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## The Anthropocene in Literature: Human–Nonhuman Interactions

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### Abstract

The Anthropocene has emerged both as a geological and a cultural framing that alters the relation of humanity to the nonhuman world. This paper investigates how literature mediates complex articulations between human and nonhuman agencies and provides a narrative response to the ecological crisis and changes on this planet. With ecocritical and posthumanist ideas, it explores how Amitav Ghosh, Margaret Atwood, and Barbara Kingsolver manifest ecological awareness as storytelling. In this frame, literature is not a representation but a site of environmental memory and ethical thought. Literature chronicles climate change, extinction and degradation of the environment while proposing ways of coexistence and renovation. By considering literary texts as aesthetic and ethical representations of the Anthropocene, the study shows how narration methods such as polyphonic voices, nonhuman perspectives and time shifts transform the discourse of human exceptionalism. These findings confirm that the genre encourages ecological awareness, empathy and responsibility for the reinvention of coexistence in the Anthropocene. It concludes that literary imagination acts as witness and catalyst in reshaping human identity, ethics, and our position on Earth.

**Keywords:** *Anthropocene, Posthumanism, Environmental Humanities, Narrative Imagination, Ecological Consciousness, Sustainability, Environmental Ethics*

### Introduction

The Anthropocene is one of the most important and debated concepts of the twenty-first century, naming an era in which human activity has taken a geological turn to become a force capable of reshaping the systems of the Earth. Anthropocene was coined by atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and biologist Eugene Stoermer in the early 2000s, the concept positions humankind as a planetary agent whose industrial, technological and cultural practices have remade the biosphere, the lithosphere, even the climate itself. The Anthropocene thus blurs traditional lines separating nature from culture, implying that human influence is no longer contained within the realm of local environments but has assumed a global and geological form. But the Anthropocene is more than a geological fact; it is also a cultural and philosophical paradigm that reshapes the place of humanity within the web of existence. The Anthropocene thus draws attention to questions around agency, ethics, and responsibility in a world where nonhuman actors—animals, plants, oceans, technologies and even microorganisms—actively participate in creating shared futures. This significant consciousness thus challenges the dominant anthropocentric vision that has guided Western thought and fosters ecocentric and posthuman impulses, which in turn point toward the distributed nature of agency and the interdependence of all forms of life. As a constituted form of cultural consciousness as both mirror and maker in literature plays a

generative role in representing and interrogating Anthropocene dynamics. Through narrative, metaphor and imagination, literary forms make visible the ways in which human and nonhuman lives are constituted in relation to one another. Translating inchoate ecological realities into experiential and aesthetic modes, they give voice to nonhuman actors and underscore the moral and emotional registers of environmental degradation. From renditions of apocalyptic ecological implosion through modest mediations on existence and revival, literature provides a site for working through affective, ethical and aesthetic dimensions of living in a damaged world.

In reimagining human agency and responsibility, literature becomes a example of ecological reimagination. Literary studies extend beyond textual analysis into environmental humanities, mending the gap between artistic expression and ecological awareness. This paper sheds importance to examine how literature articulates the condition of the Anthropocene through human-nonhuman interactions. It explores how writers construct imaginative dialogues between species, elements, and environments that question notions of progress, belonging and survival. By analyzing selected literary texts, the study aims to show how narrative art contributes to ecological thought in the form of environmental evidence and ethical reflection. Ultimately, this paper argues that literature in the Anthropocene does not simply represent environmental change; it participates in the reconfiguration of the various terms through which humanity understands its relationship with the human world.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Anthropocene and its study in literature are deeply rooted in the evolving fields of ecocriticism, posthumanism and environmental humanities, each with different yet interrelated frameworks through which to theorize the human nonhuman interactions. These diverse perspectives collectively dismantle the anthropocentric paradigms that have placed humans as separate from and superior to nature, instead theorizing a model of entanglement, interdependence and shared existence. Ecocriticism is one of the earliest literary modes of inquiry into the environment. It makes central the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Emerging in the late twentieth century, ecocriticism is ready to explore how texts represent nature and how such representations shape ecological values. Ecocritics such as Cheryll Glotfelty and Lawrence Buell highlight that literature not only reflects but also constructs environmental consciousness. In an Anthropocene framework, ecocriticism moves beyond the appreciation of nature into more vital discussions of climate change and ecological destruction, addressing the ethics of human intervention. Ecocriticism redefines literature as environmental discourse mediating culture and ecology.

