The Dystopian Anthropocene: Form and Function of Environmental Crisis in *The Parable of the Sower, New York 2140,* and *Clade*

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Abstract

This thesis examines the developing narrative form and social function of dystopian climate fiction in the Anthropocene, in response to recent skepticism regarding dystopian literature's continued usefulness in representing climate change. Through econarratological readings of Octavia E. Butler's *The Parable of the Sower*, Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140*, and James Bradley's *Clade,* the thesis considers three ecodystopian representations of environmental crisis, arguing for the utility of an intersecting genre terminology between the categories of critical dystopia and climate fiction in approaching the form and function of dystopian environmental representations. The thesis moreover argues for the usefulness of considering rhetorical tropes and modes' influence on such representations, highlighting comic manifestations of apocalypse as particularly suitable for environmental communication. Through this broad theoretical approach, the thesis surveys *The Parable of the Sower, New York 2140,* and *Clade,* finding that they exhibit a tendency towards increasing narrative experimentation and hybridization in their representations of Anthropocene anxieties. They likewise suggest an expanded range of social functions, since the texts move beyond the traditional dystopian emphasis on producing cautionary tales by also serving as spaces for processing the uncertainty of the developing risk society and the vast spatio-temporal scales of climate change. The three novels moreover foreground human capability of agency, reconciliation, and adaptation through comic modes of apocalyptic rhetoric. The thesis thereby perceives dystopian climate fiction as a form that remains suited to representing environmental crisis, even if these fictions' origin as cautionary tales will eventually be eclipsed by their function as spaces for processing the uncertainty of human existence in the increasingly dystopian Anthropocene.

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Introduction

In the year 2000, meteorologist Paul J. Crutzen and biologist Eugene F. Stoermer proposed the term 'Anthropocene' as a reconceptualization of our current geological epoch (17). According to Crutzen and Stoermer, human activity has altered Earth and its atmosphere at a global scale, making mankind the primary geological force in recent history, and likely for millennia to come (18). Since the term's initial introduction, scholarship of this 'Age of Humans' has extended well beyond the natural sciences, as the Anthropocene has come to embody not only an environmental transformation, but also a sense of cultural transformation, as the imaginative processes by which we relate to the world are obscured by anthropogenic climate change (Trexler 5). According to Adam Trexler, one such imaginative process is the production of cultural texts such as novels, poems, and plays, wherein complex ideas of history, politics, and everyday life converge in patterning the transformations of the Anthropocene (5). Many forms of cultural texts have made attempts at processing these transformations, but in recent years, the genre of dystopian fiction has particularly flourished, with Anthropocene anxieties relating to climate change now constituting a chief subject matter in dystopian novels (Booker *Critical Insights* vii).

While dystopian literature has a long history of engaging with socio-political issues and has traditionally been recognized for its capacity to encourage activism and produce effective warnings, the Anthropocene is nonetheless posing challenges to the dystopian genre. Critics such as Brian Stableford have for instance questioned dystopian fiction's ability to caution against developments such as climate change, arguing that environmental dystopia is at this point inevitable, making cautionary tales obsolete and unproductive (278). Utopian scholars such as M. Keith Booker are similarly concerned about contemporary dystopian fiction, fearing instead that the exponential increase of dystopian narratives may cause them to lose their shocking effect, thus transforming them into "mere spectacles of misery that, if anything, simply encourage audiences to feel better about the present" (*Critical Insights* 11). As dystopian fiction continues to engage with issues of climate change and environmental destruction, its continued social function is thus challenged by contemporary developments.

According to Trexler, such challenges are not unique to dystopian fiction, however, as he questions the ability of narrative and genre at large in representing human experience in the Anthropocene, arguing that novels depicting climate change must "change the parameters of

storytelling" (14) and rupture the defining features of genre to encompass the complexity of Anthropocene developments (14). It is thus befitting to examine not only the contemporary function of dystopian literature, but also its narrative form, as the genre is adapting to a new environmental context. Accepting Trexler's claim that the Anthropocene dissolves conventional modes of genre and narrative, it is furthermore befitting to undertake such an examination on a theoretical foundation spanning different traditions of genre scholarship, since dystopian climate fiction arguably bridges the traditions of utopian and dystopian literature, and the emerging genre of climate fiction, which also encompasses non-dystopian ecofiction (Bracke, "Worldmaking" 170). Novels such as Octavia E. Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* from 1993*,* James Bradley's *Clade* from 2015 and Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* from 2017 are thus all exemplary of the dystopian literary genre, and have accordingly been considered within utopian scholarship, but with their primary focus on climate change and environmental destruction, they have similarly been considered by ecocritics as examples of climate fiction.

Thus far, few attempts have been made at bringing together these scholarships and terminologies, although doing so could potentially elicit a more nuanced understanding of the continued usefulness and function of dystopian climate literature. To comprise these considerations, we therefore take our outset in the following thesis statement:

> Through econarratological readings of Octavia E. Butler's *The Parable of the Sower*, Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140*, and James Bradley's *Clade*, this thesis examines dystopian climate fictions' representation of environmental crisis, arguing for an intersecting genre terminology between climate fiction and critical dystopia in determining the developing form and function of ecodystopian narratives in the Anthropocene.

By examining a selection of prominent ecodystopian novels and the types of narratives they employ in their representations of climate change, we will consider these texts' engagement with environmental issues and assess how these narratives may adapt beyond mere cautionary tales to address the climate reality of the coming decades.

In order to contemplate these questions, we take our methodological outset in the recently outlined discipline of econarratology, a term first coined in 2015 by Erin James, who sought to

establish a method to study the relationship between literature and physical environments that paid particular attention to the narrative structures and devices used in such literary environmental representations (James and Morel 5).

Following an introduction to econarratology and its various methodological applications, we subsequently introduce our theoretical framework, which, in accordance with recent econarratological attention to the sites of genre and rhetoric, introduces a dual set of genre definitions through which dystopian climate fiction may be understood, as well as an account of relevant rhetorical tropes and modes that shape these fictions' environmental representations. This section will first provide a general account of the dystopian literary tradition, followed by introductions to Tom Moylan's 'critical dystopia' and Astrid Bracke's 'climate fiction' as two different genre categorizations through which contemporary ecodystopian literature may be approached. The second part of the theoretical framework focuses on the role of rhetoric in relation to ecodystopian fiction, outlining Greg Garrard's characterization of the 'Apocalypse' trope, as well as Stephen O'Leary and Joseph Meeker's work on the different rhetorical functions of tragic and comic representations of environmental crisis.

Based on this theoretical framework, we go on to perform econarratological readings of Octavia E. Butler's *The Parable of the Sower,* Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140*, and James Bradley's *Clade*, focusing on how they employ genre conventions and rhetorical devices in their respective narrative representations of environmental crisis. Preceding each of these analyses will moreover be an introduction to the scholarly reception of the work thus far, as contextualization for the readings undertaken by this study.

Finally, we employ our analytical findings to discuss how contemporary dystopian climate fiction is adapting its formal expression and social function to address the new anxieties of the Anthropocene, and to assess the continued usefulness of dystopian narratives in representations of environmental crisis.

The choice of Butler, Robinson, and Bradley's texts as this thesis' focal point was informed in part by what these texts have in common, namely their examination of environmental crisis in a dystopian narrative framework, but also by what they individually represent.

Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* was selected because of its centrality to the genre, as it has been argued to constitute one of the first examples of what we today understand by dystopian

climate fiction and has served as a model for much dystopian climate fiction since its publication in 1993 (Mackenthun 7).

Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* was selected because of its complex yet hopeful depiction of climate change, but also because of Robinson's prominent role as a writer of environmentally oriented science fiction and dystopian fiction, as exemplified by similar works such as *Green Earth* from 2015 and *The Ministry for the Future* from 2020. While his other novels could have been similarly interesting inclusions in this study, *New York 2140* was ultimately chosen because of its spatial and temporal setting, which works within a framework of both dystopia and climate fiction.

Finally, James Bradley's *Clade* was chosen because it exemplifies a branch of dystopian climate fiction that engages with literary fiction in its experimentation with narrative form and its exploration of climate change's effects on domestic life. Other notable works in this category include novels such as John Lanchester's *The Wall* from 2019, Claire Vaye Watkin's *Gold Fame Citrus* from 2015, and Maja Lunde's *The History of Bees* from the same year, but Bradley's novel was selected as it provides a particularly broad consideration of climate change's unfolding consequences in a narrative spanning multiple generations. Bradley has continued to explore themes of planetary trauma and environmental catastrophe in his latest novel *Ghost Species* from 2020, but *Clade* remains his most critically acclaimed contribution to the genre and has been shortlisted for awards such as the Aurealis Award, and the ALS gold medal for Australian Literature, among others ("Clade by James Bradley").

While the selected primary texts all contain insightful considerations of topics unrelated to environmental crisis and climate change, we will only engage with these other themes to the extent that they interact with our primary focus on environmental representation. The thesis will furthermore limit its analytical scope to the sites of genre and rhetoric, in accordance with the econarratological methodological approach outlined in the following section. As the selected primary texts only constitute a small sample of a diverse and growing body of literature, we will moreover be unable to consider the full spectrum of narrative developments within the genre, wherefore further work pertaining to contemporary ecodystopias will be essential to broadening an understanding of their continued function and form in the Anthropocene.

Methodological Framework

Before it is possible to discuss the contemporary role of dystopian environmental narratives, it is first necessary to establish a methodological framework through which the selected ecodystopian novels can be approached. Because we seek to consider both the function of dystopian environmental representations and the formal devices employed to produce them, Erin James' methodological pairing of narratology and ecocriticism under the term 'econarratology' is well suited to the objectives of this thesis.

As indicated by the hybrid name, econarratology as a methodological approach arose as a fusion of existing methodologies, and was first defined by Erin James in 2015, using the following description:

> Econarratology embraces the key concerns of each of its parent discourses - it maintains an interest in studying the relationship between literature and the physical environment, but does so with sensitivity to the literary structures and devices that we use to communicate representations of the physical environment to each other via narratives. (James and Morel 23)

In accordance with this definition, econarratology is then a methodological approach which makes possible an examination of the mechanics that let narratives "convey environmental understanding via building blocks such as the organization of time and space, characterization, focalization, description, and narration" (1).

According to James, ecocriticism, summarized by Cheryll Glotfelty as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii), has long hovered over the connection between narrative and environment without explicitly applying narrative theory (James and Morel 3). James for instance calls attention to the work of ecocritics such as Timothy Morton, Claire Colebrook, and Timothy Clark, who have questioned the ability of narrative, and the novel as a narrative mode, to represent life in the Anthropocene (4). Particularly the spatio-temporal scale of climate change has posed challenges for narrative representation, as argued by Timothy Clark below:

> The global context is now one of variously dangerous environmental tipping points, but in which changes are happening at scales that we do not perceive with ordinary human

> faculties, and with a complexity that may escape us, though we cannot escape it. This is a world whose 'unconformities' in a broad material sense may well elude the novel understood as a form which privileges the realm of personal human experience as the basic reality. (80-81)

According to Clark, literary modes such as the "individualist mode of, for example, the realist novel" (Parham 6) are thus ill suited to encompass the vast temporal and geographical scale of global climate change. Ecocritics such as Greg Garrard have similarly stated that "global environmental crisis is also a crisis of representation" ("Future of Ecocriticism" 709), since no traditional form in film, literature or television documentary is "unproblematically suited to capturing the geographical and temporal scale, complexity and uncertainty of climate change in particular" ("Future of Ecocriticism" 709).

The question of how environmental crisis relates to narrative representation is hence not new to ecocriticism, but with the introduction of econarratology, James outlines a methodological approach that connects such ecocritical arguments with the work of narrative scholars (James and Morel 4). In her initial 2015 outline and application of econarratology, James for instance applied David Herman's narratological concept of 'storyworlds' to describe the "world-creating power" of narratives (Herman, *Story Logic* 16), and the ways in which texts allow readers to experience and imagine life in different ecological spaces (James x-xiii). By applying a narratological theory describing how interpreting narratives necessitates the construction of immersive mental models (Herman, *Story Logic* 14), James was thus able to consider how narratives may enrich understanding of spatially distant environmental contexts (James x-xiii).

Since her initial exploration of econarratology's methodological potential, the approach has received attention from ecocritics and narratologists alike, and in 2020, James released the essay collection *Environment and Narrative: New Directions in Econarratology* in collaboration with Eric Morel, which brings together a range of potential applications and methodological focal points. Aside from considering the narratological building blocks of organization of time and space, characterization, focalization, description, and narration outlined above, the collection also considers how different narrative structures relate to "values, political and ethical ideas, and sets of behaviors that determine how we perceive and interact with ecological homes" (James and Morel 1).

Two approaches outlined in the collection will be particularly influential on our readings, namely a rhetorical approach and a genre-oriented approach to econarratology. These approaches have been selected because they both offer understandings of how narrative form relates to social function and moreover provide especially relevant insights to our selected ecodystopian texts, which all challenge generic categorizations while drawing on familiar rhetorical modes.

The former of these approaches is outlined by Markku Lehtimäki, who concurs with Ursula Heise that "perceptions of climate change and other environmental risks are shaped by narrative modes and rhetorical tropes" (Lehtimäki 87). When applying an econarratological methodology, it is according to Lehtimäki thus important to pay attention to rhetorical tropes, modes, and devices:

> classical figures, tropes, and allegorical story models, such as pastoral, apocalypse, irony, tragedy, and comedy, retain their vitality when writers try to come to terms with climate change. Based on these premises, the rhetorical approach to narrative appears relevant when we are studying the ways in which fiction communicates ideas and values related to environmental phenomena. (87)

By studying rhetorical designs, Lehtimäki argues that a novel's communicative purposes and values may be delineated, since different rhetorical modes convey different perceptions of environmental issues (89).

Lehtimäki further recognizes the importance of studying the influence of the Anthropocene on conventional rhetorical modes, as "heroic, tragic, or comical stories … may simply not suffice [in the Anthropocene], and idealistic notions of narrative's all-encompassing powers have also become suspect" (94). Lehtimäki thus follows Adam Trexler in questioning how climate change affects conventional literary forms, and how novels may be able to distort generic structures to better explore the implications and complexities of the Anthropocene (99).

The second econarratological approach that will influence this thesis' methodology is the genre-based approach outlined by Astrid Bracke in the essay "Worldmaking Environmental Crisis: Climate Fiction, Econarratology, and Genre". Here, Bracke argues that genre is an important site for econarratological analysis, since genres "guide readers in their understanding of a text, and … help them make sense of the world by framing their perceptions and

experiences" (167). Bracke builds on the definitions of Peter Seitel, who argues that "genres are also *tools* for living in society, chunks of communication that do work, and are designed to do that work, be it to educate, to test, to open a channel of communication, to punish, or merely to amuse" (Seitel 277, emphasis in original). Different genres hence serve different functions and can provide different frameworks for understanding the world at a time of crisis and change (Bracke, "Worldmaking" 167). Genres are furthermore argued by Bracke to reflect the social contexts from which they originate, while serving as narrative macro-designs that can help readers navigate not only fictional worlds, but also their physical contexts (168).

Having made her argument for a genre-oriented approach to econarratology, Bracke goes on to define and evaluate the specific genre of climate fiction, which we will also consider in this thesis. Like Lehtimäki, however, Bracke recognizes Adam Trexler's proposition that the Anthropocene challenges the kind of generic conventions typical to genre studies, leading her to consider how climate fiction narratives may embrace these challenges ("Worldmaking" 170).

Bracke moreover addresses Timothy Clark's abovementioned arguments against the novel as a suitable form to represent climate change, commenting that while alternative narrative forms such as Google Earth or samples of ice-cores may better encompass the broad temporal and geographical scale of the Anthropocene, such forms lack the novel's ability to visualize the experience of living in climate crisis ("The Novel" 98-99). That novels have traditionally favored anthropocentric conventions in which plotting, characterization, and setting revolve around a single human protagonist is also addressed by Bracke, but rather than dismissing the novel on these grounds, she instead perceives the genre of climate fiction as an optimal site for narrative innovation and experimentation, where such conventions may be challenged (88-89). The novel, Bracke holds, hence "is neither dead nor in crisis, but is a vibrant and important form in which to come to terms with life in the Anthropocene" (99).

Throughout econarratological scholarship, an awareness can then be traced of the ways that anthropogenic climate change challenges conventional narrative modes and organizational structures, and the ways in which traditional forms such as the novel may adapt to encompass these challenges. Such an awareness is also highly relevant to the objective of this thesis, as it seeks to consider how the function and form of dystopia is adapting in the context of the Anthropocene. Econarratological approaches focusing specifically on genre and rhetoric are furthermore relevant to this study, since dystopian climate fiction arguably bridges the genre

conventions of categories such as science fiction, utopian literature and climate fiction, while often drawing on rhetorical tropes and modes such as apocalypse, tragedy, and comedy in their representations of environmental crisis. Although remaining attentive to the general narratological building blocks outlined by Erin James, we will thus apply an econarratological methodology that emphasizes the roles of rhetoric and genre in dystopian environmental representation.

Theoretical Framework

In accordance with the methodological focus outlined above, our selected theoretical framework will contain an introduction to relevant genre definitions through which dystopian climate fiction may be approached, as well as an account of the rhetorical tropes and modes that feature in these fictions and shape their environmental representations.

Both utopian scholars and ecocritics have been occupied with ecodystopian literature, but have thus far diverged significantly in their definitions and assessments of the genre, despite surveying many of the same novels (e.g. Buell *From Apocalypse* 287, Moylan 223). It therefore makes sense to provide an introduction to both dystopian literature and climate fiction, in an attempt to relate these genre terminologies and scholarships.

The following section will therefore provide a general introduction to the dystopian literary tradition, and in extension of this, an introduction of Tom Moylan's definition of the 'critical dystopia' as a genre categorization through which the form and function of dystopian climate fiction may be understood. Following this account will be an introduction to Astrid Bracke's alternative categorization of 'climate fiction', which similarly provides a framework for understanding the form and function of these novels, albeit rooted in ecocriticism rather than utopian studies.

Having introduced this dual genre definition, the section will subsequently provide an account of relevant rhetorical tropes and modes featuring in these genres. This account will include an outline of Greg Garrard's 'Apocalypse' trope, as well as introductions to Stephen O'Leary and Joseph Meeker's work on tragic and comic modes and their different rhetorical functions.

Together, the above accounts and definitions will form the theoretical foundation of this thesis, providing a frame of reference through which the form and function of contemporary dystopian climate fiction may be assessed.

Dystopian Beginnings

Albeit Tom Moylan's 'critical dystopia' and Astrid Bracke's 'climate fiction' represent two different genre conceptualizations of dystopian environmental fiction, Moylan and Bracke both recognize that the novels they survey are tied to a long literary tradition of earlier utopian and dystopian writing. To Moylan, this earlier tradition can be understood as "classical" dystopias from which the later "critical" dystopias arose (*Scraps* 182), and to Bracke, the dystopian and utopian literary tradition was where speculation about catastrophic environmental destruction first found its literary expression, as a precursor to climate change's entry into literary fiction (169). In order to understand dystopian literature's contemporary occupation with environmental issues, it is thus suitable to first provide a brief account of the literary tradition from which these novels originated, as this tradition has informed both Bracke and Moylan's later genre conceptualizations. Many prominent scholars have described this literary tradition and its historical development, so in order to provide a general introduction, the following account will be informed by the work of a combination of these, although principally that of M. Keith Booker, Tom Moylan, Ildney Cavalcanti and Brian Stableford.

To contextualize this account, it may first be useful to introduce a preliminary definition of what is to be understood by "dystopian literature". Put simply, the term 'dystopia' is popularly used to refer to "an imaginary place or state in which everything is extremely bad or unpleasant" ("dystopia"), as opposed to 'utopia', which refers to "an imaginary place or state in which everything is perfect" ("utopia"). Dystopian literature is then literature portraying such bad or unpleasant places and is generally perceived as a response to the utopian literature which preceded it (Booker, *Dystopian Impulse* 17-18). Dystopian literature is furthermore regarded as a particularly political genre, often modeling its dystopian or utopian visions on concurrent socio-political developments (15).

With this rough definition in place, early dystopian thought is often ascribed to the period surrounding the turn of the 20th century, marked by the publication of literary works such as H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* from 1895, and E.M. Forster's *The Machine Stops* from 1909

(Moylan, *Scraps* 180). Before the publication of these works, writers had primarily been influenced by Enlightenment prophecies of indefinite human improvement achieved through reason, capitalist enterprise, and scientific invention, leading to literary representations that were generally utopian in nature (Booker, *Dystopian Impulse* 4-5). By the end of the 19th century, such visions appeared increasingly naive, however, as it became evident that the scientific invention of the industrial revolution had not liberated workers, but rather harnessed them to machines (*Dystopian Impulse* 6). At the turn of the 20th century, the dystopian underside of previously utopian visions thereby increasingly made its way into the literary imagination, as exemplified by H. G. Well's *The Time Machine,* which extrapolates the inequality and social division of the time by depicting a far-future where the upper and lower classes have evolved, or devolved, into entirely different species (Wells 75-81). *The Machine Stops* on the other hand expands upon fears of mechanization and technological advancement by depicting a society mechanized in every aspect of human life, which has resulted in a loss of control over 'the machine', leaving humanity to helplessly worship it in the hopes of preventing its dysfunction (Forster 33). As such, the novel is argued by Tom Moylan to represent an inversion of utopian narratives, in that it "focuses on the terrors rather than the hopes of history" (*Scraps* 111).

The Time Machine and *The Machine Stops* thus marked the beginning of a dystopian turn for the utopian genre, defined by skepticism and disillusionment rather than 19th century optimism (Booker, *Dystopian Impulse* 17-18). This turn was further cemented with the publication of literary works such as Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* in 1924*,* Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* in 1932, and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 1949, which quickly became canonical to the dystopian literary tradition (Moylan, *Scraps* 121). The dystopian dominance of the early-to-mid 20th century naturally also reflected concurrent social developments, as described by M. Keith Booker below:

> Powered by the horrors of two world wars, the grizzly excesses of totalitarian regimes in Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, and the specter of global nuclear holocaust, "negative" texts … have been far more prominent in modern literature than the positive utopias of earlier centuries. (*Dystopian Impulse* 17)

The hopes and aspirations of the 19th century that, as a by-product of technological and societal progress, for decades had pushed depictions of the future towards the utopian, were hence replaced with the fear and uncertainty of a world torn by war, conflict, and oppression. Utopian thought thus gave way completely to 'negative texts', as Booker puts it, cementing dystopia as the new driving force of the previously utopian genre.

