

From Alpine Landscapes to Multispecies Communities: Posthuman Ecology and the Reconstruction of Childhood in Johanna Spyri's *Heidi*

Ainura Sadykova¹, Nurgul Isakova¹, Aizada Toktonalieva¹✉

¹Department of Philology and Intercultural Communication, Arabaev Kyrgyz State University, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

✉ aizada.toktonalieva@gmail.com

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Abstract. This study investigates Johanna Spyri's *Heidi* through the lens of posthuman ecocriticism to explore how the novel reconfigures relationships among humans, animals, landscapes, and childhood beyond anthropocentric frameworks. While previous scholarship has primarily emphasized moral education, family values, and pastoral idealism, limited attention has been paid to the agency of nonhuman entities and their role in shaping ecological subjectivity. Employing a qualitative literary research design, this study analyzes the complete text of *Heidi* through close reading and interpretive thematic analysis informed by posthuman ecocritical theory. The findings reveal five interconnected dimensions. First, the Alpine landscape functions as a living ecological subject that actively influences emotional experience and identity formation. Second, human-animal interactions construct a multispecies community in which animals possess social and affective agency. Third, nonhuman nature acts as a restorative force that contributes to emotional, physical, and social recovery. Fourth, the novel destabilizes anthropocentric hierarchies by presenting humans as ecological participants rather than dominant actors. Fifth, childhood is reconstructed through ecological engagement, sensory experience, and multispecies relationality, resulting in a model of ecological childhood. These findings demonstrate that *Heidi* extends beyond a conventional children's narrative and offers an early literary articulation of posthuman ecological thought. The study contributes to contemporary discussions in children's literature, ecocriticism, environmental humanities, and posthuman studies by highlighting how literary texts imagine interconnected forms of life within more-than-human worlds.

Keywords: posthuman ecocriticism; children's literature; ecological childhood; multispecies agency; environmental humanities; *Heidi*; Johanna Spyri; human-animal relations



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1. Introduction

Children's literature has long occupied an important position in literary and cultural studies because it functions not only as a medium of entertainment but also as a site where societies negotiate values, identities, and relationships with the surrounding world. Over the last two decades, scholarly attention to children's literature has expanded beyond traditional concerns such as morality, character education, and developmental psychology toward broader questions concerning ecology, environmental ethics, and human-nature relations (Nodelman, 2008; Nikolajeva, 2014; Goga et al., 2018; Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles et al., 2020). This shift reflects growing awareness of global ecological crises, including climate change,

biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation, which have encouraged scholars to reconsider how literary texts imagine the relationship between humans and the more-than-human world (Buell, 2005; Garrard, 2012; Zapf, 2008). Consequently, children's literature has increasingly been examined as a cultural arena through which ecological consciousness, environmental responsibility, and multispecies coexistence are articulated and transmitted across generations.

Within this development, ecocriticism has emerged as one of the most influential approaches for examining literary representations of nature and environmental relationships. Early ecocritical scholarship primarily focused on how literature portrays landscapes, wilderness, and environmental values (Glottfelty & Fromm, 1996; Buell, 1995; Garrard, 2012). More recent studies, however, have moved beyond representational concerns and begun to explore the agency of nonhuman entities, material environments, and ecological networks within literary narratives (Iovino & Oppermann, 2014; Alaimo, 2010; Oppermann, 2016). This theoretical development has been further strengthened by posthumanist thought, which challenges anthropocentric assumptions that place humans at the center of existence and instead emphasizes relationality, interdependence, and multispecies entanglements (Haraway, 2008, 2016; Wolfe, 2010; Braidotti, 2013, 2019). Through this perspective, nature is no longer understood merely as a passive backdrop but as an active participant in shaping human experience, identity, and social life.