While posthumanism rethinks the definition of the human, it questions enlightenment notions on rationality, mastery and autonomy by arguing that humans are situated within complex networks of biological, technological and ecological relations. Thinkers such as Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti and Bruno Latour have moved the idea of agency beyond humans to its distribution among actants: animals, machines, materials and systems. The concept of companion species by Haraway and actor-network theory by Latour dismantles hierarchical separations between human and nonhuman entities, presenting a view of coexistence based on mutual influence and

responsibility. Literature, in this regard, is a place of envisioning and narrating such entanglements, offering insight into affective and ethical dimensions of more-than-human constellations of relations.

The environmental humanities bring these theoretical approaches together in a manner that bridges scientific awareness with cultural interpretation. For them, the Anthropocene is more than a scientific fact; it is a narrative, an ethical call to action and thus requires telling stories about planetary change. For scholars like Timothy Clark and Stacy Alaimo, literature is a medium of environmental imagination, a way of thinking complexity, temporality and scale within global ecological transformation. In assuming these theoretical perspectives, this paper places its analysis solidly in a multidisciplinary aspect that recognizes the ways in which literature can speak to the complexity, vulnerability and interconnectedness of life in the Anthropocene.

### **Human Nonhuman Interactions in the Anthropocene**

The Anthropocene foregrounds the collapse of traditional distinctions between the human and the nonhuman and presses literature and criticism toward an acknowledgment of the interlaced agency and mutualism among all living and non-living beings. No longer do humans stand outside nature as either detached observer or manipulator but implicated participants in those networks of reciprocal influence that shape ecological and cultural realities (Latour, *Facing Gaia* 15). Literature provides a critical space for reimagining such interconnections, representing both the vulnerability and resilience of forms of life enmeshed within planetary systems.

In most contemporary literary narratives, the nonhuman is often an actant in human destiny. For instance, in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, the Sundarbans landscape emerges as a sentient force that resists human domination, reflecting a dynamic interplay between culture and ecology. Similarly, Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam Trilogy* envisions hybrid species and bioengineered beings that blur the boundaries between the natural and the artificial, dramatizing posthuman anxieties about creation, extinction, and survival. These texts dismantle anthropocentric hierarchies and rather present ecosystems as co-constitutive environments wherein human and nonhuman actors mutually influence existence (Haraway 19).

Furthermore, the affective, or emotional, dimension of human–nonhuman interaction lies at the core of Anthropocene literature. Stacy Alaimo's idea of trans-corporeality—that human bodies are in a material relation with the environment—emphasizes how literary narratives about pollution, climate change, and toxicity demonstrate that borders between organisms and ecosystems are porous (Alaimo 2). This penetrability of borders displaces the illusion of human self-sufficiency, reminding readers that survival and identity depend on ecological order. Literature thus becomes an ecology of empathy, allowing readers to feel the shared vulnerability of existence across species and matter (Buell 430).

The Anthropocene redefines narrative temporality and scale. Timothy Morton's hyperobjects—vast phenomena such as global warming which transcend human comprehension—are exemplary of how literature attempts to grapple with scales that are spatially and temporally beyond individual experience. Through fragmented structures, non-linear

storytelling and speculative imagination, writers attempt to represent the unrepresentable: deep time, planetary agency, slow ecological violence. Rob Nixon terms this the "slow violence" of environmental degradation-damage which is incremental, often invisible, yet devastating in its long-term effects. By rendering such processes visible, literature performs an act of environmental witnessing, transforming ecological crises into narrative consciousness. In other words, the literary investment in human-natural interactions in the Anthropocene reconfigures the ways in which agency, ethics, and survival are envisaged. It displaces the narrative of human centrality with a relational ontology of co-presence, dependence, and shared vulnerability. Literature, in its imaginative grasp, does not simply represent ecological change; it partakes in forging an environmental ethos anew, one that acknowledges life in plurality and the inseparability of human and planetary futures.

