

ECOLOGICAL POETICS AS ECOLOGICAL ETHICS: TRANSCULTURAL CODES OF THE ANTHROPOCENE IN POETRY COLLECTION BY ARTŪRS PUNTE *THE WEED HERBARIUM OF JĒRCĒNI PARISH*

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Abstract. In an interdisciplinary paradigm, the idea of the Anthropocene introduces a new time period in the interaction between human industrial evolution and ecosystems of the planet. Along with the development and new intensity of the global industrialization processes, the Anthropocene provides different markers of human environmental impact on nature. Questions about the possibility of harmonious coexistence of nature and human are presented in a poetic form in the book of poetry by Artūrs Punte *The Weed Herbarium of Jērcēni Parish* (2019). Through the prism of eco-poetics, the author focuses on the transcultural codes of the (post)modern individual and their echo in ecological ethics, which postulates the need to preserve intactness of authentic ecosystems in synergy with the efforts and abilities of the modern urban individual to change and develop. The author's critical assessment can be observed in the poems with demonstrable consequences of destructive human activity and harmonious landscapes of untouched nature.

Key words: the Anthropocene, eco-poetics, ecocritical narrative, paratext, herbarium

INTRODUCTION

The dialogue or distinction between the modern individual and nature is a fundamental cultural and literary discourse. The development of industrialization is a turning point in the discourse of socio-ecological conflicts and its aesthetic projection practices. Industrial progress has a different chronology in different regions of the world, determined by the connection of the beginning of the era of modernity with imperial and (post)colonial processes. The industrial boom and the manifold impact of human on the planet, which significantly changes it, is an increasingly actualized narrative of modern literature, wherein nature and human are both object and subject.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The discussion on the transcultural aspects of ecology stems from the interaction of the object and the subject, which is given a contextual extension by the informal term ‘Anthropocene’ applied by the atmospheric chemist, Nobel laureate Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer in 2000. Etymology of the term ‘Anthropocene’ derives from Greek ἄνθρωπος, *ánthrōpos* – ‘human’, *kainós*, *καινός* – ‘new’. It is used to denote the last period of the current geological epoch in the history of the Earth – the Holocene, characterized by human impact on nature, which has significantly changed the Earth’s ecosystems. Crutzen (2006: 13-18) provides a number of arguments, such as changes in tilling the land, fossil fuel burning practices, deforestation rates, that testify to the fact that human activity has become a significant geological force. Crutzen calls the current geological era the ‘Anthropocene’ and relates it to the steam engine invented by James Watt in 1784.

The Anthropocene is a conceptual term describing the effects of humans on the global environment that have escalated in the last three centuries. It develops the discussion on the degradation of rural environment and climate change, expanding this polemic with the assessment of the impact of civilization and addressing the issues of human and planetary coexistence in the context of the ecological crisis. Because of present-day anthropogenic emissions of carbon dioxide, global climate may depart significantly from natural behaviour for many millennia to come. According to Chernilo (2017), it seems appropriate to assign the term ‘Anthropocene’ to the present, in many ways human-driven, geological epoch. Over the last few decades, this term has become a catchword in environmental research. The Anthropocene Working Group (AWG), whose creation was initiated in 2009 by geologist Phil Gibbard, has made a great contribution to the development of the term ‘Anthropocene’ and its application to a transdisciplinary treatment of modern processes. There is also another point of view, the supporters of which consider that the Anthropocene does not reflect a new geological epoch but continues the previous one – the Holocene (Smith and Zeder, 2013).