A short intermission in the dystopian prevalence did occur, however, in the 1960s and 1970s, in what Ildney Cavalcanti describes as a "utopian resurgence of … human rights, anti-racist, feminist, and ecological activism" (65), or what Moylan calls "engaged utopianism" (*Scraps* 186). Moylan broadly describes feminist utopianism as defined by a focus on personal freedom, classless societies, ecological consciousness, and sexual permissiveness (*Scraps* 80-81). According to Moylan, prominent literary contributions to the utopian interlude of the '60s and '70s included Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* from 1974, Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* from 1975, and Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* from the same year (*Scraps* 31). *The Dispossessed* deals with anarchy and anti-war rhetoric on the twin-inhabited worlds of Anarres and Urras, while *The Female Man* focuses on gender roles and social conventions, depicting both a dystopian and a utopian far-future represented by the male/female world of Womanland and the all-female Whileaway (*Scraps* 78). Lastly, *Ecotopia* reflects a developing green movement, in its depiction of the utopian state of Ecotopia, a broken-off part of the United States intent on providing ecologically sustainable solutions to its citizens (Stableford 274). This green movement took inspiration from the release of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, which had pushed pollution and environmental concerns to the forefront of contemporary cultural consciousness, encouraging utopian writers such as Callenbach to consider environmental problems, while also giving rise to a number of early environmental dystopias (272).

The utopian hopefulness of the '60s and '70s definitively concluded with the onset of new political and societal developments in the 1980s, however, as the rhetoric of hope portrayed in the utopian imaginaries of the '60s and '70s was rendered naive in the face of the 1980s New Right movement (Cavalcanti 69). Moylan exemplifies this turn by singling out Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* from 1985 as a perfect example of the "backlash" (*Scraps* 163) of the '80s: "With elements from the New Right and Christian fundamentalism conjoined with deformed and distorted feminist formations, mass-mediated consumption, and the military-industrial complex, a variant of "friendly fascism" comes alive on the page" (*Scraps* 163).

Cavalcanti concurs with Moylan's assessment of the New Right movement's influence on the dystopian literary imagination, arguing that neoliberalism, and the various economic, social, and ecological crises arising as a result of its hegemonic expansion, has been a particularly central theme for dystopian fiction from the '80s and onwards (65-66). Many of the issues dealt with in the previous decades' utopian fiction moreover remained central during the '80s and '90s, albeit now represented in dystopian frameworks. This included feminist issues, as exemplified by *The Handmaid's Tale*', environmental concerns, as described in Octavia E. Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* from 1993, and anti-capitalist, anti-war rhetoric, as exemplified in Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Gold Coast* from 1988 (Moylan, *Scraps* 163-166, 198-221, 223-245).

As the turn of the 21st century approached, a range of prominent themes could thus be identified in dystopian writing, with gender equality, religious fundamentalism, environmental destruction, and neoliberalism making up the most prominent topics (Booker, *The Science Fiction Handbook* 70-72). According to Brian Stableford, the latter part of the 20th century and the early years of the 21st century especially cemented the role of environmental crisis in dystopian literature, as it became increasingly difficult to imagine futures unaffected by environmental destruction: "The notion that the twenty-first century would be an era of unprecedented ecological crisis, highly likely to lead to a temporary or permanent collapse of civilization, became so firmly entrenched in speculative fiction as virtually to be taken for granted" (273). Whereas early environmental dystopias had addressed anxieties ranging from pollution to radioactivity, the 21st century moreover brought with it a unified focus on the threat of global warming, making dystopian climate change fiction the new prominent expression of contemporary anxieties (276).

By the end of the first two decades of the 21st century, dystopian literature had not only become centrally occupied with global warming, but had also witnessed an exponential surge in popularity, making the new climate dystopias plentiful, as dystopia, according to Cavalcanti, was now penetrating western culture as the "major vehicle for our hopes and fears" (66). Accompanying this surge in popularity has been an increase in scholarly attention to dystopian literature, whether climate focused or not, and different modes, subgenres, and terminologies have accordingly been proposed to make sense of the rich literary tradition outlined above. Tom Moylan introduces one such terminology, which particularly deals with dystopian literature published after the 1980s, and therefore with the feminist, ecological, and neoliberal themes of

recent decades. In order to establish a more focused theoretical framework for understanding contemporary climate dystopias, the following section will therefore begin by outlining Moylan's theoretical work, as the literary tradition to which he applies it has now been accounted for.

The Critical Dystopia

As evidenced by the introduction above, dystopian speculation can be traced back centuries, and has from its inception been characterized by an occupation with concurrent socio-political anxieties. Throughout the decades, dystopian literature's formal and thematic expression has developed, however, and different attempts have accordingly been made at conceptualizing this development. One of the most significant contributions to this project has been the work of Tom Moylan, who in the year 2000 published *Scraps of the Untainted Sky,* which outlines a theory of what he terms 'the critical dystopia'. In *Scraps of the Untainted Sky,* Moylan argues that the dystopian literature published since the 1980s and '90s has differed fundamentally from earlier 'classical' or 'traditional' dystopias, in both form and social function (*Scraps* 186, 188). He introduces the term 'critical dystopia' to encompass these developments, a term which has since gained widespread recognition within utopian scholarship, and which, according to Ildney Cavalcanti, remains the most useful theoretical framework for understanding the genre's contemporary engagement with topics as varied as climate change, posthumanism, and technoscientific invention (72). The following section will therefore account for this framework, taking its primary outset in Moylan's own introduction, but drawing also on the work of Raffaella Baccolini and Ildney Cavalcanti, whose early definitions are applied by Moylan, and who have since contributed to Moylan's further delineation of the genre (Baccolini and Moylan 9).

As a basis for his definition of the critical dystopia, Moylan begins by outlining a few broad characteristics of dystopian literature, which he argues applies across both classical and critical manifestations. The dystopian genre is, according to Moylan, a "negative narrative machine [which] has produced challenging cognitive maps of the historical situation by way of imaginary societies that are even worse than those that lie outside their authors' and readers' doors" (*Scraps* xi). Moylan thus concurs with the basic definition of dystopia provided above, in arguing that dystopian fiction is principally characterized by its depiction of imaginary 'worse'

societies that serve to critically comment on the societies of the real world as a form of cautionary tale (xi).

From there, Moylan goes on to define how critical dystopias build upon this basic definition, although he credits the term 'critical dystopia' to Lyman Tower Sargent, who in 1994 addressed the need for a new terminology to conceptualize the changing dystopian genre conventions of the 1980s. Sargent expressed this need in "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited", where he argued that recent politically engaged texts "undermine all neat classification schemes" (7) by being both "eutopias and dystopias" (7). Because new dystopian fiction contained increasingly utopian elements, "the terms good place and bad place simply do not work" (7). He therefore cautiously proposed the idea of a 'critical dystopia', inspired by Moylan's already established notion of 'critical utopia', which Moylan had introduced in 1986 to conceptualize utopian fiction that remained critical of utopian societies (9). As a means of comprehending the new developments within the dystopian tradition, Sargent thus suggested that 'critical dystopia' might be used to refer to dystopian fiction that remained hopeful of utopian transformation (9).

In *Scraps of the Untainted Sky,* Moylan responds to this suggestion, accepting that the utopia/dystopia dichotomy has long been a contested site. He writes: "although Sargent's 'critical dystopia' is a recent development, its political and aesthetic roots can be traced back through the dystopian intertext" (*Scraps* 188). Moylan expands on this by stating that "the dystopian genre has always worked along a contested continuum between utopian and anti-utopian positions: between texts that are emancipatory, militant, open, and 'critical' and those that are compensatory, resigned, and quite 'anti-critical'" (*Scraps* 188). According to Moylan, this continuum has become increasingly muddled since the '80s and '90s, which Cavalcanti also addresses by arguing that critical dystopias represent a "shift towards transgression of the clear-cut binary views (the eutopia *versus* dystopia dichotomy)" (emphasis in original 67). Whereas dystopia could previously be defined by its opposition to utopia, critical dystopia then mixes and blurs these formerly opposite modes of expression (Moylan, *Scraps* 188-189). Moylan thus concludes that critical dystopias "represent a creative move that is both a continuation of the long dystopian tradition and a distinctive new intervention" (*Scraps* 188).

Having thus contextualized Sargent's suggestion, Moylan goes on to apply Sargent's definition as a useful starting point for understanding the critical dystopia and its occupation with both utopian and dystopian themes. According to Sargent, the critical dystopia can be defined as:

> A non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as worse than contemporary society but that normally includes at least one eutopian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a eutopia. (qtd. in Moylan, *Scraps* 195)

Whereas the classical dystopia would also be characterized by a depiction of a worse non-existent society than the contemporary real-world society, the critical dystopia thus differs by insisting that its dystopian bleakness must be counteracted by the possibility of a "utopian horizon" (*Scraps* 196).

Such utopian elements are, according to Moylan, necessary to fulfill the genre's social function, which is not to be nihilistic or resigned, but rather to "map, warn, and hope" (*Scraps* 196). By this, Moylan understands that critical dystopias must first *map* the evils of the real world using extrapolated fictitious accounts of an imagined worse future, in order to *warn* against similar developments in contemporary society, before lastly giving readers *hope,* by presenting them with an alternative to the destructive path that is being taken (*Scraps* 196). The first two steps of this process are, according to Moylan, common to dystopia and science fiction in general, as these genres have been demonstrated by scholars such as Darko Suvin to depict cognitively consistent alternate societies that are either analogous to the real world or resemble extrapolated versions of it, resulting in an effect of cognitive estrangement that lets readers perceive their real-world environment from a fresh perspective (Moylan, *Scraps* 43-44). Drawing on Bertolt Brecht, both Suvin and Moylan understand 'estrangement' as the effect created when a recognizable phenomenon is represented in a context that makes it seem unfamiliar, and it is this effect that makes science fiction, and dystopian fiction in particular, able to warn readers of developments they might otherwise have taken for granted (Moylan, *Scraps* 43-44).

According to Moylan, the added element of hope is then what separates the constructive criticism of the critical dystopia from the pessimism of past dystopias (*Scraps* 195-196), and it is

this element that makes critical dystopias particularly useful, because these fictions not only give their readers a better perception of what is right and wrong in the world, but also help them to "think about what is to be done, especially in concert with others, to change it for the better" (xvii). Based on this distinction, Moylan summarizes the critical dystopia as a

> textual mutation [of the classical dystopia] that self-reflexively takes on the present system and offers not only astute critiques of the order of things but also explorations of the oppositional spaces and possibilities from which the next round of political activism can derive imaginative sustenance and inspiration. (xv)

The formal achievement of this expanded social function is outlined by Moylan in the remainder of his study, drawing heavily on the definitions by Raffaella Baccolini and Ildney Cavalcanti.

In first exploring the creation of "oppositional spaces", Moylan references Baccolini, who similarly describes critical dystopias as texts that help to "deconstruct tradition and reconstruct alternatives" (qtd. in Moylan, *Scraps* 188), while "maintain[ing] a utopian core" (188). Baccolini argues that critical dystopias "negate static ideals, preserve radical action, and create a space in which opposition can be articulated and received" (qtd. in Moylan, *Scraps* 188), using works by Burdekin, Atwood, and Butler as examples of critical dystopias that open up spaces for underrepresented groups to oppose and contest hegemonic discourse (189). Moylan recognizes that classical dystopias and science fiction have also been known to do this but contends that newer works "both formally and politically" foreground opposition, through narrative structures that give "voice and space" to the dispossessed and the marginalized (*Scraps* 189). Formally, this foregrounding is achieved through resistance narratives that, according to Baccolini, contain open and hopeful endings that maintain a utopian horizon *within* the text, in opposition to classical dystopias, which often close on a "subjugation of the individual at the end of the novel" (qtd. in Moylan, *Scraps* 189).

Cavalcanti outlines similar criteria in her assessment of the genre, summarizing a list of shared assumptions regarding the critical dystopia and its formal traits:

> [Typical traits include] the coexistence of both utopian and dystopian traces in the works analyzed, brought into effect by a stance of militant (or utopian) pessimism; the cognitive

> mapping of historical evils, balanced by a textually inscribed counter-narrative move of resistance; a high degree of textual self-reflexivity that strongly relies on genre self-awareness, genre blurring as well as other shared metafictional strategies (such as the emphasis on linguistic tensions and on storytelling); the activation of a utopian function regarding readers' critical response and consequent political positioning; recurring traces of gender sensitivity and class and race awareness. (67-68)

Cavalcanti's summary echoes the definitions introduced above, but also includes formal traits such as 'genre blurring' and 'metafictional strategies', the latter of which is commented on by Moylan, who argues that the act of writing can in itself be foregrounded as feat of resistance, in a formal reflection of the oppositional thematic content (*Scraps* 192).

The technique of genre blurring is moreover elaborated on by Baccolini, who claims that critical dystopias borrow "specific conventions from other genres" (qtd. in Moylan, *Scraps* 189), thereby 'blurring' the boundaries of the dystopian form to "expand rather than diminish its creative potential for critical expression" (189). She argues that genre blurring makes dystopian texts capable of being "multi-oppositional" in their critiques, rejecting the notion of knowledge as "pure, neutral and objective" (189), in favor of a recognition of "differences, multiplicity and complexity; partial and situated knowledges; as well as hybridity and fluidity" (189). Critical dystopia's incorporation of borrowed conventions thus opens the genre to spaces that are empowered by a collective voice and critique, no longer defined by a singular cause, but rather a plethora of issues presented collectively and yet diversely (189). By creatively mirroring other genres, the critical dystopia thereby both allows for "totalizing interrogations" of systemic evil (xii), as well as examinations of the diverse experiences contained in the "everyday lives of everyday people" (xiii).

Moylan agrees when Baccolini writes that critical dystopias, "with their permeable borders, their questioning of generic conventions, and their resistance to closure, represent one of the preferred sites of resistance" (qtd. in Moylan, *Scraps* 190), but whereas Cavalcanti and Baccolini primarily consider these dystopias as examples of feminist resistance, Moylan also includes "anti-capitalist, democratic socialist, and radically ecological" (*Scraps* 190) agendas in the typical subject matter of the critical dystopia.

By insisting on the inclusion of 'radically ecological' in his list of dystopian considerations, Moylan acknowledges the growing environmental concern in both contemporary society and its literary imagination, a concern which has only grown in urgency since his publication of *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*. In Moylan's most recent publication *Becoming Utopian* from 2020, he describes climate change and ecological destruction as some of the primary forces contributing to our contemporary experience of living in "dystopian times" (*Becoming Utopian* 1), as "planetary nature (including humanity) is facing a downward spiral of near-total destruction" (*Becoming Utopian* 1). In this context, Moylan perceives the hopefulness of utopian elements as more important than ever, if the current order is to be challenged and transformed "in the spirit of a just, equal, and ecologically healthy existence for all of human and non-human nature" (*Becoming Utopian* 1).

Cavalcanti similarly perceives the critical dystopia as an optimal site to intervene in the contemporary problems of the Anthropocene, arguing that it offers a creative space for exploring potential political moves against or beyond such problems (72). She contends that the critical dystopia provides "a picture of the darkest possibilities regarding social, political, and environmental issues, without losing the spark of hope for a better spacetime" (72), and goes on to quote Donna Haraway's famous "staying with the trouble" (72) when describing how the critical dystopia, rather than becoming obsolete, has contrarily found renewed relevance in its ability to keep us attentive to courses for resistance, at a time when environmental and political developments can easily appear inevitable.

In the context of the Anthropocene, the social function of the critical dystopia thus remains to "map, warn, and hope" (Moylan *Scraps* 196), which formally is achieved through open-ended, multi-oppositional, and genre-blurring resistance narratives that produce an effect of cognitive estrangement that allows the reader to re-evaluate their own social and environmental context. Through Moylan's definition of the critical dystopia, we thereby find a genre conceptualization applicable to contemporary dystopian fiction, which emphasizes how the genre's content and form converge in the creation of cautionary tales that productively communicate hope for future social and environmental transformation.

Climate Fiction and Worldmaking

As demonstrated above, Moylan's critical dystopia offers a useful conceptualization of contemporary dystopian climate fiction that can be applied to understand its narrative characteristics and social functions. Moylan's definition was drafted to encompass a broad spectrum of contemporary dystopian fiction, however, and as such, does not account for environmental dystopias in particular. It is therefore fruitful to consider Moylan's definition alongside a more environmentally oriented genre classification that similarly applies to contemporary climate dystopias, but also encompasses a spectrum of non-dystopian ecofiction. Such a classification can be found in Astrid Bracke's definition of 'climate fiction' or 'cli-fi', and will be outlined below, as a complimentary framework for understanding the selected texts of this thesis.

According to Bracke, climate fiction is a relatively new category of fiction that has come to the fore since the turn of the century, as part of the larger cultural discourse on environmental crisis in the past two decades ("Worldmaking" 169). The label 'cli-fi' was first introduced as a popular abbreviation for the genre, following a 2013 report on NPR that defined it as: "novels and short stories in worlds, not unlike our own, where the Earth's systems are noticeably off-kilter" (Evancie). As previously mentioned, these off-kilter worlds are argued by Bracke to tap into older traditions of ecodystopian and apocalyptic literature (169), although she resists likening climate fiction to science fiction, since she perceives climate fiction as having a stronger affiliation with literary fiction (170).

While emphasizing this literary quality, Bracke does consider the influence of climate change on literary conventions, and includes Carolyn Kormann's suggestion that "today, novels that would once have been called science fiction can be read as social realism" (Kormann par. 6). Bracke furthermore references Trexler in arguing that climate fiction can be perceived as a new hybrid form of storytelling that changes the capacities of contemporary literature:

> One way to measure innovation is against the backdrop of genre. Many preexisting genres offer extraordinary resources to think about complex issues like climate change. … In all of these cases, the genre helps construct the meaning. And yet, climate change necessarily transforms generic conventions. … In the face of these challenges, climate

> novels must change the parameters of storytelling, even to draw on the tropes of recognizable narratives. (Trexler 13-14)

According to Trexler, climate fiction can then be connected to a range of conventional genres, from science fiction to suspense novels, which in their respective representations each offer new understandings of climate change that in turn transform them into something unfamiliar (14). In assenting to this argument, Bracke recognizes climate fiction's formal hybridity, but nonetheless asserts the need for a somewhat narrower genre definition.

Bracke begins to specify such a definition by proposing a set of temporal criteria that distinguishes climate fiction from other genres. The first of these is that cli-fi must not be set in a distant future, like science fiction, since "the potential and strength of cli-fi is that the works are set more or less right now" ("Worldmaking" 170). Moreover, "cli-fi is not set after a big rupture, a seemingly sudden event that changed all" (170), but rather in a "risk society, a constant state of living in potential man-made danger" (170-171). Temporally, climate fiction is then primarily concerned with the near future and must be connected to the present by developing man-made dangers, rather than cataclysmic apocalyptic events such as the one inferred in McCarthy's *The Road* (170-171).

Bracke's understanding of what constitutes a risk society is informed by Ulrich Beck, who argues that recent history has been characterized by the production of a new type of man-made risk that is largely undetectable to the human sensory apparatus, is spatially and temporally borderless, and plays a central role in public discourse, and thereby in our experience of reality (Beck 21-23). These risks include pesticide pollution, pandemics, radioactive fallout, microplastics, damage to the ozone layer, and climate change, and fundamentally differ from earlier types of risks, because they initially can only be identified by means of scientific expertise and equipment. They hence exist principally in our knowledge about them, meaning that they can be downplayed or exaggerated at will, which fosters a constant state of uncertainty that citizens must navigate in their everyday lives (21-23).

According to Bracke, the representations in climate fiction thereby also tend to portray environmental crisis not as something distant that can be warned against, but rather as a problem that must be coped with daily, in settings that tend to be domestic ("Worldmaking" 171). Bracke makes this argument in reference to the work of Frederick Buell, who similarly contends that

> literature today represents deepening environmental crisis as a context in which people dwell and with which they are intimate … It suggests that society is now at a point where the shadow world has entered the daylight world and begun to change it substantially. … it does not ask for a look of panicked horror, an urgent effort to change, and then denial and forgetfulness until the next look. … It asks that audiences realize just how deeply in the soup they themselves are and how difficult and uncertain solutions are. (*From Apocalypse* 294)

Whereas Moylan is confident in the critical dystopia's ability to warn and produce meaningful change, Bracke and Buell are thus much more skeptical of climate fiction's ability to do the same, and rather emphasize these fictions' ability to process and dwell on human experience in the Anthropocene (Bracke, "Worldmaking" 171).

While Bracke does not perceive climate fiction as "narratives of resignation" ("Worldmaking" 171), she distances herself from the hopefulness of cautionary tales, arguing that such tales' emphasis on communicating that all is not lost is largely problematic, since hopefulness easily becomes a means of forestalling the truth (211). Climate fiction can then be situated somewhere between skepticism and defeatism, and what Bracke terms "a (misguided?) belief that crisis can yet be averted" (171). Bracke thereby anticipates the inevitable arrival of catastrophic global warming and perceives climate fiction as a way of coming to terms with this, a purpose which is also highlighted by Trexler, who recognizes that much climate fiction is about the failure of humanity to act in the face of catastrophe, and who contends that fiction offers a medium to explain, predict and lament this inaction (9).

Having thus positioned climate fiction temporally and in relation to other genres, Bracke outlines a number of generic elements, based on an overlying assumption that "genre = content + form" ("Worldmaking" 171). Focusing first on the content of climate fictions, Bracke lists the following themes and topics as typical to the climate fiction novel: It focuses on climate change and science; it depicts a risk society; it represents tension between familiarity (present or near-future setting) and defamiliarization (climate change effects); and it depicts tension between widespread awareness of catastrophic global warming and failure to act (171). Bracke does not elaborate on her application of 'defamiliarization', but the term is commonly associated with

Russian formalism, and can be understood as the presentation of "familiar objects or situations in an unfamiliar way, prolonging the perceptive process and allowing for a fresh perspective" ("defamiliarization"), and is hence similar to the cognitive estrangement effect described by Moylan.

In addition to outlining a list of common themes, Bracke furthermore introduces a number of formal and narratological features. Among these she mentions "contrasting lay characters and scientist characters and an emphasis on storytelling and narrativity as (metafictional) components of the novel" ("Worldmaking" 171). She moreover highlights the categories of time and space as sites for formal creativity, as the central theme of climate change often requires climate fiction to experiment with narrative form in order to encompass the vast spatio-temporal scales of transformation in the Anthropocene ("The Novel" 91). Similar to Erin James, Astrid Bracke's primary concern is with the narratological technique of worldmaking, however, which she perceives as a central component of climate fiction ("Worldmaking" 172).

