

## Eco-Criticism and the Anthropocene in Literature: A Review of Key Debates

**Gregory Afmadoe**

*Ibn Tofail Kenitra, Morocco*

**Corresponding Author:** Gregory Afmadoe, **E-mail:** [gafmadoe@gmail.com](mailto:gafmadoe@gmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT

This review examines the intersections of eco-criticism and the Anthropocene in contemporary literature, highlighting key debates that shape scholarly discourse. Drawing on a wide range of literary texts and critical studies, the review investigates how writers and theorists conceptualize human-environment relationships, ecological crisis, and planetary temporality within the framework of the Anthropocene. Central debates include the tension between anthropocentric and ecocentric perspectives, the role of literature in fostering environmental consciousness, and the ethical implications of representing environmental degradation. The review also explores methodological approaches, from close textual analysis to interdisciplinary engagement with environmental science, demonstrating how literary studies contribute to understanding the cultural dimensions of ecological change. By synthesizing these discussions, the study identifies emerging questions concerning narrative strategies, genre innovation, and the socio-political responsibilities of literature in an age of global ecological transformation, offering a comprehensive overview for scholars, students, and practitioners of eco-criticism.

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### 1. Introduction

The contemporary literary landscape has witnessed a significant turn toward environmental awareness, largely driven by the unprecedented ecological challenges of the Anthropocene. The term *Anthropocene*, popularized in environmental and geological discourse, denotes a new epoch characterized by the dominant influence of human activity on the Earth's geology and ecosystems. This concept has prompted scholars to reconsider the relationship between literature and the environment, foregrounding questions about human responsibility, ecological degradation, and the ethical dimensions of storytelling (Rodriguez, 2024). Within this context, eco-criticism has emerged as a critical framework for examining literary texts, exploring how literature both reflects and shapes cultural understandings of nature and environmental crises.

Eco-criticism, initially rooted in the study of pastoral literature and nature writing, has evolved to encompass a diverse array of approaches that interrogate the intersections of culture, ecology, and politics. It engages with the ways in which literary texts construct, challenge, or reinforce human perceptions of the natural world, as well as the social and environmental consequences of these representations. The field's expansion has been significantly influenced by the emergence of the Anthropocene paradigm, which has intensified debates around the role of literature in mediating the human-environment relationship (Hebbar 2024). Scholars now grapple with questions such as: How can literature illuminate the complexities of ecological crises? In what ways do literary narratives contribute to environmental consciousness and ethical reflection? How do literary forms respond to the scale and urgency of Anthropocene phenomena?

This review study seeks to synthesize key debates in eco-critical scholarship concerning the Anthropocene, tracing the evolution of theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, and thematic concerns. By examining both canonical and contemporary literary texts, the study highlights the multiplicity of perspectives through which literature engages with ecological issues, ranging from environmental justice and climate change to posthumanist thought and multispecies ethics (Moore, 2017). Furthermore, it interrogates the tensions and contestations within the field, including discussions on anthropocentrism, the limits of literary representation, and the ethical responsibilities of authors and readers in an era defined by environmental uncertainty.

Ultimately, this review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the current scholarly landscape, identifying critical gaps, emerging trends, and potential avenues for future research. In doing so, it underscores the centrality of literature as a lens for understanding and responding to the Anthropocene, situating eco-criticism not merely as a literary methodology but as a vital tool for engaging with the environmental challenges of our time (Crownshaw, 2019).

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Design**

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design, grounded in a systematic literature review framework. The primary aim is to synthesize existing scholarly debates on eco-criticism and the Anthropocene in literature, identifying both theoretical perspectives and critical trends. By relying on a qualitative approach, the study emphasizes depth of understanding over numerical analysis, allowing for a nuanced exploration of conceptual frameworks, thematic patterns, and methodological approaches employed across literary studies. This design is particularly suitable for tracing the evolution of eco-critical discourse and situating current debates within broader environmental and cultural contexts.

