

Literary Reverberations in the Anthropocene by tracing Human- Environment Dynamics centering on Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*

*Saud Abdullah Khalaf al Hinai,
Student, Bachelor in English Studies,
Bayan College, Oman,
Email: Sakhinai1996@gmail.com*

*Asila Abdullah Mohammed al Balushi,
Student, Bachelor in English Studies
Bayan College, Oman
Email: aseela.abloushi.1993@gmail.com*

*Divya Hariharan,
Lecturer, Department of English Studies,
Bayan College, Oman
Email: divya@bayancollege.edu.om*

Abstract

This research paper explores the intersection between literature and Anthropocene, focusing on the environmental disruptions caused by human actions. The paper traces the historical development of the relationship between humans and the environment, from prehistoric survival changes to the profound effects of the Industrial Revolution. The work identifies the emergence of the Anthropocene around the 18th century. It delves into the literary representation of this era and highlights its role in the awareness of ecological issues and the formation of cultural attitudes toward sustainable development. This research paper focuses on producing a literary review to analyze how the context of Anthropocene is revealed in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*. In addition, our research further emphasizes the extreme urge of human greed and possessiveness resulting in environmental consequences. Further, our research recommends examining literature related to the Anthropocene to improve our understanding of the connections between literature, environmental education, and sustainable practices. The paper is an intricate intersection of

literature and the Anthropocene to augment our conception of the intricate interplay between literature and nature. The predominant intention of this research is to promote for the inclusion of this genre of literature in school education, diagnosing its ability to foster ecological alertness and inculcate a sagacity of obligation towards sustainable practices among students. This paper thus contributes valuable insights to the enduring discourse on the multidimensional associations amidst literature, humanity, and the environment in the Anthropocene era, with a explicit appeal to incorporate such literature into formal instructive curricula.

Keywords: *Children's literature, Anthropocene, environmental awareness, Moby-Dick.*

1. Introduction

The subject of the Anthropocene, which relates to humanity's immense impact on earth's environment and physical terrain, has generated substantial intrigue in literature (Bonneuil et al., 2015). Given that human behavior is having an ever more detectable influence on our planet, scholars and writers have turned to literature as a potent tool for scrutinizing different aspects connected with this era. This paper investigates how authors tackle modifications brought about by environmental upheaval resulting from human actions; social movements; and cultural shifts whereby profound experiences are recorded within Anthropocene Literature. Our research is an in-depth literary review, with a focused lens on Herman Melville's magnum opus, *Moby-Dick*. Within the pages of this iconic work, we intent to excavate the nuanced interpretation of human greed and possessiveness, untying the ecological concerns inherent in these aspects of human nature. Apart from the literary analysis, the research also aims at demanding the need to integrate literature related to the Anthropocene into formal education. The paper intends to prove that by contributing these works in the curricula, ecological cognizance and obligation among students can be amplified. By doing so, the education system and curricula will be able to nurture a generation acclimated to the necessities of sustainable coexistence.

1.1 Chronological exploration to human–environment relationship

The history of interactions between humans and their environment spans millions of years, including the impact of our ape predecessors on many ecosystems (Stephen et al., 2011). Humans have altered the natural world over time to improve hunting and gathering food. This

information, which was initially acquired by trial and error and observation, allowed for minor changes to the surroundings without total alteration. Homo Erectus made great advancements in hunting and animal protection, especially with his mastery of stone tools and fire. The capacity to control fire facilitated the switch to an omnivorous diet, which brought about important modifications to the body and mind, including language's birth and the brain's growth. The usage of fossil fuels was evident in pre-industrial human society, but it wasn't until the Industrial Revolution that the full implications on the ecosystem were realized.

The Neolithic Revolution and the Pleistocene megafauna extinctions have been proposed as possible Anthropocene beginning points. Nevertheless, there are problems with the early Anthropocene theory (Stephen et al., 2011). These arguments highlight the intricate dynamics of natural variability and the Holocene carbon cycle, which cast doubt on the hypothesis's viability. Despite these disagreements, determining the beginning of the Anthropocene requires an awareness of the historical background of interactions between humans and the environment.

