

The Destruction and Reconstruction of Community:
A Study of *The Light Pirate*
from a Posthumanist Perspective¹

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Abstract

In recent years, given the increasing occurrence of extreme weather events and the growing public awareness of climate issues, climate fiction has emerged as a popular genre, and Lily Brooks-Dalton's novel *The Light Pirate* serves as a quintessential example of climate fiction. In the book, Dalton presents an imagined catastrophic scenario caused by floods and hurricanes. After the disintegration of various communities, the protagonist, Wanda, remains in her fragmented hometown and goes on to create a posthumanist community. Based on the theories of community and critical posthumanism, the evolution of communities during the climate crisis is interpreted from three perspectives: how various types of communities are destroyed by climate change, why residents in the face of a dilemma adopt different coping mechanisms, and what kind of posthumanist community is reconstructed after the climate crisis. All in all, by describing the fate of the community under the climate crisis, the novel warns people to protect the environment, reveals the complex relationship between man and nature, and suggests a possible way out when faced with the threat of climate change, that is, to live in harmony with other creatures.

Keywords: Lily Brooks-Dalton, *The Light Pirate*, climate change fiction, community, critical posthumanism, community by blood, community of place, community of spirit

Introduction

In recent decades, climate change has emerged as a pressing global issue that affects every aspect of human life. The alarming rise in climate-related disasters, such as the devastating 2019-2020 Australian bushfires, the intensifying Atlantic hurricane seasons, and severe flooding around the world, highlights the urgent need for comprehensive climate action. These crises have dealt a bitter blow to humanity and brought to light the need for systematic efforts to mitigate future risks. In this context, literature is vital in exploring and interpreting human agency, and among the many literary genres, climate fiction is an emerging one that focuses on climate change and environmental destruction, enabling readers to understand the consequences of the climate crisis and to reflect on the potential impact of human actions on the planet.

Climate fiction has evolved into an independent and prominent literary genre, distinguished by its unique focus on the impact of climate change and environmental issues. The large-scale consumption of fossil fuels and the resultant atmospheric emissions, beginning in the late 18th century, marked the onset of climate change as a defining feature of modern life. Although climate crises have occurred throughout human history, climate change did not receive significant attention until the late 1980s, towards the end of the Cold War (Maslin 12). Hundreds of non-fiction books, novels, short stories, documentaries, and films have addressed climate change in the past few decades. However, the terms “climate fiction” and “Cli-Fi” were not coined until 2007 by American journalist Dan Bloom to describe this emerging genre of climate-focused narratives in literature (Dalton). Initially, climate fiction was considered a subgenre of science fiction. However, its unique characteristics soon led many scholars to advocate it as a distinct

category on par with science fiction. For instance, Rebecca Tuhus-Dubrow explored the emergence of climate fiction as a literary genre in 2013, arguing that it reinterprets timeless human themes such as survival, fear, and resilience in the face of unprecedented environmental challenges (61). Adam Trexler also noted that around the turn of the millennium, as scientific consensus on climate change strengthened and political activism intensified, more novels emerged to focus distinctly on climate issues (223). As a result, after decades of development, climate fiction has gained much recognition, reflecting growing global concern about the effects of the climate crisis.

While describing the climate crisis, Western climate fiction frequently examines the links between the climate crisis and social realities, such as capitalism, highlighting how power dynamics and economic interests exacerbate environmental challenges. As Antonia Mehnert pointed out, climate change fiction provides an understanding of the ethical and social consequences of this unique ecological crisis, reflects on the present political barriers in addressing climate change, and examines how risks emerge and impact society (4). In climate fiction, climate change is often depicted not merely as an environmental disaster but as a phenomenon deeply associated with social power structures. Besides, it significantly emphasizes the human struggle against the climate crisis. However, *The Light Pirate* (2022) by Lily Brooks-Dalton (1987-) distinguishes itself by offering an alternative narrative in its depiction of humanity's confrontation with the climate crisis, emphasizing the potential for humans to adapt to climate change and coexist harmoniously with non-human life forms. This novel, a runner-up for the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, is centered on Wanda, who was born and raised in the small coastal town of Rudder, Florida. It consists of four sections: power, water, light, and time, which correspond to Wanda's four stages of life, depicting her birth amidst her namesake hurricane, her upbringing under the threat of recurring storms, her survival at sea after devastating storms, and finally, her peaceful later years. Current interpretations of the novel focus on its themes of loss, survival, and adaptation with a blend of realism and magical elements,

arguing that it depicts a return to nature after the collapse of civilization (see Masih; Rowland). While previous studies provide valuable insights into *The Light Pirate*, its critical posthumanist discourse invites deeper analysis. Rudder's disintegration and the residents' diverse reactions to environmental catastrophes illuminate the profound influence of a climate crisis on community and psychology, and Wanda's reconstruction of a posthumanist community offers an alternative path to navigate this crisis.

