
Annihilation: A Posthuman Paranoid Study of Ecophobic Anxieties in Weird Fiction

Ms. Ifra Mehmood

Lecturer in English, Government Graduate College for Women, Jhelum, Pakistan.
ifra057@gmail.com

Dr. Muhammad Javed Iqbal

Lecturer, Centre for Languages and Translation Studies, University of Gujrat, Pakistan.
mjaved.iqbal@uog.edu.pk

Mrs. Taiba Arooj

Lecturer in English, Government Graduate College for Women, Jhelum, Pakistan.
taiba10arooj@gmail.com

Abstract

This study delves into the psychological intricacies of posthuman identity as represented in Jeff VanderMeer's weird fiction novel *Annihilation*. Framed within a paranoid and ecophobic narrative world, the research investigates the psychological complexities associated with posthuman existence, including paranoia, claustrophobia, and schizophrenia. The central aim is to uncover the root causes of these anxieties by examining the interplay between human consciousness and the natural environment in a context where traditional notions of individuality and control are destabilized. Drawing on N. Katherine Hayles's posthuman theories of "pattern and randomness" and "distributed cognitive consciousness," the paper reveals how the illusion of human sovereignty and detachment from ecological systems contributes to the rise of paranoid consciousness. The protagonist's psychological unraveling in *Annihilation* serves as a metaphor for the broader human struggle with accepting the agency of non-human entities and ecological networks. As the novel blurs the boundaries between the self and the environment, the reader is confronted with a vision of subjectivity that is decentralized, unstable, and deeply interwoven with the natural world. The analysis suggests that posthuman anxieties stem from an epistemological crisis—the failure to integrate ecological consciousness into human self-perception. Through a close reading of the text, the study emphasizes the necessity for posthuman beings to renegotiate their understanding of agency, perception, and their ecological embeddedness. Ultimately, the findings urge a reevaluation of ecological relationships and call for a reimagining of human subjectivity that moves beyond anthropocentric dominance toward an ecologically attuned existence.

Keywords: Posthumanism, paranoia, ecophobia, distributed cognition, weird fiction, *Annihilation*, N. Katherine Hayles.

Weird fiction is a sub-genre of science fiction that captures modern-day anxieties by depicting a paranoid and schizoid world of posthumans. The common themes surfacing in the weird fiction are bioengineering, ecology and ecological disasters, posthuman hybridity, technoculture, and monster studies. It is observed that in weird fiction, the set norms are challenged and bizarre ideas are interjected to take a look at the posthuman hybridity. Thus,

weird fiction captures the posthuman paranoid world by depicting something awful and mysterious. The study at hand investigates ecology concerning posthuman paranoia in weird fiction. Paranoia is defined by Raihani(2017) in the following words “Paranoia is mainly due to an exaggerated sense of personalized threat and suggests instead that paranoia involves a negative social representations of others.” (p.3) The analysis of the text reveals that a tension-fraught relationship between posthumans and ecology has caused paranoia, schizophrenia and multifaceted fears related to ecology. Maria Goicoechea(2008) maintains that discoveries in genetic engineering, communication, and nanotechnology have revolutionized scientific and technological development, but the ultimate result is that “they produce anxiety and fear” (p.2). Instead of succumbing to fear, it is required to foster a new kinship with nature and actively work to resolve the environmental issues. Since the present study adheres to paranoia and other irrational fears of ecology, the researchers connect it to ecophobia projected by Simon C. Estok (2009). The study is also an analysis of Hayles' spectrum of posthumanism of ‘pattern and randomness” and “distributed cognitive system,” (1999, p.287) that aptly justifies the weird text of Annihilation novel written by Jeff Vandermeer to unveil the plight of posthumans stemming out of ignorance and loss of control over ecological systems.

The blurring of boundaries among posthumans, animals, and ecology is a recurrent theme of posthumanism. The central concern of posthumanism revolves around the themes of decentering and identity dissolution, where the rapid advancement of modern technology is often seen as a contributing factor to the erosion of human selfhood. This destabilization of identity has given rise to various psychological anxieties, which in turn have fostered antagonistic or defensive responses toward the natural world. In the wake of these transformations, posthuman individuals often exhibit conflicted relationships with ecology—either attempting to dominate it or retreat from it. Key contributors to posthuman thought, including Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, N. Katherine Hayles, Cary Wolfe, and Francesca Ferrando, have critically examined these evolving dynamics between human subjectivity, technological change, and ecological consciousness., but the spectrum of posthumanism introduced by Katherine Hayles (1999) is the most suitable to address the problems discussed in this study and justifies the interconnectedness of all species.

Hayles (1999) maintains The study contends that posthumans are not transcendental entities but rather integrated configurations of information and physical form. As established natural patterns deteriorate and randomness proliferates, ecological systems appear increasingly disordered and incomprehensible. This perceived chaos fosters a sense of vulnerability and existential unease within posthuman subjects. The research further explores the essence of environmental crises through the conceptual lens of Timothy Morton’s theory of *hyperobjects*. According to Morton, much of contemporary anxiety stems from our limited capacity to comprehend vast natural phenomena—objects so massive in temporal and spatial scale that they evade full human perception and understanding. and space (2013, p.1). The researchers unveil posthuman fears and anxieties connected to posthuman ecophobia through a close reading of the text written by Vandermeer.

