

An Anthropocene Dystopia: Helen Simpson's *Diary of an Interesting Year*

Niğmet Çetiner

Lecturer

Kastamonu University, TURKEY.

Article History: Submitted-06/12/2020, Revised-25/12/2020, Accepted-30/12/2020, Published-31/12/2020.

Abstract:

“Diary of an Interesting Year” is a cautionary climate fiction short story by Helen Simpson set in England in the near future depicting the condition of the Earth and societies after the much-dreaded results of global warming. The story is written in epistolary form as diary entries which heightens the sense of reality and makes it easy to associate with the unnamed character who writes the diary. The readers acquire the information regarding the collapse of social institutions including social security and health care management after “the Big Melt” through the character’s subjective point of view. The narrator who is hinted to be a woman experiences every kind of challenges from the simplest to much more complicated. Humans become the predators of their own species invading homes, imposing every kind of discomfort and driving each other out while news of cannibalism is conveyed through radio broadcast. The aim of this paper is to scrutinize the dystopian setting in Helen Simpson’s short story which is created by human impact through the lens of the Anthropocene.

Keywords: Helen Simpson, Global Warming, Dystopian, Anthropocene, cannibalism.

Introduction

Helen Simpson was born in Bristol in 1956. She grew up near a large town named Croydon in the south of London. She studied English Literature at Oxford University. She researched and wrote a thesis on 17th century Restoration Farce. She worked at Vogue for five years. She published two cookery books. Later she started to work as a free-lance writer and published several short story collections. *Four Bare Legs in a Bed and Other Stories* (1990) is her first short story collection that won Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year Award and a Somerset Maugham Award. *Dear George and Other Stories* (1995) includes eleven short stories that tackles everyday situations and the characters that everyone can associate with. The stories in *Hey Yeah Get a Life*

(2000) is about women who strive for finding an identity as a woman and a parent at the same time despite all the challenges they face. *Constitutional* (2005) is another collection by the author that allows the reader to witness the inner selves of the characters who are in their late 30s or 40s. In *In-Flight Entertainment* (2010), there are stories with characters some of whom are self-aware about the ills of technology and environmental issues. *A Bunch of Fives: Selected Stories* (2012) includes five stories from each her previous short-story collections. *Cockfosters* (2015) is her sixth short-story collection mostly about the experiences of middle-aged women from the places that give their names to the stories from Cockfosters in England to a Greek Island named Kythera. In *Motherhood* (2017), there are selected stories from her three other collections, *Dear George*, *Hey Yeah Right Get a Life* and *Constitutional*. This collection has stories that deal with the everyday struggles of parents especially of mother as indicated in the name of the book. Her short stories are celebrated as they mirror day-to-day lives with ordinary situations and people that proves the writer as a keen observer. They undeniably capture the readers' imagination as they find it both amusing and thought-provoking to read about the lives of contemporary fellow humans which bear similarities to that of the readers'.

In this study, the first of the stories and the namesake of the book, the story titled "Diary of an Interesting Year" which is the twelfth story in *In-Flight Entertainment* (2010), a collection of thirteen short stories by Helen Simpson, will be examined. It was first published in *The New Yorker* in 2009 and it is still available on its website. It won the PEN/O. Henry Prize in 2011. In the same year, it was published in *I'm with the Bears: Short Stories from A Damaged Planet*, one of whose contributors was Margaret Atwood.

Of all the collections of Simpson, *In-Flight Entertainment* (2010) is the most eco-conscious one. In the stories of *In-Flight Entertainment* aside from "Diary", the indications of an approaching global catastrophe are looming over the characters some of whom converse about the issues from carbon footprint ensuing travel by plane to global warming. Many of the stories in the book has a touch of eco-didacticism with an eco-lesson to teach explicitly uttered by the characters. This aspect of the stories may make them seem too preachy from the reader's point of view. The environmental disaster pivoting on the characters takes shape in "Diary" portraying the consequences of human negligence faced by both humans and nonhuman environments. "Diary of an Interesting Year" prophesying the disasters stemming from technological developments that

paved the way to the Anthropocene is Simpson's one of the most thought-provoking stories. Pieces of fiction such as "Diary" provide an insight to the reader about how it might be to live in a world devastated by the developments that are anthropogenic in origin.

