Alienation, abjection, and disgust: encountering the capitalocene in contemporary eco-drama

Leila Michelle Vaziri

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Alienation, Abjection, and Disgust: Encountering the Capitalocene in Contemporary Eco-Drama

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Abstract: "We are shaped, to a greater extent than almost any other species, by contact with others. [. . .] Yet what counts now is to win. [. . .] And for this, we have ripped the natural world apart" (Monbiot). This quote stems from a *Guardian* article that is also printed as an epigraph in Tanya Ronder's 2015 play *Fuck the Polar Bears*, and it reveals the connection between the Capitalocene, as described by Jason W. Moore, and contemporary eco-drama: both thematise the "Age of Loneliness" (Monbiot) in which everyone fights against each other. In contemporary drama, this behaviour is frequently reflected in the depiction of isolation and alienation from nature that is expressed in the form of disgust, for instance, by making objects that are associated with nature literally or metaphorically disgusting.

To various degrees, the depiction of the Capitalocene in combination with disgust and abjection can be found in *Fuck the Polar Bears* as well as in Dawn King's 2011 play *Foxfinder*. In both plays, disgust is depicted as degrading the relationship between humans and nonhuman nature. The dichotomy of nature and culture then lines up to "a seemingly endless series of *human* exclusions" (Moore, Introduction 2) and alienates humans from nature. In these plays, a random disgusting object functions as substitute for the border between humans and nature. By making toy polar bears or foxes disgusting, the border between humans and nature, and to some extent between humans and other humans, is redrawn, which leads to an increased sense of isolation and alienation. Therefore, both plays use disgust as a technique to extrapolate the lack of interconnection between humans and nature, which comments on the competitive, isolating, and destructive nature of the Capitalocene.

Keywords: Capitalocene, climate change, disgust, abjection, alienation, Tanya Ronder, *Fuck the Polar Bears*, Dawn King, *Foxfinder*

***Corresponding author: Leila Michelle Vaziri,** University of Augsburg,
E-Mail: leila.vaziri@philhist.uni-augsburg.de

While disgust and abjection have different underlying structures, what they have in common is the way they render an object inferior and repulsive, the way they increase the distance between the subject and the abject, and the way they alienate the subject from disgusting objects. In contemporary British drama both abjection and disgust are used to demonstrate a lack of connection between humans and nature, which then comments on the isolating and alienating nature of capitalism. Jason W. Moore's concept of the Capitalocene, which describes capitalism "as a multispecies, situated, capitalist world-ecology" (Introduction 6), identifies three aspects that are typical of the capitalist exploitation of nature: first, nature is degraded to something that is inferior, something that can be consumed; second, a dichotomy of nature and human is established; and, third, a sense of isolation, alienation, and exclusion of humans from nature, but also from each other, is created. Interestingly, all three aspects conjure up relations between humans and nature, or subjects and objects, that bear a close similarity to the subject-object relation in disgust and to the relation between subject and abject. This structural similarity is exploited in eco-drama's investigation into the ways humans, often fuelled by capitalist impulses, position themselves towards nature. As Timothy Morton observes, ecological art, including eco-drama, "must include ugliness and disgust, and haunting weirdness" (138). To various degrees, the depiction of disgust and abjection in combination with isolation and alienation from nature can be found in Tanya Ronder's *Fuck the Polar Bears* (2015) as well as in Dawn King's *Foxfinder* (2011). In both plays, the staging of disgust is used to show how humans degrade nature and animals to something contagious and inferior: one particular animal is transformed into a disgusting object, constituting a substitute for the border between humans and nature, redrawing the border in the process, which consequently leads to an increased sense of human isolation. Ultimately, both plays highlight structural parallels between mechanisms of disgust/abjection and the Capitalocene, in which both are used to underline the competitive, isolating, and destructive nature of the latter.

