
**WHEN NATURE SPEAKS AND ACTS: ANTHROPOMORPHIC
REPRESENTATIONS OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN CONTEMPORARY KENYAN
PROSE FICTION**

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how contemporary Kenyan prose fiction gives nature a voice, presence and capacity to act through anthropomorphic representation. Existing scholarship on Kenyan environmental literature has established the importance of ecological degradation, human–nature relationships and the politics of environmental exploitation, but less attention has been paid to anthropomorphism as an aesthetic means of presenting the nonhuman world as an agent rather than a passive backdrop to human experience. The article addresses this gap through a close reading of Henry Ole Kulet’s *Vanishing Herds* (2011), Ng’ang’a Mbugua’s *the Angels of the Wild* (2015), Ian McKenzie-Vincent’s *Aziza and Bakari in the Climate of Change* (2019), and Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor’s *The Dragonfly Sea* (2019). Guided by eco-aesthetic and postcolonial theories, and using a qualitative interpretive design based on close textual analysis, the study explores how landscapes, wildlife, forests, climate, seas and islands are endowed with voice, emotion, memory and agency. It argues that these representations do more than make ecological crisis vivid or emotionally accessible. They unsettle anthropocentric assumptions, expose the colonial and neo-colonial histories underlying environmental exploitation, and foreground more relational understandings of human–nonhuman coexistence. By bringing anthropomorphism to the center of analysis, the article extends Kenyan ecocritical scholarship by showing how literary representations of nature can function simultaneously as aesthetic expression, environmental witnessing and critique of unequal power relations.

Keywords: Anthropomorphism, Eco-aesthetics, Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Environmental Agency, Kenyan Prose Fiction.

1. INTRODUCTION

Environmental crisis is becoming increasingly difficult to discuss without also considering questions of culture, history, identity and power. Climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, land degradation and the depletion of wildlife are often approached through scientific, economic or political language. Literature encounters these problems from a different direction. It gives environmental change a human texture while, importantly, not always reducing it to a problem that concerns human beings alone. Through imagery, metaphor, characterisation, narrative voice and symbolism, fiction can make environmental change something that readers can feel, remember and interpret. Literary texts can therefore become important spaces for asking what happens when the relationship between people and the environments they inhabit begins to break down.

Contemporary Kenyan prose fiction offers particularly rich material for such an inquiry. Kenya's environmental history is closely tied to colonial land appropriation, changing patterns of land ownership, conservation policies, pastoral livelihoods, commercial development and the commodification of natural resources. Environmental spaces consequently carry histories that cannot be read from their physical appearance alone. A forest, for instance, may be a habitat for wildlife, a source of livelihood, a place of communal memory, a commercial resource and a contested space at the same time. A grazing landscape can be both an ecological system and a form of cultural inheritance. The ocean, likewise, can connect communities across generations while carrying memories of trade, migration, colonial encounters and contemporary economic interests.

Kenyan writers have responded to these environmental complexities in varied ways. Some have concentrated on forests and wildlife, while others have explored drought, land degradation and climate change. Others have turned their attention to rivers, lakes and the Indian Ocean. Despite these differences, their works share an important tendency that nature is increasingly being moved from the background of the story to the center of narrative attention. The environment is not simply scenery against which human events unfold. It can shape those events, influence human choices and, at times, appear to act upon the world around it.

This article focuses on one of the most striking literary devices through which such environmental participation is expressed: anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism refers to the representation of nonhuman entities through qualities, emotions, intentions, behaviours or forms of agency normally associated with human beings. In literary writing, a forest may appear wounded, an animal may grieve, drought may seem to pursue a community, the climate may appear to issue a warning, and the sea may become a living presence within personal and collective memory. Such representations immediately raise a difficult question: does giving nature human qualities simply bring us back to anthropocentrism? If the environment becomes meaningful only when human emotions and characteristics are projected onto it, anthropomorphism could appear to place human beings at the center once again.

The relationship, however, is not so straightforward. As Timothy Clark observes, anthropomorphism can reproduce anthropocentric assumptions, but it can also create imaginative possibilities for recognising forms of nonhuman agency.¹ This tension is particularly important in literary studies because writers have no language outside human language through which to represent the nonhuman world. The use of human characteristics does not therefore automatically mean that nature is being reduced to human interests. In some instances, anthropomorphism can instead unsettle the assumption that human beings are the only meaningful actors within an ecological system. The central concern of this article is consequently not merely to establish whether Kenyan writers anthropomorphise nature. The more important questions are: What does anthropomorphism achieve when it is used to represent environmental crisis? How does it shape the reader's relationship with landscapes, animals, forests, climate and the sea? What kinds of ecological agency become visible through such representations? And what historical and political relationships are brought into view when the nonhuman world is imagined as capable of suffering, remembering, warning or resisting?

The article explores these questions through four contemporary Kenyan prose-fiction texts: H. R. ole Kulet's *Vanishing Herds* (2011), Ng'ang'a Mbugua's *Angels of the Wild* (2015), Ian McKenzie-Vincent's *Aziza and Bakari in the Climate of Change* (2019), and Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea* (2019). The selection deliberately brings together different ecological settings and forms of environmental experience. *Vanishing Herds* places pastoral life, drought, forests and land degradation at the heart of its environmental

imagination. *Angels of the Wild* gives particular attention to wildlife and conservation. *Aziza and Bakari in the Climate of Change* places climate change and environmental pollution at the center of its narrative. *The Dragonfly Sea*, meanwhile, takes the discussion to Pate Island and the Indian Ocean, where ecological life intersects with histories of movement, trade, memory and global economic interests.

Bringing these texts together is important because environmental criticism has generated valuable readings of particular ecological spaces, yet terrestrial, animal, climatic and marine environments can sometimes be treated as separate areas of inquiry. This article places them within the same analytical frame in order to consider anthropomorphism as a recurring eco-aesthetic strategy across different environmental settings. Although its forms vary from one text to another, anthropomorphism performs three closely connected functions.

First, it makes environmental agency easier to see. Processes such as drought, climate change, ecological degradation and changes in marine environments can appear abstract when discussed only in scientific or policy terms. Fiction gives these processes presence and movement. They become forces that affect human and nonhuman lives and that participate in the unfolding of events. Secondly, anthropomorphism gives ecological violence an emotional and ethical dimension. When a forest is described through the language of bodily injury, or when an animal is represented as capable of grief, environmental destruction becomes more than a distant ecological statistic. It becomes an experience that invites emotional recognition. Readers are encouraged to consider not only what environmental destruction does to people but also what it means for the wider living world. Also, anthropomorphism can expose and question the systems of power through which nature is turned into property and commodity. Land, trees, wildlife and water acquire economic value within particular political and historical arrangements. Once nature is viewed primarily through ownership, profit or extraction, other relationships with the environment can easily be pushed aside. Literary representation can resist this reduction by restoring ideas of memory, attachment, dignity and agency to the nonhuman world.

