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Posted on 22 January 2018 By Amitav Ghosh

The Author brings his intellect and erudition into the issue of climate change He is scathing of people in power and like many others feels that a climate disaster is upon mankind and it s unlikely to escape without great damage to itself and the Earth He is particularly devastating on the Paris Climate Accord and bluntly tells that it s just a can kicked down the road a clever obfuscation of issues in its desperate efforts to please everyone On the other hand, he is laudatory of the Pope s Encyclical He examines how literature, especially fiction, has failed in addressing this issue, which despite the extreme danger facing mankind has not been able to raise awareness He feels vested interests are particularly responsible for confusing the danger so that the consumer culture is cannibalising human kind The rich will have the least to lose while the poor will suffer the most Contrarily, because poor nations consume less they may come out of this less damaged than what waits the rich West Ghosh has some surprising interesting vignettes to offer, like colonialism actually delayed the onset of climate change and Mahatma Gandhi understood what direction consumerism will lead the world and tried to change India s social and economic trajectory The Author is not hopeful of the future as selfish attitudes will remain pre dominant and individual efforts are likely to come to naught because by now it s too late Surprisingly, the growing involvement of religious groups, according to him, is the only way mankind may be able to arrest the climate juggernaut Sometimes I found the Author s digression into literature and philosophical intellectualism confusing but that perhaps is my

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fault A book worth reading. Naomi Klein has this to say about this book On very rare occasions, a writer marshals such a searing insight and storytelling skill that even a well trodden subject is blown wide open Ghosh is that kind of writer, and this is that kind of book I cannot agree , I consider Amitav Ghosh to be one of the greatest fiction writers India has ever produced, his IBIS Trilogy and The Glass Palace are one of the greatest works of fiction, and that is because he has always kept the social narrative in his books His fictions are not according to popular belief of how a novel should be, individual centrist, there is always a community, and the struggle of that community against the onslaught of capitalistic hubris as was the case in both IBIS trilogy based on Opium Wars and The Glass Palace based on the Oil Wars Amitav Ghosh with The Great Derangement has put forth a work of Non Fiction which will be remembered till eternity His critique of failure of main stream fiction in producing significant works on climate catastrophe, his research at how the colonialism has disrupted the common sense against the greed by creating waterfront cities of Mumbai, HongKong, Singapore while all the harbors of old be it Amsterdam, London, Rotterdam, Surat all were inland situated on rivers, the Anglosphere USA, UK, AUS and NZ has in fact on one hand stopped the rest of the world Its Colonies Asian and African states to achieve much rapid development right with Europe in 18th century while also unwittingly but fortunately have delayed the onslaught of Carbon Emission as would have been the case if whole world would have had Industrial Revolution simultaneously This book has its attention on India, how dangerous it is for our west coast to cope with any of the natural disasters that plague our eastern coast 2015 has been the first year in the recorded history that Arabian Sea has produced cyclones than Bay of Bengal and if god forbid a cyclone originating in Arabian Sea hits Mumbai, it would be a catastrophe unparalleled in the history of the world There are few books that completely alters your thinking, the time divides between the time before you read that book and after I have had two of those experiences when first i read The Fountainhead a decade or so ago, the idea of altruistic pursuit of individualism got my attention The second was To kill a Mockingbird where the unabashed morality of Atticus Finch inspired me to have a world in black and white, right and

Goddess

Pride and Prejudice

Remember Me?