Disgust, Abjection, and Fear

Before turning to the sociological implications of the Capitalocene, which can be staged through disgust and abjection, the underlying mechanisms of both aversive emotions need to be outlined. Disgust as an aversive reaction to outside objects is often described as ambiguous and is discussed in relation to nature and nurture, to other feelings like shame, contamination, contempt, and fear, and it can be found in personal and social contexts. Similar to the market mechanisms of the Capitalocene, disgust works to cheapen the object that is rendered disgust-

ing, it divides the subject from what is thought to be disgusting, and it alienates the subject. Disgust as a means to alienate and isolate can be found on several levels: in both the private and public sphere, where disgust is not just political (Tyler 24) but also "plays a powerful role in the law" (Nussbaum 72) as well as in social and developmental psychology, "in that, along with fear, it is a primary means for socialization" (Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley 638). For Sianne Ngai, disgust always has a social component: it "seeks to include or draw others *into* its exclusion of its object, enabling a strange kind of sociability" (336). Disgust can thus be used as a manipulative mechanism that separates certain groups from others and is "instrumentalized in oppressive and violent ways" (340). This thought is taken up by Sara Ahmed, who writes:

> The spatial distinction of "above" from "below" functions metaphorically to separate one body from another, as well as to differentiate between higher and lower bodies, or more and less advanced bodies. As a result, disgust at "that which is below" functions to maintain the power relations between above and below, *through which "aboveness" and "belowness" become properties of particular bodies, objects and spaces*. (89)

Disgust establishes hierarchical orders that separate and alienate by rendering its object intolerable, by cheapening its worth. Therefore, disgust and social abjection can be a powerful political tool that, according to Imogen Tyler, reveals "less about the disgusted individual, or the thing deemed disgusting, than about the culture in which disgust is experienced and performed" (23). Correspondingly, for Ahmed, an object becomes disgusting not by its nature, but through contact with other objects and through its history (87). A similar claim is made by Sarah J. Ablett, who implies that disgust is a learned reaction and culturally influenced (99).

To understand the characteristics of disgust, it is further important to compare it with abjection. As Rina Arya claims, abjection consists of "two modalities: the action of expulsion (to abject) and the condition of being abject" ("Abjection Interrogated" 52). The act of expulsion is, according to Julia Kristeva, a psychological process that has its origin in early infancy when the child rejects its mother in order to establish a border between self and (m)other to form its own subjectivity. Throughout life, the subject will always return to this primal moment of maternal rejection when confronted with the abject. For Kristeva, the abject is "neither subject nor object" (1) and thus her focus does not lie on the source of the abject,[1] but on the border that is made into an object when being affected by the

1 Imogen Tyler observes that the revolting quality does not emanate from the object, but "in actuality the subject is always already the source of her own abjection" (28). Outlining one possible

abject (4). However, the abject "has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to *I*" (1) – it threatens one's place in the world and "problematizes the boundary" (Arya, "Abjection Interrogated" 54) between self and Other. For Kristeva, the abject is:

> Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A "something" that I do not recognise as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture. (2)

Therefore, in contrast to disgust, abjection does not have an object per se, and yet its nothingness challenges one's place in the world and threatens to annihilate the self. In her account on disgust, Ahmed draws on Kristeva's notion of transforming a border into a disgusting object. She writes: "The object that makes us 'sick to the stomach' is a substitute for the border itself, an act of substitution that protects the subject from all that is 'not it.' Abjection is bound up with the insecurity of the not; it seeks to secure 'the not' through the response of being disgusted" (86). Thus, for Ahmed, disgust is ambivalent: we are disgusted by an object and create a disgusting object that separates us from the source of the disgust, and, at the same time, are disgusted by the disgusting object per se:[2] "Border objects are hence disgusting, while disgust engenders border objects" (87). This mechanism also functions on an abstract level in which the mere thought of a disgusting object can evoke disgust.[3] Therefore, disgust opens a dichotomy that separates the subject from the source of disgust by means of creating a disgusting object that is, first, separating the subject from the source of disgust, and, second, disgusting in itself.

Crucially, revolt against a primordial animality is usually identified as the cause for disgust or abjection. Both lead to feelings of repulsion (Arya, "Abjection Interrogated" 55), and, in addition to threatening the border between subject and object, both the abject and disgust question hierarchical structures by functioning

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difference between the abject and disgust, for Silvan Tomkins, in disgust, attention is directed towards the object evoking disgust as opposed to one's own body, since "the response intends to maximise the distance between the face and the object which disgusts the self. It is a literal pulling away from the object" (128).