It has been discovered that science fiction and weird literature are sketching a schizoid posthuman world whose narcissistic tendencies have distorted man’s relationship with ecology. Reading science fiction by the implication of Ecophobic theory of irrational

fear of ecology projected by Estok (2009) and incorporating Hayles' conception of posthumanism, where she talks about the cognition of all things, whether animate or inanimate, and her idea of pattern and randomness, about which she argues that all the living entities, including animals and plants, are patterns like human beings in the randomness of the universe (1999, p.287), the readers and the scholars move beyond the ordinary boundaries of myopic perception of fears and anxieties to find out the hidden complexities of the posthuman world.

Posthuman science fiction produced after the 1990s puts it directly in contrast to the environment. In weird fiction, ecology is shown to be corrupted due to human activities and the latest scientific and technological innovations. Accordingly, various theories and research, such as Transhumanism, Eco-feminism, Eco-criticism, cybergothic, and technoromanticism, have emerged to study the impact of posthuman activities on ecology. Sheryl Vint(2010) argues that SF(science fiction) is the most appropriate source to uncover the phenomena of posthumanism (p.19). All these theories depict the impact of posthuman inventions and activities that are corrupting man's relationship with nature. The theoretical and ecological trends emerging in the new millennium mark a major shift in science fiction. The arena of literature is dull with modern-day posthuman anxieties. These anxieties have been discussed in detail in SF.

Posthumanism emerged to study man's position against the backdrop of scientific and technological discoveries and issues related to ecological challenges and global warming, where man seems helpless and enmeshed between the conflicting desires of control and freedom. The diagnosis of 'Death of Man' (Descartes1985, p. 9) is pertinent to reveal how humanism lost its validity with the emergence of 'The Anthropocene Era,' where the term anthropocene refers to current geological time and refers to recent climatic issues. The hierarchical positioning of species is brought under scrutiny, and man's authority concerning other species in the world is challenged. Speciesism, or the man-made hierarchy of species, has not only been questioned but rejected by various tenets of posthumanism. Speculative and science fiction are specifically safe havens to investigate the traditional concept of man concerning science, technology, nature, and other living entities. Various tenets of posthumanism have started blaming the alienation of man from his surrounding environment as the root cause of psychological complexities and asking for compassion not only for humans but also for ecology and animals.

Ecocriticism has been defined by Pippa Marland(2013), who ponders over the idea of ecocriticism and explains that it is a broad term encompassing various critical approaches that examine how literature and other cultural expressions depict the relationship between human and nonhuman world. Its primary focus is to address the concerns about humanity's destructive effects on the biosphere, highlighting anxieties surrounding this impact (p.1). Here, the prefix 'eco', according to Lawrence Buell, refers to "human and non-human webs of interrelation" (2005, p.2). Thus, ecocriticism studies how man is interconnected to nature and how nature is related to him. Here, readers can adhere to Timothy Clark's famous doctrine, where he asserts the claim that nature includes and is 'everything' (2011, p.203). Clark invites our attention towards the challenge and to materialize and introduce such kinds of ideas and theories that make us realize the degradation of the Earth and to search for such kinds of tools that can help us to sustain a better future by employing the idea of recycling" (2011, p. xiii).

Ecocriticism calls our attention to a “crisis of the imagination, the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imaging nature and humanity’s relation to it” (Buell 2005, p. 2). He argues that, owing to our lack of understanding about the environment, multiple issues related to the nature/man dichotomy have arisen. Thus, Buell suggests devising such theories and ways for ecocritics through which humans can strengthen their ties with nature. The 1960s mark the advent of ecocriticism with the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (Garrard, p.1). The effort of Posthumans to discover the environment and make an affinity with nature is the subject of the first wave of ecocriticism.

After that emerged deep and social ecology. Deep ecology concerned itself with the position of man on earth. Deep ecology adopts an ecocentric/biocentric view where individual agency, including man is given first place as compared to nature. So, it is in direct contrast to anthropocentrism where it asks for the rediscovery of our deepest selves before delving into our relationship with nature. By comparing it to the hierarchical positioning of man in the universe, it may be claimed to have paid attention to human interests and emphasized the idea of addressing our hierarchical attitudes towards ecology before dealing with the social problems. On the other hand, social ecology comes to terms with the idea of ruling over the universe that adheres itself from the rule of man over other fellow beings (Bookchin 2005, p.65). If deep ecology has ignored the social dimensions of ecology altogether, social ecology has considered social inequalities as the root cause of all the problems. Deep and social ecology were highly critiqued by the ecocritics for their approach to the treatment of nature.