Summer Sisters

The Help

One for the Money

Something Blue

Good in Bed

Twenties Girl

The Devil Wears Prada

Eat, Pray, Love

Shopaholic Takes
Manhattan

Water for Elephants

P.S. I Love You

The Sisterhood of the
Traveling Pants

The Other Boleyn Girl

wrong, no shades of grey This is the third book which i have read that creates the demarcation in my lifetime The absolute foolishness that we are showing in the face of such a eminent disaster, playing the millennium old blame game of its him not me is really something unique to humanity This is a book which bares open how foolish, stupid and utterly deranged we are with our belief in our ingenuity The future generations, plagued by all the horrors of climate change, will look at the 21st century with such a loathing that is UN imaginable right now The world s most advanced country has half the population and a presidential candidate believing that Climate Change is a Hoax created by Chinese, developed nations want developing nations to lower the carbon footprint while abdicating there responsibility to the cause This, the time we are living in, if something unprecedented is not done within next few decades would always be know as the era of utter foolishness when we knowingly destroyed the Earth, this era we are living in, it really is the Era of The Great Derangement. Are We Deranged The Acclaimed Indian Novelist Amitav Ghosh Argues That Future Generations May Well Think So How Else To Explain Our Imaginative Failure In The Face Of Global Warming In His First Major Book Of Nonfiction Since In An Antique Land, Ghosh Examines Our Inability At The Level Of Literature, History, And Politics To Grasp The Scale And Violence Of Climate Change The Extreme Nature Of Today S Climate Events, Ghosh Asserts, Make Them Peculiarly Resistant To Contemporary Modes Of Thinking And Imagining This Is Particularly True Of Serious Literary Fiction Hundred Year Storms And Freakish Tornadoes Simply Feel Too Improbable For The Novel They Are Automatically Consigned To Other Genres In The Writing Of History, Too, The Climate Crisis Has Sometimes Led To Gross Simplifications Ghosh Shows That The History Of The Carbon Economy Is A Tangled Global Story With Many Contradictory And Counterintuitive Elements Ghosh Ends By Suggesting That Politics, Much Like Literature, Has Become A Matter Of Personal Moral Reckoning Rather Than An Arena Of Collective Action But To Limit Fiction And Politics To Individual Moral Adventure Comes At A Great Cost The Climate Crisis Asks Us To Imagine Other Forms Of Human Existence A Task To Which Fiction, Ghosh Argues, Is The Best Suited Of All Cultural Forms His Book Serves As A

I've Got Your Number

The Joy Luck Club

The Boy Next Door

Great Writer S Summons To Confront The Most Urgent Task Of Our Time History will judge this as the age of derangement, because collectively we have chosen to ignore the greatest challenge of our times climate change When Ghosh paints the frightening picture he does, it amazes us that this has remained so much in the periphery of our current discourse We experience catastrophic floods, we know rivers that have dried up, heat waves kill thousands yet there is so little of it in literary fiction and there is so little pressure on politicians and governments to take note Ghosh is dismissive of the Paris Accord and appreciative of people like Pope Francis and Gandhi, both of whom acknowledged that the push for infinite growth is unsustainable Current power structures and a prevailing mind set that celebrates individual freedom, make it virtually impossible to address the massive changes needed And though he ends on a hopeful note, it is a bleak picture he paints A must read. Amitav Ghosh takes a break from fiction to write this non fictional account on a topic that is close to his heart The looming threat of climate change due to human activity, and the dire consequences that humanity and nature is probable to face in the near future as well as currently facing is something that he brings to the forefront More prominently, he showcases the lack of discourse about it in literature and fiction and how it would be seen in hindsight as an avenue where we were left lacking Ghosh is an eminent and supremely talented writer, there is no question about it Its heartening to see him in a different role where he dons the hat of a social ecological activist. The book puts across a lot of current events and literary references which are very relevant to the topic at hand He provides adequate context and research based facts but doesn't dwell too much on them he knows his strength is in storytelling rather than hard science and he makes the most of it A few of the analogies that he makes to connect literature to global climate change seem a bit far fetched but overall it's a really coherent piece of work focusing on one of the most serious threats that we as a race, and nature as a whole, is facing right now. We should not wait till the time entire Mumbai city is washed away Mumbai is sitting on the edge It is like a time bomb ticking to explode at any moment This might of nature is evident to you as you read the book The reason I stumbled upon this book is probably because I was looking for

