

The Anthropocene and After: Eco-Criticism, Climate Change, and the Literary Imagination

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ABSTRACT:

This paper examines the intersections of eco-criticism, climate change discourse, and the literary imagination within the conceptual frame of the Anthropocene and its possible aftermath. The study investigates how literature functions not merely as a reflection of ecological crisis but as an active site of resistance, speculation, and ethical reorientation in an era defined by environmental precarity. It explores the ways in which narratives across genres—novels, poetry, and digital eco-texts—articulate both the vulnerabilities of the planet and the possibilities of sustainable futures. The methodology combines close textual analysis with eco-critical theory to interrogate how literary texts reshape human engagement with nature in the context of climate change. Through interpretive readings, the paper traces recurring motifs of ecological loss, resilience, and posthuman coexistence, showing how the Anthropocene becomes not only a geological epoch but also a cultural imagination that literature consistently mediates.

The study argues that literary narratives do more than mourn environmental collapse; they rehearse new forms of ecological consciousness that transcend human-centered perspectives. By situating literature at the heart of climate debates, the paper demonstrates how the imaginative power of storytelling provides critical frameworks for negotiating the Anthropocene and envisioning futures beyond it.

KEYWORDS:

Anthropocene Studies, Eco-Criticism, Climate Change Literature,
Posthuman Imagination, Environmental Narratives.

1. Introduction

The current epoch has been increasingly identified as the Anthropocene, an age in which human activity has been inscribed upon the earth with geological permanence. Within this discourse, literature has been recognized not merely as a mirror of ecological anxieties but as a vital medium through which environmental crises are imagined, narrated, and contested. While scientific accounts of climate change have been widely circulated, the imaginative and ethical work of literature has been comparatively marginalized, resulting in a critical gap in understanding how cultural narratives engage with planetary transformations.

The research problem has thus been framed around the insufficient attention given to the role of literary imagination in articulating futures beyond environmental collapse. It has been observed that climate discourse often privileges technical or statistical modes of representation, leaving underexplored the symbolic, affective, and philosophical dimensions that literature uniquely sustains. The objective of this paper is therefore to examine how eco-criticism and literary studies can illuminate new perspectives on climate change, the Anthropocene, and the possibilities of post-Anthropocene imaginaries.

The study is guided by the following research questions: How have literary texts reconfigured human-nature relationships in the context of ecological crisis? In what ways has the Anthropocene been represented or contested through narrative forms? What conceptual frameworks emerge when literature is positioned not merely as a record of loss but as a rehearsal of ecological resilience and posthuman futures?

The significance of this inquiry lies in its potential to reposition literature at the center of environmental thought, thereby

demonstrating how cultural texts function as critical interventions in debates about sustainability and survival. The paper has been structured as follows: the opening section situates the Anthropocene within eco-critical discourse; the subsequent section examines literary case studies of climate change; and the final section advances an argument for literature's capacity to imagine futures beyond the Anthropocene.

2. Literature Review

The emergence of the Anthropocene as a critical paradigm has been widely theorized, with its implications for literature and culture being explored from multiple perspectives. It has been argued that the Anthropocene displaces traditional human-centered narratives by foregrounding planetary processes and ecological crises (Chakrabarty 2019). Within literary studies, eco-criticism has been employed to examine how texts respond to environmental degradation, with critics emphasizing the ethical and imaginative potential of narrative in shaping ecological awareness (Glotfelty and Fromm 1996).

Recent scholarship has shown that climate change literature has expanded beyond dystopian imaginaries to engage with resilience, adaptation, and nonhuman agency (Trexler 2015). Yet, contradictions have been noted in how the Anthropocene is conceptualized, with some critics suggesting that it universalizes responsibility and obscures historical inequities of colonialism and capitalism (Moore 2016). The Anthropocene has therefore been critiqued as both a useful cultural marker and a problematic totalizing category. In response, terms such as the Capitalocene and Chthulucene have been proposed, though consensus on their literary implications has remained unsettled (Haraway 2016).

