden her brother Musa works in as a gardener. Based on Uday’s innuendo, the audience comes to

realise that Uday assaulted Musa's teenage sister Hadia when she visited the garden. Uday calls Hadia "little virgin sister" and "little creature" (196), also comparing her to the garden's hedges and greenery, strongly hinting at the environmental concerns depicted in Joseph's play (195-196), and connecting the female figure with the natural world. Likewise, US Marine Tom hires the aforementioned teenage call-girl for self-gratification since Tiger has eaten his hand and Tom can no longer masturbate without assistance from the call-girl. This crude, twenty-dollar act also underscores the exploitation of innocent girls (Joseph 204). This young girl—and those she represents—is not being used for any productive relationship, but rather for a transient material use; just like earth, the female body is being desecrated at a trivial price. In this regard, while Hadia symbolizes the greenery of planet earth which human beings are ruthlessly destroying, the teenage call-girl represents the exploitation of Iraqi land by American invaders.

In the same way, the violation of the female body and its connection with the destruction of nature can be interpreted in light of the Fisher King strand of Grail legends, which narrates "how the court of the rich Fisher King was withdrawn from the knowledge of men when certain of the maidens who frequented the shrine were raped and had their golden cups taken away from them. The curse on the land follows from this act" (Brooks 138). The story goes on to tell that the Grail was guarded by the Fisher King—wounded in the legs or groin—in his 'mysterious castle' located in the wasteland. The Fisher King's recovery of health and land depended on the successful quest of the Grail (Beavis and Cragg 14). Accordingly, recurring hideous violations of the female body (Joseph 193) in Iraq were a result of the war which irreparably devastated the entire ecosphere.

The next tier of *The Great Chain of Being*—the destroyed mineral world, with a ruined castle and desert—underscores the play's overall tragic impact (Frye, "The Archetypes" 1456). In Act Two, Scene Two, the setting is "[a] bombed out building, half standing, in the middle of the night" (Joseph 221). The character of the leper woman, surrounded by this dilapidated mineral world, refers to the mineral exploitation of the Iraqi land. Representing the physical and material structures of the land, she serves as the symbol of the maximum exploitation of planet Earth, with her decrepit shape and her hands inexorably becoming stumps. Additionally, the symbolic significance of the leper woman becomes more evident when Tom asks her for the golden toilet seat (pilfered from Uday's Castle), medicine (to tend Tom's gunshot wound), and water (near Tom's death). Since gold is a mineral which is excavated from the earth, medicines are mostly produced with herbs, and water is derived from the earth, all of these demands made to the leper woman connect her to planet Earth and its resources. Thus, she becomes the provider of gold, a mineral derived from earth, and of medicine—a healing substance primarily derived from herbs, plants and water. The earth is incapable of healing humanity because it has been devastated and ruined by wars and bombing. Therefore, the female figure depicted in the play is the strongest symbol of physical, material, vegetal and mineral plundering of planet Earth at the hands of human beings.

The last on the list in Frye's archetypal framework is water. It comes under the category of 'common resources' which are most brutally exploited by national, international and local communities. Indeed, because of this, the world is currently facing water scarcity issues (Naess 54; Synder 75). Water is also a symbol of purification, spirituality and regeneration, and the absence thereof in *BTBZ* hints at dearth and a lack of spirituality. The leper woman offers water five times (227, 228, 229), but Tom is only interested in gold (although he does go on to ask for water as he nears death, 231). Through Tom, the play hints at the absence of spirituality in contemporary times. Indeed, Tom searched and struggled for gold throughout his life, but only as he lies dying does he realise he is thirsty and needs water, symbolising the human desire for spiritual consolation in the face of death.

Consequently, the vegetal, mineral and water worlds together illustrate the lack of divine presence, a devastation of any spiritual connection with God, humanity's wish to regain the heavenly garden and the spiritual decadence of contemporary times. Moreover, the violation of female body in the play is exactly proportional to the exploitation of planet Earth. The play therefore emphasizes the need to preserve, respect and value natural resources for a healthier physical and spiritual existence.

Human World

The human world is less of a focus than the animal, vegetal, mineral and water worlds are in the play. According to Frye, the tragic vision of the human world is the depiction of tyranny or anarchy with an isolated man serving as "the deserted or betrayed hero" ("The Archetypes" 1455). Accordingly, the structure of the entire human world in the play reflects rampant tyranny and anarchy. In Baghdad, prior to the war, there were tyrannical dictators like Uday; now greedy and senseless soldiers like Tom and Kev are in power. The presence of the ghosts of tyrants like Uday and of greedy soldiers like Tom establishes the tragic version of the play.

In the play, the human world also demonstrates the conflict between races, ethnicities, classes and genders. The human and non-human inhabitants of Iraq are facing what Curtin calls "environmental racism" and "oppression of one by the other" (145). Huggan and Tiffin also highlight the issue of racism in the nations under imperial and colonial rule. They mention the exploitation of the human and non-human in the colonized and invaded areas (180-188). Tom and Kev refer to Musa as "psycho Jihadi" (161) and, ironically, "Habib" (160)—a bastardisation of the term of endearment, "Habibi". Similarly, Musa calls Americans "Johnny" (219). In *BTBZ*, humans are divided into various races, nationalities, classes and ethnicities. Before the American invasion, rulers like Uday—and then after the invasion, Tom and Kev—bully the Iraqi people. Uday himself confesses to causing humans pain (191) as he used to brutally torture and murder innocent people. Later killed by the Americans, Uday's ghost torments Musa throughout the play. After that, Americans invaded Iraq to steal their oil (192) without considering the environmental hazards for the people of the invaded land. Thus, the play comments on the environmental racism prevalent in the contemporary world.

