

From Pestilence to Pollution: Eco-Criticism and the Transformation of the Four Horsemen in *Good Omens*

Rogini, P

Department of English, Vel Tech Rangarajan Dr. Sagunthala R&D Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai, India

Vinoth Kumar. M*

Department of English, Vel Tech Rangarajan Dr. Sagunthala R&D Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai, India

S. Ramesh

Department of English, NPR College of Engineering and Technology, Dindigul, India

K. Perumal

Department of English, Vel Tech High Tech Dr. Rangarajan Dr. Sakunthala Engineering College, Avadi, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract—Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman’s (1990) *Good Omens* offers an apocalyptic rewrite of mythology, making it clear that Pestilence has been overthrown and replaced with Pollution as one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. This replacement reflects contemporary shifts of the cultural spotlight from the fear of infectious disease, which peaked in the mid-20th century, to the slow, gradual, and pernicious environmental damage caused by human agency. This shift continues through the current concerns of ecological collapse and climate change. Conventional wisdom suggests that in the Book of Revelation, Pestilence represents disease and decay. However, in *Good Omens*, Pollution symbolizes humanity’s most pressing existential threat: ecological devastation. Unlike apocalyptic works like McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006) and *Mad Max*, which depict a braver, more violent apocalypse, *Good Omens* critiques environmental destruction through humor and satire. Pollution is characterized as a passive yet powerful protagonist, representing modernity’s acceptance of ecological violence, spoofing obscene consumerism, and highlighting the destructiveness of modern societal habits. Through the lens of eco-criticism, this paper discusses how *Good Omens* interrogates current ecological worries and contributes to the conversation around climate justice. This approach ultimately leads to an insightful exploration of how Pestilence’s reframing as Pollution challenges the tropes of the apocalyptic genre, engaging with broader ecocritical and cultural discussions about the role literature can play in shifting perspectives on the ecological crises faced today.

Index Terms—eco-mythology, pollution, Apocalypse, environmental anxiety, *Good Omens*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Four Horsemen, Conquest, War, Famine, and Pestilence, have been part of the symbolic depiction of the end times, personifying the destruction and chaos associated with the Apocalypse. These figures originate from the biblical Book of Revelation, in which Pestilence is typically understood to represent disease and plague. However, in Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman’s *Good Omens*, Pestilence is noticeably absent, having “retired in 1936 after penicillin was invented,” as the novel puts it (Pratchett & Gaiman, 1990). Enter Pollution, a “greasy, smog-veiled figure” who rides in a beaten-up vehicle, personifying the slow violence of industrial waste. This substitution reframes the apocalypse not as divine punishment, but as a self-engineered crisis precipitated by human negligence and industrial overreach.

According to Arnov (2000), the myth in modern literature has evolved to address changing cultural anxieties, reframing classic archetypes to capture twenty-first-century fears. In *Good Omens*, Pratchett and Gaiman modernize the Four Horsemen to reflect present-day concerns, replacing Pestilence with Pollution. This transformation mirrors the broader evolution of apocalyptic myths, where fears of environmental collapse, such as global warming, pollution, and resource depletion, now take precedence over traditional existential threats like diseases and war. The Pollution depicted in the novel is a clear critique of how humanity has been treated, highlighting that environmental degradation does not occur all at once, but gradually and often in ways that humanity has initiated, and in many cases, controls.

With Pollution, Pratchett and Gaiman use humor to address the severe issue of environmental destruction, an issue that

* Corresponding Author. Email: vinothkumarm@veltech.edu.in

many readers might prefer to ignore rather than confront. Pollution's indifferent demeanor, especially in the line "You can't hand back a birthright," emphasizes the lasting nature of ecological damage (Pratchett & Gaiman, 1990). This saintly veneer masks a grim reality: ecological devastation occurs in ways that are often hidden, socially accepted, and irreversible. By the time readers are two-thirds through *Good Omens*, the humor is not merely for amusement; it is a powerful tool to deliver a message about the significance of climate catastrophes in a palatable, even disarming way.

Pollution, treated as almost benign and passive, critiques society's normalization of ecological harm. His cavalier attitude allegorizes our collective indifference to the irreversible consequences of environmental degradation. In one sense, this sardonic perspective makes the ecological crisis easier to digest; in another, it subtly highlights the absurdity of our collective inertia in the face of an existential threat. This playfulness, this blend of comedy and the macabre, of silliness and seriousness, is meant to remind readers that urgent action is needed. However, the character's casual indifference also raises an important question: Is the novel's humor a commentary on social indifference, or a potential softening of the severity of the crisis it seeks to address?

