The Polymodernity of Planetary Domesticity:

Polycrisis, Life, and Form in T.C. Boyle's *A Friend of the Earth* and Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God*

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Abstract This article explores the difficulties that conventional narrative form has with rendering the non-human temporalities of planetary history, with a particular focus on the domestic. By drawing from several critical threads, including Donna Haraway's Chthulucene concept, I aim to explore how fiction interrupts static historical narratives. My position is that writing against anthropocentric thinking can act as a literary disruptor, and. as experimental narrative forms of the domestic are emerging, new imaginaries and conceptual frameworks are put forward for reconstructing ideas between human and non-human life forms in a world coming to terms with multiple cascading crises. This paper also explains how contemporary science fiction reconfigures domestic fiction acting as a mode of cultural repair at a time when the everyday and local are disrupted by the global polycrisis. By examining uncertainty, in both theme and form, we discover how contemporary authors are exploring the idea that another world is not only urgently needed but is also possible. In Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* and T.C. Boyle's *A Friend of the Earth* readers encounter planetary catastrophe from the perspective of everyday spatialities and displaced futurity in domestic spaces. Each narrative provokes an attempt to wrangle with the institutional conditions of Western modernity by (re)claiming these domestic spaces and inserting human/non-human entanglements into the literary mode. This produces an ecocentric introspection against the backdrop of an apocalyptic climate on the global scale to revive a collective consciousness of uncertainty with the potential to rethink a future.

Keywords Anthropocene; Domesticity; Ecocriticism; Ecology; Planetary; Polycrisis; Polymodernity.

DOI: 10.25364/27.5:2025.2.8

Introduction: Rendering the Human/Non-Human Temporalities of Planetary History

Since the turn of the third millennium, a growing sense of uncertainty has come to punctuate the twenty-first century. This has been brought about by what could be seen as the catastrophic collapse of the global system marked by the climate crisis, ecological destruction, economic instability, terrorism and warfare, pandemics, and ongoing humanitarian crises. Historian Adam Tooze uses the term *polycrisis* as a way to map the "cognitive shock" of the interlocking crises of the present (Tooze CB 262).[1] Therefore, when confronted with the cognitive shock of today's polycrisis, humans are exposed to temporal disturbances – "heterochronies" – that threaten to disrupt the current social order by impeding sociality, i.e. the forming of social groups, as it "prevents or at least aggravates synchronized action and the future-oriented cultivation of new solidarities across different collectivities" (Baumbach and Neumann 4).[2] Heterochronies can be understood as the coexistence of multiple, conflicting temporalities that reveal the power structures dictating whose time and histories are prioritized or marginalized. Accordingly, the cognitive shock of the polycrisis accentuates the disruptions between different social groups while amplifying the influence of hierarchal power.

In her 2017 novel, *The Future Home Of the Living God*, Louise Erdrich presents a web of multiple crises as climate change has accelerated the melting of permafrost, evolution is spinning backwards, viral toxins are being unleashed on the global population, and an oppressive US government is stripping away the birthrights of mothers. It is this final point that serves as the novel's focus and places it in relation to other reproduction-based dystopias (see also Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* & P.D. James ' *Children of Men*), weaving together interlocking personal and national domestic crises. Furthermore, in T.C. Boyle's *A Friend of the Earth*, published over two decades ago, he similarly traces the impact of multiple cascading crises – climate change, loss of biodiversity, overpopulation, habitat loss, food scarcity – which when viewed in relation to the shifts in reader subjectivity bridges current discussions on climate change, the domestic, and Anthropocene thinking.[3] Both novels leverage the modes of science fiction and dystopian fiction in a framework of domestic fiction to demonstrate how the natural world has been dispossessed through the logic(s) of current stage late-capitalism, where everything – not just material resources and products but also immaterial dimensions – becomes commodified and consumable. Furthermore, Kristin J. Jacobson argues, "American domestic fiction often, if not always, exploits a family-nation correlation: the fictional family offers a picture of America in microcosm" (Jacobson 3). This bridging of Anthropocene thinking and concepts of the domestic shows how the Anthropocene is not "a planetary outside" (Hegglund 186) but rather, it invites the reader to contemplate the entanglement of the

domestic, cultural, social, symbolic, and biological to present literary narratives as sites of cultural repair for thinking through the polycrisis.

