21. "I have no place to go, old friend": Narrating Anthropogenic Ecological Violence in Nathaniel Rich's "Hermie" [1]

Ece SAATÇIOĞLU [2]

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Abstract

Nathaniel Rich's "Hermie" offers a concise yet incisive engagement with environmental crisis, foregrounding its impacts on ecological systems and human subjectivities. This article argues that "Hermie" narrates anthropogenic ecological violence through immediate, visible, and directly identifiable forms of harm, while also conceptualizing this violence as the outcome of deeply entrenched economic, political, ethical, and cultural power struggles. Used here as a descriptive and analytical heuristic rather than as a fully systematized theoretical model, the concept of anthropogenic ecological violence provides a framework for examining the story's representation of climate change, species extinction, coastal urbanization, water contamination, and waste management, as interconnected manifestations of ecological crisis. The article further contends that Rich critiques academia's emotional and intellectual detachment from environmental destruction through a narrator who studies ecological problems yet remains materially and affectively removed from their consequences. By exposing the gap between knowledge production and ethical engagement, the story interrogates the complicity of both institutions and the subjectivities they produce, questioning how they often fail to intervene meaningfully in environmental crisis, instead displacing responsibility onto those least able to bear it. In doing so, it advances a critique of institutional dysfunction, challenging academia's claims to responsibility as well as its capacity to respond to anthropogenic ecological violence, one of the most urgent crises of the present era.

Keywords: Nathaniel Rich, Hermie, Anthropogenic ecological violence, Ecocriticism, Critical Animal Studies

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[2] Dr. Öğr.Üyesi, Muğla Sıtkı Koçman Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Bölümü / Assist. Prof., Department of Western Languages and Literatures, Faculty of Letters, Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University (Muğla, Turkey), **e-posta:** eces@mu.edu.tr, **ORCID ID:** https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8408-7742 **ROR ID:** https://ror.org/05n2cz176 **ISNI:** 0000 0001 0703 3794 **Crossref Funder:** 100022870

"Gidecek Yerim Yok, Eski Dostum": Nathaniel Rich'in "Hermie" Adlı Öyküsünde Antropojenik Ekolojik Şiddetin Anlatımı[3]

Öz

Nathaniel Rich'in "Hermie" adlı öyküsü, çevresel krize yönelik kısa fakat etkileyici bir eleştirel yaklaşım sunarak, bu krizin ekolojik sistemler ve insan öznellikleri üzerindeki etkilerini ön plana çıkarır. Bu makale, "Hermie"nin antropojenik ekolojik şiddeti ani, görünür ve doğrudan belirlenebilir zararlar üzerinden anlatırken, aynı zamanda bu şiddeti kökleşmiş ekonomik, politik, etik ve kültürel güç mücadelelerinin bir sonucu olarak kavramsallaştırdığını ileri sürmektedir. Bu çalışmada antropojenik ekolojik şiddet, tam anlamıyla sistematikleştirilmiş bir kuramsal modelden ziyade betimleyici ve analitik bir sezgisel kavram (heuristic) olarak kullanılmakta; iklim değişikliği, türlerin yok oluşu, kıyı kentleşmesi, su kirliliği ve atık yönetiminin öyküde çevresel krizin birbirine bağlı tezahürleri olarak nasıl temsil edildiğini incelemek için kavramsal bir çerçeve sunmaktadır. Makale ayrıca, Rich'in çevresel sorunlar üzerine çalışan ancak bunların sonuçlarından maddi ve duygulanımsal düzeyde kopuk kalan bir anlatıcı aracılığıyla akademinin çevresel yıkıma karşı geliştirdiği duygusal ve entelektüel mesafeyi eleştirdiğini ileri sürmektedir. Bilgi üretimi ile etik sorumluluk arasındaki kopukluğu görünür kılan öykü, hem kurumların hem de onların ürettiği öznelliklerin çevresel krizdeki suç ortaklığını sorgulamakta; bunların, çoğu zaman çevresel krize anlamlı biçimde müdahale etmekte başarısız olurken sorumluluğu en az taşıyabilecek olanların üzerine nasıl yüklediklerini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu yönüyle öykü, kurumsal işleyiş bozukluğuna yönelik bir eleştiri geliştirerek, günümüzün en acil krizlerinden biri olan antropojenik ekolojik şiddet karşısında akademinin hem sorumluluk iddialarını hem de bu krize etkili biçimde karşılık verebilme kapasitesini tartışmaya açmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Nathaniel Rich, Hermie, Anthropojenik ekolojik şiddet, Ekoeleştiri, Eleştirel Hayvan Çalışmaları