### **2.2 Data Sources and Selection Criteria**

The review draws upon peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and authoritative monographs published between 2000 and 2025. This period captures the rise of Anthropocene discourse in literary studies and the concomitant expansion of eco-critical scholarship. Relevant sources were identified through academic databases including JSTOR, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Selection criteria prioritized works that explicitly engage with eco-criticism, environmental humanities, or the Anthropocene as a conceptual lens for literary analysis. Studies were included if they offered theoretical, thematic, or methodological insights, while articles with limited analytical depth or lacking a literary focus were excluded. This approach ensures a focused and representative sample of key debates within the field.

### **2.3 Data Extraction and Analysis**

Data extraction involved systematically reviewing each selected text to identify central themes, theoretical orientations, and methodological approaches. The process was iterative and interpretive, allowing for the emergence of thematic clusters that reflect the scholarly discourse on the Anthropocene in literature. Thematic analysis was complemented by conceptual mapping to track the interplay between eco-critical frameworks and environmental narratives. This enabled the identification of dominant perspectives, points of contention, and gaps in the literature. Particular attention was paid to comparative studies, case analyses of specific literary texts, and interdisciplinary engagements, as these offer insights into both the evolution and current trajectories of eco-critical scholarship.

### **2.4 Synthesis and Interpretation**

The synthesis phase involved critically evaluating patterns across the selected studies to provide an integrated understanding of eco-criticism and Anthropocene literature. Findings were contextualized within broader intellectual debates in environmental humanities, highlighting how literary studies contribute to conceptualizing environmental crises and human-nature relations. Contrasts between different theoretical approaches, such as posthumanist, materialist, and ecocentric perspectives, were emphasized to capture the diversity of scholarly engagement. The interpretive framework adopted in this review allows for both descriptive and analytical insights, ensuring that the discussion addresses not only what the literature reveals but also how it shapes ongoing debates about the Anthropocene and literary representation.

## **3. Findings and Discussion**

### **3.1 Publication Patterns and Scholarly Development**

The review of eco-critical literature in relation to the Anthropocene reveals significant growth in both volume and diversity of scholarship over recent decades. Analysis of publication patterns shows a clear acceleration in the number of articles, books, and special issues addressing environmental crises, climate change, and Anthropocene theory through a literary lens. This trend aligns with earlier meta-reviews (Layne, 2016; Tait, 2021), which argue that heightened global awareness of ecological risk has propelled eco-criticism from a niche subfield into a more central position within literary and cultural studies.

Across journals and monographs, publications increasingly foreground not only canonical texts but also diverse, cross-cultural narratives of environmental upheaval. For example, the rise of climate fiction (cli-fi), popularized by works such as Kim Stanley Robinson's *Science in the Capital* trilogy, has drawn sustained critical attention, illustrating how literary imagination has become a site for negotiating Anthropocene anxieties (Sankaran, 2025). Such patterns indicate that eco-criticism has transitioned from early textual ecological reading to integrative, theory-rich analyses that engage scientific, cultural, and political perspectives.

### **3.1.1 Chronological Trends**

The historical trajectory of eco-critical scholarship in this review demonstrates three broad phases. First, the formative phase beginning in the late 1970s and extending through the 1990s largely focused on nature writing, pastoral traditions, and foundational ecological hermeneutics. Pioneering work by Sahoo (2025) helped define eco-criticism by situating literature within ecological discourse, a phase concentrated on reconnecting literature with environmental contexts.

The second phase, spanning the early 2000s, saw increased integration of environmental ethics and post-colonial perspectives, with scholars such as Ursula Heise and Timothy Clark broadening the field's theoretical purview (Barry, 2020). During this period, studies began to explicitly reference climate science and sustainability frameworks, paving the way for Anthropocene inflections in literary critique.

The emergent phase (mid-2010s to present) is characterized by interdisciplinary engagements with the Anthropocene and related concepts such as the "Capitalocene" or "Anthropocene" critique. Scholarship from this period reflects a shift toward *transdisciplinary eco-criticism*, incorporating insights from earth system science, social ecology, and political ecology. This parallels findings in related bibliometric studies indicating a sharp increase in climate-related literary research after the publication of foundational Anthropocene texts by Dürbeck (2019) and popularization through cultural theory (Flannery, 2015). The contemporary phase also coincides with the growth of cli-fi studies, revealing how narrative forms have become central sites for ecological imagination and public engagement with environmental change.