Like James, Bracke applies David Herman's concept of worldmaking to explain how narratives encourage the reader to construct and explore storyworlds, and how the process of constructing such storyworlds in turn helps the reader to make sense of the textual world (Herman, *Storytelling* x). According to Bracke, storyworlds can be perceived as "projected environments that enable readers to travel from the actual world to the textual world, to gain access to it, understand it, and even experience it to some extent" ("Worldmaking" 172). The textual world is moreover argued by Bracke to influence the reader's perception of the actual world: "as the reader follows along to construct a fictional physical environment, they also engage in an act of making sense of their own changing social and physical world" (172). Worldmaking is thus shown by Bracke to serve a social function as well as a narrative one, since the process of modeling a storyworld can contribute to the recognition and comprehension of similar phenomena in the reader's real environment.

A narrative's worldmaking possibilities is according to Bracke furthermore tied inextricably to genre, since genre determines what sort of storyworld construction is possible, and what type of relationship connects the textual world to the actual world ("Worldmaking" 172). To understand genre's influence on this relationship, Bracke refers to Marie-Laure Ryan's principle of minimal departure, which states that we as readers always assume the textual world to resemble the actual world, until textual cues begin to initiate the construction of a storyworld

(172). In accordance with this principle, the genre of a text helps the reader to decode what sort of relationship exists between the textual world and the actual world: "To know that a text is a fairy tale or a legend, a science fiction story or a historical romance, is to know, at least approximately, which aspects of the real world will be shared by the fictional world" (Ryan 415). Climate fiction then, like fairy tales or historical romance, dictates a specific set of expectations regarding the storyworld's relation to the actual world.

Following Ryan's parameters for deciding this relationship, Bracke proposes that cli-fi constitutes its own distinctive genre, since it cannot be likened to realistic fiction, historical fiction, or science fiction, which all function according to the same natural laws as the actual world, whereas cli-fi often plays on these laws: "climate crisis has circumstances that have worsened so much that old laws no longer apply or new ones kick in" ("Worldmaking" 175). Cli-fi can furthermore be distinguished from science fiction based on its temporality, since cli-fi's present or near-future setting tends to make it more compatible with the actual world than science fiction (175). In accordance with these parameters, Bracke proposes that

> the genre of climate fiction puts the reader through a two-step process. Cli-fi depends on first depicting a textual actual world that is very close to readers' actual world, providing cues that give them little reason to suspect that circumstances and developments might be different. Next, however, the narrative extends this familiar world into the unfamiliar. … The two-step process of cli-fi is most successful when readers can barely tell apart the first and second step. (175)

Cli-fi is thus dependent on a gradual slide into unfamiliar territory, and hence a slow construction of the storyworld. Rather than merely depicting environmental crisis, it utilizes this two-step mechanic to "stretch the reader's actual world to encompass the possibilities the textual world suggests" (179), which according to Bracke makes the genre a particularly forceful communicator of climate change, since both climate fiction and climate change creates an experience of epistemological uncertainty (179). As previously mentioned, Bracke does not perceive this experience as an instrument to caution readers, however, but rather as an instrument to help readers process and make sense of their own changing environmental context (172).

In Astrid Bracke's definition of climate fiction, we thus find a quite different conceptualization of narrative characteristics and social functions than that offered by Tom Moylan's critical dystopia. Although Bracke's definition insists on a sharp distinction between climate fiction and more speculative genres, we nonetheless perceive Bracke's definition of climate fiction as a useful theoretical framework through which the selected texts of this thesis may be approached, as even the more speculative of the novels included in this thesis arguably exemplify Kormann's previously mentioned suggestion that what used to count as science fiction now increasingly resembles social realism (Buell, *From Apocalypse* 287, Trexler 8-9).

In order to understand the form and function of dystopian climate fiction, it is thus fruitful to relate Bracke's definition of climate fiction to Moylan's definition of critical dystopia, since both genre scholarships offer useful terminologies through which ecodystopian narratives may be examined. To ease the junction between the two sets of genre terminologies, an overview of their primary differences and similarities have been inserted in table 1 below, which may usefully be consulted as a guide to our analytical work in the sections to come.

Table 1

Genre traits of critical dystopia and climate fiction

	Critical Dystopia	**Climate Fiction**
Thematic content	Co-existence of utopia and dystopia Traces of gender, class, racial or ecological awareness and opposition	Climate change and science Tension between awareness and inaction
Temporal setting	Non-specified time	The present or near future
Spatial setting	A non-existent society worse than our own, related to our society through extrapolation or analogy	Our society / a risk society transformed by climate change
Social function	To warn and encourage hopeful alternative paths	To process human experience in a changing environmental reality
Narrative structure	Open-ended resistance narrative	Two-step narrative, from familiar to unfamiliar
Narrative devices	Cognitive estrangement Genre blurring Metafictional strategies	Worldmaking Experimentation with time and space Metafictional strategies

Moving away from the realm of genre, a similarly useful approach to ecodystopian narratives can be found in the study of rhetorical tropes and modes, which likewise influence narrative forms and functions. In the following section, the dual genre definition outlined above will thus be accompanied by an introduction to the rhetorical trope of apocalypse and its different expressions in modes of tragedy and comedy.

Tragic Apocalypse, Comic Survival

As described in the methodology section above, genres can be argued to create a framework of expectation, which may be realized through the application of different rhetorical tropes and modes. Tropes such as pastoral and apocalypse and narrative modes such as comedy and tragedy are utilized across genre frameworks and have been a key part of contemporary writers' attempts at coming to terms with climate change (Lehtimäki 87). When seeking to understand the form and function of dystopian climate narratives, it is hence also relevant to examine the types of modes and tropes they utilize in their representations, and how the utilization of certain figures may impact their capacity and usefulness as communicators of environmental crisis.

Because this thesis focuses primarily on dystopian fiction, the trope of apocalypse is particularly relevant, since the 'bad places'' of dystopian climate fiction are often bad because they represent extrapolated apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic visions of eco-catastrophe (Cavalcanti 71-72). Dystopian societies in these novels may thus be bad either because eco-apocalypse has already occurred, as is the case in Margaret Atwood's dystopian and post-apocalyptic *MaddAddam* trilogy (Cavalcanti 71-72), or because citizens are living in uncertain expectation of it, which according to Frederick Buell also applies to the contemporary reader:

> The world (as of the writing of this sentence and presumably also the reading of it) has not ended; eco-apocalypse hasn't happened. Yet people today also accept the fact that they live in the shadow of environmental problems so severe that they constitute a crisis. [The global environmental crisis] incorporates both the apparent failure of previously forecasted apocalypses and the continuance and even deepening of alarm. (*From Apocalypse* ix)

Apocalypse has thus been a central trope in depictions of environmental crisis, and its expected arrival, or failure to do so, has influenced both contemporary society and contemporary dystopian fiction (Cavalcanti 72).

A useful description of the apocalypse trope's utilization in environmental discourse can be found in Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism*, where he considers both fictional and non-fictional examples of apocalyptic climate rhetoric. According to Garrard, apocalyptic rhetoric is not unique to environmental discourse, as "for at least 3000 years, a fluctuating proportion of the world's population has believed that the end of the world is imminent" (93). Apocalypticism is thus an old phenomenon, typically occurring in societies in crisis; societies which in turn magnify their sense of crisis to proportions fitting to the end of time, either to stiffen resolve or to provide a vision of sudden release (94). This dual function is, according to Garrard, both a source of weakness and strength in an environmental context, which he expands upon in his subsequent account of the trope (94).

Focusing first on the strength of apocalyptic rhetoric in environmental discourse, Garrard emphasizes apocalypticism's ability to produce resolve and communicate the urgency of addressing environmental destruction (*Ecocriticism* 74, 101):

> Apocalyptic rhetoric seems a necessary component of environmental discourse. It is capable of galvanising activists, converting the undecided and ultimately, perhaps, of influencing government and commercial policy. In the United States, in particular, it can draw upon deep wellsprings of popular and literary apocalyptic sentiment. The news media often report environmental issues as catastrophes not only because this generates drama and the possibility of a human interest, but also because news more easily reports events than processes. (113-114)

Garrard thereby recognizes the powerful potential of apocalypse in addressing issues such as climate change, since its emotionally charged frame of reference is more forceful in eliciting responses than depictions of the complex and long-term processes that actually constitute a problem such as climate change (114).

These circumstances also bring to light the problems with apocalyptic rhetoric, however, since representing complex and long-term processes in this manner can easily reduce them to monocausal crises involving binary opposing groups (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 114). Such representations may foster a misguided search for culprits and causes that conflates nuanced environmental issues into a singular crisis that someone must be held accountable for (115). According to Garrard, apocalyptic rhetoric furthermore “tends to polarise responses, prodding skeptics towards scoffing dismissal and potentially inciting believers to confrontation and even violence, a pattern familiar from conflicts between liberal society and apocalyptic cults” (114). Apocalypticism is then also a divisive form of rhetoric, which potentially fosters confrontations that distract from resolving the issues it warns against. Finally, Garrard also questions the general usefulness of describing contemporary crises as eschatological catastrophe, since a “rhetoric of catastrophe tends to ‘produce’ the crisis it describes” (114). Magnifying a contemporary issue into apocalypticism is thus an act of producing a crisis, which in itself can be problematic, despite intentions of using such fabricated crises to foster resolve and resistance (114).

According to Garrard, apocalypse is thereby not an unproblematic trope in environmental discourse, even when it constitutes an influential tool to communicate the urgency of environmental action (*Ecocriticism* 101). To distinguish between useful and problematic applications of the trope, Garrard looks to the narrative modes used to frame apocalyptic rhetoric (95). He particularly emphasizes the work of Stephen O’ Leary, whose categorizations of ‘comic’ and ‘tragic’ apocalypse describe different frames of acceptance that determine the way issues of agency, time, authority, and crisis are represented (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 95). Building on the Aristotelian definitions of comedy and tragedy, O’Leary argues that:

> Tragedy conceives of evil in terms of guilt; its mechanism of redemption is victimage, its plot moves inexorably toward sacrifice … . Comedy conceives of evil not as guilt, but as error; its mechanism of redemption is recognition rather than victimage, and its plot moves not toward sacrifice but to the exposure of fallibility. The comic plot … portrays destiny as Fortune, while the tragic plot conceives of destiny as Fate. When destiny is conceived as Fortune, time is open-ended, allowing for the possibility of change, while the tragic conception of Fate promotes a view of time and human action as closed and "predetermined." (O’Leary 68)

Following this definition, tragic apocalyptic rhetoric frames time as predetermined, meaning that catastrophe cannot be avoided, leaving tragic actors to pick a side in an already drawn conflict between good and evil, much like Sophocles' Oedipus, who from his infancy is doomed to kill his father and marry his mother, and eventually fulfills this tragic prophecy, despite attempting to prevent it ("Oedipus"). Comic apocalypse on the other hand does not perceive catastrophe as inevitable, but rather as a consequence of errors that may in time be corrected by the comic actor, who like Jane Austen's Elizabeth Bennet can rectify initial assumptions and achieve hopeful outcomes (Dillon, O'Leary 68). O'Leary moreover applies Aristotle's definition of tragedy as a mode focusing on a single issue that develops from happiness to misery, whereas comedy allows for multiple issues, with some actors achieving happiness, and other actors receiving punishment (O'Leary 67).

Based on these distinctions, Garrard only perceives the comic mode of apocalypse as useful in an environmental context, since the tragic mode leaves little room for productive counteraction and risks association with 'doom merchants' and 'apocalypse abusers' (*Ecocriticism* 115). According to Garrard, the comic mode's emphasis on agency and open-ended futures is thus preferable, since "it makes sense to represent meaningful intervention as difficult, but not impossible. Only if we imagine that the planet *has* a future, after all, are we likely to take responsibility for it" (116, emphasis in original).

A similar stance to Garrard's is shared by Joseph W. Meeker, who in *The Comedy of Survival* connects traditional literary modes to cultural perceptions of environment and ecology. According to Meeker, "literature which provide models of man's relationships with nature will … influence both man's perceptions of nature and his responses to it" (8). Therefore, it is essential to investigate which responses are made possible by different literary modes, since our cultural and literary representations of nature are firmly tied to our treatment of it (7-9). The need for such investigations has, according to Meeker, only become more pressing in recent years, as environmental crisis has now become a symbol of apocalyptic expectations, exceeding even biblical floods and famines in its potency (5-6).

Like Garrard, Meeker distinguishes between comic and tragic representations of nature and argues for the usefulness of comedy in favor of tragedy, even though "tragic heroism has enjoyed greater respect and influence than the comic tradition" (16). This historic privileging of

the tragic form in Western culture has, according to Meeker, contributed to the kind of anthropocentric perception of nature that has led to our current environmental crisis:

> Tragic art, together with the humanistic and theological ideologies upon which it rests, describes a world in which the processes of nature are relatively unimportant and always subservient to the spirit of man. Nobility, honor, human dignity, and spiritual purification depend upon supra-natural forces, not upon conciliation with nature. The tragic view of life is proud to be unnatural. (51-52)

Meeker thus perceives tragedy as a mode in which humanity's doomed attempt to put itself above nature is foregrounded, often in the form of an individual tragic hero, whose superiority and uniqueness is likened by Meeker to the perceived superiority and uniqueness of mankind compared to the rest of nature (49).

According to Meeker, the comic mode is an ecologically useful alternative to tragedy, since the comic mode favors the commonplace and locates humans in their natural environments rather than above them (37):

> More appropriate to our time are the relatively modest assumptions made by the comic spirit. Man is a part of nature and subject to all natural limitations and flaws. Morality is a matter of getting along with one's fellow creature as well as possible. … When faced with polar opposites, the problem of comedy is always how to resolve conflict without destroying the participants. Comedy is the art of accommodation and reconciliation. (37-38)

Based on this, Meeker concludes that comedy is fundamentally a mode of survival through adaptation to one's environment. In the present environmental context this mode has become much more useful than the tragic mode's emphasis on battlegrounds and victories (37-38), as "ecology challenges mankind to vigorous complexity, not passive simplicity" (39).

In representations of environmental crisis, which in much contemporary literature and cultural discourse now takes the form of apocalyptic rhetoric, both Garrard and Meeker then assert the need for comic narrative modes, as such open-ended and hopeful structures leave room

for complexity, survival, and exploration of potential solutions. In this thesis' examination of dystopian climate fiction's developing form and function, it will thus be highly useful to consider how the utilization of comic and tragic narrative modes influence the environmental representations of the selected texts, and their ability to effectively warn against or process our changing climate reality.

Analytical Framework

Having introduced a theoretical framework through which contemporary dystopian climate fiction may be approached, it is now possible to consider *The Parable of the Sower, New York 2140,* and *Clade,* and the different narrative traits and devices they employ in their representations of environmental crisis.

In accordance with the methodological and theoretical frameworks outlined above, the following section will consider each of the three novels, employing the genre terminologies of critical dystopia and climate fiction as guides for comprehending their formal construction and the social functions made possible by each narrative structure. In addition to this genre-oriented analysis, each novel's application of comic or tragic apocalyptic rhetoric will moreover be assessed, to further explore the narrative conventions used to convey their various environmental representations. Prefacing each of these analyses will be a review of the novels' critical reception thus far, as each of the selected texts have been subject to considerable scholarly attention that may usefully serve as jumping-off points for our own analyses.

By correlating the three novels' different manifestations of environmentally altered futures, we hope to explore dystopian literature's adaptation to the context of the Anthropocene, and to demonstrate the usefulness of an intersecting genre terminology between critical dystopia and climate fiction in achieving a more nuanced understanding of the versatile possibilities of ecodystopian narratives.

The Parable of the Sower **by Octavia E. Butler**

Literature Review

Published in 1993, Octavia E. Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* was intended as the first in a series of *Parable* novels, but after the publication of its sequel, *The Parable of the Talents*, Butler passed away in 2006, leaving the series unfinished (Streeby 70, 81). Despite Butler's

intention of continuing the series, the first two novels have received extensive scholarly attention in response to their individual themes and storylines, with *The Parable of the Sower* telling the story of the protagonist Lauren Olamina's struggle to survive and establish a community in a near future ravaged by social upheaval, economic collapse, and environmental devastation.

Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* was, according to Shelley Streeby, among the first dystopian novels to take on the topic of anthropogenic climate change and connect it to concurrent political developments (70). This representation has fostered diverse critical responses, with some scholars emphasizing the novel's position as a prescient and multi-oppositional cautionary tale, while others have perceived it as an early literary attempt at processing and coming to terms with the uncertainty of life in a risk society. The difference in perception in such readings speak to the challenges of contemporary dystopian climate fiction and will accordingly be explored in the following review, albeit it is also worth noting that the novel's reception has spanned far beyond considerations of its environmental commentary.

Tom Moylan describes *The Parable of the Sower* as a concoction of substance and form that consists of "Slave narratives, feminist fiction, survivalist adventures and New Age theology" (*Scraps* 223), and the novel has consequently fostered a diverse array of critical responses. Readings such as those of Sladja Blazan and Micah Moreno specifically look to the novel's consideration of feminism, disability, and racism, while other scholars have emphasized the theological aspects of Butler's novel, as exemplified by the work of Clarence W. Tweedy and Alexis Melson, who both examine the novel as an expression of Black theology. *The Parable of the Sower*'s critical reception has thus been characterized by feminist, postcolonial, intersectional, and theological readings, as well as utopian and ecocritical analyses.

This review will not expand upon all these approaches, as the sheer amount of secondary literature that exists concerning Butler's novel would dilute the goal of framing relevant contributions to this paper's research field. Instead, the review's primary focus will be on the novel's reception as a critical dystopia, as laid out by Tom Moylan, Peter G. Stillman, Jim Miller, and Jerry Phillips, and the number of ecocritical readings it has similarly issued, with contributions by scholars such as Éva Federmayer, Chelsea M. Frazier, and Frederick Buell. The review will moreover consider how these readings frame the novel's apocalyptic setting, to contextualize our own examination of the novel as comic or tragic apocalypse.

Considering first the novel's reception within utopian studies, Tom Moylan has performed an influential reading, which argues that Butler "expands the dystopian form" (*Scraps* 223) by successfully utilizing the genre blurring trait that is an instrumental part of the critical dystopia. In addition to the previously mentioned categories of slave narrative, feminist fiction, survivalist adventure, and New Age theology (*Scraps* 223), Moylan also identifies traces of coming-of-age narrative in the novel's mix and blend of genre elements, resulting in a hybrid form that increases the novel's "creative potential for critical expression" (*Scraps* 189).

The novel's function as critical dystopia is, according to Moylan, furthermore achieved through the two-part structure of the novel, with one part situating Butler's dystopian narrative broadly "within a larger historical perspective" (*Scraps* 223), while the other, through Lauren and her expanding community, produces a counter-narrative that challenges this pessimistic view (*Scraps* 223). Moylan describes this counter-narrative as a "historically and theologically informed utopian alternative" (*Scraps* 223) constituted by a political collective, rather than by any singular person (223). Lauren may thus be the catalyst that started the path of her Earthseed community, but it is through the diversity and strength of the collective that it will be completed; a collective "marked by its multiplicity of race, gender, sexuality, age, and class identities" (*Scraps* 233), which according to Moylan suggests a "model for an oppositional movement that is fundamentally and insistently diverse yet strategically united" (*Scraps* 237). Moylan thus reads the novel as a warning against the dystopian regime of Lauren's future, but simultaneously perceives it as a hopeful model for united resistance (*Scraps* 237).

The novel's ability to map, warn, and hope is also considered by Peter G. Stillman in the article "Dystopian Critiques, Utopian Possibilities, and Human Purposes in Octavia Butler's Parables", which builds on Moylan's reading in its examination of Butler's attempt to "forewarn" and "prevent possibly dystopian futures" (15). Like Moylan, Stillman highlights the novel's dual energies, manifested by Lauren's utopian endeavors against the otherwise dystopian backdrop. Stillman claims that Butler "links dreams and nightmares" (15) and juxtaposes Lauren's utopian project with "the imagined future development of contemporary tendencies such as increasing social division, economic inequality, global warming, and the political fantasies of the anti-government right" (15). He too notes Lauren's insistence on communality and cooperation, which cautions against individualism in favor of "a collective project based on the conscious interdependence and agreement of its members" (22).

Contributing to the urgency of Butler's cautionary tale is, according to Stillman, the temporal closeness of her imagined world, which, in the words of Madhu Dubey, produces "a shock of familiarity rather than estrangement" (qtd. in Stillman 16). Jim Miller concurs with this temporal assertion, describing *Parable of the Sower* as "merely a logical extension of our present. We are confronted with a dystopian world, but one which is only 20 minutes into the future" (352). In spite of this closeness, both Stillman and Miller nonetheless argue that Butler's approach to dystopia is hopeful, and "reinvents the desire for a better world" (Miller 336).

Jerry Phillips takes a more utopia-centered approach to his analysis of *Sower* in "The Intuition of the Future: Utopia and Catastrophe in Octavia Butler's Parable of the Sower", although his vision of utopia is somewhat pessimistic, as he argues that Butler's novel represents "a utopianism that has shrunk to the dimensions of survivalism" (308), and hence reflects a lack of confidence in utopian projects, if mere survival is to constitute what counts as a utopia. He expands upon this by arguing that 'Acorn', Lauren's utopian community, is not portrayed as a "pure alternative to the dystopian world without" (307), but rather as entangled within its flawed system, as the community relies on the outside market for trade and must forcefully defend themselves using violence. Phillips thus perceives Lauren's utopian enclave as cynical and absent of grand revolutionary energies, but he contextualizes this cynicism in-world by quoting Lauren's own words: "The world is full of crazy, dangerous people. We see signs of that every day. If we don't watch out for ourselves, they will rob us, kill us, and maybe eat us. It's a world gone to hell and we've only got each other to keep it off us" (308). To Phillips, Butler's utopia is then an acceptance that the world has gone awry, and that only by adapting will survival, and eventually utopia, be attainable (308). Phillips, quoting Frederic Jameson, calls this drastic reduction in utopian ambition "characteristically postmodern" (300), and perceives *The Parable of the Sower* as a "project of 'Utopianism after the end of Utopia'" (300).

Despite this pessimistic outlook, Phillips remains certain of *Sower*'s ability to both warn and provide hope, arguing that "*Parable of the Sower* rejects fatalism in favor of emancipatory human agency" (307). He later expands on this with specific regard to Lauren's Acorn community, writing that "She gives the commune the fitting name of "Acorn," for to see a forest of oak trees as latent in a handful of acorns is to see the world as radical possibility. One sows as one reaps, which is to say, conscious human activity is the key force in determining social

evolution" (307). Phillips thus concurs with Moylan, Stillman, and Miller's readings of the novel, in emphasizing its critical ability as a hopeful warning against inaction.