One literary work that offers significant potential for such examination is *Heidi* by Johanna Spyri. Since its publication in 1881, *Heidi* has become one of the most widely translated and internationally recognized children's novels. Existing scholarship has frequently examined the novel in relation to childhood innocence, moral education, family values, religious influences, and representations of rural life. Other studies have explored its cultural significance in constructing images of Swiss identity, Alpine pastoralism, and idealized nature. Despite these contributions, much of the literature continues to treat nature as a symbolic setting that supports human development rather than as an agent possessing its own narrative force. As a result, the complex interactions among landscapes, animals, weather, and human characters remain insufficiently examined from contemporary ecological perspectives.

Recent developments in posthuman ecocriticism and animal studies have opened new possibilities for revisiting canonical children's texts. Scholars have increasingly emphasized the importance of examining how literary narratives represent human-animal relationships, multispecies communities, ecological agency, and nonhuman subjectivity (Jaques, 2015, 2022; Haraway, 2008; Derrida, 2008; Wolfe, 2010). Similarly, recent studies in children's environmental humanities have argued that childhood should not be understood as an exclusively human-centered category but rather as a relational process emerging through interactions with animals, places, materials, and ecosystems (Malone, 2016; Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles et al., 2020; Laliena & Tabernero-Sala, 2023; Yanar, 2023; Suvilehto, 2024). These perspectives suggest that children's literary texts may provide valuable insights into alternative ecological imaginaries that challenge hierarchical distinctions between humans and nonhumans. Nevertheless, such approaches have rarely been applied systematically

to *Heidi*, particularly in relation to the interconnected roles of landscape, animals, healing, and childhood formation.

The present study identifies three significant gaps in existing scholarship. First, previous studies have largely focused on human-centered themes, resulting in limited attention to the agency of nonhuman entities within the narrative. Second, the relational dynamics among humans, animals, and landscapes have rarely been examined as components of a multispecies ecological community. Third, the concept of childhood in *Heidi* has seldom been analyzed through the lens of posthuman ecology, despite the novel's extensive engagement with environmental experiences and more-than-human relationships. Addressing these gaps is important because it enables a deeper understanding of how classical children's literature may contribute to contemporary debates concerning ecological ethics, environmental imagination, and posthuman subjectivity.

Therefore, this study investigates *Heidi* through the framework of posthuman ecocriticism. Specifically, it examines (1) the representation of the Alpine landscape as a living ecological subject, (2) human-animal entanglement and multispecies agency, (3) the role of nonhuman nature in emotional recovery, (4) the decentering of human superiority within the Alpine ecosystem, and (5) the reconstruction of childhood through ecological relationality. By doing so, the study contributes to children's literature scholarship by demonstrating that *Heidi* is not merely a narrative of moral development and pastoral nostalgia but also an early literary articulation of posthuman ecological thought in which humans, animals, landscapes, and environmental forces participate in a shared network of life.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative literary research design using a posthuman ecocritical approach to examine the representation of human-nonhuman relationships in Johanna Spyri's *Heidi*. Qualitative literary research is particularly suitable for investigating meanings, representations, and ideological structures embedded within literary texts because it enables an in-depth exploration of how narratives construct relationships among characters, environments, and cultural values (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The study specifically adopted posthuman ecocriticism as its analytical framework because this perspective challenges anthropocentric assumptions and emphasizes the interconnectedness of humans, animals, material environments, and ecological systems (Braidotti, 2013, 2019; Haraway, 2016; Iovino & Oppermann, 2014).

The primary data source consisted of the complete text of *Heidi* by Johanna Spyri, comprising twenty-three chapters that narrate Heidi's experiences in the Swiss Alps, her temporary relocation to Frankfurt, and her eventual return to the mountain environment. The novel was selected because it presents extensive representations of landscapes, animals, environmental interactions, emotional recovery, and childhood development, making it highly relevant to contemporary discussions in posthuman ecocriticism and children's literature studies. Secondary data were obtained from scholarly books and peer-reviewed journal articles addressing ecocriticism,

posthumanism, environmental humanities, animal studies, and childhood studies to support theoretical interpretation and contextualization.

