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Worlds of Loss:
Absence and Grief in Australian Climate Fiction

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German Synopsis

Diese Arbeit analysiert die drei australischen Klimaromane *Clade* (2015) von James Bradley, *The Living Sea of Waking Dreams* (2020) von Richard Flanagan und *The Swan Book* (2013) von Alexis Wright, insbesondere deren Darstellung der Mensch-Natur-Beziehung in Zeiten des Klimawandels. Da letzterer unter anderem Naturkatastrophen auslöst, Orte unbewohnbar macht und das Aussterben ganzer Spezies zur Folge hat, ist diese Beziehung in allen drei Romanen von Verlust und Trauer geprägt. Jedoch hat Trauer auch eine positive Funktion. Sie verlangt von Charakteren sich ihrer nicht-menschlichen Umwelt emotional zu öffnen und führt dabei zu der Neuformung und Wertschätzung von Beziehungen zwischen Menschen und Tieren: in *Clade* am Beispiel von Honigbienen, in *The Living Sea* in Bezug auf den gefährdeten Goldbauchsittich und in *The Swan Book* mit Hinblick auf schwarze Schwäne. Allerdings sind die durch den Klimawandel hervorgerufenen Emotionen nicht für alle Charaktere von gleicher Bedeutung. So stellt *The Swan Book*, deren Autorin der Waanyi-Nation angehört, den Zusammenhang zwischen dem Klimawandel und Kolonialismus in den Mittelpunkt und macht deutlich, dass die Zerstörung der Natur eine zentrale Rolle in der jahrhundertealten Unterdrückung indigener Australier*innen spielt. Dieses Bewusstsein für koloniale Machtstrukturen fehlt in den anderen beiden, von weißen Autoren verfassten Romanen, wo der Klimawandel als neues, beispielloses Naturphänomen angesehen wird.

1. Introduction

The novel *Clade* starts with its main character Adam reflecting on the stark landscape of the Arctic, where he researches earlier changes in the Earth's climate. He observes his surroundings' effect on him and his colleagues, how being in this hostile but beautiful environment makes them feel more alive and at peace with themselves (Bradley 21). At the same time, however, he and his team share "an awareness that they are at the end of something. This year the ice has retreated further than ever, exposing rock and stone buried for millions of years. To the east and west the glaciers are flowing faster and faster, calving bergs half the size of cities day after day, a process of transformation so vast it is difficult to comprehend" (Bradley 21). In times of climate change, our relationships with the non-human world cannot remain free of melancholia, the knowledge of what has already been lost and will be lost in the future and the incomprehensibility of our own complicity in these planetary transformations. Climate fiction provides a space in what is otherwise a discourse dominated by science for representing and discussing these complex emotions elicited by anthropogenic climate change.

The current change in earth's climate is the result of an increase in greenhouse gases, most prominently carbon dioxide, methane, and water vapor, in the atmosphere. Consequently, when solar rays penetrate the atmosphere and a part is reflected by the earth's surface as heat, not as much can escape as before and the planet warms up. Changes in global temperature have been occurring naturally for millions of years (Maslin 31). Yet the source for the current climate crisis is human activity, burning fossil fuels principally for energy production, industry, and transport (Maslin 38). One difference to earlier climate variations is the rapidity of the current change (IPCC 6). Preindustrial CO_2 concentration in the atmosphere was 280 parts per million (Maslin 37); today it is at 418 ("Climate Change and Global Warming."). Consequently, global temperature has so far risen by 1.01 °C since 1880, the first year from which we have a continuous record of it. Projected consequences of a warming climate, some of which can be observed already, include loss of sea ice and glaciers; sea level rise; ocean acidification; changing seasonal patterns; longer, more intense heat waves; changing precipitation patterns, and more frequent and stronger storms (IPCC 5; 8 f.). Moreover, climate prediction models have their limits because it is difficult to predict tipping

points, i.e., when the accumulated changes in the global climate system lead to a sudden, and often irreversible alteration (Maslin 145; 148).

Since human activity has never affected the planet in this way, a new geological epoch has been proposed: the Anthropocene. First coined by atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen in 2000 (Ellis 29), the Anthropocene has not (yet) been designated an official geological epoch by the Anthropocene Working Group because the debate about its stratigraphic markers is still ongoing. As a less formalised term, however, it has gained currency in several disciplines outside of geology, mainly the humanities, to designate "all the new contexts and demands – cultural, ethical, aesthetic, philosophical and political – of environmental issues that are truly planetary in scale" (Clark 2). So far, we have been living in the Holocene, a period of climatic stability after the last ice age ten thousand years ago (Maslin 32). This stable climate was a significant factor in the thriving of human societies and allowed them to make technological progress, which ultimately led to the invention of planet-altering technologies like combustion engines and atomic bombs. Some of those technologies have been proposed to mark the beginning of the Anthropocene. Crutzen, for example, suggested the invention of the steam engine in 1784 while others propose 1945, when humans' capacity to alter the planet increased rapidly in what is called the Great Acceleration, and radioactive particles from the first nuclear bomb tests can be used as a stratigraphic marker (Morton 4 f.). For the purpose of this thesis, I join Crutzen in considering the invention of the steam engine as marking the beginning of the Anthropocene because of its link to CO_2, the main driver of climate change, but also its association with colonialism and the industries supported by it.

While the Anthropocene can be a useful term to describe the complex phenomenon of a planet altered by humanity, it is not an unproblematic one. In a world shaped by colonialism and the subsequent unequal distribution of resources, not everyone is equally to blame for environmental destruction and climate change. On a national as well as an individual basis, how much CO_2 one emits depends largely on wealth (Ellis 112). Europe and the US, for example, were the second and third biggest contributors to CO_2 emission in 2020 ("CO2 Emissions"). China is currently the biggest contributor ("CO2 Emissions") but has only reached this status in the last twenty years; historically, it has been a low emitter. To solve this conundrum, the idea of climate compensation has been proposed (Attfield 105). This means that, in one form or other, countries who

have historically been low emitters are compensated by countries who have been emitting more greenhouse gases for longer. Compensation could take the form of financial aid to adapt to climate change effects or an emission quota, so poorer countries can emit a little longer before reaching zero emissions (Attfield 106 f.). Currently, though, such suggestions are improbable to be taken up since many countries are reluctant to adopt binding agreements in this matter (Attfield 107).

Moreover, even within many nations of the Global North, the responsibility for as well as the risk to suffer from climate change are not distributed equally. Canada, the US, New Zealand and Australia are all settler colonialist countries where oppression of Indigenous[1] people and an exploitative view of nature go hand in hand. In "Our Ancestors' Dystopia Now", Kyle Powys Whyte, an Anishinaabe scholar from the US, remarks that for many Indigenous people the colossal environmental catastrophe happened when their lands were first colonised and thus irrevocably altered, for example by extinction, logging, and pollution. Consequently, they have since been living in an ongoing dystopia (207). In this context, climate change is a continuation of hundreds of years of colonial violence against Indigenous people and the environments in which they live(d). Based on this understanding, the Anthropocene quickly fractures into multiple Anthropocenes where environmental risk and precarity are unevenly distributed (Crane 7). The environmental changes that characterise the Anthropocene(s) affect every one of us, but not in the same way.

Living in the Anthropocene has brought about novel, environmental emotions for many people. Many of us have felt anxiety in the face of an unstable climate or grief at the prospect of species extinction at some point. This temporal dimension is particular to climate grief because it is not only directed at what we lost but also at what will be lost in the future. It creates the peculiar phenomenon of grieving in advance and thus living in a state of anticipatory grief. By nature, these are "noncathartic emotions" (Bladow and Ladino 11), i.e., emotional states from which true release is impossible. One is obliged to dwell in these feelings rather than move through and find closure from them. This is of significance for texts that deal with climate change because they

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[1] Throughout my thesis, I will use the term Indigenous person/people when talking about Indigenous people in general and Aboriginal person/people etc. to refer to the Indigenous peoples of Australia. At times, I will use more specific terms like Anishinaabe or Palawa. I took guidance in this matter from Common Ground, an educational organisation led by Aboriginal people ("Aboriginal, Indigenous or First Nations?"). While I am aware that personal preferences vary, I believe deciding on one term is essential for the comprehensibility of the thesis.

cannot necessarily offer catharsis the way other texts can. Of course, the unevenness of Anthropocenes Crane mentions (7) is also reflected in the emotional responses these ecologically unstable times evoke. Feelings like climate anxiety or grief that (white) settler descendants have only started to experience in the last ten to twenty years are not new to Indigenous people.

Climate fiction is not a formalised genre like science fiction or romance. Given the fact that climate change will figure more and more into our everyday lives in the future, the category might even dissolve again when the representation of climate change becomes just another feature of realist fiction. For now, climate fiction can be defined

> as a distinctive body of cultural work which engages with anthropogenic climate change, exploring the phenomenon not just in terms of setting, but with regard to psychological and social issues, combining fictional plots with meteorological facts, speculation on the future and reflection on the human-nature relationship, with an open border to the wider archive of related work on whose models it sometimes draws for the depiction of climatic crisis. (Goodbody and Johns-Putra, *Cli-Fi* 2)

The most important feature is, of course, the subject of anthropogenic climate change. However, Goodbody and Johns-Putra narrow it down further, requiring a more thorough examination of the phenomenon than presenting the backdrop for human action. Climate fiction should represent humans' changing relationships with the non-human world, which includes a "psychological" or affective dimension.

Climate fiction has been the topic of much ecocritical debate, especially its limits of representation. For example, its form and content often seem at odds with each other. Climate change is such a complex phenomenon that Timothy Morton describes it as a hyperobject, something that is "massively distributed in time and space relative to humans" (1). Even though we are embedded in it, its temporal scale as well as the complex interconnectedness of its causes and effects exceed human perception. Novels, however, tend towards the opposite: The restraints of setting limit the temporal and spatial scales on which a plot can unfold, the narratives are usually anthropocentric with human characters experiencing and relating events, and the story's meaning often relies on some kind of closure. Because of this discrepancy, ecocritical discussions have been focussing on literature's struggle with representing climate change

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without overly simplifying it (Craps and Crownshaw 1). For example, climate fiction often only represents the human scale, on which climate change is reduced to a single tipping point scenario or catastrophe, the consequences of which are solely focussed on humans (Goodbody and Johns-Putra, "The Rise" 235 f.). In this apocalyptic mode, climate change is a disaster that violently ends life as we know it. Alternatively, climate change can also be presented as a problem to be solved, usually with quick techno-fixes, or work as a backdrop against which the plot of the novel takes place (Goodbody and Johns-Putra, "The Rise" 233). It is evident that some of these narrative strategies are too reductive to fulfil Goodbody and Johns-Putra's more comprehensive definition of climate fiction cited above. All of these may be ways to factor climate change into a narrative, but none can adequately accommodate the complexity of this hyperobject.

In *The Great Derangement*, author Amitav Ghosh identifies another, underlying problem of the novel with regard to climate change. In his view, a "broader imaginative and cultural failure that lies at the heart of the climate crisis" (8) is responsible for our lack of action to mitigate climate change but also the lack of representation it finds in art. Novels, especially realist ones, are an art form that came to prominence with the rise of the European bourgeoisie and the rationalisation of modern life (Ghosh 19)—developments that are directly linked to Enlightenment ideas of human exceptionalism and dominion over nature. In addition, they are also a product of the Holocene, and therefore, of a stable climate that induced its own construction as mere background to human adventures (Ghosh 21). To a large extent, this is still the world in which we live. Humans, especially in wealthy countries, still extract and consume resources without regard for the consequences. The stories we write and read still overwhelmingly reflect this attitude.

However, in his study of Anthropocene fictions, Adam Trexler argues in favour of the novel as an art form to represent climate change. Novels are uniquely suited to accommodate "complex networks of ideas" (5) because they are not time sensitive, like movies for example, thus giving readers more time to sit with complex ideas. Moreover, literary studies are suited to analyse those networks without necessarily reifying their meaning (6), keeping an openness that is crucial to understanding "the patterning of enormous cultural transformations" of the Anthropocene (5). Furthermore, Goodbody and Johns-Putra see climate fiction as a space in which scientific facts can be rendered accessible to the wider public (*Cli-Fi* 9), while at the same time providing a "therapeutic

space, in which collective Anthropocene anxieties are aired, shared and worked through" (*Cli-Fi* 8). Overall, this makes the novel a vehicle for collective sense-making (Goodbody and Johns-Putra, *Cli-Fi* 7), which may prove invaluable in a time of "great derangement."

Despite appearing to be a new literary phenomenon, climate fiction has existed for decades. Not all climate novels are concerned with the current climate crisis, though. Early examples include science fiction from the middle of the twentieth century, in which terraforming—a form of geoengineering a planet's climate— plays a central role. An example of this would be Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965) (Trexler 8), the continued interest in which is evident from its 2021 movie adaptation. At the time, changing the climate firmly belonged to the realm of fantasy. Yet with climate change filtering more and more into public consciousness, climate fiction has moved increasingly into a realist mode. These days, climate novels mostly concern themselves either with the current discourse on climate change or with its future consequences based on scientific prognoses. In addition, most climate fiction that is published comes from countries of the Global North, i.e., wealthy countries where climate change does not yet play an immanent role but rather presents a future threat. Notable works in English include the *Maddaddam* trilogy by Margaret Atwood, *Flight Behavior* by Barbara Kingsolver, *The Windup Girl* as well as *The Water Knife* by Paolo Bacigalupi, Maggie Gee's *The Ice People* and *The Flood*, T.C. Boyle's *A Friend of the Earth*, and Kim Stanley Robinson's *Science in the Capitol* trilogy.

Australia has also produced its share of climate fiction, which is not a surprise considering that the nation is already beginning to experience the devastating consequences of a warmer climate like heat records, longer and more intense fires, and loss of natural diversity. Moreover, future predictions include sea-level rise, ocean acidification and changing rainfall patterns ("Climate Change in Australia"). In addition, the Australian nation is a direct product of the history of extractionist colonialism, where settlers' land use, climate change, and the oppression of Aboriginal people go hand in hand. In this context, climate fiction raises some interesting questions: Who writes climate fiction and are there differences of representation depending on who does? (How) Does climate change tie in with the colonial, violent history of the country? How does Australian climate fiction navigate the complex relationships between the local and the global?

In this thesis, I want to examine the relationship between humans and the non-human world, and the role affect plays in it as represented in Australian climate fiction. To this end, I will analyse the three novels *Clade* by James Bradley, *The Living Sea of Waking Dreams* by Richard Flanagan, and *The Swan Book* by Alexis Wright. Wright is an Aboriginal author and a member of the Waanyi nation, while both Bradley and Flanagan are white Australians. I argue that due to climate change, this human-nonhuman relationship is characterised by a decrease of biodiversity, an absence. It is marked by loss and the subsequent grief for what is lost but also anticipatory grief for future losses. Yet experiences of climate change are not universal and not everyone grieves in the same way for the environment and our relation to it. Affective responses to climate change by (white) settler descendants and Aboriginal people often differ in scope and intensity. At the same time, negative emotions can also have positive effects. In the three novels, climate change necessitates characters relating to their surroundings with (a newfound) quality of attention and affection, both of which are prerequisites to feeling grief. In this sense, grief can be productive, opening up new possibilities of relating to the environment and witnessing, caring for and making kin with fellow beings.

I will begin my examination of the topic with an overview of the most important concepts through which the human-nature relationship has been constructed in Western modernity, from the Enlightenment to the present day. In the following subchapter I will take a closer look at climate-change related affects and emotions, especially ecological grief. This will be followed by a short chapter on the link between climate change and Indigenous studies. I will end the theoretical part by outlining the current points of discussion on climate fiction from the fields of literary studies and ecocriticism. The third chapter will be dedicated to the analysis of my three chosen novels: *Clade*, *The Living Sea of Waking Dreams* and *The Swan Book*, respectively. For each analysis I have chosen those aspects of the novel that best pertain to my research question. In *Clade*, I will examine the loss of natural diversity, the displacement characters experience due to climate change impacts and how human death is presented in the novel to evoke ecological grief. I will end this analysis with a general evaluation of the book, and the other two with a comparison between the books. In the following subchapter I will discuss *The Living Sea* with regard to the overall role climate change plays in the novel and the various absences that characterise the plot. Lastly, I will analyse *The Swan Book* with a special focus on the story's numerous absences and presences and

the role of grief in an Aboriginal Australian context before concluding with a summary of my findings.

2. Climate Change in Theory

2.1 From Binary to Assemblage: A Conceptual History of the Human-Nature Relationship

To understand how we think and feel about climate change in the present, it is necessary to situate this phenomenon in a wider conceptual context of human's relationship with nature[2]. This is important because, while nature exists as a real, material entity, it is also always discursively produced (Garrard 10). The stories we tell about nature and our relationship to it crucially impact how we treat it and the natural resources at our disposal. Starting with the Enlightenment, the human subject and its capacity for reason became centred in philosophical, political and social discourse. Emblematic for this period, Immanuel Kant posited that the world can only be known through the subject, i.e., that without a subject, there would be no world (Colebrook 268). Yet this philosophical outlook and its profound influence on the modern world were also a product of favourable circumstances: "One can only imagine the world as in accord with human reason and the progress of globalism if what comes to be known as climate is rendered stable" (Colebrook 269). The steady climate of the Holocene allowed humans to form ideas about our agency and place in the world that allocated nature the role of resource and placed "man" at the top of the hierarchy of life. It is therefore not a coincidence that the Enlightenment was tied to "a history of capital, empire, and increasingly private conditions of human existence" (ibid.). Technological development and the ensuing spread of capitalism via colonialism around the globe are all tied to a stable climate that allowed humans to thrive instead of merely survive.