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"Thirty years ago, we had a chance to save the planet. The science
of climate change was settled. The world was ready to act.
Almost nothing stood in our way – except ourselves."
Nathaniel Rich[4]

Although the onset of environmental degradation is frequently traced to the Industrial Revolution, the transcontinental exchanges of fauna and flora triggered by the exploration and colonization of the Americas, commonly termed the Columbian Exchange, arguably constituted earlier and equally significant disruptions to Earth's ecosystems and the global natural order. The term "Columbian Exchange," coined by Alfred W. Crosby in 1972, refers to the massive transatlantic transfer of human populations, animals, plants, crops, diseases, as well as associated cultural practices and technologies between Europe (the old world) to the Americas (the new world) following 1492. This perspective not only articulates the temporal continuity of ecological violence but also exposes the expansive spatial and ecological diversity it has affected, framing such destruction as part of an Anthropocene-scale process. The term "anthropogenic" denotes human causation, and the phrase "anthropogenic ecological violence" therefore describes systemic and direct or indirect intentional environmental harm, rather than mere damage, resulting from human activity that is framed as violence. In ecocritical discourse, the phrase "anthropogenic ecological violence" encompasses environmental destruction, habitat loss, climate change impacts, and biodiversity collapse.[5] In contrast to terms such as environmental destruction, environmental degradation, extinction, and ecological crisis, anthropogenic ecological violence shifts attention toward harm that is registered through more immediate, visible, and attributable consequences.[6] Its effects are often more readily perceptible, and questions of power, ethical accountability, and personal responsibility can be more directly delineated.[7] Moreover, this concept implies a degree of awareness on the part of the agent, insofar as harm is enacted despite being recognized as unavoidable or acceptable. In this article, the term anthropogenic ecological violence is used as an analytical concept to designate environmentally mediated harm produced by human systems. Although no fully formalized theory of anthropogenic ecological violence yet exists, the concept can function as a productive analytical framework within environmental ethics, political ecology, and critical theory for articulating human-induced harm at systemic and ecological scales. Informed by established

[4] In his article, "Losing Earth: The Decade We Almost Stopped Climate Change," published in *The New York Times Magazine* in August 2018, Nathaniel Rich argues that between 1979 and 1989 scientists had already identified the causes and potential consequences of climate change, yet meaningful action to prevent it was never taken. This article was later expanded into a book titled *Losing Earth: A Recent History*. In the book, Rich examines the origins of modern climate change denial, detailing how propaganda, disinformation, and misconduct by the fossil fuel industry and political leaders contributed to the rise of climate denialism.

[5] The term "anthropogenic ecological violence" is used in this study as a descriptive and analytical heuristic rather than as a fully systematized theoretical model. Conceptually, the term draws on established strands of environmental humanities, particularly Johan Galtung's notion of structural violence, Rob Nixon's theory of slow violence, and Ulrich Beck's theory of risk society, as well as broader debates surrounding the Anthropocene. Accordingly, it is employed here to articulate ecological degradation rather than to advance a self-contained theoretical framework. Although the concept has not been formalized as a distinct theory, the phrase "anthropogenic ecological violence" appears in environmental, philosophical, and artistic discourse. For example, Maya Kóvskaya uses the term in her discussion of ecological destruction and environmental responsibility in *Earthbound/Earth bound* (2015), while Adam Lobel engages with it in relation to animism, ecological ethics, and human-nature relations in "Dead Turtle Animist" (2021). Relatedly, Brandon Absher develops a conceptualization of "ecological violence" in "Toward a Concept of Ecological Violence: Heidegger and Mountain Justice" (2012), theorizing ecological harm as relational and embedded in human-environment interactions. Taken together, these usages suggest that the phrase operates as an emerging descriptive vocabulary for articulating human-induced ecological harm, rather than a fully consolidated theoretical framework.

[6] Environmental destruction refers to the severe, often irreversible damage that collapses an ecosystem whereas environmental degradation refers to the deterioration of ecosystems such as pollution or deforestation. Extinction, as a biological concept, refers to the disappearance of a species and typically unfolds as a slow and cumulative process. Ecological crisis generally designates large scale environmental breakdowns, such as climate crisis. These terms commonly describe processes that develop over extended temporal horizons.

