



زمن ما بعد الإنسان: البطء والبيئة والزمنية غير البشرية في الخيال الحديث والريفي

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**الملخص :**

ستتناول هذه المقالة النظريات الحديثة للزمن التي تتجاوز التجربة الإنسانية، من خلال دراسة تقاطع ما بعد الإنسانية، والنقد البيئي، ومفهوم البطء، لا سيما في علاقتهما بالسرد الحديث والريفي. وتركز المقالة بدرجة أكبر على تركيب ومناقشة هذه الطروحات النظرية المعاصرة بشكل نقدي، بدلاً من تحليل الأعمال الأدبية بحد ذاتها. كما تسعى إلى فحص ما الذي ظل ثابتاً، وما الذي تغير، وما الذي أضيف أو أهمل في النقاشات الحديثة حول هذه المفاهيم. الكلمات المفتاحية: ما بعد الإنسانية، الزمن السردى، البطء، النقد البيئي، السرد الريفي، الفاعلية غير البشرية، الزمن البيئي، السرديات ما-فوق البشرية.

## Posthuman Time: Slowness, Ecology, and Non-Human Temporality in Modern and Rural Fiction

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### Abstract

This article will discuss recent theories of time, which surpass human experience, through an examination of the intersection of posthumanism, ecocriticism, and slowness, particularly in relation to modern and rural fiction. It will be more about synthesizing and critically examining recent theoretical discussions about these concepts rather than critically examining literary works. It will also be an examination of what has remained constant, what has changed, and what has been added or left out in recent discussions.

### Keywords

*Posthumanism, Narrative Temporality, Slowness, Ecocriticism, Rural Fiction, Non-Human Agency, Ecological Time, More-than-Human Narratives*

### Introduction

This article seeks to discuss the developments in narrative theory with regard to time. Traditionally, time has been viewed as a human construct that influences causality, time span, and agency. However, with the emergence of posthuman and ecocritical theories, anthropocentrism is being challenged with the incorporation of non-human time, which focuses on non-linear connections with humans, technology, and nature (Braidotti, 2013).

This is also in line with the criticism of the fast-paced nature of time in modernity, which is anthropocentric and linear. This has been addressed by the emergence of disciplines such as econarratology, which focus on the anthropocentrism of narrative forms and the need to develop non-traditional narrative forms to address ecological issues (Caracciolo, 2025).



In this regard, rural fiction is an important theme in narrative theory with regard to time, especially with the emergence of non-traditional understandings of time that are non-linear and slow, unlike the fast-paced nature of time in modernity. The literature review will seek to synthesize the developments in narrative theory with regard to time.

### **Scope and Method of Review**

In this subtopic, the scope and approach of the review are presented, with a focus on posthuman time, ecological time, and narrative studies. Unlike other reviews, this one does not merely review literary materials, but rather seeks to synthesize and critically review studies on posthumanism, ecology, temporality, and rural and modern fiction.

### **Type of Review**

The review method is critical/thematic, which focuses on comparative analysis and conceptual interaction to encourage debate. It is also similar to narrative and thematic reviews in its approach to literature based on themes rather than timelines and assessing consistency between studies, as proposed by Labaree (2009) and McCombes (2025).

### **Time Range of Studies**

The review prioritizes recent scholarship (2014–2026) to highlight current developments in posthumanism, ecocriticism, and non-human temporality, drawing on key monographs, articles, and edited volumes.

### **Databases Used**

Sources were collected through targeted searches in prominent databases, such as MLA International Bibliography, JSTOR, Scopus, and Google Scholar, to account for interdisciplinary research from literary studies, cultural studies, environmental humanities, and theory, providing a mix of established and new research.

### **Inclusion Criteria**

Studies were considered based on relevance to posthumanism, ecology, temporality, and narrative form; inclusion of peer-reviewed or similarly rigorous academic sources; emphasis on conceptual and comparative analysis; and engagement with non-human agency and ecological time.

### **Exclusion Criteria**

The review does not consider studies without engagement with temporality or posthuman/ecological theories, purely descriptive text-based analyses, sources published before 2014 unless they are foundational, and non-scholarly sources such as popular essays or blog posts.

### **Method of Synthesis**



The method of synthesis is thematic, comparative, and conceptual rather than statistical, and it is more focused on discovering the essential themes, comparing the theoretical perspectives on some theoretical concepts, such as non-human agency and ecological time, rather than summarizing the studies done on the specific theme (Labaree, 2009; McCombes, 2025).

## **Theoretical Framework**

This section provides a framework for this study through a critical engagement with and subversion of existing literature on posthumanism, nonhuman agency, ecocriticism, and concepts of slowness and acceleration.

### **Posthumanism and Non-Human Agency**

However, the contemporary theories of posthumanism recast the nature of human agency as a relational and distributed construct and challenge the idea of human exceptionalism by emphasizing the idea of interconnectedness between the human and non-human entities. Rosi Braidotti's idea of post-anthropocentric subjectivity recasts the idea of the non-human/human dichotomy, while Donna Haraway's ideas of relational ethics in terms of 'becoming with' and 'making kin' emphasize the idea of co-existence between the non-human and the human.

