

## **Temporal Transportation in the Anthropocene Novel**

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**Published in:**

Vol. 4, Issue 2 (2020), pp. 17-31.

**Section:**

Articles

# Temporal Transportation in the Anthropocene Novel

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*Abstract: The Anthropocene is a geological age defined by humankind's rapid and accelerating effect on the earth's environs. Literature written in and about the Anthropocene must take into consideration the issue of scale: planetary changes and distress happen on a level far beyond the scope of an individual's capacity to process that change. Russian formalists were the first to identify how stories contend with temporal and spatial distortion through narrative techniques; the following analysis of two pieces of Anthropocene literature, Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2008) and Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013), identifies how these techniques – fabula and sjuzet – make the incomprehensibility of vast time and space immediate for the reader. It is incontestable that “narrative is, indeed, magical in the ways that it can performatively enact new ways of being” (Lovell n.p.) – and the novel is an ideal form for transcending time and space in the age of the Anthropocene.*

*Keywords: Anthropocene, fabula, postmodernism, narratology, temporality*

## **T**emporal transportation in the Anthropocene novel

Ursula Heise, in *From the Blue Planet to Google Earth*, argues that in the Anthropocene – the new geological era, brought about by human impact on our planet – construction of “place” is complicated by scale. The problem, she states, is “how we might be able to develop cultural forms of identity and belonging that are commensurate with the rapid growth in political, economic, and social interconnectedness that has characterized the last few decades” (n.p.). The temporal and spatial scale of the geological force that humankind has on earth makes it difficult to conceptualize our own individual part in that force. As Timothy

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† Thank you to dr. K. Steenbergh and dr. R. van den Oever for your support and guidance. Thank you to ZMJ; my very first and very best editor.

Clark notes, "in daily life we lack any immediate sense of the Earth as a finite planet. Environmental damage happening at that scale remains usually counter-intuitive and even invisible" (22).

To be sure, this scaling problem offers a challenge to Anthropocene literature that attempts to forge connections between the narrative and the reader's sense of planetary distress. There are obvious "narrative and imaginative limitations [...] posed by the spatial and temporal scale of some of the processes that mark the Anthropocene" (Von Mossner 83). How, then, can we make the scale of the Anthropocene perceivable? Or, as Adam Trexler asks in *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*: "What tropes are necessary to comprehend climate change or to articulate the possible futures faced by humanity? How can a global process, spanning millennia, be made comprehensible to human imagination, with its limited sense of place and time?" (5). Can literature – can a novel – construct a narrative that helps resolve the scale issues of place and planetary belonging in the Anthropocene?

By examining two Anthropocene-centric novels – Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007) and Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013) – it becomes clear that narrative shifts in the temporal dimension and non-linear, postmodern representations of time in literature can address these spatial and scale problems. Following an essential theoretical overview of narrative techniques that allow stories to transcend space and time, a close reading of these narrative strategies in *The Stone Gods* and *A Tale for the Time Being* will demonstrate how both authors construct worlds in which temporality and a character's place in time are key elements in the plot, and shows how the novel, as a form, is able to tackle the problems posed by concepts of scale in relation to place.

### **Issues of scale**

One of the primary concerns of conceptualizing the Anthropocene is that we as a species are acting as a geological force, but, as Dipesh Chakrabarty states in "The Climate of History: Four Theses," "we humans never experience ourselves as a species. We can only intellectually comprehend or infer the existence of the human species but never experience it as such [...] one never experiences being a concept" (220). Similarly, one cannot experience the effects of the anthropogenic force of our species; climate change, for instance, cannot be felt or experienced as such, because its scale, on a planetary level, extends far beyond the realm of human understanding. Climate change is what Timothy Morton calls a "hyperobject" – an object so large in scale that it defies human comprehension, leaving us unable to grasp the scope of our effect on the planet. We are unable to place ourselves within

the machination of the Anthropocene because of the sheer size of that machination.

