

Gendered Resistance in the Age of Anthropocene: Eco-Stories by Page, Maracle, and Mehrotra

Şeyma Yonar

Abstract: The Anthropocene is predominantly narrated through masculine paradigms of mastery and industrial progress, implicitly centering a Western, male subject. This framing obscures the uneven distribution of environmental crises, which disproportionately affect populations marginalized by race, class, and gender. This article posits that gender is a critical analytic lens for examining how ecological catastrophes both reproduce and expose entrenched gendered hierarchies of power.

Drawing on intersectional feminist ecocriticism, which privileges situated knowledge and the inseparability of social constructions like race, gender, and the environment, this study analyzes three contemporary eco-stories: Kathy Acker's "Of Paradise" (2014), Lee Maracle's "Blessing Song" (2010), and Rati Mehrotra's "Children of the Sea" (2017). I argue that these narratives collectively reimagine the Anthropocene by centering female, Indigenous, and postcolonial experiences of collapse, thereby offering culturally diverse counter-narratives to dominant environmental discourse.

The analysis exposes the entanglement of gendered domination and ecological exploitation, revealing how these texts use narratives of resistance to challenge the heteronormative and colonial assumptions that shape both environmental discourse and literary representation. By examining how these stories foreground the interconnectedness of social and ecological resilience, this article demonstrates the vital role of diverse, gender-aware storytelling in constructing a more just and nuanced understanding of planetary crisis.

Keywords: Anthropocene, ecocriticism, Canadian short story, ecostory, intersectional feminism, environmental justice, speculative fiction

Introduction

The Anthropocene, in general terms, refers to the idea that our way of living is structured by a worldview that centers on the human being above all else. Emerging as a proposed geological epoch, it suggests that human agency is now the primary force determining the world's state of being, and its current state of crisis. Although it originated in the field of geology, the term has since transcended into various disciplines, including literary and cultural studies. Literary scholar Timothy Clark clarifies that this "anthropocentric" perspective of the natural environment consequently perceives it wholly in relation to the human being, for example, as a commodity for economic exploitation, or as the

manifestation of specific social or cultural principles (3). This human-centered bias even informs our aesthetic valuation of landscape, shaping how we assign worth to the environment. Scholars like Alexa Weik von Mossner have expanded this inquiry, examining how narrative and storytelling act as bridges, or barriers, to understanding of this crisis. She further acknowledges that “what kind of narratives and imaginative limitations are posed by the spatial and temporal scale of some of the processes that mark the Anthropocene” (83). She is not only asserting the importance of storytelling for the storyteller but also for the reader. Accordingly, by looking at the stories about our time/our planet, a growing body of critics and scholars in the humanities is now working to dismantle this notion of the human-centric view, looking for a new way to articulate our stories in which the human and the non-human are intertwined.

While the Anthropocene is recognized as our current epoch of planetary transformation, it is predominantly narrated through masculine paradigms of mastery and progress. These narratives often center on a human subject who is implicitly Western, male, and industrial, thereby obscuring the uneven distribution of environmental crises. Scholars like Donna Haraway and Laura Roldán-Sevillano argue that the term “Capitalocene” shifts the focus from a generic “humanity” to a specific capitalistic world order, namely, eco-social transformations (7). Expanding on this, Amelia Moore explains “Capitalocene” as a framework that “brings back capitalism as a *world ecology* joining the accumulation of capital, the pursuit of power, and the co-production of nature in a dialectical unity” (3). Building on Moore’s insights, Roldán-Sevillano further notes how this capitalist agenda exploits both natural and human resources to concentrate wealth among privileged, predominantly European industrial nations. This framework reveals that the ecological crisis is not an accident of human nature, but a deliberate byproduct of a system that relies on the dual exploitation of the environment and marginalized labor. Within this context, gender becomes a critical analytic tool for examining how ecological catastrophe both reproduces and exposes entrenched hierarchies of power. Intersectionality, as explained by Kimberlé Crenshaw, must be addressed to demonstrate the relationship between the Anthropocene and a critical gender lens.

This article explores the intersection of gender, ecology, and narrative through three contemporary eco-stories: Kathy Page's "Of Paradise" (2014), Lee Maracle's "Blessing Song" (2010), and Rati Mehrotra's "Children of the Sea" (2017). Drawing on feminist ecocriticism and intersectional theory, I argue that these stories collectively reimagine the Anthropocene by prioritizing the environmental experiences of women across Indigenous and African contexts. Each text exposes the entanglement of gendered domination and ecological exploitation, challenging the heteronormative and colonial assumptions that have shaped both environmental discourse and literary representation.

Theoretical Framework: Intersectionality and Ecofeminism

Intersectionality was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, who looked at both race and gender theory to "denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's employment experiences" (1244). While rooted in Black feminist thought, intersectionality extends beyond a single demographic; it offers a framework for analyzing how overlapping identities shape the experiences of all marginalized groups. Hence, intersectionality rose from the intersections of two theories that highlight the hierarchies in society. Crenshaw's work enabled new perspectives within the field of humanities, particularly in the articulation of structural, political, and representational aspects. This paper frames the critical analysis of the selected eco-stories through the intersectionality of environmental humanities and gender studies.