The issue of mingling the human and non-human matter or agentic matter has been later discussed by Jane Bennett (2010) who argues that the complicated mixing of human and non-human matter is far from unproblematic and just like deep and social ecology is redundant (p.2). To prove her stance over this issue, which she labels as ‘thing power’, she illustrated an example of ‘garbage hill’ in New Jersey, which incites the power of waste material whose toxic elements go into the groundwater after mingling with one another, whether fresh or damp. This agency of waste is constantly expanding and evolving as its source is human consumerism. This is what has been labeled as ‘trans-corporeality’, where man-made things can take on the forms of new agential roles and evoke either horror or loathing from human agency. For Iovino(2012), trans-corporeality causes hybridity by mingling the human and non-human matters, so blurring the distinction between these two agencies. By expanding on the subject of this blurring, she later adheres to ‘Posthuman Performativity’ a term coined by Barad(2008) where she entails it as a process where the concept of the “post-human” surpasses and transcends the traditional binary division between humans and non-humans, embracing a more intricate and dialectical perspective (p. 459). Assessing it further, the researchers may argue that blurring begins with man’s experimentation with science and technology where the need is to probe the possible outcomes of this agential capacity of posthumans where Cary Wolfe agrees “the embodiment and the embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world” (2010, p.15). Consequently, ecocriticism searches for a way where humans can find a solution to all these problems, as Bennett (2010) states that the intention is for the narrative of ontology to foster a greater openness to the impersonal existence that envelops and permeates us. It aims to cultivate a nuanced understanding of the intricate and conflicting interconnections between various entities and ultimately empower us to make more informed

and thoughtful interventions within this interconnected ecosystem (p.4). It has been argued by Pippa Marland(2013)that the upshot for ecocriticism is that it should acknowledge its limits in terms of practice and concentrate on challenging the nature - and blind spots - of ecology itself. Ecocriticism cannot aspire to transform society as a whole (p.14). Therefore, ecocriticism searches for the hidden potentialities of nature, and this introduces us to the next step of it, which has been termed as Anthropocene and the inquiry of monsters created by posthumans to pollute our world. Some parallels have been drawn by critics between the monster of ecology and the posthuman plight.

One of the main debates in posthumanism has been whether the mind can be taken apart from the body and whether it can exist on its own. The Cartesian dualism of Descartes(1985) serves as the basis for the embodiment theory in posthumanism and is adopted by science and speculative fiction, where readers observe mind and intellect transcending the body, and a post-biological world is established where humans are just information patterns. Instead of digging at the kind of posthumanism shown in most science fiction, where man is shown to be fighting a hopeless task of transcending the flesh through technological advancements, the present study investigates the critical posthumanism favored by Katherine Hayles, where flesh is a significant reality and connection among species and their dependency is more important. This research has applied the idea of distributed cognitive systems, the pattern and randomness of N. Katherine Hayles, to analyze the various implications of posthumanism projected by Vendermeer in his text.

Hayles' concept of posthumanism is grounded in two key ideas: *distributed cognitive systems* and *pattern and randomness* (1999, p. 289). Within this framework, she emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all entities, proposing that every living being constitutes a distinct pattern, while the broader universe operates as a vast field of randomness. This theoretical model is particularly effective when applied to VanderMeer's *Annihilation*, where traditional human-centered cognition is challenged. Hayles critiques the embodiment theory by asserting that cognitive processes are not confined to the human brain or body but can emerge through interactions with machines, tools, and non-human agents. She argues, "Located within the dialectic of pattern or randomness and grounded in embodied actuality rather than disembodied information, the posthuman offers resources for rethinking the articulation of humans with intelligent machines" (1999, p. 287). From this perspective, human beings do not dominate an otherwise inert world; rather, they exist as one of many patterns in a universe shaped by unpredictability and complexity. Hayles reinforces this notion, stating, "If pattern is the realization of a certain set of possibilities, randomness is the much, much larger set of everything else" (1999, p. 286). Her theory provides a more nuanced way to interpret Area X, moving beyond binary notions like presence and absence in understanding cognition. Furthermore, her approach aligns with Timothy Morton's concept of *hyperobjects* (2013)—entities so vast and diffuse that they resist traditional categorization. By integrating this view, Hayles presents the posthuman condition as a distributed network, where machines, animals, humans, and ecological forces collaborate within a shared cognitive system. The narrative illustrates this system through its depiction of hyperobjects as agents of ecophobic anxiety.

Carry Wolfe and Katherine Hayles are among the key theorists of posthumanism. Carry Wolfe(2010) has reflected on the idea of posthumanism by arguing that her idea of posthumanism complies with Lyotard's paradoxical viewpoint related to postmodernism, as

she maintains that it comes just after and before humanism. She further explains it in the sense that it is forerunner in the sense of "embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world." (Wolfe 2010, p.xv) She goes on to explain that it comes after when it is denoted as a historical moment of loss of center by posthumans due to their immersion in the technical, medical, informational and economical systems and is not possible to overlook (p.xv-xvi). According to Wolfe, posthumanism can be investigated at two points: first, it has emerged in response to the 17th-century mode of thought in which all relational thoughts place man in the centre, and second, it is a methodology that has brought into consideration not only humans but also other entities, including machines and ecology. Wolfe and Hayles both agree with this view point that posthumanism is significantly a distinct field from that of humanism, though Hayles talks about it more firmly as she argues, "Yet the posthuman need not be recuperated back into liberal humanism nor need it to be construed as antihuman" (Hayles 1999, p.287). It is quite evident that posthumanism investigates the decentering of posthumans, whereupon it rejects the hierarchical positioning of man.