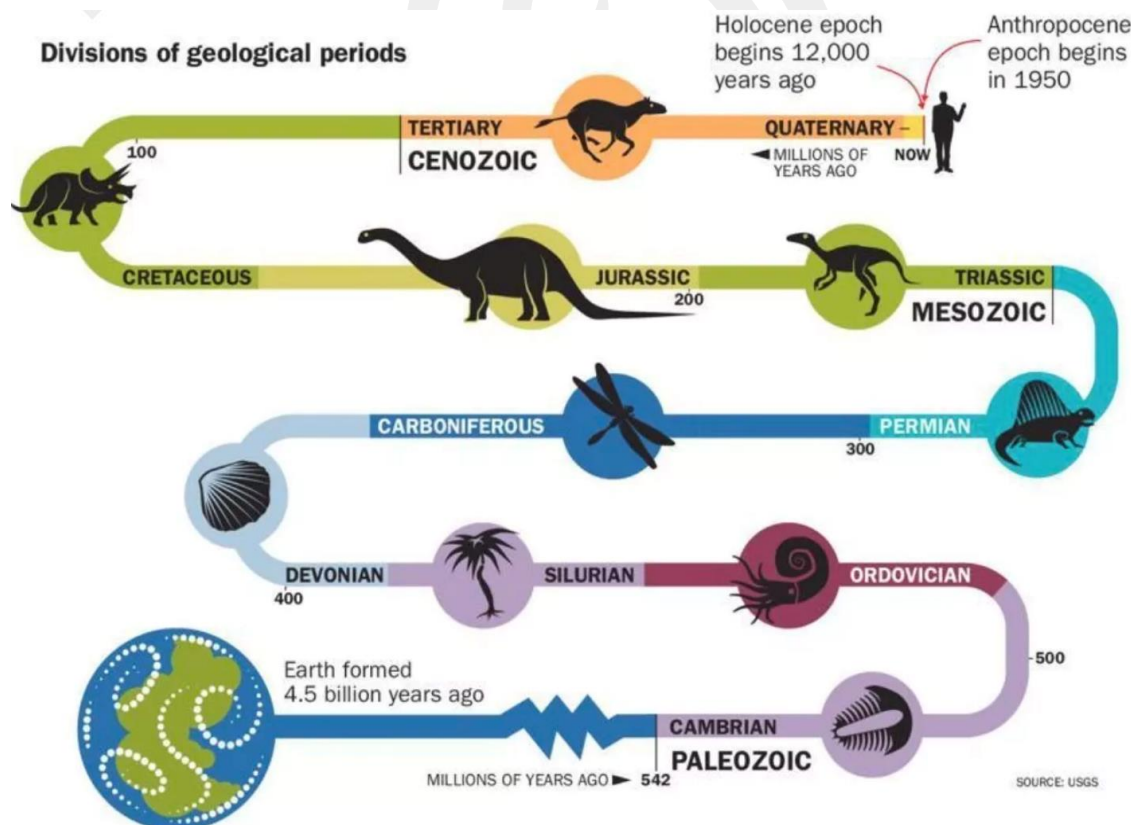


Fig 1: Division of geological periods (Anarchist Federation. (n.d.).

1.2 Anthropocene's Genesis

The emergence of the Industrial Revolution in 18th-century Great Britain and its subsequent evolution into the thermo-industrial revolution of 19th-century Western civilization marked a significant shift away from agriculture as humanity's primary activity (Stephen et al., 2011). The utilization of fossil fuels, particularly coal, during this period, allowed for increased energy usage that broke through previous natural resource limitations. This rise in human energy consumption resulted in unparalleled advancements while also causing notable developments such as synthesizing reactive nitrogen compounds to produce fertilizer and clearing ecosystems using mechanized processes.