Data collection was conducted through intensive close reading of the novel. Following the principles of literary textual analysis, the researchers repeatedly examined the text to identify passages, dialogues, descriptions, and narrative events associated with ecological relationships, nonhuman agency, multispecies interaction, environmental healing, and childhood formation (Barry, 2020; Tyson, 2015). Relevant textual units were highlighted, classified, and organized according to recurring ecological themes. During this process, special attention was given to representations of landscapes, animals, weather, plants, and environmental experiences that influenced the actions, emotions, and development of human characters.

Data analysis followed an interpretive posthuman ecocritical procedure adapted from contemporary ecocritical scholarship (Garrard, 2012; Alaimo, 2010; Oppermann, 2016). The analytical process consisted of four stages. First, textual units related to human–nonhuman interactions were identified and coded. Second, the coded data were grouped into thematic categories based on recurring ecological patterns. Third, each category was interpreted using concepts from posthumanism, multispecies relationality, material agency, and ecological subjectivity. Finally, the findings were synthesized to explain how the novel reconstructs relationships among humans, animals, landscapes, and childhood within a posthuman ecological framework.

To enhance analytical rigor, thematic interpretations were continuously compared across different sections of the novel to ensure consistency and conceptual coherence. Rather than seeking statistical generalization, the study prioritized interpretive validity by grounding all claims in textual evidence and established theoretical frameworks (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The final themes generated through this process were: (1) the Alpine landscape as a living ecological subject, (2) human–animal entanglement and ecological subjectivity, (3) the agency of nonhuman nature in emotional recovery, (4) the decentering of human superiority in the Alpine ecosystem, and (5) the reconstruction of childhood through posthuman ecology. These themes subsequently formed the basis for discussing the ecological and posthuman dimensions of *Heidi*.

3. Result and Discussions

3.1 The Alpine Landscape as a Living Ecological Subject

The narrative in *Heidi* consistently places the Alps not just as a geographical setting, but as an ecological entity that actively shapes the characters' emotional experiences. The presence of mountains, grasslands, sunlight, and vast valleys creates an affective space that allows Heidi to build an intimate connection with her surroundings. This relationship shows that nature in the novel functions as a subject that has an influence on human psychological, social, and spiritual development.



Figure 1. The Alpine Landscape as a Living Ecological Subject in *Heidi*

Figure 1 shows how the novel blurs the firm boundaries between humans and the environment. Human figures are not placed as the center of the landscape, but rather as one component in a broader ecological network. The relatively small position of figures compared to the dominance of mountains and valleys emphasizes the decentralization of the human subject which is the main principle of the posthuman approach. In this context, nature is not merely an object to be observed, but an agent that participates in the formation of the experiences, identities, and transformations of the characters in the novel.

3.2 Human-Animal Entanglement and the Formation of Ecological Subjectivity

The relationship between Heidi and the goats in the Alps is one of the clearest representations of the construction of multispecies communities in *Heidi's* novel. Different from conventional pastoral narratives that generally place animals as economic assets or complements to human life, Spyri presents goats as individuals who have identities, characters, and affective capacities recognized by human figures. The interactions that are awakened not only show emotional closeness, but also show how animals influence Heidi's actions, decisions, and ecological awareness development. To clarify these forms of interconnectedness, Table 1 presents a mapping of human-animal relations based on textual evidence found in the novel.

Table 1. Human-Animal Entanglement and Multispecies Agency in *Heidi*

No	Animal Character	Narrative Evidence	Chapter	Approx. Page*	Human Response	Posthuman Interpretation
1	Little Swan	Heidi repeatedly approaches, greets, and observes the goat II after arriving at the Alm.		pp. 13–14	Affection and companionship	The goat is recognized as an individual rather than livestock.