"Diary" reflects the dire consequences of the global warming that is the hallmark of the recent geological era, The Anthropocene, age of humans, with its unofficial name coined by Eugene Stoermer and popularized by Paul Crutzen. It denotes the human activities that are the new forces shaping the geological structure of the Earth. Its onset is speculated to be rooted in the time of Industrial Revolution that heightened the carbon emissions in the atmosphere leading to the anthropogenic global warming. "Diary" is an exemplary piece of work that reflects the dire consequences of global warming in that a dystopian world where disasters disturb the cultural sphere as well as the natural one suffers, brought down by culture itself in the Anthropocene, is congealed in it. It reflects possible horrors brewing in the Anthropocene or horrors that are not hard to extrapolate, yet they are avoided to be pondered upon as though it will make them nonexistent. On the whole, the story presents a medium to muse on how the anthropogenic activities resulting in floods, rising sea levels, diseases, decrease in the biodiversity and agricultural lands pave the way to drought and hunger. As a result, it gives rise to social collapse, creating a dystopian world where inter-human violence of every kind as well as governmental dictatorship in the form of compulsory billeting and martial law take place.

A Note on the Anthropocene

Although there is still no agreement on when exactly the Anthropocene began, some scientists claim that the birth of the Anthropocene lies with the dawn of the Industrial Revolution (late 1700s- early 1900s). It denotes to the process in which the economy based on agriculture and handicraft changes into the one based on industry and a machine-dependent production ("Industrial Revolution"). It started in Britain and later spread to the rest of Europe. During this period, the dependence on manpower diminished and the dependence on machine power increased. Factories whose power was supplied by steam engine and internal combustion engine were established. Fossil fuels such as coal and petroleum were the fuels that were burned to keep these engines working. Subsequently, significant developments took place in the areas of transportation and communication, such as the steam locomotive, steamship, automobile, airplane, telegraph, and radio, and, in the upcoming years, significant developments in the scientific fields, including the

discovery of radium and the building of power stations, were witnessed. These technological and scientific advances that started out with an intention of improving human lives prompted the evolution of today's technology and science that pollute the Earth drifting it on the verge of a catastrophe.

The results of Industrial Revolution vary. The smoke emitted by trains, trailer trucks and ships, which were used to transport goods to people living away from the industrial area, has been polluting the air since the start of Industrial Revolution. Evolving transportation entails the construction of more and more roads requiring deforestation as well as the utilization of fertile lands. In addition, it demands the use of fuels such as coal and gasoline that contributes to air pollution.

As the technology advanced following Industrial Revolution, humans discovered how to split atoms and create a massive energy. They used this knowledge to produce nuclear weapons. The first nuclear weapon was tested on 16 July 1945 in Alamogordo Bombing and Gunnery Range, New Mexico carried out by the United States Army. The test which was named as the Trinity Test marked the beginning of nuclear age and another point in time speculated to be the dawn of the Anthropocene. The echoes of this test are still observable on humans and non-human environments. For instance, cancer rates are still high among the residents that live in the area near the detonation site (Russell 2015). Furthermore, the Trinity Test, the nuclear bombings and tests carried out after them left "an extremely distinctive radiogenic signature - a unique pattern of radioactive isotopes captured in the layers of the planet's marine and lake sediments, rock, and glacial ice that can serve as a clear, easily detected bookmark for the start of a new chapter in our planet's history" (Waters et al 2015). In this regard, Donald Worster presenting the environmental history in his book *Nature's Economy* points at the date July 16, 1945 as the commencement of "The Age of Ecology" on the New Mexican desert with the detonation of a nuclear bomb for the test (1994). Worster, concerned with the outcomes of the human activities which become daring day by day, explains the idea behind the Age of Ecology with these remarks:

That the earth was sick, and the sickness was our doing, was a spreading idea after World War II. It depended on seeing the earth as a single living organism; otherwise what did the idea of "sickness" or "health" applied to the whole planet really mean? That view of the earth as organism was an old one, going back into prehistoric cultures,

but it was reborn in the modern age, and ironically the image of an ailing but ancient organic planet came from the highly polished lens of a mechanical camera carried aloft in a mechanical spaceship (Worster 1994).

The Trinity Test was a solid evidence of the modernization of warfare and its capability to harm humans as well as the environment. It is clear from the aforementioned information that humans have become a major geological force with the advancing technology which required to change the name of the recent geological epoch. Accordingly, the name, Anthropocene was coined by the biologist Eugene Stoermer and suggested and popularized by the atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen to replace the name Holocene, the current epoch that began nearly 11.700 years ago, in 2000 during a meeting of the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme in Mexico (Carruthers 2019). It is the unofficial name of the current epoch, the Holocene by its authorized name accepted via the consensus during International Geological Congress in Bologna in 1885 (Crutzen 2006). It derives from the Greek words “anthropos” meaning “human being” and “kainos” meaning “recent, new” indicating the fact that human beings became the new geological forces to shape the geological structure of the Earth (Bonneuil and Fressoz 2016).