A very significant difference between Hayles and Wolfe is related to their conception of human embodiment. Hayles has strongly opposed transhumanists like Hans Moravec(1988), who contends in "Mind Children" that the human mind could have been and would be able to survive without the body (p. 4). He claims that the mind can be separated from its biological body. Thus, he seems to be celebrating a "postbiological world" where humans will be "self-improving, thinking machines" (5). Moravec's idea is a further extension of Cartesian dualism, where super-civilization can be achieved by the erasure of the human body. This idea is further examined by Wolfe, who maintains that the binary opposition of humanity and animality is a worn-out idea. She further claims that the idea of removing the human body has its connection with perhaps the most fundamental and anthropological dogma associated with humanism, which Balibar invokes in his discussion of the animality/humanity dichotomy: namely, that becoming "the human" entails escaping or suppressing one's animal origins in nature, the biological, and the evolutionary, but more broadly, by transcending the bonds of materiality and embodiment collectively (Wolfe xiv-xv). Wolfe is thus favoring the stance of erasing the body as a posthuman condition, but Hayles contests this idea by arguing that the various technological and other humanistic theories are deeply rooted in a fantasy world that favors the idea of living without a body. Therefore, these theories are not related to a realistic world of actuality. The central point of these theories revolves around the information that they claim can be shifted to any other body. The main argument presented by these is that the material body and the mental essence of information are two different things or entities, and they can be separated from one another quite easily. Hayles asserts that it is this view point of embodiment theory against which she wants to project her ideas and not information theory or cellular-automata theory (p.12.) In this context, she has given us the example of Edward Fredkin and Stephen Wolfram, who assert that reality is a cosmic computer program (p.12). According to them, the structure of matter, energy, time, space, and everything else that exists is governed by a universal informational code (Hayles1999, p.11). Hayles goes on to define that these cellular automata are just like the coded units "that can occupy two states: "on or off" (p.11). She argues that when the cellular automata model is applied to humans, "embodiment can flow from cellular automata as easily as from atoms" (p.12). She is thus of the view that embodiment theory is a

fantasy that has complicated man's relationship with ecology and other living entities. The selected text gives a further understanding of how embodiment has created problems for posthumans. After a detailed analysis of Hayles's model of cellular automata theory, it is quite evident that she regards posthuman embodiment as the cohesiveness of information and body instead of transcendence from the body.

Contrary to embodiment theory, Hayles projects the idea of the interconnectivity of all the living species. She postulates the theory of pattern and randomness, wherein she argues, "If the pattern is the realization of a certain set of possibilities, randomness is the much, much larger set of everything else" (Hayles 1999, p.286). Consequently, she has compared different patterns to different kinds of species occupying the earth. She urges the acknowledgment of these varying patterns as equally significant and that need our attention. While discussing the fulcrum of posthumanism, she also delves into the idea of the distributed cognition system, where she ponders the cognition of inanimate objects, including the earth and animals.

Ecophobia and posthumanism complement each other despite being two distinct concepts. By acknowledging the interconnected nature of all things present on earth, posthumanism can help us to overcome ecophobia and sustain a future where all entities live in agreement. To evoke a feeling of compulsion and responsibility, it is necessary to reconsider our role in the universe as a part of an ecosystem. Likewise, ecophobia can serve as a critique of traditional human-centered thinking and encourage us to embrace posthuman ideas. By acknowledging fears and anxieties about the environment, the assumptions that are impacting our relationship with the natural world can be questioned. Humans can move beyond the idea of nature as something to be conquered or controlled and try to make a connection with it.

The present study examines the core intersections between paranoid ecophobia and posthumanism, linking them to the unsettling ecological dimensions portrayed in science fiction. While these theoretical frameworks differ in origin, the researchers identify a concealed relationship between them. It is argued that exploring paranoid posthuman ecophobia provides deeper insight into the crises of contemporary existence, where depictions of monstrous forms, eerie ecological settings, horror-driven narratives, and the collapse of centralized identity all reflect the turmoil experienced by posthuman beings in search of meaning. Within this context, narcissistic tendencies are seen to intensify the issue, contributing to a fragmented psychological state in which fear of ecological entanglement emerges. Jeff VanderMeer's *Annihilation*, the opening novel of the *Southern Reach Trilogy*, effectively presents this complex relationship. His characters are portrayed as navigating a world where they strive to affirm human values and identity, yet find themselves disoriented and overwhelmed by a posthuman environment. The narrative reveals how their efforts are continuously undermined by an ecological reality that defies control or understanding, trapping them in a cycle of paranoid ecophobia shaped by both psychological and environmental instability.

The present study is significant as it aims at highlighting the impact of the paranoid condition of human beings and how it is inculcating ecophobia. The study reveals that posthuman anxieties can be avoided, and certain strategies can be adopted to overcome

ecophobia. Estok(2009) refers to anthropocentric hatred or the hatred for the ecological disasters by claiming that "nature often becomes the hateful object in need of our control, the loathed and feared thing that can only result in tragedy if left in control" (p.6). To achieve this, the study examines the weird fiction of Vendermeer and scrutinizes the depiction of paranoid anxieties of posthumans. The theories of Katherine Hayles, Simon C. Estok, and Timothy Morton are employed by the researchers to scrutinize the text of Vendermeer's science fiction, uncovering the hidden complexities abounding in our posthuman world, and probe how ecophobia and paranoid posthumanism are interconnected.