Thus, I will first develop an understanding of what I call planetary domesticity, in which various relationalities and entanglements between the human and non-human play out even when the disruptive forces of polycrisis loom large. The term planetary domesticity evokes the etymological link between ecology and the home, as ecology derives from the Greek word oikos [house]. This highlights the idea of how human and non-human beings relate to their surrounding environments and see nature, by extension, as home. With this understanding, I will then argue that while conventional domestic narrative has had difficulties "with rendering the non-human temporalities of planetary history" (Hegglund 187), new narrative forms of the domestic are emerging, which open up a new conceptual framework for reconstructing ideas between human and non-human life forms in a world coming to terms with multiple cascading crises. From this point, I will also argue that both Erdrich and Boyle present narratives of uncertainty to liberate the future from colonial and capitalist driven epistemologies while pitting ideas of regression and evolution against one another. And finally, how these works revive a new kind of collective consciousness: in itself, consciousness as a life-form with the potential to rethink a future . This approach invites the reader to contemplate the entanglement of the cultural, domestic, social, and symbolic with the biological and natural world to present literary narratives as sites of cultural repair for a new way of thinking through the current planetary crises. Furthermore, by drawing from Donna Haraway's call for a new way of thinking about current planetary crises to interrupt static historical narratives we discover that contemporary authors, including Erdrich and Boyle, are exploring the idea that another world is not only urgently needed, but is also possible, "but not if we are ensorcelled in despair, cynicism, or optimism, and the belief/disbelief discourse of Progress" (Haraway). That is to say, for Haraway, it is vital that we do not restrict agency towards pragmatic action by succumbing to the emotional trappings and polarized narratives that denounce or proclaim progress. Instead, there needs to be an active space for an imaginative shift beyond merely seeing progress as linear or teleological, toward a more inclusive, diverse vision of improvement and coexistence to work towards a new way of being.

Planetary Domesticity: Narratives of Uncertainty

Tooze's popularization of the term "polycrisis" at the World Economic Forum in 2023 shed some light on the contemporary moment, but the term itself can be traced back to the 1990s when complexity theorists Edgar Morin and Anne Brigitte Kern coined polycrisis to argue it being "the complex intersolidarity of problems, antagonisms, crises, uncontrollable processes, and the general crisis

of the planet" (Morin and Kern in Lawrence et al. 6). While Lawrence et al. have argued that current usage of this term may lack substantiative content, risking being reduced to a buzzword, they do see how it carries the potential to better understand the linkages between contemporary crises.[4] However, while polycrisis may serve as useful concept for grappling with multiple cascading crises, as a term it still invites skepticism as it obfuscates the various mechanisms of capitalism from which the crises are borne. Several critics contend that the term prevents direct action and focusing on individual crises, and to some extent, erasing the responsibility or experience of what causes and who suffers most (Kluth; Subramanian). This skepticism comes from representing the crises as chaotic and overlapping; polycrisis risks presenting them as something inevitable, even natural by diagnosing what is happening, but not why it is happening. Moreover, it can be argued that the current state of polycrisis systemically reinforces a politics of power on a global scale with often developing countries and marginalized people suffering the most – this power imbalance also creates an Otherness that pits one group against the other.[5] In fact, to reinvoke Rancière, the term cedes ground and only names the competing temporalities of a fragmented society to which it refers rather than reframing the present moment. Furthermore, in relation to *Future Home of the Living God* Emily McAvan argues, "Erdrich's novel suggests that the theologies of domination that underpin capitalism begin to fall apart in the age of climate change" (105). Yet, this suggestion implied by McAvan, evident in the novel, does not offer any concrete solutions but instead centers uncertainty as a potential way to negotiate the crises and liberate from dominant modes of colonial and capitalist practices. Thus, Erdrich leverages the mode of speculative fiction and inserts Indigenous futures as a way to reconfigure the narrativization of space as well as time in the face of the anthropogenic climate change and that polycrisis it contains.[6] Erdrich's characters inhabit a world on the brink of apocalypse , yet, by showing this world through indigenous perspectives the novel engages in proleptic mourning – grieving for our fate – in an effort to decolonize the future which renders the novel as a powerful political practice (Siepak 63).

Published in 2017, but started in 2000, Erdrich was responding to the US presidential elections won by George W. Bush in 2000 and Donald J. Trump in 2016. In conversation with Margaret Atwood, Erdrich openly discusses her concerns regarding women's rights and the environment in relation to Trump's 2016 election (Atwood and Erdrich 2017). Thus, it becomes clear that literature, including the novel and other forms of fiction, can act as vehicles for knowledge-building and philosophizing in relation to situated experiences because of the gaze it provides, both onto the characters' existence but also back toward the reader, both over time and in each moment (See also Murdoch 326).[7]

Society in Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* is on the brink as evolution seems to be in regress, which in turn invites the reader to consider what may

happen when humans give birth to offspring that are considered to be more animal than human. This speculative biology immediately undermines preconceived notions of the neat linear evolutionary march of progress and presents a much more uncertain idea of evolution. In the novel, Cedar laments how "some paleontologist" declares, "We do not have a true fossil record of evolution [...] what we have are bits and pieces [...] that's playing 52 pickup with one deck of cards flung across the entire planet and expecting to come up with a full orderly deck" (Erdrich 69). While this chaotic evolutionary process can be read as a Darwinian dystopia, due to its regress acting as threat to coherent human-based progress, its conventional dystopian qualities reside in the backdrop of the other ongoing crises including climate change, a tyrannical government, and the erosion of women's reproductive rights which, when combined, allow Erdrich to create a narrative space to think through "a new alterity" (Siepak 59). Erdrich inserts an ontological uncertainty that speaks of unknown potentialities for the future by disrupting the orderly narrative of evolution. McAvan argues Erdrich is "suggesting that we need to see humanity as the product of a wild and complicated history. The apparent stability of evolution [...] is a myth that flatters humanity as its apparent apex [...] a story that Erdrich contests vigorously" (96). By opening up such spaces, Erdrich is positioning the human-animal dichotomy into new proximities of human subjectivity and evolutionary biology as if answering Derrida's call: "We have to envisage the existence of 'living creatures,' whose plurality cannot be assembled within the single figure of an animality that is simply opposed to humanity" (Derrida 47).