The argument developed here is situated at the intersection of eco-aesthetics and postcolonial ecocriticism. Eco-aesthetic thinking provides a way of examining how literary form influences the ways readers perceive and respond to the environment. Postcolonial ecocriticism, on the other hand, directs attention towards the historical structures that have shaped environmental relations, including colonial appropriation, uneven development, extraction and the commodification of natural resources.² Bringing the two perspectives together is particularly useful for reading Kenyan literature because environmental degradation cannot always be explained simply as the result of individual human irresponsibility. Questions of responsibility are also entangled with histories of land appropriation, unequal economic relationships, resource extraction and contemporary development pressures.

Against this background, the article understands anthropomorphism as an eco-aesthetic mode of environmental witnessing. It does more than make nature look or behave like a human being. At its most productive, it unsettles the supposedly clear boundary between human action and nonhuman agency. Through anthropomorphic representation, nature becomes more than something human beings look at, use or describe. It becomes a presence through which histories can be registered and against which human actions can be judged. The literary environment can therefore speak to human experience while also challenging the assumption that the human world is the only world that matters.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study brings together two complementary perspectives: eco-aesthetic theory and postcolonial ecocriticism. The two are useful for different but closely related reasons. Eco-aesthetic theory helps the study examine how literary choices make the environment visible, felt and meaningful, particularly when nature is represented as possessing voice, emotion or agency. Postcolonial ecocriticism, in turn, places these representations within the longer histories of colonialism, land appropriation, resource extraction, unequal development and contested belonging that have shaped environmental relations in Kenya. Read together, the two perspectives allow anthropomorphism to be understood as more than a decorative literary technique. It becomes a way of bringing the agency of the nonhuman world into the narrative while also questioning assumptions that place human beings at the center of ecological life.

2.1 Eco-Aesthetic Theory

The study's first theoretical orientation is eco-aesthetic. At its simplest, eco-aesthetic criticism asks what happens when aesthetic choices influence the way readers see and respond to the natural world. Its concern is therefore not simply with the presence of nature in a literary work, but with the ways in which language, imagery, metaphor, characterisation, symbolism and narrative form give the environment meaning. The important question is not only what does the text say about nature? But also, how does the text make nature matter?

Earlier literary approaches often treated nature largely as a setting against which human stories unfolded. Ecocriticism challenged this habit by insisting that the physical environment should itself become part of literary analysis. Lawrence Buell's environmental criticism, for instance, draws attention to literary works in which the nonhuman environment is more than a backdrop to human action; it becomes an important presence in the narrative.³ Greg Garrard similarly demonstrates the wide scope of ecocritical inquiry through his discussions of pollution, wilderness, animals, pastoralism, apocalypse and dwelling.⁴ This shift provides an important starting point for the present study. If the environment is viewed merely as scenery, drought remains something that happens in the background, the forest becomes a place in which human characters move, animals become objects within the landscape, and the sea serves mainly to locate an island geographically. Anthropomorphic representation unsettles this arrangement. Drought can appear to pursue and punish; a forest can seem to suffer from human intrusion; animals can acquire emotional and social presence; and the sea can become part of the memory and identity of those who live alongside it.

Anthropomorphism is therefore where literary aesthetics and environmental ethics begin to meet. Giving a nonhuman entity human qualities can make an environmental process easier for human readers to recognise and respond to. A suffering forest, a grieving animal or an apparently threatening drought can make ecological damage emotionally immediate. Yet anthropomorphism raises a deeper question than emotional accessibility alone: Can human beings imagine the nonhuman world as meaningful without reducing that meaning to human usefulness?

Timothy Clark's discussion of anthropomorphism is helpful precisely because it leaves this tension open.¹ Anthropomorphism can project human qualities onto nonhuman beings and therefore risk reinforcing anthropocentric thinking. At the same time, it can unsettle the belief that agency, emotion and meaningful presence belong exclusively to human beings. The tension is productive rather than merely problematic. Literature necessarily relies on human language to represent the nonhuman, but that very language can be used to challenge a strictly human-centred understanding of the world. The argument is strengthened by insights from material ecocriticism. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann draw attention to the agency of

material environments and to the ways in which matter itself participates in the production of meaning.⁵ from this position, nature does not have to be turned into a human-like character before it can matter. A river's movement, a forest's resistance, the physical force of drought or the changing rhythms of the sea can all influence human lives and generate narrative consequences. The material world is therefore capable of participating in the story without necessarily speaking in a human voice.

This distinction is particularly useful in reading *The Dragonfly Sea*. The Indian Ocean does not need to be given a literal human voice before it can become an active presence. Its tides, currents, rhythms, storms and routes intersect with human movement, memory, livelihood and identity. The sea acts upon the lives represented in the novel, even when that action is conveyed through material and symbolic rather than literal human speech. Anthropomorphism, in this sense, extends beyond straightforward personification. It can be understood as part of a broader literary process through which the nonhuman world is given narrative presence and through which readers are encouraged to recognise its capacity to shape human experience.

The eco-aesthetic framework used in this article therefore revolves around three related questions: How is the environment aesthetically animated? What kinds of agency are attributed to nonhuman entities? And what ethical and political responses does this animation invite? These questions keep the analysis close to the actual workings of the texts—their language, images, metaphors, symbols and narrative patterns, while also making room for the wider ecological meanings that emerge from those literary choices.

2.2 Postcolonial Ecocriticism

An eco-aesthetic reading, however, cannot by itself account for the historical and political circumstances surrounding the selected Kenyan texts. Environmental spaces do not exist outside history. Forests, grazing lands, wildlife reserves, rivers and the ocean have all been shaped by struggles over ownership, access, livelihood and economic value. The study therefore places its eco-aesthetic reading alongside postcolonial ecocriticism.

Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* provides an important foundation for this connection.² Their work brings environmental questions into conversation with colonial histories, development, resource extraction, animality and belonging. It also challenges the tendency to speak of environmental crisis as though it affects all communities in the same way. Environmental vulnerability is often the outcome of particular historical and economic relationships. Some communities have greater control over resources and greater capacity to protect themselves from environmental harm, while others experience the consequences of decisions made elsewhere. This insight is especially relevant to the Kenyan context. It is not enough to ask whether forests are disappearing, wildlife is being threatened or climate patterns are changing. A fuller reading must also ask who controls the land and resources, whose interests determine how they are used, who benefits from their exploitation, and who is left to live with the consequences. Environmental questions are consequently also questions of power.

Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence adds another important dimension to this argument. Nixon uses the term to describe forms of environmental harm that unfold gradually, often across large geographical and temporal distances, making them difficult to see as violence.⁶ Deforestation, soil exhaustion, biodiversity loss and climate change rarely arrive as one spectacular event. Their effects accumulate over time, sometimes becoming visible only after considerable damage has already occurred. Literature is particularly well placed to give such dispersed forms of violence a shape that readers can recognise. Through narrative, what might

otherwise appear gradual, distant or abstract can acquire human, ecological and emotional immediacy.

David Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession provides a further way of thinking about the conversion of shared or communally valued environments into economic assets.⁷ Land, forests, wildlife and other natural resources can be reorganised around commercial priorities, sometimes weakening or displacing the relationships that communities have historically maintained with their environments. The concept is useful here because environmental degradation is not always the result of careless individual behaviour. It can also emerge from larger systems in which land and nature are treated primarily as resources to be owned, developed, exchanged or exploited.