[7] For instance, knowingly cutting down a forest for development constitutes anthropogenic ecological violence due to its immediate and visible ecological harm. In contrast, climatic changes and ecological changes resulting from deforestation exemplify slow violence as they occur gradually and often remain difficult to detect.

strands in the environmental humanities and broader Anthropocene debates, it is employed here as a descriptive-critical heuristic rather than a closed or systematized theoretical model. It provides a critical lens for interpreting environmentally mediated forms of harm that are unevenly distributed across human and nonhuman life, manifesting not only in damaged landscapes but also in relations of perception, memory, and ethical responsibility. Consequently, this article not only offers a critical reading of Nathaniel Rich's short yet powerful narrative "Hermie" as a literary representation of anthropogenic ecological violence but also develops a working definition of anthropogenic ecological violence while establishing its conceptual boundaries.

Anthropogenic ecological violence invites comparison with, yet more significantly stands in contrast to slow violence as a distinct modality of harm. While the visibility, identifiable perpetrator, and intentional nature of anthropogenic ecological violence are evident, slow violence occurs at an imperceptibly gradual pace, involves multiple agents, and is carried out without full awareness of its consequences. Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" refers to "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (Nixon, 2011, p. 2). Accordingly, several environmental conflicts can be categorized as examples of slow violence: "Climate change, the thawing cryosphere, toxic drift, biomagnification, deforestation, the radioactive aftermaths of wars, acidifying oceans, and a host of other slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes…" (Nixon, 2011, p. 2). For Nixon, temporality is the decisive factor in apprehending the magnitude of violence and he foregrounds forms of destruction that accumulate gradually over time rather than the sudden and immediate forms of harm. Prior to Rob Nixon, environmental harm had already been theorized through concepts such as structural violence, environmental justice, and political ecology, all of which foreground systemic, unequal, and often invisible forms of harm. For instance, Johan Galtung's concept of "structural violence," introduced in the late 1960s, considers violence as not only direct physical harm but also indirect, not only physical but also psychological, and not always intentional or visible. Moreover, in the 1990s, he developed the notion of "cultural violence," in which violence is embedded in social norms, ideologies, and institutions, is normalized, and is rendered largely visible (Pickett and O'Lear, 2024, p. 30). Accordingly, environmental destruction is considered acceptable under the name of progress. From the 1970s through the 1990s, environmental harm was increasingly considered as a political issue encompassing resource extraction, land dispossession, and environmental inequality, and was consequently analyzed in terms of power, inequality, and political economy. The Environmental Justice Movement in the U.S. in the 1980s introduced terms like "environmental racism" and "toxic injustice" and stated environmental harm as a justice issue because it is violence disproportionately affecting marginalized groups and races. Likewise, in the 1970s, the concept of "ecocide" emerged within legal discourse, often with reference to the Vietnam War and its large-scale destruction of ecosystems. Ulrich Beck's "risk society theory" in the 1980s also explains how modernity produces systemic environmental risks that are invisible, delayed, and unevenly distributed. Recently, environmental violence has also been framed as a security issue, since resource scarcity resulting from environmental degradation is seen as generating instability and conflict.[8]

Across historical, geographical, and cultural contexts, thinkers, literary authors, and creative artists have engaged with ecology-centered ideas, producing works that respond to environmental concerns and interrogate the relationship between humans and the natural world. Mark Martin's edited volume, *I'm with the Bears: Short Stories from a Damaged Planet* (2011), as an example, assembles a diverse range

[8] For a further reading on ecological violence see Cusato, E. and Tamburello S. (2025). Ecological violence fast and slow: International law, natural resources in the OPT, and the ICJ advisory opinion, *ESIL Reflections* 14:1.

of thought-provoking narratives that examine the socio-ecological, environmental, ethical, and ontological conditions of the contemporary era, commonly referred to as the Anthropocene. Proposed by Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer in 2000, the Anthropocene is often defined as a geological epoch in which atmospheric, biospheric, and other interconnected Earth systems are profoundly shaped and increasingly endangered by human activity. Through literary and speculative storytelling that engages questions of ecological responsibility, ethics, and justice, the collection offers alternative modes of imagining coexistence and possible harmonious futures. Consequently, the volume invites diverse critical readings informed by various contemporary approaches such as ecocriticism, posthumanism, decolonial theory, animal studies, and Anthropocene studies.