As an outcome, there was exponential growth witnessed across multiple sectors leading to astounding increases in population size; and economic production whilst leaving profound environmental impacts on Earth's ecosystem (Stephen et al., 2011). Whilst pinpointing and establishing an exact beginning or start date has been cumbersome- with many acknowledging atmospheric CO₂ concentrations providing valuable insight towards gauging Anthropocene age commencement - scholars have identified approximately around the year (1800) which they believe corresponded with England experiencing substantial transformation followed by industrialization spreading globally at breakneck speed.

1.3 Literature's Response to the Anthropocene

The intricate and profound relationship between literature and the Anthropocene - a period characterized by human-caused environmental changes- serves as an essential medium for exploring complex intersections between humanity's actions on nature (Vermeulen, 2020). Writers employed narratives, poems, and essays to explore ecological crises such as climate change while showcasing how humans impact the planet in unimaginable ways.

This approach mirrors our contribution towards environmental destruction but offers space that encourages reflection, and critique of this epoch's challenges faced globally. Literature contributes significantly to raising awareness about these issues thus shaping cultural attitudes

toward sustainability through writers grappling with uncertainties present during this time span; their works add substance thereby fostering broader conversations concerning Earth's evolving narrative calling attention to interconnectedness within human ecosystems whilst urging readership introspection.

This paper is meant to draw a connection as well as awareness between the concept of Anthropocene and the children's literature. The iconic novel of *Moby-Dick* is an example of the vast range of children's novels that are embedded with hidden messages regarding the preservation of nature and the consequences of human negligence towards it. The ultimate aim of the novel is to create awareness within society of such pedagogical knowledge, as well as possible future implementation of such ideas in children's modern literature and school curricula. Such implementations, we believe, will bring about changes in the field of environmental sustainability in the years to come.

2. Literature Review

Since the advent of the romantic period in Western literature, writers have repeatedly emphasized the deterioration of nature. For example, in the novel *Moby-Dick* by Herman Melville, despite not mentioning the exact term Anthropocene, he delves into the epoch marked by significant human impact on the Earth's geology and ecosystems.

Moby-Dick depicts human greediness and possessiveness in the character of Captain Ahab (Melville & Burke, 2008). Such traits are the underlying cause of human's failure to connect with the natural elements of the earth. Ahab's obsession with hunting the white whale and his unstoppable chase are reflections of the Anthropocene's impact on the environment. This is apparent when Captain Ahab says "From hell's heart, I stab at thee; for hate's sake, I spit my last breath at thee." (Melville & Burke, 2008). Such desire for revenge and the unrelenting pursuit of goals are often at the cost of the natural world.

In the framework of the Anthropocene, the study "Island Aesthetics and the Anthropocene in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*" explores the aesthetic and environmental aspects of Melville's masterwork (Moore, 2020). By concentrating on the island topic, the examination investigates how Melville's depiction of remote environments adds to more general ecological and human

considerations. The epoch known as the "Anthropocene" is defined as one in which there has been a major impact of humans on Earth's ecosystems and geology. The study at how Melville's portrayal of islands functions as a metaphor for how humans interact with nature. The symbolic meaning of the remote and occasionally dangerous locations in *Moby-Dick* may be covered in the paper about ecological paradigm shifts and environmental degradation. The research provides insights into how Melville's island aesthetics contribute to a deeper understanding of human-nature relations in the Anthropocene by fusing literary analysis with environmental discourse.

3. Analysis and Discussion

In the *Moby-Dick* book, the narrator talks about whale hunting and to be more specific, he talks about hunting sperm whales. Catching whales was not for the Sake of saving the environment but rather for the sake of revenge and entertainment. Ishmael, the narrator of the story, is a brave and wise man who wants to sail through the ocean for the sake of Knowledge and exploration. He had no intention of harming the environment or the creatures living in the Ocean.