Bringing these ideas together allows anthropomorphism to be understood on two connected levels. On the first, it is an aesthetic strategy, that is, a way of giving the nonhuman world presence, emotion and apparent agency within the narrative, and secondly, it can become a political and critical strategy – a means through which histories of extraction, dispossession, unequal access and commodification become more visible.

The study does not, however, assume that anthropomorphism is automatically ecological, progressive or decolonial. Representing nature as human-like can just as easily reproduce the human-centered assumptions that environmental criticism seeks to question. The critical issue, therefore, is not simply whether a writer personifies nature. What matters is what that personification does within the text. Does it make environmental agency visible? Does it challenge the treatment of nature as property or commodity? Does it recover relationships between communities and their environments? Does it expose forms of ecological violence that might otherwise remain invisible? Or does it ultimately return the nonhuman world to the service of human concerns?

These questions make it possible to read anthropomorphism critically rather than treating it as an inherently positive literary practice. Its significance lies in the tensions it creates between human and nonhuman agency, between aesthetic representation and material reality, and between the imaginative transformation of nature and the historical forces that have shaped environmental life. It is within these tensions that the selected Kenyan texts reveal the environment not simply as something that surrounds human beings, but as a presence that participates in their histories and responds, in different ways, to the pressures placed upon it.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH GAP

Environmental questions have gradually become more visible in African literary criticism, although ecological criticism has not always occupied the same space as some of the more established approaches to African literature. Earlier readings of landscape often concentrated on what physical spaces represented within human stories: land as a marker of identity, the forest as a symbol of danger or belonging, or the sea as a setting for movement and memory. Ecocritical scholarship has helped to broaden this view by asking readers to consider the environment not simply in terms of what it means to human characters, but also in terms of how human lives are shaped by their relationships with the nonhuman world.

This shift becomes particularly significant when African environmental questions are approached through a postcolonial lens. Environmental problems do not emerge in a historical vacuum. In many African societies, present-day struggles over land, wildlife, forests and other natural resources are connected, directly or indirectly, to colonial histories and their continuing economic and political consequences. Huggan and Tiffin's work is important in this regard because it brings colonialism, environmental exploitation, resource extraction and the commodification of animals and landscapes into the same critical conversation.² Their

approach is particularly useful for African literary studies because it discourages readings of environmental degradation that overlook the structures of power behind it.

Anthropomorphism introduces another layer of complexity to this discussion. When writers give human qualities to animals, forests, rivers, oceans, weather or other elements of the natural world, they may appear to be imposing a human perspective upon nature. Such representation can therefore reinforce the very anthropocentrism that ecological criticism seeks to question. Yet anthropomorphism can also have the opposite effect. It can encourage readers to imagine the nonhuman world as possessing forms of agency, presence or significance that are not entirely dependent upon human interests. Clark's discussion is useful here because he does not treat this contradiction as something that must be resolved.¹ Instead, the tension between projecting human qualities onto nature and recognising nonhuman agency becomes part of the interpretive problem.

Material ecocriticism pushes the discussion further by questioning the assumption that matter is passive. Iovino and Oppermann, for example, draw attention to the ways material environments participate in the production of meaning.⁵ This insight is valuable for literary works in which forests, animals, weather, water or oceans appear to influence the course of human events. Such environments do not merely absorb human actions. Their physical properties, movements and effects can shape human possibilities and impose their own pressures upon the narrative world.

This growing interest in environmental agency is evident in recent criticism of Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea*. Tina Steiner's 2025 study approaches the novel through the idea of the archipelago and demonstrates the importance of Pate, the surrounding sea and the wider Indian Ocean network to the novel's environmental and geopolitical imagination.⁸ Her discussion is particularly relevant to the present study because it recognises the sea, winds and marine creatures as more than passive elements of the setting and highlights the importance of local environmental knowledge.⁸

Zablon, Oketch and Wakarindi take this environmental emphasis further by explicitly examining oceanic space and marine ecosystems in *The Dragonfly Sea* as ecological agents.⁹ Their work is significant because it moves attention away from the predominantly terrestrial landscapes that have often occupied African ecocritical scholarship and towards East Africa's marine environments. It also demonstrates that the ecological imagination of Kenyan literature cannot be fully understood if the ocean is treated merely as a geographical boundary surrounding coastal communities.

Other studies of *The Dragonfly Sea* reinforce the importance of water and oceanic relationships in the novel. Wang's analysis of the novel's aqueous form, for instance, shows how water becomes central to its representation of Afro-Sino encounters.¹⁰ Steiner's work similarly places the sea within longer histories of maritime connection, cultural exchange and competing geopolitical interests.⁸ Taken together, these studies show that the ocean in Owuor's novel is not simply a backdrop. It is deeply involved in questions of movement, memory, identity, history and power.

The environmental concerns of the other primary texts have also received critical and public attention. In Ng'ang'a Mbugua's *Angels of the Wild*, wildlife conservation occupies a central position in the narrative. Birgen's determination to use science and technology to protect endangered animals places the survival of wildlife alongside questions of human responsibility and environmental stewardship.¹¹ Contemporary commentary on the novel likewise draws attention to its concern with wildlife conservation and the killing of elephants.¹²

Ian McKenzie-Vincent's *Aziza and Bakari in the Climate of Change* engages even more directly with the contemporary climate crisis. Through the experiences of two young environmental

activists, the text addresses climate change, plastic pollution and the political and economic interests that may be threatened when environmental problems are confronted openly.¹³ the work therefore connects ecological degradation with activism, responsibility and competing interests over how environmental problems should be addressed.

H. R. ole Kulet's *Vanishing Herds* similarly places environmental change at the centre of its narrative. Norpisia's efforts towards environmental conservation unfold alongside pastoral life and ecological transformation, bringing questions of livelihood, environmental degradation and restoration into close relationship.¹⁴ The novel consequently provides an important example of how environmental concerns can become inseparable from the social and economic realities of communities whose lives depend directly upon the land.

Taken together, this body of scholarship establishes an important foundation for the present article. It shows that Kenyan prose fiction offers rich material for thinking about wildlife, climate change, pollution, land, conservation, water and the ocean. It also demonstrates that environmental spaces in these texts are increasingly being read as active participants in social, cultural and political life. What is less clear, however, is how these apparently different environmental representations might be connected through a common literary and aesthetic mechanism.

This is where the present study locates its research gap. Existing scholarship has often concentrated on particular ecological spaces or environmental concerns such as wildlife conservation in one text, oceanic ecosystems in another, or climate change and pollution in another. These studies have made important contributions, but their more specialised focus can make it difficult to see patterns that cut across environmental categories. The forest, animal, climate, land and ocean may appear to belong to separate critical conversations when, in the literary imagination, they may actually be performing related functions.

