THE PANDEMIC AND THE POSTHUMAN CONDITION: A STUDY OF *HOW WE LIVE NOW; SCENES FROM THE PANDEMIC* BY BILL HAYES
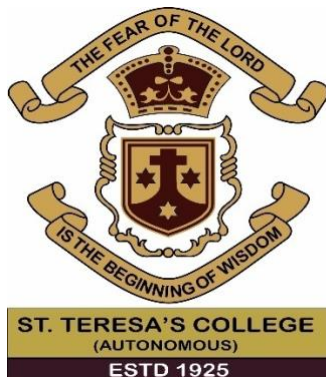

Project submitted to Mahatma Gandhi University in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS in English Language and Literature

By

JYOTHILAKSHMI C R
Register No. AM21ENG018
II M.A. English
St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)
Ernakulam

Supervisor
Ms. TESSA FANI JOSE
Assistant Professor
Department of English and Centre for Research
St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)
Ernakulam
Kerala

March 2023

THE PANDEMIC AND THE POSTHUMAN CONDITION: A STUDY OF *HOW WE LIVE NOW; SCENES FROM THE PANDEMIC* BY BILL HAYES

Project submitted to Mahatma Gandhi University in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS in English Language and Literature
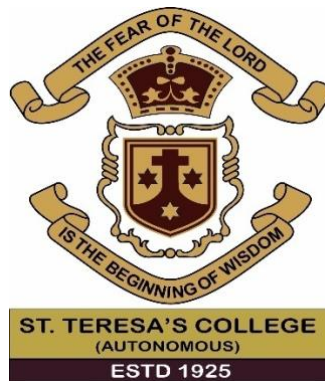
By

JYOTHILAKSHMI C R
Register No. AM21ENG018
II M.A. English
St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)
Ernakulam

Supervisor
Ms.TESSA FANI JOSE
Assistant Professor
Department of English and Centre for Research
St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)
Ernakulam
Kerala

March 2023

ST.TERESA'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS) ERNAKULAM

Certificate of Plagiarism Check for Dissertation

Author Name	Jyothilakshmi C R
Course of Study	M A English Language & Literature
Name of Guide	Ms. Tessa Fani Jose
Department	English & Centre for Research
Acceptable Maximum Limit	20%
Submitted By	library@teresas.ac.in
Paper Title	The Pandemic and the Posthuman Condition: A Study of How We Live Now; Scenes From The Pandemic by Bill Hayes
Similarity	2%
Paper ID	719130
Submission Date	2023-04-04 09:55:27

Signature of Student

Signature of Guide

Checked By
College Librarian

* This report has been generated by DrillBit Anti-Plagiarism Software

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled "The Pandemic and the Posthuman Condition: A Study of *How We Live Now; Scenes From The Pandemic* by Bill Hayes" is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Ms. Tessa Fani Jose, Assistant Professor, Department of English and Centre for Research, and that no part of the dissertation has been presented earlier for the award of any degree, diploma or any other similar title of recognition.

Jyothilakshmi C R

Reg No. AM21ENG018

M.A. English

Ernakulam

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)

March, 2023

Ernakulam

CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that this project entitled "The Pandemic and the Posthuman Condition: A Study of *How We Live Now; Scenes From The Pandemic* by Bill Hayes" is a record of bona fide work carried out by Jyothilakshmi C R under my supervision and guidance.

Ms. Tessa Fani Jose

Assistant Professor

Department of English and Centre for Research

Ernakulam   St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)

March 2023   Ernakulam

An Abstract of the Project Entitled

The Pandemic and the Posthuman Condition: A Study of *How We Live Now; Scenes From The Pandemic* by Bill Hayes

By

Jyothilakshmi C R

M.A English Literature

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)

Ernakulam

Reg. No. AM21ENG018

2021-2023

Supervising Teacher: Ms.Tessa Fani Jose

This study investigates the posthuman condition which was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications for humanity's future by analyzing Bill Hayes' memoir, *How We Live Now; Scenes From The Pandemic.* Chapter one highlights the supporting theoretical concepts of Posthumanism. Chapter two introduces the temporal and spatial shift during the pandemic specifically examining how human time and space were defined by the virus, with emphasis on how they denote a new perspective rooted in post-anthropocentrism and posthumanism. In chapter three, this change is connected to the posthuman condition as the early stages of the pandemic could be seen as a shift from anthropocentric perception to that of a post-anthropocentric one where humans were forced to confront the limits of human exceptionalism and to recognize the importance of biological, social and technological systems in their lives, establishing the interconnected nature of human existence. The pandemic has underscored the need for thoughtful and reflective engagement with the complexities of the posthuman condition.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

CONTENTS

Introduction

An outbreak refers to the sudden occurrence of a new disease or a sudden increase in cases of an existing disease in a small area or an existing group of people. The word epidemic is a Greek-derived word (epi: upon, demos: the people). When an outbreak spreads over a large area or involves many people, it is called an epidemic. Pandemic is also derived from Greek (pan: all, demos: the people). It refers to an epidemic affecting a large geographic area, such as countries across the world, and affecting a large proportion of the population. As with COVID-19, a disease that started as a small outbreak became an epidemic and later its impact was seen in many countries, affecting a large proportion of the population and hence became labeled as a pandemic (Parikh 4). Numerous pandemics have occurred throughout human history. The Black Death, often known as The Plague, was the most deadly epidemic in recorded history, killing an estimated 75-200 million people in the 14th century. The phrase was not used at the time, but it was later applied to epidemics such as the 1918 influenza pandemic, often known as the Spanish flu. SARS-CoV-2, a novel corona virus strain, was discovered in December 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. It resulted in a pandemic of instances of an acute respiratory disease known as corona virus disease 2019. The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11, 2020, the first worldwide pandemic since the 2009 swine flu epidemic. The global population infected with COVID-19 has surpassed 670 million as of January 31, 2023. In order to control an infectious disease outbreak, it is essential to "flatten the curve," or try to reduce the peak of the pandemic. This reduces the danger of health-care overburdening and allows us more time to create a vaccination and therapy. In the case of a flu pandemic, these precautions might be taken at the individual level like washing hands, wearing face masks, and self

quarantining, at the communal level with measures of shutting schools and prohibiting large gatherings and at the level of the community at large by engaging the community to promote acceptance and involvement in such interventions. It could also be at the level of the environment through cleaning surfaces and public places (Wikipedia contributors).

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the disparities in the various approaches and methods utilized by different nations and regions in order to manage and restrict the virus's spread. While some nations imposed tight lockdowns, others relied on voluntary measures such as social distancing and mask usage. The success of these measures, on the other hand, has varied widely and is determined by factors such as population density, healthcare infrastructure, government response, and cultural norms. Because the pandemic is a complicated issue and something that is constantly evolving, the most effective techniques for controlling and confining the virus may vary as more is being discovered about the virus and its behavior. Stock market collapses, industrial site closures, and widespread unemployment are just a few of the serious consequences of this pandemic. The state enforced lockdowns had a tremendous influence on both product demand and supply. The COVID-19 pandemic has had an influence on people of all ages on numerous levels including physical, social, economic and cultural. It had a tremendous impact on people who are poor, disabled, old, indigenous, and so on.

The pandemic also had a significant impact on the world of art and culture due to the closure of art galleries and museums, the cancellation of artistic performances, and the subsequent loss of employment and financial support for artists. However, this crisis has also led to new forms of cultural and artistic

expression that reflect the changing human experience in the post-pandemic world. The pandemic has challenged the accepted notions of human autonomy, sovereignty, agency, and centricity and is likely to inspire new cultural and artistic forms that question these ideas. All of this has resulted in new perspectives and responses, resulting in the birth of a new genre of creative and literary expression known as Pandemic literature. These artistic creations are a unique means of questioning and understanding the posthuman condition which calls into question the view of the correlations between life and death, environment and civilization, and humans and other species. Many works of art represent and interpret the intricacies of these interactions, such as how human activity affects the environment or how human suffering may be expressed and understood. The posthuman condition invites us to re-examine the relationship with technology, the environment, and other forms of life, and to consider the ethical and social implications of the blurring of boundaries between the human and non-human.

Pandemic memoirs, particularly those centered on the COVID-19 pandemic, offer a unique perspective on how people experienced and dealt with the challenges posed by this global health crisis. These autobiographies can provide a detailed and personal look at how the pandemic has affected people's daily life, mental health, and relationships. They can also give insight on how diverse social and political frameworks affected the pandemic's impact on particular areas and people. Since the pandemic's surfacing, several COVID-19 memoirs have been written, including personal tales of those who had been infected by the virus, healthcare personnel on the front lines, and those navigating lockdowns and social isolation.

