

ABSTRACT

Climate change is attributed to anthropogenic forces, according to the Rio Earth Summit of 1992, which focuses attention on the negative effects of humans on the Earth and its environment. The naming of the current geological epoch as “Anthropocene” by Atmospheric Chemist Paul J. Crutzen and Biologist Eugene Stoermer in 2000, which holds humans as the primary geophysical forces, adds to the recognition of human beings affecting the global climate. The coinage of the term “Anthropocene,” along with suggestions that humans are altering the planet in ways that are hazardous to the rest of the species and the entire planet, has sparked inter-disciplinary debate about the various implications the new epoch may hold for humanity and our planet. The terms “Anthropocene” and “anthropogenic climate change” are frequently used interchangeably, implying that the current epoch represents unprecedented human dominance and unrelenting anthropogenic practices harming the global ecology. Concerns about the sixth mass extinction have arisen as a result of suggestions about the deteriorating planetary ecology. Today, scientists have reached an agreement on the occurrences of five mass extinction events several million years ago in Earth’s vast history. The latest and fifth mass extinction event, which presumably occurred 65 million years ago, annihilated the entire dinosaur population, ending the Cretaceous period. The discovery of dinosaur fossils in the 1820s informed scientists about the giant extinct creatures that once roamed the Earth millions of years ago. Since then, humans have become aware of the phenomenon known as extinction, leading to the assumption of the occurrence of five major extinction events. Today’s observations and persistent warnings about climate change and its massive effects on the planet raise the prospect of another extinction event. The Earth is said to be experiencing the sixth mass extinction because it is rapidly losing biodiversity, and the rate

of extinction is said to be exceeding the rate of speciation. Scientists attribute this biodiversity loss to the unprecedented warming of the climate caused by massive amounts of fossil fuel consumption. Thus, carbon emissions are to blame for the decline in biodiversity and, eventually, the disruption of the Earth system's balance. Humans' deleterious activities that degrade the planetary ecology endanger the lives of their own species, as humans are in no way independent of the planetary system. Human vulnerability heightens concern about extinction, as humans realise their fate is linked to the volatile Earth system. This adds a paradox to the concept of the Anthropocene, which on the one hand acknowledges human dominance while cautioning humans about their activities that make them vulnerable.

In highlighting humans' existential conundrum in the Anthropocene, I argue that humans are constantly living with the fear of extinction. This awareness bothers human conscience, and predictions of mass extinction of species (including humans) cause anxiety and trauma. Such predictions have conjured up images of a potentially inhabitable planet on the verge of extinction. Visual media have mediated speculative narratives about climate disasters that are likely to significantly alter the contours of the Earth, and literary texts have created futuristic worlds to speculate on situations critical to human survival. Such narratives (pre)exhibit horrific images of melting polar ice caps, drowned cities, homeless climate refugees, water scarcity, food shortage, and a topsy-turvy socioeconomic system, instilling fear and anxiety about the future while warning current generations of these impending chaotic situations. As a result, these cautionary narratives implore us to act to mitigate the climate crisis as well as to adopt newer ways of living with changing climatic conditions. Climate consciousness is inextricably linked with extinction consciousness, which drives humans to resist climate change and avoid impending extinction. Human efforts to resist the climate crisis

and eventual extinction, I argue, constitute human survival politics. In delving deeply into human-created speculative scenarios about human-caused climate catastrophes, which are assumed to drive humans to extinction, I intend to argue that such speculations primarily address fear about the future dissolution of human agency.

As a result of this fear, humans are motivated by their proclivity to act to prevent human extinction, implying the loss of their agency. The possibility of losing human agency in the future keeps people thinking about ways to keep their agency. As a result, humans are devising methods to extend their lives despite the challenging climatic conditions, leveraging their technological and capitalistic strengths. In addition, telling speculative stories about anthropogenic climate catastrophe and extinction is part of human survival politics because these stories imaginatively present scenarios that humans may face in the future. Furthermore, these narratives imagine alternate ways of living, framing alternative futures for humans, thereby assisting them in strategising their future in order to adapt to climate change. Thus, viewing extinction through the lens of human survival politics can open a new field of study, implying that extinction does not necessarily represent a finality, signalling the end of time. Extinction instead, can be viewed as a threshold concept that invariably includes implications for survival. In this case, “Anthropocene thinking,” as I use in the thesis, comes into play. Here, I intend to evaluate the Anthropocene not as an epoch only, but also as a way of thinking that grapples with human conscience and that humans are reluctant to let go of. Humans’ desire to live longer characterises their futuristic narratives, which are fraught with anthropogenic marks. This demonstrates that humans’ future thinking features themselves that extend the Anthropocene in time and thought. Throughout the thesis, I intend to argue that, despite claims

of developing non-anthropocentric or post-anthropocentric thinking and looking beyond the species, *Homo sapiens*, there is a less likely chance of decentering human agency.