Pollution's character is so funny that it disarms the reader, making the novel a bite-sized indictment of humanity's inability to act collectively on the environmental crisis. However, there is a danger that this portrayal of Pollution as a non-threatening figure could dilute the urgency of the very message it seeks to convey. Does the use of humor make the novel more widely accessible, and the grave reality of climate change more attainable, or does it risk normalizing the very indifference it aims to critique? While the other Horsemen, War, Famine, and Death are embodied through more flamboyant and violent traits, Pollution's banal and omnipresent character points to how modern environmental crises have been normalized in society (Pratchett & Gaiman, 1990). The replacement of Pestilence with Pollution functions not only as a literary reimagining of an ancient myth but also as a critical mirror of present-day anxieties surrounding the slow, often invisible, destruction brought about by human activity, particularly through industrial waste, consumerism, and environmental degradation (Clark, 2019; Garrard, 2012).

The switch from Pestilence to Pollution reflects a growing cultural fixation on environmental concerns, such as global warming, pollution, and resource depletion, which have increasingly become central to the modern apocalyptic narratives. In classical eschatological myths, pestilence has traditionally symbolized the devastating impacts of pandemics. In *Good Omens*, *pollution* represents the slow, insidious plunder of natural ecosystems, a consequence of humanity's unrestrained exploitation of the environment. This evolution of mythological figures is significant, as it marks a shift from the fear of sudden, catastrophic adversaries (like disease) to more prolonged, though equally tragic, environmental destruction. Although not always immediately visible, these threats have irreversible and widespread consequences.

From climate change and ecological collapse to global warming, deforestation, and industrial pollution, environmental issues undeniably occupy the forefront of global concerns today (Nixon, 2011), with governments and international organizations scrambling to put them on the political agenda. In that context, *Good Omens* reinterprets the classic apocalyptic schema, swapping out Pestilence for Pollution to make room for a unique contemporary concern: environmental ruin. The novel's repurposed Four Horsemen offer a satirical yet sobering commentary on the ecological crisis and the anthropocentric worldviews that have led to it.

The environment has become a central object of concern in contemporary apocalyptic thought. Today, our society faces the environmental upheaval generated by human activities, including deforestation, burning fossil fuels, and industrial production, potentially the modern-day equivalent of the destructive forces that once rode the Earth, now manifesting as a climate crisis. Scholars have increasingly argued that the terrifying future is no longer a religious or military catastrophe but ecological destruction (Ghosh, 2016). *Good Omens* embraces this change by swapping in Pollution for Pestilence, offering a more modern understanding that it is not a sudden apocalypse that will spell the end of human civilization, but the progressive destruction of the world in the form of pollution and unsustainable practices. The addition of Pollution as a Horseman represents an apocalypse that's not caused by an immediate agent or war, but slowly builds up over time and is often unseen to those driving it.

In the wider context, the move from Pestilence to Pollution also represents the appearance of eco-mythology, the study of myth and storytelling considered through an ecological perspective (Garrard, 2012). Eco-mythology recognizes that environmental crises such as climate change and pollution have come to dominate contemporary cultural narratives. Pollution in *Good Omens* is a god of ecological destruction. Still, it's also a metaphor for the cultural fears that emerged in reaction to the broad social phenomenon of environmental destruction. By reworking the Four Horsemen to include Pollution, this novel comments on industrialization and consumer culture perpetuating ecological harm and how the apocalypse becomes a failure of humanity due to neglect, rather than a consequence of God's wrath / the chaos of war (Haraway, 2016).

The *Good Omens*' narrative is open to being folkloric after all. Still, it likely echoes the outside world and the dominant cultural narrative of environmental anxiety. This story has become increasingly pervasive as humans come face to face with climate change. Nixon (2011) and Ghosh (2016), among others, have explored these literary and cultural shifts that seem to express a growing existential anxiety about ecological collapse. This change in the character of *Good Omens*' Pestilence reflects this transformation in how culture tells stories. Instead of pestilence-fueled apocalyptic Gothicism, the fear of pollution, a long-ongoing crisis that brings long-term consequences, has become the centerpiece of folk imagination and the global conversation about the planet's future.

Through the character of Pollution, *Good Omens* addresses these modern fears, posing the environmental challenges

brought on by the Anthropocene, a term for the current geological age viewed as the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment (Haraway, 2016). In the novel, pollution is not a natural disaster but a byproduct of artificial devastation, namely modern industrialised activities, consumerism, and unbridled growth. Within an argument about global consumerism in the context of an apocalyptic narrative, this critique resonates with the contemporary moment wherein environmental degradation threatens humanity's survival (Nixon, 2011).

Through the swapping of Pestilence for Pollution, this paper argues that *Good Omens* reflects the contemporary environmental crisis and the disquiet evoked by a world in decline. Through this eco-mythological lens, the paper demonstrates how *Good Omens* critiques global consumerism as an integral part of the twenty-first century's environmental devastation, disaster capitalism, and apocalyptic fears. The analysis is situated within the wider field of eco-criticism and cultural studies, grounding it in existing scholarship to argue that the novel serves as a critique of the apocalypse to come today. This climatic destruction can erase the Earth.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Overview of Existing Research

Apocalyptic myths, especially the Four Horsemen, have been integral to religious and cultural narratives long before the advent of social media, representing major social threats like war, famine, pestilence, and death. These doomsday archetypes, rooted in the Biblical Book of Revelation, have historically symbolized various fears associated with the end of humanity (Riddle, 2015). However, with existential threats like climate change and environmental collapse looming overhead in modern society, these traditional depictions of apocalypse have evolved.