The gap is therefore threefold. First, there is still limited attention to anthropomorphism as a sustained eco-aesthetic strategy across contemporary Kenyan prose fiction. While individual scholars have examined the animation or agency of particular environments, less attention has been given to the recurring use of human-like qualities as a means of making nonhuman agency narratively perceptible. Secondly, there is a need for a comparative reading that brings land, forest, wildlife, climate and oceanic space into the same analytical conversation. Such a comparison makes it possible to ask whether similar representational strategies operate across very different ecological environments and, if they do, what that tells us about the environmental imagination of contemporary Kenyan fiction. And thirdly, there is a need to connect literary representations of environmental agency more explicitly with the postcolonial histories and political economies that have shaped Kenyan environments. The representation of a forest as wounded, an animal as grieving, drought as threatening, or the sea as remembering is not simply an aesthetic choice detached from history. Such representations can draw attention to questions of ownership, extraction, conservation, dispossession, livelihood and unequal access to environmental resources.

The present article responds to these gaps by placing anthropomorphism at the center of a comparative reading of *Vanishing Herds*, *Angels of the Wild*, *Aziza* and *Bakari in the Climate of Change*, and *The Dragonfly Sea*. Its argument is that anthropomorphism gives the environment a presence that is difficult to ignore. When forests appear to suffer, animals to mourn, drought to pursue, climate to warn, or the sea to remember and resist, the literary text is doing more than adding human qualities to nonhuman entities. It is asking readers to reconsider who or what is allowed to act, suffer, remember and matter within the ecological world.

In this sense, the article's contribution lies not simply in identifying anthropomorphism in Kenyan fiction, but in showing how the device can connect aesthetic representation, environmental agency and postcolonial power. The nonhuman world becomes part of the narrative's historical consciousness. Nature is no longer merely the space in which human history happens; it becomes one of the means through which that history is remembered, contested and judged.

4. METHODOLOGY

The methodology provided the foundation for examining how anthropomorphic representations of nature are created and the meanings they carry in the selected texts. Because the study is literary and interpretive, it did not seek to measure environmental phenomena statistically. Instead, it concentrated on the ways writers use language, narrative form and aesthetic techniques to represent relationships between human beings and the nonhuman world. The methodological process therefore involved the purposeful selection of the primary texts, close reading of their content, identification of recurring patterns of anthropomorphic representation, and comparison of how these patterns operate across different ecological settings.

The study adopted a qualitative interpretive literary research design. This design was considered appropriate because the study is concerned primarily with meaning, representation and interpretation rather than numerical measurement. It enabled the researcher to examine how literary language gives human qualities, intentions, emotions and forms of agency to animals, landscapes, forests, water bodies and other elements of the natural world. Through close engagement with the texts, the study considered not only what nature is represented as doing, but also how such representations contribute to the broader environmental, social and political meanings of the narratives.

The primary materials comprised four Kenyan prose-fiction texts: H. R. ole Kulet's *Vanishing Herds* (2011), Ng'ang'a Mbugua's *Angels of the Wild* (2015), Ian McKenzie-Vincent's *Aziza and Bakari in the Climate of Change* (2019), and Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea* (2019). The texts were selected purposively because they place environmental concerns at the center of their narratives and provide substantial material for examining the representation of the nonhuman world through human-like qualities and actions. Their selection also allowed the study to engage with different ecological environments and literary treatments of environmental change. *Vanishing Herds*, for instance, draws attention to pastoral landscapes, drought, forests and processes of environmental restoration. *Angels of the Wild* gives particular prominence to wildlife and conservation, while *Aziza and Bakari in the Climate of Change* engages with climate change and pollution. *The Dragonfly Sea*, on the other hand, places marine and island environments within the wider social, cultural and ecological world of the Indian Ocean. Taken together, the texts provide a sufficiently varied corpus for considering how anthropomorphic representation changes according to ecological context while also revealing broader patterns in Kenyan environmental fiction.

The analysis was conducted through sustained close reading of the selected works. Particular attention was given to passages in which nonhuman beings or environmental entities were described in ways normally associated with human experience and behaviour. The researcher teased out instances in which nature or animals appeared to communicate, express emotions, exercise agency, retain memories, bear witness to events, or resist human actions. Representations of voice and communication were considered where animals, landscapes, waters or other environmental entities appeared to speak, warn, respond or otherwise convey meaning. Attention was also given to emotional and affective representations in which nature

or animals were associated with feelings such as fear, grief, anger, attachment or mourning. The analysis further considered moments in which environmental entities appeared to act upon the human world by influencing events, decisions, movements or relationships, rather than simply serving as passive settings for human activity.

Another important aspect of the analysis concerned memory and witnessing. Landscapes, animals and bodies of water were examined as more than physical features, particularly where they appeared to preserve traces of personal, communal or historical experience. The representations of environmental resistance and their political implications were considered, especially where nature disrupted, challenged or exposed systems of domination, extraction, commodification or exploitation. These dimensions were not treated as rigid categories or mechanical coding variables. Rather, they functioned as flexible interpretive guides that helped the researcher recognise recurring patterns and relationships within and across the texts.

The analysis subsequently moved comparatively across the different ecological environments represented in the corpus. This made it possible to consider whether anthropomorphism assumes different meanings when associated with drought, forests, wildlife, climate change, marine environments and other forms of ecological space. At the same time, comparison helped reveal connections among the texts, particularly in the ways they challenge the assumption that nature is merely a passive backdrop to human experience. The comparative reading therefore brought into view the wider aesthetic, environmental and political significance of giving the nonhuman world a more active presence within literary narratives.

Finally, the interpretations were situated within the two theoretical perspectives guiding the study. Eco-aesthetic theory anchored the examination of the literary, imaginative and affective functions of anthropomorphism and for foregrounding how aesthetic representation can reshape the reader's relationship with the natural world. Postcolonial ecocriticism, also, helped place these representations within the historical and material realities of environmental exploitation, extraction, commodification, dispossession and unequal development. Together, the two perspectives enabled the study to consider anthropomorphism not simply as a literary technique, but as a way through which Kenyan fiction can reconstruct relationships between human beings, nature, power and environmental injustice.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Having established the theoretical and methodological foundations of the study, this section presents findings from the close reading of the selected texts. It examines how anthropomorphic representation positions nature as an active presence in human and ecological life, with particular attention to environmental agency, ecological violence, memory, responsibility and resistance.

5.1 Drought as an Agent of Ecological and Social Violence in *Vanishing Herds*

In *Vanishing Herds*, environmental crisis is inseparable from the realities of pastoral life. Drought is not presented simply as a climatic condition that exists somewhere in the background while human events take center stage. Instead, it becomes a force that enters directly into the lives of people, animals and landscapes and gradually alters the relationships that sustain the community. Its presence is experienced through the disappearance of water, the weakening of vegetation, the suffering and decline of livestock, and the increasing pressure placed upon pastoral livelihoods. What might appear, from a purely scientific perspective, as a natural climatic process consequently becomes a lived experience with social and emotional consequences. Drought determines where people can move, how they care for their animals, what resources remain available to them and, ultimately, what possibilities are open to the

community. In this sense, the novel gives drought a form of narrative agency because it does not merely occur around the characters; it actively reshapes the conditions within which they are able to live and act.

