

# IS THE APOCALYPSE NEAR?

*The Anthropocene in post-apocalyptic, young-adult fiction*

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis will analyse the concept of the Anthropocene in post-apocalyptic, young-adult fiction. Specifically, it will look at the effects of the Anthropocene that are present within the novels and the way in which the environmental crises in the books ‘guide’ the narratives as well as the messages that are presented in the novels. Two young-adult novels were selected to analyse; *The Carbon Diaries 2015* by Saci Lloyd and *Ready Player One* by Ernest Cline. The intent is to find out what perspectives on environmental crisis and other representations on the environment are present and what young readers could take away from these representations.

Keywords: the Anthropocene, young-adult fiction, apocalypse, post-apocalyptic fiction, environmental crisis

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## INTRODUCTION

*“Young adult literature exerts a powerful influence over its readers at a particularly malleable time in their identity formation [...]”.*

*Karen Coats (2011)*

With this opening quote, Karen Coats expresses the importance of young adult literature. She speaks from experience and explains that “These books full of questionable material about sex, drugs and antiwar protests taught me what it meant to be an American teenager in the 1970s. From Nat Hentoff (1968), Judy Blume (1975), S.E. Hinton (1967), Robert Cormier (1974), and John Donovan (1969), I learned what was going on in the world outside my sheltered community, and I got some insight into the people who sat across from me at the lunch table. It wasn’t until I went back to those books as an adult that I realized how much of my own everyday speech, expressions, thought patterns, and values had been influenced by their words and ideologies.”

Coats refers to this example since she argues for more scholarly attention for young adult literature. Young adult literature should not be viewed as a vehicle towards more ‘adult’ or ‘serious’ literature, but instead should be seen as ‘destination literature’ itself. Coats is not the only one to express this opinion. Bean and Rigoni (2001; qtd from Bean & Moni, 2003) explain that “adolescent readers view characters in young adult novels as living and wrestling with real problems close to their own life experiences as teens” and that “the texts themselves become manipulable, transparent constructions that can be accepted or rejected, and in which multiple meanings are explored”. Kaplan (2005) mentions that since the previous century we have created a plethora of young adult novels that helps us ‘reinvent ourselves’ since “our young adult books are constantly in search of the new and revealing so that more and more young people will find their way to the delectable hallways of good and engaging reads”. It is therefore that I would like to focus on young adult literature as well, especially young adult literature that engages with environmental problems, which proves to be a much-debated topic these days. Environmental problems are especially apparent in post-apocalyptic young adult novels. Trexler and Johns-Putra (2011) also mention this by stating that other-worlds (that often can be found within post-apocalyptic texts) are most often caused by extreme environmental changes.

Young adult novels that are concerned with environmental changes or disasters offer intriguing insight into current concerns since young adult novels often respond to urgent

issues displayed in contemporary society. Since the environment and sustainability are current topics that no one can get around, I would like to investigate how young-adult literature presents the topic. One concept related to environmental change and environmental crises in particular keeps emerging: the Anthropocene. This concept will be dealt with in depth in the first chapter, but it mainly entails that humankind exerts an immense influence on the geology and geological processes of our planet. The geological era that we live in could hence be described as ‘the Anthropocene’ and it is therefore that I would like to focus on the Anthropocene and its representation in young-adult literature.

Some authors have already reflected on the representation of the Anthropocene or environmental crises in post-apocalyptic literature. Dürbeck (2014), for example, has analysed two texts regarding their stance on the Anthropocene. In his conclusion he comes up with a list of elements that are linked to the Anthropocene and that both texts seem to display. These elements include things like: “large-scale geological changes”, “the internal catastrophe of the main protagonist is linked to the externally unfolding catastrophe” or “the protagonists are sensitive observers of disasters”. Curry (2013) has also looked at post-apocalyptic young fiction, but from an explicit ecofeminist point of view. She examines the ways in which post-apocalyptic landscapes in young adult fiction reflect contemporary attitudes towards environmental crisis and human responsibility. She also notes that young-adult fiction has been overlooked in literary criticism and that more research should be conducted towards this area of fiction.

Since very little research has been conducted on environmental depictions in young-adult, post-apocalyptic literature, I would like to venture into this realm and analyse *The Carbon Diaries 2015* by Saci Lloyd and *Ready Player One* by Ernest Cline. Both books have received much praise and are very popular amongst young adult readers. *Ready Player One* is a compelling story of a teenage boy living in a world ravaged by environmental crises and has even been adapted onto screen whereas *The Carbon Diaries 2015* features a young girl dealing with ongoing climate changes. What I would like to research is whether these novels depict these environmental changes as man-made. Furthermore, I would like to know how these (possibly anthropocentric) climate changes and environmental disasters guide the narrative and whether these works would perhaps convey an environmental message. With the ‘guidance’ of the narrative by the environmental crisis I mean the ways in which the environmental crisis has ‘shaped’ the story; the society that is described in the novels; the world as it is depicted in the novels, etc. Questions like “*What does human society look like in the books?*”, “*What organisations are present to combat the crisis?*”, “*What has changed*

*in respect to our current society due to the crisis?*”, etc. will be addressed. In the conclusion, I will return to my research questions and examine in how far I have been able to address them through my analyses of the novels that constitute my corpus. By examining these two questions, I will try and find out whether the societal concerns about the environment and the human influences on the environment are reflected in the literature.

To analyse these elements, chapter 1 will present a number of concepts and definitions; namely ecocriticism, the Anthropocene and young adult literature and will try and propose a way to analyse these concepts within the literature. Chapter 2 will answer the question of what effects of the Anthropocene are present in the novels, and chapter 3 will deal with the question as to how the narrative is guided by these environmental destructions that are described in the novel and whether or not an environmental message is conveyed to the reader.

## CHAPTER 1

## THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

*Ecocriticism, the Anthropocene and Young Adult Literature*

This first chapter will deal with a number of concepts that will be used for further analysis of the *The Carbon Diaries 2015* and *Ready Player One*. These concepts will be explained in order to answer the question ‘What effects of the Anthropocene can be found within these books and how is the post-apocalyptic environmental crisis used to guide the plot and message in these books?’. The concepts that will be dealt with are ecocriticism, the Anthropocene, and young-adult literature. I will discuss ecocriticism first, since the basis of this thesis is grounded in ecocriticism. This section will, however, be quite brief since the topic is rather broad leading me to restrict this section to a general overview. The Anthropocene will be discussed in terms of a definition and some characteristics of the concept which I will use in the analysis of the novels in my second and third chapter. Lastly, I will discuss the concept of young adult literature since both novels fall into this category and a general overview of the genre is needed to both understand what the genre comprises and how young readers might interpret the themes or messages that are present within these books.

