

Clash of Humans and Animals: A comparative Ecocritical Reading of Ruskin Bond's Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright and H.H. Munro's The Interlopers

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Abstract

The present research paper is a comparative ecocritical reading of Ruskin Bond's "Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright" and H. H. Munro's *The Interlopers*." This paper argues that Bond's postcolonial- ecocritical realism and Munro's imperial-satirical irony intersect in their common critique of human exploitation of nature. Both these stories present tense clashes between humans and animals- Villagers confronting a tiger in the Himalayan foothills and Ulrich von Gradwitz and Georg Znaeym in Eastern European woodland. Though, both works come from entirely two different worlds : first a postcolonial lens on India's rural environmental struggle and the other a sharp Edwardian satire of imperial Balkan tensions. This paper critically analyzes how both stories examine geographical dispute, false impression of human supremacy and nature's paradoxical inversion by incorporating postcolonial and ecocritical approaches. The paper shows that whereas Ruskin Bond brings to light the fragility or helplessness of both humans and animals in the midst of ecological tension and habitat encroachment, H.H Munro emphasizes uselessness of human hostility through forest's impartial power. By a comparative study of these two short stories, the present paper draws attention to common obsession with nature and suggests that these two short stories side by side or collectively enhance ecocritical and postcolonial perspectives of Indian English literary studies.

Keywords: Ecocritical, postcolonial realism, exploitation of nature, short story, humans, animals, Indian literature

Introduction

Ruskin Bond's and H.H. Munro's "Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright" and "The Interlopers" At first glance, these two stories seem to echo one another but both have staked their claim into two separate worlds: the world of Bond's story is a postcolonial terrain of the Himalayan foothills in contemporary India, while Munro's is situated in the imperial borderlands of Eastern Europe in the period of Edwardian.

Together, these two narratives focus on "entanglements between humans and wildlife in a forested terrain," in which territorial claims, hunger, and environmental strain blur the demarcation between the domesticated world and the wild (Ruskin Bond, tiger 12; Saki 1).

Whereas Bond's story has been interpreted from ecocritical and postcolonial standpoints and Munro's as a biting social critique of the class struggle and an Edwardian tale of fate that dwells on the ties between

human-animal and environmental vulnerability (Literariness. Org; Language in India). However, there exists no comparative study that analyzes Bond's nature-centred rural fiction with that of Munro's *The Interloper* which accounts a huge void in the study that connects postcolonial Indian ecological narrative to that of the imperial satire on short fiction (Literariness. Org; Language in India). The present paper therefore is placed in between the gap. It proposes a comparative ecocritical study of these two short stories, focusing on: the repercussions of territorial claim and human pride; the power of nature and animals and the transition from imperial satire to postcolonial environmental sensitivity.

The consequences of the territorial claim and human pride

In "The Interlopers," the conflict of Ulrich von Gradwitz and Georg Znaeym takes place on a "narrow strip of precipitous woodland" for which their families have fought for generations (Saki 1). The forest is no neutral ground but a trophy to be won, and men pursue it with rifles as if it were a game of human-scale war. Munro's characterization of the forest as "a narrow strip of precipitous woodland" exposed to storms and landslides, already indicates that human possession is temporary and unreliable (Saki 1; SuperSummary).

In contrast, in "Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright," the tension is between villagers and a tiger displaced into the village by drought and forest fire (Ruskin Bond, *Tiger* 12; Language in India). The villagers' idea of the tiger as an "invader" and so too Ulrich and Georg continue to act as though the forest were a matter of human genealogy. However, Bond complicates this anthropocentric perspective by illustrating how environmental destruction—dry season fire, disappearing prey—drives the tiger into human territory (Language in India; Criterion).

Hence, both tales reveal human hubris in terms of land, but with varying focus. Munro underlines feudal class possession—that the land is one's by birth—and how aristocratic men impose their minor conflicts on the wood. Bond highlights ecological economic pressure – how drought and fire break down the habitats of both man and beast and force the tiger out of the forest (Language in India; Criterion).

The main distinction is in the ideological construction of ownership. In Munro, the forest is a border contested real estate between two families, whereas for Bond's villagers the forest is a communal, contested resource sweetened by its being under threat from logging, grazing, and climatic stress. Munro's men take for granted that they can rightfully claim the forest, Bond's villagers live in a terrain in which human right to the land is perpetually contested with non-human existence (Language in India; Criterion).

The power of the natural world and animals

One of the most interesting aspects of both tales is how nonhuman elements—the storm and the wolves in Munro, the fire and the tiger in Bond—disrupt human designs. In "The Interlopers," a sudden storm blows a tree down onto both Ulrich and Georg, forcing them to rely on one another as it converts them from predators into prey (Saki 2). The woods, for all they had thought it would be a neutral backdrop to their competition, turns out to be a); fate; the arrival of wolves at the end reframes the entire encounter as a mini apocalypse, in which human hatred is inconsequential against nonhuman predation (Literariness.org; SuperSummary).

In "Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright" the tiger is activated by ecological extremis (drought, fire, and hunger) (Ruskin Bond, *Tiger* 12; Language in India). Bond does not portray the tiger simply as a monster but as an urgent hunter forced out of the forest by environmental disaster. The village's efforts

to repel it only escalate the strife, and the tiger the villagers fear reflects their own involvement in an ecosystem they ruthlessly use and on which they rely (Language in India; Criterion). To be ecocritical, both texts encourage readers to relinquish anthropocentrism. Munro does so by the ironic diminution of human squabbles under the wolf pack's gaze; Bond through the sympathetic ecological characterization of a tiger whose aggression is shaped by habitat loss and climate pressure (Literariness.org; Language in India; Criterion).

