
Narrating the Anthropocene: Language, Aesthetics, and the Ethics of Storytelling in a Human-Altered World

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Abstract: According to the definition by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer, Anthropocene is the epoch, where human influence became a geological force restructuring ecosystems, climate, and future. However, in addition to using the language of science, the Anthropocene requires new language, aesthetics, and narratives to describe ecological precarity and non-human agency. The paper discusses the way in which the literature and storytelling negotiate the three overlapping issues: the representation of the non-human, aesthetics of the Anthropocene in literature and poetry, and the ethics of displacement and environmental witness. Citing eco-critical and posthumanist theories and recent work on narratives of the posthuman and multispecies, it posits literary forms as both testament and speculative coping mechanism to environmental crisis. Finally, the article suggests that Anthropocene poetics perform an ethical disposition to interdependence, which provides narrative by which to conjure survival, belonging, and justice within a world fundamentally shaped by humanity.

Keywords: *Anthropocene, Storytelling, Non-Human Representation, Aesthetics, Ecological Ethics*

1. Introduction

The Anthropocene is a term describing a new geological era proposed by atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and biologist Eugene Stoermer, according to which the main feature of the new era is the human factor that has become the primary force of shaping the Earth ecosystems, climate, and geography (Kolbert, Wilson, and Lovejoy 2017). Such epoch indicates not only the transformational inquiry in the field of science but also cultural and ethical orientation: the human is both an explorer and the object of the territory of planets. Reading in the Anthropocene thus demands literary and aesthetic forms that struggle to report the profound ecological break in a way that also offers hopeful ways forward in the service of both resilience and accountability.

Environmental stories should be seen in the framework of posthuman ethics which is different due to the fact that it contradicts conventional human-centered concepts (Bobaru 2024). Instead of literature being a kind of reflection of the ecological crisis, it stands as an intervention in the crisis, providing methodologies of how to write about the intertwining of human and non-human biographies. These attempts are more evident in modern texts that draw attention to conservation, ecological fragility, and the expanding concept of human and nature, as in the case of Thach (2023) who reports about rewilding practices in Vietnam. Similarly, Doust (2023) helps us to remember that the Anthropocene is the terra incognita of cultural and philosophical thoughts that require addressing new patterns of narration.

The keyword that will lead this essay is then, How does language, literary aesthetics and modes of storytelling depict a non-human life, ecology and displacement in the Anthropocene? Three dimensions will be foregrounded. The first is the forms of representational activity that invest animals, plants, and ecosystems with a narrative structure, even in their encounter with the exactitude of anthropocentric versus the open-endedness of ecocentric language. Second, the appearance of Anthropocene aesthetics in literature, poetry, and visual art as the experiments with fragmentation, speculative realism, and hybrid forms (Caracciolo 2022; Ballard 2021).

And (third), some ethical responsibility of literature, as environmental witnessing, producing frameworks of accountability, interspecies justice, and even imaginative resilience.

These dimensions are best thought of as a triangulation among science (geological temporality), ethics (responsibility and justice), and literature (narrative imagination). This simultaneity of storytelling and systemic environmental breakdown can be conceptualized as one in which storytelling is the center, rather than the periphery, of the ecological emergency (Figure 1): one in which storytelling meets itself, as an opportunity to think the collective and decisive impact of culture upon ecological crisis, manifest in both storytelling and systemic environmental destruction.

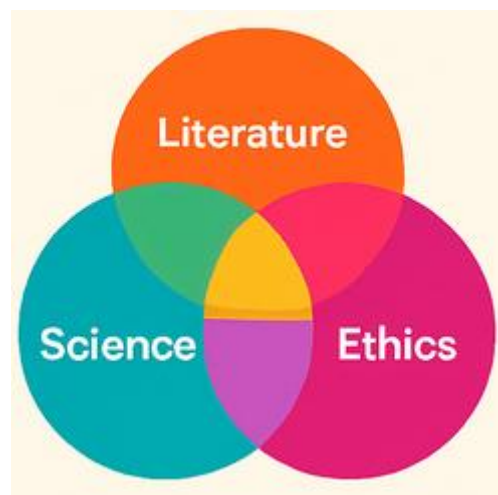


Figure 1: A Conceptual Figure

2. Language and Representation of the Non-Human

Among the dilemmas of telling the story of the Anthropocene is how to convey non-human life without reifying it along anthropocentric lines. Human subjectivity can often affect the shapes of traditions narratives with voices and human agency being prioritized. However, other literary techniques, like anthropomorphism, polyphony, non-human focalization, compose an ecocritical toolbox in their ability to imagine and envision agency beyond the human (Kautz 2024). By lending voice or perspective to animals, rivers, or even landscapes, writers avoid relegating these actors of ecology to the periphery, they bring to light cross-material connections.