Colonialism is closely related to environmental disruption and degradation (Bartels et al. 109) like the introduction of invasive species, the displacement of Indigenous people, extinction and unsustainable resource extraction. Due to the vast spatial and temporal scales on which climate change unfolds, its relationship to colonialism is less direct. However, since our world is still shaped by power structures rooted in

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[2] I am aware that this is a history of Western conceptions of nature and that there are many cultures that hold less extractionist and anthropocentric views. However, Enlightenment thinking in connection with capitalism and colonialism has had such a significant impact on the world that I will focus on it here. Moreover, as a settler colonial country, Australia and its view on nature are very much informed by, if not a product of, these processes.

colonialism that largely determine who emits most CO_2 and who is most vulnerable to climate change impacts, this relationship should be an integral part of the discourse on climate change. Colonialism was the beginning of a globalised world that persists to this day in the current form of capitalism (Ghosh 87). It furthermore built the wealth of European, and later North-American, nations that contributed to the invention and widespread use of fossil-fuel dependent technology. Lastly, the idea of the agentic, humanist subject is also integral to the enterprise of colonialism, especially as it implies economic success and the ownership of property (Bartels et al. 118). This excludes many groups of people, the oppression and exploitation of which was elemental to the definition of this identity. As Ghosh observes, the project of modernity has been exclusionary from the start (92).

The view of nature as a backdrop to human action has been reflected in certain recurring tropes, some of which will later become important for analysing modern climate fiction. In his introductory text *Ecocriticism*, Greg Garrard identifies two important genres in this regard, pastoral and apocalypse (2). The pastoral, originally a literary genre dating back to ancient Greece that later turned into a trope more broadly, features a retreat from the city to the countryside, or at least a contrast between urban and rural spaces, and an idealisation and later romanticisation of nature (Garrard 37 f.). It often includes the pathetic fallacy, i.e., the belief that nature mirrors human emotions (40). If it looks back on the past, it is usually nostalgic, evoking simpler but better times (41), which is a mode of thought that is relevant for climate fiction and its evocation of grief. Overall, the pastoral evidently reproduces a nature-culture binary and establishes a criticism of modernity. It is a very human-centred approach to nature, and its construction of nature as a refuge might seem unfitting in a time when nature once again becomes increasingly volatile. Yet pastoral elements can still be found in modern climate fiction, for example *Clade*.

More prevalent in today's climate fiction is the apocalyptic mode. This trope is of course much older than the current climate crisis. The most prevalent iteration in the West is the Christian version of the end of days, when all believers will ascend to heaven and the rest of the world will be struck by plagues and end in fire. Garrard notes that apocalypse is by definition imaginative because it always depicts a future event (94). The imagined scenario is marked by duality; it comprises a clear distinction between good and evil but also a sharp temporal caesura of before and after (Garrard 94;

96). While narratives of this kind still exist in popular media today, for example in the form of disaster movies, the trope has undergone a notable transformation. First, narratives of this kind are usually not religious anymore but environmental, implying that not the world but the planet will end at our hands. Second, the end will not come about through God's will but human (in)action. Yet, more importantly, the end is often not an end at all but a drawn-out struggle amid environmental degradation.

In his influential work *From Apocalypse to Way of Life*, Frederick Buell argues that amid continuous environmental crises, among which climate change is principal, apocalyptic narratives have lost their appeal (xiii). Instead of fearing an environmental disaster that might come to pass in the future, people are dwelling in environmental crisis in the present (67). This leads to its normalisation, the opposite of a violent apocalyptic rupture (163). Environmental crisis is "woven, intimately and everywhere" into the everyday lives of humans and non-humans alike (99). Moreover, dwelling in crisis has an important corporeal, material component; it entails "facing the fact that one dwells in a body and in ecosystems, both of which are already subject to considerable degradation, modification, and pressure" (Buell 186). Extinction, pollution and climate change force us to recognise that we are not autonomous from nature but part of it, bodily beings who exist in relation to other bodily beings and material actors. For Buell, this recognition can lead to embodiment, "a way of dwelling actively within rather than accommodating oneself to environmental crisis" (190). Originally an ecofeminist concept, embodiment means sensually relating to one's environment, instead of just existing in it. It directs attention to one's surroundings and can therefore lead to a prioritisation of ecological health over resource extraction (ibid.). It follows that embodiment is closely tied to affect and that the way we feel towards our environments determines how we act towards it (Buell 191).

Dwelling in crisis is necessarily associated with risk. In his seminal work on the topic, *Risk Society*, Ulrich Beck declares a rupture within modernity, a shift from industrial societies to risk societies (9). While in the nineteenth century, the gains from modernisation were substantial in comparison to the pre-industrial way of life, and the immediate risks associated with it were small, now the risks produced alongside modernity outweigh its benefits (Beck, *Risk Society* 10). Moreover, in globalised, capitalist modernity, risk has become uncontrollable and its unfolding hard to predict, so that technological and economic progress is increasingly overshadowed by it (Beck, *Risk*

Society 13), turning modernity in on itself. Since in a globalised world risk becomes planetary in scope, it creates a global public sphere, or "world risk society" in which "everyday life is becoming cosmopolitan" (Beck, *World at Risk* 15) because one's direct environment can no longer be separated from distant places and people. This can be linked to, Ursula Heise's sense of planet, "a cognitive understanding and affective attachment to the global" (59). Out of this understanding arises eco-cosmopolitanism, the "envision[ing] [of] individuals and groups as part of planetary 'imagined communities' of both human and nonhuman kinds" (Heise 61) and a countermodel to local attachments to place.

Evidently, we have moved from narratives of immediate disaster to ones of inhabiting risk and, thus, slow violence. The latter term was coined by Rob Nixon in his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. He defines it as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not perceived as violence at all" (2). One example Nixon gives are the Marshall Islands, subject to extensive atomic bomb testing by the US in the 1940s and '50s which led to birth defects in the population for decades (7). Thus, slow violence does not comprise a clearly demarcated event but is more diffused both temporally and spatially. As a result, it is often not recognised as violence at all and therefore rendered invisible discursively as well as geographically. Climate change can be seen as an act of slow violence, too. It is a phenomenon with numerous interacting causes and effects, massively distributed in space and time. This complexity complicates accountability. However, the lens of slow violence is still useful for calling attention to the responsibility of some actors and the undue burden of others. Slow violence disparately impacts the poor of the planet. Dumping industrial waste, fracking, mining, and military testing are just some practices that are usually conducted in areas that are impoverished and therefore often remote. And even climate change, (currently) impacts poor people more strongly. This leads to the poor "experiencing environmental threat not as planetary abstraction but as a set of inhabited risks" (Nixon 4), which is reminiscent of Beck and Buell's respective arguments. However, while Buell (rightly) points out that all humans have gotten used to living with environmental crisis, Nixon emphasises the environmental injustice of the poor bearing the brunt of it because risk is not equally distributed; for many in Europe and North America it remains an abstraction for now. One of the risks associated with

experiencing slow violence is displacement, which is in itself a form of absence: the absence of meaningful, sustainable relations with the land. Nixon writes: "I want to propose a more radical notion of displacement, one that, instead of referring solely to the movement of people from their places of belonging, refers rather to the loss of the land and resources beneath them, a loss that leaves communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable" (19). In this sense, displacement does not need to entail physically leaving a place but can also occur without moving. One example of this would be failing crops because of altered weather patterns due to climate change, leaving farmers without a viable business.

Nixon notes that slow violence also poses challenges to narration. If plot is the causal relation of events, then a form of violence that is dispersed across time and space, thus challenging the boundaries of what we call 'event', will naturally strain against the limits of representation. Conventionally, texts represent bounded events causally related to each other, which is why they struggle to represent hyperobjects like climate change, an issue I will return to later. Nixon, referring back to Raymond Williams, calls for novels that preserve local specificities without excluding "the occluded, sprawling webs of interconnectedness" (45) of a globalised world.

Slow violence is intimately connected to colonialism in Australia. Europeans brought with them the unsustainable, extractionist mentality perpetuated in modern capitalism, which Aboriginal people largely avoided (Nixon 96). Being a settler colonial state, Australia is rich in resources and can actually profit from it in contrast to former extractive-colonial countries that are often exploited by wealthier nations (Nixon 70). However, the extraction of those resources also largely happens to the detriment of Aboriginal people, whose relationships to the land are often disrupted by mines, dams, or lately, climate change.

The production of risk and the perpetration of slow violence in modernity lead to a complication of agency. In his influential essay "The Climate of History", Dipesh Chakrabarty postulates that humans are not just biological actors anymore but, as a species, also act as a geological force (205 f.). This level of agency is fairly recent because "we can become geological agents only historically and collectively ... when we have reached numbers and invented technologies that are on a scale large enough to have an impact on the planet itself" (Chakrabarty 206). Again, our impact on the planet as a species is firmly linked to technological progress and in turn, colonialism and

capitalism. Geological agency differs from other forms of human agency because it only works in one direction. As a species we are causing climate change, but we cannot seem to mitigate or even reverse it as one. We cannot experience being a species the same way we experience being an individual, or part of a group (Chakrabarty 220). It is an abstract concept that can be grasped intellectually but provides an insufficient basis for conscious action. Additionally, the outcomes of this form of agency are often unforeseeable and accumulative. The more we change our planet, the more the Earth will disrupt our way of life.

Bruno Latour expands on Chakrabarty's ideas in his essay "Agency in the Time of the Anthropocene." Earth having become, once again, an actor, instead of a passive backdrop to human action, disturbs the neat distinction between subject and object (4 f.), which, as mentioned earlier, has played a prominent role in modernity since the Enlightenment. The Earth, traditionally de-animated in modern thought and science, gains the status of a subject in times of climate change. Latour defines it as follows: "To be a subject is not to act autonomously in front of an objective background, but to share agency with other subjects that have also lost their autonomy" (5). Two aspects are interesting here. First, humans are no longer the sole proprietors of agency but share it with every non-human entity, which dissolves the hierarchical relationship between humans, animals, plants and smaller life forms and chemicals. Second, this form of agency cannot support the human fiction of acting independently of one's surroundings. It is characterised by helplessness, by a "loss of autonomy", a dependency on all parts of the network of relations between actors that constitutes life. This means that we are incredibly impactful as a species, while simultaneously being incredibly vulnerable to those impacts as well.

In the Anthropocene, at the latest, it becomes clear that the neat divide between nature and culture is no longer tenable. Therefore, it seems reasonable to move away from the binary of nature/culture towards an assemblage of naturecultures: "There is no border where evolution ends and history begins, where genes stop and environment takes up, where culture rules and nature submits, or vice versa. Instead, there are turtles upon turtles of naturecultures all the way down" (Haraway, *The Haraway Reader* 2). This allows us to acknowledge the interconnectedness of the two concepts. What we commonly understand as nature has been shaped by culture and vice versa. Humans have cultivated plants and crops, redirected rivers, and domesticated animals.

In turn, human cultures, their festivals and stories, are shaped by the local climate, the seasons and the surrounding animal and plant life, for example. Climate change will significantly influence this interrelationship. As mentioned earlier, the Holocene provided a stable backdrop for humans to make technological, social and cultural advancements, but the price to pay for these is the loss of the very climate stability that made them possible.

If there is merely a semantic distinction between nature and culture, if all things and beings instead live together in naturecultures, then the hierarchies between different species break down. Demarcating nature from culture is a tactic to set humans apart from everything else. Yet in naturecultures, humans and nonhumans live in horizontal assemblages instead of vertical hierarchies. This makes interspecies connection much simpler, or what Haraway calls "making kin" (*Staying* 2). Kin, in this sense, is not narrowly defined as genealogy or blood relation but is a question of what and who you are responsible for (ibid.). Deciding to be present with kin means "staying with the trouble", something that "requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic [*sic*] pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings" (*Staying* 1). Staying with the trouble by being "truly present" calls to mind Buell's active dwelling or embodiment. Both emphasise the need to be physically and mentally present in order to establish a meaningful relationship with one's surroundings. The configurations Haraway writes about could also be called "agentic assemblages" (Bennett 21), a term that points to the fact that agency is distributed across the assemblage and not the characteristic of any (often human) individual. This conception of agency, which recalls the shared agency integral to Latour's definition of the subject, also destabilises the human as a category because our bodies, and therefore our minds, can also be construed as agentic assemblages full of chemicals, electric signals and bacteria. This further erodes the categories through which nature has been conceptualised in modernity.

Overall, one can trace a move from binary towards plurality in the Western intellectual history of constructing nature, from individualism to assemblages. The Enlightenment promoted a clear distinction between the human subject and the world, between nature and culture (DeLoughrey et al. 11). During the transition to late modernity, the world became globalised due to colonialism and capitalism and coal- and

later oil-fuelled machinery became widely used. The collective emission of greenhouse gases has altered the Earth's climate so significantly that some scientists propose we're now living in a new geological era, the Anthropocene. The latter is characterised by the dissolution of binary categories such and nature and culture (Clark 9), instead presenting itself as a time of "insistent, inescapable continuities" (Ghosh 62). Yet this is not a linear progression from one point to the other. The Anthropocene is characterised by a profusion of often opposing ideas existing side by side. In fact, I would argue that one of the central problems of the current climate crisis is that humans, especially in the West, still act as if they are independent from nature and will remain unaffected by climate change. However, it becomes apparent that nature has already started to figure more substantially into human thinking and, by extension, feeling.

2.2 Ecological Grief

Climate change elicits various emotional responses from humans, which is why affect theory is useful in this discussion. Affect theory is a diverse theoretical field comprising influences from psychology, neurology, materialism and philosophy, among others (Bladow and Ladino 4). Despite the impossibility of an in-depth discussion here, I would like to highlight Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino's definition following the Spinozist tradition put forward most prominently by Gilles Deleuze. It describes affect "as asignifying, precognitive bodily feeling, an 'intensity' or a perpetual state of 'becoming' (5). Affects are thus unconscious and pre-verbal. If put into language, they become distinctive emotions. Additionally, affects are characterised by openness and their resistance to binaries because they are "embodied capacities— phenomena that arise and circulate as intensities among assemblages" (Bladow and Ladino 6). This propensity for circulation between entities leads Tim Jensen to describe affects and emotions as "ecological", meaning humans are embedded in affective networks with other humans and non-humans. Therefore, it makes sense that climate change and environmental degradation would affect humans emotionally.

Faced with the environmental changes of the Anthropocene, our responses range from feelings of numbness and apathy to anxiety and grief (Bladow and Ladino 2). Looking at grief as a reaction to climate-change related loss, Cunsolo and Ellis state that this particular emotion is increasingly felt because the effects of climate change are becoming more prevalent in everyday life (275). They define ecological grief as "the

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grief felt in relation to experienced or anticipated ecological losses, including the loss of species, ecosystems and meaningful landscapes due to acute or chronic environmental change" (ibid.). The emotional response is stronger the more closely people live with nature, e.g., in the case of Indigenous peoples (Cunsolo and Ellis 275), although this effect has been recorded across cultures (278). Thus, the evidence suggests that ecological grief may be a universal human response to climate change, albeit not the only one.

Indeed, ecological grief still co-exists with human entitlement, self-obsession and "contemporary cultures of excess" (Shaw and Bonnett 566). Humans have organized life in a way that is detrimental to the planet's climate, but are unable to mitigate those detriments. This dissonance between knowledge and action can lead to apathy and further self-absorption, which Shaw and Bonnett deem a grief response as well (569; 571), one in which the grief can never be resolved but staying with these negative affects is too painful. While I agree that apathy can be a consequence of grief, attributing most of the world's inaction against climate change to this cause seems like an over-simplification. Especially in the West, not many are in a habit of affectively engaging with nature and thus take it into consideration as anything other than a resource. I would argue that, while some may mourn to the point of paralysis, most are not apathetic because of too much grief but because of too little. We are used to thinking about nature rationally and abstractly but rarely emotionally and affectionately. Yet, arguably, paying close attention to and developing a personal relationship with something or someone is a prerequisite to feeling grief. Put differently, when we cultivate what Haraway calls response-ability, the ability to stay with and respond to the trouble of the Anthropocene, grief will inevitably follow.

Ecological grief is distinct from regular grief because it cannot be resolved. Usually, when one has lost someone or something dear, one goes through a process of mourning. Freud described it as letting go of the lost object (21), Elisabeth Kübler-Ross sets out its five stages in her well-known, albeit not scientifically rigid, model ranging from denial to acceptance (216). The consensus is that a healthy mourning process has an ending. Yet for ecological grief, this kind of closure is impossible to achieve. Its cause cannot be internalised, as it is continuous. We are not mourning a dead planet; we are mourning a dying planet. The cause of this grief is a state, rather than an event; and therefore, the emotion it elicits is noncathartic (Bladow and Ladino 11). The argument

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could be made that anticipatory grief does not have to be ecological; it can occur, for example, when someone is diagnosed with a terminal illness. However, even in that case, a normal mourning process becomes possible at some point and has therefore the potential to end, while this is not possible for ecological grief. Simultaneously, ecological grief is also "disenfranchised" since it is rarely publicly acknowledged in discourses about climate change (Cunsolo and Ellis 275). Thus, the public part of mourning that can provide healing or relief does not occur and individuals are often left alone with their feelings and lack the language to put them into words.

Another particularity of ecological grief is its temporality. Usually, grief occurs after the loss has been experienced and is thus directed at the past. However, in the case of climate change one also grieves for anticipated losses. One does not only mourn what has already occurred but what is still to come. This also affects how the present is perceived because any enjoyment of nature can never again be simple but must simultaneously be characterised by melancholia. Psychologist Glenn Albrecht et al. coined the term "solastalgia" for the similar but related feeling of distress of living with the decimation of one's home environment, a "violation of connections to space" (96).