No	Animal Character	Narrative Evidence	Chapter	Approx. Page*	Human Response	Posthuman Interpretation
2	Little Bear	Heidi treats Little Bear as a member of her social world and interacts with it daily.	II–III	pp. 17	13– Emotional attachment	Human–animal boundaries become less hierarchical.
3	Snowflake	Snowflake cries after being separated from its mother, who has been sold.	III	pp. 19	18– Heidi comforts and embraces the goat.	Recognition of animal grief and emotional capacity.
4	Snowflake	“Oh, you poor little Snowflake!”	III	p. 18	Empathy and care	Emotional experience is not reserved exclusively for humans.
5	Snowflake	“I shall come up here with you every day.”	III	p. 18	Promise of companionship	Formation of interspecies solidarity.
6	Greenfinch	Greenfinch almost falls into a dangerous ravine while exploring.	III	pp. 20	19– Heidi rescues and protects the goat.	Human responsibility emerges through ecological interdependence.
7	Greenfinch	Heidi opposes Peter's intention to beat the goat.	III	p. 20	Ethical intervention	Animal bodies are granted moral consideration.
8	Entire Goat Community	Heidi learns and remembers individual goat names.	III	pp. 18	17– Individual recognition	Nonhuman beings are socially acknowledged as unique subjects.
9	Entire Goat Community	Daily interaction shapes Heidi's routine and emotional well-being.	II–III	pp. 20	13– Coexistence	Subjectivity develops through multispecies interaction.
10	Little Swan & Little Bear	The goats influence Heidi's perception of belonging in the Alpine environment.	II–III	pp. 19	13– Identification and attachment	Animals participate in place-making and identity formation.

Table 1 shows that the relationship between Heidi and the goats in the Alps develops through various forms of interaction that place the animals as active participants in the social life of the main character. Of the ten data identified, most showed recognition of animal individuality through naming practices, emotional attention, and direct involvement in daily activities. Little Swan, Little Bear, Snowflake, and Greenfinch were never treated as homogeneous collective objects, but rather as individuals with distinct characteristics and experiences. This pattern indicates a shift from an anthropocentric paradigm towards the recognition of non-human existence as part of a meaningful social community.

The most prominent data appears in the case of Snowflake and Greenfinch. Snowflake is described as grieving after losing her mother, while Heidi responds to the condition with empathy, hugs, and a promise to accompany her. Instead,

Greenfinch serves as a catalyst for ethical awareness when Heidi rejects Peter's violent actions against animals. Both events show that animals are not only recipients of human actions, but also serve as agents that influence the decisions, attitudes, and moral development of the main characters. Thus, the novel builds a model of multispecies relationships based on recognition, care, and mutual connectedness.

3.3 The Agency of Nonhuman Nature in Emotional Recovery

In addition to building a close relationship between humans and animals, *Heidi* also presents nature as an active force that affects the emotional, physical, and social conditions of her characters. In this novel, the Alps, fresh air, sunlight, meadows, wildflowers, and open spaces do not simply serve as the setting of events, but as ecological agents that participate in the process of transforming human life. The narrative repeatedly shows that the change in the condition of the main characters occurs when they are in direct interaction with the natural environment. Therefore, the recovery experienced by Heidi, Clara, and Grandfather cannot be understood solely as the result of human actions, but rather as a consequence of their interconnectedness with the Alpine ecosystem that actively shapes affective and social experiences.

Table 2. Nonhuman Agency and Emotional Recovery in *Heidi*

No	Character	Initial Condition	Nonhuman Elements Involved	Evidence from the Novel	Transformation
1	Heidi	Homesickness, emotional distress in Frankfurt	Mountain landscape, fresh air, open sunlight	Heidi constantly longs for the Alps and becomes physically and emotionally weakened in the city.	Emotional restoration after returning to the Alps.
2	Heidi	Social and spatial confinement	Meadows, flowers, goats, mountain atmosphere	Heidi experiences joy, freedom, and vitality while living on the mountain.	Development of ecological belonging and happiness.
3	Clara	Physical weakness and limited mobility	Alpine climate, fresh mountain air, outdoor environment	Clara gradually spends more time outdoors in the Alps.	Improved physical condition and eventual ability to walk.
4	Clara	Psychological dependence on urban comfort	Natural environment and multispecies interaction	Clara develops confidence and independence through immersion in nature.	Increased autonomy and resilience.
5	Grandfather	Social isolation and emotional withdrawal	Mountain dwelling, interaction with landscape and animals	Grandfather chooses to live among mountains and animals after social alienation.	Gradual reconnection with community and family.
6	Grandfather	Distrust toward society	Rhythms of seasonal pastoral life	Daily coexistence with nature moderates his hostility.	Emotional softening and social reconciliation.