To bridge ecocriticism and gender studies, it is essential to first define ecocriticism. As Greg Garrard notes, ecocriticism is "the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term 'human' itself" (5). Expanding on this, Mary Buchanan et al. argue that the discipline must resist reducing women, nature, or the environment to oversimplified stereotypes, while avoiding the assumption that all humans share a single, industrialized Western perspective. Applying an intersectional lens to ecocriticism further "recognizes the inseparability of the social constructions of race, gender, and social class, as well as other constructions such as sexuality, religion, and nationality, and... [our] understanding of the environment" (365). Accordingly, such assumptions erase cultural differences and ignore inequalities, thereby

undermining the complexity of diverse experiences and perspectives. As an alternative, intersectionality works as a theoretical device to engage in a culturally diverse examination of the practices of women facing environmental challenges across the globe and takes collective action in response to these challenges (365-66). According to their framework, therefore, the intersectionality of environmental humanities and gender studies enables a new critical perspective that examines the interconnectedness of environmental challenges and gender inequalities.

In her book, *The Intersectional Environmentalism*, Leah Thomas explains ecofeminism in relation to intersectionality, which therefore leads to intersectional environmentalism, as she calls it. She explains that “intersectional feminism looks at the significance of interlocking identities within the fight for gender equality, intersectional environmentalism examines the ways that interlocking identities, like race, class, sex, gender, and religion, impact environmental justice” (28-29). Correspondingly, Mary Buchanan et al. describe ecofeminism as a multifaceted branch of feminism that seeks to connect the liberation of women with the protection of nature. It emphasizes the interrelatedness of gender and environmental issues, advocating for a holistic approach to both, which correlates with their previous statement on intersectionality. Moreover, theorist Julian Emmons Allison labels ecofeminism in four main categories, which are “liberal,” “cultural,” “socialist,” and “postmodern.” At this point, it is important to realize that the earlier writings on ecofeminism, which fall under the category of “cultural,” support the idea that women and Indigenous people have a unique bond with nature. This perspective is flawed as it perpetuates the “essentialized subject position for women, in which women are presumed to have an automatic affinity with nature, and thus a privileged affective and epistemic point of view toward the protection and restoration of the more-than-human-world” (Mallory 13). Essentialism falsely stereotypes women and Indigenous people, reducing them to oversimplified and homogenized identities. It eclipses the broader issues on both sides, women and the environment. The pressure from the hegemonic power is also overlooked within this theoretical framework. Specifically, this hegemony operates through a dual logic of domination that links the subjugation of women to the exploitation of nature, enforcing

Western capitalist and patriarchal norms that commodify the environment while disenfranchising the women who steward it.

Having established this theoretical framework, the following discussion examines how select Canadian short stories navigate the intersections of gender and ecological identity. These narratives draw crucial parallels between environmental exploitation and the systemic oppression of women, demonstrating how both are subjected to shared patterns of patriarchal and colonial control. In doing so, the texts highlight how acts of resistance, enacted both by nature and by marginalized individuals, challenge deeply rooted social hierarchies to project new models of ecological and human resilience. As the intersections of environmental humanities and gender studies continue to expand, this interdisciplinary approach offers a vital methodology for textual analysis.

This approach is particularly urgent given the realities of the contemporary environmental crisis. As one of the world's largest landmasses, Canada faces severe and accelerating impacts from global climate change. Because a deep engagement with the natural landscape is foundational to the Canadian literary canon, and given that the short story remains a dominant form within that tradition, this genre provides a crucial space for analyzing the gendered dimensions of the Anthropocene.

The following discussion applies this theoretical framework to three contemporary short stories by three Canadian (two of them Canadian-hyphenated) female authors to explore the intersections of gender and ecological identity, revealing how narratives of resistance challenge deeply rooted structures of inequality. The selected texts, "Of Paradise" by Kathy Page, "Blessing Song" by Lee Maracle (Stó:lō / Indigenous Canadian), and "Children of the Sea" by Rati Mehrotra (Indian-Canadian), illustrate diverse yet interconnected representations of the exploitation of women and nature. By examining how these narratives foreground female, Indigenous, and postcolonial experiences, this article offers a critical understanding of both ecological and social resistance in the age of Anthropocene.

"Of Paradise" by Kathy Page: The Gendered Costs of Possessiveness

Kathy Page is a Canadian author whose fiction frequently engages with issues of identity, belonging, and the natural world. In her selected work, she offers fresh and thought-provoking perspectives, addressing not only the pressing ecological crises of our time but also critically examining socially constructed gender roles. In this context, Page's narratives suggest that the Anthropocene is not only a geological phenomenon but a crisis fueled by the pre-established norms of patriarchy and the "Capitalocene." Through her short story "Of Paradise," included in her book *Paradise & Elsewhere* (2014), Page highlights the intersection of environmental and social issues, demonstrating the transformative potential of literature to challenge dominant paradigms of hierarchy, exploitation, and control.

