

Analysing Narrative Strategies in Emerging Hopepunk Literature as an Antidote to Ecological Grief: A Study of *Walkaway* and *Blackfish City*

Mr. Hari Haran R¹ & Dr. A. Ganesan²

¹Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda College (Autonomous)
(Affiliated to University of Madras, Chennai) &
Assistant Professor, Department of English

Nazareth College of Arts and Science, Kovilpathagai Main Road, Chennai

²Associate Professor, Department of English
Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda College (Autonomous), Chennai
(Affiliated to University of Madras, Chennai)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.64938/RIJ.v12i4.26.May023>

Abstract

This paper explores hopepunk as an emerging literary mode that responds to ecological grief through narratives of resilience, collective action, and deliberate optimism. Ecological grief, arising from environmental loss and climate anxiety, frequently dominates contemporary climate fiction through dystopian and fatalistic frameworks. In contrast, hopepunk challenges despair by foregrounding community, agency, and ethical futurity. Through a comparative analysis of Cory Doctorow's Walkaway (2017) and Sam J. Miller's Blackfish City (2018), this study examines how speculative fiction reimagines ecological crisis as a catalyst for transformation rather than inevitable collapse. Employing close textual analysis within an ecocritical and cultural studies framework, the paper demonstrates how Walkaway envisions post-capitalist communities grounded in radical generosity, open-source technology, and collective survival. Similarly, Blackfish City portrays collective resistance within a floating city of climate refugees, emphasizing solidarity among marginalized groups and human–nonhuman interconnectedness. The paper argues that these narratives cultivate practical optimism rather than naïve hope and position hopepunk as a significant contemporary literary response to the climate crisis.

Keywords: Hopepunk, Ecological Grief, Climate Fiction, Speculative Fiction, Resilience



Manuscript ID:
RIJ-2026-May-04-023

Subject: English Studies

Article History:

Received : 19.05.2026
Accepted : 27.05.2026
Published : 30.05.2026

Recommended Citation:

Hari Haran, R., and A. Ganesan.
“Analysing Narrative Strategies in
Emerging Hopepunk Literature as an
Antidote to Ecological Grief: A
Study of Walkaway and Blackfish
City.” *Roots International Journal of
Multidisciplinary Researches*, vol.
12, no. 4, 2026, pp. 79–82.



Copy Right: This work is licensed
under a Creative Commons Attribution-
Share A like 4.0 International License.

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, environmental issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss and ecological damage have increased rapidly. These complications have not only affected the natural world but also people's feelings and mental health. Many people now experience ecological grief and climate anxiety. Literary scholars study this state of mind through climate fiction, also known as cli-fi. Several climate fiction stories include themes like dystopia, apocalypse, and philosophy. These stories often show harm and threat. However, these stories can also make readers feel helpless and hopeless. Because of this, a new type of speculative fiction called hopepunk has emerged. This genre focuses on struggle, care, and collective action.

Hopepunk became popular in contemporary speculative fiction. It presents hope as a choice that is ethical and political, not just passive optimism. Hopepunk treats hope as a way to resist suffering and oppression. This paper places hopepunk within ecocriticism and the study of emotions. It argues that hopepunk stories help people cope with ecological grief by turning crises into a chance for harmony and alteration.

This study examines two works "Walkaway" and "Blackfish City". and shows how hopepunk fiction reimagines environmental descriptions by focusing on community acts, equal opportunities, and the links between humans and non-humans.

Ecological Grief and Climate Fiction

Ecological grief refers to the sadness people feel due to environmental loss, whether it has already happened or may happen in the future. Researchers say that climate change leads to anxiety and worry because people feel

uncertain, helpless, and aware of ongoing environmental loss. Writers often express these emotions over dystopian stories that show scarcity, oppressive rule, and ecological collapse. When dystopian climate fiction focuses too much on disaster, it warns readers about environmental destruction, but it can also make them feel hopeless.

Traditional dystopian stories often focus on individual survival or heroic characters and ignore collective resistance. These narratives can reinforce neoliberal thoughts by placing responsibility on people rather than on social systems. Hopepunk encounters this tactic by esteeming support, common aid, and shared responsibility. It does not ignore ecological grief but instead transforms it into a force for meaningful action. Therefore, hopepunk supports modern ecocritical ideas that balance mourning with social action.

Hopepunk does not eliminate conflict or suffering. Instead, it presents hope alongside with hardship. As a narrative style, hopepunk values relationship, care, and the daring to imagine better replacement for future. Hopepunk discards sarcasm and presents hope as difficult but delicate thing. People maintain this hope through everyday acts of cohesion. In this way, hopepunk changes the idea of fearlessness from individual achievement to collective deed.