One of the most prevalent writings on grief comes from Judith Butler. Her thoughts on the topic admittedly centre solely on humans but can be applied easily to non-humans as well. She describes a political dimension to grief that becomes apparent in the distinctions we make between "grievable" and "ungrievable" lives. When a life is grievable, its end is considered worth mourning and there are conspicuous ways to do so. On the other hand, "an ungrievable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all" ("Precariousness"). It is not considered a real life and is thus "derealized" ("Violence" 22). As an example, Butler names the numerous Afghani people who died in US military intervention, and who remain invisible to the US public ("Violence" 21) while American fallen soldiers were honoured and mourned individually. From these observations Butler derives a "hierarchy of grief", in which one's closeness to the Western humanist notion of the prototypical human determines one's position ("Violence" 20 f.). Maintaining the ungrievability of certain people is an ongoing process through discursive and actual violence ("Violence" 22). Butler defines violence as "an exploitation of that primary tie, that primary way in which we are, as bodies, outside ourselves and for one another"

("Violence" 18). This is a violation of our natural dependency on and vulnerability to each other.

For Butler, grief introduces possibilities of forming communities and expanding narrow definitions of the human ("Violence" 9). It is also a transformative experience, a transformation of us and our relationship with the world: "Perhaps, rather, one mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly forever. Perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say submitting to a transformation) the full result of which one cannot know in advance" ("Violence" 11). This transformation of the self occurs because the self is constituted by its relations with others, and when one is severed, the self is not left untouched (Butler, "Violence" 12). At the same time, this means that the relations that constitute us also dispossess us (Butler, "Violence" 13f.). The relations in which we are implicated—through dependency, desire, loss—show that we are not autonomous entities. In these relations the self is negated as much as it is constructed. In line with Haraway and Buell (265), this idea of grief, too, belies the notion of the sovereign individual impervious to dependency on others.

Butler's writing on grief is helpful in the context of the Anthropocene but also has its shortcomings, namely its anthropocentrism. It firmly talks about human communities and lives and completely brackets out the wider net of relationality they are formed and lived in. Climate change and other environmental degradations are showing us that our community of vulnerability extends beyond the borders of human societies and that non-human lives can be grievable, too. However, in expanding those terms, it is important to discard the "hierarchy of grief" based on identity and apply one that is based on risk and actual vulnerability. Not all humans share the same vulnerability to the effects of climate change and not all landscapes are currently equally at risk. Often, those are linked: The people who mourn non-humans most tend to be the ones who are themselves marginalised and often excluded from discourse on climate change, like Indigenous people (Cunsolo Willox 154). To render non-human lives visible and, thus, grievable in this conversation, Ashlee Cunsolo Willox posits that climate change necessitates "the work of mourning", i.e., the emotional work that constitutes grieving and is "always and simultaneously personal, political, and ethical, and corporeally embodied" (142). This labour has the potential to transform individuals and their relationships with the non-human world and can also lead to much needed

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political action (Cunsolo Willox 145; 151). Lastly, Haraway (referring to ethnographer Thom van Dooren) extends the ability to feel grief to non-human animals, emphasising that in the Anthropocene, humans not only grieve for but also always grieve with other life forms (*Staying* 38 f.).

2.3 Indigenous Studies and Climate Change

For many Indigenous people, climate change and the ensuing affects occur in a different context than they do for settler descendants. First, their relationship to land is different. Settler descendants usually see land as a resource that can be owned. Indigenous people are more likely to identify with the land, to see it as an extension of themselves (Barrett 29). Deborah Bird Rose defines this relationship as one of kinship, in which "people and country take care of each other" (49). She further states:

> People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, feel sorry for country, and long for country. People say that country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, is sorry or happy… Country is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and a will toward life. (7)

It is apparent that the same distinctions between humans and non-humans found in Western societies do not apply here. Notions like Tim Jensen's "emotional ecologies" (17) or Ashlee Cunsolo Willox's political project of extending grievability to non-human beings (151) are already in action in Bird Rose's conception of Country. Moreover, Country is not only the object of emotional responses from humans but also a non-human source of emotions.

Second, the climate crisis is not new for Aboriginal people but has been ongoing since the first settlers arrived on their land. Settler colonialism did not only have intense ramifications for the Indigenous people already living there but for their environment as well. In fact, settler colonialism can be seen as a violent disruption of people's relationship to the land (Whyte "Settler Colonialism"125) and thus, a displacement with or without moving (Nixon 19). Indigenous relationships to land were markedly opposed to the extractionist relationships settlers pursued, in which land was owned by individuals and served as a resource that could be monetised (Bartels et al. 109). Those are still the predominant attitudes of Western capitalist societies towards

nature today. Yet not only did settlers take over and appropriate the plants and animals that were already there, but they also introduced new species to actively make the land their homeland (Whyte "Settler Colonialism" 135). This often led to the extinction of native wildlife and further disrupted Indigenous people's relationships with their environment.

For this reason, land is at the heart of climate change debates and environmental justice in settler-colonial countries. The loss of Country—or rather, what remains of it after colonialism—is a dire potential consequence of climate change (Birch, "Climate Change"). Since Country is not just a place but a living entity, its degradation "will have a devastating impact on the spiritual, physical and social wellbeing of affected communities", essentially displacing them (in place) (ibid.). Dealing with climate change, therefore, requires Australia to reimagine themselves as living on Aboriginal country instead of assimilating Aboriginal people into the Western nation state (ibid.). On a related note, since climate change became a widely recognised problem, the interest in sustainable Aboriginal practices and knowledge has increased significantly. On one hand, this could be an opportunity to let Aboriginal communities take the lead on climate change mitigation. On the other hand, Birch points out the need to protect Aboriginal knowledge from appropriation by settler descendants ("On What Terms" 10).

In this context, climate change becomes the latest development in a series of environmental injustices perpetrated mostly by Western countries and settler descendants, the consequences of which disproportionally affect poor People of Colour and Indigenous people. The difference is that this time, environmental crisis has reached a scale at which it will affect everyone in the future, even the wealthy and privileged. In this context, Whyte criticizes the Western propensity to think about climate change and the Anthropocene in terms of apocalypse: "The hardships many nonIndigenous [*sic*] people dread most of the climate crisis are ones that Indigenous peoples have endured already due to different forms of colonialism: ecosystem collapse, species loss, economic crash, drastic relocation, and cultural disintegration" ("Indigenous Science" 3). A rhetoric that follows this "logics of apocalypse" (ibid.) ignores the fact that being new to living with crisis is a privilege in itself. Moreover, it evades the question of responsibility by proposing that all of humanity is equally at risk, thereby letting settler descendants and people from the Global North more generally portray

themselves exclusively as victims rather than acknowledging their share in perpetrating the current climate crisis (Pierrot and Seymour 107).

Environmental injustice is tied to settler colonialism in other ways. For example, Indigenous people are routinely characterised as more eco-friendly and in harmony with nature than settler descendants (Heise 32 f.). Apart from being likely untrue (Heise 33), what sounds positive at first, is in reality an "othering practice" (De-Loughrey et al. 4) that portrays Indigenous people as pre-modern and thus excludes them from anything associated with modernity. In the context of literature, for example, it is often assumed that Indigenous authors are not interested in certain genres like science fiction (Adamson and Monani 1), a supposition which necessitated the coinage of the term Indigenous futurisms. Furthermore, the binary of nature and culture perpetuated in Western modernity has led to the idea of pristine, untouched nature. This influences a conservation culture in which Indigenous people have no place and are routinely expelled from their ancestral lands due to the establishment of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries (Garrard 77). Climate change thus adds to an already inequitable situation.

2.4 An Emerging Genre: Climate Fiction

Climate fiction is an emerging genre and as such difficult to characterise. However, it is undeniably a trend in modern fiction. As mentioned earlier, Goodbody and Johns-Putra define climate fiction as "a distinctive body of cultural work which engages with anthropogenic climate change" in terms of setting and its psychological and social consequences (*Cli-Fi* 2). Its beginnings lie in the early science fiction of the twentieth century when the concern with a changing climate was more fantastical (Trexler 8). Since then, climate change has become a realistic facet of everyday life for most people, whether they read about it in the news or already live with its actual consequences. Therefore, it is not surprising that climate fiction has turned from a fantastical mode to a more realistic one (Goodbody and Johns-Putra, "The Rise" 239) using climate science to construct probable scenarios that could come to pass in the future. More commonalities between individual works of climate fiction can be observed. For example, climate fiction helps readers deal with affects that arise from climate change such as anxiety or grief. It can also create new affects (Weik von Mossner, *Affective Ecocriticism* 54). Most climate fiction has an overt political motivation and as such aims to convince readers

to care about climate change by rendering the effects of it more real than scientific discourse can. Works that deal with environmental justice can also aim at strategically creating empathy for marginalised groups (Weik von Mossner, *Affective Ecocriticism* 78). Antonia Mehnert calls this moral dimension of climate fiction "poetics of responsibility" (3) because fictional representations of extinction, loss of natural diversity and injustice can influence people's attitudes and behaviours in real life.

Goodbody and Johns-Putra name speculative elements as one of the defining characteristics of climate fiction (*Cli-Fi* 2). Indeed, most climate fiction of the past twenty years can be classed as speculative fiction because it revolves around the effects of climate change in the future. Of these works, most are unsurprisingly dystopic or even apocalyptic. In *Climate and Literature*, Robert Markley focusses on the numbing effects of climate change in fiction, identifying certain works as "dystopias of indifference" in which "the disintegration of affective relations into the routinised resignation of pre-apocalyptic existence" (25) is the focus. In these novels, crisis has become the norm, and individual characters are too overwhelmed to take any action. This is in line with Whyte and others' criticism of Western people's passivity in the face of climate change. It is furthermore debatable because a "disintegration of affective relations" assumes the pre-existence of the latter when, I would argue, the West's relationship with nature during modernity has largely been characterised by a lack of affect. Antonia Mehnert, on the other hand, dismisses apocalypse as a significant mode of narrating climate change because the constancy of environmental crisis has robbed it of its representational power (10). Instead, she proposes "critical dystopias". In contrast to dystopias of indifference, they "allow both readers and protagonists to hope by resisting closure: the ambiguous, open endings of the novel maintain the utopian impulse within the work" (42). This is much more conducive to giving readers room to engage with various affects regarding climate change. In that sense, the stance a novel takes on the issue has important implications for its political outlook and its effect on the reader.

Another common concern of climate fiction is the representation of climate change on different scales, which Timothy Clark has most prominently written about in his book *Ecocriticism on the Edge*. As a hyperobject, climate change exists on multiple scales, be they geologic, temporal, biological, or individual. Consequently, scale effects complicate many areas of life, from simple mundane tasks to ethical considerations and rational thinking (Clark 72 f.). An example would be starting one's car to go to work

(Morton 20). On an individual level it seems perfectly rational to use one's car to drive to work. On a planetary level, daily actions like this contribute to climate change, which makes continuing them against better judgment suddenly seem irrational. At the same time, not driving one's car would not make any difference on a planetary level: "The emergent force of scale effects is confusing because they take the easy, daily equations of moral and political accounting and multiply them both by zero and by infinity" (Clark 72). Scale effects thus complicate accountability enormously by illuminating our individual actions as both impactful and insignificant at the same time. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to which scale is applied in any engagement with climate change, called "scale framing" (Clark 75), because meaning changes accordingly.

While Clark's concept of scales is helpful for thinking about representational challenges of climate change, his deep scepticism towards literature and literary criticism's ability to engage with the topic adequately seems misplaced. Clark argues that language-based art is the least suitable to represent the Anthropocene because it is by default human centric (187). He adds that "still-dominant conventions of plotting, characterization and setting in the novel need to be openly acknowledged as pervaded by anthropocentric delusion" (191). I agree that the representation of climate change is often a problem of scaling the issue down enough to maintain an intelligible narrative that readers will find engaging without reducing it to a problem that only plays out on an individual level. To represent climate change without reducing its complexity, then, narratives do well to include a "multi-scalar logic" (Johns-Putra, *Climate and Literature* 246). However, stories about the Anthropocene have to exclude the human in order to have merit, nor do I think this is at all possible. We are compelled to understand the world and our place in it from a human point of view. The question for climate fiction should thus not be how to erase the human from narrative but how to make room for more than the human, decentring it.

So far, the limits of climate fiction have been the focus of much ecocritical debate. Greg Garrard points out "the difficulty of narrating ongoing systemic crises within intrinsically individualising forms such as the travelogue and the novel" (178). As mentioned above, incorporating a multi-scalar logic in the novel poses a challenge. Novels usually depend on specificity of time and place to make sense, what Amitav Ghosh calls discontinuous thinking: reducing issues to the immediate matter at hand (56). This is something that the novel accommodates well but which runs the risk of being

reductive. Furthermore, the novel as a language-based art form is anthropocentric by nature. Yet climate fiction also has a lot of potential. Clark formulates succinctly what role art should ideally play in times of large-scale, anthropogenic environmental change: "An art correlated to the Anthropocene is one that, however momentarily, dispels the phantasm of human normality" (185). Unlike Clark, I do not think that this disqualifies all literature, entails erasing the human from texts, or is the prerogative of avantgarde art (ibid.). Novels can construct complex, alternative worlds and break with the conventions of form by subverting typical plot structures, employing unreliable narration, and interrogating the function of voice (Johns-Putra, "The Rest" 27) as well as make use of genre conventions such as fantasy and magical realism (Johns-Putra, "The Rest" 30 f.) or tropes like the pastoral, apocalypse or even the Gothic. Overall, fiction is an adequate forum for "the productive alliance between local and global forms of ecological consciousness that is facilitated by literature's imaginative capacity to move freely across different scales and levels of action and thought" (Huggan 98).

For all its potential though, climate fiction as a genre has rightfully been criticised for its lack of diversity. In their survey of US climate fiction, Briggetta Pierrot and Nicole Seymour observe that most of it is written by white authors and features mainly white characters while failing to thematise environmental justice in any significant form, instead focussing heavily on the destabilisation of Western wealth and privilege (95). They further specify that Indigenous people are markedly absent from these novels and if they are mentioned, it is only to relegate them to the past or appropriate their experiences (ibid.). In the context of ongoing crisis under settler colonialism discussed earlier, this erasure reflects larger power dynamics in the climate change discourse. In addition, the prevalent mode of dystopia or apocalypse tends to disregard the connection between climate change and (settler) colonialism and conceals the West's culpability in the matter, instead promoting a universal human vulnerability that eschews important differences (Whyte, "Indigenous Science" 11). One such difference is that many dystopic scenarios can only have entertainment value if the reader is removed from the depicted consequences, which Toni Birch states is often not the case for Indigenous people ("It's Been"). While I think that climate change has reached a point at which even non-Indigenous people cannot read climate fiction as pure entertainment anymore, I agree that the remove from immediate threat and actual risk often leads to the exclusion of less privileged perspectives. This phenomenon reflects the same

power structures that render certain people more vulnerable to climate change in the first place.

3. Grief in Climate Fiction: *Clade, The Living Sea of Waking Dreams* and *The Swan Book*

3.1 Hope and Dystopia: *Clade*

Clade is a book by James Bradley published in 2015. It follows a loosely related set of characters for four generations, starting in our present day and extending roughly sixty years into the future, which is within the time frame of current climate change projections. Over this time, the Earth's climate alters significantly. Every chapter jumps forward in time and switches to another character's perspective and/or setting. The narrative starts with Adam, a climate scientist from Australia, doing research in the Arctic while waiting for news from his girlfriend Ellie if her IVF treatment was successful. Their daughter, Summer, grows up and eventually loses touch with her parents. Years later, Adam looks her up in England and discovers that Summer has a son, Noah, who is autistic. When they are forced to flee from a hurricane and subsequent flood, Summer abandons Adam and Noah. Adam takes Noah to Australia where he shares custody of him with Ellie, from whom he is by now divorced. During one week when Ellie takes care of Noah, she discovers some beehives near her house and meets their keeper Amir, a climate refugee from Bangladesh and now an illegal resident in Australia, whom she later marries. A few years later, a virus that causes respiratory illness and eerily resembles Covid-19 sweeps the globe, prompting Adam, Noah and Lijuan, the daughter of Noah's caretaker, to retreat to a cabin in the woods to avoid infection. Dylan, the man Lijuan will marry later, works for a company that creates virtual simulations of people who died during the pandemic. Noah grows up to become an astrophysicist, discovering a sound signal from outer space that could be an attempt at communication from an alien species. The novel ends with Lijuan's daughter, Izzie, going to a party on a tidal island that used to be a suburb of Sydney, where she gets news that Adam has died.

The episodic structure and extended timeline of the novel serve to accommodate one of the representational challenges of climate change, scales. While the novel still focusses on a human-centred scale framing, it avoids reducing climate change to the individual experience of disaster. Setting the story in Australia, England and the Arctic, Bradley acknowledges the globality of climate change. This is underlined by the

regular referrals to other countries in the news and their global relation with Australia in the form of refugee influx and a respiratory virus. These connections exceed the limits of local setting and transcend national borders, thus providing an example of Ursula Heise's concept of eco-cosmopolitanism (10). Numerous global connections can be found throughout the novel: Ellie outsourcing parts of her work to programmers in Asia (11), Adam and Ellie watching news about climate talks in Bangkok and animal extinction in Australia (Bradley 35), Amir having to flee Bangladesh (164), a deadly virus originating in China (191), Lijuan's list of extinction (207), Dylan working from home for a Chinese company (224), Izzie observing an aurora that possibly announces an instability of the Earth's magnetic field (296). The characters' eco-cosmopolitan stance is a result of the planetary scope of the environmental changes they live through, which expresses itself in an experience of shared risk.