### **3.1.2 Geographic and Institutional Distribution**

The geographic distribution of eco-critical scholarship highlights significant regional variation. North American institutions especially major research universities such as Stanford, University of California (Berkeley, Davis), and Duke are consistently among the top contributors, often through interdisciplinary centers that bridge humanities with environmental science or sustainability studies (D'Cunha, 2020). European scholarship particularly in the UK (University of Oxford, University of Cambridge) and Germany (Freie Universität Berlin) similarly anchors a substantial body of work, frequently emphasizing historical ecology, environmental philosophy, and ecofeminist theory.

In contrast, research from the Global South, while increasingly visible, remains less represented in major bibliographic counts, pointing to ongoing structural inequalities in academic publishing. Nevertheless, the literature from regions such as Africa, Latin America, and South Asia introduces vital perspectives that foreground colonial histories, resource extraction, and indigenous ecological knowledge (Gormley, 2021; Khan, 2019). For example, post-colonial eco-critical studies often emphasize land dispossession and environmental justice, linking Anthropocene discourse with longstanding critiques of global inequality. These contributions challenge predominantly Western paradigms of ecological crisis and expand the field toward more pluralistic, de-centered dialogues.

This regional disparity reflects patterns noted by scholars like Flannery (2015), who argue that dominant eco-critical narratives often prioritize Western experiences of environmental degradation. The growing engagement from Global South scholars therefore signals not only intellectual diversification but also a crucial ethical recalibration of how the Anthropocene is conceptualized across different cultural and ecological contexts.

### **3.1.3 Publication Venues and Formats**

The landscape of publication venues showcases a mix of traditional and emergent platforms. Established journals such as *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, *Environmental Humanities*, and *European Journal of English Studies* remain central outlets for high-impact eco-critical research (Bladow, 2018). These journals consistently publish special issues on Anthropocene themes, indicating ongoing editorial investment in this area. Edited volumes and collected essays often arising from interdisciplinary conferences also serve as key venues, fostering cross-pollination between literary studies, philosophy, and earth sciences.

The rise of open-access publishing has further influenced visibility and accessibility. Journals like *Environmental Humanities* and *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment* provide free online access, enabling broader dissemination beyond traditional subscription barriers (Wilson, 2024). This democratization of scholarship is particularly significant for researchers in under-resourced institutions or regions, helping mitigate some aspects of the global publication imbalance. Moreover, digital humanities projects and online forums (such as Climate Literature Listservs and Digital Eco-Critical Archives) extend scholarly reach outside conventional print formats, enabling collaborative annotation, public scholarship, and multimedia engagements (Raipola, 2019). These platforms underscore a shift toward *participatory scholarship*, in which academic research intersects with public discourse on climate change and ecological futures.

### **3.2 Theoretical Frameworks and Conceptual Approaches**

The review reveals that the theoretical landscape of eco-criticism in the Anthropocene is diverse and increasingly interdisciplinary. Scholars have moved beyond early nature-centric models to frameworks that account for the complex entanglement of human and non-human forces shaping planetary life (Ahmadi, 2022). Dominant theoretical lenses include posthumanism, which challenges anthropocentric narratives; environmental justice, which foregrounds inequities in ecological impacts; and integrated approaches that combine insights from sociology, geography, and ecology to interrogate literary representations of environmental crises. These frameworks allow for a richer analysis of how literature reflects, critiques, and sometimes anticipates environmental transformations in the Anthropocene era. For example, Glotfelty's foundational work (1996) on ecocriticism has evolved in recent studies to address issues such as climate migration, industrial exploitation, and ethical responsibility toward non-human life, demonstrating the field's conceptual expansion.

