“Topics in Environmental Studies: Postcolonial Ecocritique” will establish a new emphasis in Environmental Studies in the English Department. Its goal is to explore bridges that have been recently constructed between the two fields of ecocriticism and postcolonial studies. As critics Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt have observed, a degree of “philosophical antagonism” has existed, and remains, between the two fields. Spurred by the work of theorists like Ursula Heise, however, ecocritics have begun to recognize the dangers of a parochial regionalism, while postcolonialists have begun to explore the connections between social and environmental justice. This course will investigate both the antagonism and the recent cooperation through a range of fiction, critical readings, and other selections.

“Postcolonial Ecocritique” will feature fiction published by British, Anglo-Indian, and Indo-Anglian writers in an arc reaching from the later nineteenth century to the beginning of the twenty-first. This timeframe corresponds to the period following the First War of Indian Independence (1857) to the present day, an era of colonial disintegration and dissolution and (post)colonial critique. Most of the writers in this course were or are cosmopolitan people who travel(ed) widely in the territories of the (former) British Empire—and drew on their experiences in their fiction. In some configurations, environmentalist discourse and practice is implicated in colonialism, while in others postcolonial positions might confirm parochial forms of regionalism. In order to recognize these affiliations, we will discuss a variety of questions. For example, how are the concepts of “nature” and “the natural” represented in our literary texts? What forms of environmental degradation emerged from global colonialist activity, as represented in our texts? How do the texts address these issues? How are borders variably drawn between different species in these texts? Or how are variable species shown to be related or connected? Are current modes of environmental and postcolonial discourse adequate to identify and address the issues raised in these texts?