Page's work often examines how ecological awareness intersects with social identity, especially gender. "Of Paradise" stands as a compelling example of this convergence. The story explores the consequences of possessiveness and domination, both human and environmental, within a communal society that initially lives in harmony with nature (Löschnigg, *Introduction* 140). In this eco-story, Page constructs a microcosm where ecological and social balance is gradually destabilized by the arrival of an outsider whose presence reconfigures the power dynamics within the community. This disruption serves as a critique of the "Capitalocene"'s logic, as the outsider's arrival introduces a paradigm of enclosure and ownership to a once-communal space. By doing so, she brings into focus the ways patriarchal and anthropocentric tendencies intersect, producing both gendered oppression and ecological degradation.

The story can be read in dialogue with Maria Löschnigg's argument that Page's mythopoeic storytelling enhances contemporary understandings of gender and ecology (*Introduction* 140). Ian Buchanan defines the mythopoeic mode as literature that adopts the structure and spirit of myth while remaining a modern creation, rather than a retelling of inherited tales (329). Page's stories, though not fantasy, incorporate mythic frameworks and archetypal resonances whereby this author interrogates environmental and ethical questions. Her reworking of myth allows her, as Löschnigg notes, to "reclaim sustainable ancient knowledge and to create mythic communities that function as foils to our present societies"

(Introduction 236). In this respect, through mythic allegory, Page reimagines ecological and social harmony, exposing how it collapses under systems of exploitation.

Page's short story initially employs a collective "we," as the narrator(s), however, the narrative gradually introduces a distinction between "we" and "I". The story opens with a passage that establishes the dualistic worldview of the narrators.

In the beginning, we know our luck: to look through one of the narrow, outer windows upon our fertile land and the desert that lay beyond it was to meditate on our good fortune and on the oppositeness of the world: fullness and emptiness; colour, monochrome; fertility, bareness, and also upon its miracles: ourselves and however we had come to be, that folding of rocks which provided us with so much wetness, with fruit, grain, wines. Even the miles of burning sand and thorny scrub that separated us from whatever else there might be were a blessing of sorts, for we sensed that there was an else and an other, and also that we should not rush to meet it. (25)

This opening establishes the thematic framework of duality, abundance and void, fertility and desolation, inside and outside, self and other. These binary oppositions, as Allison has argued, are central to Western systems of domination. They form "a wide range of views concerning the causal role of Western dualistic thinking, patriarchal structures of power, and capitalism in ecological degradation and the oppression of women and other subjugated peoples" (1). Page's description of the fertile oasis bordered by desert is therefore more than a scenic contrast; it encodes the logic of separation that sustains both patriarchy and anthropocentrism.

The eco-story presents a self-sufficient, all-female community living in balance with its environment, an oasis of fertility surrounded by desolation. The collective voice of the narrators, expressed through the pronoun *we*, conveys harmony and shared identity. Their lives are peaceful and self-contained until they are disturbed by the arrival of a traveler, described at first as a woman. The narrator recalls how the appearance of unknown vehicles filled them with unease: "we would be irritable and anxious" (26). The visitor, who "was like us, yet was not" (29) is received with hospitality, but her difference soon becomes destabilizing.

As the story unfolds, the community learns that the traveler they initially perceived as female is, in fact male. This revelation shatters the epistemological boundaries of the commune and exposes the fragility of their knowledge system. The once-harmonious collective becomes unsettled by the stranger's presence, and the inclusive *we* begins to fracture into an individual *I*. The narrator reflects: "I wanted to take responsibility for her, but this, I was told, would not solve the problem" (31). The subtle shift in pronouns signals both narrative and social fragmentation, the erosion of communal unity, and the emergence of hierarchy.

The traveler's integration into the community quickly becomes domination. The narrator recounts:

Now, she demanded things of us rather than waiting for us to offer or set out our position. Land; help carrying the stones, branches and hides to build a house; tools, seeds. She demanded, we debated whether to give—but the debate was a limited one, and each time we knew sooner that we would give her what she wanted, and soon it became automatic. When the house was built and the field had been levelled and sown, she began properly to learn our language which she then used to ask yet more of us... (34)

This passage captures the transformation of mutual coexistence into coercion. The traveler's demands, initially small, become habitual and normalized. His acquisition of the community's language, a symbolic appropriation of their means of expression, marks the consolidation of power. Rather than relying on immediate physical dominance, the traveler establishes authority by gradually reshaping the community's boundaries. The shift from negotiated requests to automatic surrender mirrors how repressing power becomes institutionalized. The traveler's eventual mastery of the local language operates as a mechanism of control, which enables him to navigate and exploit the community's internal rules to secure land, labor, and resources. The once peaceful commune becomes subjugated, and its members are reduced to laborers in their own land.

The significance of language is established early in the narrative when the traveler first arrives in the community. Although a language barrier initially exists between them, the narrator notes that the community members could discern the traveler's needs simply by

observing her demeanor (27). This non-verbal attunement underscores the community's relational framework, wherein communication, whether spoken or physical, is rooted in mutual understanding, empathy, and collective care. In stark contrast, the traveler's approach to language is purely utilitarian. Rather than acquiring the local dialect to foster genuine connection or reciprocity, she learns their tongue as a strategic tool to manipulate their social norms, enforce her demands, and consolidate her power over the commune

This dynamic mirrors the historical logic of colonization and patriarchy, in which the "other" is assimilated and dominated under the guise of exchange or progress. As Gaard notes, Western notions of "hegemonic masculinity" have long justified the exploitation of both women and nature by associating them with irrationality and passivity, rendering them objects of control (Gaard qtd. Buchanan et al. 371). Page dramatizes this process by showing how language, labor, and land, core elements of identity and survival, are slowly appropriated by the traveler.