Environmental criticism is now an important aspect of contemporary literary studies, as Buell (2005) argues, suggesting that works of fiction should confront ecological breakdown, the major environmental crisis. In this vein, *Good Omens* provides a commendable reworking of the Four Horsemen with the figure of Pestilence being exchanged for Pollution. This transposition metaphorically articulates the current fears surrounding environmental calamity. This metamorphosis finds a model in *Good Omens* by Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman, in which the archetypal Evil, the figure of Pestilence, that mournful ghost of germs and graves, is reconstituted as Pollution, covering the "Toxic People" and ecological disaster of the present. This alteration is not just a structural remaking of the myth; it speaks to deeper cultural anxieties about environmental devastation and the climate emergency. *Good Omens* has been synthetically analyzed through the lenses of satire, religious critique, and the genre crossbreeding, but its eco-mythological dimensions have gone largely ignored. What the novel does in substituting Pestilence with Pollution speaks to the growing conversation about eco-criticism, environmentalism, and global capitalism.

Recent scholarship in environmental studies, posthuman studies, and the environmental humanities suggests that our modern apocalyptic narratives reflect fears of ecological collapse. Books like Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011) and Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016) grapple with how environmental degradation has moved from something far away to an urgent and immediate crisis. These scholars contend that ecological threats are our existential challenge, with humanity now being the greatest threat. In this context, *Good Omens* resonates with this cultural shift by replacing Pestilence with Pollution, marking a broader recognition of human-induced environmental collapse as the true apocalypse of our era.

B. Eco-Criticism and Cultural Studies

This analysis employs an eco-critical framework developed by scholars such as Rueckert (1996), Buell (1995), and Bate (2000) to examine literature in conjunction with humanity's relationship with the natural environment. Theoretical grounding in eco-criticism allows one to read the novel as an expression of a discourse reflecting contemporary ecological realities, where consumption and materialistic endeavor, shaped by anthropogenic modernity, are powerful driving forces (industrialization, resource depletion, global consumerism).

Good Omens is eco-critical insofar as it makes Pollution, rather than environmental destruction, a character, something more than a metaphor for the state of the Earth and a symbol for human-induced ecological collapse. The embodiment of Pollution, therefore, becomes a metaphor for how industrialization and rampant capitalist consumption have permanently transformed Earth. The novel critiques the normalization of environmental harm by treating Pollution in a casual, indifferent tone, most clearly exemplified in his quote, "You can't hand back a birthright" (Pratchett & Gaiman, 1990). This harkens to Nixon's (2011) concept of slow violence, a type of gradual, ubiquitous environmental degradation that is sometimes unseen yet undermining. The transition from Pestilence to Pollution represents a shift from the fear of sudden, acute threats symbolized by disease to the slow, often imperceptible devastation of environmental neglect.

Beyond this eco-critical approach, *Good Omens* can also be examined through cultural studies, particularly Williams's (2003) work, which links culture to the reflection of societal fears and values. Williams and Haraway (2016) highlight how cultural narratives, including myths, shift toward contemporary agendas. In *Good Omens*, their imagining of the Four Horsemen speaks to a cultural turn toward ecological concern, as humanity's will has increasingly become the leading force in determining the Earth's climate. The novel critiques the Anthropocene, the epoch in which human activity has become the most dominant force on Earth's environment. Haraway's call to "stay with the trouble" (2016) encourages critically opening up issues of humanity's culpability for environmental destruction, and it is through its representation of Pollution that *Good Omens* engages with this.

C. *Eco-Mythology: Rewriting the Apocalypse*

This paper adopts an eco-mythological framework, building on eco-criticism but focusing on how traditional myths are reimagined to address contemporary environmental concerns. Myths adapt as societies do, as seen in the works of Garrard (2012) and Meeker (1972), who examine how values and fears are reflected in the evolution of myths. Replacing Pestilence with Pollution is a prime example of how myths evolve in response to contemporary culture, particularly the increasing awareness of the ecological crisis. Pestilence, a sudden, divine punishment often associated with infectious disease, has evolved into Pollution, representing a slow and ongoing crisis with long-term consequences.

At the same time, Jackson (2012) contends that modern apocalyptic narratives reflect looming fears of environmental rather than concerns of divine vengeance. The book's presentation of Pollution as a casual, even benign quality underscores how ecological destruction has become normalized in contemporary life. Pollution doesn't ride in on horseback but arrives as a car leaking oil, reminding us that environmental destruction has become as commonplace as modern life. Pollution's banality embodies how ecological degradation has been accepted as part of daily life, making it invisible yet pervasive. This marks a break from previous apocalyptic accounts, which portrayed disease and war as events that occurred in the immediate past or future. Instead, Pollution reflects the slow, creeping devastation that happens over time, yet is no less deadly.