Yet, the characters within the novel also hint that capitalist profiteering may offer a way through the crisis as major biopharmaceutical companies may now seek to profit from the crisis: "We should invest in one of those genetics companies. They'll try to turn this thing around with gene manipulation. It will be big", says Cedar's adoptive father, Glen (Erdrich 68). Erdrich also connects this idea of corporate capitalism cashing in on crisis when Cedar Hawk Songmaker, the novel's protagonist, tracks down her biological Ojibwe family who own a Superpumper gas station franchise marking her ancestorial roots as "bourgeois" (Erdrich 6). Cedar connects this franchise to "the colonization of this region" (Erdrich 6), indicating that ancestral, geological, and colonial/capitalist histories are intertwined. McAvan highlights that Marxist environmental historian Jason W. Moore has made the argument that "'the economy' and 'the environment' are not independent of each other. Capitalism is not an economic system; it is not a social system; it is a way of organizing nature" (Moore in McAvan 100). For Moore and McAvan, then, "Dominion is therefore about the way that capitalism organizes nature, including the nonhuman animals" (McAvan 101).

Similarly, in Boyle's A *Friend of the Earth*, human subjectivities are also called into question and pitted against larger albeit mostly invisible institutional

forces – the policies of corporations and government that have ravaged the Earth with pollution, plunder, and global warming – while trying to reconfigure human/non-human relationalities that are imposing on the human body itself. The ecological dystopia reveals that human bodies are exposed to conditions of extreme "wet" and "quiet stink," and "darkness" compared to but not likened to hyenas and other animals (Boyle 11). Descriptions such as this litter Boyle's novel which highlight the concept of the relational self in flux (i.e. the self that shifts in relation to others), as Sylvia Mayer argues is , "the human as being a part of nature , as body and mind […] both nonhuman and human nature – as concretized in the body – have reasserted themselves" (Mayer 225). Mayer contends that this shifting subjectivity has been brought about by the hostile conditions the novel's protagonists experience living in the years 2025-26, years marred by the climate breakdown, overpopulation, and loss of biodiversity. In the novel's prologue, narrator and protagonist Ty O'Shaughnessy Tierwater proclaims,

> I'm an animal man […] I manage the man's private menagerie, the last surviving one in this part of the world, and it's an important – scratch that, vital – reservoir for zoo–cloning and the distribution of what's left of the major mammalian species. (Boyle 6)

The novel presents notions of human intervention in biological sciences tied up with new subjectivities that reposition spaces of alterity through speculation. Thus, there is the idea that narrative fiction, in times of polycrisis, can perhaps mediate and also help readers navigate these multiple cascading crises, bridging various epistemological experiences from one to (an)Other. In fact, we may argue that one of the ideas speculative science fiction often presents – in dystopias – is the idea that humanity must relinquish its *par excellence* status and become animal in order to conceive of new narratives that can inspire fresh creative, critical, and also political practices.

This concept aligns with Donna Haraway's call to rethink the Anthropocene question; how do the entanglements of particular forms of life (cultural, domestic, social, symbolic) and life forms (biological, climatological, planetary), productively engage with the complexities of those interactions and in turn repair humankind's relationship with the natural world and as such produce a life of form for the future? That is to say, as planetary disruptions become increasingly difficult to represent as paradigms shift, literature must acknowledge its limitations and attempt to find new ways to adapt. Haraway coins her own term, the *Chthulucene*, for navigating the current paradigmatic shifting geological age, and while finding a solution may be beyond the possibility of literature alone, the mode of speculative forms of fiction that lean on order to deepen our understanding of a "life of form" for the future, and work toward a reconsideration of the institutional conditions

that brought us here in the first place are reconfigured . As Sibylle Baumbach and Birgit Neumann argue, literature may even play an active role in "construing temporalities of and in crises" by turning a possibly enduring, structural condition into a seemingly sudden, exceptional, and "intensified situation" we construct a genre of crisis (Baumbach and Neumann 7; Berlant 7). Therefore, while some scholars ask how form in literature, or a life of form, can be leveraged to present an adequate response to the future – connecting the present and past – "beyond the impasse of adjustment," we might instead want to consider what uncertainty has to offer (Baumbach and Neumann 7-8). Furthermore, given the potential and scale for change that anthropocentric futures, including narratives of climate change, suggest as well as the Anthropocene's impact on social change and society, the usual rhythms, patterns, and scales of the novel and narrative are disrupted.