2 For example, when in close proximity to a disgusting object, say, a rotting carcass, we try to distance ourselves by vomiting and are then disgusted by the vomit itself.

3 Similarly, for Colin McGinn, disgust is closely linked to avoidance and can be seen as an aesthetic emotion that is focusing on the sudden appearance of an object. Drawing on Immanuel Kant, McGinn elucidates that "it is possible to be disgusted by an object in whose existence one does *not* believe. That is to say you could believe yourself to be merely hallucinating a disgusting object and still be disgusted by it" (8).

as "a reminder of our animal origin" (55). In other words, humans feel superior to nature despite their animal origin and reject disgusting/abject objects because they can be a reminder of said origin (Kristeva 12; Ablett 99). In addition to that, disgust has a spatial component in which proximity is felt as an offence – one is "*affected by what one has rejected*" (Ahmed 86; see also Menninghaus 1). The disgusting object threatens to transfer its "badness" or "noxiousness" (Miller 13) to the self; one wants to distance oneself from the disgusting object by all means possible. Thus, disgust is an aversive emotion that increases the distance between the offending object and the subject in a similar way fear does. Disgust and fear are connected insofar as disgust and abjection threaten the self, which must invariably cause fear. As Winfried Menninghaus suggests: "Everything seems at risk in the experience of disgust. It is a state of alarm and emergency, an acute crisis of self-preservation in the face of an unassimilable otherness, a convulsive struggle, in which what is in question is, quite literally, whether 'to be or not to be'" (1). Likewise, it is fear that subsequently connects disgust and the abject, as the abject is linked to a higher degree of fear than disgust: "while the mouldy peach is an example of disgust it does not cause abjection, whereas the corpse does. The degree of fear means that not all cases of disgust are abject" (Arya, "Abjection Interrogated" 59). Thus, both abjection and disgust have similar underlying structures, and their border is often fluid, making both an ideal pair to aestheticize the Capitalocene on stage: disgust and abjection can cheapen an object and render it inferior. They can divide subjects from certain objects and by doing so draw new borders and introduce new disgusting objects, and they can isolate and alienate the subject, introducing feelings of fear – mechanisms that are also attributed to the Capitalocene.

Degradation, Separation, and Isolation in the Capitalocene

The concept of the Capitalocene is related to that of the Anthropocene. Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, who coined the latter term in 2000, describe the development of the Holocene and delineate the "growing impacts of human activities on earth and atmosphere" (17), to the extent that humans are the most important factor in ecological change. The concept of the Anthropocene is, however, questioned by Moore, although he still accepts its importance for climate research in the last decades. For Moore, the notion of the Anthropocene is flawed "because it does not challenge the naturalized inequalities, alienation, and violence inscribed in modernity's strategic relations of power and production" (*Web*

of Life 170). Instead, Moore argues, the accomplishments of capitalism are based on a theft "of our times, of planetary life, of our – and our children's – futures" (Introduction 11). He claims that "There is no doubt that capitalism imposes a relentless pattern of violence on nature, humans included" (5), a violence that will ultimately lead to a life in which humans are isolated and alienated from each other. To express the close links between the damaging nature of capitalism and the relentless patterns of violence humans impose on nature,[4] Moore suggests the term *Capitalocene*. Both the term and – through its use of disgust as a mechanism to highlight attitudes developing in the Capitalocene – contemporary eco-drama further comment on the exploitation of nature focusing on three aspects: first, nature is degraded to something inferior; second, humans and nature are set in opposition, opening a binary thinking of humans vs nature; and, third, humans feel increasingly isolated and alienated from nature as well as from each other.