Arguing that extinction characterises the conscience of the twenty-first century more than ever before, I have chosen four twenty-first century novels - Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007), Claire Holroyde's *The Effort* (2021), Jeff VanderMeer's *Hummingbird Salamander* (2021), and Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* (2017) - to examine the concept of extinction, while focusing on human survival politics. These novels depict hypothetical scenarios of anthropogenic climate change, while prompting ways for recovery and resurgence from the climate crisis.

Laying the theoretical foundation for the thesis in the introductory chapter, titled "Introduction: Anthropocene Thinking and Surviving Extinction," I proceed on to the succeeding chapters, each focused on one of the selected novels mentioned above. The second chapter "*The Stone Gods: Speculating Extinction in Diverse Timescales*" emphasises the importance of viewing climate change and extinction over broad timescales because climate change is a complex process that is difficult to assess within a given timeframe. Jeanette Winterson depicts human existence with their indelible marks in various timescales in the novel, establishing a circular narrative scheme that suggests human history is repetitive in any given timescale. I situate the text within Anthropocene discourses, emphasising that the Anthropocene is not only an epoch, but also a way of thinking that occupies human conscience. Furthermore, I contend that Winterson's narrative expresses her concern for the future of human civilisation, which is based on her knowledge of the present, which is based on her knowledge of the past. With this, the narrative connects the past, present, and future, all while portraying humans as

overpowering forces suffering from their own mistakes. As I argue, this perhaps expresses the author's concern about human critical conditions, which ultimately speaks of her commitment to her own beings, making her narrative essentially anthropocentric in thinking.

The third chapter, "*The Effort: Trauma and the Anticipation of Extinction in an Apocalyptic Timescale*," explores the trauma associated with the prospect of extinction. The anxiety bred with the prediction of a comet crashing the Earth's surface in Claire Holroyde's *The Effort* serves as the foundation for analysing the anxiety and trauma associated with extinction. For this, I seek to borrow Kaplan's concept of "pretrauma," which elaborates on the trauma caused by climate change predictions. Through a critical examination of the mental breakdown caused by the threat of a comet crash in *The Effort*, I seek to coin the term "extinction trauma," which is specifically associated with the fear of extinction threatening human existence. Furthermore, I intend to argue that "extinction trauma" disturbs human conscience, which is intrigued by imaginations of impending disasters, while also compelling humans to seek ways to survive the disaster in order to prolong human existence on Earth.

The fourth chapter, "*Hummingbird Salamander: Awareness of Species Extinction and the Role of De-extinction in Species Revival*," examines species extinction and its impact on human conscience in the context of Jeff VanderMeer's *Hummingbird Salamander*. The chapter aims to establish a deep connection between the human and nonhuman worlds and to explain how the decline of nonhuman ecology has a significant impact on the human world. I argue, emphasising the socio-cultural significance of extinction, that the extinction of nonhuman species violates the "ethical time" (Rose 128) that connects generations of living beings. Thus, "ethical time" ensures the continuity of multiple species within the web of life. Recognising the

importance of maintaining inter-species connections, I question the ethical grounds of bioterrorism and radical methods for species conservation, as well as the viability of adopting de-extinction methods for restoring and resurrecting extinct beings. Finally, I argue that human ambitious efforts to reverse the process of extinction by deploying synthetic biology techniques are manifestations of human hubris of being able to control the ecosystem, pointing once again to human interventions in changing the world on their terms.

The fifth chapter, “*New York 2140: Foreseeing a Rise in Sea Level and Fostering Climate Positivity in the Era of Extinction*,” contextualised on Kim Stanley Robinson’s *New York 2140*, demonstrates how the much anticipated sea level rise acts as an instrument of socio-economic changes in New York a century into the future. I intend to view the Earth in the twenty-second century, as presented in the novel, by drawing on current climate observations. In addition, I seek to evaluate those human endeavours that, speculatively, have caused the unprecedented rise in sea level by 50 feet that has drowned lower Manhattan and the city’s outskirts. Without diminishing the dire human conditions and extinction threat posed by the critical climate crisis, the author appears to promote climate positivity by placing faith in humans’ ability to adapt. Adopting the author’s upbeat tone, I would like to argue that climate positivity is important for avoiding climate anxiety and trauma, and that it also suggests that humans may evolve in tandem with their surroundings to ensure their survival.

Finally, in the concluding chapter, “Conclusion: Extinction: Thinking and Beyond,” I attempt to formulate the “extinction thinking.” I argue that the term gains relevance in the “era of extinction” for human interventions in the process of extinction for the first time in Earth’s history. Such a suggestion has made humans aware of their unrivalled position in the Earth

system, which they innately want to maintain in the future. This also links “extinction thinking” to “Anthropocene thinking,” as both lines of thought prioritise the continuation of human agency in extended time and space.