## ECOCRITICISM

Ecocriticism is a relatively young form of critical analysis. Its rise came somewhere in the mid-eighties. Essays, book reviews and notes were published in journals and periodicals, and universities started adding environmental literary courses to their curricula. Before that time, environmental literary criticism was almost non-existent. Race, class and gender were topics that were covered extensively in the literature, and even though environmental crises were covered in the news, they were not yet to be found within studies of literary criticism (Cheryll Glotfelty, 1996). The first time the term ‘ecocriticism’ was used, was in 1978 by William Rueckert. He set out to ““experiment with the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature” (Bracke, 2012). It was not until a decade later, in 1989, that the term was picked up again, this time by the Western Literature Association Meeting when “Cheryll Glotfelty and Glen A. Love called for an “ecological criticism”” (Bracke, 2012). After the meeting, the term gained in popularity but there was little consensus on the exact definition of the term.

In her book *Ecocriticism and the Contemporary British Novel* (2012), Astrid Bracke compiled a number of definitions of the concept. Amongst these definitions was Glotfelty's, who describes ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Astrid Bracke, 2012). Then there is Lawrence Buell (2005) who defines ecocriticism as "an umbrella term [...] used to refer to the environmentally oriented study of literature and (less often) the arts more generally, and to the theories that underlie such critical practice" (Astrid Bracke, 2012). Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer (2006) argue that ecocriticism should re-examine "the history of ideologically, aesthetically, and ethically motivated conceptualisations of nature, of the function of its constructions and metaphorisations in literary and other cultural practices, and of the potential effects these discursive, imaginative constructions have on our bodies as well as our natural and cultural environments" (Astrid Bracke, 2012). These definitions are still quite general and it is clear from especially Buell and Gersdorf and Mayer that they have a political angle as well. This political angle is evident in a definition by Trexler and Johns-Putra (2011) as well, who describe the concept as the practice of investigating questions to do with "literature, culture, and the environment". According to them, it attempts to change dominant ideologies through showing the shortcomings of the ideas we have about the environment, to draw attention to issues related to the environment, encourage and develop new ways of thinking about the environment and calls upon people to come into action. These are only a few of the definitions that are used to describe the term 'ecocriticism'. As Astrid Bracke explained, little consensus was reached on the definition of the concept in 1989 and it is clear that there are still many authors that uphold different definitions. I can stand behind the political angle of the definitions since it reflects what I have set out to do, namely analyse how the environment is represented in the literature, how contemporary environmental concerns are displayed within the novels and to what extent literature is used to bring across an environmental message.

Despite the different inquiries Glotfelty states that ecocriticism is based on a few common premises, the first one being that ecocriticism believes that human culture is connected to the physical world and that it is both affected by it and affecting it. Most literary criticism relates the text to 'world', in which case the 'world' denotes the social sphere. In the case of environmental literary criticism, this world is expanded to include the entire ecosphere. Also, most ecocritical writing shares a common motivation; namely the awareness that we are on the verge of using up Earth's resources and that human interference is

damaging geological processes (Glotfelty, 1996). I argue in favour of the first premise in chapter 3, by analysing the relatedness of the physical and social worlds in the novels.

As well as universal premises there are non-universal premises upon which the practice of ecocriticism should be built. According to Bracke (2014), for instance, the practice of ecocriticism has endured some setbacks and difficulties while trying to close-read the contemporary (eco-)novel. Environmental themes would not be well-received by the contemporary audience, since most of the target audience belongs to an increasingly urbanized population. It is suggested that the connection between them and the non-human environment is not one of their main concerns (Head, 1998, qtd. in Bracke, 2014). Novels have also presented ecocritical readings with the difficulty of being set in fictional settings, or settings that are largely urban. Novels do not often strive to present ecocritics with the factuality that nature writings do often demonstrate (Bracke, 2014). What Bracke proposes is a shift in reading practices in order for ecocritics to analyse contemporary novels in an ecocritical manner. The shift should encompass an ecocritical reading that is quite broad. Bracke notes it should be “founded on at least two elements: an inclusive definition of ecocriticism, and the assumption that a work does not have to be environmental(ist) or nature-oriented to merit an ecocritical reading.” She notes that a number of texts that are not explicitly nature-oriented can still provide insights on contemporary human-nature relations. The form, genre or structure of the novel may influence representations of nature (Bracke, 2014). This shift seems to accompany the contemporary literature well. In the past, ecocriticism was often concerned with literary works that feature some displays of the pastoral and settings that are mainly nature-oriented. To reflect on contemporary environmental issues and topics, shifting the emphasis onto the urban seems reasonable since that is the environment most people are situated in nowadays and that makes it easier to reflect on their situation. This is also what I will do for my analyses, since both books are set in urban settings.

## THE ANTHROPOCENE

The Anthropocene is an emerging concept, and, when used to perform a close-reading on literature, it finds its bearings in ecocriticism, a concept that, as explained, is often founded on the belief that literary criticism can aid in being a solution to an environmental crisis. Raising awareness about human-nature relations is a common goal in ecocritical analysis and would be enabled by analysing elements of the Anthropocene in literature (Bracke, 2014).

The “Anthropocene” is a term originally coined by Crutzen & Stoermer (2000), who posit the term next to the “Holocene”, which is the geological epoch dating back ten to twelve thousand years till now. The Anthropocene, according to Crutzen and Stoermer, denotes the geological epoch that we are currently in. Crutzen and Stoermer were rapidly joined in their claim that we live in the Anthropocene (Steffen, Crutzen & McNeill, 2007). Opposing forces claim that the Anthropocene is nothing but a political statement and that not enough physical evidence has been accumulated to say that humans influence geological processes (A. Zalasiewicz et al., 2017).

The concept of the Anthropocene as geological epoch denotes that we live in an era in which environmental problems are man-made and that the influence of the human race is on a geological scale. The influences could be compared to planetary developments like the movements of tectonic plates (Pieter Leroy, personal communication, 6 March 2018). Crutzen and Stoermer claim we can safely say we have arrived in a new geological epoch since man has an environmental impact of geological magnitude. In their claim on calling the current geological epoch the Anthropocene, Crutzen and Stoermer mention a multitude of examples on why exactly it is that humans have a considerable impact on geological process on Planet Earth. They mention for example that Earth’s population has expanded tremendously, an expansion that impacts the use of available resources as well. Steffen et al. (2011) second Crutzen and Stoermer’s claim; they mention that “The human imprint on the global environment has now become so large and active that it rivals some of the great forces of Nature in its impact on the functioning of the Earth system”, adding that humans influence biogeochemical or element cycles, modify terrestrial water cycles and are likely driving an extinction event.