The time frame of the story is not unusual for an intergenerational novel. Following a set of characters connected through family relations is a prevalent narrative strategy to represent a changing world. It also allows for a diversity of viewpoints which helps illuminate different aspects of a complex phenomenon like climate change. Adeline Johns-Putra identifies posterity as one of the most prevalent tropes in environmental discourse (*Climate Change* 4). Fear for future generations is a potent motivator to make people care about and possibly take action against climate change (6). Yet the tactic is by nature very anthropocentric and conservative, leaving out all non-humans and many humans who do not adhere to the model of the cis-heteronormative family (6 f.). In this sense, *Clade* remains firmly centred on humans and never strays too far from the common definition of family. However, the family it portrays includes people of different identities and is less narrowly defined than a typical nuclear family. Ellie marries Amir, who is a refugee from Bangladesh, Lijuan is a first-generation immigrant from China, Summer struggles with motherhood to the point where she abandons her son, Noah, who is on the autism spectrum. The novel does not only show people who are already related by blood but how people become related by connecting with and taking care of each other in a world of precarity. The title of the novel hints at this, too. A clade is a group of organisms all descended from a common ancestor. This potentially extends familial relationships to all human beings, which in turn opens up the concern for posterity narrowly defined as blood relations and alludes to shared responsibility among all humans for each other and potentially other species, too. This vision closely

resembles Heise's "eco-cosmopolitanism", or "environmental world citizenship", in which environmental concern exceeds the limits of one's local surroundings (10). A direct parallel is drawn to bees, which play a role in the novel and are also featured on the cover of the book. As one of the most prominent animals that face extinction because of climate change, their comparison to humans also hints at the precarity of the clade and the risk that almost all life shares when the planet becomes less habitable.

Another important feature of the representation of climate change in the novel is the role of science, technology, and modernity. Notably, the scenarios in the book are a fictionalisation of actual climate change predictions, from hurricanes, rising seas and extinction to famines, refugee crises and pandemics (e.g. "Climate Change and Global Warming"). It also takes up prominent issues in popular climate change discourse, for example the question of having children, humans being biologically predisposed to ignore a complex issue like climate change, and overpopulation (Bradley 18). In that sense, Bradley's novel is an example of the poetics of responsibility mentioned by Mehnert, who, citing Heise and the anthropologist Arjun Appidurai, presents imagination as a social practice, a contemplation of humans' responsibility towards their own actions (3).

In the case of climate change, imagination can furthermore intervene in discourses dominated by science, which can be alienating and inaccessible to many people (4). Yet within the story world, science also plays a role as one way to relate to the environment. In the beginning, Adam is researching earlier periods of warming of the earth's climate in the Arctic. This setting is very fitting because the poles are the places where climate change effects have already had a clearly visible impact. Ice is therefore symbolic of loss for many people.[3] While not everyone can perceive the effects of climate change in their daily lives yet, it is evident that glaciers are retreating, and the poles are melting. Permanent ice is no longer permanent. Yet even though some effects are already visible by now—like cleaving ice shelves—the implications cannot be understood in their entirety without science. However, despite being thoroughly based on actual science, *Clade* resists categorisation as a realist novel by incorporating some sci-fi elements. This tendency increases towards the end of the novel, when Noah and

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[3] The first glacier permanently lost to climate change was situated in Iceland and is commemorated by a plaque written by the author Andri Snær Magnason. It reads: "Ok is the first Icelandic glacier to lose its status as a glacier. In the next 200 years all our glaciers are expected to follow the same path. This monument is to acknowledge that we know what is happening and what needs to be done. Only you know if we did it."

his team record signals potentially originating with extra-terrestrial life forms. However, it is also apparent in the technology used throughout the story, another way that characters relate to their environment. As natural diversity decreases, characters project images and sounds of earlier times (or completely imagined scenarios) onto their actual surroundings via overlays to relate to them aesthetically and emotionally. Actively witnessing nature becomes mediating and remembering nature. Thus, experiences of their surroundings turn from actual to virtual in a diminished world. This is a very overt example of natureculture, one in which not even the illusion of untouched nature is possible anymore. At the same time, the mediation of nature through technology is also important for the work of mourning (Cunsolo Willox 141) that climate change and the absences it creates require of the novel's characters, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

3.1.1 Natural Diversity

In *Clade*, humans' relationship to nature is characterised by loss, absences and the ensuing complex affects. Loss and the resulting absences manifest in three forms in particular: extinction or loss of natural diversity; displacement, either actual or without moving; and death. The most detailed account of extinction in the novel revolves around bees. Ellie has just moved houses and finds a beehive close to her home that inspires a new art project. In the process, she befriends Amir, a refugee from what used to be Bangladesh and an undocumented resident in Australia, who keeps the bees. Outside of the novel, bees have become the poster child for human-induced extinction in recent years, with monocultures, urban sprawl and climate change endangering the insect (Ellis et al. 438). Their suitability as a symbol for human-induced environmental destruction rests on the fact that, being furry and round, bees are generally perceived as cute and relatively harmless, while also being useful to humans by producing honey and providing essential pollination services. In addition, beekeeping is associated with small-scale honey production, peacefulness and the countryside—in short with pastoral, which is often evoked as a contrast in risk narratives (Heise 139). Therefore, it is not surprising that Bradley would feature them in his novel.

In *Clade*, the bees are dying from an unspecific malady termed Accelerated Colony Collapse Disorder, or ACCD (Bradley 148), a fictionalised version of the real Colony Collapse Disorder. It is a global phenomenon (163) that does not seem to have a clear

origin—some hives die from toxins, others from an inhospitable climate or infectious diseases (166). The only commonality is that they are declining, and fast. It is indicated that bees as a species have reached a tipping point, a scenario where "the planet's eco-systems … simply [begin] to collapse, seemingly spontaneously, the addition of one more factor to the equation triggering a phase of transition, in much the way that a single snowflake can be said to cause an avalanche" (ibid.). Again, the novel emphasises the connectedness of living beings and planetary changes rejecting the idea that species live and die in isolation. It also portrays extinction not as one disastrous event—even though tipping points may accelerate it—but as a process, in this case the outcome of slow violence that is distributed across space and time (Nixon 2). Since it is a process, the human characters witnessing the decline do not only have to live with loss but with losing, unable to intervene as individuals.

Yet amid the sense of loss in the face of the dying colonies, Ellie and Amir both form meaningful connections with the animals. Thoroughly examining the bee she caught in a jar, Ellie is fascinated: "About its thorax and head the orange-brown fur is thicker than she had imagined; coupled with the glistening architecture of the wings, its softness lends the tiny creature a curiously archaic quality, somehow blurring the boundaries between insect and mammal" (Bradley 146). The bee has always looked this way, the difference is the quality of attention that Ellie brings to it now. Bearing witness to the bee's existence is the prerequisite to an affective relationship for Ellie. She discovers a similarity in the animals' mammal-like traits, but their connection is more complex than simple resemblance:

> Once rendered many thousands of times their own size, the insects are trans-formed, made wondrous and strange. Likewise the close-ups of their faces – the blankness their eyes reveal when expanded *both invite and repel identification*; their unknowability is like a space into which one can fall, a reminder of the presence of otherness in the world. (Bradley 182 f., emphasis mine)

Two aspects are noteworthy in this quote. First, sameness as the grounds for connection and affect is rejected in favour of something more ambiguous, an acknowledgement of otherness coupled with the assertion that all living beings are potentially connected in a globalised world. Second, it is interesting how Bradley uses a spatial metaphor for writing about unknowability. A space can be inhabited, which is what Ellie does when she perceives the bee in all its polysemy. At the same time, unknowability

is not the absence of knowledge or relation but "the presence of otherness", of something beyond the self. Inhabiting risk together, in this instance, leads to the formation of an interspecies community. In a world that is quickly emptying of opportunities to connect directly with nature, this is precious.

For Amir, in turn, the bees create a new sense of belonging. Having had to flee his home country, Bangladesh, after it collapsed, he is now an illegal resident in Australia. His situation is precarious: He is hiding from the authorities, unable to access medical care or any other public services, always in danger of being incarcerated. In addition, he is traumatised from the violent displacement through climate change and the subsequent loss of his family. He is in touch with other refugees whose lives, too, count as ungrievable (Butler "Precariousness"). Amir's life is characterised by absences: Displaced by climate change, he has no meaningful relations with his homeland anymore, yet being forced to live a derealised life in hiding, he is also prevented from forming new local ties by the Australian state. Part of this derealisation through state power is the discursive violence that dehumanises refugees and omits them at the same time (Butler "Violence" 22), e.g., when Ellie reads about the camps, police brutality and forced expulsion in the news (Bradley 167). In that instance, the bees provide an alternative point of connection for Amir: "The first time they landed on me, enveloped me, it was as if I was no longer simply me but part of them, as if they connected me to something that went beyond myself" (Bradley 165). Inhabiting risk in the way Amir does shrinks one's personal world to self-preservation. It is an individualism born of necessity. Taking care of the bees provides a reprieve from precarity, through an "imagined community" of ungrievable and fragile lives.

In this situation, Ellie and Amir are both emotionally affected by the bees. When Ellie researches bees for her art project after encountering them, she realises the shared history of their two species:

> Overnight she has been reading about the cultivation of bees in Egypt and Sumer, and the evidence from rock art and elsewhere of the harvesting of wild honey in Mesolithic times; in the silence of the hillside she finds herself reminded of this history, the idea that humans have shared the world with these creatures for so long filling her with something that is not quite wonder, not quite grief, but somehow both. (Bradley 147)

As presumably many of the novel's readers, Ellie does not have the language for this new affect yet that is ecological grief in the wake of learning to love something fragile. She just entered into a relationship with the bees only to discover that she is in the process of losing them; that they are, in a way, already lost. Bradley evokes the pastoral here, only to resist it. Reproducing this trope rests on an opposition of nature and culture, so that the former can serve as a refuge from the latter. In *Clade*, however, this binary cannot be upheld; modernity, technology, and the environment are intertwined to a degree that they rather form a natureculture. The peacefulness and wonder Ellie feels in relation to the bees, among others, is not the result of an escape from crisis but actively dwelling in crisis, which entails affective connections with the environment (Buell 191). Moreover, it is not just Ellie's personal relationship to the bees that is in peril but humanity's continuous history with them. Again, the novel evokes posterity to establish continuity and in so doing, extends the meaning of family relations to another species by making kin. It becomes clear that in times of climate change, grief is a part of any affectionate inter-species relationship. Bradley hereby positions non-humans as grievable, too, part of the "new economy of feeling" towards nature that Buell calls for (191). In the novel, Ellie feels "a stab of sadness" contemplating the images of the bees and realises that "the presence of otherness in the world and … the loss of its passing" are irrevocably intertwined (Bradley 182 f.).

A few years on, the loss is finally palpable. Moving forward in time about eight years, the next chapter revolves around Lijuan, a sixteen-year-old girl, who is taken in by Adam and Noah during the beginning of a pandemic that closely resembles Covid-19. After having relocated to an old vacation home to avoid infection, Li explores the surrounding forest:

> I'm not used to the forest or trees, and to be honest I found it a bit creepy at first. I suppose once there would have been birds and things through here, but now they're gone it's so quiet all you can hear is the leaves moving in the breeze. Maybe I should have thought it was restful but really it was just weird, I've never heard anything so quiet. (199)

The affect Li initially feels is not grief but a sense of eeriness. The forest is so quiet, it is "creepy". Even though she grew up in a city and is also too young to know it any other way, the quietness seems unnatural to her. This points to the anthropogenic cause of the phenomenon, a planet altered by slow violence that cannot sustain a variety of

species. For the reader, the change is much more obvious than for Li. In the previous chapter, the bees were still there, and around Ellie's house moths and other insects (Bradley 168), possums and feral cats (170) were present. Now, in another part of the same country, the forest is disturbingly devoid of wildlife. Later in the chapter, we learn that bees are extinct by now (207). This mass extinction, likely one of the tipping point scenarios mentioned earlier, is a quiet death off-page. It resists drama, disaster or spectacle. The animals are just gone and all that is left is an absence weighing so heavily it feels like a presence. Incidentally, the silence of the forest described by Li evokes the quietness in the presence of the dead, at wakes or in cemeteries. However, the perceived loss, again, causes a combination of emotions, not just one. Li feels "sort of sad" but finds the altered landscape also "weirdly beautiful" (Bradley 200). The novel frequently represents positive and negative affects in reaction to climate change side by side, resisting a simplistic account of living in the Anthropocene. It thereby constitutes a "critical dystopia" (Mehnert 42) that leaves room for hope amid loss and grief.

To experience what the forest would have been like in the past, Li goes back a week later and switches on a simulation in her overlays: "The noise was incredible. Birds shrieking and singing, things moving in the undergrowth. Even the light was different, thicker somehow, full of smoke and colour" (Bradley 206). The simulation contrasts sharply with the eerie quietness from before, which connoted absence. The world she sees through her overlays is richer, full of animal presences, of life. Li is amazed but her captivation leaves a melancholy aftertaste because it masks the profound loss of all that she sees. Her actual world is diminished, emptier. Technology mitigates that by offering ways to relate to the natural world, which would have otherwise been impossible. Yet while Amir and Ellie could still interact with the wildlife by forming meaningful relationships with the bees, Li can only watch a simulation. Making kin has turned into remembering kin.

3.1.2 Displacement

By now, it has become clear that in *Clade*, absence and loss due to climate change do not just alter characters' relationships with their local environment but sometimes force them to abandon those altogether. Displacement, either being compelled to relocate or without moving (Nixon 19), is a further effect of climate change diminishing humans' relations with the non-human world. Displacement is a severance of one's

relationships with one's surroundings, often through slow violence or even disaster. In the novel, the most detailed account of displacement is offered in the chapter in which Adam must flee from a storm and ensuing flood with Summer and Noah in England. Upon his arrival, Adam notices that England has changed significantly since he was last there ten years ago. London is run-down, public transportation is unreliable, malaria is a risk, and the weather is hot and humid with "a foulness in the air … he [Adam] more readily associates with the tropics than with England's south-east"[4] (Bradley 96). In addition, a tropical hurricane is predicted to hit the coast in the coming days and people are being evacuated. The comparison to the tropics is noteworthy here. Not only does it illustrate a significant alteration of the temperate climate associated with England, but it also makes interesting suggestions about the power dynamics between the former centre and the former margins of the colonial world. England, apparently impoverished because the global economy does not yield as many profits as it once did, resembles its former colonies, those countries that were exploited to generate wealth for European countries and kept poor in the process of it. There is a certain dramatic irony in the fact that climate change—the product of colonialism and the accompanying technological progress—is now turning wealthy countries of the Global North into the likeness of their former colonies.

With the storm on its way, Adam goes looking for his daughter who now lives in Norfolk. Since she knows it is coming, and she is used to flooding because of the rising seas, Summer is oddly matter-of-fact about abandoning her home (Bradley 112 f.). She also lets her father know that she is no longer an environmental activist (108). Inhabiting risk for so long has her focussed on survival rather than on pursuing idealistic goals, affectively closed off from her environment. Indeed, the frequency and severity of storms and floodings makes it understandably difficult to do anything else than get by. Bradley describes the natural catastrophe as a mixture of alienation and the banal minutiae of catastrophe. Trexler notes that floods have become a widespread symbol for the destructive effects of climate change in novels, despite scientific uncertainty about the ways in which they are related to climate change (104). Taking shelter from the raging storm in a church, Adam ascribes "a primal quality to the sound of the wind" which fills him with "an animal dread, deep in his body" (Bradley 119). The ways in

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[4] Interestingly, climate change predictions also comprise the possibility that England could become significantly colder than it is now due to the Polar vortex weakening (Cwienk).

which he normally makes sense of the world are upended in the face of catastrophe; rationality is replaced by the most primal of affects. The storm swiftly breaks down the categories through which the characters understand the world: human and animal, modern and primal, alive and inanimate. Adam becomes aware that he is also an animal, while the storm is a force with agency, "like a living thing" (Bradley 117). The world is suddenly rendered hostile and strange, inhospitable to humans.

It becomes obvious that during an ongoing catastrophe, displacement becomes a process rather than an event, made up of individual instances of inhabiting risk. Adam, Summer and Noah have to flee the storm, forage for food among looters, navigate streets strewn with debris and dead bodies, flee the flood and wade through polluted water to find freshwater. Natural disasters like this easily evoke apocalyptic imagery, for example, when a wall of flood water advances on Adam, Summer and Noah, leaving them no option but to run for their lives (Bradley 126). However, similar to the pastoral, Bradley resists this idea of apocalypse as the end of times in this exchange between Summer and her father:

> 'What do you think is going to happen?'
>
> 'I don't know. We keep talking about trying to stop what's happening, slow it down somehow, but I'm not sure that's even possible anymore… The problem is we're so busy stumbling from one disaster to the next we can't get any distance, can't see what's happening for what it is.'
>
> 'You mean the end?'
>
> 'A point of transition.' (131)

Again, Bradley emphasises the continuity of humanity throughout the ongoing climate crisis. Disaster is depicted as an aspect of climate change but does not simplify it. Unlike apocalyptic thinking, it leaves room for hope. The quote above also echoes Ursula Heise's comparison between apocalypse and risk, where "crises are already underway all around, and while their consequences can be mitigated, a future without their impact has become impossible to envision" (142). This goes hand in hand with Axel Goodbody and Adeline Johns-Putra's argument that climate fiction is becoming increasingly more realist (*Climate and Literature* 239). Apocalypse is not a feature of real life, but risk increasingly is.

