

Eco-Narratives in Graphic Novels: Visual Storytelling and Environmental Ethics

Mehdya¹, Dr. Lakhvinder Singh Bedi²

¹Research Scholar, Department of English, Desh Bhagat University, Punjab, India.

²Professor, Department of English, Desh Bhagat University, Punjab, India.

Article Received: 27/08/2026

Article Accepted:29/09/2026

Published Online:30/09/2026

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2026.8.09.378

Abstract

The paper focuses on sequential art and environmental ethics and will suggest that graphic novels serve as effective eco-narratives within the framework of the Anthropocene. Focusing on Una's *Becoming Unbecoming* and Mirion Malle's *This Is How I Disappear*, with comparative references to works by Derf Backderf, Shaun Tan, and Benjamin Dix, the research analyzes how formal elements such as panels, gutters, and spatialized time create a multimodal ecological discourse. Based on ecocriticism, deep ecology, and ecofeminism, the paper illustrates the connections between personal trauma, gender-based violence, and mental distress with the failures of nature and ethics. Landscapes and domestic spaces are introduced as polysituated spaces of social abandonment and ecological crisis. The paper has concluded that graphic novels are unflatteners of perspectives and mobilizers of environmental imagination, which promotes an ethic of care and planetary responsibility.

Keywords: Environmental Ethics, Anthropocene, Polysituated, Ecological Crisis

Introduction

The modern environmental crisis that can be summed up in the name of Anthropocene poses a deep challenge to the conventional storytelling. With the human race struggling to comprehend the magnitude and intricacy of climate change, habitat degradation, and systematic contamination, the literary community has been confronted with what Amitav Ghosh is describing as a great derangement. This disorder is understood as the failure of serious literary fiction on a systemic level to incorporate the uncanny and grotesque realities of ecological disintegration in its story lines. The environmental cataclysms are

pushed to the periphery of science fiction or policy discussion in traditional novels, whose historical interest in individual moral agency and backgrounded settings. Nonetheless, the graphic novel, as a form of representation, provides an effective alternative to such a representational dead end. Through the visualization of temporality by spatializing of the graphic narratives, the boundaries of human subjectivity and the natural world are reformulated and reversed drawing the environment not as a passive source but as an active subject of the narrative mix.

The analysis of these ecocriticism ecofiction is required to give the required framework, and that is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. In the realm of graphic novels, ecocriticism is broadened to encompass deep ecology, blue humanities and ecofeminism in an attempt to answer the question of how sequential art can create eco-consciousness and encourage readers to take sustainable action. The special ability of the graphic novel to employ a mix or a mixage of depiction and description makes them a multimodal form very applicable in creating awareness of the performance and social-political issues concerning the environment.

Deep Ecology and the Formal Ethics

Within the context of eco-narratives in graphic novels, this novel by Mirion Malle, *This Is How I Disappear*, does not consider trauma as something in the past but rather as a continuous process of embodiment, which affects how people interact with each other, relationships, and the self-concept. The visual process of the graphic medium itself is an ethical visual ecology: dull colour palettes, twisted panels, abstract fluid motion of visuals reflect Clara dissociation, panic, inability to describe the pain. These visual disturbances parallels ecological disbalance positing that trauma such as environmental degradation is widespread, cumulative and at times invisible. It is the instances of empathy and unity that balance out the moments of loneliness and emotional overwhelm, noting how weakly interdependent social spaces are, in which supportive efforts, with the best intentions to do so, find it impossible to heal the invisible hurts fully.

Malle also places personal suffering in the broader context of culture and structure, revealing social disposition to deny female trauma and reinforcing the importance of community, feminist solidarity and mental health care as part of the healing process. Following the examples of Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra, theorists of trauma, the narrative of the story favors fragmentation and silence and delayed understanding, confirming the notion that trauma is averse to linear narration. By using this visual narrative, the graphic novel broadens the eco-ethical discussion by connecting psychological survival, social responsibility and ethical care.

Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher, popularized a philosophical movement called deep ecology, which offers a strong framework to define unsustainable practices and promote a worldview on the basis of the natural world value itself. The movement developed by Naess is developed on eight underlying themes including inherent value, diversity, vital needs, human interference, quality of life, policy change, population and the need to act. These themes are never simply thematic issues in the graphic novel context, but they are incorporated into formal grammar of graphic novels. Graphic novels help attract the readers into the material world, capturing them intellectually and sensuously to make the environmental problems seem more alive and immediate, and its conformity of plot, setting, panels, and the plurality of voices makes this more convincing.

As an example, the way in which the relationship between human and nature is described through graphic novels tends to emphasize a human approach to the issue and, at the same time, offers illustrative examples of profound ecological exploration. This twofold vision enables the reader to observe how human actions, i.e., plastic waste management, inefficient waste disposal and degradation of natural habitats affect the ecosystem globally. Through sequential art to portray these processes, artists such as Derf Backderf in *Trashed* are able to employ satirical realism and historical background to encourage readers to be responsive to the ecology of landfills as well as the overall effects of consumerism.

According to the approach of the eco-narratives in the graphic novels, *Becoming Unbecoming* by Una can be perceived as a potent combination of both the autobiographical witnessing and the cultural objection making the sexual violence a systemic phenomenon and not a singular event. The memoir also creates an ethical world, where the personal trauma cannot be disregarded concerning the social and institutional contexts that are affected by misogyny, victim-blaming, and silence through visual storytelling.

The interrupted designs, the broken chronology and interrupted visual constructions are reminiscent of the psychological dissociation and corrupted ethical frameworks that create the trauma ubiquitous yet unseen. The memoir also in eco-ethical ways compares personal pain to that of the entire society, revealing how the poisonous systems of culture allows suffering to continue. Based on the theory of trauma stated by Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Geoffrey Hartman and Dominick LaCapra, the narrative favors silence, repetition and nonlinearity as the formal manifestations of the traumatic memory. *Becoming Unbecoming* reclaims voice, focuses on feminist solidarity, and reinvents the process of telling stories graphically as a voice of ethical care and environmental responsibility by making personal suffering collective and witnessing.

The visual rhetoric of *Becoming Unbecoming* depends greatly on the spatial metaphors to describe both internal and external reality of trauma. Another common motif is the picture of the avatar of Una walking up a steep hill or mountain with the empty speech balloon trailing her. This interwovenness of pictures in the text unites the physical process of crossing the Yorkshire landscape with the psychological one of bearing an unspeakable secret and the wearing of the psychological burden of shame. The hill, in this way, is a figurative area which conveys the perplexing dulling processing of rape within Una and the uphill struggle to find justice within a victim-blaming culture.

The theme of trees plays a leading role in the memoir as well since it symbolizes the burden of trauma and the possibility of a new strength and growth. Relying on ecofeminism, Una investigates the way in which nature is not only a setting but also a central participant in the process of recovery. The repetitive nature of the natural images in the nightmares of Una is indicative of the extent to which the trauma has taken root in her mind, and the haptic quality of the drawings as this is created by soaking, scribbling and folding the paper is a way of invoking the reader to his/her own embodied experience of memory.

Although a lot of the scenery in the novel is coded as traumatic, Una also employs nature-related images as a recovery mechanism. This review demonstrates a relation in nature, women and trauma that eventually illustrate how ecofeminism and graphic storytelling are a remedy. Placing her own brutality in a broader social perspective, Una becomes empowered to her memories and appeals to fellow traveler to join her.

The novel is completed with full page pictures of the murdered ladies that might look like today giving the reader blank pages to reflect on. This is an artistic decision in which the white space gives respect to the victims in a manner the modern world culture was unable to, and it provided a space to reflect on and not to provide answers. This last chain of events gives us an implication that the identity of the planet and entanglements explained in affective world-making are the key to personal healing and social justice.

Conclusion

According to the analysis of Eco-Narratives in Graphic Novels, it can be seen that this is a dynamic and exciting field, in which visual narrative and environmental ethics are coming together to solve the most pressing crises of the time. With the close analysis of the *Becoming Unbecoming* by Una and the *This Is How I Disappear* by Mirion Malle, as well as the comparative analysis of works by Shaun Tan and Derf Backderf, this report has proven that the graphic novel is poised in a unique position to close the gap between personal trauma and magnificence of planetary crisis.