Traditional humanism emphasizes the rationality and uniqueness of human beings and regards human beings as a species superior to all the other creatures on Earth, just as Pramod K. Nayar argued that humanism focuses on the study of the individual and views the human subject as the focal point of the world, where human thoughts and actions have a significant influence (15). In the second half of the 20th century, under the impact of postmodernism and poststructuralism, the concept of "man" underwent deconstruction, and the essence and subjectivity of "man" were challenged and rethought. Theorists like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida are often regarded as foundational figures of posthumanism since they criticized and denied the principle of subjectivity in modern humanism from different perspectives. Foucault investigated "man" through archaeology and announced the "death of man" as man is merely a recent invention doomed to disappear (xxv), and Derrida set forth his views on "the end of man" from the standpoint of deconstructionism. Posthumanism gradually arose as a social and philosophical wave after Ihab Hassan delivered a keynote address for the International Symposium on Postmodern Performance in 1976 and argued that the human form, including desires and their outward manifestations, was undergoing profound changes; therefore, it was essential to recognize that humanism may be nearing its end as it transitions into posthumanism (843). Posthumanism contains a few branches, which, in a broad sense, can be presented as a study of the posthuman that is "a stage which might evolve after the current transhuman era" (Braidotti and Hlavajova 439), and a study of post-anthropocentrism, the reflection and critique of humanism. According to Rosi Braidotti, posthumanism includes three main

trends: the first, rooted in moral philosophy, reacts to the posthuman; the second, grounded in science and technology studies, offers an analytical perspective on the posthuman; the third comes from its anti-humanist roots, which is critical posthumanism (38). Critical posthumanism reconceptualizes humans as interconnected nodes within a vast web of relationships, interactions, and exchanges that span all living forms (Nayar 14). It dissolves the rigid boundaries traditionally drawn between humans and non-humans. Under the influence of a human-centered philosophy, humans tend to overestimate their omnipotence and maintain their transcendence by mastering nature and suppressing physical bodies (Wolfe 95). However, when unmanageable earth system crises and climate crises arise, the almighty quality of humans is challenged. Humans must abandon the thought that they are above nature and can govern other species. In this circumstance, humans' deadly impact on the earth system is rethought. As Justus Poetzsch put it, climate change is likely one of the most urgent disruptions, prompting a fundamental shift away from the previously human-centered worldview (173). Consequently, posthumanism may be regarded as a tool to assist in re-evaluating the essential reference point for humanity during the "Anthropocene" – a period marked by humans becoming a geological force capable of impacting all life on Earth (Braidotti 5).

In an era marked by frequent and uncontrollable climate crises, posthumanism challenges the anthropocentric worldview by focusing on the status of non-human life, compelling humanity to rethink the necessity of harmonious coexistence with nature. Furthermore, this intellectual shift from traditional humanism to posthumanism profoundly influences the understanding of significant transformations in the human community. As a result, posthumanism encourages the development of new communities that are more resilient, inclusive, and attuned to the intricate dynamics of the natural world and facilitates the reexamination of classical theories of community, such as those proposed by Ferdinand Tönnies, who divided the community into three forms, namely, the "community by blood," where people share a kinship which represents the original unity of being; the "community of

place,” where people live close to each other as a neighborhood; and the “community of spirit,” where people hold the same beliefs and work for the same goals (27-28).

Consequently, to investigate the novel’s multidimensional views on community, this article undertakes, from a critical posthumanist perspective, a critical analysis of the three forms of community outlined by Tönnies and exemplified in *Rudder*; it further explores the diverse coping strategies of residents in *Rudder* under such conditions and their outcomes; additionally, it analyzes the characteristics of the posthumanist community that arises in the aftermath of the crisis, providing a nuanced understanding of how climate fiction mirrors not only contemporary environmental challenges but also suggests possible strategies for addressing future climate catastrophes.