Another noteworthy example of displacement in the novel is Amir's story. Importantly, his displacement has already happened, and the novel focusses on the

consequences of his displacement rather than the event itself. Amir is from Bangladesh, which in the novel collapsed due to climate change, forcing its citizens to flee. This is in keeping with Bradley's speculative-realist approach because Bangladesh is set to experience floods and freshwater shortages in the future, making unrest highly possible (Ghosh 88 f.). In *Clade*, the nation is a spectre, hovering at the margins of the plot, mentioned multiple times to evoke globality but also as a warning of how disastrously the consequences of climate change can play out. When Amir's world was upended by climate change, he went from what we can assume was a relatively privileged life as a doctor in his home country to a refugee detained in a camp and later an undocumented citizen in Australia.

Not only did Bangladesh change from an environment that could sustain its population to one that fell completely apart, but on a global political scale, its inhabitants also turned from legal citizens to stateless refugees in a short time. This political no-man's land is characterised by an absence of rights that significantly compounds risk. While everyone inhabits risk amid the global climate crisis, not everyone inhabits it to the same degree. This becomes clear to Ellie when Amir vanishes, and she becomes afraid that he has been detained. She finds him later and, having seen first-hand how he is forced to live, tells him that she could have helped. He replies: "Could you? How? We don't just need access to hospitals, we need medicine, schools, jobs, not to be frightened all the time. To be able to buy food without being terrified somebody will become suspicious because we're using cash, or report us to the police because they don't recognise us" (Bradley 174). From Amir's description it becomes clear that being displaced means that every mundane activity is infused with risk.

At the same time, Amir's life is invisible—and therefore ungrievable—because he resides in Australia illegally. Following Butler, his life is discursively erased and he is discounted as someone who the Australian nation is neither responsible for nor cares about (Butler 12). The only joyful connection before he meets Ellie is afforded him by the bees, the physical touch of which helped him "as if they connected [him] to something that went beyond [him]self" (Bradley 165). Having been displaced means Amir has been radically severed from meaningful connection to his homelands, his family, his former life. In addition, continuously inhabiting risk like he does reduces life to self-preservation. This is necessarily a state of involuntary self-involvement because one's precarious situation occupies one's thoughts. The bees allow him to care for something

other than himself. At the same time, they also inhabit precarity because of ACCD and climate change. Thus, Amir and the bees form a community born of necessity where affection, and with it grievability, can grow.

The last example of displacement occurs at the end of the novel, when Lijuan's daughter Izzie goes to a party in the former suburbs of Sydney, which are by now tidal islands due to sea-level rise. Because of this environmental change, only poor people and immigrants live in the parts of high rises that emerge above the waterline. The islands can only be reached by boat, and the waters are illuminated by dying plankton. The displacement of residents has apparently happened a long time ago; for Izzie and her friends this layout of the city is nothing out of the ordinary. The acceptance of such a new reality is called a baseline shift, when people's reference point of what is considered normal shifts in accordance with the environmental changes around them (Mehnert 98). Bradley's characters reflect about this at several points in the novel (e.g. Bradley 152), but the last passage of the novel illustrates best what comes after the catastrophe is over and displacement has been rendered permanent. *Clade*'s overarching theme of human resilience and continuity finds its conclusion here. The suburban islands are not watery graveyards or places of public mourning but rather reclaimed spaces, testament to human adaptability and joy: "As they draw closer their lenses and aural receptors interface with the party… Now temple walls rise up, lit by Chinese lanterns; in the space overhead dragons swoop and turn, their paths criss-crossed by birds and other magical creatures" (Bradley 293 f.). Technology is again central to this reclamation because the space is transformed virtually through the characters' overlays, much like Lijuan's experience in the silent forest. Yet instead of providing a clear happy ending, the passage remains subtly ambivalent. When Izzy switches off her overlays, the illusion vanishes, leaving her disappointed: "As always it makes the pleasure of the hours before seem trivial" (Bradley 296). Humans can still come together in celebration and joy, but they cannot do so without the mediation of technology. And while a baseline shift signifies adaptation to a new reality, it also means forgetting and thereby avoiding the negative affects that come with remembering in a diminished world.

3.1.3 Death

Throughout *Clade*, several characters die, and more nameless deaths occur off-page, caused by the pandemic, floods and storms. Interestingly, the characters' deaths that

constitute notable plot points are not related to climate change, or only marginally so. The first is Declan, Ellie's half-brother, who died as a child from cancer and whose memory is stirred up when Ellie visits her stepmother Maddie early in the novel. Another example is Matthew, the little brother of Dylan's ex-girlfriend who died during the pandemic and of whom Dylan is asked to create a simulation. Lastly, Adam dies at the end of the novel of a heart attack, a consequence, one can assume, of advanced age. These deaths still need to be part of a discussion of climate change and the absences to which it leads because the grief they elicit is presented in a deliberately ambiguous manner, rendering it applicable to climate change as well as I will show shortly. This implies that feelings of grief may be more easily expressible in relation to human death, a context of meaning with which every reader will be familiar. The description of a character's death functions as a vehicle to talk about ecological grief. Furthermore, having death occur throughout a narrative that is overall hopeful in its outlook on human continuity and resilience asserts that death and grief are a natural part of life and in turn may naturalise ecological grief as well.

Declan is three and a half when he dies of cancer. Five years later, Ellie and Summer visit Maddie in her house in Bondi to disperse the ashes of Tom, who was Ellie's father and Maddie's ex-husband. This prompts Maddie to think back to her son, so the chapter alternates between her memories of him and Ellie and Summer's visit in the present. This structure allows Bradley to draw parallels between Declan's life and sickness and the worsening climate crisis in the novel, which at first glance seem separate from each other. Declan is born when "the real disasters began – mega-blizzards in North America, tornados in China, the first widespread methane ruptures in Siberia" (Bradley 61), prompting his parents to withdraw from the outside world and concentrate on their family. Right away, the global intrudes into the local, the public into the private. In a world affected by climate change, having a child is no longer a purely personal decision; it is tinged with the unease of condemning them to an uncertain future (Bradley 63). In addition, jumping back and forth in time highlights the loss of wildlife that has occurred in the meantime:

> When she and Tom bought the house it was impossible to sleep past sunrise… daybreak bringing kookaburras and cuckoos and swooping flocks of cockatoos, their crazed laughter and screeching clamour echoing through the trees like a

memory of the primordial forest… It was the *thereness* of them [Tom] said he loved, their presence and life and total absorption in the moment.

Most of the birds are gone now. She is not sure when they began to disappear: elsewhere there have been huge die-offs… yet here the process has been more gradual, species slowly disappearing. (Bradley 54 f., original emphasis)

It becomes clear that in the few short years since Declan's birth the local environment has changed from bustling with animal presences to being marked by their absence. Maddie's world is becoming quieter and emptier, furthering her isolation.

After having established a correspondence between Declan's illness and the climate crisis, Bradley describes Maddie's grief in a way that is applicable to a wider context of diminishing nature. Grieving for a child she knows is going to die is similar to ecological grief in the face of an unavertable crisis, mourning in advance a future loss. During this process, grief keeps disrupting the mundanity of everyday life:

All the while she could feel the way life sought to regain its equilibrium. The way ordinary life kept fighting its way in, so that grief was never constant but a series of shocks, each one as new, as raw, as the first. How soon would it take for life to reassert itself afterwards? She caught herself wondering. How long before this unimaginable absence became normal? (Bradley 69)

The deliberate vagueness of the description leaves room for a contextual transfer. It is not *her* life but life in general that strives towards equilibrium, a term often used in ecology to describe biospheres. It is not her son's unimaginable absence but *this* unimaginable absence. Both Declan's illness as well as climate change are abstract crises that, for a time, lack the immediacy of disaster and are therefore sometimes overshadowed by more quotidian concerns. Bradley writes intentionally vaguely about the former to evoke the latter, presenting them both as legitimate causes of grief. Furthermore, Tom and Maddie both mourn differently. While he reaches out to others and grieves openly (68), Maddie closes herself off: "It seemed easier, more truthful, to accept that he was dying, and that nothing she could do, no gesture, no flamboyant display of grieving, would change that" (67). Tom and Maddie stand in for two common expressions of (ecological) grief, one that leads to a community of mourning and the other to an evasion of those feelings due to fear of their enormity. Why dwell in negative affects if it does not change the outcome of a situation? Yet not opening up to others also isolates Maddie, leaving her stuck alone in her grief.

Like Declan, Matthew dies of natural causes, namely the Acute Viral Respiratory Syndrome (AVRS) that causes the pandemic in *Clade*. His death is arguably more directly related to the environmental changes of the Anthropocene because pandemics become more likely in a world risk society where humans intrude upon and decimate natural habitats of animals that can then pass on viruses. Dylan receives the order to create a sim of him a few years after the pandemic has ended, recognising Matthew and his sister, Cassie, whom he used to date, from the images and video footage. The simulations are life-like, programmed to act and react just like the person they are imitating. Technologically, they are an extension of the animations and sounds Lijuan laid over the silent forest, and their purpose—remembering what has been lost—is the same. Yet remembrance is a double-edged sword in these scenarios. On the one hand, technology provides a means to recall the past, experience what has been lost and feel grief in its wake, a necessary emotional process and an opportunity to engage with the object of grief. On the other hand, it enables people to stay arrested in grief, especially in the case of losing a loved one, when moving on would be a healthy outcome of mourning, something that is impossible to attain with ecological grief. It is for people "who cannot bear to let go, who need the past to continue" (Bradley 222). Technology allows the past to coexist with the present, manifesting people's memories in the real world. Yet in the end, Matthew will always remain a simulation. Dylan realises when he thinks about his mother, who died too, that "it wouldn't *be* her, it would be a copy, and somehow that would be even worse than her being gone" (245, original emphasis). In the world of *Clade*, technology has evolved enough to mimic reality so precisely that it has become a simulacrum rather than a simulation. Yet the novel makes the point that techno-fixes are not a viable option to deal with or even undo loss, whether from a pandemic or other upheavals of the Anthropocene.

The novel closes with Izzie learning from Lijuan that Adam has died of a heart attack while she is at the party. Processing this information, Izzie sits down at the shore and switches off her overlays to take in her surroundings as they are. She notices a natural phenomenon that people call "the Shimmer", a beautiful aurora that may be the portent of the Earth's magnetic poles switching, possibly with disastrous consequences. It is not clear if this is a purely natural phenomenon or related to anthropogenic climate change (Bradley 296). Again, Bradley presents the death of a major character and events related to climate change side by side, letting loss and beauty

intermingle and suggesting death is a natural part of life. It becomes apparent in the last paragraphs of the novel:

> It seems difficult to comprehend that the man she has known since she was a child should be gone.
>
> He is only one of many, of course, just as she is, just as they all are, part of a movement in time, a river flowing ever on, bearing them away from the past. They have lost so much: Shanghai and Venice, Bangladesh, all those millions of lives.
>
> Yet looking up, all of that seems to fall away, lost to the soundless dance of the Shimmer, the swirling shift and flare of its motion… And she realises that whatever else happens, this is not an end but a beginning. It is always a beginning. (Bradley 297)

This passage succinctly sums up Bradley's overarching message about grief and death in the Anthropocene. Izzie is sad about Adam's death but also accepts it as natural. This is underlined by the novel's time frame; it begins with Adam as a young scientist researching the early stages of climate change and ends with his death in a world transformed and diminished by it. As with the silent forest or the bees, beauty and loss are closely connected here, the Shimmer being both appealing and ominous, yet still providing the potential for Izzie to find comfort in it. Living in a world of climate change means living with loss—personal and ecological. When she thinks about "those millions of lives" lost to climate change, Izzie understands herself as part of a world risk society. At the same time, climate change is naturalised, when she describes death— any death—as a natural part of life, "a movement in time." *Clade* is not an apocalyptic narrative but one about human resilience, delicately balancing between grief and hope.

3.1.4 Evaluating *Clade*

Overall, *Clade* takes up various issues in climate change discourse, such as projected effects, the responsibility of the media (Bradley 36), or bringing children into a world of crisis (18). The fictional scenarios it presents are on the realistic side, only diverging towards science fiction in the last two chapters. This renders the novel a sound introduction to climate change discourse, especially for readers with little knowledge about the topic. Additionally, as fiction, it further carries the potential to add an "experiential

dimension" to the factual information by asking readers to imaginatively experience risk alongside the characters (Weik von Mossner, "Cli-Fi and the Feeling of Risk" 132).

In the novel, global effects of climate change have a notable impact on human-nonhuman relationships. One recurring motif is animal extinction. Birds die off in a short span of time (54 f.), bees go extinct (207) and whole biospheres like forests appear empty (199). Characters experience an increasing amount of risk in the form of natural disasters like storms and floods (119), and a pandemic (195). In general, the characters' relationships with their nonhuman environment are marked by absence and loss, the potential to make kin significantly decreased but all the more necessary. Grief is an affective response to this, though it is rarely the only emotion characters feel. Hope and wonder often accompany mourning in the novel, illustrating that loss often causes a newfound quality of attention towards what is still left in the world.

Clade is an example of a critical dystopia, which depicts a negative future while still maintaining hope by remaining open-ended and ambiguous (Mehnert 42). *Clade*'s representation of disaster and risk is never one-sided but always adds positive elements to its depictions of adverse scenarios. Resisting one-sidedness, it uses common tropes like the pastoral and apocalypse only to subvert them. This leaves room for feelings of hope, which can be a more powerful motivator for readers to engage with climate change outside of fiction than fear, for example. Mostly, hope is placed in humanity's resilience as a species in the novel, offering a vision of one global human community that continually adapts to live with risk, thereby showcasing a sense of planet, the "cognitive understanding and affective attachment to the global" (Heise 59). This global vision of humanity also adds different scale framings to the text and thus avoids reducing climate change to specific local effects. With its ending, the novel further resists closure, one of the narrative features Goodbody and Johns-Putra highlight in their overview of climate fiction (*Climate and Literature* 236).

Despite its merits, *Clade* leaves out issues of environmental justice entirely. It is quite limited in its Western setting and outlook. The only places that are depicted are future versions of Australia and England, both wealthy, Western countries with mostly white populations. Other countries, like Bangladesh and China, are mentioned throughout the novel as locations of disaster but the novel never establishes a sense of systemic inequality when it comes to dealing with the effects of climate change. Rather, the overall message seems to be that the human species is all in this together. While this sense

of global community may lead to an awareness of different local manifestations of climate change and a sense of empathy for people and places far away from oneself, it also flattens differences that arise out of systemic injustices like colonialism. It echoes "the racial blindness of the Anthropocene… that permeates its comfortable suppositions and its imaginaries of the planetary" (Yusoff, "Preface"). Presumably, the implied target audience is, therefore, comprised of white Western readers, who can easily identify with the overall message of the novel, which establishes solidarity without conceding the need for accountability. This tacitly assumed identification also becomes evident in the sense of beginning crisis rather than ongoing crisis that Indigenous scholars like Kyle Powys Whyte have written about ("Our Ancestors'" 208). In conjunction with the fact that most climate change-related deaths occur off-page in faraway places, the unexamined privilege of the Global North becomes evident.

Furthermore, *Clade* perpetuates what Pierrot and Seymour have observed about climate fiction in general—that it tends to ignore or erase Indigenous people (95). In a novel that is mainly set in Australia, Aboriginal people are simply absent. This absence remains mostly implicit but at some times is more obvious than at others, for example in a passage where Ellie contemplates the surroundings of her new house:

> Once the land below was farmland, given over to cows and sheep and horses: she remembers driving through here as a child, gazing out at fields and sheds. In the twenties or thirties it was sold off to one of the carbon credit schemes, and partially planted with native trees and genetically engineered plants. When the schemes went bankrupt the planting was abandoned, and the land left to run wild, the only reminders of its former lives the straggly rows of trees and the old farm buildings scattered here and there amongst them. (Bradley 141)

In this passage, the history of the land only goes back to the days of agriculture; the only people cultivating the land are farmers. After it was abandoned, the land was empty, its vegetation left to "run wild". There do not seem to be any Aboriginal people who belong in this landscape. This lacuna implicitly naturalises white Australian settlers' presence there and reinforces the narrative of *terra nullius*, the empty continent that European settlers discovered and then cultivated through farming. Leaving Indigenous people out of the story completely disregards questions of environmental justice and reinforces the notion that they are not part of finding better ways to cope with climate change, either (Pierrot and Seymour 95).

3.2 Mundane Apocalypse in *The Living Sea of Waking Dreams*

The Living Sea of Waking Dreams is Richard Flanagan's latest novel, published in 2020. In it, Anna, the protagonist and focaliser of the story, and her brothers Tommy and Terzo must determine how to care for their ailing mother, Francie. After a series of increasing health crises, the middle-aged siblings have to decide if they want to let their mother die. Tommy, a failed artist and Francie's main caretaker outside the hospital, assents, while Anna, a successful architect living in Sydney, and Terzo, a wealthy venture capitalist, overrule him to keep her alive at all costs, aware that they are cruelly extending her suffering but unable to act differently due to the history of trauma in the family. From the beginning, Anna distracts herself from the stress in her life by mindlessly scrolling through social media. At the same time, parts of Anna's body start vanishing, first a finger, then her knee, breast, hand and facial features. Although nobody seems to notice the changes in her, she starts perceiving more and more people missing body parts. A year after Francie was supposed to pass, Terzo dies in a bike accident that may have been a suicide. Anna meets Lisa Shahn, a zoologist who works to preserve the orange-bellied parrot, which is in danger of extinction. Anna decides to volunteer for the cause and flies to Port Davey, Tasmania to count nesting parrots, where she suffers a heart attack and dies. Since only Tommy is left of the siblings, he finally decides to let Francie die.