It is not only the size of the problem that transcends human imagination; it is also the temporal scale. Rob Nixon has called humanity's long-term effects on the planet "slow violence," stating that "maintaining a [...] focus on slow violence poses acute challenges, not only because it is spectacle deficient, but also because the fallout's impact [...] may stretch beyond the horizon of imaginable time" (47). This temporal dimension of the Anthropocene again makes it difficult to conceptualize planetary distress caused by human actions. As Nixon notes, it is a "temporal question [...] how do you dramatize the costs of uneven development when their delayed effects are intimate but their genesis is far-off in time?" (52).

In "Imagining Geological Agency: Storytelling in the Anthropocene," Alexa Weik Von Mossner argues that literature has the ability to effectively circumvent the problems of spatial and temporal scale. Storytelling, she argues, "can [...] help us to imaginatively experience the impact of the geophysical force that is the human" (84). It does so "through psychological activities that narratologists and psychologists of fiction call transportation and performance" (Von Mossner 84). Transportation makes use of the transformative nature of narratives to transport the reader into the story world, while performance is the reader's engagement with the text – the "act of imagining" which is "crucial to our understanding" (Von Mossner 85). Through these processes, the reader is able to actively engage with the large-scale concepts of the Anthropocene, as long as the narrative is constructed in a way that allows the text to imaginatively transport the reader. "Reading transforms the mind through processes of transportation, cognitive estrangement, strategic empathizing, and other narrative techniques" (Von Mossner 86); these techniques can be used to "scale down" the temporal scale of the Anthropocene, allowing readers to comprehend the previously incomprehensible. In other words, in order to make the scope of the Anthropocene perceivable to the reader, the author must employ techniques to zoom both "in" and "out," much like a camera, on large-scale concepts such as planet and time.

### **Narratological devices: "Time told differently"**

To examine how these transformations in temporal scale function in literary texts, it is useful to discuss the terms that narratology uses to describe time. "Russian formalists were the first to distinguish between '*fabula*' (or 'story time') and '*sjuzet*' (or 'narrative time')," according to Theodore Martin's "Temporality and Literary Theory." Story time is the chronologically ordered events of the story, while in narrative time, those same events are rearranged, expanded, or contracted by the

narrative. Martin draws on Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse* to define the concepts of "order, duration, and frequency" in narrative texts, describing how to understand the relation between story time and narrative time. Order "refers to the relation between the order of events in the story and the alternate order those same events are given in the narrative. Differences in order produce "narrative anachronies," allowing the narrative to exercise "temporal autonomy – that is, for a vision of temporality that has been freed from the chronological order of both story time and lived experience" (Martin n.p.). Duration describes the ability of narratives to speed up or slow down the amount of time the events of a story actually take versus the amount of time the narrative takes to describe them. Finally, frequency can "describe the narrative temporality of repetition, which allows a narrative both to return multiple times to a single event and to condense multiple happenings of an event into a single instance of narration" (Martin n.p.). Together, these three terms – order, duration, frequency – allow for an analysis of the ability of narratives to play with the concept of time, a "temporal distortion" through narrative techniques.

Martin goes on to describe different categories of time, including modern time, non-modern time, national time, and natural time – discussing deep time and the geological timescale of the Anthropocene, the "complex temporalities of the planet and the climate" that underpin the "formal and representation dilemmas posed by climatological time" previously discussed. Of particular interest to Anthropocene literature, however, is the concept of postmodern time, which can be seen as "challenging a more traditional experience of temporal continuity" (n.p.). Martin cites Ursula Heise's *Chronoschisms*, wherein she states that the "multiple alternative temporalities that structure postmodern novels force readers to reflect on the ways that time is scientifically and technologically determined in the postmodern present – and to think beyond those forms of determination in order to imagine what it might look like for time to be told differently" (n.p.). It is this different formation of time – time told differently – which transcends the difficulties of scale in Anthropocene literature, and which will be examined in closer detail in regards to Winterson's and Ozeki's texts.

It is also useful to turn to Mikhail Bakhtin, who, in "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics," first coined the term "chronotope," or "literally 'time space'" (15) to describe how conceptions of time and space are represented in narratives, and how this concept is essential to the very idea of narrative. For Bakhtin, the essential point of representations of time and space was the "*representational* importance of the chronotope" (22) – that is, that narratives can allow "time [...] [to] become, in effect, palpable and visible" (22).