Communities and Climate Crisis

It is imperative to critically explore the future of communities as the climate crisis disrupts daily human activities and challenges the foundations of social structures that sustain communal life. As Kari Marie Norgaard argued, in times of change and crisis, people create a sense of community based on what they focus on and what they ignore (23); therefore, through considering how climate-induced disruptions reshape traditional community bonds, forcing a reconfiguration of the relationship between human societies and their environments, the complex dynamics that define the fragmentation of communities in an era marked by unprecedented ecological change can be better understood. In this novel, Wanda’s family exemplifies a community by blood, which includes her mother, Frida, her father, Kirby, and her brothers, Flip and Lucas, from Kirby’s previous marriage. *Rudder*, as a whole, exists as a community of place composed of residents, and its residents form a community of friendship that embodies their concerted efforts to protect their homes during the climate crisis. However, as hurricanes repeatedly devastate *Rudder*, the town constantly suffers from power outages, supply shortages, and extensive flooding,

resulting in the gradual fragmentation and breakdown of local social relations and these three kinds of communities. Consequently, the fate of the communities is worth analyzing, as it presents the vulnerability of social structures in the face of climate change and raises critical questions about group life.

Family is the site of human emotional connection. However, within the community of blood, an inequality of power often lurks, which leads to the sacrifice of individual freedom to maintain the existence of the community, revealing the tension between the individual and the collective as well as the potential erosion of personal liberty and rights in the pursuit of communal stability. In this novel, the community by blood initiated by Frida, Kirby, Flip, and Lucas is originally a deeply intertwined and enduring union where the couple is committed to safeguarding their home and children. However, cracks caused by the couple's different attitudes towards storms have emerged in this community from the very beginning. When Kirby is preoccupied with making preparations for an impending hurricane, striving to protect his home amidst the escalating storm, Frida, on the other hand, is deeply distressed by the relentless hurricane and persistently urges Kirby to leave Rudder as she bears the profound trauma of having witnessed a friend's death during a hurricane, which has instilled in her an intense and overwhelming fear of the approaching storm. However, Kirby never listens to her appeals and "took her frantic appeals to evacuate as an insult" (1), as his vast experience in dealing with storms has strengthened his confidence. Although they have forged an intimate connection, Kirby positions himself as the dominant decision-maker in moments of crisis, causing him to overlook Frida's fears. Besides, Kirby's neglect of Frida's feelings illustrates that in the pursuit of communal stability, individual freedoms, and rights are often sacrificed, and this leads to alienation between them as mutual understanding and empathy represent the most fundamental manifestations of the authentic essence of true coexistence (Tönnies 34). Moreover, the fact that Kirby perceives Frida's urgent appeals as an insult further exacerbates the suppression of Frida's voice, illustrating the potential erosion brought about by power imbalances.

The inequality within the family is a significant internal factor that undermines the sustainability of the community by blood. At the same time, the severe climate crisis poses a substantial external threat to its existence. The interplay of these internal and external factors reveals the fragility of human-constructed communities in the face of extreme climatic disasters. In the Kirby family, hurricanes have twice destroyed their community. The first case happens when hurricane Wanda causes Frida's and Flip's death. During the storm, while Frida suffers from the pain of contractions, Flip and Lucas, driven by an adventurous spirit, sneak out of the house, and, caught in the fury of the storm, Flip loses his life. Meanwhile, Frida goes into labor at home alone and dies of excessive bleeding. Thus, the first community by blood in the Kirby family is destroyed by the death of two of its members. After Wanda is born, Lucas, Kirby, and Wanda form a new community by blood, which, however, is also fragmented as it is impacted by innumerable subsequent storms. The first individual to depart from this community is Lucas, who seeks to acquire the knowledge necessary to save Rudder, expressing his intent to come back "with exactly the right tools at exactly the right time" (180). Lucas devotes his love and attention to his half-sister, which shows a profound expression of humanity amid crises, reinforcing Tönnies' assertion that the love between siblings is the most humane relationship despite its essential foundation in blood ties (24). The next person who leaves this community is Kirby, who drives out on a stormy night and is engulfed by the floodwaters from a breached dam. The floodwaters serve as a microcosm for the destructive power of the climate crisis, illustrating how it severs ties among family members and destroys community structures. These catastrophic events ultimately result in the disintegration of the community by blood within the Kirby family, leaving Wanda as its sole survivor.