3.2.1 The Role of Climate Change

Climate change interweaves the main plot of the novel in both overt and implicit ways. Locally, the most palpable effect is the extension of the fire season and with it the incessant presence of smoke and deep-red skies. Almost year-round, Sydney as well as Hobart, Tasmania, the two main settings of the novel, are bathed in an unnatural orange glow and show air pollution levels that are toxic for humans (Flanagan 102). This is a realistic scenario for the near future, especially since an increase in length and severity of wildfires can already be perceived ("Climate Change in Australia"). The imagery is reminiscent of an inferno, or even imagery of Hell, but is also strangely normalised because the characters continue with their mundane activities, almost trivial in the face of such a crisis, like drinking rosé outside a café (Flanagan 229). They exhibit symptoms of Ghosh's great derangement, "the inertia of habitual motion" (53).

Flanagan's characters are aware that something is seriously wrong with the world and that humans are collectively responsible for it, yet no one behaves accordingly. Instead, they carry on with what little sense of normality they have left.

The other way climate change mainly figures into the narrative is through social media. Anna regularly doomscrolls through her Instagram feed, which is full of accounts of the raging fires, sea-level rise, and extinction side by side with mundane glimpses into other peoples' lives,

> a waterfall of faces that were and were not in her life, friends, workmates, celebrities, an ex-boyfriend…, so many meaningless droplets briefly lit before going dark…, while half of Greenland's surface ice sheet melted, France had its hottest day on record, a tiny Australian marsupial rat was the first species to be wiped out by climate change and the last Sumatran rhinoceros died. (Flanagan 46).

By referencing news from around the world, Flanagan, too, creates a sense of globality. Climate change constantly intrudes into Anna's life via her social media feeds causing her to feel anxiety, a vague sense of dread. At the same time, the non-local impacts of climate change are mediated through a screen and always stay abstract to an extent. They cannot be properly experienced or processed but continue to loom in the background of daily life. In addition, by tying climate change to social media, Flanagan emphasises the connection between this manifestation of the Anthropocene and modernity. Social media, a technology that aims at novelty and diversion, emerged at the same time as the public awareness of one of the most complex problems humanity ever had to face, which, in contrast, demands nuance and long-term solutions. This is a parallel that Rob Nixon also draws when he writes that "ours is an age of onrushing turbo-capitalism. Consequently, one of the most pressing challenges of our age is how to adjust our rapidly eroding attention spans to the slow erosions of environmental justice" (8). As I will discuss later, social media distracts characters from and numbs them to the overwhelming crisis in *The Living Sea*, too.

Flanagan makes extensive use of the apocalypse trope in this novel. The main effects of climate change that shape its setting are heat and wildfires, which lend themselves to infernal imagery, made most explicit in this passage, where Anna checks up on news about the fires on Instagram: "Caravaggio Brueghel Bosch it seems to have happened a very long time ago it's happening today is it the terracotta that lights

everything now? … A generator with an electric light illuminating a fire-created darkness at midday when did the world turn black? Hell in a wildfire nothing in the palm of the hand" (100 f.). Similar language throughout the novel creates a sense of the end of times, the late stages of humanity clinging to life on a planet that is no longer liveable. Yet the novel avoids presenting one sensational disaster after another; rather, its characters muddle through their dissatisfying and empty lives in late modernity. The end, when it comes, is quite unspectacular. Heise observes that apocalypse is one of the most prevalent modes of risk communication in environmentalism (122), and *The Living Sea* is no exception. In contrast to Buell's point (67), apocalypse and dwelling in crisis are not opposed here but one and the same—even the end times have to be lived through.

Furthermore, climate change is also tied to the (ageing) body in *The Living Sea*. Similar to Bradley's correspondence between certain characters' deaths and climate change in *Clade*, Flanagan establishes an analogous relationship between a declining world and Francie's ailing health. Interestingly, the declining body depicted here is a mother's body, a possible allusion to the allegorical figure of Mother Earth. Right in the beginning, climate change is described in terms of illness. Living with the incessant fires "was like living with a chronically sick smoker except the smoker was the world and everyone was trapped in its fouled and collapsing lungs" (Flanagan 13). The simile obscures human agency but accurately expresses the simultaneous helplessness of humans to mitigate the situation. At the same time, descriptions of Francie's condition evoke the fractured, non-linear nature of the climate crisis. For instance, she does not suffer from a distinct illness with a clear set of symptoms. Instead, she is subject to several simultaneous health issues in different parts of her body, which are separate but connected, "a slow accumulation of ailments and pattern of declining health" (Flanagan 17), which soon enough turn into "not one or even many problems but something else, something that wasn't quite a crisis, a depressing and gathering mudslide of complications, and complications on complications; side effects, and side effects of side effects, and all seemingly without end" (56). Similarly, climate change is not only a complex phenomenon with various local effects but also thresholds, interacting factors and tipping points that are hard to predict. Francie's ailments are, among others, cancer, fluid in the brain, two brain haemorrhages, a series of strokes, and bedsores. There does not seem to be an overall cause except advanced age. However, her children

cannot accept that they are losing their mother and thus try to exert control by keeping her alive by all possible means. After all, "they were accustomed to acting on the world and not allowing the world to act on them" (Flanagan 37). This is a collective delusion. The worse things get, the more they must turn a blind eye to Francie's—and the planet's—suffering.

Establishing a parallel between Francie's declining health and climate change allows for the depiction of different, entangled affects. The former two lead to loss, which Anna and Terzo are not prepared to deal with. Grief, which would be a natural response in both cases, evades Anna. Instead, she feels a growing dread when faced with instances of extinction, (un)seasonal fires, and her mother's dying body. However, her behaviour is not a result of indifference but rather fear of being overwhelmed by emotion. Shaw and Bonnett describe this as a possible form of ecological grief that arises when the severity of the crisis is recognised but appears too daunting to be dealt with (569). Anna's avoidance of strong emotions, too, is exacerbated by the apparent hopelessness of the climate crisis and late modernity, as I will discuss later.

3.2.2 Absences

The Living Sea takes a critical view on modernity, especially in its latest expression of individualised, online, extractive, global capitalism. Drawing a connection between social media, climate change and people's emotional numbness Flanagan makes the argument that we live in a world characterised by the absence of meaningful connections towards each other. These absences make themselves known in several ways. The most obvious are Anna's (and later other's) vanishing body parts. The novel begins with Anna noticing her left ring finger is gone while pulling into the hospital's parking lot:

> Between her little finger and her middle finger, where her ring finger had once connected to her hand, there was now a diffuse light, a blurring of the knuckle joint, the effect not unlike the photoshopping of problematic faces, hips, thighs, wrinkles and sundry deformities, with some truth or other blurred out of the picture.
>
> And so too now, it seemed, one of her fingers.
>
> She stared closely at her hand for a good minute. It wasn't a strange illusion or delusion. There was—it was undeniable—no ring finger. She wiggled her thumb

and three remaining fingers. They seemed fine, doing the finger things fingers

do. There was no pain. There was no immediate sense of ache or loss.

There was just a vanishing. (Flanagan 15)

Noticeable about this first, as well as subsequent, vanishings are their anticlimactic nature. Anna does not even observe the actual event of losing the finger, just its resulting loss. This is counterintuitive because losing a digit is usually a traumatic and potentially violent event. The lack of pain as well as that of a clear distinction between before and after leave Anna confused. Still being able to use her hand without any serious limitations, Anna does not immediately feel any detrimental effects. Her muted reaction points to a deeper issue that has to do with the malaise of modernity described earlier. She does not value her body for itself, only for its usefulness. Upon noticing the loss of her finger, she checks if her other fingers are still functional and if there is any pain. When there is not, she struggles to find a reason to feel any emotion about it. It does not occur to her to just grieve for what should still be a substantial loss in its own right. What she is left feeling is an affect rather than a distinct emotion because Anna cannot put any clear words to it. It is a vague disbelief and confusion mixed with embarrassment. Later, describing the vanishing to her girlfriend, Anna calls it "strange" (Flanagan 45), feeling alienation rather than aggravation.

As with Francie's ill health, the descriptions of Anna's vanishing body parts simultaneously evoke climate change. This becomes explicit when Anna notices her knee is missing, too: "It wasn't much of a knee. But now that it had vanished, she realised she missed it. But like the aurochs it was gone. Like the thylacine and the Walkman. Like long sentences. Like smoke-free summers. Gone, never to return" (Flanagan 79). Again, the loss does not really register because it is inconspicuous at first. Most of us will never see the last member of a species die in a dramatic fashion. Likewise, many of us are not experiencing the effects of climate change in a way that corresponds to the graveness of the situation. Both of those things are often mediated and abstract, and just like Anna's vanishing body parts, do not seem to impact us negatively at first. It becomes apparent only in hindsight that something has been irretrievably lost, that the world is a little diminished now. Again, Flanagan establishes an analogy between the human body and the outside world, marking the former as dependent on and part of the latter.

In addition, we can see a change in Anna's attitude towards her vanished knee as opposed to her finger. Where at first, she only reacted with confusion and vague

unease, now she misses her joint independently of its function. Moreover, she does not only liken the loss of her knee to environmental changes but also to technological developments and a general loss of complexity and nuance (Flanagan 79). Her wistfulness can be interpreted as solastalgia, "the pain or distress caused by the loss of, or inability to derive, solace connected to the negatively perceived state of one's home environment" (Albrecht et al. 96). While Albrecht et al. coined the term exclusively in reference to environmental degradation, the novel suggests a combination of climate change, technological development and late modernity as the root for Anna's distress, thereby acknowledging the Anthropocene as "a world of insistent, inescapable continuities" (Ghosh 62).

The analysis above illuminates the complex relationship between the vanishings and other events in the novel. Yet the parallel between climate change and its effects and the vanishings does not cover its whole extent. The vanishings are also a manifestation of people's alienation from themselves as bodily, embedded beings and their environment. Modernity has led to the rationalisation, optimisation and individualisation of every aspect of life. Every knowable piece of information is at one's fingertips, any part of the world just a flight away. It seems there is no need for emotional connection, community, affection anymore. Climate change is presented as one more symptom of these overarching developments, the result of humans treating nature as a resource rather than a site of embeddedness full of inter-species connections. Most emblematic of this alienation in the novel is the role of social media and its causal relationship to the vanishings. Towards the end, after having lost most of her facial features, Anna is riding the tram through Sydney when she has a sudden realisation:

> For so long they had been searching, liking, friending and commenting, emojiing and cancelling, unfriending and swiping and scrolling again, thinking they were no more than writing and rewriting their own worlds, while, all the time—sensation by sensation, emotion by emotion, thought by thought, fear on fear, untruth on untruth, feeling by feeling—they were themselves being slowly rewritten into a wholly new kind of human being. How could they have known that they were being erased from the beginning?
>
> And only then did she see: every other person on that tram had one eye only also. (Flanagan 224)

People's virtual lives are cheap copies here, solitude disguised as connection, Plato's cave in reverse: Walking in from the brilliant sun, everyone is content to sit in front of the fire and watch shadows on a wall. The material and the virtual are diametrically opposed and spending one's life in the latter is exacting a price. People are becoming less: less mindful, less capable of emotion, less material. They are even complicit in it, their online worlds providing an escape from the wretched, inhospitable, real world—the decline of which they do not want to witness (Flanagan 239). This can be read as an indictment by Flanagan of an attitude common in the Global North, which has ignored the problems of its own making for too long, only to give up now without a fight. Negative affects like grief, even though uncomfortable, would clearly be more preferable in this scenario than apathy.

The alienation from anything meaningful inherent in modernity is at the heart of this world of absences according to Flanagan. In *The Living Sea*, modernity is a system that has, against common belief in the West, not improved the world but, on the contrary, has rendered it inhospitable to humans and non-humans alike. Nobody seems to be entangled anymore in meaningful webs of relations. Instead of being embedded in their environments and dwelling in crisis, people are disengaged from their physical surroundings (Buell 190). This overall loss of meaning shows itself in two main aspects, language and time. The constant availability of news from around the world via social media and the rapidity of its cycles lead to a blurring between past, present and future (Flanagan 87). Simultaneously, the constant fire and smoke disrupt humans' biorhythms: "She thought of the fire smoke smog that lay over Sydney smearing morning into midday into afternoon with no shadow or sky to tell you otherwise, a confusion of time that was growing within her also. Was it today or yesterday or tomorrow?" (Flanagan 94) "Smearing" evokes messiness, loss of control. People's natural relationship to time is out of joint. The same is true for language: "It was as if words were now a wall between people rather than a bridge… It was as though everyone was using words to avoid using words for what words were used for. She began wondering if the very reason for words had slowly vanished…" (Flanagan 235). Common referents have been lost, emptying out the meaning of language and reducing it to an accumulation of symbols that obscure reality and serve to separate people rather than connect them.

In this world, it is painful to be genuine, caring and affectionate because to love means to lose and thus to grieve. Denial comes much easier (Flanagan 220). Yet agency

is complicated because people are not just hapless victims but actively complicit. Throughout the novel, Anna, for example, constantly uses social media to actively disengage from her immediate surroundings and the demands they make on her: "She needed a moment needed not to think not to feel she opened a newsfeed" (Flanagan 209). She actively uses social media to numb herself and to avoid feeling the emotions her immediate surroundings elicit from her. In already familiar fashion, the sentences describing Anna's use of social media mostly lack punctuation. In the sentence above, this creates a sense of urgency as Anna desperately tries to disassociate from her life. The numbing effect of social media is made explicit in another passage. On her screen, Anna sees "a world burning and nothing bringing it back. It was possible to feel nothing it was necessary to feel nothing, the news feeds and social media feeds made you feel absolutely nothing: she could do nothing she would do nothing she was nothing" (Flanagan 98). In this passage, the disparity between different scales of human agency becomes apparent. As Chakrabarty observes, humans have become geological agents since the invention of technology that impacts the planet as a whole (206). However, this geological agency of ours is collective on a species level, which means it can neither be wielded deliberately nor does it have a simple relationship to individual agency. Anna is paralysed by these scale effects that paradoxically demand personal responsibility while simultaneously rendering the idea that individual action makes a difference absurd (Clark 72).

One major effect of climate change in the novel besides seasonal fires, and another form of vanishing, is extinction. News of species going extinct are woven into the novel via the social media posts Anna consumes. She learns about Australian marsupial rats and the Sumatran rhinoceros (Flanagan 46), unnamed animal species wiped out by the fires, bees (141), platypuses and endangered lyre birds (149). Yet because Anna uses social media to disassociate from her environment and numb herself, these instances of extinction, although distressing, only join the background hum of ongoing catastrophe. This changes when Anna meets Lisa Shahn and learns about the orange-bellied parrot. Lisa, seated next to Anna on a flight from Tasmania to Sydney, is a zoologist who runs a government-funded programme to save the bird species, of which fewer than twenty wild animals are left. The orange-bellied parrot is a tiny bird, who migrates every year from mainland Australia to Tasmania. Lisa Shahn describes it as a "battler" (Flanagan 187), exposed to predators and human-made dangers, the very

definition of vulnerability. When Anna asks if the conservation efforts are successful, Lisa replies that "that wasn't the point. They probably would vanish. Or they might not. But no, they hadn't managed to stop the vanishing" (ibid.) In line with her compliance with the logics of modernity, Anna asks of the outcome of the undertaking because doing something futile seems inefficient and irrational. Lisa's approach is different. In this crisis of modernity, she knows that the only reasonable thing for her to do is make kin with others, form communities so as not to face this burning world alone. To care, in resistance to a world that does not (Flanagan 191). At the same time, she knows that in the entangled world of the Anthropocene, she can never be only protector but is forced to be "mass murderer" as well, albeit one with a "bad conscience" (ibid.). As such, Lisa manages to acknowledge the complexities of human agency in the Anthropocene from which Anna shies away, allowing herself to be entangled with others, human and non-human, for the sake of it.

Lisa is one of three characters in the novel who is not emotionally numbed, Francie and Tommy being the others. Before Francie is hospitalised at the beginning of the novel, Tommy does most of the care work for his mother, living close by and visiting her regularly (Flanagan 88). Of the three siblings, he is also the one in favour of letting Francie die in dignity before being overruled by Anna and Terzo, as well as the one present at Francie's deathbed. Francie herself grew up in a pre-Internet world. While her life was far from easy and she enjoyed less personal freedom than, for example, her daughter, it is implied that her life was richer in connection, in human community, and thus, in meaning (118). When she is in the hospital, seeing visions of people with only one eye through her window (that turn out to be prophetic), she remarks that the world is beautiful, but people see its beauty only when it is too late (71), an observation that anticipates Anna's final revelation about the interconnectedness of life upon her own death.

Francie, Tommy and Lisa stand in contrast to Anna, Terzo and all the other characters who have completely subscribed to late modernity's logic of rationality and individualisation. Instead of the isolating mechanisms of social media, prestigious jobs, and finance flows that have turned Anna and Terzo's lives into "a perfect solitude" (137) the former three are (or were) connected to humans or non-humans, making kin in a world that derides them for it. In contrast to Anna and Terzo, who are not really attached to the places they call home, global citizens in the loneliest sense, Francie,

Tommy and Lisa each have (or had) local, meaningful relationships with Tasmania, its people and animals. The difference lies in the characters' capacity and willingness to feel emotion, to be affected by the world around them. Even if those emotions are grief and sadness in the face of loss. Even if their efforts seem small and futile and their affection for something fragile and dying has no place in the modern world. Anna and Terzo, successful participants in modernity, learned to dismiss and look down upon such emotional genuineness but feel lonely and alienated as a result.