Narratives of not-knowing or uncertainty could in fact help liberate the present moment from certain institutional hegemonies and give way to alternative epistemologies. This comes at a time when Earth's species and assemblages are facing an "event already under way called the Sixth Great Extinction" (Haraway). Both Boyle and Erdrich are realigning human-subjectivity to think beyond its limitations in the wake of extinction in action, which is a compelling position to consider a *planetary domesticity* generated by their narrative. As previously discussed, I use the term planetary domesticity to call upon the etymological link between ecology and the home. Considering much of the current ecological discourse is concerned with relationalities and the planetary, the term planetary domesticity becomes a useful carrier to dismantle previous conceptions of human/non-human relations as we all share the same planetary fate. Thus, planetary domesticity constitutes a space for reconstructing ways of being at home that can support sensemaking and agency in times of polycrisis. In Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God*, and Boyle's A *Friend of the Earth* discussed herein, both writers leverage the domestic mode to question what the role of home on a planet is that itself is becoming increasingly difficult to inhabit. Furthermore, both authors reject or subvert traditional dichotomies and dualisms of narrative realism by inviting readers to reconsider what it means to be natural and/or civilized while simultaneously confronting our limitations as a species that places itself at the top of a so-called natural order through capitalist driven hierarchies.[8]

(Re)constructing the Domestic Life/Form

Before extrapolating further how both Erdrich and Boyle reconstruct the domestic form, and realist fiction, it is worth taking into account that during the 21st century, so far, there has been an accelerated number of environmental disasters. The Ecological Threat Register (ETR) of 2020 recorded a tenfold increase in natural disasters since 1960, which some scholars argue can be attributed to the

nature of neoliberal capitalism as a driving force for climate change (Barkdull and Harris 14; Pollock 2020; Park 189). While the ETR says causes can vary, there is a growing consensus that changes in climate conditions, specifically the rising global temperatures, raise the likelihood of weather-related natural disasters. During the twenty-first century, on the US mainland alone, NOAA reported that up to and including 2024 the loss of life and economic costs related to such disasters total around 10,000 and over 1 trillion dollars respectively.[9]

While data provides the numbers, much of the immediate insight into the devastation today comes from rolling news and social media feeds which place a direct lens on the precarious nature of home for those victims of weather-related natural disasters; as Jon R. Hegglund states, "These images eloquently testify that the Anthropocene is not a planetary 'outside' to an intimate sense of home as refuge or retreat from the world at large" (Hegglund 186). Home in this form is not a safe haven to retreat to but rather a place that becomes entangled in the anthropocentric planetary, as Hegglund articulates, "The Anthropocene posits a new view of the planet in which systems cannot be disentangled according to disciplinary purview" (Hegglund 186). Thus, Hegglund exposes the idea that the traditionally dominant dualism of man and nature becomes redundant and that they are no longer sufficient for dealing with our current reality. This is achieved by recognizing the interconnectedness, not the separation, of nature and culture, human and inhuman, geological and biological, and even domestic and public spheres: fictions where the boundaries between the human world and the natural world are dissolved and invite new potentialities and even new futures.

Following Hegglund's argument, the idea that the form of the novel shares a direct affinity with the domestic and domestic spaces and also shows how modes of domestic fiction, particularly those affiliated with women's writing, can be read as protest literature that offers new strategies of resistance.[10] However, the kind of protest and resistance that is often presented in domestic fiction is one dependent on a kind of "anthropomorphic hook" and calls to individual subjectivities , as conventional narrative form tends to expose the lives of its human characters (Hegglund 189). This reinscribes the human/non-human dualism, therefore, in relation to broader concepts (i.e. reconstructing relationalities between human and non-human life forms in a world coming to terms with the polycrisis against the backdrop of the Anthropocene), new ways to break this so-called anthropomorphic hook are required. Moreover, a realist mode of fiction does not suffice to break this deadlock, especially where notions of time and temporality are concerned in relation to climatological time , a time that is decoupled from human experience.[11] Accordingly, climatological time connects the present moment with the future in a chronological sense while reaching back into the past and weaves together human/non-human relationalities in a way that "we—the human reader—could imagine the historicity of the human species within the geological,

deep-historical register of time announced by the Anthropocene" (Hegglund 189). Therefore, traditional modes of domestic fiction, that are often associated with a certain bourgeois realism, would come up short in attempting to negotiate entanglements between human/non-human or reconstruct life/form temporalities.