#### **3.2.1 Ecocritical and Anthropocene Theories**

Traditional ecocriticism, initially concerned with the representation of nature in literature, has undergone significant theoretical recalibration in response to Anthropocene discourse. Whereas early ecocritical work often emphasized pastoral or wilderness aesthetics (Shukla, 2025), contemporary scholarship increasingly examines human-nature entanglements, planetary ethics, and the consequences of anthropogenic activity. For instance, Dürbeck (2020) emphasizes "literary geographies" that situate environmental narratives within global ecological networks, highlighting the interconnectedness of local and planetary scales. Literary texts such as Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy exemplify this shift, portraying hybrid ecosystems where human intervention and non-human agency converge, reflecting the theoretical move from nature as backdrop to nature as an active participant in narrative structures (Clark, 2019). This evolution mirrors broader discussions in environmental humanities that call for ethical considerations of both human and non-human stakeholders in literary studies.

#### **3.2.2 Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Approaches**

A key finding is the increasing integration of literature with climate science, philosophy, and environmental studies. Scholars employ interdisciplinary methods to enrich literary analysis with empirical ecological knowledge and ethical frameworks. For example, studies of climate fiction (cli-fi) often draw on scientific data to examine realistic projections of climate impacts, blending literary critique with environmental modeling (Reka, 2025). Philosophical frameworks, particularly from posthumanist and new materialist perspectives, further enable critical exploration of agency, embodiment, and ethical responsibility in literary texts. Additionally, some research employs transdisciplinary methods, combining textual analysis with fieldwork, GIS mapping, or ethnography to situate narratives within tangible ecological contexts. This approach highlights literature's capacity to mediate human understanding of environmental crises while fostering dialogue between the humanities and natural sciences.

#### **3.2.3 Critiques and Debates**

Despite these theoretical innovations, debates persist around the conceptual and methodological boundaries of eco-criticism in the Anthropocene. One major discussion concerns whether the Anthropocene should be treated primarily as a cultural or geological category. While some scholars argue for its utility in literary and cultural critique (Chandra, 2025), others caution that overemphasis on human narratives risks sidelining material geological processes. Additionally, eco-criticism faces critique for residual anthropocentrism, particularly in studies that foreground human ethical responsibilities without adequately engaging with socio-political dimensions such as environmental racism or economic inequities (Heffes, 2022). There is also debate over the scope of literary eco-criticism: some argue for expanding beyond Western canonical texts to include postcolonial, indigenous, and global south literatures that foreground local environmental knowledge and practices, thereby enriching theoretical understandings of the Anthropocene.

### **3.3 Thematic Clusters in Anthropocene Literature**

A close reading of the literature reveals that eco-critical engagement with the Anthropocene coalesces around distinct thematic clusters. Across contemporary literary texts, scholars have observed recurring motifs that frame human-environment interactions, foreground planetary crises, and interrogate socio-political inequities. These thematic patterns not only reflect the aesthetic strategies of authors but also indicate the broader cultural anxieties associated with ecological degradation and climate instability (Asenath, 2022; Buell, 2011).

#### **3.3.1 Climate Change and Catastrophe**

One dominant thematic strand in Anthropocene literature is the representation of climate change as a site of both catastrophe and existential anxiety. Narratives frequently dramatize extreme environmental events ranging from hurricanes and wildfires to floods and prolonged droughts underscoring human vulnerability and the fragility of ecological systems. For example, Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* (2012) depict climate disruption as a catalyst for both human and ecological transformation, using speculative scenarios to explore potential futures. Literary strategies often include apocalyptic imagery, fragmentation of narrative structure, and allegorical landscapes, which collectively communicate the scale

and urgency of planetary crises. Recent studies, such as those by Jogdand (2025) and RAHMAN (2022), note that these texts function as “climate fictions” or cli-fi, which aim to make abstract scientific phenomena emotionally and imaginatively tangible for readers. The prevalence of catastrophe motifs indicates a persistent literary effort to render climate change perceptible and ethically compelling, thereby linking aesthetic form with environmental advocacy.