Terzo never changes his ways, dying before he can realise the source of his unhappiness. Anna, however, learns to open herself up to the world in a process that takes her from detachment to connection. As the vanishings accumulate and people around her become less and less, Anna feels the oppositional urge to witness:

> Above all things, she wanted to see. She wished to once more observe the world not as people said it was, but *as it is*. She wanted to be attentive to this *is*, not panicked by what wasn't. She needed to precisely know the world as it presented itself to her. And if it revealed a bruised, damaged universe, still, perhaps there would be in the very wound some hope. (Flanagan 239, original emphasis)

For Anna, witnessing signifies a shift in attention, where seeing does not just mean looking at but attentively, affectionately observing what still exists in the world. To recall Haraway's writing on companion species, attention is one of the prerequisites of *becoming with* a species (Haraway, *When Species Meet* 19). Such a mode of attentive seeing establishes a meaningful, because unmediated, relationship with the world. Through that relationship, the world becomes grievable because its shared vulnerability is recognised when it was dismissed before, an act that derives its significance precisely from the fact that it is not self-evident (Butler, "Violence" 30). She actively prioritises the remaining presences in the world over its looming absences.

Anna's desire to witness culminates in a transcendental experience in the moment of her death. In Port Davey, checking the orange-bellied parrots' nesting boxes, she has a heart attack and falls off a ladder, apparently dying instantly. Yet in her last moment, Anna has a vision of falling through the same window out of which her mother used to see at the hospital. She starts flying and then suddenly stands on a beautiful meadow above Port Davey, her son, brothers, and father approaching and calling to her to come with them. When she is unable to follow, they turn away and Anna finds herself running after them while being shot at. She begins to transform into native animals that

have gone extinct because of human impact, always the last of its kind (Flanagan 273 f.). Through this continuous dying and holding on, she recognises the artificiality of the distinction humans have erected between themselves and other species that allow them to destroy, extract and eradicate non-humans without realising that they are hurting themselves (274). For the first time in her life, Anna understands that she is not an individual but part of a web of relations that she has ignored for too long but cannot shirk (275). Modernity in the novel is a mechanism that disguises that web of relations to create an illusion of individual freedom that will prove fatal:

> Everything was vanishing around her as if in some fantastical story: fish, birds, plants, all were going or on the verge of extinction. And no one noticed, or only for a moment, and life went on until life was no more. She had grown up, she realised too late, in the autumn of things, an extraordinary world—its ancient rainforests, its wild rivers, its beaches and oceans, its birds and animals and fish, all were to her a path to freedom and transcendence, and none—she only now saw—were but a transitory wonder so soon to vanish until all that remained for a short time longer were human beings. But just for a short time. They could not survive alone, outside of the wonder—what could?—and so that time too would end. (Flanagan 275)

In Flanagan's view, modernity will end itself by creating a planet inhospitable to life. This vision is once again apocalyptic, presenting a final ending where nothing else is left except "detritus, … ash and plastic" (276). No longer is there any hope to avert or mitigate climate change and extinction. It is too late for humans to learn how to live well together with other life forms. All they can do is die well together with them.

Like the vanishing body parts, Anna's final vision is one of the magical elements in what could otherwise be considered a realistic social commentary. Johns-Putra writes about *The Swan Book* (to which I will turn in the following chapter) in her essay "The Rest is Silence: Postmodern and Postcolonial Possibilities in Climate Change Fiction", but her remarks on magical realism also have merit in an analysis of Flanagan's novel. In Johns-Putra's view, magical realism has the potential to subvert Western hegemony by disrupting certain narrative expectations and thus "questioning our commitment to a dominant Western, Enlightenment version of [reality] as strictly rational and causal" ("The Rest" 31). By making use of it, Western and non-Western authors alike can expose and upset the power structures in which they are implicated (ibid.).

The Living Sea features extensive criticism of global modernity as it plays out in a near-future version of Australia and in doing so certainly denunciates Western centrism. Yet I would argue that the function of magical realism in Flanagan's novel is rather to point out the absurd project of self-destruction at the heart of modernity under the guise of values like rationality and objectivity. Magical realism in *The Living Sea* disrupts the normality of ways of life that are currently causing the climate crisis in an attempt to wake readers from our collective derangement (Ghosh 11).

3.2.3 Comparison

Overall, it can be said that *The Living Sea* presents a quite pessimistic perspective on the climate crisis and humans' ability to change their unsustainable ways of life in late-capitalist modernity. This outlook is supported by the predominance of the apocalyptic trope, both in the novel's repeated imagery of fire and its implications of the end of humanity. Nevertheless, it acknowledges the good deeds humans are capable of as well by including a few characters who are able to open themselves up to the dying world in its beauty as well as its sadness, thereby resisting the emotionally numbing tendencies of modernity. Despite resembling each other thematically, *The Living Sea* differs from *Clade* in central aspects. Instead of creating the sense of an ending through apocalyptic imagery, the latter focuses on the continual existence of humanity despite crisis and risk. As mentioned earlier, *Clade* also features apocalyptic aspects in its narrative but rather to discuss and ultimately resist them (e.g., Bradley 131). In that regard, *Clade* is much more optimistic in tone albeit not in terms of plot. Even though it ends with the possibility of disaster through a switching of the Earth's magnetic poles, the novel still leaves room for hope in humanity, its ability to adapt in adverse circumstances and its ingenuity when it comes to technology.

The characters in *The Living Sea*, in contrast, are generally marked by an inability to adapt to the reality of climate change and fully live in the world as it is because they are too invested in the disjoining structures of global modernity. Flanagan modifies this pessimistic view by granting some of his characters the ability to resist the numbing propensity of modern life and instead be compassionate and affectionate towards others. Yet while Bradley seems to hope humans may still find a way to live well together in the Anthropocene, Flanagan appears convinced that all we can do now is die well together. An apocalyptic outlook is not uncommon in climate fiction but is, as

mentioned earlier, potentially problematic. Aboriginal writer Tony Birch, for example, asks if "these narratives of impending apocalypse [are] something of a Western fetish" ("It's Been"), seeing them as indulgent fantasy in the face of actual, current suffering that occurs mainly in the Global South (ibid.). Pierrot and Seymour add that apocalyptic thinking leads to the avoidance of concrete culpability, for example when it comes to settler colonialism or global capitalism. Instead, the emphasis lies on the shared vulnerability of the human species (107), comparable to the issues raised by the term Anthropocene.

In spite of these differing perspectives, the representations of affective responses are similar in both *Clade* and *The Living Sea*. Climate change diminishes wildlife and renders the characters' environments less hospitable, increasing the experience of risk and precarity and decreasing the possibility of forming attachments with one's surroundings. The loss of safety and embeddedness leads to a number of emotions, primary among them ecological grief. Recalling Cunsolo Willox's article on the work of mourning, shared vulnerability in the Anthropocene leads some of these characters to recognise the grievability of non-human lives (137). Furthermore, both novels depict the productive qualities of grief as it leads to affectionate inter-species connection and community building, e.g., between Ellie, Amir and the bees or Anna and the orange-bellied parrots. In both cases, climate change and the absences it causes effect a mix of negative and positive emotions alike, acknowledging humans' complex position in the Anthropocene. However, *Clade* and *The Living Sea* differ in their representation of apathy, an emotional response that can be linked to grief as well (Shaw and Bonnett 569), although it does not necessarily have to be. In *Clade*, apathy, i.e., emotional numbness, in the face of climate change is mostly associated with institutions and governments (Bradley 17; 167). In contrast, individual characters display a variety of emotions throughout the novel. *The Living Sea*, of course, presents emotional numbness as one of its central issues, a symptom of global late modernity.

Both novels also put forward differing visions of globality. *Clade* promotes the idea of humanity as one global community that is unified in its vulnerability, thus involving a sense of planet, the pervasive awareness of how one's life is shaped by global networks of any kind (Heise 55). This awareness of globality—and therefore, shared risk—leads many of *Clade*'s characters to see themselves as part of "planetary 'imagined communities'" (Heise 61). As mentioned earlier, this view, as benign as it may be,

can nevertheless gloss over important differences between groups of people when it comes to environmental justice. In *The Living Sea*, globality mainly features in the scope of Flanagan's apocalyptic vision with the whole planet being violently altered by climate change. This information intrudes into Anna's life mostly via social media, adding to her general sense of dread and apathy but not impacting the story otherwise. A sense of global community does not exist in the novel, the only communities that are possible are limited and local, strewn amidst a general public that remains indifferent. Despite the significance of characters' relationships with their local environment, neither novel establishes a characteristically Australian setting apart from a few details like the presence of local bird species. Australia rather stands in for any wealthy, Western country, presumably to address a broader readership.

Evidently, the same criticism can be directed at *Clade* and *The Living Sea* alike: both novels centre the Global North and whiteness, which Pierrot and Seymour declare typical for the genre of climate fiction (95). While *Clade* aims for diversity by featuring a few characters of colour, *The Living Sea* does not include any major characters that are described as non-white. Moreover, *Clade* does not mention Aboriginal people at all. *The Living Sea* acknowledges their existence briefly but historicises them, i.e., represents them as if they are remnants of the past. Lisa Shahn mentions "the Port Davey people" (Flanagan 188)—presumably of the Palawa nation—and in particular the last chieftain's daughter Mathinna, who was apparently taken prisoner after most of her people had been murdered by settlers in the mid-1800s:

> Mathinna's people burnt the plains and kept the mosaic of plains and forest alive, the tiny parrots ate the seeds and sedges of the wet plains, and Mathinna would have lived amongst thousands upon thousands of orange-bellied parrots. But when the Aboriginals lost the war and the few survivors were taken away the burning stopped, the forests advanced, the plains began vanishing and the seeds and sedges with them, and the birds started their vanishing also. (Flanagan 189)

First, this passage suggests that there are not any Palawa people left in Tasmania. Since this is the only time any Aboriginal people are mentioned in the novel, it appears that the latter are part of the past, their presence ended by the arrival of settlers, when in reality, theirs is an ongoing story of survival. This exclusion from modernity contributes to the erasure that Pierrot and Seymour mention in their overview of climate

fiction (95). In many non-Indigenous authors' minds, Indigenous people are not part of combatting or even living with climate change, which is ironic considering that they are some of the most vulnerable humans in that regard. Second, the passage above further de-modernises Aboriginal people by associating them clearly with nature and specifically the survival of the orange-bellied parrot. This is not to say that Aboriginal people do not have useful knowledge about living sustainably with nature. The strategic burning mentioned above, for example, is still practised and is proving itself especially useful today when the fire season is becoming more intense due to climate change (Van Neerven, "House or Country"). However, in combination with ascribing Aboriginal people to a long-gone past, the notion that they are more in tune with nature only further marginalises them in climate change discourse.

3.3 Resisting Extinction: *The Swan Book*

In *The Swan Book*, the connection between settler colonialism, state violence, pollution and climate change plays a central role. Climate change is obviously crucial to the dystopian version of Australia in which this story takes place, but it cannot be separated from the country's colonial history. In accordance with Kyle Powys Whyte's writings on the topic, Alexis Wright, too, makes the argument that for Indigenous people, environmental catastrophe started with European colonialism and has been ongoing ever since (Whyte, "Our Ancestors'" 208). Furthermore, climate change actively shapes the human-nonhuman relationships depicted in the novel. Being choked off by sand build-up due to severe droughts, the lake where Oblivia's people have been living for hundreds of years turns into a swamp (Wright 12). Native animals like turtles can no longer survive there (Wright 16). At the same time, the Australian military uses the swamp to dump old equipment, polluting its water and thereby the people. These alterations disrupt the Aboriginal people's relationship to the land, for which they as the "caretakers" are responsible (Wright 9): "They wished and dreamed for this emotional eyesore to be removed and gone from their lands forever. It was foreign history sinking there that could not be allowed to rot into the sacredness of the ground" (Wright 11). The stark contrast of sacredness and rot drives home the significance of the pollution. However, spiritual pollution is also coupled with material contamination because the contaminated lake water causes stomach pain and even deformities (Wright 11). These circumstances make it clear that the "swamp people", as they are called in the novel, have been

displaced without moving through slow violence. The swamp people are trapped in stasis, unable to care for the land and themselves, pay respect to their ancestors or pass on knowledge to the next generation.

This is the afflicted community that Oblivia calls home. At the start of the novel, she lives in an abandoned military vessel with Aunty Bella Donna of the Champions, an old, white woman who had to flee climate disaster in her own country, presumably the British Isles. Belladonna took Oblivia in after she was gang-raped by a local group of "petrol-sniffing youths" (Wright 83 f.) and found in the trunk of a sacred eucalyptus tree. Oblivia, mute after her ordeal, is raised by Belladonna on stories from her home-land, specifically the white swans native to that part of the world. When one day, a flock of black swans settles on the swamp, Belladonna and Oblivia take care of them. After Belladonna's death, Oblivia is married as a promise wife to Warren Finch according to Aboriginal tradition. Warren is a member of the neighbouring Brolga Nation, named after another native bird, and the first Aboriginal Deputy President of the Australian Government, an example of 'successful' Aboriginal assimilation to the settler state. He takes Oblivia away from her home and travels through foreign Country with her while ordering the swamp to be destroyed. After the marriage, he sets Oblivia up in his apartment in Sydney and leaves to travel around the world as Australia's new Prime Minister. The black swans find Oblivia there. She takes care of them until she sees on the news that Warren has been assassinated. Being forced to play the grieving wife on a memorial tour around the country, she escapes at one point and starts making her way home towards the swamp. She is accompanied by the swans and frequently meets climate refugees in search for more habitable places to live. In the end, she finally reaches her former home only to find a wasteland populated by ghosts.

3.3.1 Grief and Absence

In *The Swan Book*, grief is elusive. Even though the characters inhabit an environmental sacrifice zone in which most meaningful connections to the land have been lost, what would be an expectable emotional response is rarely expressed directly. Rather, the novel is pervaded by a sense of disillusionment in the face of hundreds of years of co-lonial violence and environmental degradation. This is compounded by the invisibility of the swamp people's struggles. Due to the swamp's remote location, the government-sanctioned injustices are hidden from the rest of the country. Their lives are derealized

by the Australian state, and thus a target for violence (Butler "Violence" 22). Therefore, a template for acknowledging the grievances perpetrated against them does not exist: "After all, if someone is lost, and that person is not someone, then what and where is the loss, and how does mourning take place?" (Butler "Violence" 21) The swamp people's subjection to slow violence and their displacement in place is a direct result of their derealisation and ungrievability. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the tone of the novel is not elegiac or sad but rather laconic. The third-person narrator relates the mundane horrors of life in the swamp and later Oblivia's forced migration quite matter-of-factly, even cynically. For example, Oblivia's people do not pay attention to reminiscences about other countries lost to climate change. Those are "conversations that meant nothing to overwhelmed swamp people who had always been told to forget the past by anyone thinking that they were born conquerors. They already knew what it was like to lose Country" (Wright 40). To the swamp people, resigned to experiencing ongoing injustice, it is not as much of a novelty as it is for settler descendants and Europeans. Thus, it makes sense that climate change frames the story rather than plays an active role in it. The tone of writing also reflects how perpetually inhabiting risk transforms grief. It turns from a process with a discernible end into a continuous, non-cathartic state that leads to the swamp people's apathy, resignation and cynicism.

Various modes of storytelling emerge throughout the novel to describe the grievous legacy of colonial violence and climate change, for example postmodernism and magical realism (Johns-Putra, "The Rest" 30 f.), the Gothic, dystopia, and multi-realism (Polak 219). *The Swan Book* is a story about stories, the cultural significance of storytelling but also the erasure of some stories through others in a colonial context (Gleeson-White, "Going Viral"), which is why it defies genre by employing a multitude of Western and Aboriginal narrative strategies. As I have done with the other novels, I will focus on apocalypse here, which also features in Wright's story. It has been established by now that apocalypse in climate fiction can be problematic when it imagines the end of humanity as one big spectacle without regard for the reality of those who are already living with its consequences (Birch, "It's Been"). However, *The Swan Book* makes clear that the clarity of a definitive ending is a fantasy that Aboriginal people cannot afford to indulge in. Rather, the novel illustrates what it means to live through

the ongoing twin crises of colonialism and climate change by which the world is further emptied of meaningful connections to Country.

The violent history of the swamp has created a place characterised by absences. Displacement in place is the absence of meaningful, sustainable relationships with the land. State violence and settler colonialism have led to the loss of history and knowledge. Another embodiment of absence are the ghosts that populate the landscape. In Western literary theory, ghosts are usually a disruption—of the natural sequence of life and death, of linear time (Brewster and Thurston 3). For example, Oblivia still hears sailors' ghosts in the abandoned military vessels dumped by the government (Wright 58). Much like her, these ghosts are fixed in time, a piece of the past unable to be laid to rest. However, the ghosts in this novel are multifaceted, ambiguous beings. They are symbolic of the entanglement of cultures and stories resulting from colonisation. Some, like the sailors, can be read as ghosts in the European Gothic tradition, souls who have not found peace in death and have stayed on to haunt the living. Yet others are ancestral spirits who live in the landscape and have an organic relationship with it like the "sand ghosts" that live in the sand hill that blocks the entrance to the swamp (Wright 53). In contrast to the coloniser's ghosts, they belong to the land. Their presence is not a disruption but emblematic of the interconnectedness of time, place and spirits. However, environmental changes and pollution have affected these inter-relationships. The relationship between the spirits and their living descendants is disrupted and communication between them has become ineffective.

Among this haunted people, Oblivia is herself a ghostly presence. She is her community's repressed trauma returned. Her life is the very definition of ungrievable. The hardships she faces as an Aboriginal woman are ignored in non-Aboriginal society, and even among her own people she is rendered invisible. Oblivia shares other characteristics with the ghosts that haunt the swamp. Since being heavily traumatised, language evades her; she is quite literally silenced. She is frozen in time, trapped by the traumatic memories that constantly pull her back into the past (Wright 155). She does not have any real agency over her own life. However, her voicelessness does not simply signify powerlessness. Adeline Johns-Putra observes that it "is not passivity inasmuch as it is an active critique of voice as discourse and as power" ("The Rest" 38). Criticising narrative in that way presents a possibility of de-naturalising anthropocentrism in climate fiction. It also allows for storytelling that holds room for both humans and non-humans

without necessarily speaking for the latter: "Oblivia's inhabitation of a mute and time-less reality is expressive of an empathy with her land, and a refusal to assume both discourse and power" (Johns-Putra, "The Rest" 39). Thus, instead of simply making her an absence among the living, her silence also signifies an opening up to and transformation in connection to difference—be it humans, plants or, in Oblivia's case, animals.