The erosion of the community's harmony is both literal and symbolic. As the traveler's authority grows, the environment itself begins to decline. The once-fertile oasis becomes barren, reflecting the disintegration of balance between human and nature. The narrator describes the eventual loss: "The oasis exists now only in our memory, or perhaps in our forgetfulness" (36). The landscape's collapse mirrors the collapse of the collective's identity. What began as a utopia of cooperation ends as a memory of subjugation.

This process of decay functions as an allegory for the exploitation inherent in patriarchal and anthropocentric systems. The traveler's domination over the commune parallels humanity's domination over nature, both driven by the desire to possess and control. Page's choice to begin with a harmonious female community is significant: it foregrounds an alternative model of existence based on reciprocity rather than extraction. Yet, her narrative refuses simple idealization. The community's isolation and naivety make them vulnerable to invasion, suggesting that harmony without vigilance is fragile in the face of systemic power.

While "Of Paradise" dramatizes the imposition of patriarchal control, it also critiques certain strains of ecofeminism that idealize women as inherently closer to nature. Essentialist views

that romanticize women's "natural" affinity with the environment, as Allison notes, risk reinforcing the very hierarchies they seek to dismantle. These assumptions "have been critiqued, feared, and silenced by feminists seeking genuine liberation through theoretical and practical reconceptualization" (372). Page's story exposes this tension. The commune's downfall arises not from feminine weakness but from structural imbalance, the intrusion of hegemonic masculinity that views both women and nature as resources to be consumed.

Viewed through this lens, "Of Paradise" aligns most closely with what Allison categorizes as *socialist ecofeminism*, which situates gender and environmental oppression within broader socioeconomic and political structures. The story thus extends beyond allegory to become a critique of systems that commodify both people and the planet. The destruction of the commune by a "hegemonic masculine" outsider (Connell and Messerschmidt 829) exemplifies how dominance and extraction are intertwined processes that sustain inequality.

Page's distinctive use of *we*-narration amplifies the story's emotional and ethical impact. This collective voice fosters empathy and blurs the boundary between individual and environment, inviting readers to experience the story as part of a shared consciousness. As the voice fragments into *I*, the reader feels the loss of unity not just within the story but within themselves. The stylistic shift underscores the connection between language and ecology, between how we speak and how we inhabit the world.

Through this narrative voice, Page constructs an affective ecology, a mode of storytelling that encourages readers to feel the collapse of communal harmony as an ecological event. The "we" becomes a form of collective memory; a ghostly echo of coexistence that persists even after the physical environment has deteriorated. In this way, the story exemplifies what ecocritic Serpil Oppermann describes as the "storied matter" (57) of the environment, in which nature participates in narrative agency.

"Of Paradise" ultimately exposes how domination, whether over women, communities, or ecosystems, originates in the same ideological root: the belief in separateness and hierarchy. By dissolving boundaries between gender and ecology, Page compels her readers to confront

the shared vulnerability of all living systems. Her story does not offer redemption or restoration, but rather awareness, a recognition that loss is both material and moral.

Thus, Page's eco-story stands as a powerful meditation on the fragility of harmony and the pervasive reach of possessive power. Its mythic tone, its oscillation between collective and individual consciousness, and its intertwining of gendered and ecological concerns make it a vital contribution to Canadian eco-literature. "Of Paradise" illustrates that the exploitation of nature and the subjugation of women are not parallel narratives but interdependent histories. Through her mythopoeic storytelling, Page invites readers to imagine what it might mean to live otherwise, to inhabit a world where care replaces control, and where the paradise we seek is not elsewhere, but within our capacity to coexist.

"Blessing Song" by Lee Maracle: Indigenous Womanhood, Oceanic Kinship, and the Voice of Resistance

Lee Maracle's "Blessing Song," the shortest eco-story examined in this article, appears in the author's 2010 short story collection *First Wives Club*. Maracle stands as one of the most significant voices in contemporary Canadian and Indigenous literature. Her work consistently explores the intersections of gender, colonialism, and ecology, articulating a distinctly Indigenous worldview that challenges Western paradigms. Including Maracle in a discussion of gendered resistance is particularly meaningful, as her writing exemplifies how Indigenous women's narratives critique and transcend colonial and patriarchal frameworks. Her authorship engages ecological consciousness, feminist agency, and cultural reclamation, establishing her as a central figure within Canadian eco-literature and a vital contributor to the dialogue between gender and environmental themes.