The creators unflatten our view by means of the formal features of the sequential art, including use of gutter space as the space of the environment and space-time of time as the slow violence, and require the reader to engage in the active imagination of the environment. The Yorkshire landscape, used by Una, and the domestic interior, used by Malle, are great metaphors of how the toxic social spaces and psychological emptiness are manifested in the ecological and ethical failures.

Finally, these graphic narratives create an ethic of care and a planetary responsibility. They transcend the individual moral adventure to demonstrate that our personal, collective and ecological identities are inseparable. The graphic novel provides a powerful engagement tool that can re-create environmental boundary lines and can discover the ecological knowledge encrypted in serial art, in age of anthropocene. These visual eco-narratives offer an important choice of the so-called decolonial alternative and a new vision of how we relate to the wounded planet we call home as we navigate the great derangement of our time.

Works Cited

- Davies, Paul Fisher. "Anthroposcenes: Towards an Environmental Graphic Novel." *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-Century Writings*, no. 6, 2018, c21.openlibhums.org. Accessed 10 Jan. 2026.
- "What Grows in the Gutter? Eco-Comics." *ResearchGate*, www.researchgate.net. Accessed 10 Jan. 2026.
- Ratanaruamk, Siraprapha. "Humans and Animals in the Graphic Novel *The Call of the Wild* from the Perspective of Ecocriticism." *IAFOR Conference Proceedings*, papers.iafor.org. Accessed 10 Jan. 2026.
- Bennett, Alice. "Ecofeminism, Trauma, and Visual Metamorphosis in Una's *Becoming Unbecoming*." *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2021, comicsgrid.com. Accessed 10 Jan. 2026.
- "Filling the Silence: Giving Voice to Gender Violence in Una's Graphic Novel *Becoming Unbecoming*." *ResearchGate*, www.researchgate.net. Accessed 10 Jan. 2026.
- Rizvi, Uzma Aslam Khan. "Politics of Postmodern Multiculturalism in Shaun Tan's *The Arrival*: Reconfiguring the Subject as a Nomad." *Open Journals at Deakin*, ojs.deakin.edu.au. Accessed 10 Jan. 2026.
- "Respect the Power of the Beast: An Ecocritical Analysis into Interspecies Relationships in Shaun Tan's *Tales from the Inner City*." *ResearchGate*, www.researchgate.net. Accessed 10 Jan. 2026.

-
- Davies, ——. *Chapter 1*. City Research Online, openaccess.city.ac.uk. Accessed 10 Jan. 2026.
- “Graphic Narratives, Trauma and Social Justice.” *ResearchGate*, www.researchgate.net. Accessed 10 Jan. 2026.
- Una. *Becoming Unbecoming*. Verso, 2018.
- “This Is How I Disappear.” *Broken Frontier*, www.brokenfrontier.com. Accessed 10 Jan. 2026.
- “This Is How I Disappear.” *The Comics Journal*, tcj.com. Accessed 10 Jan. 2026.
- “Comics and Feminism.” *University of Helsinki*, tuhat.helsinki.fi. Accessed 10 Jan. 2026.
- “Becoming Unbecoming.” *Wikipedia*, en.wikipedia.org. Accessed 10 Jan. 2026.
- “Becoming Unbecoming by Una.” *Goodreads*, www.goodreads.com. Accessed 10 Jan. 2026.
- “Una’s *Becoming Unbecoming*, Visuality, and Sexual Trauma.” *University of Manchester Research Explorer*, research.manchester.ac.uk. Accessed 10 Jan. 2026.
- “Dwelling with Traumatic Memory through Embodied Drawing in the Structure of Graphic Novels.” *Modern Humanities Research Association*, mhra.org.uk. Accessed 10 Jan. 2026.
- “PTSD and Female Sexuality in the Aftermath of Childhood and Adolescent Sexual Abuse in Una’s *Becoming Unbecoming*.” *ResearchGate*, www.researchgate.net. Accessed 10 Jan. 2026.