The developments that took place after the Industrial Revolution precipitated during the mid-20th century and this period is known as the “Great Acceleration” (Steffen et al. 2007). The scientific advancement accelerated after the Industrial Revolution and the Second World War gave rise to a population boom. As a natural result of the population boom, the expansion of urbanization consumed the rural areas and farmlands. The cities and the population grew and an increasing need to use the vehicles burning fossil fuels as a means of transportation arise adding more to carbon footprint leading to the climate change. Furthermore, the emergence of new technologies has prompted the emission of new gasses such as CFCs¹ and VOCs² that disturbs the chemical structure of the ozone layer. Crutzen elaborates on the changes brought by the Great Acceleration and human impact on the planet:

The rapid expansion of mankind in numbers per capita exploitation of the Earth’s resources has continued apace. During the past three centuries, the human population has increased tenfold to more than 6 billion and is expected to reach 10 billion in this century. The methane-producing cattle population has risen to 1.4 billion. About 30-50% of the planet’s land surface is exploited by humans. Tropical rainforests disappear at a fast pace, releasing

carbon dioxide and strongly increasing species extinction. Dam building and river diversion have become commonplace. More than half of all accessible fresh water is used by mankind. Fisheries remove more than 25% of the primary production in upwelling ocean regions and 35% in the temperate continent shelf. Energy use has grown 16-fold during the twentieth century causing 160 million tonnes of atmospheric Sulphur dioxide emissions per year, more than twice the sum of its natural emissions. More nitrogen fertilizer is applied in agriculture than is fixed naturally in all terrestrial ecosystems; nitric oxide production by the burning of fossil fuel and biomass also override natural emissions. Fossil fuel burning and agriculture have caused substantial increases in the concentrations of 'greenhouse' gases – carbon dioxide by 30% and methane by more than 100% – reaching their highest levels over the past 400 millennia, with more to follow (Crutzen 2002).

As maintained by Crutzen, the starting point of the Anthropocene could be traced back to the second half of the eighteenth century when the use of steam engine invented by James Watt led to the increase in the concentrations of greenhouse gasses such as carbon dioxide and methane trapped in polar ice on a global scale as revealed by the analyses (Crutzen 2002). It proves the accelerated human influence on a planetary level. On the other hand, Crutzen and Stoermer were not the first to recognize humans' irreversible impact on the planet. To illustrate, George P. Marsh published his most influential work *Man and Nature* in 1864. What makes Marsh's book unique is that it is one of the first works that challenge the traditional sentiment which advocates the idea that claims anthropogenic impact on nature is benign. This idea is rooted in the Biblical command to subdue the Earth (Lowenthal 2015) reminiscent of the Enlightenment rationale which puts humans in the driver's seat giving them the license to dominate nature. He also claimed in his book that ancient civilizations brought about their own demise by exploiting environment for the sake of ostentation (Marsh, 1864), thus pointing out the fact that human impact on ecologies is not a recent phenomenon.

The Anthropocene is an interdisciplinary theory and it provides a tool for critical inquiry in “. . . different fields of literary and cultural studies, from speculative fiction and utopian/dystopian studies to nuclear fiction, from Marxism to postcolonial literature and criticism, from performance studies to comics and graphic novels, while also interrogating the political potential of the term” (De Cristofaro and Cordle 2018). In line with the aforementioned information, the theory of the

Anthropocene provides the perfect medium to investigate Simpson's fictional work "Diary of an Interesting Year" which depicts the circumstances following the global catastrophe which creates a dystopian atmosphere as a result of the anthropogenic impact inflicted upon the Earth.

A Dystopia as a Byproduct of the Anthropocene

The story is delivered in the form of diary entries from the perspective of the nameless female narrator. First person narration makes the story more believable and it makes it easy for the readers to associate themselves with the character. The date of the first entry indicates that the story is set in the post-apocalyptic near future in 2040 thirty-one years after the story was published in *The New Yorker*. As the reader learns from the first entry that the narrator is thirty years old and her husband whose name is disclosed just with the letter G gives a spiral backed notebook and a biro which she uses to write down daily. She keeps her handwriting tiny in order to use the notebook longer. As it is understood from this information that even the simplest things such as a notebook which is abundant in the contemporary world becomes sparse in the story denoting to the pessimistic atmosphere marked by the scarcity of resources following the disaster. This situation is demonstrated throughout the story through various examples that can be considered " . . . an immanent critique of capitalism's promise of infinite abundance" (Rottinghaus et al. 2016). Capitalism and its promises prove invalid in this grim setting. Climate change and the thawing of the ice caps lead to the scarcity of natural resources which in turn leads to the breakdown of societies and security systems turning humans into dehumanized barbarians no better than animals which they regard themselves superior to. In other words, chaos and violence ensues the catastrophe rupturing the social life irreparably.

