American biologist Edward O. Wilson has eloquently problematized the term Anthropocene, currently being used to refer to the new era the Earth is entering. Although such terminology emphasizes the centrality of our own species and its potential respect for the planet’s biodiversity, Wilson envisages the bleakness awaiting humanity if we continue changing the environment to meet our most immediate needs. For this reason, he prefers to call the coming era the Eremocene, i.e., ‘the Age of Loneliness’. Poetic as the phrase may sound, the Age of Loneliness speaks to the utter solitude humans will be doomed to if there are no flora or fauna to reciprocate and balance their lives. Unless we halt the negative interaction with our ecosystems and bring ourselves into a more ‘sustainable Edenic existence’, the future generations of humans will be deprived of the sound of birds and of the richness of forest life. In her short story ‘The Snow Archives’, Aritha van Herk explores the social consequences of this kind of solitude and imagines the complete disappearance of snow from Canada: national identity is radically transformed. The trees start to look miserable in the winter cold without the protective whiteness of the snow, and the desolate landscape is made all the more poignant when the children chant ancient rhymes about the white element but are unable to grasp their meaning. ‘And the snow had gone’, sadly acknowledges the narrator, ‘slowly falling less and less often until it was first unusual, then a rarity, then extinct: And of course, was only missed when its revisitation was extinguished, when the world suddenly recognized that it would not return’. 
The radical separation between the human and the nonhuman is connected with a long list of binary oppositions that privilege the former (those entities assumed to be on the human side, such as culture, reason, mind) and undervalue the latter. It could be argued that the practice of segregating animals and humans in these systems of representation announces the Age of Loneliness, to use Wilson’s phraseology, and contributes to its devastating consequences. However, the boundaries between the human and the animal world, as well as their differing degrees of importance in a hierarchy of values, prove to be difficult to sustain from biological, sociological, or philosophical frameworks. For Donna Haraway the material space we call our bodies is formed by numerous microorganisms, like fungi and bacteria, ‘which play in a symphony necessary to my being alive at all’. There is no way of being in the world if it is not in the company of these tiny companions such that, she concludes, ‘[t]o be one is always to become with many’. From this perspective, our corporeality is always the result of numerous interactions between different species, so that any purist notions of what it means to be human are interrogated. Carol J. Adams has also taken issue with the species divide that has traditionally supported the instrumental use of animals. In her exploration of relatedness and care, Adams perceives the boundaries between self and other as ‘artificial’ and ‘unnatural’. For her, the myth of the autonomous individual that boasts of his/her detachment from human and nonhuman communities renders invisible a whole network of interactions without which human life simply would not be possible. Working within the field of philosophy, Raimond Gaita denounces the individualism that pervades much contemporary society and breaks the traditional boundaries between the species in his defence of need and emotional attachment: ‘Humble acknowledgement of our need is our best protection against foolish condescension to both human beings and animals’, he contends. ‘Our acknowledgement of need can enable us to see things more truly’.

In spite of ever increasing ecological activism and scholarship, the shadow of the Eremocene persists. This is partly due to the fact that changes in sea level or in global temperature are, particularly in the first world, too diffuse to be taken into consideration, too removed from our daily realities to be looked at with any urgency, which confers upon them what Robert Kirkman calls ‘plausible deniability’. However, the looming Age of Loneliness will not only have severe social, philosophical, ethical, and biological consequences but will also impinge on our very systems of representation. The aesthetic contemplation of nature as a means to ponder on human subjectivity and identity will come to