This is an essential part of what Anthropocene literature must do; it must overcome problems of representation to allow the large-scale concepts of time and space in relation to human planetary effect to become palpable. Bakhtin notes that “all the novel's abstract elements – philosophical and social generalizations, ideas, analyses of cause and effect – gravitate toward the chronotope and through it take on flesh and blood” (22). It is not enough for Anthropocene literature to simply state facts of planetary distress and climate change; it does not resonate with the reader, leaves no lasting effect, falls short of communicating its essential message. Instead, literature requires the interplay of narrative time and space – the chronotope – to “permit [...] the imaging power of art to do its work” (22). Thus, it is important and worthwhile to examine specific works of Anthropocene literature for how, exactly, they manipulate and highlight the chronotope to accomplish their essential work.

### **Repetition of destruction: *The Stone Gods***

In *The Stone Gods* (2007), Jeanette Winterson foregrounds the temporal dimension by structuring her novel in three sections that take place in three very different times – the first section, approximately 65 million years ago, on the planet Orbus; the second, on eighteenth-century Easter Island; and the third, on (presumably) planet Earth some time in our near future, “post 3-War,” after nuclear destruction has rendered parts of the planet uninhabitable. All three of these separate story worlds feature iterations of the same characters – Spike, a humanoid robot, and Billie, the protagonist. This repetition echoes the themes of planetary destruction and human carelessness across multiple timescales, allowing the reader to conceptualize the long-term effects of these thematic realities on our own planet. An emphasis is put on the ability for these themes to reoccur over vastly different times and spaces.

At multiple points, Winterson's characters voice versions of the following refrain: “a repeating world – same old story.” Although some of the details of the reiterated tale of colonization, ecological destruction, war, same-sex love, and living at the brink of the planet's carrying capacity change, the overarching trajectory of each is the same (Merola 128).

Thus, Winterson makes use of the narratological “frequency” to create the postmodern “temporal distortion” which, for the reader, implicates humanity on the species level as the cause of that ecological destruction.

In the first section, Orbus is presented as a futuristic planet, leading the reader to believe that the events of the first section take place in the far future: "To stress [the] iterative tale of destruction, Winterson deliberately misleads the reader about the temporal setting of Orbus in part one" (Mertens and Craps 147). Throughout Billie's descriptions of genetic "fixing," which allows humans to remain the same age, Robo sapiens, and self-driving solar powered vehicles, she characterizes her world through an alphabet game – and "F is for Future" (Winterson 26). The combined effect of these details is to convince the reader that the setting of the book is in the distant future, which includes scientific advancements far beyond those familiar to us. This temporal displacement is one of the key elements of the novel that causes the reader to consider human impact in the Anthropocene by "scaling" through different imagined timeframes. The novel, spread across the stars and uncertain timeframes, dates, and years, "zooms out" from the present, past, or future, and "collapses" them into one story. The effect on the reader is marked: what does it mean to consider our past as future, or the future of our own planet written in its past (Anthropocenic effects)? By emphasizing that our future could be our past, Winterson sheds new light on our current situation: "when the reader finds out that this supposed future is actually a distant past, this raises the question: what if our imagined future were our past? Through this temporal confusion, Winterson in a sense places the reader in a present beyond our present to look back on our time to see what we are doing to the planet" (Mertens and Craps 148). Winterson employs a narrative time that inverts the reader's expectations, which in turn asks the reader to consider Orbus's past as our future, defined by its path to certain destruction.

While this type of narrative flourish certainly has its precursors in science fiction, what is remarkable about Winterson's use of this perhaps slightly clichéd trope is its very focused purpose. Winterson here does not just want to trick the reader; she wants to trick the reader so that the reader can conceptualize hitherto unconsidered futures where the actions of humans *now* destroy that very future. To clarify; this is not a new trope, but it comes into new focus when the trope is employed specifically to evoke a response for an Anthropocene reader, addressing contemporary concerns about the state of our planet currently.