It is obvious that the narrator's husband G who is an older man working as a tutor at a university warned about the consequences of global warming repeatedly saying "I was right" as wearily expressed by the narrator (2011). G warns about the fast-approaching consequences of the global warming and the thawing of ice caps which seemed hard to notice especially after "the Big Melt" as he puts it. It is gathered from his remarks that despite his warnings and the tell-tale signs, people unwisely assume they still have time up to 2060 until the catastrophe materializes itself as if it is a distant future and they do not take action. In parallel with this, there is such "complacency" as Michael D. Doan calls it in the contemporary world about the climate change in spite of the scientific evidence gathered for decades (2014). Some submissively retreat into inaction accepting

the existence of global warming and expecting its consequences regarding them irreversible with a feeling of “solastalgia”, mourning over the environmental change and inability to reverse the situation (Albrecht et al. 2007). Some just choose to deny it shutting their ears to the warnings of climate scientists, social scientists, and environmental ethicists. Additionally, they overlook the harbingers such as extreme weather phenomena “. . . (heat waves, cold spells, “supercharged” storms). . .” and “. . . ecological disturbances (melting glaciers, rising sea levels, floods, droughts, wildfires). . .” (Doan 2014). Furthermore, the reasons of climate change are rooted in capitalism and the capitalists choose to ignore or just reject the existence of the climate change because taking actions against it will require a substantial change in the capitalist system or may even bring the end of it (Fletcher 2018). G is aware of the fact that capitalism is to blame for the menacing situation they face and voices his criticism about capitalism: “capitalism cared more about its children as accessories and demonstrations of earning power than for their future” (2011). As the story unfolds, economic injustice as a result of capitalism after the disaster manifests itself as the people in the story barter the goods they have such as tins of sardines and tomato soup. They cannot buy the goods because the disaster disturbed the financial stability causing devaluation. Moreover, as the all the aspects of the social sphere are disturbed, there are no longer work places for people to labor and earn money to buy their needs. In compliance with the aforementioned information, it can be deduced that the dystopia created by Simpson is a “. . . dystopia [which] places [the reader] directly in a dark and depressing reality, conjuring up a terrifying future if [they] do not recognize and treat its symptoms in the here and now (Gordin et al. 2010). She is inspired by the contemporary realities the humanity faces, the main reason behind climate change and its results some of which they have already been experiencing. They are experiencing the catastrophic effects of anthropocentric struggle to overpower nature which owes its existence to Enlightenment mode of thought. Additionally, she is aware of the apathy a big proportion of the society retreated in.

In the post-apocalyptic world of Simpson, a collapse in every aspect of life ranging from economy to healthcare and social institutions is prevalent as overpopulation, once a problem of cardinal importance, is not the case after *the Big Melt*. The decrease in human population causes the wastewater treatment come to a standstill as there is no one to tend to it. The living space of humans is occupied by the water from the sewage system which, in turn, gives rise to the spread of infectious diseases such as cholera. These diseases worsen the situation killing more and more people or driving them out of the immediate vicinity they live in. The writer chooses London, a

real place as a setting, for her dystopia. London and Londoners experience the discomfort inflicted by the overflowing sewage water:

Glad we don't live in London. The Hatchwells have got cousins staying with them, they trekked up from Tottenham (three days). Went round this afternoon and they were saying the thing that finally drove them out was the sewage system when the drains packed up it overflowed everywhere. They said the smell was unbelievable, the pavements were swimming in it, and of course the hospitals are down, so there is nothing to be done about the cholera. Didn't get too close to them in case they were carrying it. They lost two sons like that last year (2011).