Implicit in the readings of both Phillips, Moylan, Stillman, and Miller is thus an understanding of the novel's apocalyptic framework as overwhelmingly comic in nature. Phillips' emphasis on the novel's representation of 'utopia as adaptation' echoes Joseph W. Meeker's assessment of the comic form as essentially occupied with survival through adaptation to one's environment, and Moylan's emphasis on the novel's complex and multi-oppositional community clearly stands in contrast to any individual tragic hero. Both Phillips, Moylan, Stillman, and Miller furthermore insist that Butler's novel demonstrates that "despite the bleak landscape, change is possible" (Miller 352), thus foregrounding the importance of human agency, as all four scholars contrast the novel's depiction of past errors with its open-ended hopefulness. The analyses above thereby closely align with characterizations of comic apocalypse, even when the novel's adherence to comic or tragic narrative modes has not been an explicit focal point in utopian receptions of the work.

Whereas utopian readings were prominent in the early reception of Butler's novel, more recent readings have leaned towards an ecocritical approach, often framing the novel as climate fiction rather than dystopian or utopian fiction. Gesa Mackenthun's "Sustainable Stories: Managing Climate Change with Literature" from 2021 exemplifies such a reading and argues that *The Parable of the Sower* has been a prototype for many contemporary climate change novels, attesting to the prescience of Butler's writing (7). Shelley Streeby concurs with this assessment, and argues that Butler, in addition to being a prominent science fiction writer, was furthermore an "important early climate change intellectual" (72), as she over the course of her lifetime collected, preserved, and annotated "hundreds of clippings about scientific research on changing weather, the greenhouse effect, and alternative forms of energy along with news of the destructive neoliberal political and economic policies that were precipitating ecological collapse" (73). Based on more than 350 boxes worth of archived collection, Streeby thus connects Butler's *Parable* novels to a concern with environmental destruction dating back as far as Butler's eighteenth birthday in 1965 (73).

Éva Federmayer takes a similar interest in Butler's engagement with environmentalism in the article "Migrants and Disaster Subcultures in the Late Anthropocene: An Ecocritical Reading of Octavia Butler's Parable Novels.", which reads Butler's *Parables* as occupied with nature's

intrinsic value, and "the interaction of the human and the non-human world" in the Anthropocene (347-348). Federmayer describes Lauren's journey as a "distinct narrative hybridization" (353), which combines the "apocalyptic-pastoral script" (353) of much American environmentalist writing, with what she terms a "toxic-risk narrative" (353). Federmayer's emphasis on *risk* is rooted in both Ulrich Beck's risk society and ecocritical considerations of "toxic narrative" (Federmayer 353), and is exemplified in the novel by how Lauren, before she is even born, inhabits the "socially-ecologically hazardous environment" (353) that is her mother's 'toxic body' and goes on to travel a world that is generally "short of pure, uncontaminated sites of nature affording chances of birth and rebirth" (354).

Chelsea M. Frazier presents a different approach to *The Parable of the Sower* in the article "Troubling Ecology: Wangechi Mutu, Octavia Butler, and Black Feminist Interventions in Environmentalism" in which she argues that Lauren "troubles conceptions of environmentalism and offers a radical model of ecological ethics that exceeds and critiques assumptions outlined in ecology, political theory, and black feminist discourses" (46). Frazier explores Butler's representation of environmental justice, reading the novel as a deconstruction of instances of white supremacy, patriarchy, and general inequality, and consequently also of mainstream environmentalism, which she perceives as predominantly white and male (47-49). She instead connects the novel to Jane Bennett's notion of 'vital materialism', as it "(1) makes human and nonhuman relationality horizontal as opposed to vertical/hierarchical, and (2) insists on the vitality or aliveness of all matter" (45). Frazier sees this reflected in the novel when Lauren's hyperempathy condition enables her to "become animal" (53) in those instances in which she feels the pain of another creature, sharing in its agony and thus giving the readers a new understanding of human to non-human interaction (53-54).

Like the utopian scholars above, Frazier also comments on the temporality and closeness of Butler's storyworld to contemporary society. Quoting Adam Johns, Frazier writes that "Butler's dystopia is created by continuing current trends, such as global warming or radicalizing Christian fundamentalism, to their logical extremes, without sudden transitions as no definitive cataclysm is ever experienced" (47). Butler's world may look post-apocalyptic, Frazier argues, but it is really the result of what Rob Nixon calls 'slow violence', described by Frazier as "the environmental and social violence that moves gradually and often invisibly while enabling hellish conditions for poor, marginalized groups" (48). Frazier thus reads the dystopian near

future not as a shock, but as a slow continuation of the present, which offers a space for processing alternative conceptions of gender and ecology (69).

Precisely the function of processing is explored in Frederick Buell's reading of *The Parable of the Sower* in "Global Warming as Literary Narrative", which investigates the very purpose of climate fiction. Buell describes the climate reality of several climate novels, Butler's included, and argues that their near futures no longer serve as fearful tales that may be avoided, but rather offer all-encompassing images of what it means to "dwell inside" an irreversibly altered world:

> all these fictions depict their characters dwelling inside a foundationless state of gradually world-deforming risk. In thus emphasizing present dwelling inside, rather than fearful anticipation of, a potent new intimacy between people and their worlds is created, even as those worlds have lost all biophysical solidity and become scarily mutable. And this new "inside" is one that has no available or even imaginable "outside"—there are no alternative spaces, no ways back. ("Global Warming" 265)

According to Buell, the 'world-deforming risk' in novels such as Butler's is thereby not a threat that looms in the distance to be fought, to be held off, or to be overcome, it just *is* (265). People live in it, they dwell in it, and accept it, as no alternative to it exists. As Buell describes it; it is an 'inside' with no available or even imaginable 'outside'.

Buell relates this changed function of climate fiction to the increasingly apocalyptic nature of real life, which has caused fictional apocalypse to lose its cautionary function in comparison: "A second consequence of apocalypse having become way of life is that, in this new phase, depiction of risk and crisis suggests no revelation, produces no awakening. Indeed, it serves as a social norm" ("Global Warming" 265). In *The Parable of the Sower,* this new social norm is accepted and processed, as Lauren realizes that she must renounce her nostalgia for order and security, since "clinging to any fortified island of security in a chaotic society is suicidal" (Buell 266-267). Climate fiction such as *The Parable of the Sower* is thus shown by Buell to "represent and assimilate the break between the past and the entry into the present's stressed, foundationless, inside without an outside" (266).

Like the utopian readings above, ecocritical readings such as Frederick Buell's do not explicitly consider the novel's adherence to comic or tragic modes of apocalypse, but whereas the utopian readings can be directly linked to the comic framework's emphasis on human agency in averting apocalypse, Buell's "inside without an outside" arguably complicates the comic/tragic distinction, as Buell's version of apocalypse is neither looming inevitably in the distance, nor is it avoidable through timely intervention. Buell's reading thus reveals an important challenge to the apocalypse trope as it has been defined above, as both comic and tragic conceptions of apocalypse are shown by Buell to rely on an assumption that the reader's point of perception is still "outside" an apocalyptic reality, as this is the only position from which it is possible to anticipate apocalypse's inevitable arrival (as in tragic apocalypse) or contemplate ways of avoiding it (as in comic apocalypse). In Buell's reading of *The Parable of the Sower*, such a point of perception is no longer available to the reader, who in many ways is already inhabiting Lauren Olamina's apocalyptic world, hence complicating the application of the distinction.

As evidenced by the readings above, the critical reception of Butler's novel has thus been divided between interpretations of it as a critical and multi-oppositional cautionary tale, and interpretations emphasizing its prescient role as a space in which the uncertainty of contemporary risk society and climate change may be processed. These differing interpretations have taken their outsets in either utopian or ecocritical theoretical frameworks, have applied differing genre categorizations of the novel as either critical dystopia or climate fiction, and have made different assumptions about the reader's position "inside" or "outside" the novel's apocalyptic future. In the following analysis, we hope to reconcile aspects of both interpretations, while contributing with the new insights offered by an econarratological approach, as such a reading has thus far been absent in the novel's critical reception.

***The Parable of the Sower:* Apocalypse from the Inside?**

The Parable of the Sower opens on Saturday, July 20, 2024, on a warm night in a gated community 20 miles from Los Angeles (Butler, *Sower* 3). If not for the fictional town name of 'Robledo' (10) and the looming size of the neighborhood wall (5), the contemporary reader could not be faulted for imagining the protagonist Lauren Olamina writing her diary only a year from the present, in the sweltering Californian heat. As Lauren on the next morning rides her

bike across town to attend church, Lauren's reality quickly diverges from that of the reader, however, as it becomes evident that Robledo is a scorched town, completely devoid of green, and short on clean water, its streets inhabited primarily by squatters, junkies, and corpses, and its neighborhoods walled in and armed to keep out the sick, poor, and desperate (9-10). As the narrative reality in this way diverges from the present reality, two diverging genre approaches to the novel also emerge. Cli-fi critics such as Bracke and Buell might challenge us to perceive the setting detailed above from the 'inside', as a continuation of our present risk society. In the section below, however, we begin our analysis by perceiving Lauren's narrative through the 'outside' point of view offered by the genre conceptualization of critical dystopia.

Time Left to Change: *The Parable of the Sower* as Critical Dystopia

As evidenced by the readings above, *The Parable of the Sower* has often been used to exemplify the genre of critical dystopia, in part due to its spatial and temporal setting, which neatly fits Sargent's definition of a non-existent society located in a worse time and space than the present (qtd. in Moylan, *Scraps* 195). This setting is established in the very first chapters of the novel, which present the reader to the seemingly familiar scenario of a baptism that is to take place upon Lauren's fifteenth birthday. As Lauren rides her bicycle to the church that is to facilitate it, the scenery that passes by meanwhile bears testimony of a world that has gone deeply awry:

> We rode past people stretched out, sleeping on the sidewalks, and a few just waking up, but they paid no attention to us. I saw at least three people who weren't going to wake up again, ever. One of them was headless. … A woman, young, naked, and filthy stumbled along past us. I got a look at her slack expression and realized that she was dazed or drunk or something. Maybe she had been raped so much that she was crazy. I'd heard stories of that happening. (Butler, *Sower* 9)

Lauren's reality is then clearly contrasted to life in present-day US suburbia, as social order outside of her walled community is shown to have completely dissolved.

The same is soon revealed to be true of the ecological order, as Lauren's community has survived for six years without rain (Butler, *Sower* 43), and the majority of California has been

transformed into the scorched home of hordes of "California trash" (78), eager to migrate to the cooler and wealthier Canada (78). Sandy beaches are "already just a memory" due to rises in sea level (111), and while Lauren is safe from the blizzards of the Midwest and the tornadoes wrecking the central states, a new drug which makes people obsessed with fire makes the drought-ridden California an apocalyptic wasteland of its own (49).

Lauren Olamina's near-future America is thus very much 'worse' than the real America of the present, but as Lauren plans her journey north, the beginning of a utopian counter-narrative emerges, in accordance with the second part of Sargent's definition, which requires that the critical dystopia includes "at least one eutopian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a eutopia" (qtd. in Moylan, *Scraps* 195).
Both elements of Sargent's condition are fulfilled in *The Parable of the Sower*, as Lauren refuses to submit to defeatism in the face of social and environmental collapse:

> 'Why do you want to talk about this stuff,' Joanne asked, bringing me back to the real fire. 'We can't do anything about it.' 'We have to.' 'Have to what? We're fifteen! What can we do?' 'We can get ready. That's what we've got to do now. Get ready for what's going to happen, get ready to survive it, get ready to make a life afterward.' (Butler, *Sower* 50)

What in the above quote begins as a tentative hope that a meaningful life may be achievable in spite of climate change and social upheaval is later in the narrative realized through the creation of 'Acorn', which, as other scholars have pointed out, introduces a utopian enclave of resistance to the otherwise dystopian setting.

Acorn is in the novel described as an isolated haven in which Lauren's racially and socio-economically diverse community can recuperate and rebuild:

> Tomorrow we'll begin to prepare a winter garden. Next week, several of us will go into town to buy tools, more seed, supplies. Also, it's time we began to build a shelter. … Mora says he's built slave cabins before. Says he's eager to build something better, something fit for human beings. (Butler, *Sower* 308)

Fitting to the image of an acorn, Lauren at the same time imagines that the community, initially formed as a means of survival, will grow to eventually overcome its marginal position: "Someday, I think there will be a lot of us. And I think we'll have to seed ourselves farther and farther from this dying place" (74). The novel thus lives up to Moylan's outline of an open-ended resistance narrative, as it closes on an expectant note of hope for the future, which balances the community's grief for their many lost friends and family members: "we buried our dead and we planted oak trees" (311).

The narrative structure of *The Parable of the Sower* is moreover fitting to the mode of comedy, which similarly allows for an open-ended approach and for complex character arches that may conclude in happiness or punishment in accordance with the choices they make. Lauren thus survives and succeeds in establishing a trusting community on behalf of her ability to adapt and reconcile with the people around her, whereas her brother Keith, who abuses, seeks out conflicts, and refuses to adapt to the demands of his surroundings, eventually suffers a painful death (Butler, *Sower* 106). Importantly, this outcome is a result of Keith's refusal to navigate his environment more than a result of his lack of morality, as Lauren is well aware that she may have to commit many of the same crimes her brother did: "I don't want gang types with their need to dominate, rob and terrorize. And yet we might have to dominate. We might have to rob to survive, and even terrorize to scare off or kill enemies" (210). *The Parable of the Sower* thus exemplifies Joseph Meeker's claim that "Comedy is careless of morality, goodness, truth, beauty, heroism, and all such abstract values men say they live by. Its only concern is to affirm man's capacity for survival and to celebrate the continuity of life itself, despite all moralities" (24). Keith's death is hence not a victory of good over evil, but a consequence of his failure to adapt and get along with his surroundings (106).

Also contributing to the comic quality of Butler's novel is its occupation with the commonplace and its emphasis on representing humans as part of their natural environment rather than set apart from it. This occupation is embodied in the protagonist Lauren, who in writing down her Earthseed verses asserts the need for a non-anthropocentric philosophy which is applicable to all living things: "Consider: Whether you're a human being, an insect, a microbe, or a stone, this verse is true. *All that you touch, You Change. All that you Change, Changes you*" (Butler, *Sower* 75). While her friends initially mock her for this plain approach to life, as exemplified by Joanna's dismissive "So we learn to eat grass and live in the bushes" (55),

Lauren's willingness to accept her own vulnerability and need to expand her knowledge becomes decisive to her survival in the apocalyptic Californian future. Even when she takes on a leading role, both in formulating Earthseed and in directing her community, she never perceives herself as divinely chosen or even as particularly skilled:

> I wish I could believe it was all supernatural, and that I'm getting messages from God. But then, I don't believe in that kind of God. All I do is observe and take notes, trying to put things down in ways that are as powerful, as simple, and as direct as I feel them. I can never do that. I keep trying, but I can't. I'm not good enough as a writer or poet or whatever it is I need to be. I don't know what to do about that. (74)

In Lauren's journal entries, the reader thus meets a flawed comic actor, who is subject to the laws of nature, and who is unable to identify herself with heroic tales of prophecy or genius.

Moylan's dystopian resistance-narrative thereby manifests itself in the rhetorical mode of comedy, which we argue contributes to the novel's ability to map, warn, and hope, as the mode of comedy offers an understanding of the world in which attempting to change is still portrayed as meaningful, even when errors will be made along the way. Lauren admits that she "[does not] know very much. None of us knows very much. But we can all learn more. Then we can teach one another. We can stop denying reality or hoping it will go away by magic" (Butler, *Sower* 53). Through Lauren's community, the reader is thus offered a hopeful and sustainable alternative, which emphasizes individual and collective agency in accordance with Moylan's outline of dystopian resistance narratives.

While the larger structuring of the narrative contributes to the novel's multi-oppositional social critique, the novel's critical function is arguably also achieved through smaller instances of cognitive estrangement, in which familiar practices are represented in new and unfamiliar ways.

A good example of this can be found in the very first chapters of the novel, where the excessive defensive precautions of Lauren's Robledo neighborhood are depicted as a natural part of an otherwise recognizable domestic life. The neighborhood's fence is for instance described as being "three meters high and topped off with pieces of broken glass as well as the usual barbed wire and the all but invisible Lazor wire" (Butler, *Sower* 69). Such a level of fortification must

be reminiscent of a military base to the reader but is portrayed as a necessity for common citizens to keep out “the street poor” (10) in Lauren’s arid world, where having access to clean water and a vegetable patch is enough to make the neighborhood a target. Only a few lines after Lauren’s remark that “we hear gunfire so much that we don’t hear it” (46), she then goes on to describe the familiar domestic act of planning a kindergarten birthday party (46), which to the reader establishes a clear tension between the familiarity of everyday domestic activities and the estrangement of a social and environmental setting that has been completely transformed.

Such instances of estrangement are further underscored by a temporal tension, as the reader’s present is often commented on from Lauren’s future point of view. When her father describes the neighborhood as it used to be in his youth, a time which is close to the reader’s present, Lauren for instance responds with incredulity:

> There was no neighborhood wall back then. Crazy to live without a wall to protect you. Even in Robledo, most of the street poor - squatters, winos, junkies, homeless people in general - are dangerous. They’re desperate or crazy or both. That’s enough to make anyone dangerous. (Butler, *Sower* 10)

When Lauren struggles to imagine what her father describes as “Once a rich, green, unwalled little city” (10), the reader is thereby made to perceive their present in hindsight, and in the context of Lauren’s apocalyptic future. As Lauren is estranged by the unfamiliarity of our present, the reader is thus simultaneously estranged by the unfamiliarity of her future.

The extrapolated descriptions of a near-future gone awry, portrayed in conjunction with this ‘looking back’ on the present can, in extension of provoking an effect of cognitive estrangement, arguably be said to caution against inaction and acquiescence in the present, since the temporal link between present and future frames Lauren’s reality as a direct consequence of present trends. *The Parable of the Sower* thus acts as a cautionary tale that warns against the consequences of following down the same path as Butler’s imagined US. Snippets of information about the past, such as Lauren’s dad’s previously mentioned recollection of Robledo or descriptions of politicians campaigning on bringing back “the glory, wealth, and order of the twentieth century” (Butler, *Sower* 20), serve to anchor the dystopian visions of *Sower* to the reader’s own reality. Butler moreover positions her apocalyptic setting within a mere one-

generational timeframe of her time of writing and, in doing so, accentuates the need for swift and decisive changes in contemporary society, if her dystopian tale is not to become prophetic.

If Butler's novel seems to actively advocate for change and for action, then her choice of title only further enforces that notion. In naming her novel *The Parable of the Sower,* Butler evokes the biblical genre of the 'parable', and in particular the content of the biblical Parable of the Sower. Looking first at the broader notion of a 'parable', the narrative category may be defined as "a short allegorical story designed to illustrate or teach some truth, religious principle, or moral lesson" ("Parable"). In assigning the label 'parable' to her novel, a label which moreover is repeated in the title of the sequel *The Parable of the Talents,* the overall narrative is thus framed by Butler as an instruction or a teaching device, which coincides well with the dystopian genre's traditional emphasis on communicating warnings in the form of cautionary tales. Butler's use of the 'parable' label can also be seen through the lens of the word's Greek origin, meaning 'comparison' or 'to compare' ("Parable"), which similarly supports an interpretation of the novel as a dystopian cautionary narrative which employs estranged and extrapolated societies to comment on contemporary ones, and hence encourages comparison between fiction and reality.

In combining the didactic 'parable' label with a narrative that is otherwise formally constructed like a diary, Butler arguably complies with the critical dystopia's tendency to blur the boundaries of genre, by creatively repurposing established conventions to serve new critical functions (Moylan, *Scraps* 189). What to Lauren is a documentation of her everyday experience of life, written for personal reflection on things that scare her or bother her (Butler 3), to the reader takes on an entirely different function, as the 'parable' label suggests that Lauren's experience should be read allegorically, a function that appears to go against the diary's unmeditated documentation of unfolding events. According to Moylan, the employment of journal entries as allegorical tales follows a "long-standing dystopian tradition" (*Scraps* 227), but through the self-reflexive titling of the novel, the hybrid form is overtly addressed, as part of the critical dystopia's open experimentation with genre in encouraging critical reflection (227).

More specifically, however, the title of the novel evokes the content of the biblical Parable of the Sower, which uses the image of a farmer planting his seed in both barren and fertile soil to illustrate how the word of God may take root, grow, and multiply, if given the right conditions (*Bible,* St Luke 8.5-8). While Lauren early in the novel rejects the religious teachings

of Christianity, and fundamentally disagrees with its understanding of what constitutes a "God", the parable's imagery of sowing and harvesting becomes a recurring theme throughout the novel. Lauren in many ways also takes on the role of the sower, as she in her work to establish Earthseed talks of it to anyone who will listen, while succeeding in converting only a few, who fittingly are described as "a harvest of survivors" (Butler, *Sower* 280).

The image of the seed is also used in the novel outside of a religious context, often playing a literal part in the narrative, as in the passage below, where Lauren regrets that she hadn't prepared better for events to come, by remembering to store away fresh seed in her survival pack:

> Granted, a lot of it is old seed, I hadn't renewed it as often as I should have while I was at home. Strange that I hadn't. Things kept getting worse and worse at home, yet I had paid less and less attention to the pack that was supposed to save my life when the mob came. There was so much else to worry about. (Butler, *Sower* 302)

While referring here to the neglect of a literal pack of seeds, the above passage works as a fitting metaphor for contemporary society's neglect of the figurative seed that is our future, as climate change and ecological concerns are neglected for other, more immediate issues. "There was so much else to worry about (302)" in this context describes both Lauren's situation, and a sentiment likely felt by many contemporary readers in the face of climate change. The temporal symbolism in the image of sowing and harvesting thus links the reader's present to Lauren's future, as Lauren's apocalyptic reality is suggested to be the cause of contemporary humanity's failure to pay attention to tomorrow's seed pack, while Lauren's own planting and tending in turn links her actions to a distant future that can hopefully be better.

Similar to the image of the seed pack is the image of the acorn and the oak tree, which likewise tie together different temporal settings, but also different spatial settings. The two homes inhabited by Lauren throughout the narrative exemplify this, as she grows up in an old neighborhood by the name of Robledo, the word 'robledo' meaning "a place of the oak trees" in Spanish ("Robledo"). When Robledo is attacked by invaders, the burning of "A live oak tree - one of our huge, ancient ones" (Butler, *Sower* 136) is described alongside the loss of their neighbors, foreshadowing the complete incineration of the neighborhood in the following

chapter. The destruction of Robledo becomes the destruction of the final remnants of the past and its security, but Lauren manages to sneak out a store of acorns that she uses as food source and seed while she is on the road: “Acorns are home-food, and home is gone.” (170). Tying together the beginning with the end and the past with the future, Lauren concludes the novel by planting oak trees and naming her new settlement “Acorn” (311). The narrative thus emulates the circular process of sowing and harvesting, while maintaining a continuous symbol of hope for the future through the image of the surviving acorn.