some fiction written by Amitav Ghosh This title grabbed my attention than the other books I am glad I chose this one Honestly speaking, I did not expect such an in depth analysis and review from a fiction writer While I was interested in the science part of the climate change, what the book offers is a perspective on the literature, history and politics of climate change Yet, I must say I was not disappointed The author delves deep into the topics when he discusses all three The author argues the reasons why the contemporary literature fails to address climate change The part on history of climate change is such a revelation It was really interesting to read about the coal and petroleum economies The politics of climate change although a little familiar to me is still interesting This makes an interesting reading in the backdrop of the recent event of all references to climate change being removed from the Whitehouse website with the 45th president coming in For someone like me who is a novice at reading books, many pages especially at the start of the book were found to be heavily laden with the literary jargon and hence a bit difficult to understand I needed a dictionary at my hand constantly But, overall it turns out to be a wonderful reading on a relevant topic. A searing analysis of how the turn to individualism in literature specifically in the dominant literary form of the novel and its feedback loop imprint on culture and politics during the last century leaves humanity unprepared to deal with the gravest problem of the commons we face climate change Ghosh wonders whether historians of the future from some other planet might look back upon our times as an age of the great derangement Although the tone is despondent , Ghosh ends on a positive note hoping that if mass organizations especially those with religious affiliations can join hands with popular movements we might just gain the momentum needed to tackle our self destruction as a species. The world was void, The populous and the powerful was a lump, Seasonless, herbless, treeless, manless, lifeless A lump of death a chaos of hard clay. The rivers, lakes and ocean all stood still, And nothing stirred within their silent depths. Lord Byron, Darkness , written in 1816 sometimes referred to as the year without a summer Amitav Ghosh s general idea here is to try to explain why it is so difficult to tackle but not exactly tackle, to conceptualize, to accept the problem of global warming On second thought,

problem doesn't feel like the right word either. Maybe we need a new word, or an entirely new vocabulary but there may not be time for that. In the first section, the book's longest, Ghosh suggests the irony that it was during the era that human beings started to radically change the environment, setting the stage for future volatility and what he calls the uncanny, the novel, according to Ghosh, settled into discussing the bourgeois conventions of everyday life, habituating readers away from the possibility that life could contain sudden, violent upheavals. This is an issue, because it appears that we are now in an era that will be defined precisely by events that appear, by our current standards of normality, highly improbable. One of the most powerful tropes of modernity, Ghosh writes, envisages time as an irresistible, irreversible forward movement. This jealous deity, the Time god of modernity, has the power to decide who will be cast into the shadows of backwardness and who will be granted the benediction. It is this conception of time that allows the work of partitioning to proceed within the novel, always aligning itself with the avant garde as it hurtles forward in its impatience to erase every archaic reminder of Man's kinship with the non-human. Ghosh has a really interesting point about the difficulty human beings face in engaging with volatility, in accepting that non-human forces have roles in determining our fates as well, in our collective tendency towards habit, inevitability and teleology. I guess it makes sense to me that the 19th century novel may have been one factor that habituated this mode of thinking. Then again, Moby Dick. There were some pretty volatile events in War and Peace, but I find his assertion that 21st century literary fiction, whatever that is, exactly needs to get its act together on climate change to be really puzzling. I'm sorry, but literary fiction, however you define it, I guess it's supposed to mean good, but I've always assumed it referred to books written in a certain overly elaborate MFA style that signals group affiliation, doesn't need to do anything, because not enough people read it to make it electorally significant. As far as forms of entertainment go, literary fiction can't even begin to compete, in terms of individual consciousnesses reached and influenced or is it mirrored with, say, superhero movies. Is this because superhero movies take on the pressing issues of our day in realistic ways? Of course not just the opposite. It's pretty clear

that as a society we prefer stories in which there's always some planetary, existential crisis, and benevolent superhuman beings to rescue us from it in other words, escapism Even the very predictability of plot and banality of dialogue seem to serve the purpose of sheltering us from the improbable, the volatile, the uncanny The next section shifts gears to an idea that I had never quite put together the intimate relationship between the maintenance of power and a carbon based economy. The boost that fossil fuels provided to Western power is nowhere clearly evident than in the First Opium War, in which steamships played a decisive role In other words, carbon emissions were, from very early on, closely related to power in all its aspects this continues to be a major, although unacknowledged, factor in the politics of contemporary global warming. This maintenance of power, naturally enough, required those countries with power to prevent others from developing it In the case of the British in India, for example, it was the very fact that India's ruling power was also the global pioneer of the carbon economy that ensured that it could not take hold in India, at that point in time The appetites of the British economy needed to be fed by large quantities of raw materials Had a carbon economy developed synchronously in India and elsewhere, these materials would have been used locally instead of being exported. This dynamic may have delayed both the climate crisis and a broader understanding of the limits of modern, industrial society Even back in the 1950s, Ghosh writes, the carbon footprint of the West was growing rapidly enough to ensure that the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere would continue to increase But that rise would not have been so steep if mainland Asia had not launched upon a period of sustained economic expansion in the late 1980s It is this acceleration that has dramatically shortened the time available to adapt what we have learned is that the patterns of life that modernity engenders can only be practiced by a small minority of the world's population Asia's historical experience demonstrates that our planet will not allow these patterns of living to be adopted by every human being. What would happen to a leader who suggested to his or her people that the universalist premise of industrial civilization was a hoax, and that maybe our country should take one for the team the opposite of Donald Trump, essentially Gandhi not