The importance of this representation lies in the way drought is transformed from an abstract environmental process into an experiential presence. Readers encounter the dry landscape not through detached meteorological description but through its consequences for everyday life. As water becomes scarce and vegetation disappears, livestock suffer, movement becomes necessary and the stability of pastoral existence is threatened. The environmental crisis consequently becomes a social crisis because human survival is closely tied to the wellbeing of animals and the availability of natural resources. The relationship between cattle, grass, water, land and people means that damage to one part of the ecological system inevitably affects the others. This interconnectedness is central to the novel's environmental imagination. Drought becomes intimate precisely because pastoral communities cannot stand outside the ecological conditions that sustain them. The crisis is felt in households, livelihoods, relationships and decisions about the future, making the environment an active participant in the unfolding of human experience.

Anthropomorphic representation strengthens this sense of environmental presence. A climatic process that might ordinarily be described in terms of rainfall levels, temperature or meteorological patterns is instead encountered as something that appears to confront, pursue and place pressure upon the community. The literary effect is significant because it brings an otherwise distant environmental process into an immediate human relationship. Drought acquires a kind of presence and force without necessarily becoming a literal human character. Its "voice" is heard through what happens to the landscape, livestock and people. In this way, the novel invites readers to understand environmental change relationally: drought matters because of what it does to the network of relationships connecting land, animals, livelihood and culture. Anthropomorphism therefore does more than make nature appear human. It provides a literary means of making ecological processes perceptible, intimate and ethically consequential.

The representation of drought also challenges any simple separation between ecological experience and cultural memory. Within pastoral communities, environmental signs are interpreted through accumulated experience. Changes in vegetation, the availability of water, animal behaviour and seasonal patterns are not merely physical occurrences; they carry knowledge that has been developed through long-term interaction with the environment. The land, therefore, communicates through signs that people learn to recognise and interpret. This becomes particularly important from a postcolonial perspective because indigenous environmental knowledge has historically been marginalised by systems that privilege externally imposed models of land management, development and environmental expertise. By giving significance to environmental signs and to the knowledge of people who live closely with the land, the novel restores interpretive value to forms of knowledge rooted in lived experience. Drought can consequently be understood as both teacher and archive: it teaches through its consequences while preserving memories of ecological change. This also resonates with Nixon's concept of slow violence.⁶ Drought does not necessarily arrive as one spectacular catastrophe; its effects accumulate gradually, making the environment progressively less capable of sustaining the lives that depend upon it. Literature makes such gradual violence visible by translating ecological change into lived narrative experience. The significance of anthropomorphism, therefore, lies not simply in making drought human-like but in making an environmental process relational, memorable and morally legible.

The forest provides another important site for examining how anthropomorphic representation gives ecological destruction an ethical and emotional dimension. In *Vanishing Herds*, environmental damage can be understood through imagery associated with bodily injury. Trees are cut, stripped and damaged, and the forest consequently appears less like an inert collection of natural resources and more like a living body undergoing violence. This shift in representation changes the way logging can be understood. When a tree is viewed primarily as timber, its removal may be interpreted as an economic transaction involving a resource and its monetary value. Once the tree is imaginatively associated with a living body capable of being wounded, however, the same act acquires a different ethical significance. The language of injury makes visible what the language of economics can easily conceal: that environmental destruction involves damage to living systems whose existence extends beyond their usefulness to human beings.

The forest consequently becomes more than a physical collection of trees. It represents an ecological organism whose condition is connected to soil, water, animals and human communities. The removal of individual trees may not immediately produce a visible catastrophe, but repeated extraction gradually alters the integrity of the wider landscape. Vegetation disappears, soils become increasingly vulnerable, water systems are affected and habitats are reduced. The forest therefore carries the cumulative consequences of human intervention, embodying the gradual character of environmental violence. In this respect, its wounded condition reflects Nixon's concept of slow violence.⁶ The damage may occur incrementally and may not receive the same attention as a sudden disaster, yet its consequences accumulate over time. By representing the forest through the language of bodily injury, the narrative gives form to this otherwise dispersed violence and encourages the reader to recognise environmental degradation as something that affects a living system rather than merely reducing the quantity of an economic resource.

The wounded forest also acquires a significant postcolonial dimension because environmental destruction is inseparable from questions of ownership, power and economic control. Ecological damage does not take place in an empty social space. It occurs within systems that determine who owns land, who controls resources and whose interests are prioritised when environmental spaces are transformed. When communal or culturally embedded landscapes are reorganised according to commercial priorities, ecological change is accompanied by changes in relationships between communities and the land on which they depend. The forest can therefore be read as a material record of dispossession. Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession is useful here because it draws attention to the ways in which spaces and resources can be transformed into economic assets.⁷ What was previously embedded in communal relationships and cultural practices may increasingly be valued according to exchange and profit. The resulting environmental transformation is therefore also a transformation of social relations.

Anthropomorphism offers a counter-language to this process of economic abstraction. By representing the forest as wounded, the narrative resists the reduction of trees to timber and of ecological space to an economic asset. The image of injury restores qualities that economic language tends to suppress: vulnerability, continuity, relationship and life. The forest's significance consequently lies not only in what it produces but also in what it sustains and remembers. Its wounds point towards a broader ecological relationship in which human beings are both beneficiaries of and agents within environmental systems. The representation therefore encourages readers to see extraction not merely as the removal of resources but as an alteration of relationships among people, land, water, animals and future generations. Through the wounded forest, anthropomorphism becomes an ethical strategy for making ecological

violence visible and for questioning the values that permit such violence to appear economically normal.

5.2 Wildlife as Moral Subjects in *Angels of the Wild*

Mbugua's *Angels of the Wild* shifts the discussion from landscapes to animals and places wildlife at the center of the ethical question. The narrative focuses on conservation and follows Birgen's desire to protect endangered animals, ¹¹ making the text particularly useful for examining what happens when animals are represented as subjects rather than objects. The distinction is important because wildlife is often described through categories that reduce living beings to resources, statistics or economic assets. An elephant, for example, can be represented as ivory, tourism value or a conservation figure. Such descriptions may be factually useful, but they can also distance the reader from the animal as a living being. Mbugua's representation works against this distancing by drawing attention to the vulnerability, sociality and emotional presence of wildlife. The elephant consequently emerges not simply as something that human beings own, hunt, protect or profit from, but as a living being whose existence has significance beyond its economic usefulness.

This becomes particularly clear in the representation of the killing of an elephant. Once the animal is represented as a living subject, its death can no longer be understood simply as the destruction of property. It becomes the death of a being with a body, relationships and a place within a social world. This is where anthropomorphic representation becomes ethically important. Commodification often depends upon abstraction: the living animal is transformed into "ivory", the forest into timber, or wildlife into tourism revenue. Once that transformation occurs, the material and emotional reality of the living being becomes easier to overlook. Anthropomorphic representation reverses the process by returning individuality and emotional significance to the animal. The representation of grief is particularly powerful because mourning implies attachment and social memory. It encourages readers to imagine animal existence as involving relationships that cannot be adequately explained through the language of instinct, property or economic utility alone.