It is implied that the research may contribute to the existing literature by highlighting the underlying causes of paranoia and posthuman ecophobia. By exploring the representations of fear and anxiety in weird fiction, the study will provide a deeper understanding of the psychological complexities of posthumans and their connection to ecology. Additionally, the use of theoretical frameworks proposed by Hayles, Estok, and Morton offer a more nuanced analysis of these emotions and their relationship with the broader themes of ecophobia and posthumanism.

Ecophobia and Claustrophobia

By expanding on the subject of ecophobia and posthumanism, the instances of disidentification can be traced, which has been a defining characteristic of ecophobia. Disidentification is the inability of posthumans to connect themselves to their surroundings. They often find themselves enclosed and dislocated in a world where their hierarchical positioning is challenged by "others." Here, "other" can denote a machine, an animal, a monster, or nature. Human beings seem to have lost their central position and are decentralised by 'others'. The study shows that the decentralisation of posthumans causes the de-familiarisation of objects and places in their surroundings. The hard objects to identify are labelled "hyperobjects" by Morton. He explains hyperobjects as the ones that cause awe and fear among the posthumans due to their incomprehensible nature and enormity of size. The study at hand explores man's dislocation and lack of familiarisation, paving the way towards dis-identification, which in turn evokes feelings of insecurity, fear, and nostalgia (Braidotti 2013, p.6), thus leading the way towards another phobia traced in the present study, labeled claustrophobia.

Claustrophobia is a posthuman phobia, and it can be categorized into two broad types: fear of suffocating and fear of restriction (Rachman 1990, p.19). Vendermeer has skillfully revealed in the text that disidentification and de-familiarisation caused by the hyperobjects of Timothy Clark induce feelings of insecurity and nostalgia in various characters of the novel and can be read under the specific category of claustrophobia, which is yet another phobia plaguing our posthuman world. It can be inferred that suffocation and restriction are sub-categories of claustrophobia.

The handling of claustrophobia in the novel and linking it to anxiety reveal how Fear of restriction is caused when humans are unable to identify their surroundings and their unfamiliar objects. It is stated in the novel that the characters entering Area X are not allowed to use their names, their technological inventions, or anything related to their world. There seems to be a tension-fraught relationship between humans and Area X. Due to the tension, disidentification emerges on the part of posthumans. It starts when characters are named after their professions. The biologist unveils how they are stripped off their identities: "*A name was a dangerous luxury [...] Sacrifices didn't need names. People who served a function*

didn't need to be named" (*Annihilation*, p.134). The biologist cleverly reveals how identity is a dangerous luxury on the part of the characters entering that area. The word 'sacrifices' illustrates that they are sent into that area with a presupposed sacrifice. The sacrifice can be analysed in terms of death, disease, or anything else. She argues that by snatching away their names, Southern Reach makes them mere characters performing a ritual to win the war against ecology. This example indicates how cautiously the characters are manipulated by the authorities. Ecology is presented under the cloak of the enemy.

The fear of ecology forces posthumans to strip away the identities of expedition members, their names, and accepted norms and rituals. The feelings of nostalgia and insecurity can be traced in various characters of the novel, which is a further subcategory of claustrophobia. The biologist utters, "*I had the unsettling thought that the natural world around me had become a kind of camouflage*" (*Annihilation* p.77). In the given quote, her use of the word "camouflage" exhibits her suffocation upon entering that area. The question arises: how can the natural world be a camouflage for humans? Vendermeer's protagonist is the representative of all the posthumans who find themselves enmeshed in a web of events, things, and places that they do not know. Hyperobjects in Area X evoke feelings of anxiety and claustrophobia in the biologist because of her inability to comprehend the true nature of things or events taking place in or around her. Moreover, her use of the word 'natural' reveals that posthumans have alienated themselves from nature. Estok is also of the view that fear of ecology is embedded in our unconscious due to our inability to have a strong communion with nature.

The theme of claustrophobia is not only traced in the biologist but also her husband, when she states, "*My husband had claustrophobia; sometimes he even had to leave our bed in the middle of the night to go sleep on the deck*" (*Annihilation* p.126). The biologist's husband had nightmares and illusions, due to which he is always shown to be a claustrophobic character. Therefore, fear of confinement is not limited to Area X; rather, it can be traced in all the characters living in or outside of Area X. Posthuman claustrophobia is a further extension of ecophobia, as mentioned above concerning Estok. Here, Vendermeer has also revealed that the reactions of all the characters are different towards Area X. The biologist's nostalgic thoughts of her childhood, her problematic relationship with her husband, and her desire to go back into the past reveal how characters react quite differently when faced with restrictions.

Another character trapped in claustrophobia is the psychologist, whose claustrophobia reveals itself in her frenzied response of jumping out of the lighthouse, thus clearly indicating the enigmatic power of that area. She is shown to be living in her shell and is often described as being closed off emotionally and psychologically. The psychologist is unwilling to share information or connect with other characters of the expedition, which creates a sense of confinement and distance.