In addition to this, it becomes much easier to empathize with the characters in this dystopian narrative for the contemporary reader that is currently experiencing a pandemic, Covid-19, a non-fictional horror in flesh and blood. The persona in the story has to wear face masks even in bed which can be considered as safe zones where humans are supposed to feel relaxed and protected from any harm. She intends to protect herself from the unnamed matter in the air that makes it dense "like filthy soup" (2011). Similarly, today people wear surgical masks in their day-to-day lives while doing activities in public places including using transportation, walking in the street and shopping to protect themselves as well as others from the disease. Nevertheless, masks do not invade their private space to such extent as in the story. However, being obliged to wear masks even while fulfilling such simple tasks as shopping and seeing other people with their masks on is a constant reminder of the existence of the pandemic and the dystopian atmosphere they experience in real life. The presence of the sight and feeling of the unfamiliar on the faces make them feel uncomfortable and stressful which enable them to empathize with the main character in the story who cannot bear wearing her mask made of bits of old sheet in high temperature and rips it off.

On the other side, people are familiar with the symbolism of other kinds of masks such as gas masks. Gas masks are reminiscent of horrors of war, especially the Second World War reminiscent of the Nazi regime. They are used to avoid the chemicals emanated during biological and chemical warfare. They also epitomize the horrors of environmental degradation and industrial growth resulting in the air unbreathable by humans. Additionally, the police wear them while deploying tear gas and pepper spray to suppress riots. However, they have become a cultural icon finding themselves a place in popular culture: ". . . the enduring cultural resonance of the gas mask

can be seen in the graffiti art of Banksy and the Doctor Who episode *The Empty Child*, while in escapist fantasies such as the Narnia television series and the film *Bedknobs and Broomsticks . . .*” (Moshenska). Therefore, it would not be implausible to deduce the fact that humanity has got used to the idea of gas masks through cinema or narratives, fiction or non-fiction that depict the World Wars steered by capitalism. On the other hand, people had not been used to picturing themselves in surgical masks in their daily lives prior to the onset of the outbreak of Covid-19. They used to wear surgical masks only in hospitals in the past, but masks have started to be on the faces of the people in countless pictures of the news stories that pertain to pollution, wildfires, government surveillance on the newspapers for a few years from now and they are gradually becoming a cultural icon piloted by popular names like Billie Eilish who wears mask as a form of adornment (Venkatraman and Kessler). Despite the fact that masks may seem appealing and trendy as items of popular culture utilized as ornaments or symbols of resistance, the idea of wearing face masks during the time of a pandemic living under the continuous threat of a fatal infection does not seem favorable. People feel uncomfortable with the idea being forced to wear face masks because of an external threat, human-made or not.

In real life, masks are used as a tool to provide a uniformity. For instance, the people who resist to authorities driven by the same purpose wear masks. In the same vein, in the fictional world of dystopia, people are forced to wear masks in order to form a kind of unity and to terminate individuality. In other words, they are used to dehumanize the populations and turn them into mechanized workers serving for the same purpose (Crew). To put it another way, the main reason behind wearing a mask is always anthropogenic and in the dystopian narrative of Simpson people are forced to wear masks possibly because of the air pollution caused by the anthropogenic impact. The main character expresses that they are supposed to wear face masks even in bed; however, she does not specify if they are forced to wear them for the reasons other than air pollution such as a government policy. The reader get the impression that the reason behind it is not a government policy because of the idea of privacy they get from the words uttered by the woman: “. . . we are supposed to wear our facemasks in bed too. . .” (2011).

Another matter hinted at by Simpson is the heightened social, economic and environmental injustice in her Anthropocene dystopia which is real and alive in the current age of humans hard to distinguish from dystopias. Craig Campbell's remarks about the injustices that will escalate during

a time of anthropogenic climate crisis bear a warning for the shadowtime generation. According to him, the economically powerless will suffer while technocrats and capitalists secure from the tumultuous conditions the crisis creates, make decisions that affect the rest of the human species:

If we're not careful, the Anthropocene may simply inaugurate a(nother) deferential of justice. Certainly one can imagine a dystopia of climate sustainability. . . . technocrats insulated from the difficulties of abject life as they make centralized decisions on behalf of humans, for the sake of the world-for-us (2018).