Destruction is echoed across temporal borders throughout the text; when Billie and the spaceship's crew head to colonize Planet Blue and leave the decimated Orbus in their wake, they discuss a third planet: Planet White. The planet is a ghost, left behind by another civilization which had pushed the planet past the brink and destroyed it completely:

We found a planet, and it was white like a shroud [...] as white and cold as death, as hot as rage. The planet is a raging death. Or it is a thing that has been killed and rages to be dead [...] A proud place this had been, one upon a time, once upon a time like the words in a fairytale (Winterson 62-63).

This whiteness, a blank depiction of destruction, is later echoed in Billie's second description of Wreck City, an area outside of her city destroyed by nuclear war: "The ugliness of the ruins – that was a shock – the ugliness of what we had built, the ugliness of how we had destroyed it, the brutal, stupid, money-soaked, drunken binge of twenty-first-century world. Whiteout. Done" (Winterson 194). Nicole Merola argues that this repetition of the whiteness motif highlights the temporal distortion in the novel:

Wreck City [...] underline[s] Winterson's use of multiple temporal and spatial scales and her logic of repetition. While technically these two locations are not yet geologic strata, the novel's looping, intra- and extratextually intertextual structure directly connects Wreck City and the dead Forest with their ghostly echoes on Planet White" (Merola 128).

Repetition frees the text from "story time," giving the novel the temporal autonomy that characterizes postmodern narratives. For Winterson, repetition is temporal distortion, simply by noting what, exactly, she chooses to repeat. These same images and motifs, pointedly repeated over moments that the reader is meant to think are distinctly separate in time and space, are intentionally repeated to make readers stop and reconsider the perhaps otherwise more fixed boundaries of temporality in traditional narratives.

Winterson also employs metatextual narrative strategies to emphasize the fluidity of the temporal boundaries of the novel. In part three, Billie discovers a manuscript while riding the subway:

*The Stone Gods*, said the title. OK, must be anthropology [...] I flicked through it. No point starting at the beginning – nobody ever does [...] I had another look. *Everything is imprinted for ever with what it once was*. Is that true? (Winterson 143-144).

This self-referential moment moves the text through multiple timescales, from the distant past of Orbus and eighteenth-century Easter Island to the Billie reading the novel itself on the tube. This moment creates a narrative anachrony for the reader (a moment of discrepancy in story-order and text-order; “hopping” through *fabula* and *sjuzet*), allowing the text itself to drive the story. This is a classical postmodern meta-move on Winterson’s part; the existence of the book in the reader’s hands creates the book on the subway seat, which again implicates the real world in a “fiction.” The presence of the same book the reader is then holding in the narrative disrupts the concept of time and place; without Billie picking up the same story being read, there is no story at all. The narrative is thus focused on nonlinear, metaphysical timescales, and Winterson here employs metafiction to highlight this nonlinearity. As Adam Trexler notes, “climate fiction has increasingly allowed nonhuman things to shape narrative. The best Anthropocene novels are not solely ‘character-driven’” (26). Here, in this moment, the character of Billie is secondary to the narrative, and, by extension, secondary to the real-life implications of Anthropocene concerns. Winterson continually uses metatextual elements and multiple timescales to drive the narrative, which comes to a point when Billie and Spike of part three discover a signal that appears to have been sent by the Billie and Spike of part one:

Wherever it's coming from, it's been set like an echo [...] Billie, I think it is something very strange, very old, and at the same time in front of us (Winterson 222).

By inverting time in this moment, Winterson again uses the logic of repetition and echoes to take the reader out of story time and stress the ability of narrative time to collapse timescales in Anthropocene literature. As discussed, temporality is one of the large-scale issues that Anthropocene literature must contend with; but, as Winterson recognizes, narratives have the ability to bend temporality in a way that a new message – both small and incomprehensibly large – can be communicated. The entire novel is built around a concept of inverted narrative time, which addresses problematic temporality in a satisfactory way, so that the narrative structure of *The Stone Gods* transcends spatial and temporal boundaries, allowing the reader to comprehend the large-scale concepts of planetary destruction echoed across multiple, repeating timelines.