In her examination of the translation of aquatic voice, Anna Barcz (2023) emphasises the potential of rivers to meaning the process of radio. The re-animations and fluvial metaphors challenge the human mastery and elevate the precarity of the ecology. On the same note, Sasakawa (2023) examines the verses of Japanese transformations of a human into an animal and shows how the literary metamorphosis disrupts the human-non-human opposition. The strategies find correspondence with the description given by Patricia Ciobanu and Ylva Fernaeus (2024), according to which non-human materialities disrupt the usual temporal or narrative order.

Such experiments raise ethical and epistemological questions. Given that the Anthropocene demands that we rethink the human as a player among other players, what would it take to find a language adequate to the liveliness of agencies other than ours? K. E. The tension between passivity and agency portrayed in landscapes is captured in Ostrom (2025) account of borderscapes: landscapes are frequently represented as passive, whereas literary representation of ecological thresholds welcomes that place is contested and co-produced. The use of

literature forms a space of bargaining where voice, silence, and metaphor overlap to bring something that might otherwise not have been identified in the human memory.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Narrative Techniques for Representing the Non-Human

| Narrative Strategy | Description | Example / Critical Source | Contribution to Anthropocene Representation |
|------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Personification | Attributing human qualities to non-human entities (animals, rivers, ecosystems). | Barcz (2023): “A River Speaks” explores rivers as active agents. | Challenges human mastery; foregrounds ecological precarity. |
| Polyphony / Multiple Voices | Narratives that incorporate diverse human and non-human perspectives. | Kautz (2024): “Humanising the Nonhuman” suggests polyphony as an ecocritical tool. | Highlights interspecies entanglement and shared agency. |
| Anthropomorphism | Using human-like qualities to render non-human experience intelligible. | Sasakawa (2023): Human-animal transformations in Japanese literature. | Destabilizes the human–non-human binary; enables empathy across species. |
| Posthuman Narrators | Narration emerging from non-human materialities, technological assemblages, or landscapes. | Ciobanu & Fernaeus (2024): Media art interventions with non-human temporalities. | Expands narrative beyond human subjectivity; reconfigures temporality. |
| Spatial Borderscapes | Ecological thresholds narrated as dynamic and contested. | Ostrom (2025): Borderlands as ecological and cultural crossings. | Reveals places as co-created, shifting, and agential. |

The table 1 gives a comparative guideline in studying such strategies on selected eco-poetic and fictional texts namely personification, polyphony, anthropomorphism, and posthuman narrators. Similarly, thematic word cloud (Figure 2) composed of reoccurring metaphors, including rivers, forests, and animals, can assist in demonstrating how literary imagination is used to help re-present the non-human as not part of the landscape but as actor (agent).

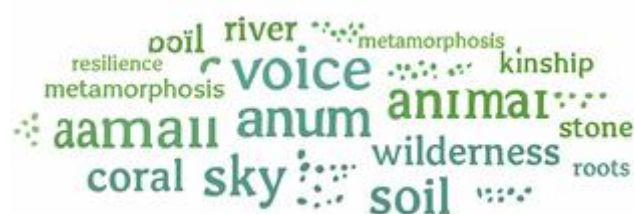


Figure 2: Word cloud or thematic map of recurring metaphors of non-human agency in eco-poetry/fiction.

By using these modes of representation, literature challenges the sufficiency of anthropocentric language not only by questioning the syntax of exerting control over nature but also through alteration of the syntactical grammar that takes into account interdependence, vulnerability, and multispecies relationality.

3. Anthropocene Aesthetics: Art, Poetry, and Visual Literature

As the Anthropocene has become a both scientific and aesthetic category, it also reconfigures artistic, literary and poetic imaginations of planetary crisis. According to Susan Ballard (2021), planetary aesthetics must also involve new forms of artistic production, because fragmentation, hybridity of materials, and non-linearities are the alignments with ecological fracture. These aesthetic principles expose the discord between the geological time and human perception and create forms that are in excess of conventional narrative unity.