The psychologist's desire to be a part of that area and ocean can be scrutinised under the theory of Hayles's distributed cognition system, where she seems to have realised that posthumans are a pattern of the vast randomness of the universe. Hayles projected the idea that our universe can be taken as randomness, where humans, animals, ecology, and all the other living and non-living entities are patterns. Vendermeer has also skillfully delineated how the hyperobject nature of Area X has hypnotized the psychologist, and her dis-identification with that area has excited claustrophobia in her. Morton states that hyperobjects

are enormous and evoke feelings of awe and dread among humans. Area X, which is a hyperobject, seems to have control over the thoughts of characters that come into contact with it. It seems to have a cognition system of its own, as Hayles puts it. Accordingly, the dis-identification introduced by Braidotti of the posthuman world embeds claustrophobia in the biologist and the psychologist. The psychologist's inability to identify the biologist and her surrounding areas and her effort to keep hypnotic suggestions in the diary further exemplify posthumans' dislocation, leading them towards dis-identification of things, places, and persons. Hayles' theory of the 'distributive cognitive system' can also be traced, where Area X is quite mysteriously shaping the minds of the characters. Therefore, it is aptly identified how ecophobia is turning into claustrophobia and impeding the characters of the biologist and psychologist from getting a better understanding of their environment. It also provokes them to take destructive measures against nature and other posthumans. The theme of claustrophobia is fully justified in the context of Quan Wang's article where the blurring of boundaries is associated with that of ecophobia. The 'fearful loss of individual identity' (2019, p.3) projected by Wang can be traced in the form of claustrophobia in *Annihilation*. The psychologist, biologist, and all the other characters lose their identity in Area X, which proves the stance of the researchers concerning past studies.

Ecophobia and Paranoia

The study of dis-identification and claustrophobia of the Posthuman world connects it to paranoia, which is a defining characteristic of the Posthuman world. The researchers observe that paranoia is stemming out of Ecophobia and is closely associated with the irrational dread of nature embedded in the psyche of Posthumans. It is explained in the following words by Raihini(2017), who argues that the primary cause of paranoia is an excessive perception of a personal threat, which shows that paranoia also involves unfavorable social perceptions of others (p.5). The inability of the characters to differentiate the true nature of Area X accentuates a paranoid state, which has been explained as a vacuum of humanity; for a sense of communion between self and other is eroded by splitting it into two halves. The paranoid setting of the novel initiates right from the start of the novel, where the helplessness of the characters to discern the true identity of Area X and its occupants generates a paranoid and schizoid state among the characters and the readers alike. The disintegration of self leads to paranoia and hallucination stemming from the lack of comprehension and self-awareness.

It is observed in the novel that all the characters experience paranoia. The biologist is the first character who exhibits paranoia by raising questions about her senses and perceptions. When she examines the tissues of the crawler, she utters, "My samples told a series of cryptic jokes with punch lines I didn't understand" (*Annihilation*, p.58). The paranoia of the biologist is depicted in the way she doubts her perception and She finds her observations and microscope insufficient to grasp the changes taking place in Area X. Morton is of the view that the inability of humans to grasp the complexity of hyper objects evokes dread and repulsion in them and the researchers observe that paranoia is a form of dread aroused out of the lack of understanding of Area X

The start of the novel confronts the readers directly with the paranoid state of the protagonist that occupies her perception of the surroundings throughout the novel. The protagonist, the Biologist, observes a tower, "*Which was not supposed to be there*" (*Annihilation*, p.01). The information provided to the characters entering Area X proves

insubstantial and inaccurate in the face of reality. In the excerpt given above, the word ‘supposed’ reveals that expedition members do not have sufficient information, and they start doubting their senses. Through the biologist, it is known that all the expedition members are hypnotized and programmed to ensure the success of the expedition. The biologist, who inhales a nodule mistakenly while examining the written words inside the tower and gets contaminated, realizes her paranoid state after getting immune to the hypnotic suggestions used by the psychologist, owing to her contamination. She expresses her frustration in the following words, “*I realized the psychologist had tried to bind me with a hypnotic suggestion*” (*Annihilation*, p.25). In the above-mentioned token, the use of the expression ‘tried to bind’ evokes the feeling of suffocation and dread among the characters. Paranoia is often related to ignorance and illusions about the surrounding environment. The characters entering Area X do not have sufficient knowledge. Further, they are hypnotized by the psychologist to lose control over their minds. It can be argued that hypnotism connects the novel to paranoia, which is a Posthuman anxiety disorder that causes dread and fear in people. Posthumans try to get rid of paranoia by running away from nature and considering it their ultimate enemy. Estok is of the view that humans need not take leave from waste material and the environment, rather, confrontation is required to deal with its problems. Vendermeer hints at the harms that can arise due to the irrational Ecophobia embedded in the human psyche. It also suggests how Posthumans are unaware of the true nature of ecology owing to their ignorance and paranoia embedded in their intuitions by the media. The biologist is unable to grasp the transformations that are taking place in Area X. Her efforts to record and save her observations are impeded by certain anxiety and fear embedded in her psyche. To her surprise, all the other members are also facing a similar kind of fear, which depicts a paranoid state of Posthumans who encounter the stark realities of ecology with a biased attitude inculcated in their minds.