The ethical implications of this representation extend beyond the individual animal. The novel complicates the conventional distinction between hunter and hunted because the animal is no longer merely an object upon which human action is performed. It becomes part of a moral community. The forest in which wildlife lives also acquires significance beyond that of habitat. It can be read as a witness to the violence taking place within it, surrounding acts of killing and carrying the traces of human intrusion. Through personification, the forest becomes a kind of moral archive, while the animals within it become witnesses and participants in a wider ecological drama. This representation is consistent with the broader concerns of postcolonial ecocriticism, in which environmental violence is understood as closely connected to political economy. Wildlife becomes vulnerable not only because individual people choose to kill animals but also because animal bodies acquire economic value within wider systems of extraction, trade and consumption.

Mbugua's novel consequently counters the logic of commodification by making wildlife visible as life. The significance of anthropomorphism here is therefore both aesthetic and ethical. By giving animals emotional and social presence, the narrative asks readers to reconsider the boundaries through which human beings decide which forms of life deserve care and which can be treated primarily as resources. The animal's value is no longer exhausted by what it can provide to human beings. Instead, its capacity for attachment, suffering and social existence becomes part of the reader's moral consideration. Anthropomorphism thus creates an imaginative encounter in which the distance between human observer and nonhuman subject

is reduced. The reader is encouraged to see conservation not simply as the management of resources but as an ethical response to forms of life that possess significance beyond their usefulness.

5.3 Climate as Warning and Protest in *Aziza and Bakari in the Climate of Change*

McKenzie-Vincent's *Aziza and Bakari in the Climate of Change* approaches environmental crisis through climate change and pollution and brings the issue into the sphere of social and political action. The narrative centres on young people who become involved in environmental activism,¹³ thereby connecting ecological crisis with questions of responsibility and collective response. Climate change presents a particular representational challenge because it operates across enormous geographical and temporal scales. Its causes are dispersed; its consequences are uneven and many of its effects are experienced gradually rather than as a single dramatic event. Literary representation must therefore find ways of making something that is often abstract, distant and difficult to perceive directly meaningful to readers. Anthropomorphism provides one such possibility because it gives environmental change a more immediate narrative presence.

When climate is represented as warning, protesting or responding to human behaviour, environmental change becomes communicative. Storms, pollution and climatic disruption cease to function only as physical processes and become, within the literary imagination, signs that demand interpretation. Such representation creates a relationship between human action and environmental consequence. It is as though the environment answers human behaviour and, in doing so, forces people to recognise the consequences of their actions. There is, however, an important distinction to maintain. The literary representation should not necessarily be read as claiming that climate systems literally possess human consciousness or intention. To interpret personification literally would risk simplifying the complex material processes that produce climate change. Its value lies instead in the ethical frame it provides. By giving environmental change a communicative quality, the narrative allows readers to perceive responsibility in ways that purely technical descriptions may not achieve.

This ethical framing becomes especially important within a postcolonial context. Responsibility for climate change cannot simply be distributed equally among all human beings because industrial production, consumption patterns, political decisions and global inequalities have shaped both the causes and consequences of environmental crisis. Some communities contribute far less to environmental degradation while experiencing disproportionate consequences. The environmental warning in the text can therefore be read alongside postcolonial ecocritical concerns about unequal responsibility and vulnerability. Climate becomes both victim and judge: it bears the consequences of human actions, yet its changing conditions also force those actions back into human consciousness. The environment does not merely suffer silently; through literary personification, its altered condition becomes a form of communication that demands a response.

The narrative consequently transforms climate crisis into a moral and political question. The issue is no longer simply whether the climate is changing but what kinds of human relationships with the nonhuman world have produced the crisis and what forms of responsibility might follow from recognising it. The involvement of young people in environmental activism reinforces this movement from awareness to action. Environmental knowledge becomes connected to agency, and ecological awareness becomes a basis for questioning existing practices. Anthropomorphism therefore helps bridge the gap between environmental process and human responsibility. By making climate change appear capable of warning and protesting, the narrative gives an otherwise vast and dispersed crisis a form that readers can encounter

emotionally and ethically. The central question becomes not merely how nature is changing, but what kind of relationship with the nonhuman world can make continued human life possible.

5.4 The Sea as an Active Presence in *The Dragonfly Sea*

The Dragonfly Sea significantly expands the environmental geography of the study by moving the analysis from predominantly land-based ecological spaces to the Indian Ocean and Pate Island. In Owuor's novel, the sea is not simply a scenic backdrop against which human events unfold. It is deeply embedded in the narrative's treatment of memory, identity, movement and belonging. Recent scholarship has drawn attention to this oceanic dimension. Steiner's study of the novel identifies the archipelago not only as a geographical formation but also as a way of imagining relationships among places, histories and forms of life.⁸ Similarly, Zablon, Oketch and Wakarindi identify oceanic space and marine ecosystems in the novel as ecological agents.⁹ These studies are important to the present argument because they support the understanding that the sea has narrative significance beyond its function as setting. It participates in the relationships through which characters experience place and history.

For Ayaana, the sea is particularly intimate because it becomes part of memory, identity and belonging. Her relationship with the ocean weakens any simple boundary between the individual self and the environment. The sea is not merely the place in which she lives; it participates in the process through which she understands herself and the world around her. This constitutes an important form of environmental agency. The sea does not need to become a human character, speak in a literal voice or display human emotions in order to exercise narrative power. Its tides, currents, winds, storms, routes and rhythms influence movement and shape imagination. The environment therefore becomes active through its material presence and through the meanings human beings develop in relation to it. Agency here is relational rather than necessarily anthropomorphic in the narrow sense.

The sea also functions as an archive. It carries and connects histories of migration, trade, cultural contact and colonial encounters, allowing the local geography of Pate Island to participate in much wider Indian Ocean histories. Steiner's analysis is particularly relevant because it demonstrates how Owuor's archipelagic imagination brings environmental and geopolitical relationships together.⁸ the island remains local and intimate while at the same time being connected to distant places and histories through the sea. The ocean becomes the medium through which these relationships are experienced. Consequently, the environmental significance of the novel extends beyond conventional conservation concerns. It raises questions about how communities understand place, how identities are formed through environmental relationships and how those relationships are affected by political and economic forces operating across geographical boundaries.

The sea also complicates conventional definitions of environmental agency because its agency is not always expressed through direct personification. It is often expressed through movement, rhythm and relation. This suggests that anthropomorphism should not be restricted to explicit formulations such as the sea "speaking" or the ocean being "angry". A broader understanding is more productive because anthropomorphic representation can exist along a continuum, ranging from direct personification to narrative forms that make matter appear capable of participating in human experience. In *The Dragonfly Sea*, the ocean's agency is therefore both material and symbolic. It shapes movement, carries memory, connects communities and unsettles fixed ideas of identity and national boundaries. The sea is consequently not simply an object encountered by human characters. It becomes part of the network of relations through which their lives, histories and identities are constituted.