### **3.3.2 Human-Nature Relations and Posthumanism**

Another salient thematic cluster involves the reconfiguration of human-nature relationships, often framed through posthumanist perspectives. Literature in this vein decouples humans from traditional anthropocentric narratives, portraying ecological interdependence and the agency of non-human actors. Works such as Richard Powers’ *The Overstory* (2018) exemplify this approach by foregrounding trees and other species as sentient participants in ecological networks, challenging the dominance of human-centered storytelling. Similarly, eco-poetic texts by Tracy K. Smith and Camille T. Dungy emphasize multispecies entanglements and highlight the ethical responsibilities humans have toward non-human entities. Scholars such as Ashraf (2025) and Debnath (2020) argue that these narratives embody a posthuman ethics that decenter humans, encouraging readers to recognize the moral and existential significance of other life forms. In the reviewed literature, common strategies include multi-perspective narration, fragmented subjectivities, and anthropomorphized yet ethically complex depictions of animals and ecosystems. Such approaches suggest that Anthropocene literature increasingly engages with the philosophical challenge of reconciling human agency with ecological humility and planetary interdependence.

### **3.3.3 Environmental Justice and Socio-Political Dimensions**

A third thematic cluster centers on environmental justice, revealing how ecological crises intersect with social inequalities, historical exploitation, and geopolitical disparities. Many contemporary works highlight the uneven distribution of environmental burdens, exposing how marginalized communities disproportionately bear the consequences of industrial pollution, resource extraction, and climate change. Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and Nalo Hopkinson’s *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998) illustrate these dynamics by linking ecological degradation to economic marginalization, colonial legacies, and systemic racism. Literary analyses, supported by studies such as Rogini (2025) and Layne (2016), demonstrate that these texts foreground the socio-political dimensions of environmental crises, emphasizing the global inequities inherent in Anthropocene narratives. Authors often employ local histories, intersecting temporalities, and politically charged imagery to expose the complicity of neoliberal development and historical exploitation in shaping ecological vulnerability. By doing so, literature in this thematic cluster functions both as critique and witness, advocating for more equitable ecological futures (Sahoo, 2025).

## **3.4 Methodological Approaches and Research Designs**

The methodological landscape of eco-criticism in Anthropocene literature demonstrates considerable diversity, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the field. Scholars have employed both traditional qualitative methods and emerging digital and comparative approaches, each offering distinct insights into environmental narratives. The choice of methodology often shapes the types of knowledge produced, revealing the complexities of human–nature relationships, climate imaginaries, and ecological ethics embedded in literary texts (Dürbeck, 2019). While qualitative approaches remain dominant, quantitative and computational methods have begun to supplement these analyses, providing scale and precision. Comparative and intertextual methods further enrich understanding by situating works in broader temporal, cultural, and ecological contexts.

### **3.4.1 Qualitative Literary Analysis**

Qualitative literary analysis continues to be the cornerstone of Anthropocene studies. Techniques such as close reading, thematic coding, and narrative analysis enable scholars to explore the subtle ways literature represents environmental crises, ecological ethics, and human–nature interactions. Close reading, for example, has been instrumental in examining how contemporary novels such as *Flight Behavior* use landscape and climate imagery to foreground the consequences of global warming. Similarly, thematic coding allows researchers to identify recurrent motifs, such as species extinction, environmental justice, and human-induced ecological disruption, across a corpus of texts (D’Cunha, 2020; Gormley, 2021). Narrative analysis further reveals how temporal structures and plot development shape readers’ perceptions of environmental urgency, often highlighting the tension between human agency and ecological limits.

One key strength of qualitative methods is their depth: they allow for nuanced interpretations of symbolic and ethical dimensions of environmental literature. However, limitations include the potential for subjectivity and challenges in generalizing findings beyond selected texts. Innovative adaptations have emerged, such as eco-narratology, which blends traditional literary analysis with ecological theory, enabling scholars to interrogate both narrative form and environmental content simultaneously (Khan, 2019). These approaches underscore literature’s capacity to shape cultural understanding of the Anthropocene.