Another character exhibiting traces of paranoia is the character of the psychologist. It is owing to her paranoia that she does not perceive the plausibility of events taking place in Area X. Later on, her paranoia is depicted through her jumping from the rooftop of the lighthouse where she utters, “*You were a flame, scorching my gaze. A flame drifting across the salt flats, through the ruined village*” (*Annihilation*, p.98). Her failure to discern the biologist is due to her fear, which is a marked characteristic of the Posthuman world. The fear of ‘other’ is a defining characteristic of paranoia and is duly traced in the character portrayal of the psychologist. The researchers argue that paranoia is due to Ecophobia, and Estok labels it an “irrational fear” of the environment.

A similar kind of paranoia is observed in the surveyor who insists on recording every minute detail of Area X meticulously. The hypnotic suggestions employed by the psychologist also allude to political agendas of invincible powers to keep the masses unaware of the true nature of environmental issues, and can be viewed as a linking of Ecophobia to that of Posthumanism. Vendermeer has skillfully submerged the Ecological issues with those of Ecophobia, which Estok contends are baseless and irrational. He argues, “Fear of the loss of agency and the loss of predictability are what form the core of Ecophobia” (Estok 2009, p.40). Loss of agency has been discussed by Hayles when she urges the need to grapple with the new understanding of the world as randomness. Hayles argues that humans are not the dominating beings; rather, they are just a pattern in the vast randomness of this universe. The realization of this truth further accentuates Ecophobia in the characters who feel helpless in

facing the stark reality of being a part and not the whole. Thus, it is argued that Vendermeer has skillfully exhibited posthuman Ecophobia by depicting the paranoid state of the characters entering Area X. Maria Gooicoichea(2008) has associated paranoia with technoculture in her article 'The posthuman Ethos. Her study unveils the hidden complexities and anxieties of the posthuman world through a careful analysis of modern-day technoculture. However, the researchers suggest that paranoia can be the result of many causes, and one of these is our alienation and estrangement from nature. Though Goicoichea has defined paranoia in connection with technoculture, the researchers have interlinked it with Ecology. Thus, the study aptly justifies the presence of paranoia in posthuman characters.

Ecophobia and Schizophrenia

Another posthuman disease combined with paranoia is schizophrenia, which is a mental disorder causing inhuman and abnormal behavior of the characters towards things, places, and events. Schizophrenia has been characterized by a dreadful preoccupation with the inner world. The changes in the inner world affect only the inner world and split apart the inner and outer worlds (Dick, p.94). A bifurcation of personality occurs due to self-created assumptions primarily formed based on some misconception. The selected text has also unveiled posthuman schizophrenia, which is a form of fear where all the characters are unable to apprehend the plausibility of events. The implausibility of events can be assessed in terms of darkness, which is the main substance that permeates the whole of the novel. Biologist utters, "*Darkness seemed more alive to me, surrounding me like something physical. I can't even say it was a sinister presence*" (Annihilation, p.61). The biologist informs us that they were kept ignorant by the psychologist and Southern Reach about the true nature of Area X. The biologist articulates her frustration, "*We were programmed not to ask questions. That the lighthouse, representative or actual, might have been a subconscious trigger for a hypnotic suggestion*" (Annihilation, p.54). Thus, it is quite evident that the Southern Reach Trilogy was trying to hide something from the associates. Estok refers to the political maneuvering of the masses against nature, where people develop a nuanced view of nature. Schizophrenia is traced in all the characters entering that area, whether it is the biologist or the psychologist. On another occasion, the biologist utters, "*We knew everything... and we knew nothing*" (Annihilation, p.54). This lack of information on the part of the characters about Area X further heightens their anxiety.

Loss of predictability about the mechanisms of Area X causes ecophobia when biologists admit that they were not given any specific information about Area X. The biologist's schizophrenia is also exhibited in her confusion about accepting the tunnel as a tower. While all the other expedition members name it the Tunnel, she is the only one who insists on calling it the Tower. Later on, while exploring the tower, one of the spore nodules gets into her nostril through inhalation, and the bifurcation of her personality starts. Her obsession with her inner world is reflected through her brightness, which makes her immune to the hypnotic suggestions of the psychologist. She states, "*The spores had affected me. They had made me immune to the psychologist's hypnotic suggestions*" (Annihilation, p.2). Later on, readers come to know about her obsession with the inner world through her desire to immerse herself in the darkness. She relates in this connection, "*Some part of the brightness wanted to return to darkness at once*" (Annihilation, p.67). The schizophrenic tendency of the biologist manifests itself through her obsession with her inner world, where

she refuses to consider the significance of other events and beings around her. Initially, the readers are informed about the prohibition to use their names in Area X. They are not provided with tools, gadgets, or any other kind of weapon. All these things result in a paranoid and schizoid reaction in the characters.