### **Temporal entanglement: *A Tale for the Time Being***

*A Tale for the Time Being* (2013) by Ruth Ozeki is a different kind of Anthropocene literature; although it takes place entirely on planet Earth, it still makes use of flexible narrative time in order to circumvent the limits of spatial and temporal scale. It tells the story of Ruth, a writer living on a remote island in Canada, who discovers a diary washed up on the beach. The diary is written by Nao, a sixteen-year-old Japanese girl. The novel begins with Nao:

My name is Nao, and I am a time being [...] A time being is someone who lives in time, and that means you, and me, and every one of us who is, or was, or ever will be [...] by the time you read this, everything will be different, and you will be nowhere in particular, flipping idly through the pages of this book (Ozeki 3).

From the very beginning, then, Ozeki foregrounds time, asking the reader to consider multiple timescales while engaging with the text. Ruth, reading the diary, decides to match her time with Nao's:

How do you search for lost time, anyway? As she thought about this question, it occurred to her that perhaps a clue lay in the pacing. Nao had written her diary in real time, living her days, moment by moment. Perhaps if Ruth paced herself by slowing down and not reading faster than the girl had written, she could more closely replicate Nao's experience (Ozeki 38).

This, of course, necessitates that the reader pace their engagement with the text to match both Nao's writing and Ruth's reading of the diary. Rocio Davis notes that the layers of the text blend "narrative voices," which in turn "foregrounds the relationship between and among writers and their readers" (87). By structuring the novel in this way, Ozeki plays with narrative time, allowing Nao to "speak" to Ruth – and the reader – across spatial and temporal boundaries. Sue Lovell argues that this challenges the reader's perception of their own place in time and space:

Ruth and Nao's stories are [...] temporally dislocated because Nao's story of the writing of the diary occurs before Ruth's story of finding it [...] This feature and the positioning of empirical readers are vital narrative strategies for creating receptivity to the idea of porous

boundaries between these story worlds, so there is a challenge to the sole reality of the original *actual* world (Lovell n.p.).

Thus, a reader of the novel might step back from considering Ruth's and Nao's respective places in time and planet to ask themselves – what is *my* place in the Anthropocene?

Ruth quickly becomes obsessed with finding Nao and discovering how the diary reached her shores. She formulates a hypothesis that the lunchbox containing the diary was carried over the ocean following the wake of the 2011 tsunami that hit Japan. In a rumination on the aftermath of that tsunami, Ozeki describes “stone markers found on hillsides, engraved with ancient warnings: Do not build your homes below this point!” The mayor of the town describes them as “the voices of our ancestors, [who] were speaking to us across time, but we didn’t listen” (114). This emphasizes the ability of a text to communicate a warning across temporal scales; the warnings, like Nao's diary, are evidence that narratives can transcend time. Books that reach us by sea years after the fact; warnings carved into stone by our ancestors; stories passed down from generation to generation – these are all evidence that narratives move through time, reach us at a point distinct from where they originated. They are also a marker of Nixon’s notion of “slow violence,” exposing “the uneven timelines and multiple speeds of environmental terror” (61). The passage goes on to describe “a tidal wave” that “collapses into tiny particles, each one containing a story ... [these images] drawn into the gyre's becalmed center, the garbage patch of history and time” (Ozeki 114). This “temporal gyre” (Ozeki 114) is representative of the shifting timescales of a story that Ozeki utilizes to displace the reader, allowing the impact of a natural disaster like the tsunami to be emotionally experienced, collapsing Nixon’s “imaginable time” into the narrative.

In her search for Nao, Ruth emails a professor whose work on suicide in Japan includes a letter from someone named Harry, who Ruth suspects may be Nao's father. While waiting for the answer to her email, she describes her impatience as “[a] temporal stuttering, an urgent lassitude, a feeling of simultaneous rushing and lagging behind” (Ozeki 227). This rushing and lagging behind may in fact mirror the experience that the reader has while engaging with Nao's story; Ozeki goes on to typographically represent this feeling:

thisis**whatt**temporalstuttering**FEELS**LIKElikeeastutstut**STUTTER****RUS**  
**HIN G**FORWARDin**TIME** (Ozeki 228).