No	Character	Initial Condition	Nonhuman Elements Involved	Evidence from the Novel	Transformation
7	Heidi Clara	and Different social backgrounds	Shared experience of Alpine environment	Both positive transformation in the mountains.	experience emotional in the Formation of intersubjective bonds.
8	Human Community	Fragmented social relations	Common ecological space of the Alps	Mountain repeatedly characters meaningful encounters.	life brings into Strengthened communal relationships.

Sources derived from Chapters I–XXIII of *Heidi*.

The findings in Table 2 show that the recovery process in *Heidi* is not constructed through the dominance of human actions, but rather through the active involvement of nonhuman elements in the character's life. Alpine landscapes, mountain air, sunlight, plants, and animals consistently serve as ecological agents that affect the emotional and physical conditions of the characters. Heidi regains happiness and vitality after returning to the natural environment that is part of her ecological identity, while Clara experiences improved physical and psychological conditions through direct interaction with open spaces. This pattern shows that the novel shifts the concept of healing from an individual process to a relational process that involves humans and the environment as a mutually affecting unit.

Furthermore, Grandfather's transformation confirms that the agency of nature in the novel is not only therapeutic on a personal level, but also has a social dimension. The life lived with the Alpine landscape and the nonhuman community slowly erodes the alienation, anger, and social rejection that was previously attached to him. Thus, *Heidi* represents nature not as a passive background, but as an ecological force capable of forming identity, restoring social relationships, and creating reconciliation between beings. These findings reinforce the posthuman argument that change and healing are not solely produced by human agents, but arise from relational networks involving humans, animals, plants, and landscapes in interconnected ecosystems.

3.4 Decentering Human Superiority in the Alpine Ecosystem

Previous findings suggest that Alpine landscapes, animals, and various nonhuman elements actively influence the lives of the characters. This condition indicates that *Heidi* does not build a hierarchical relationship between humans and nature, but presents a life structure based on mutual dependence. To understand the position of humans in Alpine ecosystems more systematically, Table 3 compares the anthropocentric paradigm with the posthuman representations found in the novel.

Table 3. Anthropocentric and Posthuman Ecological Perspectives in *Heidi*

Aspect	Anthropocentric Perspective	Representation in <i>Heidi</i>	Posthuman Implication
Position of Humans	Humans occupy the highest position in the hierarchy of life.	Humans coexist with animals, plants, and landscapes.	Humans become ecological participants rather than rulers.
Function of Animals	Animals are economic resources.	Goats are companions, emotional partners, and social actors.	Animals possess agency and social significance.
Function of Nature	Nature serves human needs.	Nature shapes emotions, health, and social relations.	Nature acts as an active ecological force.
Source of Knowledge	Knowledge originates primarily from human institutions.	Heidi learns through direct interaction with the environment.	Knowledge is distributed across human and nonhuman actors.
Healing Process	Recovery is achieved through human intervention.	Emotional and physical recovery emerges through ecological immersion.	Healing becomes a relational ecological process.
Human Mobility	Humans control movement and space.	Geography, weather, and terrain regulate human activity.	Environmental conditions influence human behavior.
Social Relations	Human society is the center of interaction.	Community includes humans, animals, and landscape.	Sociality extends beyond the human sphere.
Identity Formation	Identity develops through social institutions.	Identity develops through ecological relationships.	Subjectivity is co-constructed by multispecies interactions.

Table 3 shows that almost all aspects of *life in Heidi* move away from the anthropocentric paradigm that places humans at the center of the world. Animals are not treated as commodities, nature is not reduced to a resource, and the learning process is not limited to human institutions. Instead, the novel presents a relational ecosystem where humans, animals, plants, and landscapes influence each other in shaping life experiences. This structure suggests that the position of humans is no longer dominant, but rather part of a broader ecological network.