Besides, climate crises have passive consequences on the community of place where people share land held in common. In the novel, Rudder's community of place is fundamentally anchored in its land and comprises its residents. However, this community gradually disintegrates with the onslaught of hurricanes as storms

and floods destroy the infrastructure and cause a scarcity of resources, undermining the community's capacity to survive. The devastating impacts of hurricanes and floods are vividly depicted in the novel, juxtaposing the town's infrastructure and land conditions before and after a decade of climate crisis. Before Wanda's birth, Rudder's environment and climate are still suitable for human habitation, with a sufficient food supply and ongoing government efforts to maintain essential infrastructure. Additionally, the beachfront area featured upscale buildings "with beach views and a doorman and probably a rooftop swimming pool" catering to affluent holidaymakers (78). By the time Wanda turns ten, living conditions have deteriorated significantly, and the community is more fragile than ever. The food quality has seriously declined, and there is a persistent shortage of electrical power. More critically, Rudder's once desirable beachfront land has become increasingly uninhabitable:

Houses lie in deconstructed piles by the side of the road: slabs of Sheetrock, strips of wall-to-wall carpet, scattered shingles covered in moss and mold. Many of the structures still standing are abandoned. Ahead, a stranded buoy perches on the embankment, nestled among green waves of soggy grass, but that's been there for years. In certain places, the road itself is just gone – eaten away in big, jagged bites by an invisible mouth. (106)

These sentences vividly depict the aftermath of the climate disaster, reflecting the severe destruction of the infrastructure, and the phrase "Many of the structures still standing are abandoned" suggests a shift from a thriving community to a desolate landscape and implies that most of the inhabitants have been displaced. In addition, the position of "stranded buoy" – "nestled among green waves of soggy grass" – conveys a sense of isolation and permanence, underscoring the idea that the effects of the crisis linger long after the immediate event has passed, and the description of the road as being "eaten away in big, jagged bites by an invisible mouth" uses metaphorical language to convey the idea of relentless erosion and an unstoppable force, highlighting the

magnitude and persistence of the crisis. Overall, the paragraph mentioned above employs vivid imagery to convey the devastating impact of the climate crisis on the physical landscape and the community, reflecting the fragility of human communities in the face of environmental crisis along the lines of posthumanism that questions the omnipotence of humanity.

Under the threat of the climate crisis, the disintegration occurs not only at the material level of the community but also in the collapse of the community of spirit triggered by the deterioration of moral choices. As the climate change intensifies and the environment deteriorates, rising sea levels ultimately submerge the land in Rudder, forcing the residents to relocate. The loss of land not only results in the physical disappearance of the community but also erodes the shared values of Rudder's inhabitants, as land is "a living substance which endures with its spiritual or psychological values" (Tönnies 224). As the consensus within the community wavers, the previously solid spiritual bonds gradually weaken, resulting in a lack of effective collective action in the face of environmental crises. In Rudder, a community of spirit manifests itself most obviously in the team of Kirby's comrades, which is "based on shared work or calling, and thus on shared beliefs" (204). However, this community of spirit, upheld by bonds of friendship and rooted in long-term relationships encompassing work and leisure activities (Norgaard 23), collapses when climate change prevents them from working together as usual. Moreover, Rudder embodies a community of spirit woven together by shared beliefs and mutual trust among its residents. However, as the climate change increasingly threatens every aspect of human life, including the fundamental elements that constitute entire societies, such as cultural practices, social cohesion, and collective identities (Verlie 54), this community of spirit in Rudder begins to disintegrate as evidenced by the failure of the community members to unite in the face of the crisis and their descent into a survival-of-the-fittest mentality. Faced with resource scarcity and survival pressures, individuals often adopt self-serving behaviors to protect themselves. As resources become scarcer, the once cohesive and cooperative town devolves into a harsh and unforgiving environment. For

instance, the violent intrusion by Brie's father and brother, who rob Phyllis and Wanda of resources and murder Phyllis, formerly their neighbor, symbolizes the final collapse of Rudder's once-thriving community of spirit.