3.3.2 Presences

Even this diminished world is not devoid of entanglements. Among others, Oblivia forms a connection with a flock of black swans that settle on the swamp one day. The birds first come to the swamp because their migratory patterns have been disrupted by climate change (Wright 15f.). From the moment Oblivia sees the first black swan on the swamp, she perceives something familiar in it and recognises that "the swan was an exile, too" (Wright 14). They are both victims of the effects of colonial violence in the forms of climate change and violence in her community, respectively. They are both grieving for what once was. However, the perception is two-sided, for while Oblivia recognises something in the swan, it recognises something in her, too. Oblivia has the distinct impression that it "was searching for its soul in her" (Wright 15). "The sight of the swan's cold eye staring straight into hers, made the girl feel exposed, hunted and found, while all those who had suddenly stopped eating fish [the swamp people], watched this big black thing look straight at the only person that nobody had ever bothered having a close look at" (Wright 14). Several acts of looking intersect in this paragraph. The first swan's gaze is an act of witnessing that affects Oblivia, who is not used to being seen. It is an overwhelming, ambiguous sensation where being found and being hunted feel like the same thing. It disrupts her ghostliness, her imperceptibility, which, while it isolates, also protects her. The act of witnessing, of recognising each other's vulnerability, which had so far been denied them, is a resistance against derealisation (Butler "Violence" 30). Through the swan's gaze, the swamp people perceive Oblivia for the first time in a long while. While not re-integrating her into her community, the swans render her more present among the living.

The swans are a polysemous presence throughout the novel. Firstly, they signify the entanglement of different stories with each other and the entanglement of stories with the material world, especially Country. In Aboriginal cultures, storytelling is a way to know the land and to pass on that knowledge. Oblivia is raised with stories and fairy

tales about white swans that are native to Europe (Wright 28 f.; 40) but lacks stories about her homeland because her people are displaced in place. Moreover, when the black swans settle on the swamp because they were displaced by climate change, the people living there are confused because they lack stories about this non-native bird species. Secondly, the animals as well as the stories they are associated with create a sense of globality (e.g., Wright 41). This view of globality points out the similarities between storytelling traditions of European countries and Aboriginal cultures without glossing over the violent histories of the former and the power structures that have arisen out of it. Lastly, Oblivia and the birds' kinship is another example of how negative emotions like grief can lead to positive inter-species relationships, making kin "as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present." (Haraway, *Staying* 1). Taking responsibility for and care of each other does not necessarily ensure survival but may make living through apocalypse a little easier.

Towards the end of the book, when Oblivia leaves the city and tries to make her way back to the swamp, it becomes clear that she and the swans have become kin and Oblivia is part of the flock now: "She watched, and knew she had found her swans. They had found each other's heartbeat, the pulse humming through the land from one to the other, like the sound of distant clap sticks beating through ceremony, connecting together spirits, people and place of all times into one. These were her swans from the swamp. There was no going back. She would follow them" (Wright 303). Evidently, entanglement is still possible in this diminished world. Oblivia is not only connected to the swans but they are all connected to the land and spirits, what Allison Mackey calls "an ecocentric understanding of home" (538). Rather than presenting succumbence to grief, the novel shows Aboriginal people's persistence in an ongoing crisis.

The Swan Book depicts Aboriginal people's grief in the face of colonial and ecological violence and its transformation into resignation and cynicism after hundreds of years of adaptation and resistance. It insists on the interconnectedness of climate change, pollution, settler colonialism, and state violence and makes use of the Gothic to represent the harsh realities they create. However, in a world marked by absences, the swans are a guiding presence. Their kinship with Oblivia shows that entanglement is still possible and even necessary for survival. And yet, the story does not end on a hopeful note. On their way to what used to be the swamp, swans keep dying from the arduous journey through dried up country: "The remaining swans fly in every direction in

search of the last drying water holes. They stand on baked earth and hiss at the sky they cannot reach, then the time arrives when no more sound comes from their open beaks. The weak, feather-torn necks drop to the ground, and eventually, with wings spread they wait for the spirit flight" (Wright 328). The land, disfigured by climate change, cannot sustain the swans anymore. However, thanks to Oblivia, their deaths do not remain unwitnessed or unmourned. The swans' lives have become grievable. Moreover, continuance is still possible despite death. The swans will exist as spirits. It is not a consolation exactly but rather a dogged resistance against extinction.

3.3.3 Comparison

Overall, the dystopian future depicted in *The Swan Book* is a direct product of settler colonialism, state violence and climate change. Crucially, none of these scenarios can be considered without the others. Historically, colonialism lies at the heart of today's global capitalism (Birch "Climate Change"). Colonisers took land away from Indigenous people who had developed ways to live on it sustainably for thousands of years. These injustices are still perpetuated by settler-colonialist nations today. In the novel, the swamp people still live on part of their ancestral lands but meaningful relationships to the land have been made impossible as a result of environmental racism due to which the swamp is used as a dumping ground for military equipment. Furthermore, already impoverished communities like the swamp people are hit harder by the local effects of climate change, e.g., sand storms and heat waves, because they have no resources to mitigate them. These conditions create a world of loss, displacement and absences. Animals and plants die (Wright 16), knowledge and culture are lost, ghosts haunt the swamp (53; 58) and people grow disillusioned and apathetic.

In comparison to both *Clade* and *The Living Sea*, it becomes apparent that affective responses to climate change, while felt across cultures (Cunsolo and Ellis 275), differ significantly in context. Neither of the former novels seriously considers climate justice. *Clade* does not acknowledge it as an issue at all, merely mentioning that poorer countries like Bangladesh are impacted more severely without addressing how current global power structures compound climate change effects. *The Living Sea* mentions colonialism and Aboriginal people briefly only to depict them as historical and thus absent them from the present. Both novels, understandably, represent grief and other negative emotions caused by climate change. The point of such a planetary

phenomenon is that everyone is affected by it. However, *Clade* and *The Living Sea* fail to acknowledge that not everyone is affected the same way, especially with regard to Aboriginal people. To the swamp people in *The Swan Book*, living with environmental catastrophe and the subsequent sense of loss is not new. In this continual crisis, ecological grief has turned into disillusionment and apathy. Yet it is important here to distinguish once again between apathy as a possible grief response (Shaw and Bonnett 569) and the emotional disconnect in the face of an overwhelming problem. I would argue that *The Living Sea* discusses the latter because the characters' passivity in the face of the climate crisis is a symptom of the alienating conditions of late modernity and not a transmuted form of grief. Ecological mourning only becomes possible once characters open up emotionally to their environments and seek affectionate inter-species relationships, something that is already central to many Aboriginal cultures.

For this reason, the human-nonhuman relationships in *The Swan Book* differ considerably from the ones depicted in *Clade* and *The Living Sea*. Simply put, culture stands in the way of forming attachments with nature in the latter two novels. By promoting a binary between nature and culture (DeLoughrey et al. 11), modernity keeps separate two categories that, in reality, are intertwined in what should more appropriately be termed naturecultures (Haraway, *The Haraway Reader* 2). For example, in *Clade*, Ellie does not show any particular attachment to her surroundings until she encounters the bees and researches their common history. The knowledge is available but it is not valued in general society, so the characters' inter-species relationships in *Clade* are based on chance encounters with nature, which is disjointed from everyday life. The same case can be made for Anna and the orange-bellied parrots. In *The Living Sea*, nature intrudes upon modern life because it has become unruly and unstable in the Anthropocene, not because it has a place in it. In *The Swan Book*, on the other hand, the swamp people's community is a natureculture, where storytelling and other cultural practices cannot be set apart from their natural surroundings. However, this means that nature cannot be harmed without loss of culture. For example, this becomes apparent in the fact that Oblivia knows many more stories about non-native swans than about the native animals of the swamp: when species go extinct, the stories about them soon follow.

In this context, Oblivia's association with the black swans takes on a different meaning from Mathinna's association with the orange-bellied parrots in *The Living Sea*.

On one hand, Mathinna as a historical figure is the only Aboriginal character named in the novel. Due to this, her concomitance with traditional, sustainable ways of living merely reproduces the harmful stereotype that Aboriginal people are somehow un-modern and in extension cannot be part of the fight against the current problem of anthropogenic climate change. On the other hand, Oblivia and the swans have a complex, reciprocal relationship in which they care for each other; they are described as "exiles" (Wright 14) who are making kin "in a thick present" (Haraway, *Staying* 1). The term "present" is important here, Oblivia and the swamp people are not linked with the past. On the contrary, their existence despite a centuries-old struggle for survival is central to the novel.

4. Conclusion

In the epilogue of *The Swan Book*, Oblivia haunts her by now desertic homeland, bickering with the only swan she could save from the dying flock and talking to dust-filled Country. She is a witness to ecological death: "Her mind was only a lonely mansion for the stories of extinction" (Wright 333). Reading climate novels feels like collecting such stories of extinction as many of them revolve around the loss of natural diversity, the absence of meaningful webs of relationships, and grief in the face of a diminished world. In this thesis, I examined the depictions of human-nonhuman relationships in three Australian novels. Foremost, I was interested in how many differences and commonalities the books would share. If there were any significant dissimilarities, would they be rooted in the authors respective identities as white Australian and Aboriginal Australian? Second, I was curious to learn if the productive qualities of grief such as community building, inter-species relationships and care work featured in the novels in any important way.

It is important to situate the discussion of climate fiction and the different ways it represents climate change in a wider ecocritical context. Starting with the Enlightenment, the notion of the humanist subject, which sought to set itself apart from non-humans, and the related nature-culture binary informed—and were imposed upon other cultures during—colonialism. These ideas formed the basis for unsustainable resource extraction that built European wealth and the ecological transformation (and often devastation) of settled countries like Australia. These colonial power structures still survive in the globalised, capitalist world of today. This history also led to European, and later North-American, countries emitting CO_2 longer (Maslin 40) and having

some of the highest emissions per capita ("CO2 Emissions"). Even though not everyone contributed in the same way, humans have collectively emitted enough greenhouse gases that the Earth's climate has started to warm.

Since these planetary changes are unprecedented, a new name was proposed for this time of human-induced climate change: the Anthropocene. It is characterised by instability of heretofore stable categories. First, the nature-culture binary cannot be upheld in times when nature keeps intruding, sometimes violently, into culture. It would be more fitting not to view both categories as two ends of a spectrum and more like an assemblage, in which aspects of each are, and have always been, inseparably intertwined (Haraway, *The Haraway Reader* 2). Second, the Anthropocene is characterised by scale effects, shifts in perspective that can make an action seem harmless on one scale but downright irrational on another (Clark 73). This complicates human agency because individual actions collectively add up and further contribute to climate change. Third, the environmental changes of the Anthropocene increase overall risk. Ulrich Beck explains that humans are currently living in a world risk society because modernity produces excessive and unpredictable environmental risk on a global scale (Beck, *Risk Society* 10; 13). Humans are, therefore, not only directly impacted by their immediate surroundings but also by remote environments. Heise calls the awareness of this a sense of planet and declares that in a globalised world, people do not necessarily identify more with their local environment but likely have affiliations with remote places as well (10). Buell further argues that being constantly surrounded by risk has become the new normal. It desensitises people to living with environmental crisis and just becomes a way of life (xiv).

Despite a sense of desensitisation, climate change—environmental crisis on a planetary scale—can cause negative affects. Most common among emotional responses to climate change are anxiety, apathy, and grief. Ecological grief is distinctive because it is a non-cathartic state (Bladow and Ladino 11) that cannot be lived through but must be lived with. In addition, it does not only occur after the fact but is simultaneously anticipatory because we are conscious of the impending climate change effects. Yet grief is not only a private feeling; it can be political as well. Judith Butler writes about how some (human) lives are construed as ungrievable, i.e., they are discursively dehumanised and rendered invisible so that violence against them does not have an emotional impact on the majority ("Violence" 22). This is called derealisation. Butler only

focusses on humans in her writing, but her arguments can easily be extended to encompass non-humans, who are routinely derealised, too. Climate fiction can be a space for rendering those lives grievable, encourage readers to care about climate change or represent their disenfranchised emotions.

All three novels I discussed can be categorised as speculative fiction, meaning they all depict future versions of Australia based more or less accurately on actual climate change predictions. Unsurprisingly, all stories are dystopian in outlook. Furthermore, they all express criticism of Western modernity and humanity's responsibility for climate change, albeit to different degrees. Overall, the human-nonhuman relationships in these novels are characterised by absence and many of the novels' characters grieve at some point for the loss of natural diversity or extinct species. What was unexpected was the fact that none of the three novels represented a singular emotional response to climate change. Grief was always mixed with a range of other emotions such as wonder, curiosity, alienation, apathy, and disillusionment. The three novels also depicted the productive capacities of grief, which were reflected in the characters' inter-species relationships with bees, swans and orange-bellied parrots. A prerequisite for all those relationships was the characters' emotional openness towards their environment and a sense of their shared vulnerability. The novels also all employ common tropes like the apocalypse and the pastoral. Especially *Clade* and *The Swan Book* do not simply reproduce them but critically engage with them. *Clade*, for example, evokes the pastoral only to question if it is still relevant in times of climate change and *The Swan Book* implicitly criticises the sensationalism of apocalypse.

Despite their many commonalities, the novels also differed from each other in important aspects. The most striking one was an awareness of environmental justice in connection to climate change. Neither *Clade* nor *The Living Sea* acknowledge the global power structures that arose out of colonialism, shape the modern world, and are likely to be aggravated by climate change. Focussing on Australia, *Clade* does not acknowledge the presence of Aboriginal people at all, thus erasing them from the discourse on climate change. *The Living Sea* mentions Aboriginal people briefly but only to historicise and thus exclude them from modernity. Both of these moves are unfortunately not uncommon in climate fiction by white authors (Pierrot and Seymour 95), albeit still disappointing. In contrast, *The Swan Book*, written by Waanyi author Alexis Wright, makes the link between climate change and settler colonialism central to its

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narrative. In the novel, the main source of grief and other negative emotions is not climate change, but the continuous injustices Aboriginal people have to suffer at the hand of the Australian state. Climate change is merely one iteration in this ongoing struggle. Due to these divergent perceptions of climate change and the Anthropocene, the meaning of grief differs in these novels. In *Clade*, it is mostly a spontaneous and genuine emotion expressed when faced with environmental loss. In *The Living Sea*, grief is suppressed by apathy and alienation but felt and voiced by Anna in the last chapters. Both novels, however, create the sense that their characters live through an unprecedented crisis and that, therefore, ecological feelings are new to them. In contrast, *The Swan Book* makes the point that living in crisis is not new to Aboriginal people who have had to contend with oppression, displacement and environmental degradation since their first contact with settlers. As Toni Birch observes, being new to this shared vulnerability is a privilege ("It's Been"). Lastly, the novels also differ in their overall outlook on the climate crisis. *Clade* is the most hopeful without playing down the predicament humanity is in. *The Living Sea* presents a more pessimistic view on humanity and clearly condemns the current form of global late modernity. While *Clade* remains open about the possibility that humans can successfully adapt or even reverse climate change, no such possibility exists in *The Living Sea*. *The Swan Book* also presents a dire scenario when it comes to the devastation of Country through climate change but remains hopeful about Aboriginal survival. To conclude, the research statements that the human-nonhuman relationships in these three climate novels are characterised by loss and grief due to climate change and that ecological grief signifies differently for Aboriginal people than it does for settler descendants can be confirmed.

Further research could expand on this topic in a number of ways. For example, it would be interesting to compare different novels by Aboriginal authors with each other to see how perspectives on climate change vary among different Aboriginal voices. Expanding on that, it would be compelling to bring together perspectives from Indigenous authors from different countries, where climate change has varying effects and will intersect with local histories in distinct ways. A more materialist approach to ecological affects could also be taken. It would acknowledge the webs of material interconnections in which humans and non-humans are implicated and consider emotional responses as transcorporeal connections. Lastly, a posthumanist perspective on

emotions would be suited to question the centrality of humans within the discourse on affect and emotions.

The relevance of researching climate change in the field of literary and cultural studies appears self-evident. And yet, we are still living in the time of great derangement. According to the latest IPCC report at the time of writing, countries will be running out of time to drastically reduce their emissions and limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius by the end of this decade (Plumer and Zhong) while simultaneously, greenhouse gas emissions continued to increase rapidly in 2021 (Zhong). There seems to be a disconnect between the reality of climate change and people's emotional response to it, especially in the West. The emergence of climate fiction reflects the fact that climate change becomes increasingly harder to ignore and that the stories we tell and read shape our view of the world and what is important in it.

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Plagiatserklärung

Ich versichere, dass ich, Lena Amberge, die Arbeit „Worlds of Loss: Absence and Grief in Australian Climate Fiction" selbstständig und nur mit den angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmitteln (z. B. Nachschlagewerke oder Internet) angefertigt habe. Alle Stellen der Arbeit, die ich aus diesen Quellen und Hilfsmitteln dem Wortlaut oder dem Sinne nach entnommen habe, sind kenntlich gemacht und im Literaturverzeichnis aufgeführt. Weiterhin versichere ich, dass weder ich noch andere diese Arbeit weder in der vorliegenden noch in einer mehr oder weniger abgewandelten Form als Leistungsnachweise in einer anderen Veranstaltung bereits verwendet haben oder noch verwenden werden.

Es handelt sich bei dieser Arbeit um meinen ersten Versuch.

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