More authors agree on the claim that mankind has considerable impact upon the planet, even though not explicitly mentioning the dawn of a new geological epoch. Other concepts have been introduced to give a name to the era concerned with human influences. Palsson et al. (2013) remark that similar previous concepts have been proposed, such as: “Stoppani’s ‘anthropozoic era’ (1873), Vernadsky, Le Roy, and Teilhard de Chardin’s ‘noösphere’ (1922), Catton’s ‘Homo colossus’ (1980), Revkin’s ‘anthrocene’ (1992), and Samways’s ‘homogenocene’ (1999), to the more recent ‘Great Acceleration’ (Schimel et al., 2007)”. Vitouresk et al. (1997), for example, mention how “human alteration of Earth is substantial and growing”. They write that between one-third and one-half of the land surface of Earth has been transformed by human action in some way or another. This change does not only include anthropogenic land use change but also the quality of the environment, such as

air- and water quality. Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased by about 30 percent and more than half of all accessible fresh water is put to use by humanity. Writings like these are used by authors to support their own claims of saying how we are living in an era in which nature is heavily influenced by mankind.

To link the concept of the Anthropocene to literature, a few authors have proposed a set of characteristics or questions that could be used when analysing the concept of the Anthropocene. I will use these characteristics in my analysing chapters. Baskin (2015), for example, has compiled a list of characteristics that to him represent the era of the Anthropocene. First, he claims that the Anthropocene “universalises and normalises a certain portion of humanity as the human of the Anthropocene”. Second, the Anthropocene “reinserts ‘man’ into nature only to re-elevate ‘him’ within and above it”. The third characteristic claims that “its use of ‘instrumental reason’ generates a largely uncritical embrace of technology”, and the last characteristic says the Anthropocene “legitimises certain non-democratic and technophilic approach, including planetary management and large-scale geoengineering, as necessary responses to the ecological ‘state of emergency’”.

Dürbeck (2014) has composed a list of questions that will help an ecocritic pose critical questions when analysing a text. Some of these questions are the following: “How are large scale global changes depicted and which characters are suitable to reflect on a deep time perspective?”, “Which kinds of agencies are thematized to deploy the environmentally focused narratives?”, and “Which modes of narration (comic, tragic, ironic, didactic) are deployed to reflect on the challenges of the Anthropocene?”.

Lastly, there are two relatively closely related topics that will be discussed. The first one is the notion of ‘other-worlds’ or ‘terraformed’ worlds. Trexler and Johns-Putra (2011) write on these concepts in the context of “fiction that represents the issue of anthropogenic climate change”. They turn to science fiction since this particular genre often represents depictions of fictional climate change. What they noticed was that science fiction often deals with “other-worlds”. These worlds are “often depicted as being caused by or subjected to extreme environmental change” and can either be extra-terrestrial, futuristic or a combination of both. The fact that we would perceive these worlds as ‘other-worldly’ can be due to the fact that it is set on another planet or the fact that it plays out in another time. Often, when ecological change is depicted - in the context of extra-terrestrial climate change - “terraforming” plays a part in the narrative. The term “terraforming” was first coined by Jack Williamson (qtd. in Trexler and Johns-Putra, 2011) signifying a world that has been made

habitable by changing its climate. The terraformed planet, which, according to Trexler and Johns-Putra, often happens to be Mars, “offers a striking parable of how best to manage environmental disaster on Earth”. When the ‘other-world’ is set on Earth, the ‘other-worldliness’ is often due to a change in time, meaning that the narratives are often set in the future. These concepts of the creation of an ‘other-world’ and a ‘terraformed world’ will also be used in the second chapter in the analysis of the novels.

The second topic, something that is closely related to other-worlds and the Anthropocene, is the concept of apocalypse. As Trexler and Johns-Putra mentioned, it is often because of extreme environmental change that an ‘other-world’ is formed. These changes, in the literature, are often due to an apocalypse. Astrid Bracke (2012) defines the ‘apocalypse’ as “the collapse of society due to political, economic and environmental issues [...]”. According to Lawrence Buell the term ‘apocalypse’ has become “the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal” and the image is consequently also of crucial importance to ecocriticism (Bracke, 2012). Bracke argues that a multitude of apocalyptic narratives exists ‘out there’, whether it be on-screen, in novels, or else. According to her, these narratives are no longer original and do not shock the public anymore. They have become just one among many competing contemporary narratives. Because apocalyptic narratives have become a cliché, Bracke argues that they no longer serve as a relevant warning anymore. Richard Kerridge, however, argues that “if we were able to imagine environmental apocalypse with more certainty, people would be more likely to take action because they would know *what* to prevent” (Bracke, 2012).

## YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

Lastly the concept of young adult literature will be discussed to explain the concept of the genre as well as explain how young readers might interpret the themes or messages that are present within these books. Firstly, the categorization and definition of the concept of ‘young adult literature’ can be difficult, since its demarcations are not quite clear (Kaplan, 2005; Coats, 2011). Coats (2011), for example, acknowledges the issues of demarcation and mentions a few criteria that could be used to categorize the literature; it could be based on authorial intention, or the reception. She also mentions that it is often the case that young adult literature is marketed to fall into this category. Bean and Moni (2003), on the other hand, state matter-of-factly that young adult literature is intended for readers between the ages of 12 and 20. This leaves a range of books that could be grouped into the category of

‘young adult literature’. It is clear, then, that, a broad spectrum of novels fall under the denominator of ‘young adult literature’, but generally a few common characteristics can be defined.

One of the main distinctive common features of young adult literature are the themes that are dealt with within these novels. The themes deal with all kinds of topics that are relevant to adolescents and range from pregnancies and family conflicts to racism. They provide the teens with a guide as to how to cope with issues like these in real life. Since the protagonists deal with these issues, readers can relate since they often resemble their own life experiences (Bean & Moni, 2003). The teen protagonists themselves also display a few common characteristics. The characters are often “perceptive, sensitive, intelligent, mature, and independent” (Herz & Gallo, 1996; qtd. in Bean & Moni, 2003). Also, it is noted that young adult literature, and the protagonists within the texts, often go through a growing process (Trites, 2007; qtd. in Coats, 2011). Trites, notes that growth within these novels is always placed in the context of power relations. The novels are about who does or does not have the power, and what must be done in order to gain power. She views adolescent literature as a staging ground for power struggles. The outcomes will show the ethics embraced in a particular culture (Coats, 2011).

Another feature of adolescent literature is for the novels to try and engage the reader by having the reader position themselves within the themes discussed within the novel. The reader is invited to make sense of the text by identifying him- or herself with the protagonist and mirroring parts of what the protagonist goes through, the society he or she lives in, or the actions that the protagonist undertakes (Coats, 2011). Understanding what young readers relate to might enable me to understand how a message in the novels is brought across to adolescents. I will discuss this in the third chapter.