Among the short stories in the collection is contemporary American author Nathaniel Rich's "Hermie," a work of climate fiction that, in the vein of magical realism, weaves together realist and supernatural perspectives to explore the anxieties of the Anthropocene. The story "is both 'improbable' and 'unreal,' in its use of narrative repertoires of magic realism that manifest the impact of climate disruption, and overwhelmingly 'real,' in its vivid externalisation of climate anxiety" (Filipovic, 2025, p. 198).[9] The story addresses still timely and crucial ecological concerns, including the climate crisis, water pollution, species extinction, coastal urbanization, waste management, contamination, and how these complications underscore ecological interconnectedness and balance.[10] "Hermie"[11] offers discussions on systemic and intentional anthropogenic ecological violence, understood as harm inflicted on ecosystems, habitats, and both human and nonhuman beings through environmental degradation, exploitation, denial, and neglect, while also emphasizing that the effects of such violence can be observed in relatively short timeframes. While often intersecting with structurally embedded and systemically produced forms of harm associated with industrialization and capitalism, anthropogenic ecological violence is distinguished by its relative immediacy, visibility, and potential for attribution to identifiable human actions and decisions. Consequently, this article argues that in "Hermie" Rich problematizes academia's role and position in environmental destruction, exposing the ethical and practical limitations of academic knowledge production through the experiences of an academic who engages with environmental issues while remaining emotionally and practically detached from ecological crisis.

"Hermie" unfolds around an extraordinary and unexpected encounter between a man and his imaginary childhood friend in an uncommon setting, a hotel's communal bathroom. Through the narrative, the

[9] As Filipovic claims, "[t]hrough its use of magic realism that opens up a zone of indiscernibility between our fantasies and our realities, the short story articulates affective incursions of abject realities into the symbolic assemblages of scientific knowledge" (2025, p. 192). Filipovic argues that magic realism is particularly well suited to representing ecological problems. By blurring the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman, it renders visible what is otherwise invisible or not immediately perceptible. Through magic realism, readers become more attuned to the psychological and immediate consequences of ecological crises, while also challenging scientific knowledge, which does not typically acknowledge emotion or imagination. More importantly, because magic realism operates through ambiguity and indeterminacy, it provides an apt framework for representing ecological crises, which are themselves often ambiguous and indeterminate. Filipovic, whose article remains one of the very few scholarly studies devoted to this short story, approaches Rich's text primarily through a posthumanist and new materialist framework, foregrounding the ontological entanglement of human and nonhuman life within a Latourian "new climatic regime." His reading emphasizes posthuman relationality, affect, and ecological interconnectedness, while also highlighting the limits of cognitive mastery.

[10] "Hermie" is both a climate fiction story and a fable. A short story featuring talking animals is typically classified as a fable. Such narratives often incorporate supernatural elements to convey a moral lesson or articulate a broader philosophical truth. The attribution of human characteristics to nonhuman beings, commonly termed anthropomorphism, is another theoretical concern, as it raises questions regarding the projection of human traits onto animals and may also be discussed in terms of anthropogenic ecological violence. However, in the short story examined in this study, the animal functions as an imaginary companion rather than as a literal nonhuman entity. Consequently, questions regarding anthropomorphism and species hierarchy are only briefly addressed here, as they merit a separate study in their own right.

[11] Although frequently categorized as climate fiction, "Hermie" can also be situated within the framework of Blue Humanities, which "explores human-water interactions through socio-cultural, literary, historical, ethical, theoretical, and ecological perspectives, while also engaging with related scientific data on oceanic and limnological systems" as a transdisciplinary field (Oppermann, 2025).

autodiegetic narrator remains anonymous and is addressed only as "old friend" (Rich, 2011, p. 93) by his imaginary companion—a talking hermit crab associated with his childhood summers on the world-famous Sarasota Beach in Florida, USA, which is known for its crystal-white quartz sand and turquoise waters. The narrator, an academic specializing in Marine Biology, is preparing to present a paper on the "sustainability of coastal environments" at an international conference on limnology (the scientific study of inland waters) and oceanology (the scientific study of the oceans) which has been held annually for eighteen years. The conference takes place in Salzburg at the Sheraton, a luxury chain hotel renowned for its spaciousness, meticulous maintenance, and cleanliness (Rich, 2011, p. 92). Precisely because of this controlled and sanitized environment, the narrator is profoundly unsettled when he encounters in the restroom near the "pure white porcelain" sink "a giant Coenobita clypeatus," [sic] a hermit crab (Rich, 2011, p. 92), whose unexpected presence disrupts the hotel's regime of order and exposes the intrusion of the nonhuman into an ostensibly sterile, human-centered space. It can also be argued that an obsession with cleanliness contributes to the distancing of humans from nature. The detergents and cleaning agents in use produce chemical waste that resists assimilation within natural systems, while what is designated as 'dirt' or 'filth' frequently consists of organic matter that is neither inherently impure nor ecologically disruptive.

The need for nature's empowering qualities is reflected in a ritual the narrator has turned into a habitual practice. Struggling with performance anxiety, the academic retreats to a communal hotel restroom, where he closes his eyes and repeats "like a mantra, three words: Calm Blue Ocean" (Rich, 2011, p. 91), intended to tranquilize his nerves and steady himself before delivering his paper on coastal habitat change, a pressing environmental concern. Later, the narrative reveals that this self-soothing phrase evokes memories of his carefree childhood summers on the beaches of Sarasota, particularly at Turtle Beach. Through this ritualized return to nature in memory, the story subtly suggests that the narrator seeks emotional restoration from the very environment he now engages with only intellectually.