The human world has also been represented through various religious and popular myths just like the animal, mineral, vegetal and water worlds. Most prominently, the play incorporates the major monotheistic divine texts into its narrative to explain the disoriented human world depicted in the play. Sometimes, the play appears to take a sermonizing tone as there are many dialogues, situations and sets that hint at the stories narrated in divine texts like the Quran, the Bible and the Torah.

Firstly, one of the play's main characters—Musa—is named after the Prophet Moses, who is mentioned in all the three texts as a reverent prophet of God (*Bible*, *Exodus Book 2*; *Quran*, Chapter 28, verses 1-46; *Torah*, Shemot, Chapter 2-21). In the play, Musa is a gardener in tyrannical Uday Hussein's castle, surviving under a cruel ruler—just like the Prophet Moses did under the cruel Pharaoh. Uday Hussein is portrayed as the Pharaoh of our times who can kill anyone at his discretion. Musa being a gardener alludes to the profession of the first man, Prophet Adam, who tended the Garden of Eden. Uday is the Satan of Musa's story in the play as well. Uday whispers things to Musa, asking him to kill with the gold-plated gun. As a result, Musa kills Tom and falls prey to the temptations presented by Uday's ghost. Like the Prophet Moses, Musa kills a man and his garden is snatched away by worldly imperial gods.

Secondly, the two American Marines remind us of the story of Cain and Abel narrated in the *Bible* (*Genesis 4:1-17*, King James Version), the *Quran* (Chapter 5, verses 27-31), and the *Torah* (Chapter 4, verses 1-25). Although Tom does not directly kill Kev, his insensitivity and indifference to Kev's pain and need for kindness ultimately leads Kev to suicide:

Kev: (starts to cry) Tommy. Don't leave. You're my best friend.

Tom: I am not your friend.

Kev: Yes you are, man. And I need you, okay? I'm so scared....

Tom: Well, that's your psycho problem, Kev. Not mine. Now, I have some gold left that I have to get before I leave... (185)

Right after Tom leaves Kev, Kev commits suicide. Therefore, though indirectly, Tom participated in Kev's death.

Thirdly, the theme of sexual perversion is also a very dominant motif in *BTBZ* because sexual violent crimes like rape and perverse sexual activities like prostitution are narrated or acted out on stage. Baghdad is a land where the previous ruler, Uday, violently raped virgins like Hadia; his actions are a sordid offence against humanity. Most importantly, in Middle Eastern culture, a sister, daughter or mother's honour is a very sensitive issue for men. This instance reminds us of Fisher King's land as well as the rape of Philomela (Ovid 189). In *Metamorphosis*, Ovid describes the story of Philomela's rape by Tereus who not only rapes Philomela while she is imprisoned, but cuts out her tongue, censoring her forever. Likewise, the female body in the play is shamelessly exploited, first by Uday and then by Tom. Thus, the mythical story of rape has been insinuated by describing the contemporary horrendous acts.

Fourthly, contemporary man's obsession with gold has been connected with the ancient and cursed desire for gold depicted in the story of King Midas whose mere touch would turn anything to gold (Ovid 537). Musa also calls Uday "King Midas" (194), given

his penchant for turning everything in his palace into gold. He had a gold-plated gun and a golden toilet seat, both of which are major motifs in the play. Interestingly though, Joseph inverts the myth's curse motif. In *BTBZ*, it is not the King's son Uday who is cursed with the golden touch; instead, Uday's golden gun is cursed. Whoever touches that gun is cursed with killing someone with that gun. All in all, the gun is stolen multiple times and everyone who touches it kills someone. Myatt propounds, "The gold gun binds the men and the tiger to Baghdad's brutal past and its confused, violent present" (3). In this case, the golden gun is a demonic jinx which breaks the people's morality and soul. In short, it combines and critiques two of the most prevalent obsessions in contemporary times related with acquisition of resources like money, gold and weapons.

In conclusion, *BTBZ* is a myth-ecological tragedy of contemporary times. In fact, it is an allegory of the contemporary human situation, depicting a world full of unkind and vicious human beings who have made the lives of their fellow humans and those of other species inordinately difficult. It provides a microcosmic insight into the hazards of waging war—no matter what the reason—and highlights the disastrous effects these contemporary conflicts have on the world's ecology at all levels. The play also alludes to the need for animal conservation and protection. It warns humanity against the impending ecological doom as an outcome of the massive proliferation of global warfare. On the one hand, it laments the bio-degradation of animals, green spaces, minerals and water and, on the other, the inhumane treatment of humans by their fellow humans on the basis of gender, race, nationality, ethnicity and selfish materialistic reasons. The absent God, bombarded zoo, burnt garden, distressed animals, the talking ghost of Tiger, the anguished females, the war for oil resources, the ruined city of Baghdad and unintentional murders all hint at the devastated state of divine, human and non-human realms today. Furthermore, humanity's spiritual decadence has damaged the world's entire ecology because the broken spiritual link to the divine sphere has a poisonous trickledown effect on the entire ecosystem.

The ancient myths applied on the contemporary ecological predicament reveal the demotion of human beings from their high standing and their emergence as villainous perpetrators of the devastation of the various tiers of *The Great Chain of Being*. Subsequently, the play is a denunciation of the grand anthropocentric narrative of humanism in favour of the non-human elements inhabiting the world alongside human beings. In short, by integrating miscellaneous mythical strands related to human and non-human realms, *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* provides a fresh and unique perspective on human intervention and the destruction of the multiple ecospheres in the contemporary world.

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