The climate crisis is an environmental issue and a profound social problem that reflects the necessity of reexamining the intrinsic structures and moral foundations of human communities. The collapse of the three types of communities depicted in the novel illustrates the fact that communities which rely solely on human agency cannot effectively withstand disaster during a severe climate crisis. In the book, the climate crisis leads to the gradual disintegration of the community by blood, the community of place, and the community of spirit. The community by blood collapses because of the death and separation of family members; the community of place disintegrates as the land erodes and the residents migrate away; and the community of spirit dissolves as trust and shared values among neighbors deteriorate. This implies the fragility of human society, indicating that when ecological systems are disrupted, traditional community structures often fail to fulfill their functions. Building on this analysis, the following section will explore the various coping mechanisms adopted by the characters and will reveal how individuals respond to extreme conditions in their search for new survival patterns in severe environments.

Coping Mechanisms for Climate Crisis

In this novel, Dalton envisions a future human society shaped by climate change, vividly depicting the survival conditions and human activities. When faced with the relentless onslaught of hurricanes, the residents of Rudder and the government exhibit divergent attitudes – some prepare for the worst, but others choose to ignore the looming threats. These differing responses reflect the underlying ethical values of the Rudder community and its governing bodies. According to Emad B. Algorani and Vikas Gupta, “coping is defined as the thoughts and behaviors mobilized to

manage internal and external stressful situations,” and coping mechanisms are the varying ways of dealing with a stressor that “determine the individual’s behavior in response to stress.” By analyzing the actions taken by people in the face of climate crises, human responsibility and adaptive capacity in climate change can be better understood.

In this novel, some individuals remain at home despite the escalating environmental challenges. Their decision to stay, driven by deep emotional ties to their land, cultural heritage, and community bonds, reflects a complex interplay of attachment and a sense of duty to preserve their hometown. Among them, Kirby, an experienced lineman who works to repair electrical lines destroyed by the wind and rain, exemplifies the archetype of an individual who chooses to protect his homeland in the face of severe weather. Being used to living in violent weather and working under harsh conditions, Kirby has the capacity and confidence to survive better than ordinary people. Therefore, he is persistent in staying in Rudder. Before hurricane Wanda arrives, he makes as many preparations as possible for the coming crisis. For instance, he stacks piles of sandbags to protect his tool shed, boards up windows with plywood to safeguard their home, and persuades frightened Frida that they will be safe. In short, amid the climate crisis, individuals can face the challenge with expertise and determination.

Homeland is not only a physical space but also a place for establishing connections and sharing memories with others; therefore, even in the face of extreme weather and natural disasters, the sense of responsibility and attachment compels humans to strive to protect their homeland. Kirby’s unwavering commitment to protect and preserve his community amidst the escalating climate crisis reflects his conviction and deep nostalgia for Rudder. This dual motivation underscores the complex interplay between individual agency and communal obligation when faced with environmental challenges. Confronted with imminent and unknown risks, Kirby firmly believes that “this house is the safest place for them” and repeatedly asserts, “we’d be ready and we’ll be ready”

(6-22). Additionally, Kirby's persistence is deeply intertwined with his nostalgic attachment to Rudder, as living peacefully in Rudder symbolizes his dream of a better future, a vision that he and Frida nurture when they set out to start a new life. Therefore, home, as a fundamental anchor of human existence and a genuine microcosm where our world originates (see Relph 20; Bachelard 4), instills in Kirby a profound sense of duty to preserve his current life and motivates him to face up to the looming dangers in Rudder despite its perilous future. However, Kirby's attempt at relying solely on human effort to withstand the climate crisis ultimately fails.