Then the page goes blank; a classic postmodern move. The effect is certainly distinctive and pointed, aimed at translating the feeling of time passing; this “spatial disruption visually communicates the disorienting impact of lost time, the blank pages carrying readers into an experience of the void of timelessness. Once again, Ozeki’s discursive strategies constitute readers’ experience: time stutters, and it is then suspended altogether” (Lovell n.p.). Thus, Ozeki demonstrates the ability of a narrative to mimic the reality of being in time, translating the stillness of a moment in time into a blank page. This collapsing of time is also described in an appendix on quantum mechanics:

quantum mechanics is also time being [...] entanglement: by which two particles can coordinate their properties across space and time and behave like a single system (i.e. a Zen master and his disciple; a character and her narrator) (Ozeki 409).

The entanglement between the narrative and the reader throughout the novel causes the temporal distortion defined by narratological theory, manipulating the concept of time for both the reader and Ruth.

This temporal entanglement comes to a head for Ruth when Oliver, her husband, points out that in the process of reading the diary, Ruth has lost sense of actual time. She writes to the professor that it is a matter of urgency, but as Oliver points out, “it’s not like this is happening now, right? (Ozeki 313). The diary was, in fact, written more than a decade ago, “and we know the diary’s been floating around for at least a few years longer” (Ozeki 313). Ozeki goes on to describe Ruth’s reaction to this revelation as a sort of “slippage,” pointing out that “the days got jumbled together, and entire weeks or months or even years would yield to the ebb and flow of the dream...Fiction had its own time and logic. That was its power” (Ozeki 313-314). Reading Nao’s diary has literally taken Ruth – and, by extension, the reader – out of her time, causing her to forget when, exactly, the diary may have been written. When Nao catches up with herself in the diary, Ruth turns the page to discover that it is blank, where it had previously continued to the very end of the book (notably and suitably bound inside of Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*). Ruth is visualizing Nao’s lost time: “It’s like her life just got shorter. Time is slipping away from her, page by page...” (Ozeki 343). It is not until Ruth intervenes in Nao’s story, through a dream sequence, that the diary comes to its conclusion; in this way, as Rocio Davis notes: “the writers and readers in the text [...] participate in multilayered acts of creating themselves and each other” (94). Ruth has to intervene in a story that, as Oliver pointed out, took place long ago: this is again Heise’s

postmodern “time told differently,” a narrative which requires the characters to actually move through time to construct the story. In a narrative, time can be manipulated; “where time itself is so porous, challenging ontological boundaries between worlds and expanding possible ways of being human are also expanded in ways most alluring,” narratives that play with time ask readers “to open ourselves to the probability, rather than the possibility, that narrative is, indeed, magical in the ways that it can performatively enact new ways of being” (Lovell n.p.). Without this porous time, without the inversion of narratological order, Nao’s diary could not reach its conclusion; the temporal dimension, then, becomes a key element in the novel, driving the story.

*A Tale for the Time Being* does not, perhaps, so obviously and immediately reveal itself as a piece of Anthropocene literature in the way *The Stone Gods* does. However, through a close reading, one can see that the postmodern elements of manipulated temporality in Ozeki’s novel are purposeful in their focus – and that focus is decidedly Anthropocene. While a far-off dead planet in the future is perhaps an obvious choice for imagining the long-term effects of humanity’s effect on the earth, it is more difficult – and possibly requires a more nuanced use of narrative strategy – to make readers see that their actions have an immediate destructive consequence. Ozeki’s hillside warnings and Nao’s tsunami highlight the folly of humanity as “masters” of the earth; these disasters, unfortunate and uncontrollable consequences of exponentially growing, Anthropocene-driven climate change, need a more concrete connection. Ozeki’s use of anachronistic, postmodern temporality arguably makes that connection slightly more real for the reader.