In this chapter I have explained the main concepts that will be used in this thesis and the notions and characteristics of some of these concepts that will be applied for the analysing chapters of this thesis. The following chapters will be devoted to analysing my corpus: the second chapter discusses the effects of the Anthropocene that are visible in the novels and the third chapter analyses how the post-apocalyptic environmental crisis guides the narrative and the message of the books.

## CHAPTER 2

## THE ANTHROPOCENE

This chapter will analyse the effects of the Anthropocene in *Carbon Diaries 2015* and *Ready Player One*. An ‘effect’ of the Anthropocene could for instance be the man-made character of environmental change. By analysing these effects, I hope to show whether or not the Anthropocene and the current concerns regarding the environment are represented within contemporary young adult literature. I will make use of the characteristics of the Anthropocene as described in the previous chapter, namely Baskin’s characteristics of the Anthropocene and Trexler and Johns-Putra’s notion of ‘other-worlds’ and Williamsen’s notion of ‘terraformed worlds’. The chapter is divided into two sections; the first discussing *The Carbon Diaries 2015* and the second discussing *Ready Player One*. Both sections will start with an introduction into the book and will present a general outline of the novel after which the analyses of the books will be presented.

## THE CARBON DIARIES 2015

*The Carbon Diaries 2015* is a young-adult post-apocalyptic novel written by Saci Lloyd and published in 2008. Saci Lloyd has become very popular amongst adolescent readers and *The Carbon Diaries 2015*, which also happens to be her first book, has been said to have acquired a ‘slavish following’, not only in the United Kingdom, but also in America (Thorpe, 2010). The popularity of the book is also evident in its critical acclaim; the book has been shortlisted for the Costa Children’s Book Award, an award that honours “some of the most outstanding books of the year written by authors based in the UK and Ireland” (Costa Book Awards). Lloyd has even written a sequel: *The Carbon Diaries 2017*.

*The Carbon Diaries 2015* centres around a teenage girl, Laura Brown. She lives in the UK in the year 2015 (which in 2008 would have been the future), and her country is the first to introduce carbon dioxide rations in order to try and combat the effects of the environmental crisis. The book is written in diary-style, with each month being a new chapter, and separate headings within these chapters stating the day of the week and the date. The fact that the novel is written in diary-style means that the reader is only aware of Laura’s perspective on matters. Besides the diary-style, other young adult-elements are present in the novel as well, including the language, the different forms of writing, the images featured in the book, and the themes. The language clearly displays elements of ‘adolescent, texting-like’ language. Examples of this type of language are seen throughout the novel. Shortened words

like “thru” (pg. 5) or “cos” (pg. 6) instead of ‘through’ and ‘because’ are scattered throughout the text. Lloyd has also featured a variety of textual forms within the novel. The diary-style is the main style, but within this diary textual forms like emails, applications, letters and notes are shown. Lastly, the themes are typical themes that would occupy a young protagonist and a young readership. The narrator is sixteen, and naturally deals with all kinds of issues. The main storylines (apart from Laura dealing with the carbon dioxide rations) revolve around her love interests, band practice, and family troubles.

Whilst dealing with the struggles that surround her love interests, family, etc., Laura also has to deal with the carbon rations and still trying to live life just as she knew. These carbon rations were implemented after what is called the “Great Storm” (pg. 4): a storm that swept over most of Europe but in which the UK was hit the hardest. It left the country without petrol for a month and houses were ripped out of the ground, making countless people homeless. It is implied then, that this Great Storm has been caused by global warming, which, as is explained in the book, is in its turn caused by the release of greenhouse gases (like carbon dioxide). The solution proposed in the novel is that the output of these gases should be reduced. Regulating the output of greenhouse gasses is a solution that is already implemented in contemporary society but the extent to which this is happening, on the other hand, differs from what would be expected nowadays. Each of the UK’s citizens get a ‘carbon card’, showing its owner how much ‘carbon points’ one can still use. These points are used for virtually everything; food, petrol, plane tickets, electricity, hot water, etc.

By coming up with this solution to the crisis, Lloyd has taken a different route than is the case in many young-adult post-apocalyptic novels. In many cases of anthropocentric environmental crises, the crisis is combatted with some form of geo-engineering or planetary management. Bracke (2012) alluded to this by saying that the apocalypse “relegates to the realm of fantasy rather than actuality”. Lloyd seems to venture back into the realm of actuality and proposes a solution that is the complete opposite of geo-engineering, planetary management or any other technological solution. This then goes against what Baskin (2015) mentioned as one characteristic of the Anthropocene, namely the legitimization of “technophilic approaches [...] as necessary responses to the ecological ‘state of emergency’” as one of the four characteristics of the concept of the Anthropocene. The solution proposed in Lloyd’s novel has a multitude of consequences for the inhabitants of the UK: the most obvious consequence is that people are limited in their freedom of choices since everyone only has a limited amount of Carbon Points to their name and each product or service ‘costs’ Carbon Points. Not only are products rationed and harder to consume in large quantities,

people have fewer options when it comes to leisure time and activities. Since transportation is too expensive for many and it costs too many Carbon Points, luxury trips or going out is no longer an option. As a friend of Laura's exclaims: "Yeah, yeah, but what's the use when there'll be no clubs, no weekenders in Ibiza, no chilled Laurent-Perrier, no Versace?" (pg. 5).

Another characteristic of the Anthropocene as proposed by Baskin is "its use of 'instrumental reason'" which would generate "a largely uncritical embrace of technology". As I have shown, there seems to be no technology at work to reverse the effects of the environmental crisis. There is, however, "use of 'instrumental reason'" generating a "largely uncritical embrace" of regulation and carbon cutbacks. The UK is willing to go to extreme lengths to find a solution to their problem which according to them would be most efficient and most helpful in order to combat their problem. Not everyone is overly joyful about this decision, but most citizens seem to have found their peace with these regulations and are adapting their lifestyles accordingly.

The current generation's lifestyle as it is described in the novel is in contrast to how the previous generation used to live their lives, spend their money and consumed. There are multiple allusions in the book to the fact that the previous generation did not pay attention to carbon dioxide emissions and consumed and lived without concerns for the environment. Laura's mom, for example, explicitly tells Laura that she feels "responsible for my generation" since they are the ones "who've messed it all up for you" (pg. 12). The fact that Laura's mom mentioned that her generation is 'responsible', seems to be a clear characteristic of the Anthropocene, namely the environmental crisis being influenced by mankind (Baskin, 2015; Crutzen & Stoermer, 2011; Steffen et al, 2011). It is also a clear example of Baskin's notion of the reinsertion of "'man' into nature only to re-elevate 'him' within and above it". Basically, what Baskin is saying here is that although 'man' is part of nature, mankind cannot be equated to any other animal. Laura's mum implies, in saying that it is "my generation", that humankind can change their environment without the environment having much of a 'say' in the matter. This mindset is later found in another passage as well. Laura is enrolled in college and at the start of the new semester a welcome speech is given. Laura mentions that: "He finished by saying our generation would be thanked by all those to come - it was us who finally made the choice to change our lives and save the planet." (pg. 269). In other words, it is not again only humankind who can destroy the planet, but also humankind who can save it.