only seems to have understood this, but he was willing to carry his vision to its logical conclusion by voluntarily renouncing, on behalf of the nation, the kind of power and affluence that is conferred by industrial civilization. This was perfectly well understood by Gandhi's political enemies on the Hindu right, who insistently characterized him as a man who wanted to weaken India. And indeed it was for this very reason that Gandhi was assassinated by the former member of an organization that would later become the nucleus of the political formation that now rules India. This coalition came to power by promising exactly what Gandhi had renounced: endless industrial growth. This has ominous implications. I don't know if transitioning to a non-carbon based economy necessarily means a loss of modernity. I suspect some people disagree with that, but it will mean changes in lifestyle and changes in leaders. Putin, for example, would be nowhere without Russia's oil and gas revenue; the implicit contract he's made with the Russian people—higher standard of living, safety and security, in exchange for political freedom—would have been broken long ago. The leadership of the United States, meanwhile, recently joined Russia, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait at the U.N. Climate Summit in refusing to endorse a new landmark study on global warming, which seems like a statement of intention of planetary suicide pact whether the rest of us like it or not. We're going to ignore reality and ride in the armed lifeboat for as long as possible. I think Hollywood can safely bank a few Avengers movies. I have been lamenting the lack of novels about climate change for a long time, so was delighted to see that Amitav Ghosh had written a book on the subject. Although the reasons for this deficiency in modern literature are the central enquiry of *The Great Derangement*, there is a great deal to it than that. Ghosh advances a resolutely Asian-centric perspective on climate change, which is refreshingly different from the US and European narratives that dominate climate change writing. As he points out, this dominance is not only because the US and Europe have been disproportionately responsible for greenhouse gas emissions; anglophone countries are home to most of the climate change deniers and the climate scientists. Yet, as he points out, the extreme weather events that are becoming frequent and severe due to climate change have a much greater impact in Asia. Ghosh

illustrates this with the example of Mumbai's vulnerability to cyclones and storm surges. Ghosh's thesis about the lack of climate change novels has multiple overlapping facets. One concerns the partitioning of nature from culture, a second the separation of science fiction from literary fiction, a third the centring of human consciousness, agency and identity in the arts. The latter point is developed specifically with regard to modern novels, which according to John Updike must involve individual moral adventure. As Ghosh explains, this emphasis on individual interiority over community and disregard for nature is heavily linked to Western political economy generally. It doesn't necessarily apply in Asia, although literature is becoming increasingly globalised. Like me, Ghosh finds so-called cli-fi unsatisfactory and articulates why very neatly. But cli-fi is made up of disaster stories set in the future, and that, to me, is exactly the rub. The future is but one aspect of the age of human-induced global warming; it also includes the recent past and, most significantly, the present. Climate change is precisely not an imagined other world apart from ours nor is it located in another time or dimension. By no means are the events of the era of global warming the stuff of wonder tales yet it is also true that in relation to what we think of as normal now, they are in many ways uncanny and they have indeed opened a doorway into what we might call a spirit world, a universe animated by non-human voices. Ghosh's analysis helped me to consolidate my own thoughts about those novels I have read that are concerned with climate change, few as they are. The good: *Flight Behaviour* by Barbara Kingsolver, *The Rapture* by Liz Jensen, and *The Carbon Diaries 2015* and sequel by Saci Lloyd. All four extrapolate the effects of climate change in the near present and how they alter people's lives. Each is compelling, thought-provoking, distinctive, and narrated by a relatively vulnerable person: an under-educated woman in rural America, a social worker and her charge, a teenage girl. These novels are not about people who can buy themselves out of the effects of climate change, as current culture often seems to assume we all will. The bad: *The Lamentations of Zeno* by Ilija Trojanow and *Solar* by Ian McEwan, which I couldn't finish, are about middle-aged men's collapsing marriages and say nothing meaningful about the effects of climate change on anyone, let alone the vulnerable. They use it as set dressing, perhaps to