5.5 Anthropomorphism as a Counter-Language to Commodification

A comparison of the four texts reveals a recurring relationship between anthropomorphic representation and the commodification of nature. Modern economic systems often make the nonhuman world legible through measurement and exchange. Forests can be reduced to hectares, timber volume or commercial yield; wildlife can become tourism revenue or ivory; land can become property; livestock can be converted into economic value; climate can become data; and ocean space can be understood through trade routes, extraction or geopolitical competition. Such categories are not necessarily meaningless, but they privilege particular ways of seeing nature. They tend to emphasise what the environment can provide, how much it is worth and how it can be managed. What can become less visible within this language are the qualitative dimensions of environmental existence: memory, grief, attachment, vulnerability, dignity and belonging.

The literary representations examined in this study repeatedly restore these dimensions. In *Vanishing Herds*, pastoral animals cannot be understood adequately through economic value alone because their relationship with human beings is also cultural and emotional. In *Angels of the Wild*, elephants resist reduction to ivory or tourism resources because they are represented as socially and emotionally complex beings. The wounded forest becomes more than timber because its destruction is represented as injury. In *The Dragonfly Sea*, the ocean exceeds its potential economic uses because it is embedded in memory, identity and cultural history. Likewise, the representation of climate change in *Aziza and Bakari in the Climate of Change* moves beyond the treatment of climate as numerical data by presenting environmental disruption as a warning that demands recognition and response. Across these texts, therefore, nature repeatedly returns as something that cannot be fully contained within the language of economic utility.

Anthropomorphism consequently functions as a kind of counter-language to commodification. It does not deny that forests, animals, land, livestock, climate systems or oceans have economic dimensions. Rather, it insists that economic value is not the only value through which the nonhuman world should be understood. By giving nature qualities associated with human experience—such as vulnerability, memory, grief, agency or relational presence—the texts interrupt the abstraction through which environmental objects can become commodities. This interruption is particularly significant because commodification often depends upon distance. It is easier to exploit what has been transformed into a number, a product or a unit of exchange than something represented as living, relational and vulnerable.

The strongest point of convergence among the four texts is therefore their movement from abstraction towards relationship. Nature is repeatedly presented through the relationships it sustains and the consequences that follow when those relationships are damaged. The environmental world becomes meaningful not simply because it exists but because human life is entangled with it. Anthropomorphism enables this entanglement to become visible. It asks readers to imagine forests as more than timber, animals as more than commodities, climate as more than data and oceans as more than routes or resources. In doing so, the literary texts challenge a purely utilitarian understanding of the environment and create space for a more relational ecological imagination.

5.6 Environmental Memory and Indigenous Knowledge

Another significant finding emerging from the comparative reading is the close relationship between environmental agency and knowledge. In the selected texts, the environment frequently communicates through signs that require interpretation. Drought is read through changes in the landscape and animal life; forest degradation becomes apparent through changes

in ecological conditions; wildlife behaviour carries meaning; and the sea communicates through tides, winds and rhythms. These representations suggest that knowing the environment involves more than collecting detached information about it. It also involves attention, memory and sustained participation in the places where human and nonhuman lives intersect. Environmental knowledge is consequently represented as something that can be accumulated through experience and transmitted through cultural memory.

Such representations challenge the assumption that legitimate environmental knowledge must originate exclusively from formal scientific institutions. Indigenous and local knowledge systems often emerge through long-term observation, memory and participation in the environment. The land is not external to community life but part of everyday existence, and environmental signs become meaningful because people have developed ways of reading them over time. This does not mean that literary representations of indigenous knowledge should be treated as transparent records of actual belief systems. Fiction remains a creative form of representation. The important point is that anthropomorphic language can provide an aesthetic form through which knowledge systems that do not begin from the assumption that nature is mute matter can be imagined and articulated.

This has particular significance within a postcolonial context. Colonial systems of knowledge frequently displaced or subordinated indigenous ways of understanding land, animals and ecological processes by privileging externally defined forms of expertise. The texts examined here complicate that hierarchy by presenting environmental knowledge as something grounded in lived relationships with particular places. When the land "speaks", for example, the literary representation can be understood as giving aesthetic form to a mode of knowing in which environmental changes already possess meaning. The environment becomes readable because people live within it rather than simply observing it from outside. Anthropomorphism therefore functions as an epistemological strategy: it creates literary space for forms of ecological knowledge that treat the environment as participant rather than merely as object.

This relationship between environment and knowledge is especially evident in *The Dragonfly Sea*, where the sea, winds and island environment are embedded in local histories and forms of knowing. Steiner's study similarly emphasises the novel's attention to localised knowledge of environmental care.⁸ The environment consequently becomes not only an object of knowledge but also a participant in knowledge production. This distinction is important because it shifts the analytical focus from what human beings know about nature to how relationships with nature contribute to what human beings are able to know. The texts therefore suggest that environmental knowledge is relational, historical and experiential. Through anthropomorphic representation, ecological signs are given narrative significance, allowing the environment to participate in processes of remembering, interpreting and understanding the world.

5.7 Nature as Witness, Victim and Resisting Subject

The comparative analysis identifies three recurring positions occupied by nature across the four texts: nature as witness, nature as victim and nature as resisting subject. These positions are not necessarily separate or mutually exclusive. A forest may simultaneously bear witness to extraction, suffer the consequences of that extraction and, through the narrative, appear to resist the human attempt to reduce it to a resource. Similarly, animals may become victims of hunting while their behaviour and social relationships challenge the assumption that they are passive objects. The sea may carry the traces of human history while continuing to shape human movement and identity. The usefulness of these categories therefore lies in showing the movement through which nature is represented as increasingly active within the narratives.

As witness, nature records what human beings do. Forests bear the marks of extraction; landscapes register drought and degradation; the sea carries histories of migration, trade and conflict; and animals become living witnesses to forms of human violence. Nature thus becomes a repository of memory, holding traces of actions that might otherwise disappear from human consciousness. As victim, meanwhile, nature suffers the consequences of human activity. Trees are cut, animals are killed, land is degraded, climate systems are destabilised and marine environments are threatened. These representations establish the seriousness of ecological violence by showing that environmental damage is not simply damage to an abstract "environment" but harm to living systems upon which human and nonhuman communities depend.

Yet the texts do not leave nature at the level of victimhood. Nature also emerges as a resisting subject. Drought disrupts pastoral life and forces people to change their movements and practices. Wildlife resists or escapes human control. Forests, represented through the language of injury, appear to bear and register the violence directed towards them. Climate responds through increasingly disruptive conditions, while the sea shapes human movement, identity and historical consciousness. In each case, nature exceeds the position of passive recipient. The environment acts back upon the human world, not necessarily because it possesses human intentions, but because material ecological processes have consequences that constrain, redirect and reshape human action.

This movement from victimhood to agency is central to the article's argument. If nature is represented only as a victim, human beings remain the sole agents: humans act, while the environment merely suffers. Anthropomorphic representation complicates this hierarchy by creating narrative worlds in which human beings act upon nature while nature, in turn, acts upon human beings. The relationship is reciprocal, although this reciprocity should not be interpreted as suggesting that human and nonhuman forms of agency are identical. They are not. Human beings act intentionally and symbolically in ways that differ from the agency of drought, forests, animals, climate systems or oceans. What the novels demonstrate instead is that human agency is always exercised within material environments that enable, constrain and reshape it. People make decisions, but those decisions are made within ecological conditions that they do not entirely control.