The fact that humankind was able to change Earth on a geological scale had already become evident when the "Great Storm" was mentioned. This storm was, as mentioned

before, implied to have been caused by the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, which, in its turn, was due to mankind releasing loads of (mainly) carbon dioxide through transportation, consumption patterns, using electricity, and more. Humankind had the ‘power’ to make this “Great Storm” happen. The rest of the novel describes the effects of the climate change on the people; there are periods of extreme heat and drought and extreme cold, all geological processes that have been influenced by humankind and that make life less comfortable.

In conclusion then, there are elements in the novel that are clearly pointing to elements of the Anthropocene, like the influences of mankind on the environment that are apparent on a geological scale and mankind who is able to dominate nature. There are also elements, however, that point in the opposite direction. Instead of turning to technology and large-scale implementation of geo-engineering or planetary management, the novel proposes a solution that is the exact opposite; citizens have less access to modern-day technology. The government is, however, willing to go to extreme lengths to reduce the output of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and is making use of its ‘instrumental reason’, even though it is not in the form of modern technology.

## READY PLAYER ONE

Ready Player One is another hugely popular young adult novel, written by Ernest Cline and published in 2011. It once again happens to be a debut novel, and not only is it popular amongst young adults, it has also received critical acclaim. In 2012, it received the Alex Award from the Young Adult Library Services Association division of the American Library Association (“Yalsa’s Alex Awards”, 2012) and won the Prometheus Award in the same year (“Prometheus award winners announced”). The Alex Awards were specially brought into existence to be awarded to books that have special appeal to young adults whilst being written for adults (“Yalsa’s Alex Awards”, 2012), whereas the Prometheus Awards are honouring libertarian fiction (“Prometheus Awards: A Short History”). Aside from the literary prizes the book has won, the story has been adapted onto the big screen.

Even though *Ready Player One* is now widely marketed as a young adult novel, it is evident from the Alex Awards the novel has won, it was not originally meant to fall into this category. It does, however, deal with themes that are very much related to the occupations and mindsets of young adults. The main character, Wade, is being bullied for example. He also talks about his insecurities, his (lack of) friends, his crush, and his sexual desires. As with *The Carbon Diaries 2015*, the language in the book is clearly intended for a younger

audience. Words like “dough” (pg. 35) - instead of ‘money’ - are used and there are comments in the book that point to a somewhat naive character. Wade mentions for example that he doesn’t understand how he can “be expected to know when the adults were bullshitting” him (pg. 16).

Wade lives on the outskirts of Oklahoma City somewhere around the year of 2040. The world as it is being described in this imagined future is somewhat bleak (or, in Wade’s words, they had “been born into an ugly world” (pg. 34)). An “oil crisis” was the onset of an energy crisis, which led to the world’s population going on a massive trek into the cities. This significant increase in the urbanized society led to loads of crime, unemployment and housing shortage. To deal with the problem of housing, the “stacks” were created; huge towers of recreational vehicles that had been stacked together on the outskirts of any major city. These stacks are often very unsafe; the places are crime-riddled and it is not uncommon for a stack to topple over. After both his mom and dad died, Wade went to live with his aunt who mainly took him in because of the increase in food stamps she would get. Since Wade is not a very sociable person and it is clear that his aunt is not interested in spending any time with him, he spends most of his time in “the OASIS”, an online multiplayer game that allows the player to feel like they are being transported into another world, since the game is based on virtual reality. The creator of the game, Halliday, has recently passed and left the players of his game with a contest: there are three ‘easter eggs’ hidden in his game. The first one to find all of them and finish the quests that these easter eggs present to the player, wins Halliday’s entire fortune. Wade is obsessed with winning Halliday’s fortune, leading him to make an entire study around Halliday’s life and interests. Most of his waking hours Wade spends in the OASIS, since he also attends school in the game. He even mentions that “being human totally sucks most of the time. Videogames are the only thing that make life bearable” (pg. 11).

This does not only apply to Wade since most of humanity is trying to forget about their daily lives by going online and entering the game. The fact that so many people prefer to spend their time within the OASIS turns the game into a new world that poses a ‘new reality’ to many of its players. As Trexler and Johns-Putra (2011) mentioned, science fiction novels are often occupied with themes of environmental change and the formation of a terraformed planet. The OASIS could be described as a ‘terraformed’ and ‘otherworldly’ planet as well. It is otherworldly in the sense that the game is different from any other world that we know today. For example, it can only be occupied by humans, so there are no animals within the OASIS, except for when someone chooses their character to resemble one. This is quite interesting, since this is also a clear example of “‘man’ into nature only to

re-elevate ‘him’ within and above it” (Baskin, 2015). Most of the world’s population chooses to live in a world where they do not interact with (actual) animals. Aside from the OASIS not being occupied by animals and looking like a completely different world than Earth as we know it, it is apparently hard to distinguish from the ‘real world’. Wade mentions that his surroundings in the OASIS look “almost (but not quite) real” (pg. 27). The game is rendered in 3D and the people who enter into the OASIS are able to wear all types of gear to make it feel as if they are actually wondering around in the worlds the OASIS provides. Since the OASIS has become a very real reality to most of humanity, the argument could very well be made that the OASIS is some kind of otherworldly planet, being a completely different world than the world as we know it today.

The OASIS also suggests the creation of a terraformed world. Even though it does not fit the definition of Williamsen and Trexler and Johns-Putra completely, it has not been made habitable by changing the climate on the planet and it does not “offer a striking parable of how best to manage environmental disaster on Earth” per se, it is a planet that has been made inhabitable for humankind. Everyone living on Earth is looking for an escape from the planet when entering into the OASIS. In this ‘world’ they can again experience fun and the freedoms that are no longer accessible on Earth, which makes the OASIS a planet that many find more habitable than Earth.