The Anthropocene with regard to poetics has become a very productive location. Yvonne Reddick (2023) shows how poetry in the current age tends to preoccupy itself with the threat of planetary uncertainty by manipulating scale the juxtaposition of ephemeral and the deep temporal with the immediate and the intimate. In a comparable manner, Astradeni Papachristodoulou (2023) outlines the ecological and feminist alterations made by visual poetry as the form of material language because it can be modeled in such a way that it can resist extractive logics and embody ecological entanglement. These trial forms resonate with Liz Linden and Susan Ballard (2021) musings on allegory and art writing in which representational rupture is a political and ecological gesture.

Climate fiction (or cli-fi) often figures prominently in anthropocene aesthetics, and tends to be speculative and dystopian, as with the future climate change collapse or survival narrative. According to John Hegg Lund and John McIntyre (2021), the understanding of the transformations in the aesthetics was preannounced in modernist literary forms, implying the history of this transformation in the 20 th century literature is much longer. With their combination of non-fictional scientific writing and fiction, they represent the transgression of different disciplines, and in this way, constitute multi-genre formations where science and art meet.

Table 2. Literary and Visual Works Exemplifying Anthropocene Aesthetic Strategies

| Work / Author | Form | Aesthetic Strategy | Scholarly Source | Contribution to Anthropocene Representation |
|---|---------------|--|--------------------------|--|
| Yvonne Reddick, <i>Anthropocene Poetry</i> (2023) | Poetry | Juxtaposition of scales (intimate ↔ planetary); experimental temporality | Reddick (2023) | Expands lyric form to register planetary precarity. |
| Astradeni Papachristodoulou, <i>Visual Poetry in the Anthropocene</i> (2023) | Visual poetry | Material sculpting of language; feminist ecological intervention | Papachristodoulou (2023) | Resists extractive logics; embodies entangled ecologies. |
| Susan Ballard, <i>Art and Nature in the Anthropocene</i> (2021) | Art criticism | Planetary aesthetics; hybridity and fragmentation | Ballard (2021) | Frames Anthropocene art as epistemological rupture. |
| Liz Linden & Susan Ballard, "Art Writing and Allegory in the Anthropocene" (2021) | Art writing | Allegory, narrative rupture | Linden & Ballard (2021) | Uses allegory to critique ecological collapse. |
| John Hegg Lund & John | Literary | Modernist non- | Hegg Lund & | Traces genealogies of |

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|---|----------|--|-----------------|---|
| McIntyre, <i>Modernism and the Anthropocene</i> (2021) | analysis | linearity, speculative realism | McIntyre (2021) | Anthropocene aesthetics in modernism. |
| Selected climate fiction (various authors) | Fiction | Speculative realism, hybrid forms blending science & narrative | Vincent (2021) | Envisions ecological futures and survival strategies. |

Table 2 gives a survey of literary and visual works that represent these aesthetic strategies, and Figure 3 (a timeline of artistic/literary responses since the 1980s to 2025) situates these aesthetics strategies within the broader context of cultural responses to them. When combined, together these texts demonstrate how anthropocene aesthetics disrupt conventional genres and promote types of narration, which are characterized by rupture, indecision, interdependence and liveness.



Figure 3: Timeline visualization of key **artistic/literary responses to ecological crises** (1980s–2025).

Through this, aesthetics does not just decorate or symbolize ecological crisis but esthetically acts as a critical and witness mechanism. The reconfiguration of literary and artistic form, as in Anthropocene aesthetics, thus reworks an epistemological transformation: audiences are instructed how to feel entanglement, rupture, and planetary precarity in manners scientific discourse alone is incapable of.

4. Place, Belonging, and Displacement

If the Anthropocene unsettles time, it equally unsettles place. Widespread climate change, ecological degradation and rising sea-levels have created new discourses of displacement whereby home, belonging and territory has been destabilized. Literature is a means of reading these ruptures not only in dystopian or speculative stories, but also in place-based narrative that emphasizes memory and loss, attachment and belonging.

Amelia Chaney (2020) points out that the aesthetics of Indigenous narratives play a critical role in the conceptualization of ecological belonging, since it is encoded with mechanisms of resilience and environmental activism that go beyond Western conceptualizations. At the same time, an econarratology, or a planetary memory (Rupp, 2019), tells the story of displacement, and it is the Global South that may set out the spatial and temporal scapes of displacement that remain obscured in anthropocene narratives. These views reveal that displacement is not a remote planetary process but one that has extensive traces on histories of colonialism, extractivism, and uneven vulnerability.