However, despite the similarities between the ideas of the various theorists of posthumanism in emphasizing the idea of relationality between the non-human and the human entities, they are conceptually distinct from one another and thus give rise to debates on the idea of a unified theory of posthumanism.

### **Ecocriticism and Environmental Time**

Environmental time refers to the temporal periods longer than the span of human life and includes concepts of geological and climatic time, which are now at the core of ecocriticism. This can be seen in the idea of hyperobjects as presented by Timothy Morton, which discusses the idea of ecological objects such as global warming on a vast and non-local scale and the difficulty of understanding the idea of the present with regard to the non-human world. This idea of hyperobjects has been challenged by Ursula Heise on the grounds that the entire world would then be a hyperobject and the idea would then cease to be of use.

On the other hand, Stacy Alaimo focuses on the idea of the body and the interconnections between the material world and the idea of ecology and interdependence with regard to the non-human world and the idea of the body and its relation to ecology and the non-human world.

### **Narrative Temporality and Slowness**

In contemporary theories of narrative, temporality plays a dynamic role in influencing both narrative structure and ecological thought, moving beyond strictly anthropocentric models and toward non-linear time (Ricoeur).



Hartmut Rosa's theory of social acceleration points to how our contemporary world is characterized by technological and cultural speed, and how this has created a crisis, one that is starkly contrasted with ecological time.

In counterpoint to this, ideas of "slowness," drawing on Bergson's theory of lived time (*durée*), highlight qualitative temporality and its relation to ecological narrative.

These ideas illustrate a dynamic relationship between accelerated social time and slow ecological time, and how they might be mediated through ecological narrative.

### **Modernity, Acceleration, and Human Time**

This section enters the scholarly debate on the human experience of time, especially industrial time, acceleration, alienation, clock time and lived time, and narrative speed in modern and post-modern literature, through the comparative problematization of the theories, rather than the theories themselves.

### **Industrial Temporality**

According to critics, industrial capitalism changed our understanding of time in that it privileged quantifiable, time-tabling clock time over pre-industrial, natural time. This changed time perception created efficiency, synchronization, and control in industrial and bureaucratic systems, using time as a means of regulation and optimization. Time thus became abstract and segmented, providing the basic framework for the normative time organization of modernity.

### **Speed, Crisis, and Alienation**

According to Hartmut Rosa's social acceleration theory, the main characteristic of modernity is the increasing speed of technology, social change, and life in general, which causes a "shrinking present" and a lack of stability in the expectations of the future (Rosa, 2013/2015). This generates a paradox in which innovation generates more pressure on time rather than saving it.

However, this acceleration is not absolute in the sense that some social groups face a situation of "pockets of inertia" or are excluded from the accelerated change process. Hartmut Rosa's idea of "frenetic standstill" emphasizes the situation in which a lot of movement generates little progress and causes anxiety and a crisis in the social and psychological experience of time.

### **Clock-Time vs. Lived Time**

Distinguishable from clock time, quantified, segmented, and related to industrial time schedules, lived time is qualitative, uninterrupted, and associated with subjective experience, memory, and stories. The dominance of clock time in modernity has fundamentally transformed how individuals experience time, with a focus on efficiency and productivity, and a subordination of subjective time. This has given rise to a division between measurable time and experienced time, a central concern in theories of alienation in modernity.



## **Modernist and Postmodern Narrative Speed**

These tensions in literary and cultural theory can be seen in modernist narratives, where non-linearity, interiority, and the importance of fragmented temporal experience have been common themes in dealing with a speeding modern world. Postmodern theories of narrative fragmentation and speed can be seen to take this further, relating it to late capitalism according to theories such as Jameson's.

These theories can be seen to show how modernist and postmodern narratives subvert traditional notions of linear storytelling by dealing with issues of speeding social contexts and representations of time.

### **Synthesis of Scholarly Discussion**

In terms of disciplines, it has been argued that the temporality of modernity is characterized by speed, abstraction, and fragmentation, with crisis, alienation, and time scarcity being the result. These changes, fueled by industrial and technological development, have further exacerbated the division between clock time and embodied time. Since the late nineteenth century, the abstraction of time has been the focus of increasing criticism, and narrative studies are both a product and an investigation of this.

### **Slowness as Aesthetic and Ecological Resistance**

However, scholars have also redefined slowness as an aesthetic and ecological form of resistance to acceleration, focusing on human and non-human interconnectedness and ecological time (Caracciolo, 2022). Slow narrative practices, therefore, resist linear and goal-oriented storytelling, focusing on duration, repetition, and attentiveness, and leading to a "thickening of attention," which highlights different temporalities.

Furthermore, this concept also has an ethical side, moving from fast-paced structures to aligning with environmental time (Sommer, 2023). Slow storytelling has also been seen as a form of ecological action, representing human and non-human interconnectedness and temporality, often through multiperspectivity and non-linearity, moving away from linear plot structures (D'Amato, 2025).