Furthermore, the representation confirms Spyri's critique of the strict separation between man and nature that underlies much modern thought. Through the experiences of Heidi, Clara, and Grandfather, the novel shows that identity, knowledge, health, and social relationships are born from being connected to the non-human world. Thus, *Heidi* offers a model of ecological life that deconstructs human superiority and replaces it with the principles of coexistence and multispecies interdependence that are at the core of the posthuman ecology perspective.

3.5 Reimagining Childhood through Posthuman Ecology

If previous findings suggest that humans and nature are in an interdependent relationship, then the most important implications of that relationship can be seen in the construction of childhood in *Heidi*. The novel does not portray children as individuals who develop primarily through formal social institutions, but rather through direct engagement with the ecological environment. Heidi's daily experiences

with mountains, animals, plants, weather, and Alpine landscapes shape the way we think, feel, and understand the world. Thus, childhood in the novel is represented as a co-construction process between humans and the non-human world that produces a form of *ecological childhood*.

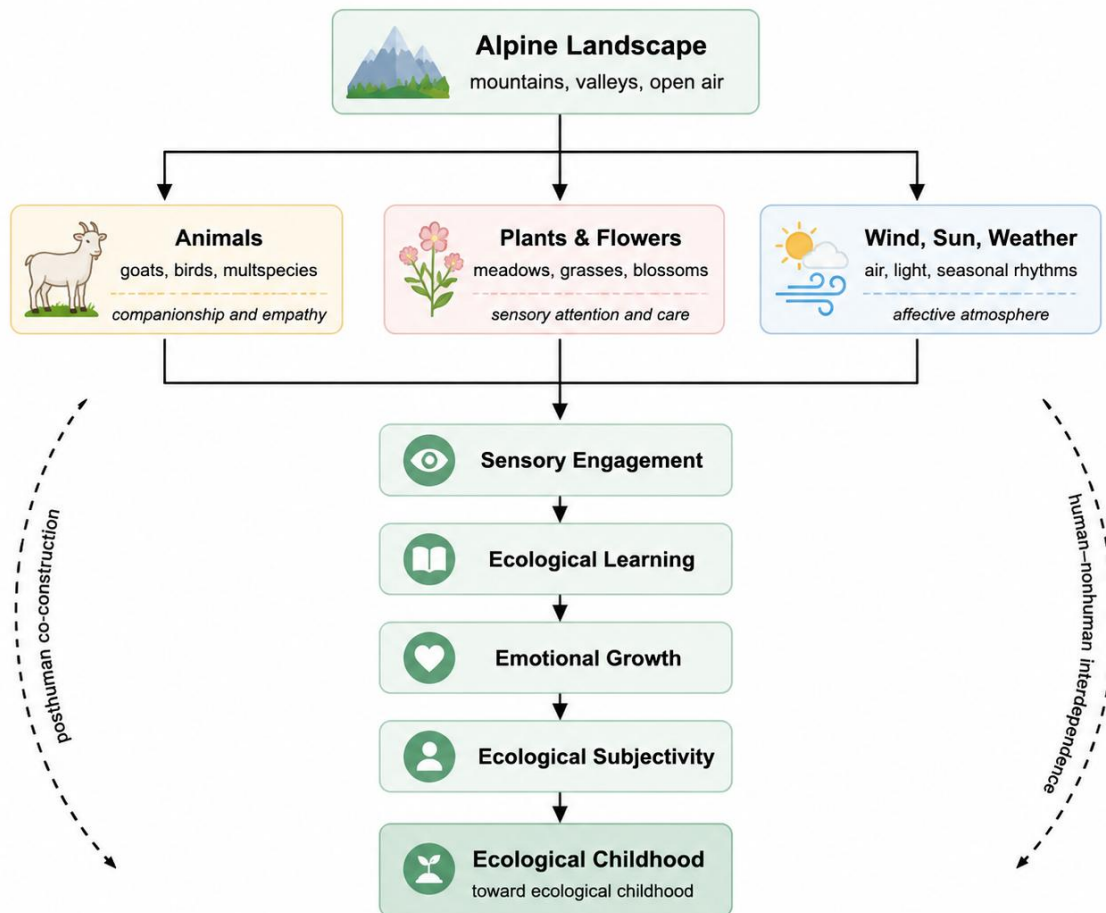


Figure 2. Conceptual Model of Ecological Childhood in *Heidi*

Figure 2 shows that Heidi's development takes place through an ecological learning process rooted in direct experience with the non-human world. Knowledge is not gained primarily through formal instruction, but rather through observation of the goats, flowers, birds, wind, and the changing landscape that surrounds it on a daily basis. These interactions result in deep sensory engagement, build empathy for other beings, and broaden Heidi's understanding of her position in the wider network of life. Thus, nature functions as a pedagogical partner that helps shape the cognitive and affective development of the main character.

Furthermore, this model suggests that *Heidi* offers a conception of childhood that is different from the modern anthropocentric paradigm. A child's identity is not built through isolation from nature, but rather through a constant connection with the multispecies community in the Alps. The presence of animals, plants, and landscapes not only enriches childhood experiences, but also forms an ecological consciousness that places humans as part of the ecosystem. Therefore, the novel reconstructs

childhood as an ecological process born of the reciprocal relationship between humans and the non-human world, a perspective that is at the core of the posthuman ecology approach.

Dicussion