Bill Hayes is an author, photographer, and a regular contributor to the New York Times. When the COVID-19 epidemic first struck the city of New York and the rest of the world in the early months of 2020, Hayes took his camera outside to the streets of New York and captured what it was like to live in the city at that time. He describes the transformed landscape in detail;

> When you look out and see the empty streets, sidewalks and shuttered shops, a friend tells me, see it as solidarity - everyone doing their best to keep themselves and everyone else healthy.... Even so, I can't deny how sad and disorientating the absence of life in these once busy streets seems. (109)

Despite the numerous changes brought about by the lockdown, his passion for New York remains unabated. Hayes also described how New Yorkers were adjusting to the sudden changes, citing examples such as an independent bookshop that took orders from customers inside the building, a groundskeeper who had recently lost her work partner, a pharmacist who distributed free disposable masks, a special education teacher who was following up with her students' parents, and more. In addition, Hayes thought back on how he felt throughout those months in comparison to how he felt previously, as well as how he handled a relationship that had just begun shortly before the pandemic struck. However, his work is not just about loss, but about how we must live in the present moment. This memoir demonstrates how sometimes the most meaningful moments are the simplest ones. In words and pictures, this city in the midst of the crisis is given a heartbreaking and moving homage. Hayes shares his views and personal moments to remind the readers that they don't have to seek far to find solace in these unusual and terrible times. It's also a heartwarming book, demonstrating that no matter how much such difficult times has changed peoples'

lives, the human spirit will always want social connection and optimism. Regardless of how terrible things are at these moments, people sometimes forget to tell themselves to breathe, to look on the bright side, and to be mindful and grateful of the things around us. Documenting them will undoubtedly help us to live in the present.

Writing about personal experiences during a pandemic can help individuals process their emotions and contribute to the larger narrative of what it's like to live through such a time. By sharing personal stories, people can connect with others and find solace in the fact that they are not alone in their struggles. In the early days of the pandemic, there was a palpable sense of apprehension and uncertainty. But as we read about how many of those anxieties have been relieved to an extent, we feel encouraged and hopeful for the future. Hayes' work is a passionate message to both the past and future, reminding people of the challenges they have overcome and the resilience the world has shown in the face of adversity. It is a testament to the power of storytelling and the importance of documenting history, even in the midst of turmoil and uncertainty.

The COVID-19 pandemic can certainly be considered a black swan event, as it was a rare and unexpected event that had a significant impact on society and the economy. The pandemic has disrupted peoples' lives in countless ways, and it has forced us to make rapid and profound changes to the way we live, work, and interact with each other. In many ways, the pandemic has accelerated the shift towards a posthuman future, where technology and automation are becoming increasingly vital to lives of people across the globe. This study intends to identify such changes and to evaluate through Bill Hayes' memoir, how the pandemic caused the world to have a rapid posthuman turn and how the change in perceptions caused by it will affect the future of humanity.

Chapter 1

Posthumanism

The term posthumanism basically means after humanism or beyond humanism. Ihab Hassan once stated that Humanism may be coming to an end as it transforms itself into something one must helplessly call posthumanism (247). As it is a philosophical framework that emerged from or became a reaction against what was known as Humanism, a concept which is derived from the Latin term *humanitas* which translates into "education that befits a civilized man" ("Humanism – Definition, Meaning and Synonyms"). This idea began circulating during the Renaissance era, promoting classical Greek and Roman values like reason, ethics and social justice, instead of supernatural or religious ideas. This doctrine put emphasis on human interests, values, stresses an individual's dignity and capacity for selfrealization through rationality.

Posthumanism deviates from humanism by demoting humanity back to its embedded relationship with nature and other species. Hence it rejects notions of anthropocentric dominance which is based upon human exceptionalism or supremacy. This stream of thought suggests that humans have no intrinsic rights to control and destroy nature by assuming a central position in the universe. Human knowledge is also abridged to a less controlling position, which was earlier seen as the crucial facet of the world. The rational aspect of human knowledge isn't completely rejected but the fallibility of it is addressed and human rights are seen on the same spectrum of the rights of the non human or ahuman forms thus limiting the superior position and in its extension, the previously uncontrolled agency of humans in the humanist field of thought. Francesca Ferrando categorizes this philosophical

approach into three major aspects: firstly, what she terms posthumanism, which refers to the irreducible plurality of human experience, the fact that it cannot be assimilated within one universal category or metanarrative. Secondly, post-anthropocentrism, which refers to the decentering of the human in relation to the non-human and finally post-dualism, which refers to the breaking down of the rigid binaries (black/white, male/female, human / animal and so forth) upon which the identity of the human has been conventionally expressed ("The Party of the Anthropocene: Post-humanism, Environmentalism and the Post-anthropocentric Paradigm Shift" 160). The centrality of human beings and the so called developments due to higher cognitive advancements explicit in growth of technology, caused drastic changes in the environment leading to many unexpected repercussions which the theory of posthumanism analyses and to an extent, seeks to change at the very least through a reform in modern thought and philosophy. On the one hand, Posthumanism can be viewed as "post-humanism," that is, a radical critique of humanism and anthropocentrism; on the other hand, in its significations as a "posthuman-ism," it recognizes those aspects that are constitutively human while going beyond the constitutive limits of the human in the strict sense. Posthumanism is both a praxis and a philosophy of mediation, delineating post-dualistic, postcentralizing, inclusive, and comprehensive approaches (Ferrando, *Philosophical Posthumanis* 3).

Ihab Hassan coined the word "posthumanism" in 1977, referring to the prospect of a new posthumanist culture reflecting shifts in the concept of the human as a result of new technology. Such technologies have altered the understanding of what it means to be human. However, it is critical to distinguish between posthumanism and transhumanism, which are frequently used interchangeably.

According to Ferrando, Posthumanism formed alongside Postmodernism and Transhumanism traces its origins in the Enlightenment, and for that reason does not expropriate humanism (*Philosophical Posthumanism* 3).

Posthumanism is a second generation of Postmodernism, taking the deconstruction of the human to its logical conclusion by including speciesism, or the privilege of certain species over others, into its theoretical revision as propounded by her on the basis of her understanding of Rosi Braidotti in *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*;

> Postmodernity is notoriously the age of proliferating differences. The devalued others which constituted the specular complement of the modern subject – woman, the ethnic or racialized other and nature or earth-others – return with a vengeance. They are the complement to the modern subject, who constructed himself as much through what he excluded. (2002, 174)

Transhumanism is the triumphalist project of human enhancement through technologies such as prosthetic and robotic implants, surgeries, genetic alteration and cloning, digital modification, and the application of artificial intelligence, among other things. But surely, this technology centered ideology, concerned with exceeding current human limitations in health, performance, intelligence, and even mortality, is simply an extension of humanism in all its glory and ambition; it remains bound to the fantasy of Man's control and mastery over the world, now enabled by technology. It is in a way, it can be seen as a denial of humanity's limitations. In the age of the Anthropocene and pandemics, such a triumphalist and technocentric narrative is just unsustainable. Instead of attempting to surpass or escape the category of the human,

posthumanism is far more restrained and modest; it deconstructs the human category by recognizing its limitations.

Posthumanist discourse critically examines what it means to be human as the previously understood levels of meaning have to be reinterpreted within in this specific philosophical and theoretical framework. Deconstruction by Jacques Derrida is a helpful theoretical framework in breaking down binaries like the self and the other which was perpetuated by the humanist discourse. The human remained the authoritative centre since the enlightenment era and has been continuing with its position of power even in the 21st century in spite of technological advancements and cybernetics that seek to overthrow this specific centrality and hegemony. In *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*, Derrida mentions an "event", which caused a "rupture" and "redoubling" in the supposed closed system of language which questioned the limits of Structuralism (1). This "rupture" was not just narrowed down to logocentrism but also to all other disciplines that were built on a supposed center as Derrida explained, attempting to transcend the Subject, to replace it with a new Signifier, as structuralism attempted to do in respect to humanism, is only re-establishing its centricity. This is what we observe in Transhumanism, another type of replacement that swaps one primary identity, one form of authority, with another, which is, technology in place of humans while restoring Man's position at the centre of the universe. Posthumanism not only questions the ethical aspects of human technological development, but it is also consistent with certain biological conservatism. It can be seen as an opportunity to reconsider and think beyond human boundaries. It is basically to admit that if the human is defined in terms of autonomy, rational agency, and of the separation of

mind from body, of ideas from matter, of man from animal, then we have never been human and never will be.