It is not only the game that suggests the formation of an ‘otherworldly’ planet. Earth itself is also subjected to otherworldliness. The creation of this otherworld is due to a temporal shift, since there is a jump in time of approximately thirty years between the time the book was published and the time it is set. The world as it is described in the novel is a bleak and dark place. As mentioned, a significant percentage of the world’s population is living in the stacks, the unsafe outskirts of major cities. These stacks alone create a sense of other-worldliness, but there is more. In the introduction Halliday’s contest is introduced. Wade speaks of his amazement about the announcement on the news that a person - even though of world-changing influence - has died. He mentions that “the people of Planet Earth had other concerns. The ongoing energy crisis. Catastrophic climate change. Widespread famine, poverty, and disease, half a dozen wars” (pg. 1). He goes on to say that broadcasts on the news more often speak of “the outbreak of some new killer virus, or another major city vanishing in a mushroom cloud” (pg. 1) than the dead of a famous person. These types of environmental disaster are unlike any disaster we know today since the scale on which it happens and the frequency with which it happens are unbeknownst in today’s world.

It is clear, then, that the world's population is dealing with immense environmental disasters. There is, of course, the mention of the "ongoing energy crisis" (pg. 59), "the oil crisis" or "the Global Energy Crisis" (17) throughout the novel. Wade discovers how this crisis came to be by scouring through books that can be found within OASIS libraries. First, Wade discovers in these books that he is part of the human race. Something so fundamental was apparently written down by authors "who weren't afraid to be honest" (pg. 16) and it was kept from the masses. In these books, the human race is called "a really smart animal" (pg. 16), which also relates to the 'elevation of man above nature' as described by Baskin. Wade then walks the reader through a speed-lesson in the world history of the human race. Within this narrative of human's history, Wade explains that the human race had evolved to develop great things and a society was built. This society, however, needed lots of energy to keep going and before Wade was even born, the last of these resources were drained. The civilization that was built could no longer keep running, meaning that civilization had to cut back on the use of its energy resources and that is what is commonly named the "Global Energy Crisis". It is clear then, as well, that it is humankind who is 'to blame' for this to happen. Wade, however, does not feel that way. His mom had apparently still lived in this era since he mentioned that she had lived in a world that provided plenty of resources and she "had to watch it all slowly vanish" (pg. 18). Wade mentions that "she was a victim of fate and cruel circumstance, like everyone else" (pg. 18), and that is why he does not blame her for the state the world is in. The fact is, however, that mankind had a great deal of influence on the planet's geological state which seems to be a clear characteristic of the Anthropocene, the era that is under significant influence of the human race (Baskin, 2015; Crutzen & Stoermer, 2011; Steffen et al, 2011).

Again, there are elements in the novel that point to effects of the Anthropocene and there are elements that seem to point in the opposite direction. As I have shown, the world in which Wade lives, whether it be the virtual 'world' or Earth, can be described as an otherworldly or terraformed planet, other than any world we know today. Also, there are allusions to the environmental crisis, or oil or energy crisis as it is called in the novel, being man-made. Even though Wade does not explicitly blame the previous generation, it has become quite clear that it is due to human influences and interferences that the world is now tormented by environmental disaster.

## CHAPTER 3

## THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS AND HOW IT GUIDES THE NARRATIVE AND THE MESSAGE

The man-made crises that are described in both *The Carbon Diaries 2015* and *Ready Player One* seem similar at first; both have been caused by the human race depleting Earth's resources and both have had catastrophic effects on planet Earth. The way these crises guide the narrative, are used to further the plot, and are bringing across a message, however, differ immensely. To reflect on the question at hand, the questions that Dürbeck (2014) posed will be used as a guideline, which were "How are large scale global changes depicted and which characters are suitable to reflect on a deep time perspective?", "Which kinds of agencies are thematized to deploy the environmentally focused narratives?" and "Which modes of narration (comic, tragic, ironic, didactic) are deployed to reflect on the challenges of the Anthropocene?". These questions will enable me to answer my research question as to how the environmental crisis is guiding the plot narrative and is possibly trying to convey a message.

## THE CARBON DIARIES 2015

It seems obvious that the main plot and storyline of *The Carbon Diaries 2015* revolves around climate change, the human influences that caused it and the societal changes that are made in order to combat the climate change as effectively as possible. These plotlines, then, are the main carrier for the overall message of the novel. Very early on already, it becomes clear that the main aim of the novel is to make evident to its readers why we are on a dangerous path right now regarding environmental disasters. It is trying to convey how our 'wrongdoings' to Earth will deplete the planet of its natural resources and in the process the changing lifestyles are explicitly described as well in order to strengthen the overall message.

This main message is brought to the reader in a multitude of ways. There are, for example, multiple allusions to the destructive behaviour of our current consumer pattern. One of the ways in which our destructive behaviour is brought to light is via 'hidden explanations'. Laura explains, for example, that there is a clock on the Channel 4 news that does not display time but instead the hands of the clock point towards "carbon symbols". Each day, a new symbol will be pointed to. When Laura is watching the news, the hands are pointing towards "food miles". It is explained then, through the use of an example (a mango from South Africa versus an apple from Kent), that produce that has to travel a great distance

has a greater number of food miles in comparison to the local foods, making them a lot less sustainable. Other examples to show the reader that our current consumer patterns should not be taken for granted can be found within the novel as well. Laura, for instance, explains that electronics that have been built with “dirty fossil fuel” and that have “been shipped over from China” are much more expensive since “you’re paying for all the energy that’s gone into making it” (pg. 6). The novel also makes it very apparent that lives and lifestyles are changing drastically with the implementation of a carbon tax since everyone has a limited number of carbon points. This results in the citizens of the UK being unable to travel unlimitedly, having to eat differently than they did before (bacon is heavily frowned upon), and maybe even have their jobs disappear (like Laura’s dad’s job at the Travel & Tourism department which was deemed irrelevant).

The answer to Dürbeck’s question “How are large scale global changes depicted and which characters are suitable to reflect on a deep time perspective?” underscores the message as well. The global changes that are depicted differ; there are physical as well as societal changes. Both are interdependent and influence one another. As explained, the main geological change that is described is “The Great Storm”, which is commonly viewed as the onset of the environmental crisis and was the prompt for the government of the United Kingdom to implement the Carbon Rations. The effects of this “Great Storm” were visible on both a physical and social level. The storm left the country without petrol for a month and made people homeless, but it was also after the Great Storm that the effects of the human-made climate change are visible. During the summer, for instance, the population has to deal with intense heatwaves and drought, and during the winter with extreme cold. It is not only the environmental hazards that the world’s population has to deal with, but with societal changes due to the carbon rations as well. Laura describes quite a few instances of ‘war-like scenes’; sometimes rather explicitly so (“I’m starting to get scared. There was a queue outside Tesco’s for bread, like in the war”, pg. 30) and sometimes more implicitly (when instances of looting or riots are described).