As another source of emotional empowerment, the narrator's imaginary childhood friend, embodied as a hermit crab, suddenly reappears. This reappearance marks a decisive turning point in the narrative, as the nonhuman figure's altered body exposes both the material consequences of anthropogenic ecological violence and the narrator's ethical detachment. In the bathroom, the narrator unexpectedly encounters his long-absent imaginary childhood friend and, despite their former intimacy, initially struggles to recognize the hermit crab. The narrator attempts to offer logical and scientific explanations for his inability to identify his closest companion, whose body he "remembered so well" (Rich, 2011, p. 92). "Perhaps it was because he had changed his shell" (Rich, 2011, p. 92), the narrator speculates. The narrator's comparison of the hermit crab's former and current shells clearly illustrates the immediate impacts of anthropogenic ecological violence rather than the hardly noticeable slow violence:

> Gone was the buyscon spiratum [sic] I remembered so well: a perfect pear whelk, with alternating bands of burnt orange and nacre, polished by the tide to a delicate glow; its long tapering stem; its tight spiral apex; and the open fold revealing a darker orange interior—an elegant, if compact, home. In its place was a filthy, unwieldy, carbuncled husk, to which there clung small bits of wet garbage and sea gunk. On closer examination it was clear that two common shells—one dark brown, the other a dreary shade of green—had been roughly fused together. There is no scientific term for such a monstrosity. (Rich, 2011, p. 92)

The narrator's choice of wording, particularly the implication that the hermit crab 'preferred' to change its shell, reveals a broader tendency to displace human responsibility for the harmful consequences of environmental degradation. In this framing, the suffering of the hermit crab is naturalized as an inevitable byproduct of marine ecosystem disruption, including ocean pollution and oil spills. This

rationalization also reflects the academic subject's reliance on scientific discourse as a mechanism for managing emotional disturbance, echoing a broader tendency within contemporary academia to privilege instrumental and technical rationality over ethical and affective responsiveness. Within this context, Rich's attention to the hermit crab is significant, as the organism inhabits empty gastropod shells as its "home." As it grows, it abandons its original shell in favor of a larger one. This continuous process of shell exchange can be understood as both an expression of identity formation and a search for belonging, as well as a metaphorical condition of existence within a borrowed structure, underscoring the interdependence between organisms. The reliance on external shells for survival foregrounds themes of vulnerability, exposure, isolation, identity crisis, connection, endurance, and transformation. At the same time, this adaptive process may be interpreted as a strategy of natural survival, insofar as the creature demonstrates the capacity to appropriate new forms of protection in response to growth. However, the altered shell cannot be reduced to a simple, unavoidable, and ordinary consequence of physical development. Rather, it signals the material effects of the Anthropocene on nonhuman bodies. The narrator comes to recognize this condition upon hearing the hermit crab's detailed account. The deformed shell thus functions as evidence of anthropogenic ecological violence, reflecting the cumulative impact of pollution, habitat destruction, and forced adaptation. The marine creature has undergone significant transformation within a relatively short temporal span, and he confesses: "I can't even recognize myself" (Rich, 2011, p. 93). This statement ultimately underscores the extent to which the organism has been transformed beyond natural variation, compelled to inhabit a condition of imposed and unstable embodiment.