The potential of the notion of the Anthropocene is contextually compelling. It is applied not only to denote a geological era; this notion has initiated the debate concerning the human in the Anthropocene. Climate change can be considered in both anthropogenic and sociogenic discourse (Malm and Hornborg, 2014; Power, 2017). ‘The Anthropocene, a notion adopted fairly recently in the humanities and the social sciences, implies an enormous reframing of modernity and its legacy’ (Duperrex, 2024: 32), Power accounts for the habits and products of the modern consumer society, which are related to human nature, society, and culture, by habits and values, which are the driving factors of the current technological and social development. In the use of the notion, details are less important

than the social message – human activity has brought us to a point beyond which the future depends both on the ideology that influences our decisions and on the ways in which we perceive our future as a living species (Power, 2017). Malm and Hornborg hold that climate change is not caused by an individual, but by a specific structure of society. The interpretation of the relationship between human and nature in the perspective of the Anthropocene and the view of the consequences of human activity in an ethical and aesthetic context encourage a reassessment of the relationship between the concepts of ‘subject’, ‘agency’ and the collective understanding of ourselves as a unified species (Malm and Hornborg, 2014).

At present, the concept of the Anthropocene is subject to increasing criticism, as The International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS) on 20 March 2024 have published report *The Anthropocene*, postulating that they do not recognize the Anthropocene as a geological epoch and see no signs for its formal ratification, at the same time not denying the potential of its use and noting that the Anthropocene may be used as a non-formal non-stratigraphic term [Online 1]. IUGS report states that the term may be used in an interdisciplinary context to describe the interaction between human and the environment:

The Anthropocene will continue to be broadly used not only by Earth and environmental scientists, politicians, economists, but also by society in general. [...] it will not be recognized as a formal geological term, but the usefulness of its informal application in further discussions of anthropogenic influences on the Earth's climatic and environmental systems cannot be denied. (Online 1)

In communities where the discursive practices of the Anthropocene organically resonate in the modes of coexistence with nature, for example, in Latvia, this statement gains public resonance in the media, expressing regret for the missed opportunity to highlight the destructive effects of human industrial activity in the cycles of planetary history: ‘The impact of humans on the planet is not honoured with an official record on the geological time scale. Namely, the Anthropocene, or the time period characterized by the influence of *homo sapiens* on the Earth and its ecosystems, will remain an unofficial term’ (Mikelsons, 2024), despite the fact that social, ethical, and aesthetic discourses have already developed for the term ‘Anthropocene’. Turning to the potential of the concept ‘Anthropocene’ in the interpretation of eco-poetics, Burima has indicated that ‘In literature, the Anthropocene is represented as a multimodal narrative. It has great potential as an umbrella concept or collection of meanings to articulate transcultural and local practices within ecocritical narratives of human interactions with ecosystems and impact on the planet’ (Burima, 2023: 95).

The current Baltic literary discourse related to ecophilosophy is marked by the elaboration of more dis-anthropocentric ecoculture systems, revision of

traditional notions of nature, and production of models of relations between nature, culture and literature. Ecocritical narrative and eco-poetics are represented in complementary unified entities that represent nature: living organisms (plants, animals) and inorganic nature elements (water, air, soil), accentuating their interaction with human. Plants as actors in ecoliterature are not widely used as textual optic. Their ambivalence originates in their regenerative potential and pollution hazard. As noted by Heather I. Sullivan,

It is of great concern that large-scale and interconnected vegetal lives frequently appear to represent the ‘opposite’ of human culture, despite being the basis upon which human cultures and lives depend. The scales of human lives and civilizations are contained within this interconnected, multispecies system, which is changing in the Anthropocene’s dark green. Hence, we need more imaginings of the plant-human relations within the florosphere’s breathable air, [...] the force of the vegetal as both life-enabling and potentially threatening with the new circumstances shaped by industrialized practices and waste. (Sullivan, 2020: 98)