D. *Gaps in Literature*

Although *Good Omens* has been analyzed for blending genres, humor, and religious satire, its eco-mythological aspects have received little attention. The most comprehensive scholarship situates the work within frameworks of Religion, genre, and contemporary society, but not so much its environmental elements. As the novel substitutes Pollution for Pestilence, an ecocritical reading provides an opportunity to explore the different ways *Good Omens* engages with the global environmental crisis by remaking a mythic narrative about the contemporary fears of the apocalypse. This paper aims to enrich this important yet fragmentary vein of the existing literature by re-reading the novel as an eco-myth that engages with and reflects upon contemporary anxieties about environmental collapse and critiques the unsustainable practices of contemporary consumerism.

The paper also locates *Good Omens* in an emerging trend in modern apocalyptic fiction wherein environmental issues become a central focus in stories about the collapse of society. In several more recent works, from Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) to Emmerich's *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) and Bong Joon-ho's *Snowpiercer* (2013), the apocalypse is not written as a divine punishment for human sinfulness but because of human indifference and environmental devastation. *Good Omens* takes that trend a step further: it presents Pollution as the embodiment of anthropogenic ecological collapse, now widely recognized as one of humanity's most pressing existential threats.

Criteria for evaluating these works set up theories of eco-criticism, cultural studies, and eco-mythology as interpretative instruments, tools for unearthing *Good Omens* and its polyphonic reconfiguring of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. In replacing Pestilence with Pollution, Gaiman and Pratchett proffer a, for want of a better term, rewrite of the apocalypse that resonates with modern anxieties about the environment. The novel challenges the normalization of environmental destruction, encouraging readers to interrogate how culture unwittingly and complacently enables this harm to continue. It also engenders a potent resistance, proposing a new way to approach the climate crisis and reviving how we might adapt apocalyptic storytelling to engage with the realities of the Anthropocene. Future scholarship will need to continue interrogating contemporary apocalyptic fiction, especially the eco-mythological underpinnings of much of this fiction, concerning climate change and the future of the planet.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. *Eco-Criticism*

Eco-criticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the natural environment and how texts represent, critique, or reflect environmental issues. The framework examines human interactions with nature in all forms of literature and how literature can reflect and respond to environmental crises (Glotfelty, 1996). Eco-criticism establishes the framework for examining how literature shapes public understandings of ecological concerns and demonstrates how *Good Omens* treats the planet, particularly how the novel is critical of modern consumerism and environmental degradation. But as we see the planet continue to be ravaged by human activities like deforestation, industrialization, and overconsumption, *Good Omens* leans into those concerns in a 21st-century way and replaces Pestilence with Pollution, zeroing in on the environmental implications of our behavior. Key texts on eco-criticism, like William Rueckert's *Literature and Ecology* (1996) and Cheryll Glotfelty's broad analysis of eco-criticism, offer foundational understandings of how narratives can be interlaced with environmental themes. Neo-humanism is defined here as the act of grasping the interconnectedness of the biological form within and the symbolic in-between, together, reading and writing nature through literature, defining eco-criticism as the study of the representation of the natural world in literature, and the role of literature as to foster an ecological awareness (Glotfelty, 1996; Rueckert, 1996). Within such a theoretical framework, an investigation can be undertaken into how Pollution in *Good Omens* reflects an ecological crisis while simultaneously critiquing the socio-economic systems that aid environmental damage, such as capitalism and global consumerism (Garrard, 2012).

B. Cultural Studies

Cultural studies offer a wide lens for examining the ways that cultural products, including literature, reflect and perpetuate challenging social norms and values. This framework will place *Good Omens* in a larger discussion around how modern apocalyptic narratives respond to cultural anxieties surrounding the present moment, particularly as it relates to the environment. Scholars ranging from Williams (2003) to Haraway (2016) encourage us that culture may filter our understanding of the Anthropocene, the geological epoch in which human beings' influence has become the planet's most salient feature. In this sense, cultural studies can be a tool that you can use to disclose how *Good Omens* responds to contemporary environmental challenges. Cultural studies would focus, for example, on how the reworking of the Four Horsemen reflects social and cultural changes. These reinterpretations of classical myths can further provide insight and awareness of socio-political change. Over time, with myths adopted into cultural texts, the references eventually metamorphosed, rather like the way pestilence morphed into pollution. Williams (2003) discusses how cultural texts reveal and criticize the ideologies of modernity, capitalism, and consumerism that lead to environmental degradation. Haraway's (2016) work on the Anthropocene is another brilliant explanation of how narratives need to evolve to register the degree of damage that humans are doing to the environment. This will inform readers on how to read *Good Omens* as a critique of those ideologies, particularly emphasizing how global capitalism creates environmental damage but simultaneously utilizes apocalyptic narratives in a way that helps to raise awareness.

