

Digitizing the Anthropocene: Posthuman, Postnature, and Virtual/Augmented Reality in Contemporary YA Fiction

Britni Marie Williams, Illinois State University

With increasing awareness of environmental degradation, the Anthropocene has become a growing topic of conversation in literary analysis. The topic is also growing specifically in the scholarship of children's literature as young adult dystopian novels continue to draw attention to environmental issues. This paper takes an ecocritical and posthumanist approach to three popular texts of YA fiction: M. T. Anderson's *Feed* (2002), Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One* (2011), and James Dashner's *The Eye of Minds* (2013). These novels are specifically chosen for their focus on augmented and virtual reality (AR and VR) technologies. While Anderson's work set a precedent for YA dystopian novels about AR and VR, the more recent novels exemplify the trend in current YA literature that seems to suggest that when humans have done everything possible to manipulate their physical environment to their liking and still find it lacking, they will continue to improve their environments by augmenting or completely replacing them with digital technology. This paper explores the role of posthumans and their relationships to other people and their environments as well as the shift toward the postnatural environments of AR and VR portrayed in these texts. This paper also highlights the consequences to the material world when virtual and augmented reality becomes the focus and habitus of the characters' everyday lives. Ultimately, I argue that YA literature depicts VR and AR technologies as the next transition in the progression of the Anthropocene due to the ill-defined boundaries of reality and the technology that expands on, and eventually replaces, it.