Laura is an ideal character to reflect on these issues; she is a critical teenager who does not censor herself and she is not too happy having to change her life. She also blames the previous generation for being selfish and messing things up (“How did people let things get so bad? Selfish bastards.” (pg. 248)) and is not content with her generation having to remedy the situation. When the start-of-the-semester-speech is held at her college, the speech-giver, Bob, mentions how all of the future generations will applaud the current generation for turning things around and aiding the planet in combating climate change. All

the students are cheering and clapping when the speaker finishes his talk. Laura, on the other hand, voices her discontent over the speech. Bob literally told the students that “it was us who finally made the choice to change our lives and save the planet” (pg. 269), but Laura says she had no choice in the matter and that she hates the rationing. She, for instance, had to deal with band practice becoming a hard-to-plan activity; since frequently the band would not have any electricity to practise. She also has to watch her family go through tough times, since the rationings are not easy on anyone and they have to spend more time in the house together since no one can go out anymore. The narrative, then, is set up in such a way that the reader is forcefully invited to reflect on his or her own consumer patterns in the light of Laura’s pattern since she can no longer take small liberties for granted.

Then there is Laura’s sister, Kim, who rebels the most against the carbon rationing. She goes on luxury trips to far-off places and basically, as Laura puts it so nicely, “dragged” her family “into carbon bankruptcy” (pg. 147). She was even sent for reprogramming at ‘Carbon Offenders’. Even during her time in the offender’s programme, Kim is a bit of a rebel, dealing in carbon points. She seems to be unable to fully conform to the rationings implemented by the government. Both sisters are seen to be struggling with the Carbon rationing, then, which cannot come as a surprise since they had to give up a lot of freedoms and there are more characters who are seen to be struggling with the rationings. Some characters, however, seem to be dealing adequately with the rationing. The sister’s neighbour, for instance, mentions that “carbon rationing won’t last for ever”. He even takes pride in the carbon rationing, mentioning that “[...] these years, when we all said *No, enough!* – those who come after us may well view us all as heroes” (pg. 315). He sees the good in the rations, having the citizens of the UK come together to do good for their country and pull together. Laura does not agree; she thinks that is easy for him to say, since he is old and is “gonna drop dead soon” (pg. 315.)

It is obvious then, that there are different levels of cooperability and willingness amongst the citizens of the UK to comply with the government’s carbon rationings. It is interesting that the government put these carbon restrictions upon her citizens in the first place, since the government goes to extreme lengths of restriction and, what basically is, a de-modernization. The UK government takes the ‘risk society’ (as firstly described by Beck, 1992) and ‘instrumental reason’ quite seriously, then. The risk society is ultimately based on the assumption that before any decision that could possibly have an impact upon the natural environment, it should be assessed what the kinds of effects (and risks) are. It is shown, then, that the fictional UK government acts differently than governments do nowadays. The impact

on readers might be all the greater as a consequence, since they can reflect upon the lengths to which a government may go to reverse the effects of the environmental crisis. This also answers Dürbeck's second question "Which kinds of agencies are thematized to deploy the environmentally focused narratives?".

Lastly, Dürbeck asks the question of "Which modes of narration (comic, tragic, ironic, didactic) are deployed to reflect on the challenges of the Anthropocene?", and, as mentioned, the novel shows different sentiments towards the carbon rations and the environmental disasters. At first, many citizens seem to be hesitant in turning their lives around. Laura's mom, for instance, has an exceptionally difficult time letting go of one of her most loved possessions: a Saab. Also, as we have seen, Laura's friends do not deal so well with the rations and her sister indicates that she (just as Laura's friend indicated earlier in the novel), just wanted "to work in fashion travel" and that all of the "usual shit" is over now (pg. 156). The overall tone of the novel is highly didactic. As I argued, there is a central message that Lloyd is trying to convey to her readers. In the last chapter this becomes exceptionally explicit. During the winter, the UK had to contend with extreme weather and most of London was flooded. Amidst all these troubles Laura speeches that "You never think it's gonna happen to you, but all that pollution and dirty fumes and flights and factories and shit we don't need and suddenly there you are, [...]" (pg. 352-353). This, to me, captures the entire point the novel is making, and seems to be directed straight to the reader.

It can be concluded that with the 'aid' of the environmental crisis and post-apocalyptic world, the novel is conveying a message to its readers. The message announces that contemporary society should stop depleting Earth's resources, look at consumer's patterns and try and live more consciously. It does so by describing the world in which Laura lives. A world that no one is truly enthusiastic about, when compared to the world and the liberties everyone had before the implementation of the carbon rations. Also, there is a strict government that allows the reader to reflect upon their own situation since the actions of the government are not too absurd or imaginary, the reader might be able to imagine the rationings being implemented by his or her government.

## READY PLAYER ONE

The central message in *Ready Player One* is different from the one in *The Carbon Diaries and 2015*, as the 'environmental message' is not at the centre of the novel. Instead, the central message in *Ready Player One* mainly deals with friendships, overcoming insecurities, and the

fight between ‘good and evil’. Even though the central message is not related to environmental destruction, the narratives of *Ready Player One* and *The Carbon Diaries 2015* do show striking similarities. Both are set in the future in a world that is destroyed due to previous generations’ actions and the current generation has to deal with the numerous changes the climate change brought over them.

Since the central message of the novel does not revolve around the environmental crisis, the crisis in *Ready Player One*, then, is more of an enabling factor in order to create the ‘terraformed’ world for the story to take place in. This terraformed world had to be created in order to form an interesting story, obviously, but possibly also to make it believable or understandable to the reader that someone would want to spend all their time in an online game. The world as it is described is a tough and unpleasant place to live, and most of humanity finds solace in living in another world which might become more ‘real’ to them than their lives on Earth.

Even though the ‘environmental message’ is not central to the story, examining it may still offer valuable insights. The novel takes another direction than *The Carbon Diaries 2015* when it comes to the ultimate cause of the crisis. Instead of ‘blaming’ humanity, *Ready Player One* makes it sound as if humanity had very little to do with the crisis. The current generation is born into the energy crisis and were anything but responsible, which is also made very clear within the novel. When Wade reads through the ‘secret’ books in the OASIS-library, he discovers humanity’s history and the cause of the energy crisis. He mentions that he found out in those books that “burning all of those fossil fuels had some nasty side effects, like raising the temperature of our planet and screwing up the environment. So now the polar ice caps are melting, sea levels are rising, and the weather is all messed up. Plants and animals are dying off in record numbers, and lots of people are starving and homeless” (pg. 17). Everything is in the past tense, and it is written in the context of evolution, domestication of animals, the invention of computers and the landing on the moon. Even though the year is only 2040, the way the text around the environmental crisis is written sounds like it happened in a distant period of time. The citizens that are alive in the year 2040, then, apparently did not even know about this episode in their history and are far from responsible. The previous generation does not get the blame either, at least, from Wade. As I have explained, Wade states that he does not blame his mom (or anyone of the previous generation, for that matter), for having ‘caused’ the environmental crisis his generation is in. He even mentions that “Her generation had it the hardest. She’d been born into a world of plenty, then had to watch it all slowly vanish.” (pg. 18). This is the complete opposite of *The*

*Carbon Diaries 2015*, then, since humanity is depicted to have no apparent control over the environmental crisis.