C. Eco-Mythology

Eco-mythology is an interdisciplinary direction that studies how traditional myths have been adapted to express modern environmental problems. Garrard (2012) in *Environmentalism in the Age of Myth: The Return of Mythology* explores how environmental studies intersect with mythology, analyzing how traditional myths are reimagined to address modern ecological concerns. In this sense, Pollution's replacement of Pestilence in *Good Omens* is an example of eco-mythology, for it substitutes a mythological figure for one rooted in the traditional myth, thus repurposing that which resonates with viewers' contemporary fears regarding climate change, the environment, and environmental collapse. Pestilence's extinction at the hands of Pollution reflects how the apocalyptic myths are evolving in the face of environmental crisis urgency. This theoretical framework will be used to explore *Good Omens*'s role as a mythological reworking, creating an environmental narrative that epitomizes current ecological issues. By positioning Pollution as a contemporary apocalyptic figure, the novel itself is a cultural artifact reflecting the climate crisis. It situates *Good Omens* in the expanding genre of eco-fiction, which aims to engage global environmental issues through myth and storytelling. Since global environmental issues like climate change, deforestation, and pollution have become urgent, eco-mythology provides a dynamic lens for a re-exploration of traditional myths that connect with modern environmental fears (Nixon, 2011).

IV. DISCUSSION

Using qualitative literary analysis, this study explores *Good Omens* through the lenses of eco-critical and cultural studies. This methodology combines close reading of the novel's environmental themes with thematic coding of key passages, particularly those related to Pollution's characterization and the speculative satire addressing the ecological crisis. Interpretation is informed by theoretical frameworks presented by Nixon (2011) on slow violence, Garrard (2012) on eco-criticism, and Haraway (2016) on Anthropocene. This approach allows for iterative coding through systematic examination while maintaining nuance in literary analysis, connecting textual interpretations with modern environmental frameworks.

A. Mythological Adaptation: Reimagining the Four Horsemen

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse traditionally symbolize Conquest, War, Famine, and Pestilence—divine forces representing catastrophic destruction in biblical lore. In *Good Omens*, these figures are reimagined to reflect contemporary anxieties, notably replacing Pestilence with Pollution, highlighting modern environmental crises as central existential threats.

B. Modern Subversion in *Good Omens*

In *Good Omens*, the original Horsemen of War, Famine, and Death remain. Still, their functions have been translated to the modern world's complex social, political, and economic realities, for example, rather than War personifying a soldier or general, no longer in use, who gains by reporting conflict and earning from it as a journalist. This new adaptation highlights how media and the commoditization of violence and human suffering have become defining aspects of contemporary society. In a world where war and conflict are routinely sensationalized for profit, War, a journalist, acts as a critique of the ethical implications of news coverage that profits off tragedy (Haraway, 2016).

Similarly, when it is Famine who had previously embodied the absence of food and resources, he is an opportunist of the diet industry, profiting from humanity's obsession with how we look and how much we eat. This contemporary interpretation of Famine speaks to the increasing awareness of food insecurity and the diet industry's part in perpetuating unwholesome food systems. Death, by contrast, is essentially unchanged, though he finds representation as a more casual, impersonal figure, which suggests a modern, cynical perception of mortality. His dispassionate view of human life stands in stark contrast to more traditional portrayals of Death as a stately or inevitable force (Williams, 2003).

These new roles for the Horsemen reflect a contemporary reality in which the forces of destruction, war, famine, and death are irrevocably intertwined with modern capitalist systems. Through these new representations, Pratchett and Gaiman critique how global institutions profit from violence, hunger, and death, while commenting on the cultural normalization of suffering and violence in contemporary life.

Most notably, and perhaps most significantly, is the replacement of Pestilence with Pollution in *Good Omens*, one of the most meaningful subversions in the novel. Myths evolve as society's values and fears shift (Foster, 1998). The transition from Pestilence to Pollution marks a shift in contemporary apocalyptic narratives. Rather than being a literal act of God, the apocalypse becomes an avoidable disaster brought about by human inaction and environmental destruction. This shift critiques how modern myths are shaped by concerns surrounding the Anthropocene, an age in which human activity has become the primary driver of ecological collapse.

Pollution is neither visible nor an imminent threat, unlike Pestilence. Instead, it represents the slow, creeping destruction of the environment. Pestilence was an acute and devastating force, consider the Black Death, while Pollution is more like an ever-ticking time bomb that infiltrates every aspect of contemporary life. It results from unregulated industrialization, overconsumption, and the rampant exploitation of the natural world. The pollution in *Good Omens* is not a sudden catastrophe but a constant, insidious crisis. This shift in the role of the Horseman underscores the broader societal shift toward recognizing the environmental collapse as the result of human activity rather than external or divine forces.

C. Why Pollution?

(a). *From Pestilence to Pollution: A Historical Context*

In pre-modern times, pestilence, often manifested as diseases like the plague, was one of the most immediate and terrifying threats to human populations. In contrast, advances in medicine, sanitation, and public health have significantly reduced the threat of infectious disease outbreaks. In its place, Pollution has emerged as a more fitting Harbinger, representing the environmental damage caused by industrialization and unchecked capitalist growth (Garrard, 2012).