Similarly, Rob Nixon explains that the Anthropocene, a common product of technocrats, capitalists, politicians and plutocrats, is accompanied by all types of inequalities, economic, social and environmental. As maintained by him, these injustices intensify the rupture between “the uber-rich, the aforementioned group of the elites and the ultra- poor, between gated resource- hogs and the abandoned destitute”, making the rich capitalizing on the poor richer and the poor poorer (2017). While the majority of the population who do not belong the class of the elites, the few whose machinery destroys nature for the sake of their monetary gains, are reduced to societies that barter or forage. Even breathing clean air, once provided by nature for free, transform into a luxury for them. In the meantime, the corporate elite, “the top layer” (2011) as put by the writer, enjoy the filtered air to the utmost in their isolated plastic bubbles. In the same manner, clean water which is abound and easily accessible in homes in the kitchens and bathrooms is another luxury item for the majority of the population that survives. These people use ashes and lye for cleaning. They cannot access the proper sanitation. Furthermore, the sources of water such as rivers and streams are toxic because of fertilizers and other kind of toxic bodies as well as bacteria that cause diseases such as typhoid. The remaining population struggle to fight with various ailments such as goiters and tumors which develop unnaturally possibly because of the polluted air as they cannot afford or even find face masks to buy. Instead of face masks, they tie bits of old sheet around their mouths. Moreover, they cannot afford or acquire such a simple everyday item as an umbrella and they get soaked wet all the time in constant rain resulting from human-induced climate change. Further to that, one can gather they are not provided with health service. To illustrate, a female character, Maia, and her baby dies because a Caesarean is needed during the process of the birth. Evidently, the remaining natural resources, health services and sanitation continue to serve for the elite who

hold the biggest slice of the cake. Their power to access all kinds of resources keep them dry, satiated, secure and healthy.

It is apparent throughout the story that the Anthropocene whose point of origin is human technology renders it ineffective in the face of global warming and the ensuing catastrophe, the flood. The failed technology exhibits itself in many forms. The main character complains about difficulty in finding out the ways of earning money in the altered world because the internet is down. The characters are so dependent on human technology, especially on the internet, they do not know how to survive in this hostile environment without googling it. The character tries to divert her mind from the miserable condition she is in by trying to imagine the days when human technology is intact. Her imagination of the things that contemporary humans would not even take notice of and enjoy brings about a feeling of nostalgia.

Wandering round a supermarket – warm, gorgeously lit – corridors of open fridges full of tiger prawns and fillet steak. Gliding off down the fast lane in a sports car, stopping to fill up with thirty litres of petrol. Online, booking tickets for *The Mousetrap*, click, ordering a crate of wine, click, a holiday home, click, a pair of patent leather boots, click, a gap year, click. I go to iTunes and download *The Marriage of Figaro*, then I chat face to face in real time with G's parents in Sydney (2010).

As it is understood from the excerpt, people utilize the technology in every aspect of life such as illuminating their environment, keeping their food fresh and travelling somewhere fast before the catastrophe. They make the most of the opportunities provided by the internet which is another piece of human technology. They book tickets, order food and drink, buy pieces of clothes or download music with one click. Sudden disappearance of this technology leaves the characters in such a state they lack the necessary skills to survive. They do not even know how to purify contaminated water. In addition, they do not have the access to the knowledge how to deliver babies which has been passed down on from generation to generation with firsthand experience in the past. In the contemporary world, delivering babies is carried out in hospitals by the experts. In line with this, contemporary humans relying on technology and experts to deliver their babies may face the same demise as Maia does. It is clear that they are not even equipped with the adeptness to survive and repopulate the Earth without technology.

The anthropogenic climate change in the story foreshadows the shift of suitable conditions from formerly cultivable areas to the ones that are not suitable for agriculture which in turn produces climate migrants. Octavia E. Butler comments on this situation as “The greenhouse effect has intensified and there has been a certain amount of starvation and agricultural displacement. There are real problems. Some of our prime agricultural land won’t be able to produce the crops that it’s been producing [...] These are big problems . . .” (Kenan 1991). The issue of climate refugees is one of the biggest problems that lead to the social collapse and it heightens the sense of an unsafe atmosphere (Andersen 2020). To illustrate, the incoming refugees from Spain staying in the narrator’s house because of compulsory billeting spread terror. They start with confiscating their bedroom compelling them to sleep under the kitchen table. The narrator is under the constant fear of getting raped by the portly Spaniard, Miguel. They forfeit their canned food they hide under the floor boards and G is exposed to violence by Miguel when he tries to take his tin of sardines back. The narrator and her husband, in an attempt to get away from the unsafe environment in their home, set off towards Russia that becomes “the new land of milk honey since the Big Melt” as put by G (201) what makes them climate refugees. On the way to Siberia, the encounter another climate refugee to whom the narrator refers as M. M kills off the narrator’s husband and violates her time and again. The narrator suspects that he keeps her alive because he intends to cannibalize her which is not surprising as she hears about cases of cannibalism on the radio. As is clear from the information that with the disappearance of law and order of human civilization after the disaster, there is a rupture in the social contract and it makes “barbaric forms of human violence” which are suppressed resurface (Andersen 2020). Accordingly, human technology which enable humans to travel in a short time in a globalized world makes them vulnerable to the violence inflicted by the individuals from anywhere around the globe. In this regard, the societal decline and eventually a collapse in the social sphere occur.