The well-known opening line of *Moby-Dick's* story is "Call me Ishmael." A typical scenario in New York City is described by the sailor Ishmael when big groups of men get together on their days off to think about the ocean and fantasize about living at sea. He clarifies that he went to sea because, like these individuals, he was yearning for adventure and was experiencing a "damp, drizzly November in [his] soul." Rejecting anything very "respectable" (or pricey), he never sails as a passenger but rather as an ordinary sailor. Ahab, on the other hand, was nothing like Ishmael. Ahab was the captain of the ship. Captain Ahab is a guy dedicated to wickedness, insanity, and retaliation—all attributes that are associated with the devil. Captain Ahab is a Quaker, though.

Given the significant role that pacifism plays in his faith, his ruthless pursuit demonstrates just how far he has deviated from morality. The environment is a powerful entity that haunts everyone who tries to harm it or harm its creatures. As was demonstrated in *Moby-Dick*. Ishmael was the only survivor in the Adventure, but Ahab faced the most Horrendous death by the white whale Moby-Dick. The fate which Ahab faced was the great Revenge of nature. Ahab was chasing the whales in their home and trying to take his revenge after the white whale cut his leg. He was the Depiction of human passion and greediness. The white whale Moby-Dick can

represent the relationship between human beings and nature. Ahab didn't want to catch the white whale, but he wanted to kill it. There wasn't any significant reason for killing the whale but to

take revenge on it for taking the captain's leg. "Hast seen the White Whale?" (Melville & Burke, 2008). The captain was asking every passing ship about a white whale he urged to kill. Ahab met the Englishman who had lost an arm fighting with the same white whale. Moreover, even though these two men faced the consequences of challenging nature, they still think their power is greater than the power of nature and the environment. Breaking into the animal's environment and expecting them to accept being caught and killed without resistance or any reaction is insane. What is even more insane is to take revenge on helpless animals trying to survive in the ocean.

When it comes to protecting themselves, their young ones, and their home, almost all wild animals are violent (*Aggression*, n.d.). perhaps the white whale Moby Dick was scared and trying to protect itself and its surroundings, but Ahab considered it personal and took a vow to himself to pay back the deed of the poor animal. According to Newcastle University lecturer and biologist Dr Richard Bevan, sperm whales can recall if they have been attacked in the past (Coxon, 2013). He also stated, "I have no doubt that an individual would remember being harpooned and might respond aggressively if it thought that it was threatened". A whaling boat would be seen as a threat by the sperm whales minding their own business in the ocean and were previously attacked by a similar boat. They would defend themselves and they have the right to do so. One Whale was once slaughtered by Ahab and the other whales would never forget the death of their group member. The unexpected storm tests even Ahab's passion and uncovers more aspects of his personality. Ahab is keen about fighting the storm even if the crew wants to go. He rebels against the enormous power of nature (*Chapters 116-119*, n.d.). perhaps the storm was a sign and warning from nature which Ahab had completely ignored due to his greediness and gullibility.

The other sign is when the storm passed, the ship's compass was gone but that wasn't enough to stop Ahab from attaining his goal. He was convincing his crew to move on to accomplish their ultimate goal of killing Moby-Dick no matter how bad the circumstances that they face, killing the poor animal matters more than the lives of crew members. Ahab continues to ask every passing ship ("Hast seen the White Whale?" in passion to find that whale and satisfy his inner

desire to kill it. A ship called *Rashel* whose captain is familiar to Ahab told him how he lost his son during a conflict between them and white whales. That illustrates how the revenge of nature could be dreadful and heartbreaking. Losing a son is the most expensive loss that could ever happen to a parent. Losing an arm or a leg is less effective than losing a beloved one, not to mention if that beloved one was a son. Especially if you're not sure of his death or survival. Ahab sped the boat as fast as he can, not to save his friend's son but to catch *Moby Dick* and kill it. Catching the whale is more important than the life of a human being. That is another proof of how Ahab was a heartless and apathetic person.