The posthuman experience is marked by an increasing awareness of human's place within, and reliance upon complex ecosystems and networks populated by nonhuman factors and beings, both natural and technological. When Foucault notably postulated some time ago that Man would vanish "like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea" (422), he was referring to humanism's discursive and empirical limits, as well as the recognition that the figure of Man was a relatively recent and contingent historical artifact. This is the point at which the humanist and modernist traditions that have dominated European thought for centuries come to an end. As humanist principles become decentered, more opaque, and diffused, their conceptual limits and discursive boundaries become less evident, its identity becomes more pluralized and diversified, and its authority and sovereignty become less certain. According to Keeling and Lehman, Posthumanist philosophy constitutes the human as: physically, chemically, and biologically enmeshed and dependent on the environment; moved to action through interactions that generate affects, habits, and reason; and possessing no attribute that is uniquely human but is instead made up of a larger evolving ecosystem (1).

The very existence of humans has always been dependent on complicated relationships and interactions with other agents and forces, whether natural or artificial, to the point that we can never claim self-sufficiency or autonomy. This not only radically broadens up the human experience, but also imposes certain ethical obligations on humans to those who have been historically excluded, as well as to the non-human organisms with which we share this precarious planet, whose survival depends on us, and whose survival we also rely on. According to Cary Wolfe,

posthumanism is the recognition of the human's embeddedness within broader social systems, be it natural, communicative, cultural, and/or technological which blurs the binary division between the human and non-human, while also giving deeper significance and specificity to the human condition and "the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatic, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore" (16-17).

The influence of anthropocentric behaviors on the world has grown so large in the twenty-first century that geologists are referring to the current age as the Anthropocene, in which human actions are gravely impacting the environment. Previously, humans were not considered as agents directly affecting climate change. The majority of present human society's material interactions in this planet are built on anthropocentric principles, which are heading to a breaking point in ecological and sustainable terms. Because everything is interconnected, the disturbed balance has a direct impact on human well-being as well. The Anthropocene notion is basically posthumanist in many ways since it emphasizes the terrestrial character of humans as an animal species and their unavoidable connection to the planet's biosphere. There is, nevertheless, the obvious potential of a humanist reading within the Anthropocene. At its core, the idea acknowledges the significant consequences human activity has on the earth and invites critical introspection. However, it also highlights the fact that no other species has ever had such a negative influence on the planet. This allows anthropocene rhetoric to reinforce the humanist worldview of limitless agency over the non human, autonomy, and self-mastery as man is at the centre of the universe capable of cognitive advancement that gives him the decisive power over the world around him. Nimmo comments that this idea is the recognition of the enormous relevance of the fact that human activity is now the primary material

factor affecting the planet, outpacing all other natural forces put together and being comparable in scale and scope to the era-defining changes like ice ages and mass extinctions that characterize geohistorical epochs (3).

The term "posthumanism" has taken on a number of connotations in the recent times. In its broadest meaning, it refers to an organized effort to contest humanist presumptions that underlie the construction of "the human." The challenge that follows is how to define "the human," which includes all kinds of existence connected to but not completely dependent upon it. The "posthuman condition" has become more prevalent during the last few decades. The notion of who human beings are and where they fit in the world has undergone a profound change due to the posthuman state of being. In today's world, advanced technology and virtual worlds are an indispensible part of their daily life. In a variety of ways, digital technologies have already fused with human bodies: phones and computers are progressively replacing and enhancing the functions of human sense organs. They enable people to share their memories, interact with others, and travel to distant places and periods. Technology enables society to overcome human limits. Smartphones have long since become an extension of human beings. Humans are becoming increasingly reliant on the gadgets they own. All these are the result of the cognitive achievements of humans yet they embed their own identities in the ever developing world of technology, even in the attempts of substituting the human mind with innovations like the AI. Humans and machines are no longer totally separate from one another. The concept of being human has evolved significantly. In her famous work, *A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s*, Donna Haraway investigated the notions of human fixity and initiated the inquiry into the hybrid in constructive terms: "By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic

time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics" (50).

The posthuman theory contends that humanism is an outmoded idea that is inadequate for understanding the posthuman condition. For Braidotti, "What or who is the human today can only be understood by incorporating the posthuman and nonhuman dimensions". In other words, the issue of what it means to be human is intrinsically linked to the question of what it means to be non-human and/or posthuman. "The posthuman" cannot be reduced to "a dystopian vision of the future", because she claims it to be a defining feature of the present. To be more precise, it constitutes "both a historical marker of our condition and a theoretical figuration" (*Posthuman Knowledge* 1-2). As a historical marker, it designates a spatiotemporally specific constellation; we have been observing the introduction of a new era, which may be described as "the posthuman condition". Essentially, it is portrayed by the convergence of two major forces: posthumanism and post-anthropocentrism. The former is concerned with the critique of the Humanist ideal of "Man" as the allegedly universal measure of all things. The latter criticizes the present paradigm of "species hierarchy and anthropocentric exceptionalism. Although these two key concepts intersect in many ways and are sometimes used interchangeably, they should be distinguished: they relate to separate sets of circumstances - both epistemically, in terms of their respective intellectual genealogies and empirically, in terms of their respective social manifestations. Braidotti's aim, then, is to carry out "a balancing act between posthumanism and post-anthropocentrism" (*The Posthuman* 40-54).

The posthuman condition is one of both loss and happiness; a feeling of sadness for what we previously were, and elation at the new possibilities that have opened up before humans. As given by Rosi Braidotti, on the one hand the sharp

awareness of what we are ceasing to be or the end of the actual and on the other the perception of what we are in the process of becoming or the actualization of the virtual. (*A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities* 36-37). The posthuman world, therefore, is formed through the ontological intertwinement of human and non-human forces, whose spatiotemporal situatedness in the universe obliges people to examine subjects across numerous axes and, consequently, in terms of their 'transversality'. In this new historical setting, what is required is a subject position worthy of the times, that is, a subject whose subjectivity is constructed in such a manner that its transversal constitution is seen as both a product and a producer of the posthuman condition. By posthumanizing subjectivity, it may be repositioned as a dynamic convergence phenomenon between posthumanism and postanthropocentrism (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 44-45). The "posthuman condition" is not so readily delineated. Simply defined by Robert Pepperell, it is the state of being in which humans find themselves once the posthuman era begins.

Posthumanism is a philosophical paradigm that challenges the primacy and need of the human as a concept. While humanism uses their shared humanity to build community, posthumanism sees this method of thinking as restricted and full of latent prejudices. Posthumanists argue that the notion of the human is inextricably linked to issues such as colonialism, patriarchy, and racism. Historically, the concept of "the human" has been utilized to subjugate anyone (or anything) who was judged "nonhuman." The philosopher Rosi Braidotti claims that notion of "the human" is founded on Leonardo da Vinci's 1490 Vitruvian Man. Slaves, indigenous peoples, and women, she claims, have historically been excluded from the category of what she terms "fully human." As a result, they were denied equal rights with the white male. Braidotti opines that "Humanism's restricted notion of what counts as the

human is one of the keys to understand how we got to a post-human turn at all"
Intellectuals did not really investigate what was meant by "the human" until the
publication of Foucault's The Order of Things. As a result, post-1968 radical
intellectuals rejected both classical and socialist Humanism, and the Vitruvian ideal
was "actually dragged down from his pedestal and dismantled". What this has taught
humans is that individualism is not an essential part of human nature, but rather a
historically and culturally discursive creation (*The Posthuman* 16-24).

Chapter 2

The Post-Anthropocentric Experience of Time and Space in the Pandemic

Time and space are important indicators of human existence and its varied facets like perception. Peoples' understanding of it is personal and is framed by various cultural, social, and personal factors. It also influences how we interact and communicate with others, and how we interpret events in life.

Temporality refers to the experience and perception of time. The pandemic experience has brought numerous features of posthuman theory into light. It has first revealed how temporality has transitioned from anthropocentric to postanthropocentric. Man must have come into contact with a virus that benignly inhabits the organs of wild animals, not because animals encroached on human territory, but because humans violated their ecosystem. The virus and vaccine then overcame traditional time and space limitations in order to have a consequence on mankind.

Bill Hayes presents a picture of what life was like in New York City during the first two months of the Pandemic. It definitely appears like the Pandemic had a before and an after that were vastly different from each other. He captures this in words and images that will make you reflect on and feel deeply about those days. He takes pictures, or more specifically, portraits, of random people when he is out and about in New York (with their permission). The images are frequently accompanied by a vignette, which may be about what was going on that day or a personal anecdote about his meeting and chat with the stranger in question. The photos and portraits he takes evoke pathos in the reader. He just captures meaningful images and photographs. They use visual communication to convey fear, generosity, normality,

newness, grief, joy, respect, and life. Hayes is able to recognize the frontline workers, vital workers, survivors, and the hundreds of thousands of individuals who have lost their lives to this horrible illness while also sharing certain absurd elements of the lockdown and quarantine.