Therefore, what I have previously termed planetary domesticity , could potentially break this anthropomorphic hook and invites a reading that inserts questions of uncertainty into domestic spaces as a way to protest and resist the dominant forces of contemporary colonial and capitalist practices by reconfiguring perceptions of time. In Erdrich and Boyle's novels, the fragmented and fractured nature of time while making overt references to planetary and evolutionary time offers various temporal registers that reconfigure the human/non-human dichotomy. Yet, while the narrative perspective still foregrounds individual human subjectivity, through the speculative mode of dystopian science-fiction, both authors are able to position these subjectivities alongside other forms of life and inter-species relationalities. Furthermore, Erdrich uses the epistolary form to connect the novel's protagonist, Cedar Hawk Songmaker, with her unborn child and her own personal history and intradiegetic storytelling. In *A Friend of the Earth*, T.C. Boyle uses a temporal disjunction by presenting Ty as both the autodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrator straddling two time periods – 2025-26 and the years 1989 to 1997 respectively. These shifts in narrative perspective point towards concerns of subjectivity and identity formation in relation to temporal disruption on a planetary scale as well as inter-species relationalities.

The opening page of Erdrich's novel is marked with the claim that "our world is running backward. Or forward. Or maybe sideways" (3). This statement is inscribed in a letter Cedar writes to her unborn child and foreshadows the novel's central premise that various species on the planet, including humanity, are undergoing the process of devolution. This sentiment is later echoed by the anonymous paleontologist , who states, "[...] we might not see the orderly backward progression of human types that evolutionary charts are so fond of presenting. Life might skip forward, or sideways" (Erdrich 69). This statement is beamed into the Songmaker family home via a TV-news broadcast, which causes the family to speculate on the future. While Cedar's father, Glen, an environmental lawyer, seeks for a positive outlook on the claims saying, "cave art was exquisite" (Erdrich 70), he is quickly reprimanded by Cedar's adoptive mother, Sera, who cries, "I can't believe you, Glen! You're PC even about the foraging apes our species may become in a few generations" (Erdrich 70). In this exchange, the Songmaker family is trying to make sense of an extinction level event where the biological classification and meaning of the human is destabilized and called into question, illustrating how the forces of history, culture, and human nature intertwine. The friction between Glen and Sera invites readers to reconsider ideas of what is natural or civilized, human or less-than-human. Later in the novel, Cedar ponders,

> I understand why so many people did not believe in evolution before last month, and still don't, and never will. It means that perfect physical harmony, grace, and in Darwin's phrase, endless forms most beautiful, resulted slowly as the result of agonizing failures. In their eyes, evolution makes life on earth a scenario of bloody, ham-handed, ruthless, tooth-and-nail struggle. (Erdrich 117)

In this section, Cedar connects evolutionary time with lived human experience, as well as invoking a metaphysical possibility through a disbelief in Darwinian evolution. Moreover, just as the anonymous paleontologist, who appeared as a talking head on TV earlier in the novel, discusses de-evolution, there is a deconstruction of the linear progression of evolution. Instead, Cedar ruminates that regression and failure – backs and sideways movements – are just as crucial to the development of the human form. In writing these thoughts to be read by her unborn child, who could be a devolved form of human, Cedar produces a text that challenges the consecutive progression of time. Louise Faison makes the exemplary argument that "As a pregnant epistolary writer, Cedar produces the next generation and the literary text. Erdrich depicts the baby—an assemblage of salvaged traits—as allegorizing this collaged aesthetic, tying the future of the (non)human to the future of the literary" (361).

Each of these scenes takes place within the confines of the home, thus further extending the relationship between different temporalities and histories. Epistolary writing can also be seen as a mode that connects the domestic with outside spheres. In Boyle's novel, the main protagonist and narrator Ty Tierwater recalls his life before ecological disaster had set in:

> […] for the better part of my life I was a criminal. Just like you. I lived in the suburbs in a three–thousand-square–foot house with redwood siding and oak floors and an oil burner the size of Texas, drove a classic 1966 Mustang for sport and a Jeep Laredo (red, black leather interior) to take me up to the Adirondacks … I guess I was dimly aware – way out there on the periphery of my consciousness – of what I was doing to the poor abused corpus of old mother earth […]. (Boyle 47)

Ty, in an admonishment of the conventional domestic lifestyle that follows a certain routine that traces the path of the American Dream, recognizes his own complicity in pushing earth's climate past its tipping point. Later in the novel, Ty claims "I wanted to live like Thoreau" (Boyle 270), recalling America's Romantic transcendentalist and "the Patron Saint of American environmental writing" (Buell 28).