disguise the extreme conventionality and tedium of the actual plots I felt tricked by both, as the blurbs led me to believe that they were novels about climate change. The best climate change novel I've read is technically sci-fi as it's set in the future *New York 2140* by Kim Stanley Robinson. What distinguishes it from cli-fi is both its systematic world building, continuity with the present, and refusal to treat climate change as hopeless. The plot concerns a diverse group of people who live in the same block of flats and cooperate to fight against structural neoliberal forces, rather than an insular group saving only themselves from apocalyptic collapse. The main character is a city damaged but not destroyed by sea level rise. Not only does *New York 2140* portray daily life in a climate changed world rather than using it as a generic disaster background of *The Water Knife*, but it demonstrates that there is hope for improvement. I wish literary or science fiction did this. I fear that speculative fiction, anything not concerned exclusively with the emotional lives of middle class Western families, is increasingly getting pushed onto the sci-fi or crime thriller shelves. Yet the current conventions of sci-fi favour thriller plots centred on individual survival and/or futuristic settings with little applicability to the present day. In addition to lamenting the lack of climate change centric fiction, Ghosh presents a very interesting angle on responsibility for climate change. He argues that it is capitalism and imperialism are of equal importance and that while they are certainly dual aspects of a single reality, the relationship between them is not, and has never been, a simple one. I found this very thought provoking as I, admittedly, have always blamed capitalism for climate change and considered imperialism to be one of capitalism's especially vicious manifestations. Although a detailed history of empire and capitalism's entwined links to industrialisation and fossil fuel based economies would take up a much longer book than this concise one, Ghosh summarises his point convincingly in *India's Case*. It was imperialism that dictated the nature and tempo of India's engagement with global capitalism, and thus the trajectory of its carbon emissions. These particular chapters reminded me of my impatience for the sequel to *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming* by Andreas Malm, likely to be titled *Fossil Empire*, which is expected to explain how coal based

industrialisation came to be exported from Britain to the world. Amitav Ghosh is an articulate, wise, and incisive writer and this book repaid careful reading. Among his analyses are some notable comments on politics: the public sphere, where politics is performed, has been largely emptied of content in terms of the exercise of power as with fiction, it has become a forum for secular testimony, a baring of the soul in the world as church. Politics, as thus practised, is primarily an exercise in personal expressiveness. Contemporary culture in all its aspects including religious fundamentalisms of almost every variety is pervaded by this expressivism, which is itself to a significant degree a result of the strong role of Protestant Christianity in the making of the modern world writes Roy Scranton. This reminded me of the current drive for inclusive characters in fiction, because a wider range of people wish to see themselves represented. I am very sympathetic to this desire, however personally I am much eager for novels about climate change than novels in which people like me are represented. As things stand, there are hardly any of either. Ideally I'd like both, but to me ignoring the existential threat to humanity's survival is an immediate issue, especially as it is the vulnerable and underrepresented that will suffer most as a consequence of climate change. And the two desires are the very opposite of mutually exclusive: the wealthy, white, able, cis, heterosexual men of this world are most likely to be able to avoid confronting climate change. This was part of the reason why *The Lamentations of Zeno* and *Solar* proved so disappointing: they centred on men who suffered none of its effects and could thus waste all their energy on extramarital affairs. It also occurs to me that during the Cold War nuclear destruction was not as rare and exceptional a topic for fiction as climate change is today. Returning to politics, Ghosh makes this specific point which echoes *Why We Disagree about Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity*, if I recall correctly. The public politics of climate change is itself an illustration of ways in which the moral political can produce paralysis. Of late, many activists and concerned people have begun to frame climate change as a moral issue. This has become almost a plea of last resort, appeals of many other kinds having failed to produce concerted action on climate change. So, in an ironic twist, the