For Moore, this sense of isolation and subordination that separates humans from nature leads to several "questions of oppression" (Introduction 2). One such mechanism of oppressing nature is the concept of cheap nature: "For capitalism, Nature is 'cheap' in a double sense: to make Nature's elements 'cheap' in price; and also *to cheapen*, to degrade or to render inferior in an ethico-political sense, the better to make Nature cheap in price" (2–3). This concept of cheap nature thus describes an automatism that degrades nature to something that is inferior to humans to simplify and justify nature's exploitation. It helps to draw a line of demarcation between humans and nature that has a similar quality to, and may indeed make use of, mechanisms of disgust and abjection, which are, after all, likewise directed against a primordial animality and hence, in a way, an expression of human subjectivity sealing itself off against nature. Correspondingly, disgust and abjection, in the context of eco-drama, can be used to reveal the sense of superiority over "cheapened" nature and to comment on the nature vs humans binary by recreating the abstract socioeconomic concept of the Capitalocene in their concrete affective experience. For Moore, a dualistic system nature/society is highly problematic, and, he believes, it is necessary to overcome this dualism in order to tackle the ecological crisis: "efforts to discern capitalism's limits today [. . .] cannot advance much further by encasing reality in dualisms that are immanent to capitalist development" (3). The disruption of this binary is also the reason why Moore suggests the term *Capitalocene* in the first place, as the dualism between nature and human society is core to the notion of the Anthropocene. Because of the structural parallel of the affective reaction of disgust and the human-

4 Human-imposed patterns of violence that change the natural environment are also described by David Harvey as "second nature – nature reshaped by human action" (184).

nature relationship in the Capitalocene, stage representations of disgust can show that this dichotomy of nature and society leads to humans' isolation and alienation from nature as well as from each other and from their own way of life.[5] According to Moore, the reasons for this alienation can be found in capitalism, where "The ongoing condition of turning human activity into labor-power, and land into property, was a symbolic-knowledge regime premised on separation – *on alienation*" ("The Rise of Cheap Nature" 86). Similar mechanisms are at play in the exclusion and separation of humans from nature, and certain groups of humans from humanity, such as Indigenous peoples (87). Just like the cheapening of nature, the isolation and alienation from nature help ease the exploitation of natural resources.

In contemporary drama, representations of disgust can function as a means to demonstrate and criticise all three aspects that cheapen, separate, and isolate nature and humans. Thus, drama challenges the "old, nature-blind cognitive map" (Moore, Introduction 4) that describes the nature/society dualism. What is described by Moore as the degradation, separation, and isolation of humans from nature is also the topic of a *Guardian* article by George Monbiot, which is printed as an epigraph in *Fuck the Polar Bears*. According to Monbiot, we are entering the "Age of Loneliness," in which the only thing that counts is to win and where we are increasingly driven by consumerism, wealth, and power, a trend that leads to an increased sense of isolation and alienation from nature and from each other. In order to live a consumerism-driven life "we have ripped the natural world apart, degraded our conditions of life, surrendered our freedoms and prospects of contentment to a compulsive, atomising, joyless hedonism, in which, having consumed all else, we start to prey upon ourselves" (Monbiot). This is reflected in *Fuck the Polar Bears* and *Foxfinder*.

Disgusted by Oneself: *Fuck the Polar Bears*

Ronder's play portrays the couple Gordon and Serena, "*down-to-earth people come to money late*" (7). They are in the middle of moving house, and while Gor-

5 This sense of alienation also corresponds to "fears of exclusion," which Zygmunt Bauman describes as one of the core fears in modern, liquid societies, which will be fought individually: "In the liquid modern society of consumers, each individual member is instructed, trained and groomed to pursue individual happiness by individual means and through individual efforts" (48). A sense of separation in modern societies is described by Naomi Klein who states that one way to engage with climate change – often as an act of denial – is to look at it as isolated entities that "tell ourselves that all we can do is focus on ourselves" (4).

don is always stressed, negotiating a promotion in his high-end job for an energy company, Serena is a stay-at-home mother and wife. The whole play takes place in their house, in the company of their au pair Blundhilde, Gordon's brother Clarence, and their little daughter Rachel. While there are several instances that induce disgust, for example, when Serena chews a piece of pizza that contains pieces of broken glass (18–19), or when she talks about blocked drains that contain "Pale slimy sludge embedded with hair" (33), I would like to focus on one specific storyline that connects the three aspects from the Capitalocene and displays them by showing different forms of disgust and abjection. While the parents are busy with their life, Rachel's cuddly toy polar bear Phoebe goes missing. During the search for Rachel's favourite toy, which lasts for almost the entire play, it becomes clear that the polar bear itself is an object of both physical and moral disgust[6] that serves not only to degrade and cheapen nature, to create and reinforce a human vs nature dichotomy, but also to create separation among the play's human characters.