What may come across as some sort of ‘environmentally aware’ message, is the fact that in the book the ‘history’ is dubbed the “Good Old Days”, in which “things used to be pretty awesome” (pg. 17-8) and “Things” nowadays (in the year 2040) are “kinda terrifying” (pg. 18). Besides these statements, the reader themselves will probably not want to live in a world with constant environmental threats, diseases, power cuts, etc. which might make them reflect upon their current behaviours. On the other hand, teenagers might find Wade’s world rather attractive. He is able to spend all his time online, in the OASIS, a game that lets you discover an infinite number of places and in which you can be any character you want to be. Still, the overall tone of the novel is rather dark. The world is a bleak place in contrast to the world as we know it today in terms of environmental disasters, public safety and overall quality of life. As the novel summarizes it succinctly: Wade’s generation is basically “born at a pretty crappy time in history”, and “human civilization is in ‘decline’” (pg. 18).

To answer Dürbeck’s questions, then, it seems that no characters in *Ready Player One* are fit to reflect upon the environmental, deep time changes. This is in contrast to *The Carbon Diaries 2015*, where there are enough characters to reflect on these changes. Wade nor other characters are suitable to reflect upon the changes since Wade was till recently not even aware of the fact that there existed a world other than the one he is born into. From other characters (players in the game, for instance) it is not made explicit whether they are aware of this fact. There are no organisations either that seem to be taking charge in the environmentally-difficult times. There seems to be little or no intervention of an overarching organisation that takes care of the citizens and tries to make planet Earth into an inhabitable place again. Also, the tone of the novel is rather dark. This could be understood as a didactic message, since teenagers might reflect upon their situation and realise that they do not want to live in Wade’s world, but I would say this is not the author’s intent. The ‘environmental history’ is explained very briefly and it is not one of the character’s main concerns. It is clear then, that the oil or energy crisis in *Ready Player One* is there to enable the plot to develop and it helps form this ‘other-world’ in which the story is set and not to bring across a message.

## CONCLUSION

In this thesis I wanted to answer the question “What effects of the Anthropocene are present in post-apocalyptic, young-adult literature and how is the post-apocalyptic environmental crisis used to guide the narrative and message in the books”. I wanted to answer these questions to find out how environmental crises are portrayed in contemporary young adult novels and what message they bring across to young readers. It seemed important to do so with the aid of young-adult literature, since, as the opening quote in the introduction by Karen Coats explained, young-adult literature might influence the way young people think, speak and act. I chose to analyse *The Carbon Diaries 2015* by Saci Lloyd and *Ready Player One* by Ernest Cline since the books are widely popular and discuss some type of environmental crisis and the aftermath of this crisis.

In the second chapter I discussed the first part of the research question. Both novels do show effects of the Anthropocene; both depict their environmental crisis to be heavily influenced by mankind. In *The Carbon Diaries 2015* it is mankind’s consumer’s patterns as well as their unconscious and unlimited use of electric, gas, water, etc. that caused the crisis. The novel is very clear, then, in mankind being able to influence the geological processes on planet Earth both negatively and positively. The entire point of the carbon rations being implemented is for humankind to take action and try and reverse the environmental crisis. In *Ready Player One* mankind is also the ultimate factor in the environmental crisis, even though they are not explicitly blamed and are more so portrayed to be victims as well. *Ready Player One*, on the other hand, exhibits other ‘typically’ anthropocentric elements like its formation of multiple terraformed or otherworldly planets.

How the environmental crisis guides the narrative and message in the books is discussed in the third chapter. It is clear in *The Carbon Diaries 2015* that the author wanted to convey an explicit message to her readers: an environmental crisis is near and you can still turn things around. She educates her readers in the novel on every-day consumer choices and ways to make those more sustainable. Many of the readers may have similar lives to Laura’s which makes Laura an excellent character for young readers to reflect and identify with. Also, the apocalyptic crisis in *The Carbon Diaries 2015* does not seem too far-fetched or imaginative. Richard Kerridge argued that “if we were able to imagine environmental apocalypse with more certainty, people would be more likely to take action because they would know *what* to prevent” (Bracke, 2012). *The Carbon Diaries 2015* seems to do so. The apocalypse is presented in such a way that it can be imagined as really happening. The reader

is invited to reflect upon his or her own situation and imagine the possible scenarios that their lifestyles could induce. In *Ready Player One*, the apocalyptic environmental crisis is not used in so many ways to bring across a message. Rather, the crisis is 'used' to create the otherworldly planet on which Wade lives. The environmental message that is conveyed is the one that humankind is indeed responsible for the environmental crisis, but the main character also sees mankind as a victim of the crisis. Even though Wade does share his view on the environmental crisis, he is not the best character to reflect upon the crisis. Until recently, he was not aware that there existed a world prior to his birth that was different from the one he knows. Even though both novels show effects of the Anthropocene, then, the way in which these effects are presented and the way in which a possible message is presented, differs. The environmental crisis in *The Carbon Diaries 2015* is used to convey a message whereas in *Ready Player One* the crisis is used in order to shape a thrilling plot.

It seems to be clear then, that both novels present environmental crises to be ultimately caused by humankind. Both books also show society after the environmental crisis, which in both cases does seem to be represented inferior to today's society, whether it be due to decreasing freedom, overall lack of governmental control, crime, or waves of heat and drought. As I have shown, it depends upon the book how strong the environmental message is conveyed, so adolescents might glean over the message. Young adults who read these books might still, however, adopt the viewpoint of humankind ultimately causing the environmental crisis and project this view onto the ongoing environmental crisis in today's society.

The question arises in how far these books can be said to be representative for the entire genre. As explained in the introduction, a post-apocalyptic narrative is often accompanied by an environmental crisis. Since there exists a plethora of post-apocalyptic novels that depict an environmental crisis like *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner, *The Host* by Stephanie Meyer or *Ashes* by Ilsa J. Bick, just to name a few, it could be speculated that many more post-apocalyptic novels present the environment as a theme within the narrative. To what extent, however, they represent the environmental crisis in such a way that it allows young readers to reflect upon their own situations I cannot tell for certain. To fully explore this goal as to how young adult literature presents the Anthropocene or environmental crises in general in more depth, more books would have to be analysed. Moreover, more books should be analysed that do not explicitly mention an environmental crisis at all. It would be quite insightful to discuss how or if books which topic does not revolve around the environment or nature depict society's relationship with the environment.

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