In speculative fiction, hopepunk challenges the belief that technology and capitalism control the future. It often includes open ethical source, post-growth economical ideas, and decentralised societies. Hopepunk does not present a perfect utopian world. Instead, it shows possible futures shaped by ethical choices. This approach makes hopepunk important for addressing ecological grief because it accepts loss while encouraging renewal and the creation of hope.

Walkaway presents an upcoming world divided between the wealthy elite, called the “zottas,” and people who leave capitalist systems to create “walkaway” communities. These societies follow the ethics of open-source technology, shared economies, and common aid. Doctorow challenges capitalist thinking when he writes, “The problem with scarcity isn’t that it exists, but that we insist on organising our world around it.” The novel places ecological collapse in the background, but it does not treat it as the end of society. Instead, it uses the crisis to imagine new forms of community and cooperation.

The walkaway communities represent hopepunk values because they reject scarcity-based thinking. They freely share knowledge and resources and challenge the capitalist idea that survival depends on competition. The novel acknowledges ecological grief over views of environmental destruction, but it also focuses on restoration and revival. Doctorow writes, “The future was not something you waited for, it was something you built, together.” His narrative focuses on collective effort and suggests that people can build sustainable futures through continuous cooperation.

“Walkaway” rejects specific heroism, and instead focuses on communal policymaking and public responsibility. The characters care more about united survival than individual ambition. This narrative reflects hopepunk’s belief that people sustain hope through relationships and cooperation rather than individual actions. The novel presents ecological crisis as a chance to contest manipulative systems and build a better moral future.

“Blackfish City” takes place in Qaanaaq, a floating Arctic city populated by climate refugees. This novel discovers shifting environments, vulnerability, and ecological

defenselessness while concentrating on marginalised societies. Contrasting traditional dystopian stories that highlight social division, “Blackfish City” emphasises interdependence and collaboration among diverse groups of people.

The novel also highlights human–animal associations through characters who travel with representative animal companions. These relationships reinforce the novel’s ecocritical attention to the links between humans and non-humans. The animal companions symbolise what the novel describes as “a bond that was older than nations and stronger than borders” (Blackfish City 146). These relationships encounter human-centred ways of intelligent and suggest new systems of belonging. One character says, “Survival wasn’t about outlasting others it was about holding on to each other” (Blackfish City 301). The novel shows ecological grief through the loss of motherlands and cultural remembrance, but it also stresses the opportunity of harmony among diverse groups of people.

The novel also presents collective resistance as an important theme. The characters fight against corporate exploitation and political corruption through joint action. Hope in “Blackfish City” is neither simple nor guaranteed because the characters constantly struggle to protect it. Even so, the novel shows that strong community bonds and ethical imagination can resist despair. In this way, the novel reflects hopepunk’s commitment to resilience while still recognising human vulnerability.

Both Blackfish City and Walkaway turn ecological grief into a form of protest. Doctorow highlights the idea of shared ownership, while Miller focuses on cultural diversity and marginalised voices. Although these novels vary

in several ways, both reject dystopian hopelessness and support the potential of shared futures.

Both novels decrease the importance of individual protagonists and instead focus on associated groups. This approach reflects ecocritical ideas about interrelation and links human society with ecological principles. In addition, both novels present hope as an active practice built through support, care, and ethical risk-taking. Instead of providing clear endings, the novels encourage readers to envision and contribute to current social changes.

Conclusion

Hopepunk literature plays an important role in modern climate discussions because it addresses ecological grief without falling into despair. Through “Walkaway” and “Blackfish City”, hopepunk shows how speculative fiction can transform crisis into a space for ethical imagination and collective renewal. These novels accept grief but also encourage responsibility, action, and unity. Hopepunk highlights communal flexibility, ecological ethics, and the connection between humans and non-humans. In this method, it encounters

traditional dystopian thoughts and expands the emotional potentials of climate fiction. As ecological crises continue to grow, these descriptive stories become more important, not as distracting imaginations but as tools for confrontation and regeneration. Therefore, hopepunk stands as an important literary form for understanding the emotional and ethical challenges of the Anthropocene.

Works Cited

1. Doctorow, Cory. *Walkaway*. Tor Books, 2017.
2. Miller, Sam J. *Blackfish City*. Tor Books, 2018.
3. Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke UP, 2016.
4. Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard UP, 2011.
5. Rowland, Alexandra. “Hopepunk.” *Tumblr*, 2017, temperance-blues.tumblr.com.
6. Scranton, Roy. *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization*. City Lights Books, 2015.