As the toy bear is the only representative of "nature" in the play – even though ironically it is anything but "natural" itself – its physically disgusting appearance transfers the notion of cheapness from the toy onto nature, particularly in the eyes of Gordon. As Blundhilde explains, Phoebe looks disgusting:

> She got so dirty from Rachel dragging her round everywhere that we washed her in the bath then hung her out to dry, but Rachel wanted her that night in bed so Serena put her in the tumble dryer but the plastic on the eyes melted. Now she looks like she's always looking at you, wherever you are in the room. (34)

This short passage shows that the polar bear conveys several aspects of disgust by its deformed and violated nature. As Ablett observes: "Deformed bodies or dismemberment can give rise to feelings of disgust" because they "represent the instability of the border between object and subject" (110). The polar bear's distorted looks seem to have a similar effect on Gordon – they represent a reminder of nature that has been rendered disgusting. Seeing the bear, and thus nature, as something abject and disgusting, Gordon can continue his well-paying job for a big energy company that seeks fracking licences without signs of remorse. At the same time, the polar bear reminds Gordon of nature and the climate crisis. Hence, it also symbolises a disruptive force in Gordon's life, which is another feature that aligns it with mechanisms of disgust and abjection. For Kristeva stresses that "It is [. . .] not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (4). The

6 The distinction between elicitors of physical and moral disgust follows Heinämaa (381).

toy does exactly this – it challenges Gordon's identity, his position in life, and his future life plans by reminding him of the fragility of his existence. This shows that the toy is also disgusting on a moral and metaphorical level.[7] Being disgusted by his own life – for instance, when he says: "Sometimes a man can't sit with his own smell, know what I mean?" (36) – Gordon knows that by continuing his way of life he is acting against nature. One way to deal with this inner turmoil is by rendering nature inferior and disgusting/abject. Gordon transforms the toy polar bear into a disgusting object, by which he is then disgusted again – a safety measure that protects his self from feeling guilty towards nature. For Gordon, the toy polar bear is precisely the sort of disgusting border object described by Ahmed: it disgusts him because it is a border object between animal and toy, between nature and culture, while its disgusting character further marginalises the toy and reinforces its border status – the toy polar bear, a representation of an increasingly marginalised animal, in Gordon's eyes has become the "substitute for the border itself" and been rendered disgusting to protect Gordon from having to face nature – and the consequences of his career on nature – in any other way than as cheapened, degraded, and disgusting. This metaphorical disgust continues when Gordon sees a white hamster Blundhilde brought into the house earlier, which he mistakes for Rachel's cuddly bear. This short encounter is enough for Gordon to rant about polar bears and their "cunning and vengeful" (49) nature – a clear overreaction when thinking of a plastic toy. To him, polar bears are "dangerous" and disgusting: "You seen beneath their fur? Dark grey and patchy, like a saggy boar" (49). He goes on to connect everything that goes wrong in his life to the polar bear (50). The play implies a hierarchical structure that degrades nature to the cause of human suffering and thus to something inferior to humans.

All of this also draws a border between humans and nature and opens a binary structure – a mechanism to justify nature's exploitation (Moore, Introduction 2–3). This dichotomy of humans and nature criticised by Moore is visualised and intensified in Gordon's dreams:

> My sleep's poison. I'm swimming in this river of treacly stuff, like the bile at the end of diarrhoea, spilling from a crack in this mountain that I need to try and mend. Rache has her green spangly goggles on. I try to swim to her but there are things in my way. She can't see through her goggles. The things I'm passing are corpses, humans and bears. With plastic eyes. On the banks, up high, are daisies, tourists taking pictures and hedgehogs. Then I see Rache is holding Phoebe, trying to swim. "Rache!," I yell, "drop her, let go of the bear!" She still can't see but Phoebe looks at me. Not caring if she takes her down. (70)

7 For McGinn, "cheating, corruption, cruelty, bullying, deception, selfishness, hypocrisy, confusion, sloppiness, laziness, pretentiousness, evasiveness, obscurity, sophistry, prolixity, cliché, plagiarism, bad grammar" (37) are forms of intellectual disgust that have a metaphorical character.