### **Reimagining Humanity in the Age of the Anthropocene**

The Anthropocene is compelling a fundamental rethinking of what it is to be human. As the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman dissolve, literature provides an important space to reconsider humanity's role, not as the master of the Earth, but as one participant in a web of interdependence. Rosi Braidotti argues that the posthuman condition "a shift from the unitary vision of Man as the measure of all things to a dynamic and relational understanding of subjectivity" (The Posthuman 49). In this reconceptualization, the ideal of autonomy that underlies humanism is replaced with relationality, vulnerability, and ecological embeddedness at the core of being.

In such a sense, literary responses to the Anthropocene have notably rendered humans as ecologically entangled and ethically accountable. Amitav Ghosh critiques in *The Great Derangement* how modern literature has failed to confront climate change adequately, claiming that fiction needs to "restore to the human the sense of the uncanny intimacy that binds us to the nonhuman" (Ghosh 30). Similarly, Margaret Atwood's speculative narratives, such as *The Year of the Flood*, create post-apocalyptic worlds where human survival is contingent upon cooperation with other species and the regeneration of ecological systems. These texts foreground the necessity for humility and adaptation, which urge readers to reconceive humanity not as an exceptional category but as a mutable and collaborative existence within the biosphere. This has deep ethical consequences for such a reimagined humanity. Donna Haraway appeals for a mode of "staying with the trouble," an ethics of response and responsibility across the interwoven fates of all beings (Staying with the Trouble 1). Literature, through its possibility to imagine and empathize, launches an ethical laboratory wherein readers experience the moral complexity of coexistence. Posthumanist fiction-from Richard Powers's *The Overstory* to Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer*-builds ecological empathy by giving narrative space to trees, insects, and animals, thus expanding the purview of moral consideration beyond the human (Powers 502). Such texts dismantle the illusion of separation and affirm the shared precarity of life on a damaged planet.

Ultimately, Anthropocene literature envisions a new human consciousness: one for which interdependence becomes strength, and vulnerability the nexus of connection. It calls for an

ethics of care, sustainability, and kinship across species lines. As Braidotti affirms, a posthuman subject is "an assemblage, a transversal being made of relations that exceed the human" (Posthuman Knowledge 23). It is in storytelling that writers and readers take part in this transformation: together, they dream of new forms of belonging aligned with the rhythms, limits, and resilience of the Earth itself.

### **Outcomes of the Study**

This study demonstrates that the literary engagement with the Anthropocene is one that represents ecological crises but at the same time revises and reshapes the conceptual premises of the human relationship with the nonhuman. Synthesizing ecocriticism, posthumanism, and environmental humanities, the paper establishes that literature functions as a medium that is reflective and transformative, recording ecological trauma while fostering new modes of ecological consciousness. A central outcome of this research is to bring forth the idea that literature functions as a cognitive and ethical bridge between human perception and planetary reality. As Alaimo points out, the matter-affective interconnectedness of bodies and environments dissolves any illusion of human separateness (Bodily Natures 2). The literary texts that dramatize this entanglement are narratives that deliver a function of scientific and philosophical ideas of the Anthropocene into emotionally resonant experiences, whether in the tidal ecosystems of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* or in posthuman speculative worlds of Atwood's *MaddAddam Trilogy*. Through these representations, literature not only mediates ecological knowledge; it also provokes empathy and moral awareness toward the nonhuman.

Another major result is that the Anthropocene has remade literary ethics and aesthetics. The study finds that such narrative strategies as polyvocality, fragmented temporality, and nonhuman perspectives allow writers to dismantle an anthropocentric hierarchy and foreground ecological interdependence (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 49). By this aesthetic reconfiguration, it invites readers to reimagine the human being as a collective species entangled in other forms of life, rather than as some privileged agency cast upon nature. In this context, critical analysis of literature becomes a site for negotiating ethical responsibility and environmental justice. The paper, further, underlines the role literature plays in resistance and renewal. In chronicling the ecological degradation, or in envisioning its alternatives, a writer makes narrative an activism. Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence underlines how fiction and poetry can frame the long-term impacts of exploitation and climate change (Nixon 2). By environmental memory and imagination, literature defies cultural amnesia over ecological loss, making sure that environmental degradation bears witness to a moral concern.