individual conscience is now increasingly seen as the battleground of choice for a conflict that is self evidently a problem of the global commons, requiring collective action it is as if every other resource of democratic governance had been exhausted, leaving this residue the moral. By comparing the Pope's encyclical on climate change with the 2016 Paris Agreement, Ghosh then demonstrates that this morality truly is a mere residue. What power can it command against the weight and complexity of the carbon economy. Towards the end of the book, Ghosh turns to the arena in which climate change's seriousness is not contested the military security establishment. This makes for an unsurprisingly downbeat ending, concerned as it is with the politics of the armed lifeboat. Nonetheless, I have read depressing and much less thoughtful books about climate change. The impact of this one is disproportionate to its short length and I hope it will spur further discussion on the treatment of climate change in fiction. Novelists don't necessarily have a duty to write about issues of contemporary concern, but why wouldn't they. Surely there is inspiration to be found in drought induced migrations, extreme weather events, and eroding coastlines than the tired topic of marital difficulties. It isn't as if there is binary choice between human stories and those concerned with nature that dichotomy has been fundamentally undermined by the advent of the Anthropocene. Where are the novels that explore how people feel about climate change. The ambivalent, paradoxical, fatalistic, confused, and frightened emotions evoked by something so much larger than our minds can easily encompass deserve analysis by gifted novelists, and soon. This extended essay is both huge in scope giving detailed attention to topics from the Victorian view of nature as reflected in *Madame Bovary* to the Chinese industrial revolution of the 11th century, to the forecast effects of sea level rise on Mumbai and New York and very narrow in its ultimate focus, which is the culture of literary fiction, i.e the Booker and broadsheet review sort, so than the experimental oddities popular in vocal circles of GR. If you enjoy seeing the results of a polymathic mind at work even if you aren't especially into books about environmental issues and or have reservations about litfic this would be a satisfying novella length read. Literary Fiction. Last year, I became frustrated whilst involved in frequent discussion about litfic,

how utterly separate it seemed from the topic I was reading most about in non fiction, climate change And Richard Powers reported novel in progress, about trees, was nowhere near publication So this book came along at just the right time However, because Ghosh is himself so enmeshed in the litfic fraternity, he doesn't have, or rather doesn't transmit, a sense of how small a field it is in sales and readership terms, or in the eyes of the many readers who have other preferences, and oddly never even alludes for his focus on literary is implicitly related to cultural prestige never alludes to the experimental and highbrow, as if litfic were the apex and not seen as a dull middlebrow by some who prefer obscure or trashier works, or both On Goodreads, various readers of experimental fiction mingle in the best reviewer rankings with readers of popular genre novels litfic has always seemed to less prominent on here and the province of the newspapers. I also thought he neglected to address the partisanship, over a century old, about political and issue led fiction versus the aesthetic, artistic and amusing There are frequent skirmishes over the topic on Goodreads, framing it as an either or a false dichotomy in my view, many of the most interesting novels managing to incorporate both However, it was refreshing that Ghosh did not delineate everything in the same old terms because he is calling for both realism about the issue of climate change in literary fiction and for greater attention to the fantastical and non human, as is found in folktales from times when human life was directly subject to nature It felt as invigorating as a new paradigm But because his argument is quite subtle, it could quite easily read to the art for art's sake team as entirely a denigration of their viewpoint That isn't helped by his rather sweeping, example free statements about Modernism and its focus on language and human internality, and less on politics, as being even pronounced than those of recent litfic These rang hollow to me because, since I became aware of Ghosh's book nearly a year ago, by far the best example of serious fiction I've read which fulfils its suggested remit is the section Time Passes in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, in which a holiday home is abandoned for years, encroached upon by animals and plants, whilst its upper class intellectual owners are affected by the First World War It shows that the experimental may be an easier place to introduce the non