Here, nature is clearly linked to several kinds of bodily fluids, something that is, according to Kristeva, disgusting because they show the porous body (53) and how it might be contaminated. This fear of contamination indicates the low status nature has for Gordon. At the same time, he places himself in direct opposition to Phoebe, opening the human/nature binary. Lastly, Gordon is clearly separated from his own daughter by the polar bear. The bear functions in three ways: it is a cheap plastic toy and at the same time an object of disgust that degrades nature; it opens a binary between Gordon and nature; and it separates Gordon from his family, in his dreams as well as in reality.

What disgust shows, and what has also been linked to modern societies in the Capitalocene, is a sense of alienation and isolation. Especially when Gordon sees the hamster and starts to panic, rambling about the danger of polar bears, his wife Serena cannot understand his reaction (47). Gordon seems to be fighting a personal fight being disgusted by an object only he finds repulsive. Serena cannot grasp why she should be repelled by the stuffed toy, as this form of disgust only manifests in Gordon's mind, and thus, she turns away from him. In Michael Billington's words, "Gordon is a bit of a mess all round." What takes place is a "sublime alienation" (Kristeva 9) that goes hand in hand with disgust and abjection. Throughout the play, Gordon seems to be more and more isolated and alienated from his family, which reaches its climax when he attacks his own daughter in act 3:

> *Out of the corner of his eye he sees a white figure run into the playroom.* GORDON *turns. He stalks to the door, pulls it closed and draws the lock.*
> GORDON: Now I've got you, you little bitch!
> *He pulls a chair up against the handle.*
> And I'm not letting you go. You're here till my wife gets home so I can show her who you are, furry fucking demon. Messing with my head. You're severed from my daughter. Before she ever sets eyes on you again, I'm ripping you up, pinning you down, shaving you bald, then I'm going to get a knife . . .
> *He goes to the kitchen, gets a knife.*
> I'm going to get a knife so I can cut your stupid fucking eyes out, plunge my knife inside your brains and cut them off from their stems, roll your sightless dismembered head in shit, foul it with excrement then stuff it down your neck, ex-ex-bear. Give me my fucking document,[8] you cut-wit fuck-shit cunt 'stinct fucker. You're not taking her with you, you're not taking her with you, you're going alone and you're never coming back, wreurrrrghhhhhhhhhhhh! (57–58)

8 The document he is referring to, which was found and hidden by Blundhilde, is a contract that affirms his pay rise but also implies that Britain will continue its trade with fossil fuels at nature's expense.

What Gordon does not realise in this scene is that the figure he sees before him is his daughter wearing a polar-bear costume. Moreover, this scene shows his complete alienation from everyone around him and his drifting into paranoia. He is not just separated from nature and the polar bear he directs his disgust and hate towards, but also separated from his own daughter and everyone in the family.

This exaggerated reaction towards his own daughter, which plays with elements of disgust, thus shows one way theatre can aestheticize the harm capitalism poses to humans and nature alike. Intermingled with the fear of losing his living standard by giving in to his urge to not further destroy nature, Gordon is disgusted by nature and transfers this disgust to the polar bear. He degrades nature to something cheap and vile, he opens a binary between himself and everything that is reminiscent of nature, and he becomes increasingly alienated and isolated by his disgust.

Disgusted by the Other: *Foxfinder*

Similar mechanisms are at play in King's dystopian drama. Samuel and Judith are farmers who expect a visit from William, a foxfinder, "investigating the area" (12) to find and destroy foxes. As it turns out, the food supply in the country is endangered due to heavy rainfall, and the farm is not "on target to meet its quota for this year" (19). The only explanation that the government provides for the climate change and the failing crops is contamination by foxes. By calling William a foxfinder, and not foxhunter, the negative and aggressive nature of the hunt is entirely attributed to the fox. As Eckart Voigts and Merle Tönnies observe: "foxes are thus first constructed as the ethical Other to man, as a scapegoat in a dystopian regime" (304).