### **3.4.2 Quantitative and Digital Methods**

In recent years, quantitative and digital approaches have complemented traditional literary analysis, offering scale, pattern recognition, and visual representation of environmental discourse. Corpus studies and computational text analysis allow scholars to examine linguistic patterns, frequency of ecological terms, and the co-occurrence of climate-related motifs across large datasets (Wilson, 2024; Raipola, 2019). For instance, bibliometric mapping has been used to trace the evolution of Anthropocene literature, identifying influential authors, cross-disciplinary citations, and thematic clusters within environmental humanities scholarship.

These data-driven methods provide valuable insights into macro-level trends that qualitative analysis alone may overlook. They enable comparisons of environmental discourse across time periods, geographies, and genres, offering a “bird’s-eye view” of the field. However, such approaches are not without limitations: they often abstract away contextual and stylistic nuances, risking reductionist interpretations. Scholars have increasingly advocated for mixed-methods designs, integrating computational analysis with close reading to balance scale with interpretive depth (Ahmadi, 2022; Dürbeck, 2020). This hybrid methodology enhances the rigor of eco-critical research while retaining sensitivity to literary form and meaning.

### **3.4.3 Comparative and Intertextual Approaches**

Comparative and intertextual methods constitute another important research design in Anthropocene literary studies. By examining texts across historical periods, cultural contexts, or genres, researchers can trace the evolution of environmental ideas and identify persistent ecological motifs. For example, studies comparing Romantic poetry with contemporary climate fiction highlight shifts in the portrayal of nature from sublime and pastoral to vulnerable and crisis-laden (Flannery, 2015). Similarly, intertextual analyses reveal how contemporary novels and films engage with canonical ecological works, creating dialogues that reinforce or challenge prevailing environmental ethics.

The strength of these approaches lies in their ability to situate individual texts within broader intellectual and ecological networks, providing a multi-layered understanding of environmental discourse. They uncover patterns of influence, adaptation, and innovation, allowing scholars to explore how literature participates in cultural debates about climate change. Limitations include the methodological complexity of integrating diverse textual traditions and the need for deep contextual knowledge across regions or historical periods (Heffes, 2022). Nevertheless, comparative and intertextual frameworks remain essential for mapping the global and cross-temporal contours of Anthropocene literature, illustrating both continuities and transformations in human-environment narratives.

## **3.5 Emerging Debates, Research Gaps, and Future Directions**

The review of recent scholarship reveals that while eco-criticism and Anthropocene studies have achieved significant theoretical expansion and global visibility, they remain characterized by conceptual tensions, uneven geographical representation, and methodological fragmentation. A growing body of research demonstrates increasing interdisciplinarity, with literary studies engaging environmental humanities, geology, climate science, and political ecology. However, the analysis also identifies unresolved debates concerning terminology, ethical positioning, and representational strategies (Reka, 2025). Furthermore, although the field has broadened beyond its Anglo-American origins, substantial imbalances persist in the inclusion of marginalized voices and regions. The following subsections synthesize these emerging debates and outline promising avenues for future scholarship.

### **3.5.1 Conceptual Ambiguities and Theoretical Gaps**

One of the most persistent debates concerns the definition and scope of the Anthropocene itself. Scholars differ on whether the Anthropocene should be understood as a strictly geological epoch, a cultural metaphor, or a socio-political critique. The term, popularized by Paul Crutzen, has been widely adopted in literary studies, yet its universalizing impulse has drawn criticism. Critics argue that framing “humanity” as a homogeneous geological agent obscures historical inequalities, particularly colonialism and capitalism (Shukla, 2025). As a response, alternative formulations such as the Capitalocene and Plantationocene have emerged, emphasizing systems of extraction and exploitation rather than species-wide culpability. This conceptual divergence reveals a theoretical gap between environmental humanities’ ethical aspirations and the uneven distribution of ecological responsibility.

Closely related is the debate surrounding sustainability narratives in literature. Earlier eco-critical models often foregrounded pastoral recovery, ecological harmony, and conservationist ethics. However, contemporary Anthropocene fiction frequently resists redemptive narratives, portraying ecological collapse, species extinction, and climate precarity (Ashraf, 2024). For example, novels such as *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood and *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy complicate sustainability discourse by depicting dystopian futures shaped by technological excess and ecological ruin. These works challenge optimistic environmental narratives and instead foreground ethical ambiguity, survivalism, and moral fragmentation. The review finds that while such texts

are widely analyzed, there remains insufficient theoretical clarity regarding whether eco-literature should promote activism, critique modernity, or simply bear witness to environmental transformation (Asenath, 2022).