human and the slipperiness of a material reality once assumed to be secure than is yet another realist novel about infidelity in Hampstead. For the benefit of those who view issues in fiction as oppositional to aesthetics, Ghosh could have emphasised that contemporary literary fiction frequently features other sociopolitical topics, especially class and wealth divisions between people, and experiences of war, but that climate change, and nature as a force to which humans are subject other than via common serious diseases such as cancer is distinctively missing. A point which, as I read *The Great Derangement*, I realised was the source of my frustration mentioned above. Experimental fiction may be less inclined to foreground issues, but they are often present in the background, perhaps in characters' living conditions. Yet when one is hanging out in online crowds in which literary fiction is the favoured form, Ghosh's critique of its neglect of a major issue of our time and of imminent times, and especially of how this indicts its claim to seriousness when other topics are addressed over and over, is absolutely relevant. I wanted to nag some people to read this book even before I'd looked at anything than the preview. A common response to mentioning the lack of reference to climate change in litfic whether among people I know, or among BTL Guardian commenters is to just read SF instead. FFS. Here is a good recent article about climate change in fiction including SF. The neglect of the issue is seen by some friends as merely one symptom of litfic's backwaterish irrelevancy and dullness outside the newspapers and prizes merry-go-round. It is indeed a form with a far smaller audience and a diminishing contribution to the wider cultural conversation compared with what it had in, for example, the 1950s and 1960s. Its genre snobbishness although this I see far among GR hardcore experimentalist circles now, as litfic readers, writers and critics who grew up on comics hit their 40s and gain significant influence looks particularly archaic and ridiculous when compared with film. Among cineastes, it's form and presentation that counts towards respect, not topics circumscribed, and there is plenty of arthouse SF. Perhaps proportionally than experimental speculative fiction in book form. Yet literary fiction does still count as both measure of and signal to what does or should really matter to the broadsheet-inclined audience, which includes the political classes and

other significant decision makers If Ghosh thinks the near absence of climate change in literary fiction is symptomatic of society's unwillingness to face up to the future and the effects of its own actions noting that future settings are as uncharacteristic of litfic, just as much as historical fiction is a staple of prize longlists I would say that, as other forms have addressed it, it is perhaps related to the neglect of it, and to general short termism and unwillingness to seriously contemplate what will happen, among the comfortable chattering classes My view may be skewed because, over the past year, I have returned to reading about the environment than I had for over a decade, but it does seem as if there are serious stories getting public attention now than there used to be, even a couple of years ago Ghosh notes that in 2015, two highly significant international documents about climate change appeared the Paris Agreement, and the papal encyclical Laudato si whilst the Booker longlist was entirely devoid of the subject I would argue that the following year's *The North Water*, however, does address human despoliation of the environment in a historical setting Anna's excellent review of this book explains other reasons why literary fiction matters specifically in covering this topic, including its artistic approach. Ghosh sees the situation of serious fiction as flowing from Enlightenment and C19th views of nature, in which nature was surprisingly to us now seen as stable, ordered and subject to only gradual change An opposition of catastrophism versus gradualism, in which the former was seen as primitive, existed in geology from Lyell's time, and was still around among 1980s doubters of the asteroid theory of dinosaur extinction This sense of stability in nature mirrored the increasing stability of western bourgeois life as industrial society grew up and medicine advanced, such stable lives being seen as ideal subject matter Emma Bovary's love of melodramatic romances and foolish rejection such stability, being quoted in support However, this idea was there in the novel at least a couple of hundred years earlier, with *Don Quixote*, written when modernity was emerging, but life including Cervantes own was still highly turbulent Is that because it's a bourgeois idea Because a certain leaning towards the prosaic is inherent in the novel And given the reservations many people I know have about the middlebrow, middle classness of literary fiction, this

aspect of the critique, of the subgenre being too concerned with stable bourgeois life, was an easy sell. Between 2012 and 2016, when the online social justice movement was at its height, among my frustrations with it was the total neglect of environmental issues in favour of aggressive minutiae of identity politics. Ghosh agrees however, he seems not to have noticed that the idea of speciesism was, recently, slowly gaining ground in some quarters of it, and the way this ties in with the rise of veganism. As a Guardian reader, my current impression from the paper is that about 30-40% of people are now vegan, not, what, 1-2% that's how prominent it's becoming. And that another 10% are trying obsessively to avoid buying plastic. One of the book's big questions is how will people in a future, climate-changed world view literature of the C20th and early C21st. It parallels the social justice reading of older fiction. Assuming that book distribution, leisure time and literature study are still as plentiful as today I really don't think it will be in 150 years, and probably sooner, I would think that, as with slavery and casual racism and sexism in books from our past, some readers will see resource profligacy and obliviousness to this to be defining features of these novels, reasons why they should be consigned to the sidelines, whereas many others will see them as unfortunate, with plenty else to enjoy in the stories regardless. And surely some will wish they were living in times of such everyday luxury a decadence cult. Asia Climate Change. Ghosh critiques the idea that Asian countries are entirely future victims of climate change, in a complex argument. He mentions that western environmentalists, such as Naomi Klein, neglect to mention imperialism as a cause of climate change alongside capitalism itself. Or rather, of the particular patterns of climate change which are occurring now. Essentially, he considers that imperialism may have delayed significant climate change, but that colonial powers are still significantly responsible for global environmental changes as they are experienced. Major Asian countries had industrial expansions and extractive industries that are little known to the average Westerner. I managed to do a whole history degree albeit not very recently without having heard of the Chinese industrial revolution of the C11th. It led to significant deforestation and, once coal was discovered, its adoption as a fuel in some areas. However, as the deposits were not very