Ironically, the narrator's academic expertise and research focus center on the sustainability of coastal environments, including erosion, rising sea levels, and other impacts on coastal composition (Rich, 2011, p. 96), various serious climatic challenges that the hermit crab has long been experiencing. However, the narrator appears to be encountering these anthropogenic ecological conflicts on an intimate level for the first time, which reflects his hypocrisy because as a member of devoted academics working on those issues, he seems unaware of "the ecological realities they are intended to change" (Filipovic, 2025, p. 198). For example, upon recognition, the narrator and the hermit crab exchange some fond memories of funny adventures from childhood years. Each memory revolves around another game the narrator played on the shore together with his imaginary friends called "the crew," including the hermit crab as his best one of "the gang" (Rich, 2011, p. 95). The narrator, then, learns from the creature that the other members of the crew are all dead from poisoning, and, as the only survivor, the hermit crab suffers not only from a necessary metamorphosis but also from enforced displacement. The tragic loss of imaginary friends or Hermie's misery is not just their "story of defeat, of course, it mirrors the narrator's own and behind the nostalgic exchange of their encounter resides the familiar loss of innocence and sincerity" (Filipovic, 2025, p. 198). The creature is forced to leave the Turtle Beach, which was the original home where they used to play games. The beach has been exploited, and columns have been inserted to construct an apartment building "much too close to the water" (Rich, 2011, p. 95). This construction creates hurricanes that gradually convert the natural climate and eventually destroy the whole beach. "The marine life has been devastated by rising sea levels, ocean acidification, extreme weather patterns and accelerating erosion that 'swallowed up the beaches whole' (Rich, 2011, p. 95), resulting in an extensive loss of habitat and a raging torrent of defenseless non-human refugees, pouring further inland, looking for shelter" (Filipovic, 2025, p. 198). The creature is then forced to find another safe place to continue living but is unable to because of other environmental problems such as "sticky water, sharp unnatural pebbles, and invisible seaweed that tastes awful" (Rich, 2011, p. 96). This displacement "evokes the current issue of climate refugees, who are forced to leave their homes because of grave natural disasters or other climate-related reasons" (Fernández Gabás, 2024, p. 9). Thus, among

the consequences of anthropogenic ecological violence is displacement, "defined as relocation in response to an adverse change in the natural environment" (Chesler, 2024, p. 263).[12] Both humans and nonhumans have been forced to move their natural environment for a variety of reasons. "Environmental displacement"[13] is typically "driven by both negative environmental factors in the place of origin and those motivated by positive environmental factors in the destination" (Chesler, 2024, p. 263).[14] While environmental displacement is often theorized as driven by both adverse conditions at the point of origin and the promise of more favorable environments elsewhere, the narrative foregrounds a striking asymmetry: displacement is propelled almost entirely by environmental degradation, with scant evidence of viable or desirable destinations. In this sense, the story points to a world in which the pull of environmental promise has eroded, leaving only the pressures of ecological decline.

On top of physical and spatial changes the hermit crab has had to endure, it later becomes clear that the hermit crab's presence in the narrator's world is crippled when the narrator's mother warns him against maintaining imaginary childhood companions as he grows older. Consequently, despite his need for emotional support, he has begun repressing this imaginary friend and relying solely on himself and human companions. Animals, as natural companions in childhood, are gradually relegated to the periphery with maturity, reflecting a growing estrangement from the nonhuman world. This affective distancing resonates with the asymmetrical dynamics of environmental displacement, in which the erosion of viable ecological relations leaves individuals not only physically displaced but also affectively and conceptually unmoored from the environments they inhabit. Yet even the narrator's career choice is shaped by his childhood animal companions, suggesting that animals persist as indispensable elements of human life, even as they are pushed to the margins.

Although the academic is an expert on water pollution and species extinction, this encounter confronts him with new and unsettling knowledge about the fate of the hermit crab and other marine creatures who constitute "the crew." The narrator and Hermie used to play "The King's Castle" and "Man-buried-alive" on Sarasota Beach (Rich, 2011, p. 94). The beach has likewise undergone an anthropogenic transformation of the coastal landscape; it is no longer the idyllic shore where the narrator once observed the sea, marine life, and sand and gained intimate ecological knowledge and awareness, but instead has been reconfigured as a space that reflects coastal urbanization, a dramatic conversion of natural beaches into built, commodified, and artificial environments. This spatial reordering constitutes a form of anthropogenic ecological violence, erasing ecological memory and lifestyle, completely severing affective relations between humans and more-than-human world. Hence, just as the hermit crab was banished from the narrator's world by his mother, he is now nearing the end of his existence

[12] Exploring Environmental Violence: Perspectives, Experience, Expression, and Engagement (2024) explores violence from a variety of perspectives, specifically focusing on the environmental consequences that jeopardize the rights of humans and nonhumans and sustainable life. The volume discusses how the temporal and spatial elements of environmental violence are made visible or invisible. The book lists the impacts of environmental violence, such as the political, the bodily, social, and agricultural impacts, and discusses various responses and resistances to them.

[13] "Environmental displacement is now a top policy priority among the world's major intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and national governments, and is already influencing decision-making considerations across areas of defense, foreign relations, homeland security, and immigration" (ibid.).