Another conceptual tension arises from the global versus local framing of ecological crises. Many Anthropocene narratives adopt a planetary scale, emphasizing climate change as a global phenomenon. Yet critics have argued that this scale can eclipse localized ecological experiences and indigenous environmental epistemologies. Scholarship influenced by postcolonial eco-criticism highlights that environmental degradation manifests differently across regions, shaped by histories of resource extraction, displacement, and environmental racism. The review indicates that while global climate fiction has gained prominence, more nuanced frameworks are needed to reconcile planetary consciousness with local ecological specificity. This gap underscores the importance of integrating regional knowledge systems into broader theoretical debates.

### **3.5.2 Underexplored Genres, Regions, and Voices**

Despite the field's expansion, eco-critical scholarship remains disproportionately centered on Anglophone fiction and Western theoretical paradigms. Canonical texts from North America and Europe dominate analyses of climate fiction, dystopian narratives, and environmental poetry. While these studies have generated valuable insights, the review identifies significant underrepresentation of African, South Asian, Pacific Islander, and Latin American literatures (Jogdand, 2025). Given that many of these regions are at the forefront of climate vulnerability, their literary articulations of ecological crisis offer critical perspectives that challenge Western assumptions about development, sustainability, and resilience.

Indigenous literatures, in particular, remain underexplored relative to their theoretical importance. Indigenous ecological knowledge systems often conceptualize land not as property but as relational and sacred. Works such as *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko and *Carpentaria* by Alexis Wright illustrate how storytelling intertwines environmental degradation with colonial violence and cultural survival (Debnath, 2020). These texts reframe the Anthropocene not as a new epoch but as an intensification of colonial ecological disruption. The review finds that while theoretical discussions frequently reference indigenous epistemologies, detailed textual analyses remain comparatively limited.

Similarly, non-fiction genres such as environmental memoir, documentary poetry, and activist writing are often overshadowed by climate fiction. Yet these forms play a significant role in shaping public ecological consciousness (Rogini, 2025). The relative neglect of drama, young adult literature, and oral storytelling traditions also represents a gap in the field. Expanding generic boundaries would allow eco-criticism to capture diverse narrative strategies for representing environmental crisis.

Regional disparities are further evident in scholarship production. African eco-critical studies, for example, are growing but remain less visible in global academic discourse. Emerging analyses of oil extraction narratives in the Niger Delta or drought fiction in East Africa demonstrate how local ecological crises intersect with postcolonial governance and global capitalism (RAHMAN, 2022). Greater inclusion of such contexts would significantly enrich Anthropocene debates and decentralize Western academic dominance.

### **3.5.3 Future Research Directions**

The findings suggest several promising methodological and theoretical pathways. First, interdisciplinary collaboration should be strengthened. Integrating literary analysis with climate science, environmental history, and political ecology can enhance interpretive depth while avoiding reductive metaphorization of scientific concepts (Buell, 2011). Digital humanities tools, such as corpus analysis of climate fiction trends, also present opportunities for mapping thematic shifts over time.

Second, future scholarship should foreground ecological justice and environmental ethics. The disproportionate impact of climate change on marginalized communities calls for analyses that link literature to activism and policy discourse (Chandra, 2025). Studies might explore how contemporary narratives engage movements such as youth climate activism or indigenous land defense initiatives, examining literature not only as representation but as intervention.

Third, speculative and futurist genres warrant deeper attention. Climate fiction (cli-fi), speculative realism, and Afrofuturism offer imaginative frameworks for rethinking human–nonhuman relations and envisioning alternative ecological futures. Texts that depict adaptation, resilience, and multispecies coexistence can complicate apocalyptic tropes and inspire transformative imaginaries (Clark, 2019). Research might investigate how speculative narratives reshape ethical agency in a warming world.

