

3. Charles Darwin, *The Variation of Animals and Plants Under Domestication*, 2nd ed. (London: John Murray, 1875), 233, <http://darwin-online.org.uk>.
4. Darwin, *Variation*, 226.
5. Deidre Shauna Lynch, *Loving Literature: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 8, 10.
6. Alex Woloch, *The One Vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 24.
7. Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. Ian Jack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 5.
8. Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 135, 8.
9. Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 9.
10. This essay draws on arguments I make at greater length in the introduction to my book, *Minor Creatures: Persons, Animals, and the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).



Anthropocene

JESSE OAK TAYLOR

TO describe the Anthropocene is to deploy a Victorian lexicon. This is perhaps most obvious in relation to the epoch's titular agent: the *Anthropos*. No aspect of the Anthropocene debate has been more provocative, or controversial, than the effort to align the differential histories of capitalism, empire, and industrial modernity with planetary time and the evolutionary history of the human species. In attempting to date the Anthropocene, stratigraphers are looking for the "signature" of human action, the mark of a single species operating as an agent at the level of planetary systems. In that endeavor, "human action" serves as a distinguishing marker from other forms of causality, whether atmospheric, lithic, or biological. However, humanists and social scientists have been quick to point out that human action is not uniform. There are vast disparities between humans in terms of both ecological impacts and vulnerability to the Anthropocene's manifold catastrophes, from rising sea levels to antibiotic resistant diseases. Those most at risk from ecological

collapse are, consistently, those least responsible for it. Thus, while the Anthropocene has already been extremely generative for scholarship in the humanities (e.g., Chakrabarty, Menely and Taylor), other humanists remain skeptical and argue that the concept masks inequality and perpetuates ecological injustice and have proposed terms like “Capitalocene” (Malm, Moore) or “Plantationocene” (Haraway, Tsing et al.) to foreground the new epoch’s inherently exploitative character.¹ Dating geologic agency to the industrial shift from water power to coal in the 1830s, historian Andreas Malm describes this new force as “the very negation of universal species being,” in that the forces disrupting Earth systems are the same ones responsible for the divergence in human fortunes.² However, from a stratigraphic perspective, distinguishing one species from others (or from non-biological forces operating within the hydrosphere, lithosphere, or atmosphere) operates as a *specifying* designation rather than a universalizing one. Even if the “Anthropos” includes only a tiny subset of humanity, or arises through the exploitation (or even extermination) of some human groups by others, Anthropocene history is predicated upon the legibility of the human within the Earth’s archives, as one species among many preserved in the fossil record.³ Thus, despite these trenchant critiques, the species designation is inherent in the Anthropocene concept, particularly as it appears in the stratigraphic debate over whether to designate it as a formal epoch of geologic time.

In this regard, the Anthropocene debate revisits an earlier encounter with a similar set of questions, namely Victorian debates over evolution and the age of the earth, in which scientists, theologians, philosophers, writers, and artists grappled with the implications of rethinking the human in species terms. In this project, Victorian evolutionary theory’s misdeeds are every bit as vital as its insights for understanding the Anthropocene as an epoch fraught with inequity. The challenge (and opportunity) for Victorian studies in the Anthropocene, then, lies not simply in looking for nascent ecological insights in historical artifacts, but rather in taking seriously the prospect that the Victorian era aligns with the historical period during which the Anthropocene emerged. Whereas Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer originally proposed dating the Anthropocene to the Industrial Revolution, a recent announcement by the Anthropocene Working Group proposes locating the Anthropocene’s lower boundary in the mid-twentieth century.⁴ That shift means the long nineteenth century, or the period between 1784 (the steam engine) and 1945 (the nuclear bomb), marks the boundary period between the Holocene and the Anthropocene, an intermediate space in which to trace the

Anthropocene's emergence. While the question of dating the Anthropocene customarily focuses on the question of origins, the Victorian era offers a glimpse of the Anthropocene *in medias res*, from the midst of still-unfolding, slow-motion catastrophe. If the Anthropocene is "the very negation of universal species being" then the long nineteenth century is precisely the geohistorical space within which that negation took place. It is also the period in which many of the conceptual tools and rubrics—from the stratigraphic method, to the greenhouse effect, natural selection to anthropogenic extinction—were articulated. The Anthropocene thus performs an uncanny inversion of many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century debates and anxieties.⁵ A key question for Victorian studies in the Anthropocene, then, is how to understand the alignment between these conceptual rubrics and epistemological frames and the broader ecological impacts within which they occurred. After all, this is the history that we must undo if we are to survive its aftermath.