[14] The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines "environmentally displaced persons" as "[p]ersons who are displaced within their country of habitual residence or who have crossed an international border and for whom environmental degradation, deterioration or destruction is a major cause of their displacement, although not necessarily the sole one" (Melde, 2014, 13). Furthermore, "forced displacement" refers to "the involuntary movement, individually or collectively, of persons from their country or community, notably for reasons of armed conflict, civil unrest, or natural or man-made catastrophes" (Melde, 2014, 12). Within this framework, these definitions may be extended to nonhuman beings, whose experiences, particularly those resulting from anthropogenic causes closely parallel those of human populations. In brief, the term "environmental migrants" denotes individuals who relocate due to environmental factors such as climate change or ecological degradation, whereas the term "environmental refugees" remains without formal legal recognition.

in the natural world, as this system has turned into a monstrosity due to pollution and toxins. He is being erased from physical existence, just as he was once wiped from innocent childhood memory.

The hermit crab, reminiscent of several human and nonhuman beings in the actual world, emerges as a victim of climate change, environmental degradation, and displacement. "As a climate refugee, driven away from his natural habitat, Hermie is desperate for a new home that he hopes the narrator will be able to provide" (Filipovic, 2025, p. 198). Having no place to go Hermie asks the narrator to take him home, "a safe, clean home" (Rich, 2011, p. 97), a request the narrator immediately refuses. He rejects Hermie's desire to live together again in the same place, initially by pointing out that he would not be able to pass through airport security (Rich, 2011, p. 97). This stance displays not only the boundary between the human and the nonhuman, but also the line between those granted the possibility of life and those from whom it is denied. In this context, the domestic space no longer appears as a site of hospitability, but rather as a space of exclusion. Ironically, the narrator explains that his wife is allergic to shellfish (Rich, 2011, p. 97), suggesting that the hermit crab is no longer regarded as a companion or even a living being, but rather commodified and reduced to a mere source of food. Seeing a marine creature solely as a food product can be understood as a form of anthropogenic ecological violence, as this hierarchical mindset entails a violation of animal rights and, ultimately, contributes to processes of species extinction, a consequence that may materialize far sooner than is generally recognized.

Just as the hermit crab's life has been irrevocably altered over the years following their separation, so too has the narrator's life. No longer a ten-year-old boy, he has grown up becoming a professional, getting married, and even having a daughter who, ironically, has never been to the ocean or encountered marine life. Even Hermie's questions aimed at getting to know the narrator's daughter unsettle him; expressing his displeasure with the remark "I didn't like this line of conversation" (Rich, 2011, p. 97), he becomes uneasy at the thought that the being with whom he once shared his own childhood might now form a bond with his own child. Accordingly, in his adult world, there is no longer any space for the creature that symbolizes childhood imagination and purity. More broadly, this arrangement produces a world in which new generations of children grow up without nonhuman companions, thereby fostering forms of subjectivity in which being human itself is increasingly detached from relational ties to the nonhuman world. This refusal signals the narrator's loss of innocence and his diminished capacity to sustain intimate, non-instrumental relationships in an adult world increasingly detached from nature. With no alternative, the hermit crab reluctantly accepts his fate; yet, finding his loneliness and enforced displacement unbearable, he ultimately asks his "old friend" to return him to the toilet so that he may be flushed back into the ocean. Awkwardly, the beach on the ocean shore with which he is familiar has already been destroyed; consequently, his desire to return home effectively constitutes an act of self-annihilation, for the creature has no place to go. The hermit crab's death symbolically represents the death of the narrator's childhood and innocence. At the same time, the narrator fails both to help the creature, and paradoxically, in Norgaard's terms, "to integrate … knowledge into everyday life or to transform it into social action" (as qtd. in Filipovic, 2025, p. 199). Complaining that, with his worn-out body, climbing into the toilet would both be difficult and time-consuming, Hermie asks the narrator for one final favor, namely, to carry him to the bathroom and flush the toilet once he has sunk to the bottom of the bowl. Although the narrator thinks that he momentarily lost his ability to think rationally when he first encountered Hermie, he makes no effort to consider how he might save him in response to this touching request. Instead, he simply nods and says, "Bye, Hermie" (Rich, 2011, p. 99). Thus, he shows that he is willing to let Hermie, once his closest companion, disappear into filth. As the narrator flushes the toilet and Hermie spins in the water, the colors emerging from his deformed shell vividly bring back memories of the games they used to play together on the beach. While Hermie vanishes, the narrator's

childhood memories flash before his eyes one last time. He convinces himself that helping Hermie disappear is the right thing to do, yet he feels no shame in throwing his old friend into the toilet as if he were filth meant to be disposed of immediately.