As Julia Emberley notes,

The Stó:lo writer Lee Maracle is a notable figure because her entry into publication in the 1970s, with *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel* (1975), was initiated through two men who saw in her political activism and life story a unique platform for challenging state power in the United States and Canada. Irrespective of the political use of her work in the service of a leftist cause, Maracle republished a revised version of her life story solely under her own

name as *Bobbi Lee: Indian Woman* (1990). She has gone on to write fiction, poetry, and critical essays that focus on Indigenous knowledge and settler/Indigenous relations, attending to the interwoven diversity of gendered, racialized, and intimate Indigenous relations, notably in works such as her 1993 novel *Ravensong*. (Emberley 211)

This background underscores Maracle's commitment to both political and ecological transformation. Her literary practice is rooted in Indigenous epistemologies that link human survival to the vitality of the land and water, positioning storytelling as an act of resistance, remembrance, and renewal.

In "Blessing Song," Maracle presents a deceptively simple, yet deeply symbolic narrative centered on three generations of Coast Salish women, a grandmother, her daughter, and her granddaughter, embarking on a whale-watching trip in the Pacific Ocean. The Pacific Coast, home to numerous Indigenous communities, is historically and spiritually central to the Coast Salish peoples, whose traditional territories encompass the Strait of Georgia, Vancouver Island, and the mainland of British Columbia (Anderson). Maracle situates her story within this geography, portraying the sea as both a living archive of Indigenous memory and a site of intergenerational continuity. The narrator refers to the ocean as "the garden of generations of Salish people" (29), invoking its sacred role as a sustainer of cultural identity and ancestral connection. Despite the brevity of the story, its focus on the natural world and the enduring relationship between people and water reveals Maracle's profound ecological sensibility.

The narrative alternates between the pronouns "I" and "we." Maracle's use of "we" retains its literal sense: it denotes shared experience among family and community. This shifting perspective underscores the unity of the three women while reinforcing a communal Indigenous worldview in which the self is never isolated from kinship relations or the natural environment. The grandmother-narrator recounts their whale-watching journey, noting that while tourists and the boat's captain react with fear as the killer whales approach and splash water onto the vessel, she and her family remain calm, attuned to the rhythm of the sea. Their composure signals not naivety, but recognition, an understanding rooted in ancestral familiarity and respect.

In an interview with Chantal Fiola, Lee Maracle explains that the Stó:lō “believe there is one earth and that all humans are relatives” (162). However, she stresses that colonialism has so severely disrupted these bonds that “in order to even perceive of ourselves as relations, those denied nationhood must have it and those from the privileged colonial nations must participate in the resurrection of nationhood for the colonized” (162). This imperative for relational renewal underpins the story’s turning point, which occurs when the killer whale demands that the characters sing. This moment establishes a sacred dialogue between humans and nonhuman kin. As John Bierhorst explains, interactions between Indigenous communities and the natural world “take place on both spiritual and physical levels, according to many cultures, personifying spirits are embedded not only in humans, but also in animate and inanimate elements of the natural world” (qtd. in Turner and Freedman 176). The whale’s call for song reawakens this spiritual bond, drawing forth an ancient Salish hymn that unites generations through voice, memory, and place.

The narrator describes this awakening vividly:

I feel a song being pulled from some place deep inside me. I hesitate. We don’t sing in front of white people, but killer whale seems to demand nothing less. The song emerges from my daughter and me as we stand there before this mammoth, both of us sing the oldest Salish song we know. The very moment the song ends, the whale slaps the water. (Maracle 31)

This passage captures the tension between Indigenous cultural expression and colonial oppression. The hesitation to sing “in front of white people” signals the historical suppression of Indigenous voices and traditions under colonial regimes. Yet, through the whale’s insistence, the women reclaim their song, transforming a moment of cultural constraint into one of spiritual liberation. The whale’s response, slapping the water, signifies not a definitive end but communication, an acknowledgment of mutual recognition between species.

Thomas King¹, in his discussion of Indigenous storytelling, identifies four major narrative categories², one of which is the *polemical* story, those that “argue” for Indigenous presence and resistance within colonial contexts. “Blessing Song” clearly aligns with this tradition. Maracle constructs a narrative that distinguishes between Salish and settler perspectives while asserting Indigenous epistemologies as equally legitimate and vital. The narrator’s reflection, “It strikes me as odd that we have opted to take a holiday that is so modern and tourist-like, and yet we feel so old and so Salish” (29), encapsulates this dual consciousness. Even within a commodified “white” activity such as whale-watching, the characters reclaim their cultural identity through a relational understanding of the sea and its inhabitants. What appears to be a leisure outing becomes an act of decolonial remembrance and resistance.

The whale, in this context, functions as both ancestor and teacher. Its demand for song reactivates an ancient kinship that transcends human generations. In Salish cosmology, whales are not merely animals but relatives, guardians, and storytellers who maintain balance between worlds. The narrator’s recognition of this bond underscores an Indigenous eco-philosophy in which human and nonhuman lives are intertwined through reciprocity rather than domination. The act of singing, therefore, becomes more than a cultural expression, it is an ecological communication that bridges species and reaffirms continuity with the living world.

This interpretation resonates with Steve Mentz’s articulation of the ocean as a “sea of stories,” a metaphor he borrows from Salman Rushdie to describe the ocean’s narrative abundance and connective power. As Mentz writes, “the sea offers a vision of multiplicity, of stories crossing and mixing like currents” (3). Maracle’s “Blessing Song” embodies this principle by situating storytelling itself within the sea, each song, like each current, contributes to a larger circulation of knowledge and connection. For Maracle, the ocean is not an empty backdrop but an animate text, carrying ancestral voices that resist erasure.