Furthermore, they are equally built around spatial inversion:

- In Munro, the men's hunting ground, the forest, turns into their prison, and the would-be rescuers are the predators.
- In Bond, the tiger's "invasion" of the village is a displacement, not a sudden arrival.

These inversions can be said to enact a kind of ecocritical critique of the human as master of nature model. Non human entities—wolves and tiger—are no longer the background of the story but powerful forces which challenge and negate human design (Literariness.org; Language in India).

Irony, Fate, and Closure

A point often commented on "The Interlopers" is its harshly ironic ending: as Ulrich von Gradwitz and Georg Znaeym make peace and decide to put an end to their long-standing feud, they see what they believe are rescuers—only to discover that these are wolves (Saki 3; SuperSummary). However, the ceasefire in their hostilities is suddenly rendered useless and the narrative ends with a feeling of cosmic indifference as human feelings and gestures are engulfed by nonhuman predation (Literariness.org; SuperSummary).

"In contrast to "Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright"... (Exotic/ Indian). The tiger may be driven off, killed, or delayed, but the fundamental conditions—drought, encroachment, shrinking forest—are not addressed. This openness is indicative of a postcolonial ecological realism: the issue is not an individual tiger or a single village, but a persistent structural disequilibrium between human growth and ecological constraints (Language in India; Criterion).

Thus:

- Munro's irony highlights the meaninglessness and insignificance of human enmity.
- Bond's unresolved conclusions emphasize the continuance of ecological and human-wildlife struggles.

From its close reading, this difference is enlightening. Munro's tightly constructed, fatalistic irony is part of a late imperial worldview for which nature may be a sublimely indifferent arbiter; Bond's unresolved struggles belong to a postcolonial world in which ecological collapse is an ongoing political matter (Literariness.org; Language in India; Criterion).

The transformation of imperial satire into postcolonial ecological awareness

The two stories, contextually, fit onto vastly different timeframes of culture. Munro writes within the late imperial period, and "The Interlopers" has the Gothic Balkan tones of many of his tales, making the forest a liminal place where aristocratic hostility loses its glamour and becomes comical (Literariness.org; Criterion). They apply a natural metaphor: the wolves, converting Victorian imperial anxieties about the limits of control over land and body, into a symbolic judgement on human pride (Literariness.org).

By contrast, Bond is a product of a post Independence Indian reality, in which the forest ceases to be a European imperial margin and becomes a common, contested arena among villagers, forest department bureaucrats, and the pressures of global capitalism (Language in India; Criterion). In “Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright,” the tiger is not a metaphor for exotic “otherness” or a typical Gothic predator; it is a real animal on the run, whose path crosses with human pursuits and with policies of state-level forestry (Language in India; Criterion).

This discursive movement is essential to the comparative frame. While Munro’s story can be interpreted as a satiric mockery of class based territorialism in the imperial aristocratic mindset, Bond’s is an ecocritical postcolonial meditation on how human-animal conflict is connected to climate and land use change (Language in India; Criterion).

This change also indicates a generic and tonal shift. Munro’s parable brevity and ironic closure belongs to a tradition of Edwardian short story satire, Bond’s village story realism and open endings sit within postcolonial regional narrativisation which prioritises lived experience rather than moral closure (Literariness.org; Language in India; Criterion).

Comparative Reading and Pedagogical Expectation

Turning the two stories into a kind of tandem reading for a class discussion, a few points of comparison could be drawn. First, both texts insist that to say “territorial dispute” is to omit the differing power relations that accompany it such as class, caste, or ecological privilege. In Munro, the feud is between two land holders aristocrats; in Bond, it is among villagers, forest laborers, and state level forestry potentials.

Second, each story lends itself to discussions of non-human agency in ecocritical courses. Students may compare:

- What makes the wolf pack a representation of nature’s indifference in Munro;
- How Bond portrays the tiger’s hunger and exile as a metaphor of ecological disaster.

Third, the stories serve as a very good lead-in comparative literature time – homework. One can be asked to:

- compare the narrative stance (Munro’s detached irony vs. Bond’s empathetic realism);
- identify role of the setting (East European forest as Gothic border as opposed to Himalayan Forest as common, contested environment).

In an English literature syllabus in India, teaching *The Interlopers* in tandem with *Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright* enables the teacher to:

- Link up imperial satirical fiction with postcolonial ecocritical fiction;
- Travel from conceptual abstractions of nature to tangible inquiries of climate, displacement, and human wildlife coexistence.

Conclusion

In a comparative ecocritical reading of Munro’s “*The Interlopers*” and Ruskin Bond’s “*Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright*,” this paper seeks to argue that the two narratives, although distantly placed in history and geography, exhibit a shared obsession with non human agency and the precarity of human dominance over nature. Munro employs the forest and wolves as a metaphorical device to ridicule the absurdity of a class-based feud, while Bond likens drought, fire and the tiger to ecological fragility and the reliance of village on wilderness.

For Indian English literary studies, such a comparison provides a heuristic to link up imperial Edwardian satire with postcolonial environmental fiction and by extension it elucidates the usefulness of ecocritical and postcolonial paradigms in the classroom and the academy. Comparative studies on Saki's forest tales and—consider Indian English writers such as R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, or contemporary ecocritical minded writers who focus on human wildlife conflict could be an avenue for further comparative analyses.

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