From an early age, foxfinder William is indoctrinated by a government institution called "The Institute" (35) to believe that foxes are humans' enemies, although neither he nor anyone else in the play has ever seen one (60). His only sources of information are his teachers and his textbook, which claims, amongst other things:

> The beast's bloodlust far outstrips its appetite and it will slaughter every hen in a henhouse, leaving the headless carcass behind. A perfectly evolved killing machine, the beast's teeth can grow up to ten centimetres in length, and its claws can disembowel a man. [. . .] The beast has influence over the weather, and blights farmers' crops with unseasonable rainfall or periods of drought. It can also cause fires [. . .] and is riddled with parasites and dangerous diseases to which it is immune but which it reveals in spreading about the countryside.

> The fox has powers to confuse and can send visions to the mentally unstable and disturb the dreams of the weak. Under its influence, the good and hard-working become fat, lazy, alcoholics or [. . .] sexual perverts. (45)

What William describes here are several instances of disgust and abjection, showing that they can be a learned experience. The fox is described as the Other to man, as disgusting on several levels. What all instances from the textbook have in common is that they endanger the individual and are thus opposed to the self. As Kristeva outlines: "I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and stead of what will be 'me.' Not at all an other with whom I identify and incorporate, but an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be" (10). William seems obsessed with the fox, and at the same time this obsession and his "foxfinding" give his life meaning. He is indoctrinated that the fox, as the designated enemy, brings him into contact with several forms of physical and metaphorical death through force, germs, parasites, or fire, as well as alcoholism or "perversion" – most of which are attributed to disgust and abjection. His rejection of foxes reveals a rejection and fear of death. Nature is thus degraded and "cheapened" to being the cause of death. At the same time, to return to the act of expulsion that abjection describes (Arya, "Abjection Interrogated" 52), the abject insinuates a cleaning ritual: "The experience of abjection both endangers and protects the individual: endangers in that it threatens the boundaries of the self and also reminds us of our animal origins, and protects us because we are able to expel the abject through various means" (*Abjection and Representation* 3). As a reaction to the abjection caused by foxes and their supposedly evil spirit, William undergoes a cleaning ritual in which he whips his body, reciting: "I. Am. Clean. In. Body. And. Mind" (42), which demonstrates his attempt to increase the distance between himself and the abject. It is William's attempt to avoid contamination – "in the sense of feeling oneself to be invaded, violated, made unclean" (McGinn 41) – by disgust and abjection.

As Ngai observes: "In fixing its object as 'intolerable,' disgust undeniably has been and will continue to be instrumentalized in oppressive and violent ways" (340). This violence separates humans from nature and traps them in a binary thinking. Through disgust, foxes, and with them nature are degraded to something dangerous, contagious, fearful, and disturbing. At the same time, William is alienated from nature and sees the enemy all around him:

> This entire country is a battleground between the forces of civilisation and the forces of nature. If we lose, England will starve. Our towns and cities will crumble, and trees will grow amongst the ruins using the bones of dead men as fertiliser. Do you see? They want nothing less than our complete annihilation, Samuel. Without man, the fox will rule. (31)

He is convinced that there must be a war between humans and foxes, revealing the human/nature binary and distracting him from the totalitarian regime.[9] While all characters are concentrating on the fox, it is the rabbit that supposedly eats all the crops and thus reveals an ecosystem that, due to human interference and especially the hunting down of foxes, has become unbalanced. However, in line with the general vilification of the fox, the rabbits are seen as the foxes' victims and are thus protected by humans. The fox as the designated enemy to distract from a dysfunctional and oppressive surveillance state is only hallucinated and therefore can never be contained. As Arya observes, stigmatized individuals or groups "In their otherness [. . .] are regarded as abject, lowly and despicable and, to return to etymology, are 'cast away' (are outcasts)" (*Abjection and Representation* 7), which is exactly what happens to the fox in the play. The fox stands for the degradation of nature to something fearful, contagious, and disgusting, and it opens a binary structure that separates humans from nature and that sends William into a war-like state in which his life is restricted to fighting and killing a hallucinated enemy, set up to assure that he neither questions the Institute that "educated" him, nor the government that employs him. As Ngai observes: "disgust does not so much solve the dilemma of social powerlessness as diagnose it powerfully" (353) – in this case for the audience of the play.