For Victorianists, the problem of the Anthropocene is not simply the question of how (or indeed whether) a period anchored on the reign of a single British monarch retains coherence in the face of planetary catastrophe on the one hand and deep time on the other. Instead, it arises from the uncanniness whereby so many Victorian artifacts seem to speak to the Anthropocene in ways that belie the historical remove that separates them from our own moment. Put differently, the question is not so much why the Victorians didn't understand the Anthropocene, as tracing the multitudinous ways in which they did, framing the Victorian era in terms of what Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz call the "modernizing unconscious."⁶ Perhaps these two issues are not so far removed after all. Glimpsed from a distant future, in which all that remains of human society is a compressed stratigraphic trace and radically different climate, the Victorians become our contemporaries. Their words are still with us, just as the carbon spewn from their chimneys lingers overhead. As readers, writers, and teachers we are the speakers for the dead, the living media through which our Victorians interlocutors can speak to the shared predicament of a depleted, overheated world.

NOTES

1. The Anthropocene conversation in the humanities was largely sparked by Dipesh Chakrabarty's influential essay "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): 197–222. That essay is now part of a trilogy, as Chakrabarty has followed it with "Postcolonial Studies

and the Challenge of Climate Change,” *New Literary History* 43, no. 1 (2012): 1–18; and “Climate and Capital: On Conjoined Histories,” *Critical Inquiry* 41, no. 1 (2014): 1–23. See also the range of perspectives included in Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Taylor, eds., *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2017). For critiques of the Anthropocene concept and alternate terms (Capitalocene, Plantationocene, etc.) see Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming* (New York: Verso, 2016); Jason Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Verso, 2015); Rob Nixon, “The Anthropocene: The Promise and Pitfalls of an Epochal Idea,” *EdgeEffects*, University of Wisconsin Center for Culture, History and Environment (CHE), November 6, 2014, <http://edgeeffects.net/anthropocene-promise-and-pitfalls/>; Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, et al. eds., *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

2. Malm, *Fossil Capital*, 390–91.
3. See Jeremy Davies, *The Birth of the Anthropocene* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 83.
4. Colin N. Waters, et al. “The Anthropocene is Functionally and Stratigraphically Distinct from the Holocene,” *Science* 351, no. 6269 (2016): aad2622. Geographers Mark Maslin and Simon Lewis proposed an additional possibility, dating the Anthropocene’s emergence to European conquest of the Americas, and the decimation of 90 percent of the Indigenous inhabitants, some 50 million people. They argue that the cessation of agriculture and resultant reforestation across much of North and South America could represent a carbon sink responsible for a dip in atmospheric CO₂ legible in ice core data, fixing the date at 1610. This dating aligns with the beginning of the capitalist “world system” and coincides with a reshuffling of the biosphere unseen since the breakup of Pangea (Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, “Defining the Anthropocene,” *Nature* 519 [March 2015]: 171–180). Even though this dating has been critiqued in the sciences and will not be formalized, it has been embraced by many humanists and remains useful in framing the Anthropocene in terms of the ecological globalization wrought by empire—a dynamic of obvious relevance in the Victorian era as globalization was both extended and accelerated by the turn to steam. See Dana Luciano, “The Inhuman

Anthropocene,” *Avidly, Los Angeles Review of Books*, March 22, 2015, <http://avidly.lareviewofbooks.org/2015/03/22/the-inhuman-anthropocene/>; and Steve Mentz, “Enter the Anthropocene, Circa 1610,” in *Anthropocene Reading*, 43–58.

5. See Eric Gidal, *Ossianic Unconformities: Bardic Poetry in the Industrial Age*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015); Noah Heringman, “Deep Time at the Dawn of the Anthropocene,” *Representations* 129 (Winter 2015): 56–85.
6. Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fessoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History, and Us*, trans. David Fernbach (New York: Verso, 2016), 199.



Author

ANDREW ELFENBEIN

IN a typical literary critical essay, the author, rather than being a consistent concept, shifts rapidly among different, sometimes incompatible assumptions, evidence, and purposes: a biographical person, a synonym for the narrator, an implied presence governing an entire work, a metonym lending coherence to a career, an item in a list characterizing a movement or a period, the receiver or producer of literary or contextual influences. This mosaic is and is not productive. It enables a shorthand that lets literary critics gloss over complex, messy questions to zero in on textual analysis. Yet those messy questions never go away and haunt the margins of analysis with unfinished business. Literary critics have not ignored Foucault’s “What is an Author?” but they have skipped its relevance to their own practice.¹ The large question of “What is an author?” has blocked the smaller but more pressing question, “What should an author be in a work of literary criticism?”

I list some familiar manifestations of the author found in much literary criticism. I developed this list by generating all the different versions of the author that appeared in a single paragraph in a representative work of Victorian literary criticism; I am less interested in criticizing this work than in describing figurations of the author found throughout scholarship.