Hayes set out to chronicle the pandemic's early phases, and his work is both tragic and inspirational. He captures the sense of loss that so many people faced during those unprecedented times, and his stories and photographs bring those experiences to life. He was always inspired by his late partner, Oliver's advice stating that, "The most we can do is to write—intelligently, creatively, critically, evocatively—about what it is like living in the world at this time"(21); this quote from the book recognizes the significance of memoirs and personal experiences in conveying the essence of a historical event. During a pandemic, memoirs become even more vital as people grapple with the challenges of living through an unprecedented global crisis which could be called as a black swan event, a term that was popularized by Nassim Nicholas Taleb. Such events are difficult to predict and can have a profound and lasting effect on peoples' lives. Black swan events are often characterized by their extreme rarity, their unpredictable nature, and their ability to challenge assumptions and perceptions of the world.

The quarantine period could be defined as a window in which human temporal adaptation occurs in relation to the rhythms of activity imposed by the virus. It could be described as a waiting period where human interactions can create a future that won't be perceptible to humans for two to three weeks until after confirmation of COVID-19 infection. Human time began to be measured inside and against a different type of time; it gets attuned to viral temporality defined by infection,

proliferation and elimination of the virus present in the human body. The virus's timeline intersects with humanity's timeline. Therefore the virus's sequence and cycle has transformed perception of time to a posthuman temporality. The stages from the start of symptoms, medical tests to confirm viral infection, medications used at regular intervals to alleviate the disease, remission, and post-recovery can all be viewed as temporal indicators of this new posthuman timeline.

The change in temporality experienced by Hayes is described as a disruption in the universe and in an attempt to take control of his time he begins to jot down everything in his journal. All expectations for the future had been thrown into complete disarray. He noted down even the most insignificant chores that he had to perform in order to take control of his new found sense of time. He couldn't think of any other way to put it, "words had begun to seem insufficient" (44). He made a to-do list to have a sense of order in a world which was slowly descending into chaos and he wrote down all things he has control over starting with everyday cleaning of his apartment, getting the groceries and the like. But the most noticeable part of his list is "stop taking your temperature", because it reveals his paranoia about the viral outbreak and additionally, it is also important to note that most of these tasks were focused on protection, disinfection and cleaning surfaces that are often used, which includes his desk, closet, file drawers and the like (44).

The title of this memoir is taken from Susan Sontag's short story, *The Way We Live Now* which was written during the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s. It explores the socio-cultural changes that were taking place during this crisis. Sontag addresses the fear and stigma surrounding AIDS then and showcases the ways in which it impacted peoples' lives. Sontag's story recounts the challenges that one has to face in

navigating an ever evolving and disoriented world. Hayes even uses an excerpt as an

epigraph to his memoir which resonates with his own experience during the COVID-

19 pandemic;

> Of course, it was hard not to worry, everyone was worried, but it wouldn't
>
> do to panic, because, as Max pointed out to Quentin, there wasn't anything
>
> one could do except wait and hope, wait and start being careful, be careful
>
> and hope. (10)

Bill Hayes compares the stigmatized epidemic of AIDS to further his acceptance and

understanding of this new viral pandemic. He raises his concerns regarding the lack

of information or rather assurance of safety given to the queer community in the

crisis and underlines his doubly increased anxiety as a gay man who is still tormented

by the traumatic memories of the AIDS epidemic which includes the death of loved

ones. When we think about the past, we are engaging in a different temporal

orientation than when we think about the present or the future. Reflecting on the past

repeatedly can create a sense of temporal displacement, where one feels disconnected

from the present moment and is more focused on events that have already happened.

This can be particularly true for people who have experienced traumatic events or

significant life changes, such as the loss of a loved one or a major health crisis, both

of which he has experienced. In the case of Bill Hayes, his familiarity with the AIDS

epidemic have clearly shaped his perception of the current pandemic and his own life

in the uncertainty, creating a sense of temporal dislocation and reflection on the past.

He reflects on his experience with HIV/AIDS and how it has informed his

understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic especially when it comes to the

preventative and protective measures. He describes the moment when he realizes he

can put his daily Truvada pills back in the bottle, as he is not currently sexually active

due to the threat of corona virus. This moment highlights the contrast between the availability of preventative medication for HIV/AIDS and the lack of a vaccine or cure for COVID-19 during the early stages.

Access to preventative medicine has also raised concerns about disease's temporality. Hayes also recalls the early days of the AIDS epidemic when there were no treatments or preventative measures available. This memory shapes his perspective on the current pandemic and reminds him of the importance of continuing the search for solutions to infectious diseases. Hayes also notes the way in which access to preventative medicines like Truvada can create a sense of temporality around a disease, as many portrayals of AIDS seek to showcase the disease as a thing of the past. However, as he points out, the feeling of temporality evoked by a disease does not always fall into this category. This suggests that stories about disease can serve as a way to initiate new conversations between medical-humanities and posthuman perspectives, rather than simply serving as a process of memorialization. Moreover, the pandemic has resulted in a significant number of deaths, which has been compared to the AIDS epidemic, with Hayes pondering what the final death toll of COVID-19 will be (84).

The steady increase in death tolls that was observed by the masses through the media on a daily basis became one of the most upsetting parts of this worldwide crisis, causing widespread speculation, dread of the future, and trauma. Bill Hayes' memoir *How We Live Now: Scenes from the Pandemic* describes the pandemic's enormous influence on different perceptions of the human body, on mortality, and the media. When the death toll rises, it is easy to get overwhelmed by the enormity of the loss. The sight of mass graves, previously uncommon, has become all-too-common in

many countries. This normalizing of death, dehumanization of the victims, lowering of their worth to mere statistics, heightened sentiments of despair and widespread hopelessness is suggestive of the rapid and unprecedented decentralization of human exceptionalism that was enforced by the pandemic.

Bill Hayes' list of activities (13-14) that were once a part of his daily life in his memoir reflects a temporal shift, through the reminiscing of his pre-pandemic experiences, particularly social interactions and activities that were once taken for granted but have since been disrupted or prohibited as a result of the pandemic. This list, present at the opening of the book offers a surprise to the readers, thereby reorienting their perspectives on the pandemic even if it is read during a time where humanity might have overcome the crisis. The author underscores the tremendous changes that have happened in everyday lives, as well as the losses and limitations brought about by the pandemic, by presenting his personal experiences that has a universal appeal. The list highlights how the pandemic has transformed human centered actions and interactions in terms with the paradigm of posthumanism. The lack of physical touch, for example, raises concerns about technology's role in fostering human connection and intimacy in a time where it wasn't possible in real life. Questions regarding the effects of human interventions on the environment and the urgent need to reevaluate the role of humans within the biosphere were highlighted during the tragic event while analyzing its causes like the reasons for the animal to human transmission of the virus, and its effects like the sudden pause in activities including the working of the transportation networks resulting in lesser amounts of pollution. Altogether, the list serves as a sad reminder of how the pandemic has disturbed lives and forced people to confront new difficulties and

uncertainties, leading humanity to reconsider their role in the world as a component of a wide variety of systems, be it technological or environmental.

A stark contrast in spatiality is observed in Bill Hayes' memoir and it takes its most evident form in his photographs. There's a disparity between his lively images from 2018 and 2019, and the disturbingly empty cityscape in 2020. The city of New York appears to be full of outsiders and specific idiosyncrasies in the former images, whereas the effect of social restrictions and lockdowns creates a profound sense of alienation in the latter. In his vignettes, he elucidates how the virtualization of peoples' lives replaced the physical interactions that we once considered normal, he shares his worries about the future as we become more and more dependent on the internet and the upcoming communication technologies.

In *How We Live Now*, we could examine life during the early days of the pandemic and the changes brought about a significant shift in human spatiality. The virus began to define the spatial relationships with others, as social distancing and lockdowns became the new norm. As Hayes notes, living in New York meant that you couldn't become too attached to certain places or people, as they frequently vanished. However, the pandemic took this reality to a whole new level. According to him, one of the realities of living in New York is that you can't become too attached to certain places. They frequently vanish, and you may never learn why. Yet the his spatial sense was overturned in the matter of few days during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic and especially through methods that the government took to handle the situation, such as lockdown, quarantine, social distancing et cetera. But the things happening in the city at the time wasn't just one or two people who had disappeared. It appeared to affect everyone everywhere (18). In his apartment

building, where he often felt sequestered, became less than half full. Many residents have moved to their second homes in the Hamptons or upstate; some younger ones have gone back home to live with their parents. There are no children left in this entire eighteen-story building. Some of the elderly, a category that was considered the most vulnerable had already died from COVID-19.