Towards the end of the novel, Ty's Thoreauvian turn comes as he reunites with his ex-wife and flees to a dilapidated, abandoned cabin in the Sierra Nevada mountains owned by the environmental activist group Earth Forever! Up in the Sierra Nevada mountains, "It's hot [...] downed trees, splintered telephone poles, potholes and craters everywhere" (Boyle 281), which is in stark contrast to Thoreau's idyll at Walden Lake. Ty and Andrea have already occupied this holiday cabin, now turned home, with Ty's daughter Sierra while he was evading the authorities. Ty and Andrea end the novel setting up housekeeping "to measure out the remainder of their young-old lives" in 2026 (Boyle 276). Their reconfigured family at the novel's conclusion includes Petunia, a Patagonian fox rescued from a flooded sanctuary, and the most prevalent animals in sight are mutant jays, although the sounds of owls and coyotes begin to perforate at the edges of the returning forest. This shift in family structure often mirrors the shifts in the national character, "in both a positive and negative sense"; contained therein are ideas of progression and regression but most notably change (Jacobson 7). Nothing is certain for Ty and Andrea anymore, they have found a haven in the Sierra Nevada region scarred by the years of environmental collapse, but the "woods – these woods, our woods – are coming back" (Boyle 281). The home immediately extends outwards to the surrounding environment, forming a link between the domestic and the environment, further compounded by the fact Petunia, the Patagonian fox, has now been successfully domesticated "we don't need the muzzle anymore, or a cage [...]" (Boyle 281). This shift towards domestication is still contingent on Ty acknowledging that "Petunia is not a Dog" suggesting a mutual adaptation as Ty must accommodate this distinction as something that "will be vitally important" (Boyle 272). Here, human-animal companionship is reconstructed to accommodate empathy and coexistence, acknowledging a wild animal as an agent of uncertainty rather than the certainty of dominance associated with traditional pet ownership. Consequently, this newfound relationality with another species offers the reader a sense of quiet optimism as A *Friend of the Earth*'s epilogue provides grounds for hope amidst a world shrouded in uncertainty. Boyle seems to be suggesting that if anthropogenic climate change leads to an experience of mass extinction and polycrisis, nature will adapt even if we do not, as Jacobson argues, "[t]his radical vision asks readers to shift from an anthropocentric worldview to an ecocentric perspective."

The Future of Uncertainty

In the final pages of Erdrich's novel, Cedar writes her way back into the past, to a memory of playing in the snow with her adoptive parents. This retreat into memory is one that offers Cedar a temporal escape to resist subjugation[12] and to some extent resist the carceral state in which she is detained waiting for her next (forced) pregnancy. However, the final lines, "where will you be, my darling, the

last time it snows on earth?" (Erdrich 337), offers a glimpse through time. This sudden shift in tense thrusts the reader forward in time to the uncertain future. In this speculative inquiry, Cedar connects the future with the past and repurposes the present through narrative uncertainty in an attempt to liberate the future from her captors as a written act of resistance: "Cedar's journal that she continues to write even though it is banned by the institution, emerges as the last sign of protest. The narrative becomes a means of contention against the suppression of the female voice" (Siepak 66). Yet, unlike Boyle's quiet optimism, Cedar seems to concede to the idea that there will be no return to the way things were. However, this concession should not be read as a defeat, as the address to her child connects the future to something comprehensible and human, which positions the child as an analogy for the aesthetics of an uncertain future. Faison argues that "Erdrich ties the future of the (non)human to the future of the literary, offering writing as one technology for producing altered—and notably nonwhite, anticapitalistic—forms of futurity" (361).

Hegemonic ideas of progress, including evolution and the march of modernity, dominate much of Western culture imposed on a global scale through waves of colonialism and capitalist expansion. In the introduction to their book, Ian Scoones and Andy Sterling advocate for an "appreciation of uncertainty" that resists a colonization of the future by a Western framed globalizing modernity (Scoons and Sterling 7). Uncertainty becomes more than a perceived lack or absence of knowledge but rather an active form of the "conditions of knowledge – how we understand, frame and construct potential futures […]" (Scoones and Sterling 8). It is here that we can see how uncertainty liberates itself from hegemonic structures and becomes a useful tool with which to imagine what Haraway calls "still possible pasts, presents, and futures." Haraway's Chthulucene presents an alternative lens that can be used to navigate the current paradigmatic epoch shifting age of the Anthropocene and polycrisis.

In fact, like other terms that stand in as an apropos for the Anthropocene, such as capitalocene, plasticocene, (M)anthropocene, misanthropocene, urbanocene, and even Americocene[13], there is still the element of uncertainty about how to label or name the present moment but the need to do so anyway. Yet, each one offers a potential way of understanding the present moment in relation to the past as well as the future. Furthermore, these terms afford a critical distance from the hegemonic ideas of globalized modernity and can help form critical responses to the multiple cascading crises in the world today against the tide of anthropogenic climate change. Haraway proposes the Chthulucene as "one of the big-enough stories in the netbag for staying with the trouble of our ongoing epoch". By combining the theoretical with the need for narrative storytelling to make sense of these shifting times, "Chthulucene is made up of ongoing multispecies stories and practices of becoming-with in times that remain at stake, in precarious times, in

which the world is not finished, and the sky has not fallen—yet" (Haraway). This anticipatory "yet" highlights an urgent temporality and underscores the precariousness and uncertainty of the current times.