Pollution's omnipresence reflects the irreversible damage caused by industrialization and capitalism. It is a byproduct of mass production, global commerce, and consumerism, continuing to degrade the environment at an alarming rate. In *Good Omens*, Pollution's transformation into a Horseman symbolizes this ongoing environmental collapse, emphasizing the existential peril of humanity's neglect of nature (Ghosh, 2016).

(b). *Satirical Commentary: Humanity has "Conquered" Disease Only to Create a New, Self-Inflicted Doom*

Substitution of Pestilence for Pollution is a satiric commentary on humanity's tendency to defeat one menace, only to create another, and often more nefarious, threat, which is evident in Pratchett and Gaiman's narration. While significant progress has been made in medicine, it highlights the irony that humanity has created an amenity far worse than disease: Pollution. This threat is pervasive and much more difficult to address. Pollution, a byproduct of industrial growth and consumer culture, illustrates humanity's hubris in assuming that the production of things that make us wealthier and our lives easier is inherently beneficial (Haraway, 2016).

The transition from Pestilence to Pollution reflects how contemporary apocalyptic fears are increasingly rooted in human will and negligence. While Pestilence was often depicted as a form of divine punishment, Pollution is a result of human actions, driven by economic and political systems that prioritize short-term profits over long-term sustainability. *Good Omens* replaces Pestilence with Pollution to highlight how modernity has embraced unchecked progress, disregarding the moral concerns about the long-term consequences of its actions on the world.

D. Modernity's New Fears: Environmental Anxiety and the Climate Crisis

(a). *Industrialization and Capitalism as Drivers of Ecological Collapse*

Pollution in *Good Omens* is a natural outcome of unfettered industrialization and capitalism. Mass production, global commerce, and consumerism have caused significant environmental destruction, ecosystem erosion, air and water pollution, and resource depletion. Pollution is not merely a byproduct of industrialization; it is a crucial cog in the global capitalist machine that prioritizes profit and growth over the sustainability of the Earth (Nixon, 2011). Pollution's role as a Horseman in the novel reflects how contemporary apocalyptic fears are rooted in the excesses of consumer capitalism and the relentless exploitation of the Earth's resources.

(b). *Pollution's Omnipresence (Air, Water, Microplastics) vs. Pestilence's Episodic Nature*

Unlike Pestilence, which wreaks sudden, localized devastation (e.g., the Black Death), Pollution is a global scourge and a slow death. The novel highlights this transition when Pollution states, 'I don't kill, I just make life untenable' (Pratchett & Gaiman, 1990). His harm is diffuse poisoning the air, water, and even human bodies through microplastics, a critique of what (Ghosh, 2016) describes as the 'unthinkable' scale of Anthropocene damage, affecting everything from the air to the water and the microplastics that have infiltrated the food chain. This omnipresence mirrors the global extent of environmental destruction, which impacts all aspects of human life and knows no borders. Pollution's sweeping power in *Good Omens* reflects the widespread, systemic nature of environmental harm in the contemporary era. Pestilence episodically affected isolated populations. Pollution, in contrast, does not dissipate after an event; it is a contrast. Pollution,

therefore, represents a slow and invisible form of violence that continues to harm both humans and the planet (Nixon, 2011).

E. Satire and Dark Humor

(a). *Pollution's Casual Demeanor ("You Can't Hand Back a Birthright") Mirrors Humanity's Complacency*

In *Good Omens*, Pollution is depicted as casual, even indifferent. The quote, "you can't hand back a birthright" (Pratchett & Gaiman, 1990), speaks to humanity's irreversible damage to the environment. Just as a birthright cannot be reclaimed once lost, the destruction of the environment will have permanent consequences that humanity must face. This satirical commentary highlights humanity's complacency in the face of widespread environmental destruction. While the other Horsemen are dramatized with sensational violence, Pollution is portrayed as a more insidious force that, unlike the others, is mundane and has become ingrained in modern life, something humanity has grown accustomed to, as Ghosh (2016) describes.

(b). *Contrast With the Other Horsemen—Pollution is Banal yet Inescapable*

In contrast to the dramatic personae of War, Famine, and Death, Pollution presents itself as a banally inescapable force. This juxtaposition reflects how modern fears of the apocalypse, particularly those related to environmental annihilation, have become normalized. While War, Famine, and Death embody more immediate and dramatic threats, Pollution is depicted as an ongoing, backdrop force, steadily degrading the planet. This underscores how contemporary apocalyptic anxieties about the environment are often downplayed until they reach a crisis point (Nixon, 2011).

F. Global vs. Local Apocalypse

In conventional apocalyptic stories, the world's annihilation is often portrayed as divine retribution for humanity's failings. However, in *Good Omens*, the apocalypse is not caused by a divine or supernatural force; it results from human actions, specifically, wanton environmental destruction. The novel subverts the traditional apocalyptic narrative, suggesting that humanity is not simply an inert victim of divine vengeance but rather a contributing factor to its demise. By inverting this cliché, *Good Omens* satirizes modern society's indifference to the permanent damage inflicted on the environment and underscores the need for accountability in the face of impending disaster.