Whether there is still hope for the future was addressed by Butler in several discussions of the novel before her death, particularly in relation to climate change, which will not be fixed by Lauren’s ability to provide a socio-politically stable settlement for her community. In a lecture at MIT in 1998, Butler said the following about her representation of climate change and future hope:

> A character in the novel is Global-Warming. This is something that I really wanted to pay attention to, and it's odd how it went in and out of fashion while I was working on the novel. … It seems to me that a thing as important as global-warming should get a lot more attention than it does. So I portray a world in which global-warming is doing things like creating a lot of erratic weather and severe storms and drought in California, and other things like that. This was not a book about prophecy; this was an if-this-goes-on story. This was a cautionary tale, although people have told me it was prophecy. All I have to say to that is "I certainly hope not." (Butler, “Why I Write” par. 25-26)

In the years following the publication of her novel, Butler thus recognized the potential devastating impact of global warming but remained hopeful that such impacts could be avoided through timely counteraction.

Interestingly, her description of global warming as a “character” who is “doing things” anticipates the later observations made by Adam Trexler regarding climate change’s representation in fiction as an agent of transformation (13-14), but also gives new meaning to Moylan’s point that “critical dystopias give voice and space to … dispossessed and denied subjects” (*Scraps* 189), as the environment is granted agency alongside Moylan’s other examples of marginalized groups and characters, who similarly have been denied representation, albeit on

the grounds of race, gender, or income (188-190). *The Parable of the Sower* then underscores the complexity of the truly multi-oppositional resistance narrative and supports Moylan's claim that critical dystopias have the potential to move beyond identity politics in their representation of anti-capitalist and radically ecological critiques (190).

When approaching the novel through the genre framework of critical dystopia, a final observation worth noting is the often metafictional commentary the novel employs in addressing its own role as a communicator of such ecological critiques as has been considered above. Cavalcanti argues that "self-reflexivity", "metafictional strategies", and emphasis on the role of storytelling are all typical to the genre of critical dystopia (67-68), which in *The Parable of the Sower* is exemplified through Lauren's continual reflections on how she may responsibly and effectively communicate the gravity of their situation to her peers and elders. Upon deliberating this with her father, the following advice is given to her:

> It's better to teach people than to scare them, Lauren. If you scare them and nothing happens, they lose their fear, and you lose some of your authority with them. It's harder to scare them a second time, harder to teach them, harder to win back their trust. Best to begin by teaching. (Butler, *Sower* 61)

In passages such as the above, Butler addresses the difficulty of Lauren's communicative task, but also the difficulty of her own communicative situation in employing apocalyptic rhetoric that may easily be interpreted as scaremongering or result in dismissal. Several of Garrard's concerns regarding apocalyptic rhetoric's potentially divisive and problematic applications are hence overtly addressed in Butler's novel, as Lauren also realizes that she must incorporate means of hopeful and productive counteraction into her ominous warnings of the future, if she is to hope for meaningful responses.

One such constructive suggestion towards meaningful counteraction is made by Lauren to her friend Joanna, who, having been faced with the gravity of their social and environmental situation, asks hopelessly what she can do to avert it (Butler, *Sower* 52):

> [Lauren:] 'Is there anything on your family bookshelves that might help you if you were stuck outside?' [Joanna:] 'No.' 'You answer too fast. Go home and look again. And like I

> said, use your imagination. Any kind of survival information from encyclopedias, biographies, anything that helps you learn to live off the land and defend ourselves. Even some fiction might be useful.' (54)

Here, Lauren's nod to the usefulness of fiction becomes another metafictional reflection on the potential utility of novels such as Butler's own, as its inclusion of productive counteraction, in accordance with the comic mode of apocalypse, allows it to function as an instructional cautionary tale that may prove useful for our chance of survival. If we are to avert the type of future Butler depicts, we, as readers, must then similarly "use our imaginations" and potentially look to fiction for constructive ways of facing the threat of environmental disaster.

While Butler may have written *The Parable of the Sower* at a time when she could still imagine the reader outside the environmental disaster depicted in the novel, and accordingly imagine a more hopeful outcome, the novel arguably also provides an early glimpse into life inside disaster, as was demonstrated in Buell's reading of the novel. In the passage above, Lauren realizes that fiction may help her navigate life inside disaster, and if we perceive *The Parable of the Sower* through the genre framework of climate fiction, such a function of Butler's novel may similarly be foregrounded, as the Anthropocene now posits the reader closer to Lauren's reality than ever before.

No Way Back: *The Parable of the Sower* as Climate Fiction

As illustrated in the analysis above, *The Parable of the Sower's* use of narrative structure, temporality, genre blurring, cognitive estrangement, and rhetorical mode all contribute to a social function as cautionary tale. In the context of the Anthropocene, the novel arguably takes on new and different purposes, however, which may be better explored through the terminology of climate fiction. An interpretation of the novel as climate fiction complicates several of the assumptions made above, but at the same time expands our understanding of how the Anthropocene reconfigures the role of dystopian fiction in representing environmental crisis.

Taking our outset in the definitions introduced by Astrid Bracke, the novel's thematic content is fitting to the genre category of climate fiction, as the novel explores the tension between awareness of climate science and inaction on environmental issues, by depicting a world in which this tension has been left unresolved. The citizens of Lauren's future America are

obviously aware of anthropogenic climate change, but fail to take environmental action, either because they are too busy worrying about the failed economy, as exemplified by the newly elected President Donner's dismantling of "overly restrictive" environmental protections in order to ensure better hiring conditions for corporations, or because they feel that the problem of climate change exceeds their capability for counteraction. Lauren's father and her friend Joanna both exemplify such stances of apathy:

> [Lauren:]'People have changed the climate of the world. Now they're waiting for the old days to come back.' [Joanna:]'Your father says he doesn't believe people changed the climate in spite of what scientists say. He says only God could change the world in such an important way' 'Do you believe him?' … . 'It doesn't make any difference,' she said. 'We can't make the climate change back, no matter why it changed in the first place. You and I can't. The neighborhood can't. We can't do anything.' (Butler, *Sower* 52)

In addressing humanity's failure to act in the face of climate change, Butler explores a central subject matter of contemporary climate fiction, while also considering the reasoning behind this inaction, in accordance with Trexler's claim that climate fiction offers a medium to "explain, predict, implore, and lament" (9).

In the above passage, we moreover get a glimpse of the spatial setting of the novel, which appears to be a reality in which environmental crisis has simply become a fact of life, as climate change has already occurred and will not be undone by attempts to encourage more sustainable and responsible practices. In the genre framework of critical dystopia, such bleak descriptions might have been interpreted as an urgent warning to take action while climate change still *can* be undone, or at least before it gets any worse, but in the framework of climate fiction, such a position is no longer available, and passages such as the above hence take on a different role, as they rather illustrate to us the difficult position of navigating life inside environmental crisis.

From this perspective, the spatial setting of the novel may be perceived as a risk society not much unlike our own, in which humanity faces the constant uncertainty imposed by unpredictable man-made dangers. Ulrich Beck describes these dangers as being primarily characterized by their ability to evade direct perception, and by the unpredictability of their effects, as they can neither be limited in time nor space, which makes them difficult to

understand and describe (27). Climate change is a good example of such a risk, as it is argued by Adam Trexler to escape direct experience, even if its influence is global:

> Emerging from computer models, specialist journals, and university press releases, global warming appears first and foremost as a scientific proposition requiring elite, privileged knowledge to evaluate. As a global, rather than a local phenomenon, involving changes in climate over decades rather than from month to month or year to year, the very scale of climate change challenges people's capacity to understand it. (75)

In *The Parable of the Sower*, we see this exact challenge integrated in Lauren's domestic life, as the scale of global warming makes her father unable to understand it as something other than an act of God (Butler 52), while Lauren, who *is* able to understand it as a scientific phenomenon, is nonetheless struggling to adapt to it, as the local effects of the global phenomenon are complex and unpredictable.

This complexity becomes especially evident when her community must decide where to settle and establish themselves, which turns out to be a difficult decision, as they had initially planned on going north, where rain can still be depended on, but realize that areas in which the weather is still dependable have in turn become centers for predatory capitalist exploitation as a result of the constant influx of climate refugees:

> They were supposed to provide jobs for that northward-flowing river of people. … The workers are more throw-aways than slaves. They breathe toxic fumes and drink contaminated water or get caught in unshielded machinery… It doesn't matter. They're easy to replace – thousands of jobless for every job. (307)

Lauren thus decides on settling where they are, realizing that "There are no guarantees anywhere" (304), as climate change is revealed to transform not only the ecological order, but also the political and economic order in geographical areas far removed from the initial site of climate disaster. In the developing risk society, Lauren must hence process a reality in which "things which are substantively-objectively, spatially and temporally disparate are drawn together causally" (Beck 28).

In accordance with Ulrich Beck's characterization of the risk society and the "terrible psychological stresses" (27) caused by the undetectable nature of many modern risks, the changed climate is moreover just one of many dangers shaping Lauren's everyday life, as she must also navigate risks of chemical contamination, disease, and other pollutants, while adjusting to an increasingly arid climate:

> Anything you buy from a water peddler on the freeway ought to be boiled, and still might not be safe. Boiling kills disease organisms, but may do nothing to get rid of chemical residue - fuel, pesticide, herbicide, whatever else has been in the bottles that peddlers use. … You drink whatever the local householders are drinking. It might taste, smell, or look bad, but you can depend on it not to kill you. (Butler, *Sower* 190)

In Lauren's navigation of her surrounding environment, the epistemological uncertainty of contemporary risk society is then a central theme, as several of the dangers she faces "completely escape human powers of direct perception" (Beck 27), rendering the human sensory apparatus useless. Bracke's argument that climate fiction depicts and explores life in risk societies is thus highly applicable to *The Parable of the Sower,* which, through Lauren's journey, depicts an attempt at navigating such a society's inherent unpredictability.

In accordance with Bracke and Buell's argument that climate fiction necessarily depicts such societies from the 'inside', Lauren's experience of epistemological uncertainty is moreover extended to the reader. This extension is achieved through the limited perspective offered by the novel's narration, as the novel is told from a first person focalizer. According to Astrid Bracke, the use of a single narrator and focalizer in climate fiction eliminates "any possibility for the reader to get a wider perspective, or to find out what is actually happening" ("The Novel" 98), which "echoes the larger experience of what it means to live through climate crisis" (98). Because the reader must make sense of the world through Lauren's limited first-person point of view, the reader is then forced to process the same sense of uncertainty that Lauren experiences.

This sense of uncertainty is further underscored by the novel's tense, since Lauren's diary entries are generally written in the present tense, sometimes taking the form of stream-of-consciousness reflections on the present as it is in the process of happening, as in the passage immediately following the final collapse of her childhood neighborhood:

> Morning now. What shall I do? … *What now!* Now, I have to go home. I don't want to. The idea scares me to death … I have to write. I don't know what else to do. … I have to write. There's nothing familiar left to me but the writing. God is change. I hate God. I have to write. (Butler, *Sower* 147-148)

As Lauren's world becomes enveloped in uncertainty, there is hence no means for the reader to temporally distance themselves. Due to the novel's diary format, such passages of immediate experience are mixed with passages written in the past tense, however, as Lauren uses her diary to reflect on ongoing events as well as the events of the previous hours and days. In both present tense statements such as "There's a big fire in the hills to the east of us" (185) and past tense statements such as "Last night, when I escaped from the neighborhood, it was burning" (143), the time of the telling is never more than a few days removed from the time of the told, however, which leaves the reader in the same state of oblivion and uncertainty as the protagonist, since no future vantage point of safety is ever guaranteed. The narration of the novel thus contributes to a sense of "dwelling in" apocalypse, since the mode of the present-tense, first-person diary entry always reflects on events as they are still in the process of unfolding, the form being inherently a snapshot from the inside.

Further contributing to the novel's formal construction as climate fiction is its narrative structure, which adheres to Bracke's two-step model from familiar to unfamiliar, since Lauren's tale begins in the familiar setting of a suburban neighborhood that retains a sense of normalcy as its members commute to recognizable jobs and gather at weekly neighborhood church services (Butler, *Sower* 7). This familiarity is then slowly dismantled as the neighborhood falls victim to more frequent and more harmful attacks, until it is finally burned to the ground and Lauren is set adrift in a world that is entirely unrecognizable. This process is arguably not as inconspicuous as Bracke would have preferred, as the diary format's use of timestamps frames the temporal setting as separate from the reader's reality before the narrative has even begun. Similarly, Lauren's abovementioned bicycle ride to get baptized establishes the dangers outside the neighborhood wall from the very first chapters, even if life on the inside continues to proceed normally for a while longer. The novel thereby does not take its outset in direct continuation of the present, as Bracke perceives as ideal, but the narrative structure nonetheless lends itself to a

gradual process of worldmaking, as the textual world is developed from one that resembles that of the reader, to one which is drastically changed.

As Buell also argues, this process serves to assimilate the secure past with the uncertain present and future ("Global Warming" 266), hence blurring the line between fiction and reality. In the novel, this bridging of past and present is performed in part through the gradual loss of normalcy as Lauren's neighborhood is dismantled, but it is also performed through moments of nostalgia, as Lauren's stepmother for instance reminisces on her own childhood, which, according to the novel's setting in the 2020's, would have taken place around the time of the novel's publication in the 1990's: "'There are city lights now,' I [Lauren] say to her. 'They don't hide the stars.' She shakes her head. 'There aren't anywhere near as many there were. Kids today have no idea what a blaze of light cities used to be - and not that long ago'" (Butler, *Sower* 5). The "not that long ago" in exchanges like the above functions to "stretch the reader's actual world to encompass the possibilities the textual world suggests" (Bracke, "Worldmaking" 179), and thereby contributes to the reader's process of making sense of the fictional world. This process, according to Bracke, has a double effect, however, as the process of considering the fictional world in extension of the actual world in turn encourages the reader to "engage in an act of making sense of their own changing social and physical world" (172). Through passages such as the above, the reader is then able to process their own uncertain environment as part of the fictional developments described in the novel, which may not bode well for the reader, but may nonetheless allow the reader to employ some of Lauren's practical acceptance of her altered world to their own existence in the contemporary Anthropocene.

One circumstance that is highly relevant to the present context of the Anthropocene and that Lauren must also come to terms with is the changed scale of time that climate change challenges us to navigate. Astrid Bracke recognizes that "the vast temporal and spatial scale of the Anthropocene" ("The Novel" 91) considers climate change in the light of geological epochs, and hence challenges the "limited scale of the novel" (91), but whereas critics such as Timothy Clark has questioned the novel's ability to encompass this scale, Bracke is confident in climate fiction's ability to creatively find ways of comprehending and representing it (89).

In *The Parable of the Sower,* time is accordingly a focal point, and is represented primarily through recurring imagery related to sowing and harvesting, which, as demonstrated in the previous section, ties the reader's present to Lauren's present, while simultaneously offering

a model through which Lauren's present may be related to an even more distant future. Whereas Lauren's elders are "anchored in the past, waiting for the good old days to come back" (Butler, *Sower* 52), Lauren herself has no such hopes, as she recognizes that what she is trying to achieve with her Earthseed community will likely not come to fruition for generations, and certainly not within her own lifetime. When Lauren envisions how Earthseed may make the world a better place, and eventually allow humanity to start over "among the stars" (80), she realizes that "Right now, it's also impossible. The world is in horrible shape … No one is expanding the kind of exploration that doesn't earn an immediate profit, or at least promise big future profits" (80). In spite of this knowledge, she nonetheless works tirelessly to sow seeds that future generations may benefit from "'I know it won't be possible for a long time. Now is a time for building foundations" (209). In naming her community 'Acorn', and in employing a recurring terminology around sowing, planting, harvesting, nurturing, and taking root, she establishes a framework of expectation for her community that still emphasizes the reward of a fruitful harvest, but which locates this reward in a temporal framework spanning generations rather than decades, in accordance with the temporal scale of Anthropocene developments such as climate change.

The imagery of planting and harvesting moreover encapsulates a question that has been central among scholars of the Anthropocene, namely the question of whether we are being good ancestors. Jonas Salk, developer of one of the first polio vaccines, asked this question years before 'the Anthropocene' was first proposed as a conceptualization of our current epoch:

> We have so altered the conditions of life on the planet, human and non-human, as to become the co-authors of our destiny. Will our actions influence the course of future events in our favour? Will we have the wisdom to perceive the long as well as short-term advantage in the choices we make so as to enhance the quality of our own lives and of the generations to follow? Will future generations speak of the wisdom of their ancestors as we are inclined to speak of ours? (15-16)

The considerations Salk describes above have since become central to studies of the Anthropocene, with scholars from fields ranging from archeology to anthropology, history and geology arguing that in the Anthropocene, "an aspiration to become good ancestors with a long view needs to engage us" (Koster par. 8). This "long view" is by some scholars addressed as a

recognition of ‘deep time’, a term first coined by John McPhee to encompass geological time, but which also encompasses what Robert MacFarlane describes as the “temporal vertigo” experienced when we perceive the present moment in the context of geological history and realize that “this Earth is so old, but the Earth is also old *to come*” (Morris and Stern 4:45-6:00).

In the image of the acorn, Butler’s narrative encompasses both the expanded scale of time that goes into considering human communities long after Lauren’s individual lifetime, but also the question of good ancestry, as the act of planting for someone else to harvest is essentially an investment into future generations. The image of the acorn has hence also been predominant within scholarly considerations of deep time and the Anthropocene, as exemplified by Roman Krznaric’s *The Good Ancestor: A Radical Prescription for Long-Term Thinking,* which in contemplation of Salk’s question contrasts the image of the marshmallow with the image of the acorn as two symbols for short- and long-term thinking:

> Each one of us has what I think of as a “marshmallow brain,” which can become fixated on short-term desires and rewards. But we each also possess an “acorn brain,” which allows us to envision distant futures and work towards long-term goals. … If we hope to be good ancestors, it is essential to … fully recognize that our minds are indeed capable of long-term thinking. (17-18)

To Krznaric, the image of the acorn, and the action of “planting an oak tree, which will mature long after we have gone” (15), perfectly symbolizes the kind of shift in temporal perception that is necessary to be good ancestors in the uncertain reality of the Anthropocene, while the individual and cultural tendency to favor short-term convenience explains the tension between awareness of anthropogenic climate change and inaction that Trexler also addresses (Krznaric 18). Krznaric moreover links the image of the acorn to the concept of ‘Cathedral Thinking’, which, like the planting of an acorn, refers to the planning of projects that will be realized for the sake of future generations (Krznaric 10). In *The Parable of the Sower*, Butler anticipates the need for such actions and such a shift in perception, contrasting Lauren’s long-term vision with the hunt for “immediate profit” (80) that has created the apocalyptic landscape she inhabits.

In its long-term representation of time, its consideration of domestic life in the contemporary risk society, and its examination of themes such as failure to address environmental destruction and the experience of dwelling in a world that is both spatially and

temporally transformed by climate change, *The Parable of the Sower* thus lends itself well to a reading within the genre conceptualization of climate fiction. While such a reading may resonate with the contemporary reader's own experience of navigating a changing environment, we nonetheless consider both the framework of climate fiction and critical dystopia useful in our concluding assessment of the novel.

Blurred Boundaries and Transformed Contexts

As illustrated in the analyses above, Octavia E. Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* is not easily described through any clear-cut genre categorization or label. Its thematic content and formal construction lend it to multiple interpretations that each emphasize different features of life in the Anthropocene and address different functions that ecodystopian novels may serve to the contemporary reader. Through the genre framework of critical dystopia, *The Parable of the Sower* takes on the role of a prescient cautionary tale that holds out hope for survival and meaningful human agency, while an interpretation of the novel as climate fiction rather foregrounds its role as a space for processing and coming to terms with the uncertainty of contemporary risk society. Having demonstrated how both of these functions are realized through different formal features of the novel, we perceive them not as mutually exclusive, but instead find merit in aspects of each understanding, as ecodystopian novels may simultaneously provide us with projections of everyday life in altered environments, while also providing us with instructions to avoid further devastation. Although it may be too late to escape the effects of global warming, the ability of dystopian novels to critically examine contemporary practices and visualize their potentially harmful outcomes may thus continue to play an important role in encouraging hope that meaningful human action can still improve future prospects. In the context of the Anthropocene, *The Parable of the Sower'*s instructional function as an if-this-goes-on tale may thereby help us to intervene and "stay with the trouble" as Ildney Cavalcanti, in the words of Donna Haraway, also argues (72). *The Parable of the Sower'*s use of the comic mode to frame its apocalyptic rhetoric further supports this representation of human action as meaningful and inspires hope that humanity may yet intervene in their own destiny.

Nonetheless, the above analysis also demonstrates that *The Parable of the Sower* in the context of the Anthropocene takes on new and transformed social functions, as the descriptions Butler hoped would serve to warn readers of a worst-case scenario now increasingly resonate with contemporary challenges. While the novel's content remains unchanged, the repositioning

of the reader from 'outside' environmental crisis to now being on the brink of stepping 'inside' reveals new points of comparison and association, reviving the novel's relevance 30 years after its publication date. *The Parable of the Sower* hence also exemplifies how science fiction in the Anthropocene may achieve renewed pertinence as social realism (Kormann par. 6), and how "climate novels have a role to play in our collective accounting of the Anthropocene, even those that were written in the hope that such a day would never come to pass" (Trexler 237).

Whereas Butler's novel arguably has anticipated many of the cultural and environmental developments of the Anthropocene, a more recent contribution to the "collective accounting" of the present epoch may be found in Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140*, which similarly employs a dystopian narrative framework in its depiction of near-future environmental crisis.

New York 2140 by Kim Stanley Robinson

Literature Review

Published in 2017, *New York 2140* was released at a time when both public and scholarly awareness of 'the Anthropocene' and its inherent challenges had expanded exponentially. The critical reception of the novel has thus from the beginning been occupied with its representation of Anthropocene developments, with scholars chiefly taking note of its unconventionally hopeful outlook on climate change, although it has also been studied in the context of the rich canon of literature about the city of New York. In the following review, a selection of readings will be considered, with focal points ranging from the novel's urban setting to its commentary on finance yet connected by their shared interest in Robinson's depiction of environmental crisis, which will also be a focal point in our own reading of the novel.