Lockdown is not a public health term and rather refers to mandated advice for people, often given as a result of state surveillance to encourage people to remain in their homes, for the closure of industries and educational institutions, and for the restriction of cultural activities and travel. Social distancing is a method for avoiding crowds and keeping adequate physical distance from others in order to prevent and manage disease-causing pathogens. Isolation is a way of separating sick persons with contagious illnesses from healthy ones. Quarantine distinguishes between individuals who are still healthy but may have been exposed to an infectious agent and those who are healthy but have not been exposed. All of these precautions, which oppose human freedom and safety during pandemic times, elicit conflicting feelings of comfort and horror. Lockdown, isolation, and quarantine evoke feelings of anxiety about being monitored, imprisoned, and the loss of social ties.

Social interactions deteriorate and become antagonistic during a lockdown as individuals retreat inside their houses, exchange sly looks with their neighbors, and become xenophobic. When people are isolated or confined, they suddenly realize that their plans for the foreseeable future have changed radically. Their anxiousness will most likely be exacerbated by their failure to manage their affairs or provide for their dependents. Loss of emotional visual signals due to masking and tactile signals due to social distance are both examples of psychic deprivation (Bansal 704). Physical

factors like contact barriers, protective equipment and psychological factors such as separation from loved ones, inability to read facial expressions from masked faces, deprivation of human touch, inability to make out a human shape beneath protective equipment aggravate psychological alienation.

Bill Hayes' photographs capture the absence of human agency that has became a feature of urban landscapes during lockdowns (Hayes, fig. 1, p. 20). It's comparable to Hanna Higgins' characterization of the early days of lockdown.

> First the images of absence became common place. Pictures were taken of a newly ubiquitous nothing: of no people on city streets, no people in major plazas of the world, no people at rallies, no people in classrooms, no one in abandoned markets, no one in desolate businesses, no one in churches without mourners where closed coffins conveyed the ever-silenced dead into the afterlife. These empty spaces were also quietly reassuring of state-mandated efforts to contain the spread of disease. For the most part these were images of relative silence. (1)

Michel Foucault provides one historical example, referring to these locations as "plague towns," describing street-level administrative processes for quarantine in the Middle Ages in terms of tight spatial partitioning thus highlighting spatial politics during the pandemic period. Nothing appears to have changed. This concept was used throughout the lockdowns, and metropolitan landscapes became segmented, immobile, frozen spaces. Each individual is fixed in his or her place. And, if he moves, he risks his life, infection, or punishment (Peters 1).

Bill Hayes talks about how he saw the city alter before his eyes. Looking out from his apartment windows throughout the day, he noticed that over fifty city blocks

were so vacant that people could stroll in the centre of the street and skateboarders and cyclists could ride where vehicles formerly did. According to him; "It's lovely in a certain, dreamlike way. But then I notice the surgical masks on faces, the distance between pedestrians, and I have to look away. It's just not right" (18-19). When the viral spread was gaining momentum, large gatherings of any kind were discouraged. Businesses were forced to close early, with some even closing for good. The last time he traveled by plane was in late November. There were screenings at festivals scheduled throughout the spring, including one on Martha's Vineyard in March for which he had already purchased plane tickets, one in Portland, Oregon, and others. But, by March, the remaining film festivals for the year had been cancelled, and movie theatres were closing (27).The mandate to maintain social distancing went into effect, and the desolate streets of New York were a reflection of this new reality. Even going for a stroll was not without its challenges, as people had to counteract the eerie atmosphere of the closed restaurants, pubs, and stores.

Hayes used lightweight leather gloves on the metro and also purchased training gloves for the gym. Even though he was never a germophobe, he carried a small bottle of hand sanitizer with him, and despite the fact that there were fewer than fifty corona virus related deaths reported in New York in early March, he recounts a feeling that subway cars, packed with strangers and ideal vectors for viral transmission, were going to be places he'd want to avoid. This is an insight that he got from the past lessons of the AIDS/ HIV epidemic.

The author describes how Miriam and Troy, stalwarts of independent booksellers, changed things by not allowing anyone inside. Instead, they stood at a distance and asked customers to call out the title of the book they were looking for.

This new way of interacting was a reflection of the spatial changes brought on by the pandemic. Overall, the pandemic brought about a significant shift in how we interacted with the environment and with each other. Spatial relationships were defined by the virus, and human interaction took on new forms. Despite the challenges, people found ways to adapt and connect in this new reality. His photography could capture the pace with which things were changing, and he was concerned that street photography as he had done it would never be the same again. He remembers when he initially became actively interested in photography soon after arriving to New York. He had taken tens of thousands of photographs, including many of the eccentric groups of people that could never be repeated.

Fig. 1.

Fig. 2.

The landscape of New York at night is very unique. The flood of red lights that was previously referred to be a "fiery red Milky Way on the streets of Manhattan" in a photo he took in December of a crowded Eighth Avenue on an average evening around six (Hayes, fig. 2, p. 32) is simply no longer there to be photographed during lockdown. He describes the Eighth Avenue "a sky snuffed of stars" (Hayes, fig. 1, p. 20).

The last time he used the metro was on March 13, and he saw that others were not yet wearing masks, and just a few wore gloves like him, but everyone was

making an effort to stay as far away from each other as possible. More people stood than sat, for example, which was unusual; previously, you may be challenged for an empty seat. "This is not how New York, the New York I knew, operated" (37).

The Covid19 pandemic has altered perception of space. The bodily, communal, and species boundaries have all been crossed. The isolated life and forced social distancing have reshaped spatialities of its victims. As a result of weakening geographical borders, human spatiality has collapsed into itself, transforming the concept of space from a human-measured concept to one that is only calculable in nonhuman forms. This new notion of spatiality enables humans to examine the biological and digital landscapes, implying that the posthuman body creates its own space. The "posthuman" defined as a human inhabited by many nonhuman forms such as bacteria and viruses, arises continually throughout time and space, and as a result, this new ontology has irreparably disrupted the claimed human sovereign authority over temporal and geographical space. Fourth, the very networks that enabled human movement, from airports to public transit systems, were conduits for the virus. As technology, humans, and nonhuman forms collided in a border crossing crisis, enabling systems became threats, revealing the extent to which our assemblages are also dangers (Nayar 14-17). The pandemic experience drew humanity deeper into the condition where we share this state of vulnerability across continents, regions, languages, and other cultural boundaries that divide people. In some ways, the contagion's work has transformed the globe into a really transnational one however this does not homogenize the vastly different experiences.

The complex interactions of human and nonhuman bodies highlights the fallibility of the human as a self-contained being, indicates how the virus is an in

between form of non-life and demonstrates how these invisible bodies bleed through the boundaries between the living and the nonliving. They can be considered as organisms vacillating between life and death, a state of liminality that it shares with its victims as well. The dismal philosophy of life offered by these fatal agents has the potential to reshape both social and physical limits and this predicament highlights the importance of recognizing and addressing the complexities of the posthuman condition that we are living in. Bill Hayes vividly portrays this shift in spatiality through his observations of a quiet gas station on a Friday evening, the disappearance of familiar places and activities, and the disorienting absence of life in the once-busy streets. As he reflects on this experience, Hayes compares it to losing one's life while still being alive, where memories of the past seem almost impossible to imagine again. Despite the dreamlike beauty of empty streets, the absence of life is undeniably melancholic and confusing. In this decentered condition, human spatiality was radically and rampantly delineated by the virus.