G. Cultural Studies Lens: Consumerism, Denial, and Narrative Resistance

(a). *Environmental Narratives in Popular Culture*

Good Omens is one example of a broader trend in popular culture that critiques climate inertia and the environmental crisis at large. In movies like *Mad Max* and *The Road*, the apocalypse shifts from being about divine retribution to focusing on humanity's tendency to renege on and trivialize our pact with God, that humanity will be good, virtuous custodians of the Earth in exchange for existence. These stories criticize the inability and unwillingness of polluters and politicians to prevent the climate crisis and the planetary destruction driven by human habits. *Good Omens, with satire and humor, contributes to this conversation* to expose the absurdity of humanity's apathy toward environmental destruction.

(b). *The Horsemen as Corporate Entities*

Unlike traditional literary conceptions of the Horsemen, in *Good Omens*, they are also corporate entities that profit from human suffering and environmental destruction. Famine, for instance, is depicted as the diet industry's shrewd "overhead," capitalizing on the global obsession with weight loss and body image. Similarly, Pollution's ties to capitalism are literalized in his appearance; his car, a 'rusted sedan that wheezed exhaust' (Pratchett & Gaiman, 1990), mirrors the decay of the fossil fuel industry. Symbolically, as a Horseman, repeating the cycle of destruction for profit, Pollution embodies Haraway's (2016) critique of the Anthropocene, in which corporations outsource the cost of ecology. The novel's satire comes full circle when Pollution shrugs, 'They call it progress', highlighting the complicity between consumerism and environmental destruction and the exploitation of natural resources for profit. The authors use this perspective to comment on how capitalism preys on humanity's suffering and the destruction of the Earth.

H. Agency and Hope

While *Good Omens* carries a satirical tone, it also delivers a message of hope through the characters of Aziraphale and Crowley, who defy divine order to prevent the end of the world. Their rebellion mirrors the global anti-mining struggle, with rural organizing standing up against the predatory forces of globalization and capitalism, the state's militarization, and extraction and industrialization practices. Through these characters, the novel suggests that individual agency and collective action can resist impending disaster.

V. CONCLUSION

Good Omens re-contextualizes classic apocalyptic mythology and presents a sharp reversal of current environmental handwringing. By substituting Pollution for Pestilence, Pratchett and Gaiman provocatively reconfigure the classical Four Horsemen, shifting the focus from the imminent threat of disease to the slow, creeping violence of environmental

catastrophe. This substitution challenges readers to reconsider the apocalypse, not as a divine or otherworldly catastrophe, but as a self-inflicted catastrophe resulting from human carelessness and unchecked industrial practice. While traditional apocalyptic narratives portray the planet as the victim of external, often divine forces, in *Good Omens*, humanity destroys the environment (Garrard, 2012).

The introduction of Pollution as the new Horseman is significant, not only because it addresses a modern ecological fear that has superseded older existential threats, such as disease and war, but also because it underscores how environmental destruction has become humanity's greatest threat. By presenting Pollution not as a blatant villain but as a banal, even neutral, character, the novel highlights the ordinariness of Environmental Destruction. Pollution is colloquial, and, as he states, "You can't hand back a birthright" (Pratchett & Gaiman, 1990). This is a stark reminder that humanity has made permanent changes to the environment and that the climate crisis is not just a fleeting issue. In doing so, the novel reflects how pollution has become the backdrop to much of modern life, often unseen yet pervasive and inescapable, and critiques how society has come to accept slow destruction as an inevitable part of daily existence (Ghosh, 2016).

But there's a question that arises with that normalization — and it's urgent: Has change become urgent? Rather than portraying the apocalypse in a straightforward, dark style like in *The Road* or *Mad Max*, *Good Omens* uses its satirical tone to introduce levity while critiquing societal passivity. The use of satire in representing Pollution seeks to normalize environmental destruction without trivializing it. Humor, in this context, serves a double purpose: on the one hand, it underscores the gravity of the situation by mocking the absurdity of allowing such devastation to unfold without consequence. The novel interrogates the entanglement of human lives with this slow-motion catastrophe by tracing geological resonance through layers of geology, ephemera, and text. It raises a reflection of complicity and makes way for a critical call — an ultimatum, even — to change the roles played in a system that perpetuates this ongoing degradation (Nixon, 2011).

In re-examining the mythological framework of the apocalypse, *Good Omens* encourages a reconsideration of the cultural narratives that shape our perceptions of environmental devastation and our relationship to the wider world. With development, consumerism, and economic expansion as true threats, the novel subverts conventional end-of-the-world tropes by suggesting that the real apocalypse is not a divine punishment or a failure of external forces, but rather the consequences of human choices. *Good Omens*, set in a world teeming with turmoil and destruction, speaks to our current moment by emphasizing the need for a paradigm shift in how crisis is approached, as humanity grapples with the dual specters of the Anthropocene — a geological epoch in which human activity has accelerated the planet's climate and environmental changes — and the Apocalypse, as the world continues to play the game of exponential climate change (Garrard, 2012). Thus, the novel's blend of satire and eco-mythology offers readers a rare opportunity to reflect on the environmental devastation already in motion and engage in the conversation about how to change course before it is too late.