Besides, the frequent natural disasters triggered by climate change can lead individuals to experience traumatic events that threaten and impact their mental health, making it difficult for them to confront an unpredictable future. In this psychological state, people will find it challenging to face reality, opting instead for avoidance as a coping mechanism to alleviate anxiety and distress, and this escape reflects a sense of helplessness, further rendering them vulnerable to the climate crisis. In the novel, Frida consistently exhibits a strong desire to escape from Rudder. Frida is sensitive to climate change owing to her rich sailing experience in her childhood; therefore, when hurricane Wanda is still on the ocean, Frida can already "smell the rich stink of thunder in the air, something like ozone and gasoline and dirt all mixed together" (5). However, such an ability is not a blessing but a curse because the cost of awareness in a world beset by threats and suffering is emotional distress and unease (Macy and Brown 27). Frida's fear is depicted through vivid and tactile imagery such as "curls up on Frida's shoulders, nestling softly against her neck, pressing up against her windpipe – a gentle, invisible stranglehold" (7). In the novel, Frida's pervasive anxiety and fear inhibit her from taking any action beyond urging Kirby to leave, making her a typical pessimist. This emotional state reflects what is described as "Anthropocene anxiety," which is defined as an emotional condition marked by inactivity and apprehension regarding global socioecological transformations (Merola 27). Such anxiety takes the form of a profound reluctance to engage with the present

situation and a longing to escape it, resulting in diminished personal agency.

As opposed to the limited consequences of individual behaviors, the government is responsible for providing public support and resource allocation. Therefore, its concession leads to the community's rapid collapse and further exacerbates the social division. Initially, the government demonstrates a commitment to ensuring the survival of its residents, albeit with delayed action. Over time, however, this commitment is no longer valid, as illustrated by Kirby's recollection that "the municipality used to promise Kirby they'd give him salaries for more linemen, but they don't even mention it anymore" (123). Although financial constraints contribute to the decline of commitment, it is also apparent that the municipality lacks a robust emergency response plan and is inadequately equipped to handle the escalating climate crisis. As the most straightforward approach to solving the considerable threats that global warming poses to society, culture, and the economy – given the scale of the issue – is to engage in collective political action (Norgaard 41), the government's failure to provide adequate support accelerates not only the disintegration of the community but also the growing number of climate refugees.

Neither tenacious resistance through individual efforts nor timely concession in the face of difficulties can effectively withstand the climate disaster. In unpredictable crises, adapting to changes is the correct strategy for pulling through, as continuously adjusting the coping strategies to meet new environmental conditions can significantly increase the chances of survival. Wanda and her teacher, Phyllis, exemplify the right way to survive under conditions of climate change as they view climate change as a long-term adaptation process. Phyllis is a typical "prepper" and "survivalist" (76) who has been preparing for the coming of doomsday and has experienced a sense of isolation in adapting to climate change for decades because she remains aloof from political and collective actions. As adapting to climate change represents a transformative process that is likely to be challenging, uncomfortable, and at times disorienting (Verlie 114), most

residents choose to ignore the potential disasters posed by the climate crisis, while Phyllis stands out as one of the few active individuals. Luckily, she meets Wanda, whose curiosity is not satisfied at school and enjoys learning various skills from Phyllis, as well as exploring nature with her:

Sometimes they go to one of Phyllis's plots and gather data. Other days, they stay at the blue house and work in the garden, or cook, or do various projects around the property: building a new ramp for the henhouse, fixing a broken window box filled with herbs, climbing up on the roof to check the solar panels. Phyllis teaches her to use tools, to measure wood, to plant seeds, to purify water. When it rains, they read together. And Wanda loves every second of it. Survivalism – a term she doesn't even know yet – comes naturally to her. (141-2)

This passage highlights the adaptive strategies employed by Phyllis and Wanda as they confront the challenges posed by climate change and reveals their approach to survivalism through hands-on activities. Under Phyllis' guidance, Wanda acquires enough survival skills, and their interaction with nature provides the basis for Wanda's adaptation to climate change and provides the hope of survival. Their practice is consistent with the notion of "the humanist view of adaptation" articulated by Allen Thompson and Jeremy Bendik-Keymer in 2012, who advocate adjusting the concept of identity to better adapt to new circumstances (7).

In addressing the climate crisis, the novel presents three primary modes of response: persistence, concession, and adaptation. The persistence mode, exemplified by Kirby, reflects a stubborn and blind optimism in the face of climate change and ultimately leads to failure, while Frida's concession illustrates how fear and anxiety can result in tragic outcomes when individuals retreat from proactive engagement. By contrast, Wanda and Phyllis' adaptive strategies reflect the importance of practical action and skill development in navigating climate challenges. Their approach aligns with posthumanist ideals, advocating for a redefined community that acknowledges the interdependence of human and

non-human elements. Overall, effective responses to the climate crisis require the capacity to adapt, which is a feasible strategy for establishing more inclusive, sustainable communities in the face of environmental change. The following section will delve into the characteristics of Wanda's posthumanist community and its implications when addressing climate change.