Chapter 3

COVID-19 and the Posthuman Condition

Today's time and age could be termed as the Anthropocene epoch, in which human activity has a significant and permanent effect over the planet. Nobel Laureate Paul Crutzen, who created the phrase, contended that human-induced changes in the Earth system had such a profound influence and lasted so long that a new era in Earth's history might be declared. Furthermore, the Anthropocene idea calls for a new, comprehensive understanding of humans' involvement in influencing natural systems (Zalasiewicz et al. 838). But, the Anthropocene is also a vulnerable experience, as global citizens become conscious of the reliance of humanity on unstable ecosystems and unpredictable natural forces, and therefore suffers the repercussions of the destructive activities. The pandemic is an example of this situation, appearing as nature's retaliation for human exceptionalism. The pandemic has highlighted issues that will only worsen in the future if humans do not pay attention to them. It is high time to take remedial actions against the effects of human interventions in the biosphere that resulted in climate change and widespread ecological damage. The fact that the novel corona virus emerged from wildlife meat markets in Wuhan, China, as a result of an unintentional infection between man and animal, highlights the perilous and unpredictable repercussions of the economic exploitation of nature and nonhuman beings (Parikh 80). Human interventions have drastically altered, destabilized, and depleted the earth's ecosystems, causing global warming and climatic instability, extensive deforestation, increasing sea levels and temperatures, species extinction, and viral mutations. The decline of the Earth's green cover will have a significant long-term impact on human beings. The disruption of

the ecosystem is caused by the use of forest vegetation for commercial purposes, the burning of fossil fuels, the release of toxic exhaust gases from manufacturing processes and transportation. Humans are rapidly depleting natural resources in order to build new industries, and infrastructure. Demand for dairy and meat products, such as eggs, meat, and milk, has increased as the human population has grown. This has boosted poultry farming and animal husbandry, which are thought to be the major gateways for viral transfer from the natural world to the human world (Hoban et al. 35). According to a research on Zoonotic illnesses conducted by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), epidemics will become more common in the near future due to substantial changes in the environment and food chain. Wild animals have abandoned their native habitats and are moving to towns or other human settlements as a result of widespread deforestation. Hence, new infections and diseases were passed from these animals to people. Therefore the food chain is being harmed, and zoonotic diseases will become more prevalent in the near future which is dangerous as millions of viral species are still to be discovered and characterized ("Preventing the Next Pandemic - Zoonotic Diseases and How to Break the Chain of Transmission").

The COVID-19 pandemic is a result of human intervention in the ecological balance. Ironically, the corona virus outbreak has boosted the use of technology and digital mediation, as well as raised hopes for vaccinations and scientific remedies. With the COVID-19 outbreak, it has become increasingly evident that, contrary to humanist belief, humans are not the only autonomous entity: the illusion of human sovereignty has been nearly completely demolished in the last year. Human fragility has never been revealed on such a large scale before, which is why posthumanism as

an approach, a school of thought, a methodology, and a position makes even more sense now.

The enormous proportion of asymptomatic but positive corona virus cases is analogous to Schrodinger's cat, which is both alive and dead at the same time. While one does not have the symptom, one does have the infection. Because the disease is unknown and infection spreads unintentionally, such a person is deemed the most hazardous in terms of his or her ability to infect others. It also shatters the arrogant belief that global citizens can control something like a pandemic in real time. The virus becomes an invisible entity that is there in the air humans breathe and the surfaces that they touch. It may be present in the people that one might encounter in daily life, or worse, in friends and family. The horrifying knowledge that this infection is carried on to people in such a manner, even through loved ones, or that a person could pass it on to them is a powerful source of worry. We are all aware of this interdependence. Human vulnerability, according to Judith Butler, is described as the porous and interdependent character of peoples' bodily and social life (4). Nevertheless, the tangible modes of human interaction have now become dangerous and life-threatening. This crisis has made everyone aware of a human's vulnerability to other humans, even by a mere touch or sneeze. It has made us aware of the permeability of human bodies to a viral contagion and of the fragility of all social relationships. According to James Baumlin, the COVID-19 viral presence modifies self-perception; we are no longer a single macro-organism; we are, in actuality, an "assemblage" of microorganisms, upon which life depends completely (46).

The virus is an ominous presence that can alter viewpoints because it is a microorganism too little and invisible to the naked eye as well as an entity that can

wreak havoc because it is too large, in the sense that it could assert its presence as a worldwide contagion. Therefore it gives the impression that it is not within the reach of conscious control as an average human being. The pandemic vividly demonstrates the interconnectedness of nature and culture, undercutting anthropocentric notions of human autonomy and sovereignty and reminding people of co-existence within wider networks and ecosystems. The pandemic has proven the potency of viral formations, emphasizing the need of the agency of nonhuman forces, as well as the general importance of Gaia as a living, symbiotic planet ("We Are in This Together, but We Are Not One And The Same" 2). Yet, the common life as an inhuman, non-anthropocentric force which Braidotti calls zoe exists independently of people. Many are impressed by how, despite the epidemic, spring is progressing, flowers are budding, and the land continues to grow regardless. This affirms the idea that humans are not the centre of the universe and nature will continue to flourish even in their absence.

Post-anthropocentrism challenges the notion of human exceptionalism and the hierarchical order that places humans at the top of the natural world as propounded by Humanism and its tenets. Instead, it recognizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living beings, and emphasizes the need for collective action to address the challenges facing the planet. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the urgent need for such action, as the virus has highlighted the vulnerability and fragility of global systems and the devastating consequences of neglecting the health and well-being of the planet and all its inhabitants. Post-anthropocentrism is also a philosophical idea that challenges the traditional human-centered view of the world and emphasizes the equality of all forms of life. It recognizes the importance of non-human life and rejects the idea that humans have a special, privileged position in the

world. Instead, it views all forms of life as equally important and valuable, and seeks to promote a more inclusive and egalitarian society that recognizes and respects the inherent worth of all living beings. It is a response to the commodification of life that is inherent in advanced capitalism, and represents a shift towards a more ethical and sustainable approach to living in the world.

The post-anthropocentric perspective of posthumanism is essentially a deconstruction of the notion of species supremacy, and it also undermines the idea of human nature as a separate category from the life of animals and non-humans, or zoe (*The Posthuman* 61). It challenges the centrality of humans as the dominant species results in the breakdown of many boundaries between humans and other forms of life, bringing into light, new and unexpected perspectives. This leads to the emergence of a nature-culture continuum within the embodied structure of the extended self. This shift can be understood as a kind of "anthropological exodus" away from the traditional view of humans as superior to all other forms of life (Hardt and Negri 215).

The crisis of Humanism empowers marginalized human groups to emancipate themselves while the crisis of anthropos relinquishes the assumed demonic forces of non-human entities such as animals, insects, plants, the environment, and the cosmos as a whole. As a result, human species bears a unique responsibility for the current ecological crisis, given the technologically-mediated power and its potentially lethal consequences for all other life forms. This reality is underscored by the fact that this geological era is now referred to as the anthropocene ("A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities" 11). The contradiction at the core of Humanism lies in its claim to represent both an abstract universal and a specific supreme species,

namely human and anthropos. This logically impossible claim is based on an assumed political anatomy in which the 'power of reason' is equated with the idea of Man as a "rational animal" (*The Posthuman* 143).

Hayles defines three terms that can be used to understand the current COVID-19 pandemic and the broader posthuman condition in her research article "Novel Corona: Posthuman Virus." The terms are species in common, species in biosymbiosis, and species in cybersymbiosis respectively (Hayles 4-5). Each of these terms provides a distinct perspective on the complex relationships that exist between humans, other species, and technology, and they aid in elucidating some of the key issues at the core of the posthuman condition. By delving deeper into these concepts, humanity can gain a better understanding of how the pandemic is reshaping the world and the implications for the future of humanity and the planet as a whole. These ideas are utilized in this study on the memoir How We Live Now; Scenes from the Pandemic written by Bill Hayes.

The first is the concept of humans as species-in-common, which emphasizes the similarities that all people have, not withstanding ethnic, racial, geopolitical, and other specificities. Global citizens may witness flashes of this thought throughout history, including the current pandemic, a scenario that crosses all boundaries and geopolitical divisions to attack humanity worldwide. The second term is species-inbiosymbiosis, which recognizes the manner in which various species interact and the third is species-in-cybersymbiosis, which emphasizes how artificial agents, particularly artificial intelligences, actively collaborate with humans to change common reality.

Bill Hayes' *How We Live Now: Scenes from the Pandemic* could be seen as a creative culmination of the above given perspectives in praxis and the work captures the impact of the pandemic on human lives and its transformative effects on the understanding of the relationship between humans and the natural world. The pandemic has led to prolonged periods of isolation and confinement, resulting in a decline in mental health. When Hayes was feeling fine physically but going stir-crazy in his apartment, he decided to take a walk. It highlights the importance of physical activity and outdoor exposure in promoting mental health during times of crisis. This shift towards a post-anthropocentric worldview has emphasized the healing power of nature, as people have turned to parks and green spaces for solace and healing during a time of heightened anxiety and stress. The quote "It is so quiet: You can hear a bird singing" (57) and the encounter with a young woman making a *mandala* with petals and twigs in a park illustrates the importance of nature in human lives. The pandemic has also provided an opportunity for the natural world to thrive without human interference, as seen in the quote "I'll bet all those plants, grasses, ferns, and trees up there will enjoy the time to themselves, grow as wild and unruly as they'd like, free of the scrutinizing gaze and trampling feet of human beings"(64). One of the most notable changes has been the sudden decrease in human activity, resulting in a marked reduction in noise pollution. In his book, Hayes mentions how he was able to hear birds singing and trees rustling from his apartment, a phenomenon that was previously impossible due to the constant bustle of traffic and other human activity.