The static quality of plants and their bond to place determine their obscurity or ever-presence as concerns human existence, even though human exists in a constant exchange of prerequisites vital for life processes with plants. ‘Besides our bodily needs, human cultures more broadly take various forms based on the particular strategies they engage in the plant-human interactions’ (Sullivan, 2020: 93). Ecopoetics and ecoethics foreground the idea that humans have not been too selective as to the means of pressing out of ecosystems more than they can yield. However, ecosystems try to adapt even under such conditions, they get restructured and preserve themselves for the humanity to continue receiving their resources. Sullivan notes: ‘Human cultures are strongly influenced by the shape of their plant relationships’ (Sullivan, 2020: 95). Econarratives, including those that address the subjugation of wild plants in the epoch of Anthropocene, raise a range of issues concerning the abilities of ecosystem self-preservation and their degradation. Humans as receivers of services from nature need to respect the capacities of ecosystems to provide the resources needed for humankind. The network of motifs in the collection of poems under study suggests the idea of plant poetics that ‘plant-human scale disorients since it removes human beings from their seemingly solitary and dominant narrative position’ (Sullivan, 2020: 96). Punte’s ecopoetry shifts the positions of nature (object) – human (subject), thus noting the consequences created by the entry of modernity and industry into nature.

TEXTUAL AND PARATEXTUAL STRATEGIES OF ECO-POETICS AND ECO-ETHICS

The focus of ecocriticism is the research of the interaction between literature and the environment, making a shift in focus within the messages about the balance, which is lost in the industrial world between the social and biological representation of the individual, the coexistence of human and nature, their interaction and struggle. Eco-narratives address the regularities of an individual's existence, which are ecological in their essence. Eco-texts bring to the fore the diversity of nature, the aggressivity of industrialization, nature's claim to self-determination, the need for humans to create a dialogue with nature, based on the vision of deep ecology that all life is a value, regardless of its usefulness to humans. Eco-narratives reflect on nature as the environment of human existence, which from the beginning can be characterized as a dynamic system with three stages: development – crisis – degradation. Nature is not the realm of stability and harmony; hence, it cannot serve as a model for the ethical systems created by humans. 'Care for nature is actually our care for ourselves, because as a result of the human-caused ecological disaster, nature will not cease to exist, but will transform into a different ecosystem, in which there may be no place for human' (Rižijs, 2013: 460).

Artūrs Punte in his book of poetry *The Weed Herbarium of Jērcēni Parish* (Punte, 2019a) through the prism of eco-poetics addresses the transcultural codes of the (post)modern individual and their projection in ecological ethics.

Punte is a Latvian poet and sound artist, member of the text group *Orbita* [Orbit]. He is involved in cross-genre and synthetic art, as well as creating and using sound installations, acoustic instruments, and is the author of video-poetic works. He writes poetry in the Russian and Latvian languages. He is the founder of the publishing house *Orbita*, editor of the almanac *Orbita*, and the compiler of several books of poetry. *The Weed Herbarium of Jērcēni Parish* is published in Latvian. It includes the poetry originally composed in Latvian and translations from Russian produced by Pēteris Draguns, Arvis Viguls, and Inese Zandere.

Punte's book of poetry *The Weed Herbarium of Jērcēni Parish* offers a projection of ecocritical ethics and its representative aesthetics in syncretic text-reader communication strategies. The author calls it a 'book – mutant' (Žolude and Punte, 2019) and a 'novel in verse' (Muktupāvels and Punte, 2019): 'I produced the book as a single whole, in fact it is a novel in verse, – the whole book together with the inserted poem' (podcast Muktupāvels and Punte, 2019: 05:11 min.). The book has a conceptual construction combining three books into a single edition that is presented as if resulting from a typographical error. The title of the book in the original has metrical arrangement of three dactylic feet, and in fact it comprises both the first poem of the book and the key to the poetic structure of the book, and the eco-epic poem *Newcomers* that is inserted into

the collection. It introduces the main images of the book: Jērcēni parish (located in Latvia), weeds (from the perspective of human economic activity, an anti-plant, an unwanted flora specimen), and a herbarium (historical evidence captured from the dynamic world of nature). The toponym Jērcēni should be 'perceived as an image of a place from which there is no news, as a journey inward' (podcast Muktupāvels and Punte, 2019: 05:30 min.), reflecting on the human impact on nature. Jērcēni parish is a real administrative territorial unit of Latvia in Northern Vidzeme, with the river Gauja flowing nearby. Punte has land property in Jērcēni parish next to the highway. In an interview, answering the question of the writer Inga Žolude, 'Tell me about your connection with Jērcēni', Punte explains:

I think that they [Jērcēni] are to be perceived as an image. I created this book as an image, not a medium. Conditionally there could be another parish, but since I have land in Jērcēni, I thought it would be cool to capture it. In addition, Northern Vidzeme and Piegauja also appear in the poems and in some way connect everything in the book, hold it together. (Žolude and Punte, 2019)

The lexeme 'weeds' in Latvian has a negative and base meaning: *nezāle* = *ne-zāle* ('non-grass'), uncultivated (wild) and untamed plant. Weeds are plant species that enter the tended areas against human will. Punte reveals his poetic intention through the image of weeds. He accounts for it, as follows:

...weeds must also be perceived as an image, because botanically there are no weeds, it is an ideological concept – we think: here, this is a weed. In other circumstances, the same plant, if it does not harm our activity, is no longer a weed. It's as if you study nature but apply to it uncharacteristic and alien categories. I struggled with the fact that the land becomes overgrown – birches grow faster than weeds. Then I realized that maybe I shouldn't have fought with those birch trees, if they grow so well there – maybe I should have pruned them and let them grow, and then, for example, collected the birch sap... But it was already too late – those, which grew on agricultural land, had already been removed with great effort – it's like you get rid of a tree, but the roots remain, you can't walk or plough there without mighty equipment – such invincible nature. (Žolude and Punte, 2019)

The multiple layers of the book and the interplay of text and paratext are expressed by the strategy of mystifying the herbarium (Punte, 2019b), which, according to Ivars Šteinbergs, comprises several levels of interpretation:

...looking at the simple but attractive cover, one can soon identify the features of mystification: the author is silenced, instead only the apparently 'dry' title is provided – The Weed Herbarium of Jērcēni Parish, which, superficially judging, would be more suitable for an exhibit

in a regional museum than for a collection of poetry. However, understandably, upon reading more carefully, the dactylic quality of the title is revealed, which reveals an essential characteristic of Punte's manner – the immediately imperceptible but apt poeticizing of the everyday. (Šteinbergs, 2019)

The mystification of the herbarium, or the use of postmodernist game and carnivatization techniques, becomes a formal solution to the three-part composition model of the book's text. Herbarium elements are visually present in the book. In the first and third part of the book, where there is a collection of poems, the images of herbarium plants are covered by text and cannot be seen clearly, whereas in the second part that contains the text of the poem *Newcomers*, the herbarium prints are not used. Hence, the use of herbarium elements performs the functions of a paratext evoking associations about the lost harmonious interaction with nature when the mode of familiarization was decisive. On the cover of the book, the word 'herbarium' is framed. This paratextual technique represents dead plants, but in a broader sense also the rites of the seasons, the disappearing plant species, the different sections of the longevity of human and nature. On the other hand, the laconic design of the covers without mentioning the author's name actualizes the thesis about the author's absence claimed by Roland Barthes in his essay *The Death of the Author* (1967). The concept of the author's death is compatible with the idea of a specific narrative voice, as well as other concepts indicating the author's presence, used in (post)structuralist poetics and narratology. Barthes' thesis suggests that the author should be separated from the work, because the interpretation depends on the experience of the reader, and the author him/herself is also a reader. In text creation, the author borrows previously applied ideas, operating in the field of intertextuality. Visually, the covers of the book stylize an academic edition of a herbarium, offering academic reading as one of the levels of interpreting the nature-human relationship and the given book.

Retrospection and academic interpretation of natural rites and natural sciences are represented by prints of plants collected in the 19th century, available in the herbarium of the University of Latvia Faculty of Biology Botanical Museum, reproduced in the book's illustrations in contours of evanescent shading.