New York 2140 expanded upon Kim Stanley Robinson's already extensive effort to model potential human futures in the context of climate change. According to Everett Hamner, this effort has been a shared feature of most of Robinson's fiction, which "has pondered ties between human social structures and larger ecologies since the late twentieth century" (450). For several decades, Robinson has thus held a prominent position as a writer of speculative environmental fiction and has been particularly recognized for what he himself terms an "angry optimism" (qtd. in Hamner 451). This "angry optimism" has been used to describe the distinctly utopian approach Robinson takes to the dystopian prospect of climate change, an approach that,

according to Hamner, is also apparent in *New York 2140*, which describes an initially dystopian setting that is reversed, as the main characters join in a communal effort to reconfigure the financial, environmental, and political situation they find themselves in (452).

According to Hamner, Robinson's optimism regarding humanity's ability to achieve utopia in the face of climate change has divided critical responses, but Hamner dismisses readings of the novel as naively utopian, arguing instead that *New York 2140* is a nuanced mix of utopia and dystopia, displaying "ambiguous utopianism" at best (452). Everett Hamner's reading is shared by Spencer Adams, who in "Staging the Speculative: On Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140*" similarly perceives Robinson's fiction as part of a complex interplay between hope and ongoing environmental crisis, arguing that *New York 2140* "marks the contingent, ephemeral impulse to carve out minor utopias available in confrontations with and refusals of the sanctioned terms of the present" (534). Scholarship of Robinson's novel has thus been closely occupied with its mixed application of utopian and dystopian narrative strategies, with scholars such as Ildney Cavalcanti using it to exemplify the critical potential of hopeful dystopias in the changing climate reality of the Anthropocene (72).

Readings focusing on *New York 2140*'s utopian or dystopian qualities have moreover often framed their analyses around the novel's central themes of climate change and economics, and how these two fields are portrayed in the novel as deeply connected and in need of transfiguration if utopia is to be realized. In "Strategies of Cognitive Estrangement in Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140*" Michał Klata for instance analyzes *New York 2140* as a utopian science fiction novel that "encourages readers to take a fresh look at the system they live in, and make ecological, economic, and political choices that will aid the survival of species, our own included" (118-119). Klata relates Robinson's environmental representation to economic criticism, arguing "that the novel was written as a call to action to mitigate the effects of climate change" (109), but that it emphasizes the need for economic restructuring in doing so (116). According to Klata, what principally characterizes Robinson's ecological standpoint is then the position of eco-socialism or eco-Marxism, which emphasizes how "capitalism exploits nature and the rest of humankind alike" (116). Klata thereby interprets *New York 2140* as a novel which extrapolates capitalism's damaging effects on both climate and humankind, and which accordingly seeks to caution against these effects.

Klata argues that an important way in which this criticism is conveyed in *New York 2140* is through Robinson's use of focalization, which encourages the reader to identify with the character that best embodies the capitalist system of exploitation, only to have that character go through the most significant political transformation:

> In the case of all but one protagonist the narration is in the third person. The only character using the first person is the trader Franklin. This decision could be interpreted as a suggestion that in the society of late capitalism only those with sufficient means, who are intimate with the rules that govern the system, can "tell their own story". At the same time, this type of narrative strengthens the persuasive effect of Franklin's journey, … allowing, hopefully, for a new perspective on [the readers'] own eco-political attitudes. (Klata 117)

In Klata's reading of *New York 2140*, Robinson's use of focalization is thus foregrounded as central to the novel's communication of its political message, and its persuasiveness in cautioning against capitalist exploitation.

A different reading, which focuses on the social function of the novel's treatment of climate change and economic policy, is undertaken by Matthew Benjamin Cole in the article "At the heart of human politics': agency and responsibility in the contemporary climate novel", which argues that early climate fiction depended on "visceral cautionary tales" (133), but that Robinson's *New York 2140* should not be perceived as such a tale (133). Cole instead considers *New York 2140* alongside more "constructive" narratives such as Richard Powers' *The Overstory*, and Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island,* which, according to Cole, are only tentatively hopeful, and "emphasize continuity and gradual transformation" (146). As opposed to apocalyptic cautionary tales, which rely on fear to inspire action, Cole argues that novels such as Robinson's instead offer readers an alternative context through which questions of agency and responsibility may be processed, as our present moment seems to be increasingly defined by economic, human, and natural systems in distress (148):

> Robinson, Powers, and Ghosh do not point us toward an alternative future, utopian or otherwise. Rather, they depict the climate crisis as a transformed context for action. What

> they ask us to imagine is not so much the future – even Robinson's novel is more concerned with our precarious present – but how, amidst the crisis, we might devise an ethos of cooperative action and shared responsibility. [These authors are] now challenging us to imagine new ways of being and acting in an endangered world. (147)

Cole thus interprets *New York 2140* as representative of a new generation of climate novels, which no longer seek to convince readers of the gravity of climate change, as this function has already been achieved by plenty of disaster narratives in the past, but which rather hope to provide maps of "what can be done, with whom, and on what terms" (147).

Other scholars have taken a greater interest in the urban elements of Robinson's novel, one such scholar being Magdalena Mączyńska, who focuses specifically on its representation of New York as a city navigating climate crisis. In the article "Welcome to the Post-Anthropolis: Urban Space and Climate Change in Nathaniel Rich's *Odds Against Tomorrow*, Lev Rosen's *Depth*, and Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140*", Mączyńska reads New York not just as a backdrop to the story, but as instrumental in conveying both the magnitude and impact of climate change on the world. She writes: "the climate-stressed metropolis is a laboratory for rethinking ideas about dwelling, environment, and the relationship between human and nonhuman life" (166). A laboratory that, according to Mączyńska, is becoming increasingly relevant when considering climate change's diverse effects on both people, economies, and ecosystems, as more than half of the world's population now live in cities (166).

Mączyńska moreover acknowledges that with the Anthropocene, a new awareness of geological time, or "deep time", has arisen, which poses a challenge to the novelistic form, but which is solved well in *New York 2140* through its utilization of what Srinivas Aravamudan calls catachronism; "the re-casting of the present and the past in terms of a projected future" (171). Mączyńska claims that Robinson's *New York 2140* "abounds in reminders of New York's geological history" (171), reminders which train climate fiction readers to become more aware of the long-lasting processes "that have shaped the world we recognize today—and of the ways in which our present actions shape worlds to come" (171).

Mączyńska also refers to a 'rewriting of the city' that takes place in this new context, elaborating that "the New York City of climate fiction presents itself as a habitat and a landscape, a porous site where 'nature' and 'culture' intersect" (175). She writes of an

"aesthetization of the natural city", exemplifying it by quoting Robinson's character Amelia, who describes the New York harbor as "awesome; sublime; even refreshing, after the monotony of the eastern hardwood forest and the high planes" (qtd. in Mączyńska 175). The nature/city dichotomy is thus dissolved as the city takes on the role of both sides, having absorbed nature into civilization, transforming New York into a "proper object of aesthetic delight" (175). In Mączyńska's reading, both the city and the temporal setting of Robinson's novel hence become focal points, as the city takes on new meaning in the context of climate change, while the future New York is connected to both the present city, and its ancient geological past through instances of historical reminiscing.

Anna Gilarek makes a similar argument to Mączyńska's in her article "Historicizing Contemporary Capitalism: Future Retrospection and Temporal Estrangement in Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* and Nora K. Jemisin's *Emergency Skin*", albeit through the specific lens of 'historicization', which, in line with Aravamudan's 'catachronism' term, denotes both 'future retrospection' and 'contemporaneity'(Gilarek 37-39). Gilarek takes particular interest in Robinson's meta-character "the citizen", who in 'looking back on the now' blends historical facts known to the reader with fictitious additions that further the plot, thus 'denaturalizing' the reader's experience (39). Gilarek exemplifies the effect of historicization with Robinson's use of the Great Depression of the 1930s and the 2008 economic crisis to create a contemporaneity that is carried into his dystopian future, which depicts two further fictitious economic collapses that are rendered discernible and comprehensible through the novel's historical lens. In other words, "The historically estranged frame of reference established in Robinson's and Jemisin's texts creates cognitive distance and liberates the reader from viewing the present order in terms of an absolute, revealing both its inadequacies and transformative potential" (38). Despite the differences in terminologies, Gilarek and Mączyńska are thus both interested in Robinson's historically centered representation of the future in their respective readings of *New York 2140*.

Finally, Anna Kornbluh also takes an interest in the novel's repurposing of history in the article "Climate Realism, Capitalist and Otherwise". Whereas other scholars have focused on Robinson's inclusion of historical events, Kornbluh is interested in Robinson's formal mimicry of historical forms, however, reading the novel as a "too late" example of 19th century "old school realism" (104). Kornbluh in particular points to its omniscient narration, social breadth, and psychic depth, the combination of which offers a totalizing overview of history that may be

untimely in the Anthropocene (104, 115), but demonstrates that "untimely fictions can continue to help us imagine collective and even statist projects that can still weld how horribly we go out" (115). Kornbluh is then hopeful that traditional modes of narrative may yet prove useful in the context of environmental crisis, appointing *New York 2140* as a prime example (104).

As evidenced by the scholarly reception outlined above, readings of *New York 2140* have been centrally occupied with its representation of environmental crisis and its relation to political structures, economic systems, narrative forms, and the urban metropolis. The novel has been interpreted as a cautionary tale and a guide for contemporary action, with scholars emphasizing its use of temporality and focalization in communicating its ecological standpoint, but it has also been studied for its creative repurposing of historical events and forms. These interpretations will be useful starting points for our own analysis, which will similarly take an interest in Robinson's formal achievement of his environmental representation, and his critical utilization of historical references. In our analysis, we hope to employ a more deliberate consideration of genre than has been employed above, however, as scholars have often approached it broadly as a "climate novel", applying interchanging terminologies ranging from 'utopia' to 'critical dystopia', 'sci-fi', and 'climate fiction'. In accordance with this thesis' econarratological methodological framework, we will moreover contribute with an examination of *New York 2140*'s rhetorical mode, as rhetorical examinations of the novel have thus far been marginal in the novel's critical reception.

New York 2140: Reimagining the Dystopian Climate Novel

Out of the three novels surveyed in this thesis, the temporal setting of *New York 2140* is by far the furthest removed from the vantage point of the contemporary reader. Set, as the title suggests, in the 2140s, Robinson's characters look back on more than a century's worth of events between their present and that of the reader, but except for the 50 feet of water that now covers lower Manhattan, the general state of Robinson's New York is in many ways much closer to the present societal order than that of Butler's chaotic California in the 2020s and 2030s. While similarly extrapolating present trends into dystopian future difficulties, Robinson's novel is then mostly an unobtrusive extension of the present, as the citizens of New York lead recognizable urban lives as day-traders or public servants in a metropolis now nicknamed 'the super-Venice'. Although Robinson's characters inhabit a less apocalyptic America than the characters of *The*

Parable of the Sower, Robinson nevertheless takes a much more militant stance to the social, political, and ecological order of the 2140s, as all three are transformed throughout the course of the novel. Robinson's climate dystopia then challenges the passive processing and 'dwelling-in' of the climate fiction novel, yet also resists the gloom of the typical dystopian setting. In seeking to determine its contemporary role as a communicator of environmental crisis, both the genre frameworks of critical dystopia and climate fiction may thus provide useful insights into the content of the novel, while an examination of its formal construction as a comic apocalypse narrative may contribute to a better understanding of the connection between form and function in representing the transformations of the Anthropocene. In the following analysis, we therefore begin by considering *New York 2140* in the genre framework of critical dystopia, before relating this analysis to the novel's rhetorical mode, and finally to the insights offered by the framework of climate fiction.

A Critical Dystopia of the Anthropocene

When Tom Moylan first defined the critical dystopia, he perceived it as a genre that had arisen in response to the particular political and ecological developments of the 1980s and '90s (*Scraps* 194). In Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140*, however, we are met with a critical dystopia that responds to the full spectrum of developments in the Anthropocene, as the novel arguably applies the critical dystopia's traditional narrative traits to address the challenges of a new century. As will be demonstrated in the following section, Robinson utilizes a range of themes and formal devices characteristic of the critical dystopia, testifying to the genre's continued relevance in representing contemporary issues related to climate change and environmental destruction.

Looking first at the novel's content, a central theme of *New York 2140* is arguably its hybrid representation of utopia and dystopia, which in the readings above also constituted a primary focal point. In accordance with Moylan's definition of the critical dystopia, Robinson's novel combines utopian and dystopian elements, as the future that is introduced is improved significantly throughout the novel, but starts out decidedly bleak, following a century of flooding and climate disasters:

> And so the First Pulse and Second Pulse, each a complete psychodrama decade, a meltdown in history, a breakdown in society, a refugee nightmare, an eco-catastrophe, the planet gone collectively nuts. The Anthropocide, the Hydrocatastrophe, the Georevolution. Also great new options for investment and, oh dear, the necessity of police state crowd control as expressed in draconian new laws and ad hoc practices. (Robinson 34)

In the wake of these decades of catastrophe, neoliberalism has had free reign, and the New York that is introduced at the beginning of the novel is hence not only covered under 50 feet of water, but is also struggling to cope with income inequality, incoming refugees, and exploitative corporations that are competing for the profits of the intertidal zone (3-7, 32-34). By the end of the novel, the neoliberal global order has been overturned, however, a living wage has been proposed for all, and new environmental protections have been enacted (602), resulting in a version of New York that is almost utopian. Robinson's novel is thus exemplary of a hopeful dystopia, and possibly even challenges the framework of the critical dystopia through the extent of its hopefulness, as the "utopian enclave" required by Sargent's definition is replaced with a full utopian revolution that transforms not only the US, but the rest of the world as well (602).

While Robinson's utopian transformation may appear improbable in comparison to Butler's focus on mere survival, Lauren Olamina's small-scale practical steps towards building her community are in many ways similar to the large-scale practical steps that Robinson's characters undertake. Similar to how Lauren builds Acorn, the characters of *New York 2140* join and expand the Householder's Union, through which citizens achieve communal power against the established neoliberal societal order (Robinson 526). Robinson moreover includes countless suggestions and explanations of strategies through which humanity may improve their environmental situation, ranging from wildlife habitat corridors, in which "wild animals could live, eat, reproduce, and move in whatever direction the climate pushed them" (38), to communal roof farming (418), and investments in alternative forms of transportation such as airships and small 'cointainerclippers' as alternatives to diesel-powered ships (398). The utopian transformation is thus broken down into practical steps that respond to the demands of the dystopian context. What may initially seem like improbable optimism is furthermore dampened by the strike of the apocalyptic hurricane Fyodor towards the end of the novel, which serves as a

reminder that environmental transformation is a long-term process, and that the planet itself is also an actor in the complex actor networks that facilitate change (603). Although at times challenging the critical dystopia's setting in a "worse" society than the present (Sargent qtd. in Moylan, *Scraps* 195), Robinson's utopianism is, as Everett Hamner also argues, thus ambiguous at best, and always builds on practical suggestions for achievable activism.

Whereas the distinct optimism of *New York 2140* may at times challenge its classification as a critical *dystopia*, the novel's *critical* content is on the contrary highly consistent with the genre definition laid out by Moylan. One aspect that makes *New York 2140* distinctly critical is its utilization of a diverse cast of characters to communicate a multi-oppositional critique that takes into account complex ties between individual, collective, economy, and ecology, and moreover demonstrates "gender sensitivity and class and race awareness" (Cavalcanti 67-68).

Taking its outset in the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company Tower, the story is told through eight different focalizers, seven of which are characters inhabiting the MetLife building, while the eighth focalizer, "the citizen", is a zero-focalization omniscient commentator. The traditional novel's emphasis on a single heroic protagonist, is, in accordance with Timothy Clark's skepticism of this format's continued usefulness (80-91), hence replaced by a collective, better equipped to address the multifaceted concerns of the future setting, whether they be environmental, political, or economic in nature.

Each of Robinson's characters accordingly grants insight into a different experience of the Anthropocene, and each contributes with a unique approach to facing its challenges. Franklin, a day trader, represents the economic aspect of Robinson's dystopian future, unveiling the inner workings of the neoliberal power structure, while the character Charlotte brings to light the political concerns of the novel through her work in the Householder's Union. This union helps the "the paperless, the homeless, the water rats, the dispossessed" (47), and thus the victims of the very same capitalist system that Franklin excels in. Amelia on the other hand is an online celebrity, who concerns herself primarily with environmental activism and the effects of climate change, as she documents her travels on the airship *Assisted Migration*, which she uses to relocate endangered species (98-99).

While the abovementioned characters provide access to the economic, social, and environmental realm of Robinson's future, other characters supplement this insight with demographically diverse accounts of their daily lives in the city. Jeff and Mutt are two

unemployed and homeless coders, the two industrious 'water rats' Roberto and Stefan live in a small boat that Vlade lets them moor in the MetLife boathouse, and Vlade himself is an immigrant who works as the tower's superintendent and tries to keep Roberto and Stefan out of trouble. Finally, inspector Gen Octaviasdottir is an African American police officer attempting to uphold the influence of the NYPD against increasingly unruly private security firms.

Through this demographically diverse cast of characters, Robinson is able to critically examine the complex ties between ecology, finance, legislation, and social order, while also providing the reader with practical steps "to move toward creating a social reality that is shaped by an impulse to human self-determination and ecological health rather than one constricted by the narrow and destructive logic of a system intent only on enhancing competition in order to gain more profit for a select few" (Moylan, *Scraps* 189). Robinson's critique thus adheres to the critical dystopia's aim of being multi-oppositional, a goal which is formally achieved through its divided focalization that grants access to diverse experiences of the same spatial and temporal setting and to diverse routes of reshaping it, as each focalizer plays their own part in resisting the hegemonic status quo.

Contributing to the novel's multi-oppositional critique is furthermore its utilization of genre blurring, which formally emphasizes the diverse experiences of the different focalizers, as the narration of the plot follows different genre conventions depending on the focalizer. Inspector Gen's chapters thus resemble the detective novel in their focus on the discovery and solution of a crime, whereas Stefan and Roberto's chapters bring to mind quest-narratives and adventure stories, as the two boys spend the majority of the novel hunting for treasure. Mutt and Jeff's chapters on the other hand consist almost exclusively of dialogue, in line with a screenplay or theatrical drama, and even emphasize this resemblance through intertextual references, as the entire chapter 3-b for instance mimics the play *Waiting for Godot,* by having Mutt and Jeff wait indefinitely for the arrival of their captors, while they at the same time discuss the plot of *Waiting for Godot* in their circling and often absurd dialogue that help them pass the time (Robinson 148). As mentioned in the theory section above, Raffaella Baccolini argues that "by self-reflexively borrowing 'specific conventions from other genres,' critical dystopias more often 'blur' the received boundaries of the dystopian form and thereby expand rather than diminish its creative potential for critical expression" (qtd. in Moylan, *Scraps* 189). Within the genre framework of critical dystopia, genre blurring is then a means of facilitating a more nuanced

critical commentary and to formally emphasize "the recognition of differences, multiplicity, and complexity" (189), as different genres give priority to different experiences and routes of resistance.

Upon examining Robinson's use of genre blurring and focalization, the perhaps most interesting focalizer to consider is the anonymous citizen, whose omniscient narration, in the words of Anna Kornbluh, mirrors "Austenian irony", "Dickensian omniscience", and "Melvillean hyperbole" (101), and hence reintroduces 19th century narrative traits into the present context of the Anthropocene. Kornbluh recognizes that precisely the 19th century realist novel has been deemed "incapable, generically, of representing climate change" (104), but in Robinson's creative combination of narrative forms and genre traits, the realist elements of the citizen chapters enter into a "play of familiarity and distance" (104) as they are applied in combination with other borrowed forms to account for a transformed environmental context (104). Robinson thus combines totalizing realist accounts of entire social and political structures with Mutt and Jeff's spontaneous and absurd dialogue-sequences, using each genre convention to capture different critical possibilities, as the citizen's chapters enable "totalizing interrogation" (Moylan, *Scraps* xii), while the confused dialogue of Mutt and Jeff provides insight into the immediate experience of the "everyday lives of everyday people" (xiii). The citizen's omniscient narration is then merely part of a larger whole, in a play of familiarity and distance that utilizes the realist novel's strength in providing broad accounts of socio-political connections, while allowing other genres to drive forward the plot of the novel, and detail individual activism. The novel's genre hybridity moreover contributes to the critical dystopia's essential effect of cognitive estrangement, as the unexpected combination of familiar narrative conventions encourages fresh perspectives on their established capabilities.

When considering the novel's use of cognitive estrangement, the novel's temporal representation is also central, however, as Anna Gilarek similarly argued in her reading above. The citizen's historical overviews are in this context particularly interesting, as the act of looking back on the present, and hence perceiving it in the context of the novel's fictional future, is a primary way in which contemporary practices may be denaturalized and criticized, as was also argued in the examination of Butler's novel. In passages such as the one cited below, the citizen links contemporary practices directly to a fictional rise in sea levels in the 2050-60s, and hence utilizes a broad historical overview to infuse the reader's present with new meaning:

> So yes, the First Pulse was a first-order catastrophe, and it got people's attention and changes were made, sure. People stopped burning carbon much faster than they thought they could before the First Pulse. They closed that barn door the very second the horses had gotten out. The four horses, to be exact. Too late, of course. The global warming initiated before the First Pulse was baked in by then and could not be stopped by anything the postpulse people could do. So despite "changing everything" and decarbonizing as fast as they should have fifty years earlier, they were still cooked like bugs on a griddle. (Robinson 139)

By infusing the reader's present with the knowledge of what present actions will lead to in the future, the reader is thus encouraged to perceive contemporary environmental initiatives from a fresh and more critical perspective.

The citizen's descriptive narration is also used to paint detailed pictures of the cityscape, which similarly produce an effect of cognitive estrangement, as the descriptive realist panoramas of pedestrians in the streets uncannily weave the recognizable with the unknown. Familiar descriptions of fashionable New Yorkers who "keep their bare heads down and hurry from building to building on the hunt for a quick Irish coffee" (Robinson 262) and who "would take a taxi if they ever took taxis, but they don't of course, taxis are for tourists or the fucking executives or if you've made a dreadful scheduling mistake" (262-263) are hence entwined with estranging images of "the silver brilliance of late winter, [where] the canals and rivers become great white floors" (263), or the tropical heat of summer where "cholera festers in every swallow of water, gangrene in every scrape" (263), creating an overall defamiliarizing effect that encourages a fresh perspective on the city and its inhabitants, as the realist novel's panorama of mundane daily life is seamlessly expanded to account for the improbable seasonal changes of a city under 50 feet of water.