The alienation and isolation from nature and humans alike can be seen in the storyline including Judith and Samuel's four-year-old son Daniel, who recently died. From the beginning, the lethal accident hangs like a dark cloud over the play and reveals Samuel's feelings of guilt and his mental health problems (21–22). William's insistence that the fox is to blame for all tragic events is taken up by Samuel, who now has found someone to blame for his son's death. Therefore, seeing the fox as a scapegoat and disgusting object does not only alienate and isolate William, but also Samuel. This idea of the fox being to blame for Daniel's death is first mentioned by William in scene 10: "I suspect that the beasts were watching your house that night. [. . .] For a few moments Daniel lay unguarded and they used that time to call to him. They lured him outside. They led him into the muddy water and they laughed as he drowned" (49). While at first doubtful, from scene 12 onwards, Samuel begins to believe it has been foxes who killed Daniel. The more William starts to doubt that foxes are in fact the enemy of humans, the more Samuel gets hooked on the idea and hopes to take violent revenge on the foxes: "I'd like to use dogs. More painful. But a bullet will do it. I'll

9 I would suggest that the regime in *Foxfinder* is totalitarian: the only *real* aim the foxfinder has is to monitor and control Samuel and Judith. Printing flyers that claim the fox might not be the real enemy is punished by the loss of possession. Surveillance, restrictions in free speech, and punishment are typically totalitarian mechanisms.

bring back the heads, so you can spit on them" (73). As Miriam Gillinson observes: "Samuel, desperate for someone to blame, hunts down his grief with a gun." Samuel actively draws a border between nature – whether his own natural self that he still blames for Daniel's death or his surrounding environment in which Daniel drowned – by using the fox as a disgusting object. He degrades the fox, and thus nature, to something dangerous and deceitful that is too vile to be killed humanely. Samuel not only mentally turns the foxes into physically disgusting objects by imagining their severed heads, but also renders them disgusting on a likewise imagined moral ground. This obsession with the abject fox further leads him into a spiral of paranoia and neglect, isolating and alienating him from Judith. At the end of the play, Samuel shoots William, who was about to rape Judith, and thus reveals a form of moral disgust, with the words: "I shot a fox" (82). This demonstrates that all negative connotations associated with the fox have travelled to William, to be eliminated and to restore the balance in Judith and Samuel's lives. Consequently, in *Foxfinder*, similar to what capitalism does to our relationship with nature, the fox is first degraded to something inferior: it is seen as the (ethical) Other and opens a binary of nature/fox vs human, which then leads to an increased sense of isolation and alienation. By portraying a totalitarian regime that instrumentalises the fox as a disgusting object, *Foxfinder* employs (satirical) exaggeration to underline the destructive nature of the Capitalocene.

Therefore, the "relentless pattern of violence [imposed] on nature" (Moore, Introduction 5) by humans in the Capitalocene is revealed in both *Foxfinder* and *Fuck the Polar Bears* through their structural parallel to affective reactions of disgust and abjection, which are combined to portray human separation, isolation, and alienation from nature and from each other. Both plays portray the exploitation of nature by focusing on several aspects that can be represented through disgust and abjection, for instance, by utilising soft toy polar bears and foxes as the designated disgusting enemy: nature is degraded to something that is inferior. A dichotomy of nature and human is established, and a sense of human isolation, alienation, and exclusion is created. Therefore, disgust can be used as a technique to extrapolate the lack of interconnection between humans and nature, which comments on the pattern of violence and destruction capitalism imposes on nature.

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Bionote

Leila Michelle Vaziri

is a Research Assistant and PhD student at the University of Augsburg. In her dissertation, which is funded by the *Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes* (German Academic Scholarship Foundation) and the Marianne-Plehn Programme, she explores the thematic and aesthetic implications of the theatre of anxiety, which combines topics of social, political, and ecological importance with anxiety. She holds an MA in philosophy and literature from University College Dublin (2017) and an MSc in Psychological Studies from the University of Aberdeen (2018). Her research focuses on contemporary (British) drama and performance, and the intersection of literature with philosophy, psychology, and sociology as well as feminism and ecology.