Posthumanist Community Reconstructed After the Climate Crisis

During the climate crisis, the communities relying solely on human power have become extremely fragile. Thus, survival requires constructing a posthumanist community where humans are closely connected with nature and other creatures. By reconstructing symbiotic relationships with the environment and ecosystems and fostering cross-species cooperation and coexistence to address the multifaceted challenges of the climate crisis, humans can achieve more stable and sustainable survival in changing natural conditions. Faced with the relentless threats of hurricanes and floods, the social order and individual mental states are severely compromised, leading to the collapse of communities in Rudder. Wanda successfully adapts to the climate crisis and establishes a new posthumanist survival pattern capable of withstanding extreme weather conditions. Her outdoor survival skills not only help her endure that period of living alone but also lay the groundwork for her eventual collaboration with Bire in establishing a new posthuman community. In the aftermath of the flood that washes away Rudder, Wanda is forced to adapt to exist on the sea surface and acknowledges her vulnerability in the face of harsh conditions as she adjusts her daily activities to extreme temperatures, recognizing that "daytime temperatures are fatal" (205). To sustain herself, Wanda learns to locate fish aggregations to catch them more efficiently and undertakes long journeys to access freshwater springs. In this context, natural forces profoundly influence all aspects of her life. Her attitudes towards life, nature, and non-human entities reflect an ecological perspective in which humans

are no longer viewed as the dominant force but as integral components of the ecosystem. This perspective is not only a pragmatic response to catastrophes but also shows a transformative shift in understanding and interacting with the environment.

Besides, a posthumanist survival pattern means adopting an ethical and respectful attitude toward animals, recognizing them as equal participants within the ecological network; animals are no longer seen as mere resources for human exploitation. Wanda's attitude towards animals undergoes a significant transformation due to her adaptation to the new, harsh realities imposed by the climate crisis. Previously, from a human-centered perspective, animals have been viewed primarily through the lens of utility or domesticity. However, after the flood, Wanda begins to perceive animals as integral and interdependent components of the ecosystem with which she must coexist. Moreover, this new posthumanist outlook recognizes the equality between human and non-human entities, challenging the traditional human tendency to assert dominance through naming. When Wanda and Brie attempt to recall the manatee's former name, "sea cow," they realize it was merely a "saying, nickname, object, idea" that has become obsolete, with no "pastures, or grain, or milk" remaining (235). Thus, the term "animal" is exposed as a human construct, a label meant to categorize and define other living beings, and, in a posthumanist world, such modes of classification become unnecessary.

Furthermore, while embracing a posthumanist worldview, Wanda fosters a profound spiritual and emotional bond between her and the non-human world. When she processes fish, she discards the entrails to alligators in the water as sustenance. Similarly, when she and Brie consume papaya, she disposes of the rind into the water to serve as a treat for manatees. Thus, Wanda's instinct to know what happens in her surrounding environment exemplifies her spiritual connection with the nonhumans:

She can hear everything in this lagoon: the scamper of tiny feet in the branches of the mangroves. Manatees snacking among the grasses. The lapping of the water against the hull of her canoe.

Mangrove leaves rubbing up against each other. Frogs, singing in the backs of their throats. (235)

This scene vividly portrays Wanda's deep sensory immersion in the natural environment of the lagoon, illustrating her awareness and connection to the non-human world around her. The detailed descriptions of various sounds – “the scamper of tiny feet,” “manatees snacking,” and “the lapping of the water” – represent Wanda's acute awareness of her surroundings. This sensory engagement suggests a profound connection to the environment, reflecting a shift from viewing nature as an external entity to perceiving it as an integral part of her experience. Therefore, Wanda's ability and gift contribute to establishing a posthumanist community.