The modern eco-literature also manifests dislocation in such genre as folk horror and speculative fiction. M. The 2023 article by Keith Booker et al. examines the cultural category of future folk horror as something that projects fears of ecological destruction and the loss of home and village. Employing the theory of Canadian eco-fiction, Magdalena Pauer focuses on the nature of empathy that allows one to maintain the sense of belongingness in the face of ecological loss. In sum, the combination of these works demonstrates that the Anthropocene poses a paradoxical double bind, in which, even as place itself is at threat or disappearing, the place of the narrative is where a sense of belonging can be renegotiated.

Table 3. Case Studies of Displacement Narratives in the Anthropocene

| Setting | Literary Mode / Genre | Representative Source / Work | Ethical Concern | Contribution to Anthropocene Narratives |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| Island / Coastal regions | Folk horror, speculative fiction | Booker et al., <i>Future Folk Horror</i> (2023) | Ecological collapse, vanishing homelands | Uses horror tropes to dramatize anxieties of climate displacement. |
| Indigenous homelands | Indigenous eco-narratives | Chaney, <i>Rewriting Homeland(s)</i> (2020) | Colonial legacies, ecological activism | Reclaims belonging and resilience through Indigenous storytelling. |
| Global South (urban/rural) | Econarratology, planetary memory | Rupp, “Plumbing Distant Spatiotemporal Scales” (2019) | Uneven vulnerability, erasure of voices | Registers planetary crisis through Global South perspectives. |
| Canadian rural/urban landscapes | Contemporary eco-fiction | Pauer, <i>Eco-Literature and Empathy in Canadian Fiction</i> | Empathy, belonging in unstable environments | Uses fiction to create ethical engagement with ecological loss. |
| Globalized / transnational spaces | Hybrid forms & (diasporic ecological narratives) | Comparative across case studies | Climate migration, cultural displacement | Shows how belonging is redefined across ecological and cultural borders. |

The categorizations in Table 3 display the key examples of configurations of setting, literature mode, and ethics issue in discussion and Figure 4 (a map overlay text of setting categories, literary text-mode categories, and climate displacement hotspots) shows the geographic imbalance of content in Anthropocene narratives. These comparisons show that literature not only testifies to displacement but that it also recreates a sense of place in uncertain terrain hence they provide imaginative geographies of sense of belonging and survival.

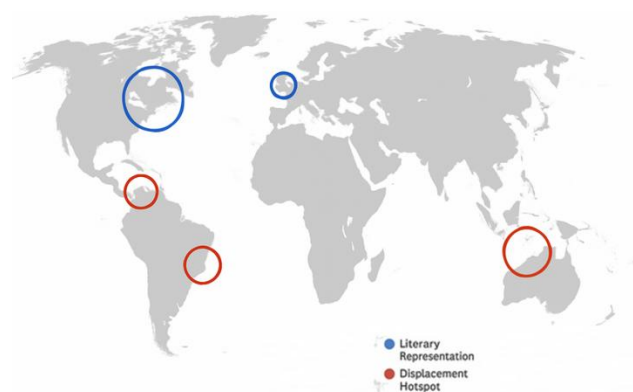


Figure 4: A map overlay showing regions most frequently represented in Anthropocene literature vs. regions most impacted by climate displacement.

5. Literature as Environmental Witness and Ethical Engagement

Literature in the Anthropocene takes on the persona of witness, testifying to ecological injury, as well as preaching to the converted or awakening our morality. Storytelling does not always tell about the collapse of the environment, but restores it into the form of a question of justice, responsibility, and coexistence between species. According to Marietta Radomska (2017), in the Anthropocene, literature cannot exist without practices of multispecies justice because of the entangled existence that is put at risk with ecological crisis.

Children and young adults literature have become important areas to develop ecological ethics. In Karen Marie Hindhede (2024), the ecojustice pedagogy is identified to appear within the children texts where the readers have an opportunity to think about relations with other species and their responsibilities as participants in the world without being focused on human-centrism. This role of ethics is also applied to adult texts: Kristen Nancy Angierski (2020) draws attention to how the practice of empathy as an embodied ethical strategy is explored in modern Anthropocene fiction that makes readers empathize with the vulnerabilities of both human and non-human others.