We wanted old plants because we expected them to be poorly preserved. But it turned out that they were all very well preserved. The staff of the herbarium even helped us to find defective samples, which was even not possible because spoiled samples are not stored. We selected plants that showed visible traces of time. Their life continues from the 19th century. The oldest herbariums used in the design of the book are from the 19th century, but there were also plants from the 18th century, collected by German pastors. (Žolude and Punte, 2019)

In her review of Punte's book, Ilva Skulte, the creative activity expert of the text group *Orbita*, emphasizes the pragmatics of the herbarium:

Herbarium is not only one of the violent actions of human culture towards the time and space of nature – compressing the spatial plant in a two-dimensional plane in order to preserve its withering splendour in time; the herbarium also represents the need we feel for such materialized memories. This means pages between pages (parallel readings, enhanced by the excellent design and visual formatting by Mārtiņš Ratniks), but also marking, arranging, collecting, classifying, system, thus pointing to modernity with its pronounced rationality and problems that can no longer be veiled. (Skulte, 2019)

The projection of imprints of past (bygone) time into the present is another important thematic component of the book. Herbarium is not just an image; it is a metaphor for 'encapsulated memories'. The hard-to-determine forms of the herbarium elements evoke parallels with past feelings and images that preserve fragments of certain situations over time. Introducing the conception, genre, and composition of the book, Punte notes that '... there are no random elements – either in the design or in the text. My name does not appear on the cover. It is one of the ways of hiding poetry' (Žolude and Punte, 2019).

Compositionally, the book consists of 2 sets of texts. The core of the book is the small format ecological epic poem (Online 2) *Newcomers*, which is placed in the middle of the book (the second part of the book), while the first and third parts comprise a collection of poems that frames the poem *Newcomers*, which also has its own internal dynamics. This is evidenced by the different length and layout of the lines, the changing font size and other paratextual effects, as the text is also intensively involved in shaping the design of the book. The scale of the text gradually increases, leading to an explosion as the climax of the poem:

The explosion and subsequent fire across our land changed everything in an instance – the landscape, the domesticated populations, the composition of substances, food chains, and our everyday life. It was a new beginning, so now we divide the time before and after the explosion.
(Punte, 2019a: 10)

Typologically, the scene of explosion depicted by Punte echoes one of the interpretations of the point of origin of the Anthropocene – the explosion of atomic weapons in 1945, bombing the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the modernized world, the message of the explosion evokes the dominant association with the use of nuclear weapons in Japanese cities and is a poignant reminder of human fatalities and ecosystem destruction. These imprints of history should motivate humanity to model micro- and macro-ecosystems where aggression and destruction are not tolerated.

Touch has a special function in the paratext of the book. The effect that two different sets of texts as if incidentally appeared in the book is enhanced by the use of paper of synthetic origin for the pages of the poem *Newcomers* dedicated to the theme of nature, as a revolutionary solution (podcast Muktupāvels and Punte, 2019: 18:06 min.), which should surprise and provoke the reader's tactile associations about the concepts 'natural', 'genuine and 'artificial', 'fake'. Such a paratextual technique sheds light on the compromise between the ethical respect for nature and the acute need for its utilitarian use, contained in the concept of the Anthropocene.

Punte indicates that the book:

...in general, it is one text in which the narrative of the poem does not allow for lyrical interjections as it would make the structure unmanageable; therefore the poems are outside the main text, but in fact one could add numbers to certain verses in the poem: see this poem or that one. (Žolude and Punte, 2019)

The reading of the collection of poems and the poem offered by Punte leads to the identification of genre parallels with Rainis' novel in verse *Dagdas piecas skiču burtnīcas* [Dagda's Five Sketchbooks]. In its introduction, Rainis writes: 'Since I was not given a title by the author, I call the entire joint publication simply "Dagda's five sketchbooks". But I call it a novel because the author himself talks about this as the novel of his life in the last letter' (Rainis). The motif network of Punte's book represents the characteristic features of the hybrid genre of "novel in poetry", providing a unique testimony of experience that fits into a broader narrative about the formation of collective ecological experience.