¹ In November 2025, Thomas King published an essay titled “A most inconvenient Indian,” stating he has no evidence of Cherokee ancestry on either side of his family lineage. In this article, I acknowledge him not as an Indigenous Canadian writer, but as a Canadian-American writer.

² In “Godzilla vs. Postcolonial,” King names the categories of Native writing as; *tribal*, *interfusional*, *polemical*, and *associational*.

The story's title foregrounds the significance of song, positioning it as both blessing and resistance. The act of singing operates as a performative restoration of balance, acknowledging the ocean as a living participant in the story. Through their song, the women reaffirm their kinship with the whale, which the narrator ultimately identifies as their ancestor. This interspecies recognition blurs distinctions between human and nonhuman, past and present, myth and reality. It encapsulates the fundamental ethos of Indigenous environmental thought: that survival depends upon sustaining reciprocal relationships with all beings.

At the same time, "Blessing Song" contributes to the broader theme of women's resistance within ecological and social systems of domination. The three generations of women, the grandmother, mother, and granddaughter, represent continuity, resilience, and renewal. Their shared act of singing becomes both a spiritual ritual and a declaration of identity. By preserving their ancestral song in a contemporary, touristic setting, they subvert colonial expectations and reassert cultural sovereignty. In this way, Maracle transforms a moment of leisure into an act of resistance, where the women protect not only their traditions but also the integrity of their relationship with the natural world.

The story culminates in a moment of profound unity:

The closing of the gap between us; the creation of oneness between three generations of Coast Salish women doing what every generation before us has done, standing in the middle of the sea singing to the whales. (Maracle 31)

This passage encapsulates Maracle's central message, that the acts of remembrance and care are inseparable. The women's song does not simply recall their ancestors; it enacts their presence, bridging generations through embodied practice. The ocean, too, becomes a participant in this communion, symbolizing continuity and transformation.

"Blessing Song" thus serves as a microcosm of Maracle's broader literary and ecological philosophy. Through a concise yet emotionally charged narrative, she demonstrates how Indigenous women's voices embody both cultural memory and environmental ethics. The story affirms that resistance does not always manifest through confrontation; sometimes, it

resides in the quiet endurance of tradition, in the act of singing to a whale that remembers you.

In its brief span, "Blessing Song" achieves remarkable depth, articulating a vision of harmony grounded in relationality and reciprocity. The ocean functions as both literal and metaphorical space, an ancestral archive that carries the voices of those who came before and sustains those who remain. Through this story, Maracle redefines what it means to inhabit the world ethically: to listen, to sing, and to recognize the interconnectedness of all life. Her narrative stands as a testament to the resilience of Indigenous women and their capacity to preserve balance amid environmental and cultural upheaval.

"Children of the Sea" by Rati Mehrotra: Water, Loss, and the Ethics of Survival

Rati Mehrotra's short story "Children of the Sea," published in the anthology *Cli-Fi: Canadian Tales of Climate Change* (2017), exemplifies the growing global and multicultural dimensions of Canadian speculative fiction. Mehrotra, an Indian-born writer who now resides in Toronto and is widely recognized for her work in science fiction and fantasy, consistently explores themes of justice, anti-colonialism, and environmental transformation. Her writing often draws from her upbringing in India, a background that enriches the Canadian literary landscape with transnational and cross-cultural perspectives. In "Children of the Sea," she weaves together motifs of female endurance, environmental collapse, and posthuman evolution to examine how ecological crisis amplifies existing social inequalities. Through this particular short story, "Children of the Sea," Mehrotra positions water not merely as a setting or threat but as a living force that determines both the destruction and renewal of human existence.

Set in a near- or post-apocalyptic world, the story is told from the perspective of Benita, a first-person narrator whose intimate voice pulls readers into the emotional and ecological devastation of her environment. As Suzanne Keen observes, first-person narration functions as a particularly powerful literary tool for evoking empathy, since it offers "direct access to a character's thoughts, emotions, and experiences" (220). The immediacy of Benita's voice not only personalizes the climate crisis but also transforms environmental loss into an embodied

experience of grief and resilience. By blending the personal and planetary, Mehrotra uses narrative perspective to collapse the distance between human emotion and ecological destruction.

The story's ecological core is centered on water. Benita lives on the West African coast, a landscape increasingly consumed by the sea. Her nephew Elhad remarks that "[t]he land is changing. Every day we lose some of it" (23), a statement that encapsulates the slow violence of climate change, the creeping erasure of home and heritage. The rising sea levels threaten the survival of the village, while the vanishing mangrove forests deepen the crisis, stripping away both natural protection and cultural identity. The destruction of the mangroves, ecologically vital ecosystems that sustain coastal life, serves as both an environmental and symbolic loss, marking the disintegration of interconnected systems of care between humans and nature.