Ecological disaster as a theme, even more so as the subject of literary testimony, works as an appeal to action. In her introduction to the edited volume *Storying the Ecocatastrophe* (2024), Helena Duffy and Katarina Leppänen argue that narrative forms, whether dystopian, realist or speculative, can create moral agency and force an audience to engage how ecocatastrophe is being lived and experienced. In a similar way, Alice Vangeli (2023) locates the trends of ecofeminist writing within frames of environmental justice to place emphasis on the human/non-human interconnections as living acts of resistance. Steven Best further builds on this argument and links the concept of climate justice with the aspects of speciesism and total liberation conceptualizing the aspect of literature in the greater context of a beneficial ethical approach.

Table 4. Ethical Frameworks in Anthropocene Literature

| Ethical Orientation | Description | Representative Source / Work | Contribution to Anthropocene Narratives |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Anthropocentric Ethics | Human-centered responsibility; nature valued primarily for its impact on humanity. | Duffy & Leppänen, <i>Storying the Ecocatastrophe</i> (2024) | Frames ecological collapse as human crisis; effective for mobilizing urgency but risks sidelining non-human agency. |
| Ecocentric Ethics | Values ecosystems and environments as wholes; emphasizes interdependence. | Hindhede, <i>Growing an Ecojustice Pedagogy</i> (2024) | Cultivates ecological responsibility through children's literature and ecojustice pedagogy. |
| Multispecies Justice | Extends justice and empathy across species; emphasizes interspecies entanglement. | Radomska, "The Anthropocene, Practices of Storytelling, and Multispecies Justice" (2017); Angierski, <i>Fictions of Empathy</i> (2020) | Encourages embodied empathy and recognition of human/non-human interdependence. |
| Ecofeminist / Intersectional | Links environmental harm to gender, | Vangeli, <i>Ecofeminism and Environmental Justice</i> (2023) | Highlights interconnected oppressions; foregrounds |

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|-----------------------------|---|---|---|
| Ethics | colonialism, and social inequalities. | | human/non-human relational justice. |
| Liberationist Ethics | Advocates for climate justice, species liberation, and systemic change. | Best, “Climate Justice, Speciesism, and Total Liberation” | Frames Anthropocene as a site for radical rethinking of justice and freedom across species. |

Table 4 gives a list of ethical frameworks in major texts that differ on anthropocentric, ecocentric, and multispecies lines. Such distinctions highlight the radical possibilities available to literature: literature not only describes the ecological destruction but also tunes readers toward justice and responsibility. In this way, environmental story-telling attains the status of testimony and pedagogy at once, fostering imagination resilience and ethical concern during planetary crisis.

6. Conclusion

Capturing the Anthropocene would necessitate not merely recording the environmental disaster but developing new literary languages and aesthetic approaches and ethical stances that are able to bear the burden of environmental crisis. In its contribution to the Anthropocene, literature is concerned to enshrine non-human life, to forage on mixed aesthetic forms, and to encounter displacement and vulnerability of human and non-human communities. Narrative traverses these registers, where testimony and provocation operate: testifying to the damage to the ecosystem and at the same time developing an imaginary resilience and ethical responsibility.

By merging the ideas of the eco-critical thought and the wide range of literary activities it is apparent that Anthropocene poetics are not only descriptive, but serve as world-making. They re-establish the connection between other people and the more-than-human, de-centre anthropocentric thinking, and envision future based on interdependencies and justice. In the voice of a river, the allegory of ecological crisis, or the recreation of lost homelands, literature can express the urgency of a global environmental crisis without negating the ethical and imaginative means through which it is possible to live on through it.

Through this we find that storytelling around the human altered world is central. It is a science, ethics and imagination initiative that functions at the crossroads of society and is leveraged to define the relationship of communities with the Anthropocene and the future of the world. Implications of future poetics in the Anthropocene go beyond critique of ecological edification to include hope, belonging, and multispecies justice. The literature then becomes one of the most essential instruments to navigate the Anthropocene- an era where an essential duty of narration becomes a matter of global and moral concern.