The outcomes of this paper affirm that the Anthropocene calls not only for new narratives but also for new ways of reading-ways that attend to the porous boundaries between species, the multiplicity of temporalities, and the affective dimensions of planetary life. Literature emerges as a dialogic space where ecological awareness, ethical inquiry, and imaginative renewal converge. As Timothy Clark contends, "to think the Anthropocene is already to be engaged in an act of reimagining humanity" (*Ecocriticism on the Edge* 12). This paper concludes that literary



imagination, based on human–nonhuman interaction, is at once a witness to environmental crisis and a facilitator of re-envisioning coexistence in the age of the Anthropocene.

### **Future Scope of the Study**

While this paper has explored the intersection of literature and ecology through the lens of the Anthropocene, the scope for further research in this field remains vast and dynamic. The Anthropocene, as both a scientific and cultural framework, is continuously evolving—raising new questions about human accountability, environmental justice, and the ethics of coexistence. Future studies can build upon the insights developed here by investigating a wide range of cultural and geographical portrayals of the Anthropocene, especially in non-Western literary traditions where local ecologies, indigenous cosmologies and postcolonial histories intersect. As scholars like Nixon have so aptly pointed out, the unequal distribution of environmental crises tends to impact poor and other marginalized communities disproportionately (Nixon 4). Extending the inquiry toward eco-postcolonial and subaltern environmental narratives may therefore also allow a deeper understanding of ecological inequity within global literature. Another promising direction for the future lies in the interdisciplinary approaches that incorporate literary studies into environmental science, digital media, and visual culture. According to Timothy Morton, ecological thinking needs to move "beyond the page" toward new media and sensory modalities with a capability to capture the scale and complexity of hyperobjects such as climate change (Hyperobjects 7). Analyses of film, graphic novels, and digital storytelling can offer new insights into how narrative imagination adapts to emerging environmental realities.

### **Conclusion**

The Anthropocene brings a radical turning point in human self-understanding and compels both science and the humanities to reconsider the consequences of human dominion over nature. This paper has explored how literature, as an imaginative and ethical mode, represents ecological realities and participates in the reimagining of humanity's place within the larger web of life. The engagement with ecocritical, posthumanist, and environmental humanities frameworks has shown that literary texts are dynamic sites where human-nonhuman entanglements are narrated, remembered, and ethically negotiated. Throughout this discussion, literature has emerged as a powerful site of environmental memory, resistance, and renewal. Writers like Amitav Ghosh, Margaret Atwood, and Barbara Kingsolver thematize the deep interdependence between human culture and ecological systems and turn narrative into a witnessing practice. Such works contest the illusion of human exceptionalism and offer in its place a relational vision of existence based upon empathy, coexistence, and care. As Donna Haraway's own formulation of "staying with the trouble" suggests, the Anthropocene requires that humanity learn to dwell within complexity rather than seeking to master it (Staying with the Trouble 1).

This paper concludes that the literary imagination operates both as a diagnostic and as a restorative. It diagnoses the moral and ecological crises of the present while envisioning new forms of planetary belonging. Blending scientific awareness with emotional and ethical resonance, literature renders tangible and meaningful those invisible processes of ecological

transformation. It provides ecological literacy and shared vulnerability necessary for sustainable futures. Ultimately, the Anthropocene calls for a redefinition of humanity-not as a species apart, but as one among many in an interconnected biosphere. It is a transformation to which literature lends its powers of imagination, empathy, and remembrance. It asks its readers to reconsider coexistence, modesty, and care as building blocks with which to reimagine life on a changing planet. Literary studies, by doing this, affirm their importance to environmental ethics and consciousness in the twenty-first century.

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