The interplay between past and future, familiar and unknown is, as the readings by Gilarek and Mączyńska also suggest, a key motif throughout Robinson's novel, and is particularly evident in Robinson's use of history as a model for the future. Similar to how he uses fictional future developments to contextualize present trends, the novel also achieves an effect of cognitive estrangement by insisting on understanding extrapolated future problems through

familiar problems and solutions from the past. A prime example of this is Robinson's application of the 2008 financial crash as a model for the much more extreme financial crash that the characters of the novel face, as illustrated by the below suggestion made by Charlotte to her ex-husband Larry:

> in 2008 they nationalized General Motors, and they could have nationalized the banks too, as a condition for giving them about fifteen trillion dollars. They didn't do that because they were bankers themselves, and chickenshits. But they could have. And now you can do it. (562)

By introducing familiar solutions to a problem of unfamiliar proportions, Robinson combines estrangement and cognition, and asks readers to creatively reconsider both real and fictional developments. He moreover insists on the relevance of history in addressing the unknown, which interestingly is mimicked formally by his experimentational application of past narrative conventions, such as 19th century realism, in his representation of the unfamiliar and often erratic manifestations of climate change in the Anthropocene. Such reconfigurations of history and established formal practices are, according to Moylan, a preferred method for writers of critical dystopia, as the recontextualization and "breaking open" of memories and favored perspectives often leads to refreshing connections that "not only critique the present system but also begin to find ways to transform it" (Moylan, *Scraps* 190).

A similar way that Robinson uses history as a means of conveying his social criticism is through his considerable use of epigraphs, which preface every chapter and often appear in pairs or triplets, giving them significant airtime, considering that the novel is divided into 66 chapters. The epigraphs include quotes from architects and artists (154, 536), citations from theorists in sociology and economics (15, 317), excerpts from poems, novels, films, and plays (186, 413, 429), biographical notes (156), and comments that appear to be made by the omniscient citizen, or perhaps even Robinson himself (196, 340). Like the insertion of the 2008 financial crash as a model for the novel's fictional financial crash, the epigraphs guide the reader's understanding of the plot, often suggesting relationships of familiarity between history and the strange challenges of the fictional future, while also functioning as more explicit expressions of Robinson's social criticism than what can be hinted at by the plot.

Exemplifying both of these functions are the epigraphs preceding Franklin's chapters, which often consist of excerpts from economics textbooks or financial policies, as is the case in chapter 2-a, which is introduced by an excerpt from a 2002 statement by the International Monetary Fund describing how the financial industry could be re-regulated to face the risks of its own actions (Robinson 64). The chapter itself then goes on to describe Franklin and Jojo recklessly speeding around in Franklin's boat, while discussing their leisurely gambling at the "game" of finance:

> 'I mean it's a game, right? So cheating would mean you're lame at the game.' 'not that much of a game, though. It's just gambling.' 'But gambling smart. Figuring out trades that outsmart even the other smart traders. That's the game. If you didn't have that, it would just be, what, I don't know. Data analysis? Desk job in front of a screen?' (70)

This playful approach to trading and investment is in itself only suggestive of potential problematic consequences, but in the framework of the epigraph's statement that the banking sector can too easily disperse the risks associated with its investments onto non-banking sectors and households (64), its harmful consequences are unmistakable.

Similar to how the novel experiments with genre conventions, Robinson also challenges the traditional use of the epigraph, however, by creatively adding to quotes and often challenging conventional syntax in his credentials, as exemplified by the following epigraph to chapter 5-f:

> Popeye speaks Tenth Avenue's indigenous tongue. Betty Boob speaks in exaggerated New Yorkese.
>
> explained the Federal Writers Project, 1938
>
> Words her biographer claimed first appeared in print in the prose of Dorothy Parker: art moderne, ball of fire, with bells on, bellyacher, birdbrain, boy-meets-girl, chocolate bar, daisy chain, face lift, high society, … what the hell, and wisecrack.
>
> Hard to believe. (340)

While the epigraphs produce cognitive estrangement by introducing familiar frameworks for understanding the at times obscure content of the chapters, the content of the epigraphs is in itself also subject to defamiliarization, as the reversed syntax of "explained the Federal Writers Project" and the ambiguous addition of "Hard to believe" estrange the reading experience, in accordance with Moylan's claim that the critical dystopia is often characterized by "textual ambiguity" (*Scraps* 189) as a means of formally foregrounding the complexity and openness of its social critique.

The novel's critical commentary is furthermore characterized by a range of metafictional strategies, also typical of the critical dystopia (Cavalcanti 67-68), as the citizen often addresses the reader directly, warning them to "skip to the next chapter" (Robinson 141) if they are bored of the historical overviews (141), and likewise employs a high degree of self-awareness in the, often sarcastic, accounts of the reader's present:

> People sometimes say no one saw it coming, but no, wrong: they did. … [Scientists] published their papers and shouted and waved their arms, and a few canny and deeply thoughtful sci-fi writers wrote up lurid accounts of such an eventuality, and the rest of civilization went on torching the planet like a Burning Man pyromasterpiece. Really, that's how much those knuckleheads cared about their grandchildren, and that's how much they believed their scientists, even though every time they felt a slight cold coming on they ran to the nearest scientist (i.e. doctor) to seek aid. (140)

Through such metafictional references as the mention of "canny and deeply thoughtful sci-fi writers", Robinson infuses an added layer of significance to his own criticism, as the effect of cognitive estrangement is extended to the role of the novel itself, which the reader is urged to reconsider.

In addition to illustrating the novel's use of metafictional commentary, the above passage also directly addresses the same Anthropocene question of whether we are being good ancestors that *The Parable of the Sower* also anticipated in its acorn/oak tree imagery. Comments such as "that's how much those knuckleheads cared about their grandchildren" (140) directly expose the present generation's failure to be good ancestors, a point that is moreover suggested by the two

children of Robinson's novel, Roberto and Stefan, who are both abandoned orphans, left to fend for themselves by a previous generation who did not care to look out for them:

> Stefan said, 'Roberto never had any parents or guardians. He brought himself up.' [Franklin:] 'What do you mean? How does that work?' Roberto stood up from his chair and said, 'I take care of myself.' 'You mean you don't remember your parents?' 'No, I mean I never had any. I can remember back to before I could walk. I always took care of myself.' (424)

Unlike Lauren Olamina, who at one point states that a community's "first responsibility is to protect its children - the ones we have now and the ones we will have" (Butler, *Sower* 305), Roberto and Stefan are emblematic of a present generation that has failed to consider the children to come, and who must do better, if they hope to be recognized as ancestors at all.

In *New York 2140,* many of the same thematic considerations and narrative techniques are thus utilized as in *The Parable of the Sower,* and like Butler's novel, Robinson's narrative similarly employs these themes and techniques to caution readers of the future likely to ensue if-this-goes-on: "History is humankind trying to get a grip. Obviously not easy. But it could go better if you would pay a little more attention to certain details, like for instance your planet" (Robinson 145). That the novel functions as a cautionary tale is also underscored by its ending, which is predominantly happy, but on the last page of the final citizen chapter is tainted by a foreboding reference to the melting of the Antarctic ice-buttresses that caused the First and Second Pulse of sea level rise:

> So no, no, no, no! Don't be naïve! There are no happy endings! Because there are no endings! … Who knows. Who the fuck knows. Meanwhile get over your childlike Rocky Mountain desire for a happy ending, because it doesn't exist. Because down there in Antarctica – or in other realms of being far more dangerous – the next buttress of the buttress could go at any time. (604)

The novel thus closes on a note of caution, which reframes the environmental and social activism undertaken by the characters as an ongoing process rather than a permanent fix, leaving the

ending open, and balancing the following chapter's celebratory conclusion. Like Butler's novel, Robinson's *New York 2140* can hence be read as an open-ended cautionary tale, in accordance with Moylan's characterization of the critical dystopia.

Whereas Butler's novel was published before popular awareness of global warming was widespread, and hence had a task in convincing readers of the gravity of its consequences, Robinson's novel was published in 2017, when discussions of both climate change and the Anthropocene had long been part of the public discourse. Robinson's call to action is accordingly also different from Butler's, as it devotes less space to descriptions of the environmental disaster itself, and, in the words of Matthew Benjamin Cole, instead concentrates its attention on "what can be done, with whom, and on what terms" (147). Where *The Parable of the Sower* abounds with descriptions of violence, drought, hunger, and natural disasters, Robinson summarizes such misfortunes in a few lines here and there, as in the following recap of the aftermath of the Second Pulse: "All that happened very quickly, in the very last years of the twenty-first century. Apocalyptic, Armageddonesque, pick your adjective of choice. Anthropogenic could be one. Extinctional another. Anthropogenic mass extinction event" (144). Summaries such as the above still serve a cautionary function, and emphasize the need for urgent climate action, but they also reflect a shifted context of reception, as contemporary readers are well equipped to imagine the disasters implied by Robinson's interchangeable adjectives but may on the other hand lack the imagery needed to envision agency, intervention, and hopeful outcomes. While still cautioning readers against the consequences of inaction, Robinson's emphasis is thus on the *hope* in "map, warn, and hope" (Moylan *Scraps* 196), in accordance with the changed demands of the Anthropocene.

By devoting the majority of its plot to a hopeful social and environmental transformation, *New York 2140* thereby challenges the bleakness of the traditional dystopia, while maintaining a critical tone. This double function is achieved through a complex and multi-oppositional character cast, experimentational genre blurring, textual ambiguity, cognitive estrangement, and a collective dystopian/utopian resistance narrative that offers social criticism as well as a step-by-step guide to intervening in our uncertain future. Robinson's novel is thus a prime example of a critical dystopia adapted to the contemporary context of the Anthropocene.

While hopeful emphasis on human agency in the midst of disaster is a hallmark of the critical dystopia, it is also a key feature of the rhetorical mode of comedy, which in *New York*

2140 plays an even greater role in framing the narrative than in Butler's *The Parable of the Sower.* The novel's utilization of comic environmental rhetoric will therefore be explored in depth in the following section.

A Comedy of the Anthropocene

As evident from the above analysis, *New York 2140* employs a range of narrative devices typical to the critical dystopia in its representation of environmental crisis, and in doing so, it establishes a hopeful outlook on contemporary developments, as the reader is offered practical means of intervening in both environmental, financial, and social matters. Underlying this representation is the novel's larger structuring in accordance with the rhetorical mode of comedy, however, which we argue contributes substantially to the novel's environmental representation, and its framing of the otherwise dystopian near future. The comic quality of Robinson's narrative is moreover a recurring element of both its character arcs, its plot structure, and its many intertextual references, as will be demonstrated in the following sections.

If we, in accordance with both the Aristotelian definition of comedy and that proposed by Stephen O' Leary, understand comedy as a mode which, in its crudest form, moves from misery to happiness (O'Leary 68), the general plot structure of *New York 2140* may easily be identified as comedic. At the beginning of the novel, Mutt and Jeff establish the context in which the plot takes its outset, proclaiming that "'the world is fucked. We're in a mass extinction event, sea level rise, climate change, food panics, everything you're not reading in the news.' 'All because of the market'" (Robinson 4). Roughly 600 pages and 3 years' worth of story events later, these unhappy circumstances are contrasted to the new social, environmental, and political order, which is summarized by the citizen in a lengthy retelling, from which the following is only an excerpt:

> Among the changes they quickly enacted at the WTO were tight currency controls, increased labor support, and environmental protections. The neoliberal global order was thus overturned right in its own wheelhouse. These new taxes and the nationalization of finance meant the U.S. government would soon be dealing with a healthy budget surplus. Universal health care, free public education through college, a living wage, guaranteed

> full employment, a year of mandatory national service, all of these were not only made law but funded. (602)

At the scale of the overall storyworld, a clear shift from misery towards happiness can thereby be identified, as significant steps are taken towards the resolution of the storyworld's initial problems.

Importantly, these developments are not achieved in a violent victory of good over evil, but rather through democratic processes of negotiation and compromise, as exemplified by Charlotte, who realizes that her best option for inspiring change is by running for congress, where she may achieve it in a peaceful manner and work through one aspect of the problem at a time (552-553). The novel thus exemplifies Joseph Meeker's claim that "the problem of comedy is always how to resolve conflict without destroying the participants" (38), and it furthermore recognizes the complexity of creating a more socially and environmentally just future, as ecological balance is demonstrated to be deeply connected to both financial and social issues, since achieving environmental well-being is as much a question of profitability as a question of moral obligation: "Carbon-neutral and even carbon-negative technologies were all over the place waiting to be declared economical relative to the world-blasting carbon-burning technologies that had up to that point been determined by the market to be 'less expensive'" (Robinson 378). The achievement of both environmental, social, and financial 'happiness' is hence approached as a complex and multi-faceted problem that cannot be solved through tragedy's binary and mono-causal narrative structure.

At the scale of the individual characters, similarly happy developments occur, although at a scope much better suited to the comic mode's emphasis on the commonplace and the everyday. Vlade mends his relationship with his ex-wife after years of emotional distancing (Robinson 569), Inspector Gen solves the case of who was sabotaging the MetLife building (518), and Stefan and Roberto find their treasure, learn to read, and are given a permanent home (544). In accordance with the comic mode's emphasis on reconciliation and survival, the characters of the novel thus manage not only to survive the apocalyptic hurricane Fyodor, but also to resolve personal conflicts and anxieties.

Perhaps most prominent of all the characters is Franklin, whose narrative is the only one that is told from a first-person point of view, and who may accordingly be approached as the

central comic hero of Robinson's novel. While Michał Klata's reading of Franklin as a protagonist of high social standing, "intimate with the rules that govern the system" (117), perhaps commends him better to the role of the superior tragic hero, we argue that his progress throughout the novel is distinctly comic and exemplifies how the comic actor skillfully adapts to his surroundings and achieves happiness only in reconciliation with the rest of nature.

Although at the upper end of the social hierarchy, Franklin begins his narrative as a day trader in a financial district full of day traders (Robinson 24), and unlike the perfect tragic hero who must be morally superior only to make his moral corruption more pitiful (Meeker 46-48), Franklin is from the beginning a morally ambiguous character, as he earns his salary from placing financial bets on the misfortunes of the ever-sinking intertidal zone:

> sea level got bet on, sure. … It joined all the other commodities and derivatives that got indexed and bet on … . Sea level in the Philippines up two centimeters, huge, people panicking, but not noticing the typhoon developing a thousand kilometers to the south: take a moment to buy their fear, before tweaking the index to register the explanation. High-frequency geofinance, the greatest game! (Robinson 19)

While hoping to move higher up in the financial hierarchy through such exploitative schemes as the above, Franklin is at the same time navigating a love life in which he more often takes the role of the underdog, as he for the majority of the novel unsuccessfully chases the "regal" Jojo (22), who works as a day trader at a more prestigious firm than himself (24). Franklin is thus a morally questionable protagonist who is struggling to succeed romantically, but who is redeemed by his good sense of humor and his initially reluctant, but later genuine, feeling of responsibility towards Stefan and Roberto.

In accordance with the comic mode, Franklin's opportunistic approach to life often leads to error, as his attempts to impress Jojo leads to her rejecting him, and his financial strategy likewise turns out to be unwise, as it relies on a housing zone that is deteriorating (Robinson 285, 289). These errors do not become Franklin's downfall, however, but rather serve to humble him and give him a better outset for future learning: "No one knows anything. But I know less than that, because I thought I knew something, but I was wrong. So I know negatively. I unknow. … So okay, back to square one, quit the whining" (415). In such passages, Franklin demonstrates

that "the lesson of comedy is humility and endurance" (Meeker 39), and upon "quitting his whining", Franklin indeed succeeds in turning around his fortune.

The most significant example of this is his transition from day trading to venture capital, since he realizes that betting against nature's eventual victory over the New York shoreline is bound to be a losing game, and that he would be better off investing his money in agreement with his environmental surroundings:

> Mother Ocean can't be beat. And it's turning out to be toughest to fight her in the intertidal. Tide after tide, wave after wave - nothing can stand against that, not over the long haul. … So, there's a combination of new techs that add up to what you might call eelgrass housing. Some of it comes from aquaculture. Basically, you stop trying to resist. You flex with the currents, you rise and fall on the tides. … Eventually, you'd have a floating mat of these platforms, a whole neighborhood of them. (286)

After observing eelgrass flowing in the tide, Franklin comes up with the above investment scheme, and like the housing project's purposeful imitation of nature, Franklin thus adapts to the demands of his environment, and succeeds in turning around his fortune while also making a positive difference in the world.

Franklin moreover shifts his attention from the competitive social environment of the financial district and instead begins to form genuine relationships with his neighbors at the Met, which eventually leads to him falling in love with the older, yet funny and compassionate Charlotte, who, unlike Jojo, returns his affection (590-591). By reconciling with the people around him and accepting that his financial investments are subject to the laws of nature, Franklin then fulfills the purpose of the comic hero, who navigates the world like a game rather than a battleground, and whose fate is more likely to end in a wedding than a funeral (Meeker 38).

Franklin's narrative likewise exhibits Joseph Meeker's point that in our current environmental reality, as well as in the comedy,

> survival depends upon man's ability to change himself rather than his environment, and upon his ability to accept limitations rather than to curse fate for limiting him. It is a

> strategy for living which agrees well with the demands of ecological wisdom, and it cannot be ignored as a model for human behavior. (39)

In Franklin's chapters, the reader is thus presented with an imperfect comic actor, who, in spite of his past errors, is able to guide his own fortune by adapting to his environment and its limitations. As Meeker also argues, such an approach to life is key to navigating the environmental reality of the Anthropocene, and furthermore rings a note of hope that humanity may still be able to do more than merely "curse fate", as intervention is still possible, albeit always on the terms of one's surroundings.

As demonstrated above, *New York 2140* draws heavily on the rhetorical mode of comedy in its overall plot structure as well as in its individual character arcs. The novel's comedic framing of its dystopian content is also achieved through a range of intertextual and metafictional references, however, which strengthen the novel's hopeful outlook, and guide the reader's expectations of the plot.

One such reference is established in the very first chapter of the novel, which is told from the point of view of the two coders Mutt and Jeff. "Mutt and Jeff" was also the title of a daily comic strip by Bud Fisher that appeared in American newspapers from 1907 to 1982, and which popularized the phrase "Mutt and Jeff" as a descriptor for an unlikely or mismatched pair, appearing together to a comic effect ("Mutt and Jeff"). The comic strip was adapted into multiple plays, films, and cartoon animations ("Comic Strip / Mutt and Jeff"), coinciding with Robinson's formal construction of the Mutt and Jeff chapters, which in line with a play script or comic strip consist almost exclusively of dialogue:

> 'That's why we're all broke except the plutocrats.' 'I always see the Disney dog when you say that.' 'They've squeezed us till we're bleeding from the eyes. I can't stand it anymore.' 'Blood from a stone. Sir Plutocrat, chewing on a bone.' 'Chewing on my head! But now we're chewed up. We're squoze dry.' (Robinson 4)

In Mutt and Jeff's chapters, the novel's previously mentioned use of genre blurring is then extended to include a form mirroring the comic drama, which the intertextual naming of the characters similarly alludes to.

That the novel should be read as a comedy is likewise implied by the playful titles of the novel's subsections, the most noteworthy example being the title of the eighth part of the novel, which is named "The Comedy of the Commons" (Robinson 535). Robinson here references the environmental and financial theory known as "the Tragedy of the Commons", which describes a situation in which "individuals with access to a public resource (also called a common) act in their own interest and, in doing so, ultimately deplete the resource" (Spiliakos par. 4). In replacing 'Tragedy' with 'Comedy', Robinson explicitly frames the conclusion of his novel as a comedic one, while suggesting a more hopeful future for the 'common' that is the planet, as the final subsection challenges the original theory by demonstrating the ability of humans to protect communal interests and make positive changes that extend beyond individual desires.

While the setting and subject matter of Robinson's novel is generally dystopian and becomes close to apocalyptic when hurricane Fyodor wrecks New York, the rhetorical mode of comedy is utilized as a framework for the novel's apocalyptic content, contributing to its function as an instructional dystopian cautionary tale that upholds human capacity for agency and intervention. *New York 2140* then recognizes the difficulty and complexity of even beginning to counter the challenges of the Anthropocene, but in its hopeful depiction of environmental crisis, it answers Greg Garrard's call for comic applications of apocalyptic rhetoric, as "only if we imagine that the planet *has* a future, after all, are we likely to take responsibility for it" (116, emphasis in original).

Climate Fiction from the Outside?

As demonstrated in the above analysis, Robinson's *New York 2140* draws on the conventions of both the critical dystopia, and the rhetorical mode of comedy, to the effect of cautioning readers of future environmental catastrophe, while nonetheless remaining hopeful of humanity's ability to intervene and adapt. This didactic yet hopeful approach to environmental crisis is not easily aligned with the genre framework of climate fiction, which is skeptical of representations that assume a position of clarity, optimism, and overview, as such a position, according to Bracke and Buell, is no longer available to the reader, who in the words of Frederick Buell is already "deeply in the soup" (*From Apocalypse* 294) and thus too enmeshed in the uncertainty of contemporary risk society to be able to avert an apocalypse that they are already living (294). Robinson's totalizing and omniscient overviews defy such an uncertain

'inside' perspective, but as a novel representing climate change and human existence in the Anthropocene, aspects of *New York 2140* may nonetheless be more usefully examined through the genre framework of climate fiction, than through that of the critical dystopia. Through the genre framework of climate fiction, it for instance becomes possible to pay more careful attention to Robinson's use of time and space in his representation of climate change, which according to Bracke are key areas in which climate change novels innovatively process the changed scale of causality in the Anthropocene ("The Novel" 89).

Looking first at Robinson's spatial setting, *New York 2140* generally confines itself to the city limits of New York City, the only exception being Amelia's conservationist air ship excursions. While such a confined spatial setting may at first glance appear unsuitable to the vast reach of developments such as climate change, Robinson uses the confined setting deliberately, to represent how the local connects to the global, and how a city like New York may be representative of everywhere else:

> [New York] was like all the cities in the world, and interesting as such, as a type… So, while there is no need to describe the situation in other coastal cities like watery Miami, or paranoidly poldered London and Washington, D.C., or swampy Bangkok, or nearly abandoned Buenos Aires, not to mention all the inland snoozefests called out when one says the single dread word Denver, it is important to place New York in the context of everywhere else … . Because from now on in this tale, as really all along, the story of New York only begins to make sense if the global is taken into account to balance the local. If New York is the capital of capital, which it isn't, but if you pretend it is to help you think the totality, you see the relation; what happens to a capital city is influenced, inflected, maybe determined, maybe overdetermined, by what happens elsewhere in its empire. The periphery infects the core, the provinces invade the imperial center…
> So: Hurricane Fyodor unleashed its wrath on New York and the immediate vicinity. A local catastrophe for sure, but for the rest of the world, a fascinating bit of news. (495-96)

In reflections such as the above account by the citizen, New York is framed as both center and periphery, as a representation for any coastal city in the Anthropocene, and as an example of how global climate change manifests itself unevenly in local disasters. Robinson thus uses the

confined spatial setting as a deliberate strategy for representing the spatial scale of climate change, as the local focus is supplemented with a careful attention to its connection to the global, while also providing the reader with an in-depth glimpse into a specific place that may stand in for anywhere else.