CLOSE READING PRACTICES OF PUNTE'S ECO-POETICS

In the Anthropocene epoch, the models of interaction between humans and the natural environment are revised, offering frameworks that envisage not only changes in people's attitudes or personal habits, but also changes in social relations, institutional frameworks, and customary practices. Such a situation creates the basis for various kinds of conflicts. Changes in human-environment relations are inseparable from transformations in social relations. Social conflicts are forming, which are directly or indirectly related to the models and practices of the use, management, and protection of nature (Svece, 2022). The transcultural codes of the Anthropocene involve the questioning of the notions of nature as a pure and stable sphere nowadays (Zariņa and Vinogradovs, 2022: 5), which is manifested in the literary text as eco-poetics and is projected as ecological ethics. 'Literary texts reflect the spiritual quest of their era, the nation's value system and its identity; bringing up a topic, the author reproduces not only

his/her subjective position, but also shows the collective understanding of it' (Romanovska 2021: 559).

Thematically eco-poetics actualizes global ecological generalizations and local modes. Global generalizations (universals): climate change, disproportionate consumption of natural resources, pollution of nature, use of atom in energy and weapons production, urban lifestyle, etc.

Local modes: ethno-codes (notions rooted in mythology and folklore), culture codes (themes and images presented through culture narratives), events of public life with a symbolic character; for example, this is illustrated by the withdrawal of the construction project of the Daugavpils hydroelectric power station at the very beginning of the period of the restoration of Latvian statehood or reconstruction. On 17 October 1986, the newspaper *Literatūra un Māksla* [Literature and Art] published the article *Thinking about the Fate of Daugava* by Dainis Īvāns and Artūrs Snips. This was the first publication in the USSR that provided argumentation for the danger and futility of one communist storm construction project, causing an explosion-like effect and stopping the construction of the Daugavpils hydroelectric plant, even though millions had already been spent on it. The landscape of the most important Latvian river, the Daugava, was saved. It was an essential turning point in further processes of decolonization and de-Sovietization (Sprūde, 1986).

In Punte's poem *Newcomers*, the newcomers to the natural territory are willing to establish their own order and understanding of harmony, but they fail because nature is adaptive, stronger, and self-renewing. To describe the colonization of nature, Punte uses the lexical range of war and battles: battlefield, battle, never-ending fight, forms of fighting, battle scene, victory, predominance, get the upper hand, not to feel resistance, fierce resistance, sustaining the fight, fire line, defence, superiority, take someone's side; stand in for somebody, choose a less hostile side, enemy, ally, actual balance of forces, break(through) (Punte, 2019a).

The military lexicon emphasizes the human desire to utilitarianly colonize nature and the superiority of nature, regenerative processes, the close interweaving of materialities:

- ‘The light of lanterns when first touching the leaves here
Illuminated a seemingly generous *battlefield*’ (Punte, 2019a: 003),
henceforth – T1:
- ‘like a single freeze frame *in a battle*
A balance that did not lean towards someone's *winning side*’ (T1: 003)
- ‘Plant and animal *forms of fighting* were as if half-dead
For centuries no one could get the upper hand but the fight generously
supplied
Nutrients for sustaining both the hostile parties and *the fight*’ (T1: 003)
- ‘We faced here a *never-ending fight* and engaged in it [...]’

We thought that we should simply take *someone's side*' (T1: 004)
'...we believed we must stand in for somebody and choosing
A less hostile side we became too diligent
Even not understanding *our enemy* nor even our ally' (T1: 005)
'the main thing was *to gain predominance*' (T1: 005)
'At sunset, the actual *balance of forces* became clear' (T1: 005)
'*The forest attacked* under the stars surrounding the patch of land taken
from it in light' (T1: 006)
'At dawn everything happened again – we went out on the *fire line*'
(T1: 006)
'grass blades *broke through* the poured concrete faster than it hardened'
(T1: 006)
'...foreign organisms lodged in each fistula *not feeling resistance*' (T1: 006)
'...resistance grew fiercer but in its immobility
It still reminded of a *battle scene* on the side of an ancient amphora
In the neighbourhood we were the only species in need for *protection*'
(T1: 007)
'...with *our superiority* it only got worse' (T1: 009)