### **Ecology and Non-Human Temporality**

Recent studies on the concept of narrative and ecology have focused on temporalities that are beyond the human perspective, such as "deep time," "animal time," "seasonal time," and "object-oriented time." All these temporalities have helped to expand the concept of narrative by breaking the conventional human perspective on time, creating new forms of ecological representation (Griffiths, 2023).

For example, "deep time" is the concept that repositions the human perspective in the geological scale, thereby complicating the traditional concept of time and creating long-term views. "Animal time" and "seasonal time" are focused on the non-linear and responsive nature



of time, as opposed to the goal-oriented nature of time, while "object-oriented time" focuses on the temporal agency of non-human entities, breaking the anthropocentric concept of time.

### **Rural Fiction as Temporal Counter-Modernity**

Rural fiction is highlighted as an important location that counters the effects of modern temporal acceleration by promoting alternative models of time based on the seasons and interspecies relationships. Rural settings are distinguished from the linear, productivity-based temporality of urban and industrial spaces, with rural fiction being understood as temporal counter-modernities based on ecological time, embodied time, and spatial time.

These types of fiction counter abstraction and promote interdependence, with the land being understood as an active force of time, thus countering teleology and accelerationism in narrative form.

### **Comparative Trends in Recent Scholarship**

However, recent research in narratology, ecology, and posthuman temporality suggests some possible paths of comparison: modern and rural fiction, Global South and Western ecology, and the development of narrative techniques. Modern fiction is linked with acceleration, fragmentation, and anthropocentric and capitalist temporality, while rural fiction is characterized by cyclicity, embodiment, and ecology, although the number of comparative works between these genres is relatively low.

Global South ecocriticism seeks to overcome Western ecology with a focus on land, decolonization, and the specificity of ecological narratives. In all these areas, researchers focus on the use of slowness, fragmentation, and decentered focalization as a way of countering anthropocentric and linear temporality. The study demonstrates a growing interest in the topic of comparative temporality, although the gap between the potential of these approaches and the actual use of the topic remains significant.

### **Critical Evaluation of Existing Literature**

However, a critical review of the latest literature reveals the following limitations in the study of narrative temporality, ecology, and posthumanism: Firstly, despite the close relationship between the concepts of posthumanism and ecocriticism, the fragmented nature of the vocabularies and approaches of these two concepts makes it difficult to achieve a unified understanding of non-human temporalities.

Moreover, despite the shift in the focus of the study of narrative temporality from anthropocentrism to non-anthropocentrism, the majority of the research conducted on the topic continues to focus on the human experience of temporality and thus demonstrates a strong level of bias.

Another limitation of the study of rural temporality is the fact that the topic is rarely approached as a distinct concept and is more likely to be approached with a sense of nostalgia and contrast with urban temporality.



Finally, despite the close relationship between the concepts of posthumanism and ecocriticism, the majority of the research conducted on the topic demonstrates a strong level of fragmentation and a lack of integration of the approaches of the

### **Research Gaps**

However, there are certain gaps in the study of narrative ecocriticism and posthumanism, which include the lack of a theory of nonhuman time, which has hindered the wider scope of the study, the lack of consideration of rural fictions, which are an essential part of the study of time, the focus of the study on urban modernity, which has led to the relative neglect of rural areas, and the need to develop a model that can compare different forms of time, such as Western and Global South time.

### **Implications for Literary Studies**

The review discusses several implications, including those relevant to literary studies, narrative, ecology, and temporality. The recent approaches, according to the review, have reconfigured narrative form as an ecological tool, using narrative features such as multiperspectivity and open-endedness to manage readers' awareness of human-nonhuman relationships and temporality.

Temporality has emerged as an ethical concept, with narrative playing a crucial role in shaping readers' awareness of environmental responsibility, human-nonhuman relationships, and future orientations, thereby challenging anthropocentric conceptions of time. The ecocritical theory has placed considerable emphasis on ecological imagination as a narrative function, allowing readers to become aware of environmental complexities and anthropocentric conceptions.

Finally, the recent reading strategies have reoriented attention from human centrality towards non-human agency and relationships, while maintaining critical purchase through the analysis of narrative techniques such as focalisation and narrative tempo.

### **Conclusion**

This literature review reveals important trends in the development of narrative theory, ecological theory, and posthuman temporality, and establishes a connection between modern fiction and acceleration, and between rural fiction and cyclical time. It also points to the fragmentation that exists in the literature, such as the overlap between posthuman and ecocriticism, methodological weaknesses, and a lack of theorization concerning time and the rural.

The major contribution that this literature review offers is to bring these different strands of thought together to reveal important trends and areas that need to be addressed, such as the need for future research to continue to develop integrative approaches, comparative models of time, and methodological approaches, to ensure that literary studies continue to address ecological crises and non-human agency through a posthuman approach.



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