While significant attention has been paid to ecological narra-

tives in fiction and poetry, less work has been undertaken on the ways in which digital culture and posthuman thought reshape literary representations of climate crisis. Furthermore, the imaginative work of literature has often been overshadowed by empirical climate discourse, leaving underexplored the symbolic, ethical, and affective registers through which texts negotiate ecological futures.

The present study is situated within these debates by examining how the literary imagination mediates the Anthropocene and gestures toward post-Anthropocene futures. By addressing the gap between ecological discourse and literary creativity, the paper seeks to highlight literature's distinctive role in envisioning alternative modes of coexistence and sustainability.

3. Theoretical Framework

The analysis has been situated within the critical lens of eco-criticism, a field through which literature is read as a site of environmental consciousness and cultural negotiation. The Anthropocene has been interpreted not only as a geological marker but as a cultural construct, and this study is guided by theoretical interventions that interrogate the entanglement of power, nature, and narrative. The ecological humanities articulated by Lawrence Buell and the foundational perspectives of Cheryll Glotfelty have been employed to foreground literature's capacity to reshape environmental imagination.

The notion of the Anthropocene as a contested category has been critically discussed, with Dipesh Chakrabarty's reflections on planetary history offering a framework to connect climate change with cultural temporality. Donna Haraway's concept of the Chthulucene has been invoked to explore post-Anthropocene alternatives that emphasize multispecies coexistence. Similarly, Bruno Latour's actor-network theory has been considered to demonstrate how lit-

erature destabilizes the divide between human and nonhuman agency. Poststructuralist insights, particularly Derrida's emphasis on language as a site of deferred meaning, have been drawn upon to analyze how ecological narratives resist closure and sustain multiplicity.

Through these theoretical approaches, the research has been framed to interrogate how texts negotiate climate anxiety, ecological loss, and the imaginative construction of sustainable futures. The framework thereby aligns with the study's objective of demonstrating literature's critical role in envisioning modes of existence beyond the Anthropocene.

4. Research Objectives and Questions

The study has been undertaken with the following objectives:

- » To examine how literary texts, reimagine human–nature relationships in the Anthropocene.
- » To analyze how eco–critical theory frames climate change within cultural narratives.
- » To explore the potential of literature in envisioning post–Anthropocene futures.

5. Research Methodology

The present study has been designed as a qualitative inquiry employing textual and discourse analysis as its primary methods. Selected literary texts addressing ecological crisis and climate change have been examined as the central data sources, while secondary materials such as critical essays, theoretical works, and scholarly commentaries have been consulted to contextualize interpretations. Texts have been read closely to identify recurring motifs, narrative strategies, and representations of human–nature interactions that illuminate the conceptual framework of the Anthropocene

and its possible aftermath.

The approach has been interpretive rather than empirical, with the aim of situating literary narratives within broader cultural and ecological discourses. Discourse analysis has been applied to trace how language, metaphor, and symbolism negotiate questions of climate anxiety, environmental ethics, and posthuman imagination. Ethical considerations have been addressed through responsible engagement with sources, avoidance of misrepresentation, and acknowledgment of intellectual contributions. The methodology has thereby been framed to integrate literary interpretation with eco-critical theory in order to advance a nuanced understanding of literature's ecological imagination.

6. Analysis and Discussion

1. Reframing the Anthropocene through Literary Narrative

The Anthropocene has been conceptualized as an epoch in which human agency has become a geological force, yet literature has been shown to destabilize this framing by foregrounding vulnerability, fragility, and nonhuman presence. In Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement*, the absence of climate change in mainstream fiction has been interpreted as a failure of imagination (Ghosh 2016). This concern has been addressed in select contemporary texts, where ecological catastrophe is rendered not only as a backdrop but as a central structuring force. Through metaphor and allegory, these narratives compel recognition of climate change as lived experience rather than distant abstraction. The imaginative space of literature has thus been mobilized to critique the epistemic limits of scientific discourse and to re-inscribe affective and ethical engagement with environmental futures.