The anthropogenic climate crisis in the “Diary” results in relentless government regulations. The government controls the food sources and rations the people with canned food. It issues compulsory billeting and strangers from Spain come and invade the narrator’s and her husband’s personal space. Furthermore, it announces that civilians will no longer use fuel. In addition, the government restricts the freedom of travel as they cannot leave homes without permission. The narrator also informs the reader about the rumor of a martial law, but the story ends before the reader learns if it is brought into force. On the way to Siberia, the narrator and her husband

encounter farmlands surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards, yet it is not clarified if the tyrannical government or the corporate elite confiscates the land. Moreover, it is not possible that government surveillance which is ever-present in most of the dystopian narratives, can be carried out by means of technology in "Diary" as technology is disabled by the disaster. The government asserts power over the individuals in the form of control of resources and oppressive societal control through implicit threats of arrest. It is important to note that although the lives of the characters in the book are even more rummaged by the government's repressive decrees, they show no sign of preparation for a revolt against it. It can be concluded that they can neither find the courage nor the power to revolt against the government in the dystopian world where they struggle to survive one more day.

Conclusion

"Diary of an Interesting Year" By Helen Simpson discloses a dystopia in the Anthropocene in which a human-induced disaster pushes the humanity on the verge of extinction, bringing social infrastructure to a halt, creating tyrannical governments and cannibals. The main character can be regarded as the microcosm of the suffering population. Aside from being exposed to various forms of violence, she also has real woman problems that renders the story more realistic and relatable. As a dystopian narrative conveying the bitter outcomes of the human domination, it bears a warning, so the question that could be asked is not if the story a piece of fiction. The question is if the world and society is plummeting towards the conditions described in it.

Notes:

1. CFCs, namely, chlorofluorocarbons are the gases used in refrigerators, automobiles and air conditioners as refrigerants. They are one of the chief reasons of the depletion of the ozone layer. The depletion on the ozone layer results in the arrival of the ultraviolet radiation to the surface of the Earth introducing the risk of eye cancer, skin cancers and infectious diseases because of the deterioration of the immune system. It causes mutation of the plants and it diminishes the production of planktons and other marine animals which are important parts of the food chain (Reddy 2011).
2. VOCs, namely, volatile organic compounds, are chemicals such as isoprenes, terpenes, alkenes, alcohols, esters, carbonyls and acids (Kesselmeier 1999). A multitude of daily products such as nail polish, perfume, hair spray, adhesives, aerosol sprays and carburetor ("Volatile Organic")

contain them. The release of VOCs results in air pollution which can lead to health hazards such as lung cancer and dysfunction of the nervous system as well as a myriad of environmental problems such as the depletion of the ozone layer (Ismail and Hameed 2013).

Works Cited:

Albrecht, Glenn, Gina-Maree Sartore, Linda Connor, Nick Higginbotham, Sonia Freeman, Brian Kelly, Helen Stain, Anne Tonna, and Georgia Pollard. "Solastalgia: The Distress Caused by Environmental Change". *Australasian Psychiatry* vol. 15, 2007, pp. S95-S98.

Andersen, Gregers. *Climate Fiction and Cultural Analysis: A New Perspective on the Life in the Anthropocene*, Routledge, 2020.

Bonneuil, Christophe and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz. *The Shock of the Anthropocene*. Translated by David Fernbach. Verso Books, 2016.

Campbell, Craig. "Industrialism and the Time of Catastrophe: A Lesson in the Anthropocene." *Feelings of Structure: Explorations in Affect*, edited by Karen Engle and Yoke-Sum Wong, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018, pp. 48-66.

Carruthers, J. "The Anthropocene". *South African Journal of Science*, vol. 115, no. 7/8, 2019, p. 1.

Crew, Thomas. "The Dystopian Age of Mask." *The Critic*, The Locomotive, 10 September 2020, <https://thecritic.co.uk/the-dystopian-age-of-the-mask/>.

Crutzen, Paul. J. "The Anthropocene." *Earth System Science in the Anthropocene*, edited by Eckart Ehlers and Thomas Krafft, Springer, 2006, pp. 13-18.

Crutzen, P. J. "Geology of mankind." *Nature* vol. 415, no. 3, 2002, p. 23.

De Cristofaro, Diletta and Daniel Cordle. "Introduction: The Literature of the Anthropocene." *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-century Writings* vol. 6, no. 1, 2018, pp. 1-6.