This urgency is compounded by the idea that the natural world may be vulnerable and close to exhaustion brought on by the enterprises of capitalism (and colonialism) through incremental acts of environmental violence, or the processes of "slow violence" (Nixon 2) . Furthermore, Rob Nixon notes the asymmetry in the slow violence that climate change enacts on the planet, which he calls "an attritional violence [...]", and how there is a disproportionate impact on the poor and marginalized who bear the brunt of the negative effects of environmental destruction (Nixon 2). Building on Nixon's argument, McAvan insists, "In Erdrich's work, therefore, we can see the way that a slow violence which began against Native Americans with colonialism has come home to roost for the white culture of the Americas in general with the destruction of the climate" (101). This is echoed in Erdrich's novel when Cedar's father states, "Mother Earth has a clear sense of justice. You fuck me up, I fuck you up" (Erdrich 68). Yet, the idea that such violence is slow can be challenged by the reality that for displaced people, and people on the move, affected by climate-related disaster, the violence is not attritional, but in fact precipitated by the crises associated with environmental destruction.

Therefore, planetary domesticity could also imply a kind of radical homemaking (See also Jacobson) in this current epoch. While Boyle's novel closes with a certain white domesticity. Erdrich's novel weaves together a multicultural or transnational family, yet, Ursula K. Heise is somewhat skeptical of such narrative representations that are simply presented as "an ecological family romance" as such representations potentially limit their "socially transformative power" (Heise 394).[14] Yet, both novels resist hegemonic or simplistic romanticized possibilities by instead choosing uncertainty:

> [...] uncertainties can be generative of diverse, imagined alternatives. By opening up spaces to re- imagine futures, to dream and to construct alternatives, uncertainties can be confronted in positive ways: not as threats or sources of fear, but as sources of hope and possibility. (Scoones and Sterling 21)

Therefore, these narratives weave in the multicultural and transnational family unit with positive uncertainties which then "function as narrative solutions to environmental problems" as the domestic sphere intersects with broader ecological systems.

Conclusion: Contemplate the Entanglements

Tracing back through the critical threads often afforded to writers of dystopian science fiction , Erdrich and Boyle present works of fiction that (re)claim domestic spaces and insert human/non-human entanglements in the literary mode by playing with forms of domestic fiction through various narrative modalities as discussed. In these works, the gathering of collective introspection against the backdrop of an apocalyptic climate on the global scale revives a new kind of collective consciousness: a life form with the potential to rethink the future of uncertainty. Both authors revitalize the domestic form which acts as a mode of cultural repair at a time when the local seems to be overwhelmed by the disruption of climate crisis and other catastrophes (see also Faison).

Just like attempts to reconfigure the Anthropocene by giving rise to other useful terms that allow us to think with, through, and against the current epoch, polycrisis has provoked further thoughts about what such a term could actually mean. In her recent (re)publication of her work *Metamodernity*, Lene Rachel Andersen has *retitled the work Polymodernity: Meaning and Hope in a Complex World.* Her decision was provoked by the fact that her theory was being aligned too closely with metamodernism, a movement which aims to bring together contemporary culture through the combined gaze of the modern and postmodern, rather than what Andersen is reaching for: "[…] to see the globe as a connected whole consisting of many cultures each with their explanatory power. A polymodern epistemology must be able to provide this" (Andersen 9). It could also be posited that by creating new forms of knowledge by thinking with terms such as Anthropocene, polymodernity, and even polycrisis, we could construct new ways of dealing with the systemic risks that present themselves in the contemporary moment.

While Andersen makes a compelling case, weaving through both academic and non-academic modes of thought, the work tries to insert a certain way of doing things in the face of the polycrisis (with certainty). One of Andersen's claims is that polymodernity provides us with a framework for "understanding ourselves and our societies in a more complex way," yet this set up seems more concerned with naming this condition and setting up a hierarchy of increasing societal complexity that ranges from indigenous to polymodern via modern and postmodern (Andersen 9). Such hierarchies risk oversimplifying complex societal structures similar to the oversimplification of naming current, multiple cascading events through the application of clever neologisms such as polycrisis, which does not consider the combined and uneven nature of interlocking crises.[15] As such, polymodernity could be further critiqued as only offering a way to navigate the polycrisis by serving a neoliberal, utopian agenda as it shifts its focus to free-market economics and the commodification of social bonds.[16] Even as Andersen expresses an openness towards different kinds of realities, and acknowledges oversimplification, her text calls for "a need to [quantify]" all too often, which closes the door on spaces of uncertainty

and necessary skepticism (Andersen 10).[17] By thinking through the current epoch with planetary domesticity in mind, the various relationalities and entanglements between the human and non-human are able to play out through uncertainty, even when the disruptive forces of polycrisis loom large. Through these uncertainties, we may be able to shift the focus beyond the restrictions of human-centered hegemonies, to more ecocentric ones, and leverage a narrative medium to explore the various temporal and spatial dimensions (and disturbances) of the past, present, and future in relation to planetary ecology. In both Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* and Boyle's A *Friend of the Earth*, form and convention are leveraged and disrupted as readers are invited to contemplate entanglements of the cultural, domestic, social, and symbolic with the biological across shifting temporalities, breathing a new life into literary form. Thus, Erdrich and Boyle present us with the idea that literary narratives can act as sites of cultural repair by confronting the inadequacy of conventional modes of expression for a new way of thinking through the current planetary crises and resist falling into despair, cynicism, or unwarranted optimism, and the belief/disbelief discourse of progress.