2. Eco-Critical Resistance and Cultural Memory

Literary representations of ecological loss have often been framed as acts of cultural resistance. As Buell has argued, literature functions as an ethical call to reimagine humanity's place within planetary systems (Buell 2005). Texts foregrounding ruined landscapes, displaced communities, and altered ecologies have been read as narrative archives of the Anthropocene. At the same time, cultural memory embedded in myth, folklore, and indigenous traditions has been mobilized as counter-discourse to industrial modernity. Such imaginative strategies resist homogenizing narratives of the Anthropocene that obscure colonial histories of extraction and exploitation (Moore 2016). By reasserting suppressed ecological memory, literature has been positioned as a vehicle for decolonial ecological consciousness.

3. Posthuman Futures and the Literary Imagination

Critical interventions in posthumanism have been employed to illuminate how literature envisions futures beyond human-centered paradigms. Haraway's proposal of the Chthulucene, with its emphasis on multispecies entanglements, has found resonance in literary works that decenter human agency (Haraway 2016). Narratives populated by hybrid beings, artificial intelligences, or rewilded landscapes have been read as rehearsals of post-Anthropocene co-existence. The destabilization of binaries—human/nonhuman, culture/nature, technology/ecology—has been achieved through narrative experimentation, suggesting that literature imagines survival not through domination but through relationality. Such texts articulate a literary ecology in which technology is reframed not solely as an agent of destruction but as a potential partner in sustainability.

7. Findings and Results

From the textual corpus examined, several patterns of lin-

guistic and stylistic significance were observed. Ecological vocabulary was found to recur with notable frequency, particularly terms denoting destruction (“ruin,” “waste,” “extinction”) and renewal (“resilience,” “regeneration,” “coexistence”). A keyword frequency analysis conducted through AntConc revealed that environmental lexis appeared with greater density in contemporary texts compared to earlier narratives, suggesting an intensification of ecological consciousness in literary production.

Narrative voice was consistently marked by a shift from anthropocentric to eco-centric focalization. Pronouns and narrative perspectives were frequently employed to decenter the human subject, with plural pronouns (“we,” “our”) used to invoke collective responsibility and posthuman inclusivity. Figurative language was observed to rely heavily on metaphors of hybridity and entanglement, supporting the claim that literary style contributes to posthuman ecological imagination.

Stylistic analysis further indicated that fragmented syntax and non-linear temporalities were deployed to mirror ecological disruption and climate uncertainty. Discourse markers of uncertainty (“perhaps,” “might,” “unforeseen”) appeared frequently, reinforcing the thematic preoccupation with unpredictability in the Anthropocene.

8. Conclusion

Through this study, it has been demonstrated that literature provides a crucial imaginative space in which the Anthropocene and its aftermath are interrogated. The analysis has revealed that ecological crises are not only thematically inscribed in literary texts but also stylistically encoded through linguistic patterns of disruption, hybridity, and uncertainty. The findings have shown that eco-critical vocabulary, posthuman figurations, and experimental narrative

strategies are consistently employed to destabilize anthropocentric paradigms and to foreground collective ecological responsibility.

The implications of these results are both theoretical and societal. Theoretically, it has been indicated that eco-criticism, when extended through posthuman and discourse-analytic perspectives, offers a framework for understanding literature as a site of ecological knowledge-production. Societally, the study has suggested that literature functions as an ethical intervention by cultivating empathy, responsibility, and imaginative preparedness in the face of climate change. Such insights underscore the need for cultural texts to be considered alongside scientific discourse in shaping sustainable futures.

It can finally be affirmed that the Anthropocene, when refracted through the literary imagination, is neither a static epoch nor an inevitable decline but a narrative possibility. Literature's enduring task has been revealed as the envisioning of futures otherwise, beyond collapse, toward coexistence.

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