Mehrotra's narrative reveals the experiences and perspectives of three successive generations of women: Benita, her daughter Aila, and her granddaughter Katyani, each navigating the tension between survival and displacement. Their intertwined stories form a lineage of resistance against the dual forces of ecological collapse and patriarchal exploitation, both of which are the marks of the "Capitalocene." The generational differences among them reveal the shifting ways in which women respond to a world unraveling under global and environmental pressures. Benita, the matriarch, clings to the land and to traditional modes of life; Aila, the daughter, yearns for economic independence in Europe; and Katyani, the granddaughter, becomes the symbolic link between human and posthuman futures.

Aila's longing to leave her devastated homeland reflects the persistent allure of Eurocentric ideals, a theme Mehrotra treats with sharp irony. As Lois Tyson defines it, Eurocentrism is "the use of European culture as the standard to which all other cultures are negatively contrasted" (420). Aila's belief that she can "make enough in Europe in one or two years to buy a house inland" (26) reflects her internalization of this worldview, equating Western modernity with progress and safety. Her mother, Benita, however, embodies a quiet

defiance against this logic. She rejects the colonial hierarchy that positions Europe as a site of salvation, recognizing that such aspirations are built upon histories of exploitation that continue to endanger communities like hers. In this way, Mehrotra portrays not just the erosion of coastlines but the erosion of cultural self-determination under the weight of neocolonial influence.

From the opening pages, the story establishes an apocalyptic tone. Benita's narration oscillates between past and present, fusing memory and loss into a continuous reflection on decline. She recalls:

If I could, I'd live in that time forever. The time before foreign trawlers appeared on the horizon, stealing all our fish. The time before drought took the mangroves, and storms pounded the coast, and Ibnar had to go out further and further to feed his family, until the inevitable day when he simply did not return. The time before everyone began to leave or die. (Mehrotra 26)

This lament, expressing deep sorrow, anchors the story in the socio-ecological realities of global capitalism and environmental injustice. Clark's observation that "[e]cological problems are seen to result from structures of hierarchy and elitism in human society, geared to exploit both other people and the natural world as a source of profit" (2) resonates profoundly here. Mehrotra dramatizes these structures not as abstract forces but as lived experience: the arrival of foreign trawlers, the theft of local resources, and the subsequent disintegration of both family and community. Benita's personal grief becomes a microcosm of planetary crisis, revealing how global economic systems turn distant political decisions into intimate catastrophes.

As the narrative progresses, personal tragedy intertwines with collective loss. After a dispute over Aila's plan to migrate to Europe, mother and daughter part ways. Aila promises to send letters, but her messages stop arriving after a year. Later, Benita learns of her granddaughter's birth, and of Aila's violent death at the hands of men who exploited and ultimately murdered her. Aila's pursuit of safety and prosperity ends in the very violence she hoped to escape. Benita narrates, "Aila tried to run away from the men who held her captive in a Spanish brothel. She was caught and shot dead as a warning to the other girls" (27-28).

Through this tragic turn, Mehrotra exposes how patriarchal power and neocolonial exploitation are deeply entangled, leaving women most vulnerable in the global hierarchy of crisis.

In the wake of this loss, Benita names her granddaughter Katyani, meaning “[s]layer of demons and epitome of feminine power” (28). This act of naming reclaims agency in the face of despair, transforming grief into defiance. Katyani becomes both a memorial and a promise, a future that might transcend human failure. Benita’s maternal devotion evolves into a broader ethical commitment when she joins forces with the “green suits,” a group of scientists experimenting with genetic adaptation to the rising seas. Their work seeks to engineer aquatic humans capable of surviving in a submerged world. The project is ethically fraught, but for Benita, it represents both necessity and hope: an attempt to ensure survival on a planet irrevocably altered by climate catastrophe.

In the climactic moment of the story, Benita offers her granddaughter to this project, sacrificing her human kinship to guarantee a future beyond extinction. Her decision embodies a complex moral calculus, one that fuses maternal love with planetary responsibility. Mehrotra’s depiction of this act avoids simple judgment; instead, it invites readers to consider what survival might demand when the boundary between human and environment collapses. Benita’s death at the story’s end marks the completion of one cycle and the uncertain beginning of another, as Katyani becomes the bearer of the first of the “children of the sea.” This refers to the experiment that “green suits” (Mehrotra 28) are conducting in order to develop a new hybrid race that can survive on the devastated planet.

This conclusion resonates with Kathy Page’s “Low Tide,” another Canadian eco-story featuring a female sea creature caught between humanity and the oceanic. Yet while Page’s protagonist is exploited by men, Mehrotra’s aquatic beings emerge as a form of ecological evolution rather than tragedy. In “Children of the Sea,” the ocean does not merely reclaim the land, it reclaims the human. The story thus extends the discourse of the Blue Humanities, where, as Serpil Oppermann argues, “water’s material reality is not beyond the reach of meaning-making processes or discursive formulations,” and where its meanings

"emerge through interpretive practices that are always entrenched in cultural, historical, and ideological discourses" (23). Mehrotra's ocean embodies this duality precisely: it is both material and symbolic, destroyer and creator, the site of death and the birthplace of new life.