Lockdowns are harmful to society, the economy, and education. Nonetheless, due of the low levels of pollution emitted by automobiles and industry, it has a positive impact on the environment. This newfound peace emphasizes the impact of humans on the environment and emphasizes the urgency of a postanthropocentric

shift. The pandemic has provided people with an opportunity to reflect on their relationship with the natural world and re-evaluate societal objectives. It serves as a reminder that in order to protect the earth and its non-human inhabitants, the citizens of the world must prioritize sustainability and conservation activities.

This memoir is a collection of observations about New York during the 2020 pandemic lockdown. His thoughts about the changing world around him and the individuals he interacted with mirrored the strangeness of the times. The number of positive cases had risen rapidly around the world. This posed a significant risk to people and other living organisms. As young people were given precedence over the elderly, specific groups were left fighting for basic utilities and medical attention. This is what causes emotions of inequity, prejudice, and isolation among the weaker groups which is portrayed through the lived experiences of the marginalized people that he met during his strolls across the city, like the immigrants from the third world countries, the homeless, sex workers, sanitation workers et cetera.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused precarity on multiple levels, leading to a posthuman condition that has affected all aspects of society. Bill Hayes' *How We Live Now: Scenes from the Pandemic* illustrates how the pandemic has forced millions of people to confront social distancing, isolation, and financial instability, among other issues. As a result, people were forced to adapt and cope with new, unfamiliar realities. The pandemic had also had led to a shortage of essential items, such as face masks, which were initially reserved for frontline workers but later when recommended for everyone else, which lead to certain comical instances initially when people attempted to masks out of everything and anything as the proper surgical masks were advised to be reserved for the medical field workers and patients

who needed them most (80). Even this is suggestive of the shift in the perspectives of the people who once lived in the comfort of consumerist habits, capitalism and globalization. They underwent a change from overconsumption to that of conservation is induced by the pandemic and the fear of the virus.

The life and struggle of the vulnerable sections of the society during the pandemic remain as a testimony to showcase how easily human lives are rendered vulnerable. Their identities were reconfigured by their socio-economic status and the prejudices against them which were exacerbated by the advent of virus. Many were losing their jobs, as evidenced by the closure of King of Cutz, a barbershop that had to lay off its employees and the owner/chef who had to lay off his entire staff (58, 66). The pandemic has exposed vulnerabilities and inequalities in society, as seen in the situation of homeless people who are more vulnerable to the virus due to their lack of access to healthcare and living in close quarters. Hayes describes the struggle of a homeless man named Raheem, who collects recyclable bottles and cans for money to live on (81). He refuses to go into a shelter or an old age home as they became dangerous sites for the rampant spread of the virus and caused several deaths. The menacing irony is the fact that these places were built with the intention of protecting the vulnerable sections of society and then became fertile grounds for the virus and became sites for its devastating impacts.

The pandemic has also caused people to become more isolated and alienated from one another, leading to a sense of disconnection from society. Hayes describes the story of his immigrant friend Ali, who contracted the virus and was isolated at home without any contact with others (92-93). He was also the sole breadwinner of his family and this realization causes much anxiety in his mind. The pandemic has

also led to an epidemic of worry and fear, with concerns about fragility and mortality becoming a prevalent part of its experience. It has also forced people in the sex industry out of work, leading to permanent loss of income (104). Their bodies are seen as easy sites of viral transmission and they were often defined and discriminated objectively because of it.

The pandemic has also resulted in changes in the rituals surrounding death. The strict protocols to contain the virus have made it difficult for families to say goodbye to their loved ones, leading to an impersonal, lonely death. Hayes describes how his partner died at home with family and friends, whereas COVID-related deaths are not afforded the same comfort (105). The dreaded corona virus causes people to experience human closeness with anxiety, terror, and abhorrence. Funeral gatherings became risky because of the pandemic, robbing mourners of a customary ritual and the consolation of friends and physical presence of loved ones.

The COVID-19 crisis has forced humanity to address the previously ignored concerns regarding the growth of technology and the adverse effects of human interventions in the natural world, resulting in a posthuman state where people must adapt to new social conditions and challenges. The pandemic has highlighted societal disparities and vulnerabilities, forcing people to confront their mortality and loneliness. The pandemic has blown open a variety of fears, resentment, anger, and hostility which has led to an increase in prejudice and stigmatization, as individuals seek to blame others for the spread of the virus. The pandemic has also blurred the lines between fact and fantasy, confirming the irrational fears of death and making it difficult to distinguish between what is real and what is imagined.

The impact of the pandemic on mental health has been a significant concern. As evidenced in Bill Hayes' book *How We Live Now: Scenes from the Pandemic*, individuals have experienced feelings of isolation, fear, and uncertainty during the pandemic. His mental state and sense of fragility during the lockdown is explicit in the below given excerpt;

> I almost want to clap or cheer. Or weep. I'm not sure why I find this so moving, until another thought comes to mind, a far scarier one, like something out of sci-fi: What if I looked out and saw no cars at all? Not one. As if every last person in Manhattan were taken by this pandemic except for me, standing alone up here. (32-33)

Hayes' observation of watching cars hit all the green lights without stopping, followed by the thought of a deserted Manhattan, highlights the potential psychological toll of the pandemic. Furthermore, the repeated purchase of protective gloves and hand sanitizer illustrates the fear people have had in safeguarding themselves from the infection. The latest corona virus pandemic has had a profound influence on mental health. Lockdowns, quarantines, social distance, and isolation used to contain the disease's spread have contributed to experiences of terror. The pandemic's psychological repercussions extend beyond just the victims who have contracted the virus. Humanity has been influenced severely by the virus's lurking threat and the state enforced limitations upon basic rights. The outbreak has made social inequalities in the world more apparent and prompted us to reevaluate the beliefs about security and safety, and thereby resulted in a loss of identity and an awareness regarding the fragility and ephemeral nature of human life.

This is also true for all the frontline workers and volunteers who were ready to do the same with the hope of a better future and stood steadfast as beacons of hope and goodwill during such bleak times. The psychological consequences of the COVID-19 contagion are extensive and complicated. The crisis has had an influence on mental health in both visible and unexpected ways, and the consequences will be felt in the foreseeable future. It has also resulted in a transformation towards a posthuman and postanthropocentric way of life. Hayes' contact with the three doctors he met on his stroll who prioritized the treatment of soldiers and cadets over their personal safety or enforcing the state's orders of lockdown over citizens, might be interpreted as a radical departure from an anthropocentric viewpoint. This highlights a change in societal values, emphasizing a need for collective action and care during the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a substantial shift towards a posthuman reality, in which technology plays an important role in protecting and preserving life. The expanding reliance on technology for healthcare, education, and social relationships reflects this transition. The outbreak has hastened the use of technology as a critical tool for sharing information, providing healthcare, and preserving social ties, and thus emphasizing the significance of technology in lives. Many incidents in the memoir highlight the varied ways in which technology was utilized throughout the crisis.

The role of technology in connecting people during the pandemic is portrayed in the memoir when Hayes renewed old friendships through various digital platforms. This speaks to the importance of social connections and support systems during difficult times, and how technology can facilitate these connections even when

physical distancing is necessary. This helped him know the whereabouts of his loved ones who lived in faraway places and to monitor their health including the ones who were infected with the virus. This demonstrates how the pandemic has made people more reliant on technology to maintain social connections, accentuating the posthuman condition where technology is an integral and inseparable part of social interactions.

Telemedicine, which had grown in popularity throughout the pandemic, was a method of connecting patients with doctors remotely. The text's reference to telemedicine demonstrates how technology has become a critical tool for the healthcare system throughout the public health crisis. The fact that Ali, who had not envisaged to be using such technology, was able to communicate with a doctor through it indicates how the pandemic has hastened the use of technology in healthcare, leading to a posthuman transition in which technology is a key aspect of healthcare. This technology enables patients to get medical care from the comfort of their own homes, minimizing the danger of virus exposure. It also shows how the pandemic has propelled the use of different technological systems that would have taken years to become integral otherwise. The reference to watching celebrity hand washing demonstrations on social media highlights how technology has become a vital tool for disseminating information on how to stay healthy during the pandemic. This underscores the dependence on technology for information and knowledge.