In "Hermie," Rich critiques academic detachment from ecological crisis through the narrator's emotional disengagement. By the end of the narrative, the narrator is preoccupied solely with his composure, his paper, and the audience's reaction to it. His remark, "I didn't even feel nervous when I delivered it" (Rich, 2011, p. 99), signals a moment of personal achievement, as he delivers the paper with apparent self-control. Yet this seeming triumph is overshadowed by a far more troubling development, for his newfound composure coincides with the deliberate suppression of his emotional self. In other words, although he overcomes his anxiety and fear of public speaking, he simultaneously resolves to rid himself of his emotions, most drastically through the killing of his old friend. The symbolic murder of this acquaintance, who represents his innocence, marks a decisive rupture with his former identity. What appears to be personal growth thus reveals an overwhelming loss, as success is ultimately achieved at the expense of emotional integrity. Moreover, because this so-called achievement follows a profound detachment from nature, any sense of balance and wholeness is irreparably destroyed, even by an academic who has ostensibly devoted his career to ecological equilibrium, the interrelatedness of species, and the preservation and sustainability of life. While he revels in academic success, he becomes increasingly diminished as a human being, acting solely through calculated control.

Rich's narrative problematizes how academia, despite being personally implicated in the very problems within its field of expertise, opts not to pursue substantive solutions but instead eliminates those who are directly, immediately, and even potentially fatally, affected by the issue. At the end of the story, the narrator notes that his listeners number approximately twenty-five. During the cocktail reception following the conference, he states that four audience members congratulated him and expresses his intention to submit his paper to *Hydrobiology Review*, one of the field's prestigious academic journals, for publication. Given that the conference, held annually at the international level for many years, to addresses urgent environmental crises that threaten ecological and social systems, including "organochlorine contamination of the Bering Sea's Steller sea lion pup population" (Rich, 2011, p. 91), Rich draws attention to the limited reception of such research within highly specialized academic contexts. While these figures do not in themselves indicate academic failure, they invite reflection on the relationship between specialized scholarly knowledge and its broader social significance. More importantly, however, the story's critique of academia emerges through the narrator himself. Although he is a specialist in coastal sustainability and environmental degradation, he remains unable to respond meaningfully to Hermie's suffering, despite directly witnessing the consequences of the ecological crises that constitute the subject of his research. His failure to alleviate Hermie's plight exposes a gap between knowledge production and ethical action, suggesting that expertise alone does not necessarily translate into responsibility or intervention. As such, the narrative interrogates academia's capacity to confront anthropogenic ecological violence not merely as an object of study but as an urgent ethical reality demanding meaningful engagement.

Known for his environmentally themed works, Nathaniel Rich's "Hermie" explores the fragile bond between humans, nonhuman beings, and the natural landscape in the Anthropocene. The story can be read as a critique of anthropogenic spatial practices, particularly through focus on the transformation of coastal landscapes, which is another example of anthropogenic ecological violence that disrupts natural marine life (the sand, the sea, and the marine creatures) and converts natural environments into artificial spaces. It also exposes the ecological consequences of coastal urbanization, especially the

commodification and destruction of beaches. Centered on the consequences of environmental degradation, the narrative suggests that life is fundamentally enriched through shared modes of existence between human and nonhuman entities, emphasizing interspecies coexistence and ecological relationality. Rich foregrounds the necessity of multispecies coexistence, emphasizes the need for deeper connections with the natural world, and exposes the dangers of ecological imbalance, while critically examining humanity's exploitative, violent, and irreversible impacts on nature. "Hermie" narrates persistent anthropogenic ecological violence through immediate, visible, and directly identifiable forms of harm, while also conceptualizing violence as the outcome of deeply entrenched economic, political, cultural, and ideological power relations embedded within capitalist and anthropocentric systems of exploitation.

The two central characters of the story embody opposing worldviews: While the narrator represents academia marked by knowledge production without corresponding ethical or practical engagement, the hermit crab signifies the narrator's repressed humane, innocent, emotionally attuned, and ethically responsive self. However, the story's ending implies that even if the narrator were to reunite with his better self, he would ultimately feel compelled to abandon it in order to survive within a harsh world, one that merely performs awareness of anthropogenic ecological violence while offering no obvious and meaningful solutions. In this context, considering his other writings, which often employ a more forceful rhetorical mode than "Hermie," and taking into account Nathaniel Rich's position as a Professor of Practice in the Environmental Studies program at Tulane University, his critique may be read not as targeting a single academic figure but as a broader interrogation of the structural functioning of academia and the academic community. From this perspective, Rich's institutional location can also be seen as part of the interpretive framework through which his critique of academia is articulated. Through this narrative, Rich, who has written both fiction and nonfiction examining political and corporate failures to prevent climate change and other ecological problems, offers a critique of academia while simultaneously opening a space for readers to reconsider and confront their complicity in anthropogenic ecological violence. After all, as "Hermie" illustrates, in destroying the natural world, humanity is ultimately destroying itself.

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