The psychologist portrays the loose ends of schizophrenia in her misconception of the biologist as a flame, where the biologist records her hallucination in the following words, *"She had seen me as a flame approaching; she had attributed her inability to shoot me to some exterior force; she had been assailed by the fear of some approaching presence"* (Annihilation, p.105). In the excerpt mentioned above, the biologist highlights the schizophrenic condition of the psychologist, who is unable to recognise her. The mention of 'exterior force' reveals the dread embedded in the anxiety of posthumans related to 'others'. Posthumans are afraid of ecology, machines, aliens, and animals. They are phobic about being replaced by some outside agent. The use of the word "external force" reveals that posthumans are petrified of losing control over ecology. Katherine Hayles reflects on the concept of surrendering our control with the claim that, being situated within the interplay of pattern and randomness that is rooted in physical embodiment rather than abstract information, the posthuman seeks opportunities to reconsider the connection between humans and intelligent machines (Hayles, p.287). The fear of exterior force can also be assessed in the context of the fear of randomness, where Vendermeer seems to imply that humans need not be afraid of this randomness but rather embrace and accept it. It is crucial to comprehend the connectivity of all living beings with that of the universe. Thus, to get a better understanding of the universe, the interconnectivity of ecophobia and posthumanism needs to be acknowledged. Posthumans are in fear of losing control, and they consider ecology their ultimate enemy. Vendermeer has delineated that the psychologist's obsession with Area X draws a line between her and the other expedition members. She tries to get control over the other members by using hypnotic suggestions. Her preoccupation with Area X divides her into two halves, leading to schizophrenia. The schizoid state of her mind causes her to see the biologist as a flame or some external force approaching her. The psychologist is afraid of the biologist, considering her flame or some external force that is manifested in the form of ecophobia in Area X, which has been labeled by Estok as irrational.

The study depicts a paranoid state of all the expedition members entering Area X. It has investigated anxiety in the shape of paranoia emerging out of claustrophobia. The researchers have noted during the analysis that paranoia is working in collaboration with Ecophobia and undermines the psyche of the characters entering Area X. Paranoia is traced in almost all the characters entering Area X.

In an attempt to find different anxieties and fears of the Posthuman world, the study has shown yet another form of anxiety exhibiting itself as schizophrenia. Schizophrenia is a psychological abnormality in which people experience a dreadful preoccupation with fear towards their surrounding environment, including other people, places, and objects. In this anxiety disorder, the personality is divided into two halves, where hallucinations occur in the mind to create illusions owing to self-created assumptions. The text has illustrated certain instances of schizophrenia in all the characters experiencing it in one way or the other way. The improbability of events and objects evokes hallucination, which is primarily occurring due to the darkness that has been a substantial force introduced in the text. So, the root cause

of schizophrenia is the setting, which can be assessed in terms of randomness that envelops everything existing in that area.

There are various characters in the novel who exhibit traces of schizophrenia due to the strange and mysterious environment of Area X. The Biologist is shown to be suffering from schizophrenia. During the analysis of the text, the researchers have discovered her schizophrenia through her refusal to accept the tower as a tunnel and her insistence on calling it a tower. Her schizophrenia has created illusions in her mind and impeded her from distinguishing between the tower and the tunnel. The second and most striking example of her schizophrenia has been observed when she inhales mold spores while observing the writing script inscribed on the walls of the tower. The study has unveiled that it is at this point her personality starts dividing into two halves. One part of her persona wants to go away from that area, but another part of her loves to immerse herself in the pristine nature and the darkness of Area X. Her heightened observation and brightness help readers to get a deeper understanding of her schizophrenia. Under the influence of a split personality caused by schizophrenia, she kills the surveyor and decides to live in that area. The second character going through the tunnel of schizophrenia is the psychologist. She conceives the biologist's a flame owing to the illusions caused by schizophrenia. The researchers have assessed her jump from the rooftop of the lighthouse owing to ecophobia, which can be inferred as the ultimate end of schizophrenia. A similar trace of schizophrenia has been perceived in the persona of the surveyor, who has developed a kind of animosity towards the biologist and tried to kill her to get rid of the feeling of ecophobia. Therefore, the misconception and ignorance related to hyperobjects can appear in severe forms of anxiety and phobia, which is the main question of this study, where the researchers have observed ecophobia evolving out of ignorance of hyperobjects and paving the way towards a catastrophic end. Thus, the study has aptly uncovered Ecophobia, which is the root cause of various anxieties and fears emerging in this Posthuman world.

Conclusion

The study has aptly justified that posthuman paranoia and ecophobia have surfaced owing to man's alienation from ecology. It has been discovered that paranoid posthuman ecophobia is inculcated due to the hybridization and dis-identification of posthumans with ecology. The researchers have noted that lack of familiarity on the part of Posthumans springs from their ignorance of other significant patterns and cognitive systems operating in the universe, by justifying the perspectives of Katherine Hayles and Estok. A schizoid world sketched out in the novel depicts a lack of control over ecology. Ecophobia and paranoid posthumanism are interconnected, as they both deal with psychological complexities of posthumans related to ecology. The present research suggests that paranoid ecophobia is an engineering of fear in the minds, and it is required to overcome it. It is observed that most of the studies have only dealt with the fear of paralysis related to ecology and ignored the underlying causes of ecophobia and anxiety. The present study not only discovers the cause of paranoid posthuman ecophobia but also hints at searching for survival strategies to subdue it. So, the study is a detailed analysis of our inability to comprehend the nature of hyperobjects, foregrounding claustrophobia and provoking humans to take measures against it. Claustrophobia has been exhibited through the in-depth scrutiny of the biologist, the psychologist, and the surveyor. The study has also addressed the problems related to narcissistic impulses of paranoia and schizophrenia to trace Posthuman fears and anxieties.

Thus, it may be argued that the research has convincingly answered the question related to the emergence of different fears and tensions in the Posthuman world.

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