Notes

[1] Adam Tooze argues, "the polycrisis idea has always been first and foremost about mapping a cognitive shock" and bout how each social group views itself in relation to the ongoing crises. Tooze also posits that "In the polycrisis the shocks are disparate, but they interact so that the whole is even more overwhelming than the sum of the parts."

[2] Citing Foucault by way of Rancière, Sibylle Baumbach and Birgit Neumann claim that heterochronies of the present "dismantle the sense of community that the term 'contemporary' implies and give way to fragmented, highly atomized, and competing temporalities" (4).

[3] Amy Kaplan states that domestic spheres can be thought of as extending to the nation as a domestic space: "The domestic in intimate opposition to the foreign. In this context domestic has a double meaning that not only links the familial household to the nation but also imagines both in opposition to everything outside the geographic and conceptual border of the home" (581). This, by extension, situates the domestic space of home in a broader environmental context.

[4] Michael Lawrence argues that the term can be thought of as "the causal entanglement of crises in multiple global systems in ways that significantly degrade humanity's prospects" (2).

[5] E. Anthony Muhammad makes a compelling argument for deterritorializing the development of concepts of Otherness and alterity from the hegemonic White political structures from which they emerge and reshape the philosophical borderlands around these notions.

Notes

[6] For a more complete argument how this idea relates to the Indigenous decolonial project, Julia Siepak argues that Indigenous writers present, then, the social critique of extractive economies and environmentally irresponsible politics. Founding their fiction on Indigenous perspectives, they attempt to re-imagine and re-narrativize the poetics of the apocalyptic future to include Native peoples, inherently engaging in decolonial efforts.

[7] Iris Murdoch claims, in her seminal work *Existentialists and Mystics*, that "literature is a way to picture and understand moral situation" while positing language and perception in narrative ethics extends the philosophical boundary (386).

[8] Here I want to draw attention to Louise Faison's exemplary scholarship on Erdrich's novel which contextualizes the reading from a feminist perspective and incorporates indigenous history to formally mimic the biological recycling she thematizes, positing "altered forms of disorderly, literary beauty for a nonhuman (and notably nonwhite, anticapitalistic) future" (357).

[9] While the US has endured over 400 weather related disasters since 1980, NOAA's "Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters" data reveals that the number and cost of disasters between the years 2000-2024 exceeds the previous two decades (1980-1999) combined.

[10] For a fuller account of this argument, see Birgit Christ's monograph, *Modern Domestic Fiction*. Christ builds upon the framework of Nina Baym's *Women's Fiction* (1978) as a study of how domestic fiction took a central role in promulgating popular feminist ideas, creating a mass magazine market geared to women, and shaping new middle-class identity.

[11] See also Markley, R. "Literature, Climate, and Time: Between History and Story" in *Climate and Literature* in which Markley argues, "Beginning around 1800, however, work in geology, planetary astronomy, and paleontology transformed conceptions of climate by decoupling planetary history from human experience, memory, and myth."

[12] Frida Buhre and Collin Bjork argue for emphasizing temporality in Indigenous rhetoric by examining how indigenous activists are informed by "temporal topoi" to resist subjugation.

[13] The term Americocene can be attributed to Jared Hickman's essay "The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism and the Case for the Americocene" in which he states "the intellectual territory of apocalypse in American literature and culture rightfully belongs to indigenous peoples." An argument that can help elevate a reading of Erdrich's text through the lens of indigenous studies (19).

[14] I refer here to Heise's argument: "The multicultural or transnational family is recuperated as an agent of social resistance and as a synecdoche for a more ecologically sustainable social order even as the insistently domestic framing of such cultural encounters contains and limits their socially transformative power" (394). Yet, Heise offers a way out for such representations when there is an understanding of ecosystems and human social systems as analogous in their structure and as subject to the same ethical imperatives (396)

[15] The Nordic Bildung website offers downloadable slides that show these hierarchies of increasing societal complexity that are focused on "being human", which also takes an anthropocentric position rather than an ecocentric.

Notes

[16] Andersen's work in progress article, "Polymodern Economics" offers useful ways to rethink current economic models but at times offers simple binaries and aims to quantify thinks like "how many favors did you do yesterday [...] how much did you talk to your neighbor?" to produce data for municipal investments thus potentially straying into indirect of commodification of building social and emotional bonds (2024).

[17] Here, I would even draw attention to an argument of fictionalism presented by John Gibson based on a philosophy of skepticism. While skepticism has often been the crux of many debates around Western Philosophy, it still offers a useful doubt that resists unwarranted optimism while warding off overt cynicism. Gibson argues, "A fictionalist stance is required when we have come see that a region of discourse is indispensable to our cultural practices but that we have lost grounds for believing in the commitments evidently demanded by that discourse" (112). Which, in light of the argument, provides us with useful sites of cultural repair.

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Biography

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