Finally, theoretical innovation remains essential. Moving beyond anthropocentric paradigms, scholars may engage posthumanism, new materialism, and multispecies studies to interrogate the boundaries between human and nonhuman life. Such approaches challenge hierarchical ontologies and encourage relational models of ecological belonging (Barry, 2020). At the

same time, future work must remain attentive to historical accountability, ensuring that planetary frameworks do not obscure colonial and capitalist structures of environmental exploitation.

In conclusion, eco-criticism and Anthropocene studies have reached a productive yet contested stage of development. Conceptual ambiguities, regional imbalances, and genre limitations highlight the need for sustained critical reflection (Rodriguez, 2024). By embracing interdisciplinary collaboration, amplifying marginalized voices, and advancing ecologically just theoretical models, future scholarship can more effectively address the cultural and ethical dimensions of planetary crisis.

#### 4. Conclusion

This review has examined the evolving relationship between eco-criticism and Anthropocene studies, tracing publication trends, dominant theoretical frameworks, thematic clusters, methodological approaches, and emerging debates. The findings demonstrate that eco-criticism has moved decisively beyond its early focus on nature writing and pastoral representations to engage complex planetary concerns associated with the Anthropocene—climate change, mass extinction, extractivism, environmental injustice, and the entanglement of human and nonhuman agencies. As the Anthropocene has gained prominence as a conceptual and geological marker, literary scholars have responded by rethinking the ethical, political, and aesthetic dimensions of environmental representation.

The analysis reveals that eco-critical scholarship in the Anthropocene is characterized by theoretical pluralism. Posthumanism, new materialism, political ecology, decolonial theory, and environmental justice frameworks have collectively reshaped literary interpretation. These approaches challenge anthropocentric assumptions and foreground relational ontologies, multispecies perspectives, and global inequalities. At the same time, the review identifies tensions surrounding the Anthropocene's universalizing rhetoric. Critics argue that the term risks obscuring uneven histories of colonialism, capitalism, and industrialization—leading to alternative formulations such as the Capitalocene or Plantationocene. Such debates underscore that literary studies do not merely adopt scientific terminology but actively interrogate its ideological implications.

Thematic analysis indicates that contemporary literature engages the Anthropocene through recurring motifs of ecological grief, dystopian futures, climate migration, and species extinction. Yet alongside narratives of crisis, there are also counter-narratives of resilience, adaptation, and ecological imagination. Literature functions not only as a mirror of environmental catastrophe but also as a space for ethical experimentation and speculative possibility. The rise of climate fiction ("cli-fi"), Indigenous ecologies, and transnational eco-narratives illustrates how writers negotiate scale—from the intimate and local to the planetary—while foregrounding lived experiences of environmental change.

Methodologically, the field has expanded from close textual reading to interdisciplinary and comparative approaches. Scholars increasingly integrate insights from Earth system science, environmental history, digital humanities, and affect theory. While this interdisciplinarity enriches analysis, it also raises questions about methodological coherence and the risk of conceptual overextension. Nevertheless, the review affirms that such hybridity reflects the complexity of Anthropocene realities and the need for integrative critical tools.

Importantly, this study highlights several research gaps. Global South perspectives remain underrepresented relative to Euro-American scholarship, despite the disproportionate impact of environmental crises in these regions. There is also a need for more empirical and reader-response research examining how Anthropocene literature shapes public understanding and environmental ethics. Furthermore, non-Anglophone and oral literary traditions require deeper engagement to avoid replicating epistemic hierarchies within eco-critical discourse.

In conclusion, eco-criticism in the age of the Anthropocene stands at a productive crossroads. It confronts the limits of human-centered thinking while grappling with the political stakes of naming and narrating planetary crisis. The field's future vitality depends on its capacity to remain critically reflexive, globally inclusive, and methodologically innovative. By fostering dialogue between literature, environmental humanities, and the natural sciences, eco-criticism can continue to illuminate how storytelling shapes ecological consciousness and ethical responsibility in a rapidly changing world.

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