The findings of this study show that *Heidi* not only presents the Alpine nature as a pastoral setting, but as an ecological agent that actively shapes the subjectivity, emotions, and social relations of the characters. This reading expands on previous studies that tend to position *Heidi* as a children's novel about innocence, family, and morality. In the perspective of ecocriticism and posthumanism, the Alpine landscape works as a *more-than-human environment* that influences the way Heidi feels, learns, and builds her ecological identity. This is in line with the idea that literature can show the reciprocal relationship between humans and the environment, rather than simply representing nature as an aesthetic object (Glotfelty, 1996; Buell, 1995, 2005; Garrard, 2012; Iovino & Oppermann, 2014; Zapf, 2008). Thus, the novel data shows that Heidi's happiness in the mountains is not just a matter of space nostalgia, but a form of ontological attachment between the child's body, landscape, animals, air, light, and the ecological rhythm of the Alps.

Heidi's relationship with the goat strengthens the argument that this novel decentralizes human excellence. Snowflake, Greenfinch, Little Swan, and Little Bear do not exist as anonymous livestock, but as nonhuman subjects who have names, characters, emotions, and capacities to influence human actions. This reading is close to the study of animal studies and posthuman children's literature which emphasizes that animals in children's literature can function as a critique of anthropocentrism (Jaques, 2015, 2022; Haraway, 2008, 2016; Derrida, 2008; Wolfe, 2010; Sujinah et al., 2024). Recent articles on animal characters in children's literature also confirm that animal characters can go beyond simple anthropomorphic functions and open up ethical possibilities for reading nonhumans as social agents. Therefore, Heidi's actions of comforting Snowflake and preventing Peter from hitting the Greenfinch are not just good child morality, but proof that the novel builds a multispecies ethic.

The emotional recovery aspect in *Heidi* also shows that nature has a therapeutic function. Heidi is weakened in Frankfurt because she is cut off from the ecological environment that made her up, while Clara undergoes a physical and psychological transformation when she enters the Alpine space. This pattern intersects with the concept of *therapeutic landscape*, which is a space that works through the relationship between the body, place, experience, and recovery (Gesler, 1992; Williams, 1999; Kearns & Gesler, 1998). In the context of children's literature, this reading is reinforced by cutting-edge ecocritical studies that place the environment as a narrative element that shapes the character, reader's experience, and ecological awareness (Laliena & Tabernero-Sala, 2023; Yanar, 2023; Aslan & Baş, 2020). Thus, Clara and Heidi's recovery is not merely the result of human compassion, but rather the effect of the body's engagement with air, light, open space, vegetation, and the rhythm of nonhuman life.