Students have turned to distance learning alternatives when educational establishments have closed. However, many institutions attempted to implement online learning. Some youngsters are unable to access electronic devices and a suitable internet connection in their communities. The reference to the special

education teacher trying to ensure all students are set up for remote learning underscores how the pandemic has forced a shift towards remote education, which heavily relies on technology. It highlights the challenges of online learning and the digital divide. This indicates the significance of ensuring that all students have equitable access to technology, particularly during times of crisis. The total reliance on technology for education bolsters the transition towards a posthuman condition. The present COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted vulnerability of the separate and superior category of the human as propounded by the humanist principles and it has forced to reconsider its connection with the natural environment. This newfound understanding is needed for understanding the current posthuman state which is a notion that challenges the prevalent idea of humans as special and superior beings to other kinds of life. Humans are considered as part of a wider ecological system in the posthuman condition exacerbated by the pandemic, and the distinction between human and non-human became frequently blurred as the temporality and spatiality was bound to that of the virus. This shift in perception is especially important in the context of the postanthropocene, a term used to define the current epoch in which human activity has become the dominating factor in altering the planet, particularly seen in climate change.

Conclusion

Posthumanism is a philosophical framework in which the universal figure of man, derived from discourse of humanism, rationalism and Cartesian dualism becomes decentred. It insinuates the growing realization of the embedded nature of human existence within complex social systems, be it natural, cultural or technological. The limits of human agency are becoming more and more ambiguous as humanity acknowledges its dependence upon non human factors like other organisms and the growth of technology. Therefore it can be viewed as a deconstruction of the category of human by realizing its vulnerabilities and limits. The pandemic has been a transformative event that has disrupted human lives in unprecedented ways, and forced us to rethink the relationship with the natural world and with each other. As Bill Hayes documents in his book, the pandemic has brought about a profound shift in the understanding of what it means to be human, and has accelerated the posthuman turn in contemporary thought.

During the early days of the pandemic, the spatiality and temporality of human existence became redefined by the corona virus, exacerbating the posthuman condition. Social distancing, lockdowns, and other measures became the norm. The loss of life caused by the virus, as well as the loss of work, routine, and future ambitions, has contributed to the pandemic's psychological impact. Through his vivid stories and photographs, Hayes captures the fragility and interconnectedness of life in the pandemic. The book is a reminder of the importance of empathy, kindness, and solidarity during a viral outbreak. At the same time, he highlights the transformative potential of technology and innovation, as people embrace new forms of communication. The pandemic has also hastened the development of new technologies and innovations, like as telemedicine, remote learning, and contactless

delivery, which have the potential to change the way human beings live and work in the long run.

At the same time, it has shown the frailty of the current systems and institutions, as well as profound injustices and imbalances in society. As one traverses the post-pandemic world, it will be critical to build on these experiences and insights in order to develop a more resilient, sustainable, and inclusive way of life. Humanity can construct a better society by embracing a post-anthropocentric vision that appreciates the embedded nature of all living beings, nature, and technology, and by harnessing the potential of human innovation.

The posthuman decentralization of the so called human, asks human beings to let go of the sense of autonomy and to accept the interconnectedness of everything. This shift in viewpoint may encourage policymakers and citizens to finally take significant action to reduce further ecological devastations. A more inclusive posthuman approach might thus aid humanity in confronting difficult global issues such as the climate change.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant influence upon the perceptions and interactions of people across the globe. It has destabilized human superiority and exception and hence, emphasized the need for a more comprehensive view of life on Gaia, or earth. As man manages this crisis, humanity must adopt a post-anthropocentric vision that acknowledges the need for systemic change in problems like the uncontrolled human interference in nature and the exponential growth of technology that often excludes those who are othered by the humanist metanarratives. The pandemic has highlighted the need for thoughtful and reflective engagement with the complexities of the posthuman condition.

Works Cited

Bansal, Parul. "The Ravaged Psyche: Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the

    Human Mind." *SpringerLink*, 28 Jan. 2021,

    link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42087-021-00190-

    6?error=cookies_not_supported&code=6a01d1f0-8e16-4541-8612-

    98e0acbc8a6d.

Baumlin, James S. "From Postmodernism to Posthumanism: Theorizing Ethos in an

    Age of Pandemic." *Humanities*, vol. 9, no. 2, MDPI AG, May 2020, p. 46.

    https://doi.org/10.3390/h9020046.

Braidotti, Rosi. "A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities." *Theory,*

    Culture & Society, vol. 36, no. 6, SAGE Publishing, Nov. 2019,

    https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276418771486.

---. *Posthuman Knowledge*. Polity, 2019.

---. *The Posthuman*. Amsterdam UP, 2013.

---. "'We' Are in This Together, but We Are Not One And The Same." *Journal of*

    Bioethical Inquiry, vol. 17, no. 4, Springer Science+Business Media, Aug.

    2020, pp. 465–69. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11673-020-10017-8.

Butler, Judith, et al. *Vulnerability in Resistance*. Duke UP Books, 2016.

Derrida, Jacques. *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*.

    Translated by Alan Bass, hydra.humanities.uci.edu/derrida/sign-play.html.

Ferrando, Francesca. *Philosophical Posthumanism*. Bloomsbury, 2019.

---. "The Party of the Anthropocene: Post-humanism, Environmentalism and the

Postanthropocentric Paradigm Shift." *Relations*, no. 4.2, Led Edizioni

Universitarie, Nov. 2016,

https://doi.org/10.7358/rela-2016-002-ferr.

Ferreira, Helena Lage. "Braidotti, R (2002). Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist

Theory of Becoming. Reino Unido: Polity Press." *Revista Lusófona De*

Estudos Culturais, vol. 3, no. 1, University of Minho, June 2015,

https://doi.org/10.21814/rlec.104.

Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*.

Routledge, 2002.

Haraway, Donna. "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist

Feminism in the 1980s." *The Postmodern Turn*, Nov. 1994,

https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511570940.007.

Hassan, Ihab. "Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Postmodern Culture?"

Performance in Postmodern Culture, edited by Michel Benamou and Charles

Caramello, Coda Press, 1977.

Hayles, N. Katherine. "Novel Corona: Posthuman Virus." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 47,

no. S2, University of Chicago Press, Jan. 2021,

https://doi.org/10.1086/711439.

Hoban, Sean, et al. "Genetic Diversity Is Considered Important but Interpreted

Narrowly in Country Reports to the Convention on Biological Diversity:

Current Actions and Indicators Are Insufficient." *Biological Conservation*,

vol. 261, Elsevier BV, Sept. 2021,

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2021.109233.

"Humanism - Definition, Meaning and Synonyms." *Vocabulary.com*,

www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/humanism.

Keeling, Diane Marie, and Marguerite Nguyen Lehman. "Posthumanism." *Oxford

Research Encyclopedia of Communication*, 2019,

oxfordre.com/communication/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.001.0

001/acrefore-9780190228613-e-

627;jsessionid=00DB423F1227D7C32149E0DB15012B83.

Nayar, Pramod K. *Posthuman Pathogenesis: Contagion in Literature, Arts, and

Media*. Edited by Başak Ağın and Şafak Horzum, Routledge, 2022.

Nimmo, Richie. "Posthumanism." *SAGE Research Methods Foundations*, SAGE

Publications Ltd, 2019, https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526421036.

Parikh, Swapneil, et al. *The Coronavirus: What You

Need to Know About the Global Pandemic*. Penguin Book India, 2020.

Pepperell, Robert. *The Post-human Condition*. Intellect Books, 1995.

Peters, Michael. "Philosophy and Pandemic in the Postdigital Era: Foucault,
Agamben, Žižek." *SpringerLink*, 29 Apr. 2020,
link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42438-020-00117-
4?error=cookies_not_supported&code=71da0ad3-e31a-4a93-ba75-
1815417005cf.

"Preventing the Next Pandemic - Zoonotic Diseases and How to Break the Chain of
Transmission." *UNEP - UN Environment Programme*,
www.unep.org/resources/report/preventing-future-zoonotic-disease-
outbreaksprotecting-environment-animals-and.

"Sonic Images of the Coronavirus." *In The Moment*, 17 June 2020,
critinq.wordpress.com/2020/06/17/sonic-images-of-the-coronavirus.

Taleb, Nassim Nicholas. *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*.
Random House, 2007.

Wikipedia contributors. "Pandemic." *Wikipedia*, 15 Feb. 2023,
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pandemic.

Wolfe, Cary. *What Is Posthumanism?* University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

Zalasiewicz, Jan, et al. "The Anthropocene: A New Epoch of Geological Time?"

Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences, vol. 369, no. 1938, The Royal Society, Mar. 2011, pp. 835–41. https://doi.org/10.1098/rsta.2010.0339.