Although "Children of the Sea" incorporates elements of gendered violence, its primary focus remains the agency of water and the transformation it necessitates. The sea operates as both an ecological and moral force, washing away the remnants of human civilization and offering, in their place, a new mode of being. The narrative's power lies not in depicting humans adapting to the ocean but in imagining the ocean remaking humanity. Katyani, as the experiment expands, bears twins who will be the "first aquatic humans in a million years!" (Mehrotra 29). The "green suits" transform Katyani's genes so that she could give birth to a whole new race, although "all her modifications will never truly belong in the water, but her children will" (31). By presenting this posthuman vision through the lens of a grieving mother, Mehrotra fuses the intimate and the planetary, the emotional and the ecological.

While earlier ecofeminist readings might emphasize the parallels between women's oppression and nature's exploitation, Mehrotra moves beyond simple analogy. Instead, she articulates what can be described as an *aqua-ethical* perspective, an understanding that survival depends on accepting water's transformative agency rather than resisting it. Benita's final act, though tragic, symbolizes a relinquishment of control, an acknowledgment that human dominion must yield to environmental reality.

The story's affective power also stems from its empathy toward both people and place. Mehrotra's prose evokes grief not only for lost family but for lost ecosystems, making the reader feel the weight of extinction as a personal emotion. Her use of first-person narration, as Keen suggests, "invites an especially close relationship between reader and narrative voice" (220). This closeness transforms environmental awareness into emotional responsibility, a hallmark of effective climate fiction.

Ultimately, “Children of the Sea” is not simply a tale of apocalypse but a meditation on adaptation and rebirth. Mehrotra reimagines the end of the human as the beginning of something continuous with the Earth rather than opposed to it. The sea, with its vast and uncontrollable power, becomes a symbol of both reckoning and renewal. By entwining themes of gender, survival, and water’s agency, the story exemplifies the central insight of the Blue Humanities: that water is not passive matter but an active participant in shaping culture, identity, and future life.

Through Benita’s journey, Mehrotra reminds us that ecological crisis cannot be separated from histories of social injustice, that rising seas are inseparable from the forces of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy that have long governed human relations. In return, these ideas are introduced as “Capitalocene,” which then made this reading possible. Benita, as the generational elder of her family, narrates the story about herself, her husband, her daughter, and finally her granddaughter. Everything in the story is told from her point of view; therefore, the reader has the utmost connection and knowledge about her. In addition, she is the family’s survivor, while also attempting to save her granddaughter, and consequently save her community and humanity. Within this devastation, “Children of the Sea” offers a vision of resilience grounded not in domination but in transformation. The ocean, once a source of loss, becomes a new ground of being. Mehrotra’s story thus calls for an ethics of humility, an acceptance of our shared vulnerability and our potential to evolve in relation, rather than opposition, to the living planet.

Conclusion

Beyond the individual narratives, these eco-stories reveal that gendered resistance and ecological crisis are deeply intertwined, signaling a broader exploitation of nature rooted in patriarchal and colonial power. “Of Paradise,” “Blessing Song,” and “Children of the Sea” present narratives where women’s struggles against oppression parallel nature’s resistance to destruction, emphasizing the agency of both marginalized communities and the environment. Through their depictions of ecological devastation, survival, and

transformation, these stories challenge dominant narratives of control and highlight the necessity of reimagining relationships between humans and the natural world.

By foregrounding female protagonists who resist not only societal constraints but also environmental exploitation, these stories reinforce the role of literature in fostering awareness and advocacy for understanding the power dynamics. Rather than offering just observation, the narratives promote an ethic of care, a commitment to planetary stewardship that resists the escalating climate crisis. The intersectionality of gender and ecological resistance explored in these texts further contributes to the growing discourse in ecocriticism and gender studies, demonstrating that nature and gendered bodies are not passive entities but active forces of resilience and change. This article, therefore, underlines the necessity of reading eco-stories through an intersectional point of view, one that acknowledges the interconnected struggles of women and the environment while envisioning alternative futures rooted in coexistence rather than domination.

As has been explained, Page's "Of Paradise" presents a sharp critique of the exploitative mindset of patriarchy. In the story, the arrival of a male stranger disrupts the harmony of both the community and their land, symbolizing the intrusion of colonial and patriarchal forces into a once-balanced existence. Through this narrative, Page exposes the destructive consequences of dominance and exploitation, emphasizing the interconnected oppression of women and nature. Lee Maracle's "Blessing Song" offers a deeply rooted Indigenous perspective, exploring the lives, traditions, and resilience of Indigenous women. By integrating traditional storytelling and cultural practices into contemporary settings, Maracle bridges the past and present, illustrating the continued significance of Indigenous epistemologies in navigating both personal and environmental challenges. Finally, Rati Mehrotra's "Children of the Sea" powerfully portrays the systemic inequalities, environmental devastation, and social hardships endured by women in the wake of severe ecological collapse. Through her narrative, Mehrotra highlights the disproportionate burden placed on women, revealing how they are most affected by climate crises, yet often remain marginalized in solutions and decision-making. By centering women's experiences, the story

emphasizes the gendered dimensions of environmental injustice and the urgency of addressing these disparities.

Ultimately, the intersection of these narratives confirms that the climate crisis does not distribute its burdens equally; its impact is significantly more profound for those marginalized by gender, race, and class. By centering these experiences, we move toward a more just and comprehensive understanding of environmental injustice and the urgency of addressing these disparities.

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