In his poetry collection, Punte focuses on the physical manifestations of metaphysical phenomena. The author's texts express by the means of eco-poetics the leitmotif of global generalizations about the problem of naturalness in the consumer society, and eco-poetics fills the environmental discourse with aesthetic categories that arise from the interaction of transcultural practices of nature perception: communicating culture with nature and layering culture on nature as a strategy of subjugation. Eco-poetics mediates between ecocriticism, which addresses environmental issues, and poststructuralism, which argues that language fails to capture or reproduce our immediate embeddedness in nature (Knickerbocker, 2012). Using nature images in the poem *Newcomers* Punte broadens the unidimensionality of nature symbolism reconfiguring the understanding of plants as passive objects and pointed out the idea of vegetal dialectics. The vegetal dialectics as a phytocritical outlook according to Ryan (2018: 14) '...emphasizes the agencies of botanical beings in poetic texts and considers how plants are rendered, evoked, mediated, or brought to life in and through language'. Punte's book relates about the mastery of nature and human's relationship with the forces of nature, the relations between human and the earth, nature, which grow more and more alienated in the age of technology. In the poem *Newcomers*, the archetypal image of newcomers undergoes a metamorphosis and is endowed with the features of modern reality (Online 2). Even in cultivating a small piece of land, one faces what is described in Punte's poem: nature has its own laws, and the desire to change them will bring failure to a person who is not prepared:

The light of lanterns when first touching the leaves here
Illuminated a seemingly generous battlefield
Like a single freeze frame in a battle
A balance that did not lean towards someone's winning side.
(Punte, 2019a: 3)

Along with the state of war between nature and humankind, Punte admits the possibility of harmonious communication between the contemporary individual and the forces of nature: 'The outcome may be completely different, yet a person has an opportunity to get to know oneself and find new ways in relationship with nature' (podcast Muktupāvels and Punte, 2019: 16:50).

In the human relationship with nature, the contradiction between the desire to protect and at the same time to consume nature, the simultaneous mastering and subjugation of nature is an essential leitmotif of Punte's book. The author states: 'We cannot be as green as we wish' (podcast Muktupāvels and Punte, 2019: 17:22). Taking a stand against the violent use of nature, Punte admits that different ways must be sought for human coexistence with the environment:

But in the middle of the undergrowth forest
I can stay in turf bogs for a long time
Immersed in watching
How boots slowly press into the deep. (Punte, 2019a: 7)

Unlike the widespread literary view of nature and human created by romanticists, Punte observes nature as a materialist, scientifically, dispassionately, with attention to details, as a result of which he notices something like cracks in it, which makes it possible to sense the otherness beside that is mystical, magical, connected to the whole (Skulte, 2019). In an interview, Punte states that the leitmotif of the poem *Newcomers* is mastering and subjugating nature: 'But it is absolutely certain that nature must be restrained, mastered and made to work for our own good' (podcast Muktupāvels and Punte, 2019: 17:49). However, it is impossible through violent action of human, which is ironically represented in the opening part of Punte's poem.

The national culture code traditionally represented in Latvian cultural consciousness by the simultaneous veneration of nature and its colonization contained in the canonized title of novel by Jānis Purapuķe *Savs kaktiņš, savs stūrītis zemes* [One's own nook, one's own patch of land] (1898), is replaced in Punte's poems not by the traditionalist's sentimental delight or naive description, but instead – by the search for an as if lost dimension, '...taking measurements to understand the spirit and the spiritual that have been lost, forgotten, somehow irretrievably lost' (Skulte, 2019).