Moreover, the novel's ability to blend humor with a sharp environmental message is a cultural accelerant. It encourages individuals to reflect on their impact on the environment and contributes to the broader conversation about climate policy and action. By reinterpreting the classical Four Horsemen and introducing pollution as one of the central figures, *Good Omens* provides a mirror that loudly critiques consumerism, reckless production, and the failure to protect the environment. There is an ironic, humorous undercurrent to this critique, which serves both to relate to the readers in a less pretentious way and to provoke deeper contemplation of the global urgency of the environmental crisis. The collision of myth, satire, and social critique forms a compelling argument for the reappraisal of religious tropes while simultaneously questioning complicity in their very echoes that drive the destruction sought to be overcome (Haraway, 2016).

As noted, radical, post-humanist ecology has been fragmented into divisions, colonies, and regional perspectives that treat nature and narratives of crisis as separate. Neologisms and metaphors become too easy at the expense of details and contexts, failing to improve human sentiment. Yes, the Four Horsemen are reinterpreted in *Good Omens* — but so is the perceived urgency to address climate change right now. The novel's eco-critical themes—humanity's stewardship, the ubiquity of pollution, and the necessity of a cultural paradigm shift toward planetary change—encourage readers to interrogate their role in caring for the Earth. By linking mythological narratives with modern environmental crises, *Good Omens* implores us to rethink the narratives crafted about the future and the collective action needed to prevent the apocalypse from being of human creation (Nixon, 2011).

Beyond literary critique, *Good Omens* contributes to climate communication by leveraging satire to disrupt apathy. While grim narratives like *The Road* paralyze audiences with despair, Pratchett and Gaiman's humor disarms readers, making the environmental critique both palatable and provocative.

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Rogini. P is a Research Scholar in English at Vel Tech Rangarajan Dr. Sagunthala R&D Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai, India. She received her M.A. in English Literature from Auxilium College, Vellore, in 2013, and her M.Phil. from St. Peter's University, Chennai, in 2016. Her M.A. thesis explored psychological impulses behind crime and corruption in contemporary Indian fiction, and her M.Phil. dissertation applied Queer Theory to modern Indian drama. She has around six years of teaching experience as an Assistant Professor, during which she guided four M.A. students. Her academic interests include Cultural Studies, Mythology, Psychology, Gender Studies, and Diaspora Literature. She has presented papers at national and international conferences and published articles in reputed academic forums.



Vinoth Kumar. M is an Associate Professor of English at Vel Tech Rangarajan Dr. Sagunthala R&D Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai. He earned his Ph.D. in English from the University of Madras and holds PGCTE and PGDTE from EFLU, Hyderabad. With over 11 years of academic and research experience, he has published 7 Scopus-indexed articles, 6 UGC CARE-listed papers, three book chapters, and authored three books. He guides 4 Ph.D. Research Scholars. A recognized poet and theatre practitioner, he has received honors from ESN Publishers and Aram Foundations. He has directed over thirty stage plays, organized theatre festivals, and coordinated several academic programs. His areas of interest include Cultural Studies, Sports Literature, Indigenous Studies, and Post-colonial Studies.



S. Ramesh is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at NPR College of Engineering and Technology, Dindigul, Tamil Nadu, India. He completed his undergraduate degree in English Literature in 2005, and received his M.A. in 2007 and M.Phil. in 2010 from Sourashtra College, Madurai. He earned his Ph.D. in English from Madurai Kamaraj University. He has served as a Senior Lecturer at Latha Mathavan Polytechnic College and as Associate Professor and Head of the Department of English at Sethu Institute of Technology, Kariapatti. He has authored academic books, including *Feminism and Literature of Waiting for the Barbarian*, *Business English and Presentation Skills*, and *AI-Based Advanced English Language Teaching Tools*. His recent Q1 Scopus-indexed article, "Investigation into the Source of Students' English Speaking Difficulties," was published in the *World Journal of English Language*. His research interests include English language teaching, literary theory, and applied linguistics.



K. Perumal is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Vel Tech High Tech Dr. Rangarajan Dr. Sakunthala Engineering College, Chennai. He completed his undergraduate degree at Thiru. A. Govindasamy Government Arts College, Tindivanam, and his postgraduate degree at Arignar Anna Government Arts College, Villupuram. He earned his Ph.D. in English from VIT University, Chennai. He began his teaching career at St. Mary's Matriculation Higher Secondary School, Kelambakkam, and later served as an Assistant Professor Junior at VIT University, Chennai Campus, for three years. His research interests include writing skills, teaching methodologies, and learning strategies. He has published several research articles in Scopus-indexed journals and holds two patents in the field of English Language Teaching. Dr. Perumal is also a member of ELTAI and continues to contribute actively to the field through research and academic engagement.