accessible with medieval technology, topography meant that large scale fossil fuel based industrialisation didn't begin in medieval China, and instead had to wait until Europeans started it in the C18th. Most accounts of the history of oil trace its initial drilling to the C19th USA; however, many countries used oil on a small scale where local deposits, little understood, were available and the Burmese had been using oil with the widest spread trading network. Ghosh suggests that nineteenth century Burma would have been the world's first petrostate if it had not been crushed by British colonial wars. India, for a while, developed a formidable shipbuilding industry and copied British built steamships. However, the Empire stymied this by banning Indian built ships from its ports. So, had history progressed only slightly differently, global industry would have had rather a different distribution and carbon emissions would have been much higher, much earlier. Ghosh considers there to have been two significant eras for emissions: the West in the early twentieth century, and Asia in the 1980s onwards, the latter although it was not so densely industrialised, had a huge impact due to sheer human numbers. A significant difference from the West was that in major Asian countries, there was always greater opposition to industrialisation from religion: Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and from public intellectuals. Nineteenth century novels may sometimes lament the coming of the railways and the changes they wrought to the countryside, but no one truly influential spoke up against industrialisation itself as opposed to, say, conditions in factories. However, as colonial powers packed up and went home, political leaders became keen to start trying to catch up with the West. Gandhi, before his assassination, was accused of trying to hold India back and Chinese Communism pushed religious belief to one side in favour of punishing regimes of agricultural and industrial progress. Ghosh considers that on balance, the West still owes the rest of the world, including Asia, for damage wrought by climate change, but that Asia in particular is not purely a victim. A Dystopian Future Ghosh has a particularly gloomy view of the future. Is that why he's frustratingly blasé about the issue of individual action versus collective action, assuming they are an either/or, and that readers aren't going to be rolling their eyes at his international arts lifestyle living and evidently flying quite frequently between

New York and India I posted about this subject here The outright collapsitarian vision whilst alarming to some has a strong element of freedom to it, and for physically tough people with certain viewpoints, it may even be invigorating But the world envisaged here, dominated by the politics of the armed lifeboat has no such primitivist, libertarian appeal Delineating plausible and pessimistic reasoning for military planners careful study of climate change, he considers how climate change and the instability it will wreak to be an excuse for increasing authoritarian militarisation, especially of countries that are likely destinations for millions of refugees from regions stricken by famine and unbearable heat The countries where the refugees originate may, in turn, have punitive policies of their own, introduced to appease Western powers The poor everywhere, but especially those in the Global South, end up worse off than ever I think this increased authoritarianism is, very sadly, plausible in densely populated countries like Britain, whereas the US is spread out and contains many recalcitrant armed citizens it does seem likely to fragment and collapse There even appears to be an implication that some actors in the deep state may not want to do much to mitigate climate change, precisely because they see global turbulence as an opportunity to strengthen their stranglehold, which is considerably depressing than, as usual, assuming they only care about making money in the short term Ghosh tries to end the book on a sudden hopeful note, that current youngsters and the literature they have yet to write, may help to create a better world than that He also has high hopes for world religions becoming ready made pressure groups for lowering carbon emissions no mention of the Catholic neglect of population as an issue I was reminded of Mark Lynas Six Degrees and his description of illogically optimistic conclusions many authors add to their environmental books because they feel they should With a little creative vision, and words, that conclusion could have sounded convincing and inspiring to action as otherwise it doesn't sound like Amitav Ghosh wants to join Dark Mountain just yet. There may be a few flaws in this book, but it's an original and interesting melange of topics The issue it addresses with literary fiction may seem minor to some especially those who don't read much litfic but some of us, at least, had been frustrated by it already Ghosh is saying

something that needed to be said how can this subgenre claim such seriousness and weight and relevance when it has its head in the sand However, will many dedicated readers of literary fiction actually take a break from novels to read this critique