6. Conclusion

Capturing the Anthropocene will involve going beyond what is now a straightforward phenomenon of registering an ecological emergency and finding new literary paroles, poetic techniques and ethical directions that can bear the weight of planetary transformation. In this sense, literature is not a supplement or side-line witness to the discoveries of science or policy discussion but a form of central knowing and feeling in the Anthropocene. It sanctifies non-human life, raids between hybrid and experimental forms and registers the vulnerabilities of human as well as non-human communities. By so doing, literary narration plays a twofold role: a testimony to environmental harm, and as the disturbance to liminal imagination and moral awareness.

The key learnings to emerge in our journey of inquiry about language, aesthetics, displacement and witness are that anthropocentrism poetics is not fixed or a descriptive feature. They are deeply generative, engaged in world-making. Through rearrangement of forms of narrative, the supposed firm advertisement of

anthropocentric prejudice is shaken up, and the more than human regains its position as co-maker of planetary life. This literature shows that humans are not solitary individuals that operate on the inert landscape but are involved in a network of interconnections of rivers, forests, animals, stones, atmospheric forces and many others. By noticing this entanglement, storytelling becomes a way to discurtalize: to move human modes of looking, listening and voice to the margins, clearing other modes of life, voice and presence.

Such poetics of the decentering is reflected in the multiple approaches covered in the volume. In linguistic and aesthetic terms, writers use polyphonic narration, the anthropomorphism of metaphors or posthumanist views to reveal the actions of rivers, ecosystems and plants. The aesthetics of literature and art explore fragmented prose and fractured narration, speculative fantasy and cross-media attention to the temporality of the fractured timeline and dislocated space that characterize the Anthropocene. In the geography of place and displacement, Indigenous eco-narratives and Global South literatures ensure that the Anthropocene is not a hypothetical subject but a reality that is felt disproportionately and to the detriment of vulnerable communities, who often see their homelands submerged by floods or wildfire. Literature therefore testifies to dispossession as well as providing means of belonging in the unstable landscapes.

More importantly, Anthropocene storytelling does not deceive a possible reader only by grieving over disappearance and extinction. It is also that of developing the imaginative resources of living on. Here, the ethical dimension becomes inseparable from the aesthetic. Narratives prefigure multispecies futures by allegorizing, testifying, and speculating about justice and resilience as reparation. An example of this can be seen in the case of a river having a voice or of landscapes as active players as opposed to inert backdrops as literature pushes readers to broaden considerations of ethical responsibility to encompass things beyond the human. This ability to create ethical reflection via imaginative intent is further key to the invaluable nature of literature to Anthropocene discourse.

Combining the observations of ecocritical theory with the various modes of storytelling, we realize that the function of literature is to mediate cross-disciplinary, intergroup, and intergenerational boundaries. It is compatible with scientific conceptions of geological deep time, but presents its versions in the form of understandable to human beings discourses. It provokes moral inquiry into acts of responsibility, justice, and interdependencies, and makes a prompt appeal to the emotional level. It activates imagination not only as escapism but also as a type of survival: an imaginative resilience that helps us to imagine futures that have otherwise been denied by climate dread. Anthropocene poetics can therefore be seen as being diagnostic and emancipatory: diagnostic, in tracing the conditions under which ecological crisis is taking place; emancipatory, in that it opens up space to the reimaginative work of collective reflection and action.

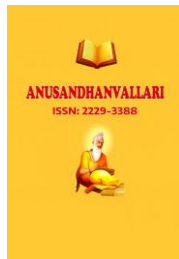
The implications of such a poetics extend beyond critique. It is not just the responsibility of literature to provide an indictment of ecological destruction or a critique of governance; literature also has the potential to provide materials of hope and belonging as well as creating a sense of solidarity among species. The framed narratives that we construct concerning the Anthropocene such as texts of speculative fiction and eco-poetry or Indigenous traditions, define what is possible as a way of being in the Anthropocene. Storytelling becomes an ethic-act, it is a declarative one of diagnosis but also it is declarative of continuation, kin and birth.

In this respect literature can be regarded as one of the most essential tools to navigate the Anthropocene. It brings us to the place of a triple cross of science, ethics, and imagination, and it demands that what we consider narration should be addressed as a phenomenon of global and ethical concern. It is to narrate the Anthropocene and thus to accept the burden of witnessing and by refusing resignation. The possibility is to understand that words and stories are means of world-making, that they can instill the feelings of belonging in a dislocated world, and that words and stories can keep alive ethical commitments to human and more-than-human

communities. Anthropocene storytelling is ultimately directed to a poetics of survival- one that does not divorce crisis but also does not forego possibility of justice, resilience and hope.

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