Findings about *ecological childhood* are the main contribution of this article. Heidi's childhood is not constructed through modern schools, disciplines, or

institutions, but through sensory experiences with mountains, animals, plants, wind, and weather. This is in line with the idea that children in literature can be read as subjects formed through material, affective, and ecological networks, rather than as autonomous individuals separated from the non-human world (Nikolajeva, 2014; Nodelman, 2008; Goga et al., 2018; Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles et al., 2020; Malone, 2016). Recent studies on childhood and animal memory have also shown that a child's relationship with *more-than-human beings* can shape empathy, well-being, and posthuman reflection in education. Therefore, *Heidi* can be read as a text that offers a model of ecological childhood: children grow not by mastering nature, but by listening, feeling, and living with the non-human world.

Thus, this article places *Heidi* as an important text at the intersection of children's literature, ecocriticism, animal studies, and posthumanism. While previous studies have often focused on the moral value and romanticism of nature, this study suggests that the novel's strength lies precisely in the way Spyri builds ecological communities where humans, animals, plants, and landscapes form each other. This argument reinforces the posthuman thinking that human subjects are never independent, but rather always exist in a relational network involving bodies, places, other species, and environmental materiality (Braidotti, 2013, 2019; Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010; Alaimo, 2010, 2016; Oppermann, 2016). The contribution of this article, then, is to read *Heidi* not only as a classic children's novel, but as an early ecological text that offers a posthuman imagination of healing, learning, and coexistence in multispecies ecosystems.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Johanna Spyri's *Heidi* presents a complex ecological imagination that extends beyond its conventional interpretation as a children's novel about morality, family values, and pastoral life. Through a posthuman ecocritical reading, the findings reveal that the Alpine landscape functions as a living ecological subject that actively shapes emotional experiences, social relationships, and identity formation. The novel constructs multispecies relationships in which animals are recognized as socially and emotionally significant actors rather than passive objects, while mountains, weather, vegetation, and other environmental elements participate in processes of healing and transformation. These representations challenge anthropocentric assumptions by positioning humans as participants within a broader ecological network characterized by interdependence, relationality, and coexistence. As a result, *Heidi* emerges as a literary text that foregrounds the agency of the more-than-human world and anticipates contemporary ecological and posthuman concerns.

Furthermore, the study reveals that childhood in *Heidi* is reconstructed through ecological engagement rather than through institutional or exclusively human-centered forms of development. Heidi's growth, learning, emotional maturity, and sense of belonging are co-constructed through continuous interactions with animals, landscapes, plants, and environmental processes. This ecological childhood model offers an alternative understanding of childhood as a relational experience grounded in multispecies connections and environmental participation. The study therefore

contributes to children's literature scholarship by demonstrating that *Heidi* can be reread as an early articulation of posthuman ecological thought, enriching contemporary discussions on ecocriticism, animal studies, environmental humanities, and childhood studies. Future research may extend this perspective by examining other canonical children's texts through comparative posthuman and multispecies frameworks to further explore the role of literature in shaping ecological consciousness and human-nonhuman relationships.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, A.S., N.I., and A.T.; methodology, A.S. and A.T.; formal analysis, A.S., N.I., and A.T.; investigation, A.S. and N.I.; data curation, A.S. and N.I.; writing – original draft preparation, A.S.; writing – review and editing, N.I. and A.T.; visualization, A.S.; supervision, A.T. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable. This study involved textual analysis of a published literary work and did not involve human participants, personal data, or animal subjects.

Data Availability Statement

All data analyzed in this study are derived from Johanna Spyri's *Heidi*, a publicly available literary text. Additional supporting materials are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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The authors used generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools during the preparation of this manuscript to assist with language refinement, editing, and organizational support. All interpretations, analyses, arguments, and final decisions regarding the content remain the sole responsibility of the authors. The authors carefully reviewed, revised, and verified all AI-assisted outputs prior to submission.

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