The Captain of *Rashel* understood that he couldn't challenge nature, but Ahab's egoism prevented him from understanding this and he proceeded in his way of fulfilling his goals. Ahab's only concern was to make sure that *Moby Dick* is still alive so that he will be the one to kill it. Ahab was sailing to meet his fate along with his crew members, but he was ready to die," we all will sleep at last in one place or another. We will sleep and "rest amid greenness." He was ready to die but not alone. Ahab will see, according to Fedallah, two things: a hearse created by spirits and a coffin fashioned of American wood. Fedallah concludes by saying that hemp is the only substance that can kill Ahab. Regretfully, the Captain believes that this prophecy indicates he will be successful in murdering *Moby Dick*. Ahab would consider everything said to serve his only goal.

Even though the prophecy is to warn him about challenging nature he is too aggressive to understand this. Ahab's crew couldn't argue with him. They were led to their slaughter against their will. "There she blows! --- there she blows! A hump like a snow hill! It is *Moby Dick*!" Ahab was screaming happily but *Moby-Dick* is not an easy goal. They struggled in the sea fighting *Moby-Dick* for three days. Eventually, Ahab and his entire crew were killed and the only survivor from this battle was Ishmael our narrator who survived to tell the story. How would the life of this white whale be without the interference of humans? It would swim cheerfully with its group, and they would live happily in the ocean. However, evilness is in the hearts of some people who think that they can control everything and take advantage of everything. *Moby-Dick* was the victim of an aggressive man who lived his life to kill an innocent creature living far away from humans and doing nothing but survive from people and ships.

Trying to destroy a creature in nature is not acceptable and not forgivable. Nature gave Ahab many signs to back off but he considered them as signs to move on. The dreadful end that Ahab met was the revenge of nature and its self-defense against Ahab's attitudes. Since Ishmael was not willing to take any action against nature, he magically survived the fatal death that others met.

4. Conclusion

The book *Moby-Dick* illustrates how human revenge and greed can negatively affect the relationship between humans and the environment. More than any other compelling reason, Captain Ahab's relentless beluga Moby Dick is driven by his desire for revenge. Ahab's actions and disobedience to nature and warnings ultimately led to the deaths of his and the other crew members. The moral of the story is to respect nature and live in harmony with it, not exploit or destroy it. Moby Dick, the white whale, represents the force of nature and the results of defying it. Nature warned and signaled Ahab, but his ego and obsession made him blind, prioritizing his vengeance over the lives of his crew. However, the story's narrator, Ishmael, stands for a more modest and considerate attitude toward the natural world. His ability to observe and absorb knowledge from nature, as opposed to attempting to manipulate or damage it, is what allowed him to survive.

The journey of Ishmael serves as a reminder that living in harmony with nature results in a more contented and long-lasting life. *Moby-Dick* is essentially a warning story about the perils of the human ego and the significance of understanding our place in the natural world. It serves as a reminder that nature should not be exploited for selfish gain or retaliation, but rather respected, preserved, and enjoyed. The children's book *Moby-Dick*, is a great illustration of how literature can be used to teach young readers about the Anthropocene, a period of significant environmental impact caused by humans.

Using themes related to sustainability, conservation, and human-nature relationships, *Moby-Dick* hopes to encourage young readers to adopt an environmentally conscious lifestyle. By emphasizing the fragility and beauty of the Earth, *Moby-Dick* challenges readers to recognize their responsibility as stewards of the environment and advance sustainable lifestyles. More research is needed to fully understand how Anthropocene novels like *Moby-Dick* intersect with the instructional curricula to foster ecological alertness in children. It is advised to investigate

Moby-Dick's ecological perspective, its relationship to the Anthropocene, and its function in island aesthetics. It is possible to analyze the novel's relevance to the Anthropocene because the Whalers' gaze illustrates how humans have impacted the environment. It can be advantageous to teach *Moby-Dick* within the framework of the Anthropocene. Through interdisciplinary connections, *Moby-Dick* research can be improved, and new perspectives added. This will further our comprehension of the connection between literature, the Anthropocene, and environmental education for kids.

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