Doan, Michael, D. "Climate Change and Complacency." *Hypatia* vol. 29, no. 3, 2014, pp. 634-650.

Fletcher, Robert. "Capitalizing on Chaos: Climate Change and Disaster Capitalism." *Ephemera* vol. 12, no. 1/2, 2012, pp. 97-112.

Gordin, Michael, D., Helen Tilley and Gyan Prakash. *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility*, Princeton University Press, 2010.

"Industrial Revolution". *Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, 20 Sept. 2020,

https://www.britannica.com/_event/Industrial-Revolution.

Ismail, O. M. S., & Hameed, R. S. A. "Environmental Effects of Volatile Organic Compounds on Ozone Layer." *Advances in Applied Science Research* vol 4, no. 1, 2013, pp. 264- 268.

Kenan, Randall. "An Interview with Octavia E. Butler." *Callaloo* vol. 12, no. 2, 1991, pp. 495-504.

Kesselmeier, Jürgen and Michael Staudt. "Biogenic Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC): an Overview on Emission, Physiology and Ecology." *Journal of Atmospheric Chemistry* vol. 33, no. 1, 1999, pp. 23-88.

Koot, Liesbeth and Menno Grootveld. "Interview with Graham Harman on the Anthropocene." *Sonic Acts Research Series #10*, Anthropocene Objects, Art and Politics, <http://www.sonicacts.com/portal/anthropocene-objects-art-andpolitics-1>.

Lowenthal, David. "Marsh's Man and Nature at 150." *George Wright Forum* vol. 32, no. 2, 2015, pp. 227-237.

Marsh, George. P. *Man and Nature*, University of Washington Press, 2003.

Moshenska, Gabriel. "Gas Mask: A Cultural Icon, UCL's Gabe Moshenska muses on the extraordinary iconic significance of the gas mask." *Military History Matters*, 3 Nov. 2010, <https://www.military-history.org/articles/gas-mask.htm>.

Nixon, Rob. "The Anthropocene and Environmental Justice." *Curating the Future: Museums, Communities and Climate Change*, edited by Jennifer Lewell, Libby Robin and Kirsten Wehner, Routledge, 2016, pp. 23-31.

Randall Kenan, —An Interview with Octavia E. Butler, JSTOR, *Callaloo*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 495-504, Spring 1991.

Reddy, K. K. S. K., & Sivasakthivel, T. "Ozone Layer Depletion and Its Effects: A Review." *International Journal of Environmental Science and Development* vol. 2, no. 1, 2011, pp. 30-37.

Rottinghaus, Adam Richard, Pluretti, Roseann and Sutko, Daniel. "The End of Material Scarcity: Dystopia and Immanent Critique of Capitalism." *International Journal of Communication* vol. 10, no. 2016, pp. 20165699-5709.

"70 Years After the Atomic Bomb Test. N. M. Residents Still Affected." *OCB NEWS*, CBS Interactive Inc., 16 July 2015, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/70-years-after-atomic-bomb-test-new-mexico-residents-still-affected/>.

Simpson, Helen. "Diary of an Interesting Year." *I'm with the Bears*, edited by Mark Martin, Verso Books, 2011.

Simpson, Helen. *In-Flight Entertainment*, Vintage Books, 2010.

Steffen, Will, Paul, J. Crutzen, and John R. McNeill. “The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?.” *The Globalization and Environment Reader*, edited by Peter Newell and J. Timmons Roberts, John Wiley and Sons, Ltd, 2016.

Venkatraman, Sakshi and Ben Kessler. “‘This dystopian look’: Face masks enter mainstream amid coronavirus worries.” *NBC News*, NBC Universal, 1 March 2020, <https://www.euronews.com/2020/03/01/face-masks-enter-mainstream-amid-coronavirus-worries-n1145231>.

“Volatile Organic Products (VOCs) in Commonly Used Products.” *health.ny.gov*, <https://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/indoors/voc.htm>.

Waters, Colin N., James P. M. Syvitski, Agnieszka Gałuszka, Gary J. Hancock, Jan Zalasiewicz, Alejandro Cearreta, Jacques Grinevald, Catherine Jeandel, J. R. McNeill, Colin Summerhayes, Anthony Barnosky. “Can nuclear weapons fallout mark the beginning of the Anthropocene Epoch?.” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* vol. 71, no. 3, 2015, pp. 46-57.

Worster, Donald. *Nature’s Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Xiolan, Wang. “Dystopian Nightmare in Contemporary Adolescent Fiction and Its Ethical Value.” *Forum for World Literature Studies* vol. 8, no.1, 2016, pp. 75-86.