This is perhaps the most important ecological insight generated by the comparative reading. The four texts collectively unsettle the assumption that nature is a silent stage upon which human history is performed. Through anthropomorphic representation and related forms of ecological narration, the environment becomes witness, victim and resisting subject, while also functioning as archive, teacher, moral presence and source of knowledge. The result is a more reciprocal understanding of human–environment relations. Nature is not simply something that human beings act upon; it is part of the material world through which human possibilities are created, limited and transformed. Anthropomorphism is therefore significant not because it simply makes nature "human", but because it provides a literary language through which the active, relational and consequential presence of the nonhuman world can be recognised.

6. CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP

This study contributes to scholarship on Kenyan literature, ecocriticism and the environmental humanities by showing how contemporary Kenyan prose uses anthropomorphic representation to rethink the relationship between human beings and the more-than-human world. Its central contribution is the argument that anthropomorphism should not be treated merely as a decorative literary device. In the selected texts, personification, metaphor and the attribution of human-like qualities to animals and environmental forces perform important intellectual and

ethical work. They make ecological processes more perceptible, give environmental suffering emotional and moral weight, and encourage readers to reconsider the assumption that meaningful agency belongs exclusively to human beings.

The study also brings together ecological spaces that are often examined separately. Drought, forests, wildlife, climate change and the ocean are brought into a single comparative framework, revealing important continuities in the ways Kenyan writers imagine environmental agency. This comparative perspective shows that the environment does not simply provide a setting for human stories. Rather, environmental conditions shape human choices, livelihoods, memories and identities. By reading terrestrial, climatic, wildlife and oceanic environments alongside one another, the study broadens the scope of Kenyan ecocritical scholarship and demonstrates the value of examining environmental representation across different ecological spaces.

A further contribution lies in connecting environmental agency to postcolonial histories and structures of power. The environmental crises represented in the selected texts cannot be adequately explained as the result of individual carelessness or isolated human actions. They are also shaped by extraction, commodification, changing relations to land and resources, unequal development and broader histories of colonial and economic power. This perspective strengthens the relevance of postcolonial ecocriticism to the study of Kenyan environmental fiction. It shows that questions about the destruction or protection of nature are also questions about who controls resources, whose knowledge is valued and whose interests determine how environments are used.

The study further contributes to discussions of indigenous and local environmental knowledge. Across the selected texts, environmental knowledge is closely connected to memory, experience, observation and community relationships with particular places. Nature is therefore not presented simply as an object waiting to be scientifically interpreted. Environmental signs acquire meaning through the lived experiences of people who depend upon and interact with their surroundings. This finding is particularly important in a postcolonial context, where local ways of knowing have often been marginalised by dominant systems of knowledge. The study does not suggest that literary representations are transparent records of indigenous belief; rather, it shows how literature can create space for forms of ecological knowledge grounded in relationship, memory and experience.

The inclusion of *The Dragonfly Sea* also expands the geographical imagination of Kenyan ecocriticism by bringing the Indian Ocean into conversation with terrestrial and climatic environments. Recent scholarship has already demonstrated the importance of oceanic space in Owuor's novel.^{8 9} This study builds on that work by placing the marine environment alongside representations of drought, forests, wildlife and climate in other Kenyan texts. Such a comparison demonstrates that environmental agency is not confined to the land. The sea, too, participates in the production of memory, identity, movement and belonging, thereby widening the environmental spaces through which Kenyan literature can be read.

More broadly, the study proposes a relational understanding of environmental agency. Contemporary Kenyan environmental fiction should not be read simply as literature about nature. It can also be read as literature that questions the boundaries between human and nonhuman agency. When drought appears to disrupt human life, animals display emotional and social presence, forests bear the marks of violence, climate becomes a warning, and the sea shapes memory and identity, the texts invite readers to reconsider who or what can be understood as an agent. This question has significance beyond literary studies because it speaks directly to contemporary concerns about environmental justice, conservation, climate responsibility and sustainable development. The contribution of the study, therefore, lies not

only in identifying anthropomorphism in Kenyan fiction but in demonstrating what that representation enables literary texts to think about: power, responsibility, ecological interdependence and the possibility of a less anthropocentric relationship with the natural world.

7. CONCLUSION

This article has examined anthropomorphism as an eco-aesthetic strategy through which contemporary Kenyan prose fiction gives nature presence, significance and agency. Through close readings of H. R. ole Kulet's *Vanishing Herds*, Ng'ang'a Mbugua's *Angels of the Wild*, Ian McKenzie-Vincent's *Aziza and Bakari in the Climate of Change*, and Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea*, the study has demonstrated that environmental representation in Kenyan fiction extends well beyond the use of nature as background scenery. The selected texts repeatedly place human life within ecological relationships in which land, animals, forests, climate and the sea influence the conditions under which individuals and communities live.

The analysis of *Vanishing Herds* shows how drought and environmental degradation become closely connected to pastoral life, ecological memory and changing relationships with land. In *Angels of the Wild*, the representation of wildlife challenges the reduction of animals to commodities by foregrounding their vulnerability, sociality and emotional significance. *Aziza and Bakari in the Climate of Change* gives climate crisis narrative immediacy by presenting environmental disruption as a warning that demands awareness and action. In *The Dragonfly Sea*, the ocean emerges as an ecological, historical and cultural presence whose movements and rhythms become inseparable from memory, identity and belonging. Although the environmental spaces differ, the four texts share an important tendency: they move nature from the margins of the narrative towards a more active position within it.

Taken together, these representations challenge a strictly anthropocentric understanding of the environment. Human beings certainly act upon nature, but they do not act in an ecological vacuum. Their choices and aspirations are continually shaped by material environments that enable some possibilities, constrain others and sometimes force unexpected changes in behaviour. The study therefore understands environmental agency not as an attempt to make human and nonhuman agency identical, but as a way of recognising the capacity of ecological forces to affect, redirect and reshape human life. This relational understanding is particularly important in Kenyan literature, where environmental questions are often inseparable from histories of land, livelihood, extraction, inequality and cultural memory.

The study also demonstrates that anthropomorphism carries an important tension. Giving nature a human-like voice can challenge anthropocentrism by making nonhuman suffering and agency visible, yet it can also risk placing human categories at the centre of environmental experience. Its value, therefore, does not lie in suggesting that nature is literally human. Rather, anthropomorphic representation becomes productive when it unsettles the assumption that the nonhuman world is silent, passive or without significance. By allowing nature to appear to mourn, warn, resist, remember or communicate, the literary text makes ecological relationships available for ethical and critical reflection.

Ultimately, the selected texts invite readers to see nature not simply as a resource, a setting or a victim, but as part of the network of relationships through which human communities remember, survive, struggle and imagine their futures. The central contribution of the article is therefore its demonstration that when nature speaks in contemporary Kenyan fiction, it is not simply being given a human voice; the human position itself is being reconsidered. Anthropomorphism becomes more than a figure of speech. It becomes a literary means of questioning established boundaries of agency and of imagining a more relational ecological

world in which human life is understood as inseparable from the lives, histories and material forces of the more-than-human world.

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