After the destruction of the original community, it is inevitable to form a new community, as human survival relies on collective strength. Furthermore, the new community must adapt to external environmental changes and foster cooperation among its members. Phyllis foresees a dramatic upheaval as necessary for the emergence of a new societal model, stating that the world “would have to collapse in order for a new kind of society to be built; or, more likely, for some other epoch to have its day. Humanity was an ecological disaster” (242). After Wanda meets Brie, she generously offers the site of the mangroves to help survivors establish a post-disaster community. They constitute a new community of place where the mangroves take on the role traditionally held by the land in such communities, acting as the foundation that supports the collective. In this reimagined society, the inhabitants dwell in treetop homes nestled within the mangroves, a natural environment that accommodates rather than yields to human needs. “Their community builds where the trees make room for them” (317), and their nests are meticulously arranged among the branches. The mangroves, providing shelter and sustenance, symbolize a reciprocal relationship rather than dominance or exploitation. As Zoe Jaques suggests, trees possess an inherent posthumanist potential due to their symbiotic relationship with humans,

challenging the traditional hierarchy that prioritizes animals over plants (114). As the basis of the new community of place, the mangroves support the community's members and foster their cohesion.

Besides, the cooperative mechanism of the new community is characterized by mutual support, and each member contributes to the survival of the group. The harmonious atmosphere is reflected in their daily activities, such as fishing, trapping, harvesting, repairing, sewing, child-rearing, and building. Their focus on survival tasks, rather than exploitation, reveals a collective effort to cooperate rather than compete: "they are engaged in the work of survival, not plunder" (283). This cooperative model, free from the competitive "law of the jungle," highlights the necessity of working together in the face of climate-induced challenges. Moreover, Wanda's role in this posthumanist community further illustrates one of its unique characteristics. Wanda's ability to control and attract bioluminescent microorganisms in the water is vital for living normally without electricity. With this power, she inherits her father's mission of bringing light to the community in a different form, as she obtains light from glowing organisms instead of electricity. Wanda's control over light is essential for the well-being of the community, and, as more individuals with similar powers emerge, the resilience and continuity of the community are reinforced.

All in all, Wanda's posthumanist community exemplifies a profound integration with nature, where humans are not dominant entities but equal participants in a more extensive ecological network. This posthumanist perspective extends beyond traditional human relationships, encompassing all life forms and their ecosystems, and this community model transcends conventional notions of kinship, geography, or spirituality, emphasizing symbiosis and cooperation among diverse species to address global challenges like the climate change. This inclusive and multifaceted social model not only redefines community but also offers a more comprehensive framework for navigating the complexities of the posthumanist era.

Conclusion

Climate change presents an undeniable and pressing challenge. However, its impact often fails to resonate deeply with people due to a disconnect between theoretical understanding and the harsh realities of nature. While catastrophic floods are not everyday occurrences, their threat has loomed over humanity since ancient times, as evidenced in texts like the *Genesis*. In Brooks-Dalton's climate change novel, the story is set in the small town of Rudder and follows the experiences of a single family over several years. This narrative approach offers readers a tangible and relatable depiction of human struggle during a storm, making the novel's portrayal of a possible future more credible and immediate. As such, the book serves as a critical wake-up call, urging us to consider how we might prepare for the inevitable flood crises that could accompany global warming, underscoring the necessity of cooperation as a viable strategy for survival.

The novel points to the relationships between fiction, humanity, nature, and climate, challenging anthropocentric views and advocating posthumanist values. The climate crisis in Rudder wreaks havoc on the community, leading to a significant displacement of climate refugees. Despite the diverse responses within the community – some individuals put in immense effort to save the town – disasters continue to strike, and, ultimately, the power of nature proves overwhelming. As the townspeople realize they cannot combat these forces, they must adapt and coexist with nature. Under the framework of posthumanism, a new kind of community emerges, grounded in preserving the natural environment and rejecting the exploitative practices characteristic of modern society. Therefore, the novel underscores the fragility of human-centered communities and reimagines the future through Wanda's reconstruction of a posthumanist community.

Climate change is fundamentally a collective action issue that demands the participation of all individuals. The narratives explored in climate change fiction, such as Brooks-Dalton's novel, are not merely speculative but reflect our current reality. This work

provides a blueprint for how humanity can collectively respond to the climate crisis, emphasizing the need to move beyond anthropocentrism. As Tara Lynn Masih aptly notes, “A luminous map to the not-so-distant future, *The Light Pirate* does what it’s meant to do: warn, educate, and provide a glimmer of hope and resilience.” When confronted with the climate crisis, we must learn to live with it, recognize our place within the broader ecosystem, co-evolve with other life forms, and work together to address the challenge.

Note:

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