Then for a while we managed to get into the balance process – we invested and received equally. There was no question of profit, but the damp terrain let us in, and now everything around was abundantly juicy, as if it was meant just for us. Water began to flow, draining the swamps and thinning the thickets. The insects vacated the air. The animals adapted, just like us, and dispersed to their niches – no one drank their blood anymore, poisoned by local plants.

Our task continued to get more complicated in the course of the solution – despite expectations, the harmony did not last long. I don't know, maybe our predominance started too soon [...]. (Punte, 2019a: 8-9)

Newcomers is a poem about human communication with place and territory, landscape, the world of flora and fauna, as well as the urban area. In Punte's poetry, man compares his forces with the forces of nature, until he comes to the observation that nature's regeneration process is sustainable and self-renewing, whereas man's patience and resourcefulness are running out.

Being in the city, we cherish every plant, every tree is counted, it seems that we need more of them. But if you come to arable land and need to grow food for humans, the approach changes completely – you destroy on daily basis all kinds of plants without remorse, being strongly convinced that you are doing the right thing. Deep in the countryside, it is difficult to tell what a protected species is – rather, a person is concerned about how to survive. (Žolude, 2019)

The Weed Herbarium of Jērcēni Parish challenges contemporary people to find strategies for coexistence with nature that correspond to the personality structure of each individual, and as noted by Skulte, in Punte's poetry '...the eco- and techno-discourse takes a completely unexpected turning, [...] the story of the newcomers acquires a social and maybe even a political dimension' (Skulte, 2019).

Punte's collection of poetry, read in the mode of ecocriticism, raises the question of the broad range of relations and interaction between human and nature, showing mutual connection and interdependence. Greg Garrard holds that the relationship between humankind and nature is best described as asymmetrically interdependent (Garrard, 2004: 155). Nature's existence is fulfilled when it functions as an environment for the existence of living beings, while humanity cannot survive without nature, because what human needs comes from land. This thesis also occurs in Punte's poetry:

When after the explosion
a new equilibrium began to form,
we were already destined for it,
included in the balance sheet as own. (Punte, 2019a: 12)

Punte's poetry represents nature as a unified whole. Human is positioned as both its opponent and its component, in both modes transmitting the message of modern human's colonial and synergistic strategies in communication with nature.

CONCLUSIONS

The Anthropocene characterizes human impact on the Earth and its ecosystems. In fiction, the resonance of human-nature interactions outlined by the Anthropocene is a multimodal narrative. The concept of the Anthropocene has great potential as a generalization, articulating transcultural and local practices in ecocritical narratives about human impact on the planet. Discourse analysis is one of the approaches that can be used to better understand the communicative aspect of the conflicts brought by the Anthropocene.

The authors of the text group *Orbīta* have always sought new approaches and forms for contextualizing controversial social discourses. Paratextuality is greatly significant in Punte's book *The Weed Herbarium of Jērcēni Parish*. It is one of the trajectories that expands the compromise between the ethical respect for nature and the acute need to use it utilitarianly, included in the concept of the Anthropocene. The image of human in Punte's texts of the Anthropocene is impersonal and passive, beyond the historical and spatial framework. It represents the author's position, which does not offer evaluation and does not criticize, but records and illustrates the amplitude of the process of interaction between nature and human.

The Anthropocene as a leitmotif of Punte's poetry points to the consequences of human activity. Through the prism of eco-poetics, the author determines the 'diagnosis of the Anthropocene', which is represented in the principles of ecological ethics of the (post)modern individual caused by the need to preserve intact, authentic ecosystems in synergy with the efforts and abilities of the modern urban individual to change and develop. The author's critical assessment and simultaneous contrast can be observed both in poems with demonstrable consequences of human activity and in texts with relatively harmonious landscapes.

In Punte's poetry of the Anthropocene, the border between the recording of the catastrophe (explosion) and its aestheticization is very narrow. Although Punte's book is a testimony or diagnosis of the Anthropocene Epoch, it purposely misses exact time markers – they oscillate between fiction and subjective interpretation.

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