That Ozeki invokes the temporal gyre to describe this postmodern temporality is no small thing when we consider how the Anthropocene novel can make real-world connections between large-scale problems and the reader. A reader “in the know” will of course connect the temporal gyre to the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a large vortex of trash floating in the Pacific Ocean as readers today turn the pages of *Tale for the Time Being*. Like the earth itself, or climate change, the Pacific trash vortex can be seen as a hyperobject, a stain on the planet so large that even a photograph or documentary that tries to communicate the scope of this horrible bit of “rubbish” might well fail to communicate the scale of the problem to a viewer. This is where the Anthropocene novel might shine a light on humanity’s planetary effect; while a photo of garbage floating in the ocean could evoke a flash emotional response, a novel – a temporally manipulated narrative – could, arguably, leave a more lasting “gyre” in the minds of readers than simply *showing* the Anthropocene visually.

### **Redefining temporalities in the Anthropocene**

Although *The Stone Gods* (2007) and *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013) are two very different novels, both engage with the Anthropocene through postmodern narrative techniques which manipulate order and frequency to create new, flexible temporalities. Jeanette Winterson's use of repetition across multiple times and planets creates a narrative echo, transcending time to allow the reader to conceptualize planetary disaster on its largest scale. The deliberate inversion of time asks readers to consider "how the temporality of the future" (or the distant past, as in part one) "determines the ecological crisis as a point of reference that defines the contemporary" (Parikka 138). Ruth Ozeki employs a fluid, almost magical temporality that her characters, and the reader, must contend with; without this temporal manipulation, the story itself cannot be told. As Sue Lovell notes, "both Ruth and the empirical reader are aligned across an ontological boundary as readers of Nao's diary and in their struggle to understand and attribute a truth status to it" (n.p.). The novel constructs an identity for the reader as a "time being" who, like Ruth, must navigate through Ozeki's narrative time to understand Nao's story, dictated through a diary which has moved through time and space to reach us.

What, exactly, is at stake when authors manipulate narrative forms in this way? What purpose do the narrative techniques first outlined by Russian formalists serve? When examining Anthropocene novels, the answer becomes clear – it is through postmodern manipulation of these techniques that narratives can contend with issues of comprehension that seem beyond human understanding. In relation to human effect on the climate and the planet, it is essential that fiction – perhaps all media – is able to effectively communicate these issues. What is more, doing so creatively, in an engaging way, as these two novels have done, can perhaps contribute to real change on a planetary scale. While literary texts often employ techniques like repetition, these novels demonstrate that narrative manipulation can take on a new dimension in relation to the Anthropocene – these authors employ narratological inversions not only for rhetorical flourish but for a pointed *purpose*. Natural disasters are an immediate problem; helping humanity to understand that these disasters may be a direct consequence of human action on the planet is less immediate. Repetition, temporal distortion, transportation: these narrative features can serve the specific purpose of highlighting humanity's planetary effect, making the previously unimaginable comprehensible for the reader.

By examining these two novels for evidence of temporal manipulation, noting how both authors use narrative time to shape the story, it becomes clear

that the novel does indeed have the ability to transcend the large-scale problems that come with comprehending the Anthropocene. As Von Mossner argues, “[a]ll stories about the Anthropocene keep pushing against the boundaries of what is currently imaginable” (85); they can do so by playing with order and frequency to construct a chronotope that crosses physical and temporal boundaries. It is through this non-linear, postmodern narrative temporal manipulation that the novel is able to transport the reader, through white nuclear winters, across distant dead planets, and over the formidable waves of a decade-old tsunami, allowing the full scope of the Anthropocene to be understood. In Anthropocene literature, “fictionalizing [the Anthropocene] is not about falsifying it, or making it imaginary, but rather about using narrative to heighten its reality” (Trexler 75). Different narrative modes of engagement – with postmodern time as the key concept driving the novel – allow for the reader to feel the scope of ecological disaster and conceptualize their own place and planet. Narratives can resolve issues of space and place by redefining temporal reality in the text, making the chronotopes of Anthropocene literature both identifiable and essential to raising human awareness of the Anthropocene.

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