The spatial setting laid out by Robinson above is moreover recognizable as a risk society, with Hurricane Fyodor exemplifying how "modernization risks appear in geographically specific areas, as well as unspecifically and universally" (Beck 27). Similarly, Arctic polar bears must be moved from their natural habitat to save them from extinction (Robinson 99-100), exemplifying how modernization risks "endanger *all* forms of life on this planet" (Beck 22), and not just the producers of the risk. Robinson's characters must furthermore navigate invisible pollutants and chemicals, the city canals being described as a toxic "stew of heavy metals" (17), which are not immediately recognizable to the human sensory apparatus. In accordance with Bracke's definition of the climate fiction novel, Robinson's *New York 2140* thus depicts life in a risk society transformed by climate change, but rather than merely processing human experience in such a society, it also attempts to uncover strategies of intervening in risk production and of improving the experiences of its inhabitants, as argued in the sections above.

Temporally, Robinson's novel also reflects the conditions of the risk society, as the flooded lower Manhattan is exemplary of how present carbon burn produces risks that "outlast generations" (Beck 22), tying back to Salk's previously mentioned question of whether we are being good ancestors. This question is also pondered by Amelia, who regrets that the previous generations of humans have been responsible for the extinction of more than fifty thousand species, and who realizes that her own generation must make an effort to leave behind a world that is still inhabitable for future generations of humans as well as animals and plant life:

> So we have to nurse the world back to health. We're no good at it, but we have to do it. It will take longer than our lifetime. But it's the only way forward. So that's what I do. I know my program is only a small part of the process… [But] it's part of the larger thing that we have to do. (Robinson 259)

In Amelia's willingness to accept a project that spans beyond her own lifetime, she thus mimics Butler's Lauren Olamina by exhibiting the kind of shift in perception towards cathedral thinking that Roman Krznaric calls for (10).

Robinson's consideration of time goes beyond the cross-generational scope that Amelia considers, however, as the chapters of the citizen operate at the scale of deep time, the first citizen chapter going as far back as the geological formation of the Bight of New York:

> It was one dripline coming off the world-topping ice cap of the Ice Age, which was such a monster that the entirety of Long Island is just one of its moraines. When the great ice monster melted ten thousand years ago, sea level rose about three hundred feet. The Atlantic came up and filled all the valleys of the eastern seaboard, as can be easily discerned on any map, and in that process the ocean sloshed into the Hudson, as well as into the valley between New England and the Long Island moraine, creating Long Island Sound, then the East River and all the rest of the vast complicated mess of marshes, creeks, and tidal races that is our bay in question. (Robinson 32)

By framing the events of the novel in the context of New York's geological origin, Robinson invokes the feeling of temporal vertigo that Robert Macfarlane has also described as characteristic of the recognition of deep time, as the reader is presented with the humbling overview of humanity's relatively insignificant presence in the larger scheme of history (Morris and Stern 4:45-6:00).

At the same time, however, the citizen's geological overviews also address the significance of the Anthropocene's intrusion into deep time, as humanity's temporally insignificant role is contrasted with its considerable spatial influence, which is exemplified by the unmaking of thousands of years' worth of geological formation in only a few centuries:

> Initially it was known for its hills and ponds, but they chopped down the hills and filled in the ponds with the dirt from the chopped hills to make the flattest real estate they could, hoping also to improve traffic, not that they did any good, but whatever, all gone now, pretty much flat. (Robinson 33)

The novel thereby not only represents time at the scale of deep time, but also foregrounds the responsibility to alter humanity's conduct in the Anthropocene, as its intrusion into the geological processes of deep time is revealed to be highly disproportionate.

Having in this manner framed the events of the chapters to come, the citizen maintains its vast temporal outlook throughout the rest of the novel, often zooming out to reconceptualize the events of the story in the grander scheme of geological history, as is for instance the case at the end of the novel, where the citizen looks ahead, arguing that the people "in this era" (Robinson 603) indeed made a difference, but that their actions will be just a "flurry" or a "wave" in the grand scheme of history, which is bound to "break up like spring ice" (603-604) in new eras and epochs.

This awareness of deep time is also traceable in the moments of reflection by the other focalizers, however, as exemplified by Franklin's observation regarding the cityscape of the intertidal zone:

> We were surrounded by the big buildings between NoMad and Rose Hill, block-sized stone-and-glass monsters, rising sheer from the canal to the first setbacks high overhead. Nothing less like the nineteenth century could be imagined, there were no little remnant buildings tucked between the monsters to give a glimpse back into the Holocene. (421)

Here, Franklin positions himself temporally in opposition to the Holocene, thus embracing a geological scale of time, in which the Anthropocene's intrusion into the Holocene is moreover problematized as a "stone-and-glass monster" that has usurped what came before. In Robinson's representation of both time and space, he then succeeds in considering the changed scale of processes such as climate change and environmental improvement, in accordance with Bracke's confidence in the ability of the climate fiction novel to creatively do so ("The Novel" 89).

As previously mentioned, this creative representation is further achieved through the use of genre blurring, which is a typical trait of the critical dystopia, but also of the climate fiction novel (Bracke, "Worldmaking" 170). In the context of the climate fiction novel, genre blurring becomes a method to deal with the problem of representing climate change, as different genres, according to Adam Trexler, are able to capture different aspects of our changing environmental reality (13-14). In the citizen's purely descriptive chapters, which mimic historical non-fiction or

19th century realist fiction, it is thus possible to consider the long-term chronologies and causalities of global warming, whereas the sense of suspended time in Mutt and Jeff's present-tense chapters achieves the diametrically opposite effect, depicting instead the experience of living inside climate change as it is unfolding, in the drama or suspense novel's immediate expression of action and dialogue. Similarly, the conventions of the detective novel in Inspector Gen's chapters are well suited to the unraveling of political plots and financial schemes that lie behind influential decisions on environmental matters, while Amelia's preservationist voyages provide first-hand insights into the Anthropocene's effects on the non-human world, in a 22nd century echo of a Thoreau essay, as also suggested by the many Thoreau quotes dispersed throughout the novel (154, 383, 442). *New York 2140* thus utilizes its hybrid form to creatively take advantage of different formal traditions' versatile abilities to represent climate change.

Whereas the genre framework of critical dystopia emphasized hybridity and textual ambiguity as means of strengthening social critique, the genre framework of climate fiction makes it possible to consider how formal ambiguity relates to environmental ambiguity. Similar to how climate change often creates improbable situations, brings together disconnected phenomena, and challenges the established laws of nature (Bracke "Worldmaking" 175), the formal structure of *New York 2140* is likewise improbable, often challenging the same narrative traditions that it borrows from. This is for instance the case when the familiar quest-narrative of Stefan and Roberto's chapters is unexpectedly resolved only halfway through the plot (Robinson 306), just like Mutt and Jeff's *Waiting for Godot*-reminiscent dialogue does not trail on in indefinite expectation but is interrupted in the middle of the novel by the arrival of their liberators (316). While borrowing genre conventions, the novel then also employs them in improbable ways, as was previously also demonstrated in Robinson's experimental use of epigraphs.

Like climate change, which brings together disconnected phenomena and erratically challenges familiar patterns, *New York 2140* likewise uses both the present and past tense and shifting types of focalization between first- and third-person internal focalization and the citizen's omniscient chapters, bringing together styles and forms that do not traditionally belong together. The division of the novel into subsections and chapters is similarly random, with varying numbers of chapters to each section, and no order to the sequence of focalizers, as some subsections feature all eight focalizers, while others repeat and omit specific points of view. The

focalizer that plays the largest role in tying all of the other perspectives together is moreover the only focalizer whose title changes throughout the novel, as 'the citizen' in some chapters is "a citizen" (Robinson 32), "that citizen" (77), "the citizen redux" (439), "the city smartass again" (494), or merely "the city" (531), further destabilizing the regularity of the narrative structure. In its improbable formal constellation, which is a patchwork of genre, narration, and style, *New York 2140* thus mirrors the conditions of the Anthropocene, as the structure of the novel in many ways resembles the mismatched debris left behind by the high tides of the intertidal zone.

While the novel insists upon transformation and intervention in the midst of this environmental and structural jumble, and hence challenges the more passive social function of climate fiction, the novel's literary experimentation with form and genre, its representation of the challenges of the risk society, and its consideration of the broad spatial and temporal scale of climate change nonetheless lends it well to a reading within the framework of climate fiction. A full consideration of the novel's role as both critical dystopia, climate fiction, and comic apocalypse will therefore be useful in our concluding assessment of the novel.

Repurposing the Past to Imagine the Future

As the above analyses testify to, Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* ambitiously experiments with established forms, in a 613-page dystopian comedy bound to fail its own opening proposition "to be brief about it" (8). Reviewing Robinson's environmental representation is hence not a 'brief' undertaking either, but in bringing together the observations of the readings above, a general assessment of the ecodystopian novel's role to the contemporary reader may nonetheless be approximated.

Like Butler's *The Parable of the Sower*, Robinson's *New York 2140* is usefully approached through the genre frameworks of both critical dystopia and climate fiction, which each contribute with valuable insights into the novel's thematic content and formal structure. Through the genre framework of critical dystopia, the novel takes on a social function as a multi-oppositional call to action that insists upon the continued need for social, environmental, and financial transformation, even if climate crisis has already arrived. Moreover, it insists upon the continued relevance of the past in approaching the challenges of the future, an insistence which is both formally and thematically foregrounded through the novel's employment of historical models and established narrative forms. *New York 2140* then upholds the relevance of the critical

dystopia in the Anthropocene, demonstrating in particular how the climate dystopia may be a source of hope and agency at a time when imagining hopeful outcomes has become increasingly difficult. This hopeful emphasis is further accentuated by the novel's utilization of the rhetorical mode of comedy, which in the midst of uncertainty and crisis similarly upholds the importance of reconciliation, adaptation, and human agency.

While Robinson adheres to the genre conventions of the critical dystopia and draws on the much older rhetorical mode of comedy, *New York 2140* is at the same time a novel of the Anthropocene, the complexity of which necessitates narrative innovation and hybridization. Through the genre framework of climate fiction, it becomes possible to address this context, and to understand Robinson's formal experimentation not merely as a means of producing cognitive estrangement or of repurposing past conventions as models for future change, but also as a means of representing the destabilized experience of living in the Anthropocene. In the framework of climate fiction, the novel's formal structure may thus be interpreted as a reflection of the present's changed environmental context, which increasingly calls for innovation and complexity. The framework of climate fiction moreover enables an examination of the novel's representation of time and space, which encompasses the new demands of the Anthropocene by embracing both the local, the global, the present moment, and the geological past.

As the above analysis demonstrates, Robinson's *New York 2140* is thus both a glimpse into life in environmental crisis, a formal expression of the Anthropocene, and a call to intervene in matters of climate, economic, and social policy in time to avoid the reality of the novel. First and foremost, however, it is a guide of "what can be done, with whom, and on what terms" (Cole 147), testifying to the critical dystopia's continued usefulness, and its adaptability to contemporary social and environmental challenges. That Robinson chooses to answer these questions by repurposing and reimagining familiar forms brings hope that the reader too may already be in possession of the means to face the future.

Whereas both *New York 2140* and *The Parable of the Sower* upholds the possibility of intervening in climate crisis, James Bradley's *Clade* provides an alternative dystopian representation of climate change, which will be explored in the following section.

Clade by James Bradley

Literature Review

Published in 2015, James Bradley's *Clade* predates Robinson's *New York 2140* by only two years, and hence shares Robinson's context of reception, as it was released at a time when public awareness of anthropogenic climate change was already well established. Compared to Robinson's novel, the scholarly reception for *Clade* has been modest, however, and almost exclusively comprised of ecocritical readings examining the novel's relation to the genre of climate fiction and to Australian eco-fiction more broadly. A few readings have approached the novel in the framework of cognitive narratology, but as will be demonstrated in the following review, the scholarly reception has been primarily concerned with Bradley's representation of climate change, which will also be the focal point of our reading.

Centrally occupying the scholarly reception of Bradley's climate change narrative has been an attention to the novel's representation of temporal and spatial scale. One scholar that has worked with Bradley's novel is Gregers Andersen, who, in his 2019 book *Climate Fiction and Cultural Analysis,* details precisely the temporal and spatial characteristics of *Clade.* Andersen argues that *Clade* transcends ordinary conventions of space and time by having the narrative span multiple human lifespans and locations, as opposed to just one (136). Andersen notes that this structure alters the novel's perspective on climate change from just "one human being to the overall movement of the human species through time and space" (136), which he reads as a sign of the 'narrative ambition' of Bradley's novel to "widen in time and space the perspectives of its reader" (136), and hence "solve one of the formal problems which has often been associated with narrating anthropogenic global warming" (136).

Andersen argues, however, that the expansion of the narrative scope, as detailed above, is itself dwarfed by the novel's conclusion, which introduces an alien signal emanating from a star five hundred light-years away, thus widening the perspective even further. According to Andersen, "The novel transcends its own ambition" (136), by laying bare the fact that this very ambition "is in itself infinitely small in scale compared to the vastness of time and space" (137). The conclusion is furthermore argued by Andersen to be important, "because it essentially erodes the foundation of the anthropocentric exceptionalism which has been so heavily criticized" (137), thus driving home humanity's mortality and inseparability from the rest of nature.

In a review of present developments within climate fiction, Adeline Johns-Putra makes a similar point to Andersen, noting that *Clade* is exemplary of a subcategory of climate narratives that take their outset in the present, yet still provides "a long view of climate change" (269), which in *Clade* is achieved through its multifocal structure that allows it to span decades (269).

This interpretation is also shared by Abeer Khalaf, who in the article "Aesthetic Consolation: A Possible Remedy for Solastalgia in James Bradley's Clade (2017)" argues that Bradley "engages with the challenges of time, place, and human agency that climate change presents" (60). Like Johns-Putra and Andersen, Khalaf is interested in the novel's temporal and spatial scale, which she argues encompasses the "slow violence" of climate change, invisibly dispersed across time and space, yet made visible in the novel by its distinct narrative structure (55-56). Unlike the readings above, Khalaf is also interested in Bradley's representation of solastalgia, defined by Glenn Albrecht as a term "created to describe the specific form of melancholia connected to lack of solace and intense desolation" (qtd. in Khalaf 57). According to Khalaf, this melancholia reflects the psychological pain caused by climate change, instigated by both the physical desolation experienced "when the place one is connected to is directly attacked" (57), and the psychological desolation "when one's sense of place is lost and is depressed due to the inflicting changes upon that place" (58). Khalaf argues that both expressions of solastalgia are exemplified in Bradley's *Clade* but at the same time claims that the novel finds a sense of "aesthetic consolation" in the endurance of everyday life, demonstrating that "it is acceptable to find comfort and aesthetic … value [in] the familiarity of everyday routine" (60). By maintaining that "beauty will continue to exist whatever the circumstances" (60), Khalaf thus finds a note of hope amid the otherwise dominating sense of environmental grief in the novel.

Environmental grief and adaptation is similarly a theme in Jeffrey Barber's reading of *Clade,* in his chapter "The Challenge of Imagining Sustainable Futures: Climate Fiction in Sustainability Communication", which briefly highlights Bradley's novel as an example of climate fiction "adaptation narratives" (152). Barber emphasizes both the novel's depiction of physical adaptation, as migration is depicted in the novel as an unavoidable consequence of climate disaster, but also psychological adaptation to the grief induced by climate change's erasure of life and ecosystems, thus mirroring Khalaf's double focus on physical and psychological solastalgia, albeit not employing the same terminology (152).

Angelo Monaco provides a different perspective on Bradley's novel in his article "Narrative Empathy in James Bradley's *Clade*: Disability, Ecosickness and Hope", in which he examines how human vulnerability and ecological fragility can create emotional responses in readers. He argues that *Clade* depicts human vulnerability and ecological fragility as interconnected, the struggles of the characters being reflected in depictions of environmental decline (209), and that the reader's empathetic response to the characters' vulnerability hence "aligns readers not only with the precariousness of human life, but also with the delicate question of climate change" (209).

Monaco highlights one specific method of creating narrative empathy, namely Peter Goldie's "in-his-shoes perspective shifting" (210), which, as the name suggests, occurs when the reader, or characters of the novel, consciously imagine themselves in another person's shoes. According to Monaco, *Clade's* multifocal structure doubly enables this experience, as it both allows the reader to empathetically relate directly to the characters, but also creates scenarios in which the characters interact and empathize with each other from different perspectives and points in time (210). Accordingly, "Bradley's formal choices reveal a narrative form preoccupied with the evocation of feelings: by scattering the plot with multiple focalisers, the novelist establishes connections, while also defying the reader's easy distribution of empathy" (212). Goldie's method is thus argued by Monaco to not merely elicit an empathic response from the reader, but also to challenge their 'distribution of empathy' with its multifocal narrative.

Having established readers' emotional connection to Bradley's characters, Monaco then begins to expand this connection to the environment of the novel. He argues that by including characters who "display empathic concerns with the wounds of the planet" (213), the reader, who is already emotionally invested in these characters, is then enticed into a form of "civic engagement" (213) with the novel's ecological threats, raising awareness "of their position as environmental caretakers" (213). Monaco realizes that achieving an engaged audience does little if the author's message proves too fatalistic to encourage change, however. Quoting Greg Garrard's definitions of the comic apocalypse, Monaco thus argues that the novel does not succumb to "self-destructive impulses" (213), but rather is "open-ended and episodic" (213), framing human agency as revolving around an ethical struggle between "light and darkness, disability and hope, death and survival" (213). A struggle that, according to Monaco, is positively influenced by Bradley's use of empathy and solidarity as a guard against the violence

and destruction of the otherwise dystopian near future, hence maintaining a hopeful outlook amid apocalypse (213).

Bradley's hopeful outlook is finally also a topic of Sue Lovell, Bridget Thomas, and Olga Wickham's reading, who in a study of Australian climate fiction argue that "*Clade* is ultimately that rare thing, a potentially hopeful cli-fi narrative" (9), based on its insistence that "worthwhile life continues" (9), even if the environmental terms on which we lead those lives are subject to change (9).

As demonstrated in the readings above, the scholarly reception of Bradley's *Clade* has been centrally occupied with the novel's temporal and spatial representation of climate change, as well as the emotional responses to ecological destruction experienced by the novel's characters, and its encouragement of similar responses among readers. The novel's categorization as a climate fiction novel has moreover been a focal point in its critical reception, and will similarly be central to our own reading, but whereas readings within the climate fiction genre framework have thus far been occupied with the narrative categories of time and space, we hope to contribute with a more nuanced consideration of the novel's narrative structure, in accordance with our econarratological methodological approach. We moreover seek to expand on the readings of the novel as "hopeful" or "comic" above, in a more thorough consideration of the novel's form and social function.

***Clade:* New Dystopian Possibilities**

Out of this thesis' selected ecodystopias, James Bradley's *Clade* takes up the smallest number of pages yet offers the most expansive account of unfolding climate crisis, as the novel spans several generations' worth of story events in its ten brief chapters. Taking its outset in a domestic setting located temporally in direct continuation of the present, the novel is exemplary of Astrid Bracke's climate fiction novel, wherefore the genre framework of cli-fi will also be prominent in the following analysis. As evidenced by the emphasis on hopefulness in the readings above, the terminology of both the critical dystopia and the comic apocalypse may nonetheless be useful in a full assessment of the novel's form and social function. In the following section, we therefore begin by providing a comprehensive examination of the novel in the genre framework of climate fiction, but also consider the insights offered by Moylan and Meeker's definitions.

Worldmaking the Future Risk Society

While Bradley's novel is unmistakably dystopian in its projection of the potential future destruction brought on by climate change, *Clade* best captures the *transition* into dystopia out of the three novels surveyed in this thesis. This focus on the time between the present and a future time of crisis makes the novel ideally suited to the genre approach outlined by Astrid Bracke, which describes the uncertain transitions brought about by climate change, while also considering the experience of domestic life in the Anthropocene, and the ways in which climate fiction may help readers to process this experience. In the following sections, we argue that *Clade* is in many ways an archetype of Bracke's climate fiction novel and begin to demonstrate this by first examining Bradley's representation of the risk society in transition.

As stated in the theoretical framework above, Bracke argues that a defining feature of the climate fiction novel is its concern with "climate change and science" ("Worldmaking" 171), and its depiction of "characters living in a risk society" (171), preferably as seamlessly connected to the present risk society as possible, and often including "contrasting lay characters and scientist characters" (171) as a means of comprehending it. Impressively, *Clade* establishes this theme, setting, and character cast in the very first chapter of the novel, which opens in Antarctica, where Adam, a scientist, is charting traces of previous periods of climate change while his partner, Ellie, is undergoing fertility treatments at home (Bradley 5). From this opening chapter, a number of conditions of the risk society can be discerned, which establish the foundation for the worldmaking of the following chapters.

Looking first at the chapter's depiction of risk, two parallel manifestations of Ulrich Beck's modernization risks may be detected from the opening pages, namely that of climate change and that of infertility, setting the scene for the dual consideration of environmental and domestic crisis that permeates the novel throughout.

Upon first examining the chapter's representation of climate change, an interesting condition of the risk society is revealed, namely the reliance on "the 'sensory organs' of science" (Beck 27), as climate change, to the lay characters of Bradley's novel, is shown to be a diffuse risk, not immediately recognizable to the human sensory apparatus, and hence not easily addressed, to Adam's great lamentation: "We can see it when it's in front of us, see what it means; we know we have to change. But as soon as we're away from it our old thinking reasserts

itself' (Bradley, *Clade* 19). Contrasting this diffuse recognition is Adam's insight as a scientist, his access to first-hand scientific knowledge making it possible for him to perceive the risk of climate change at its larger scale:

> In the Arctic the permafrost was melting; in Greenland and Antarctica the ice sheets were destabilising, their deterioration outpacing even the most pessimistic models; in the Atlantic the currents were growing more erratic, slowing down and shifting. Even the oceans themselves seemed to be dying, their waters more acidic by the month. One day in his office he reviewed a new study about the release of methane from the ocean floor and saw, more starkly than ever before, the conundrum the world faced. (17)

Adam's scientific knowledge thus provides an insight into the developing risk of climate change before its consequences begin to unfold. In the contrast between his ability to "starkly see", and the diffuse ability of the general public to do the same, a key challenge of the risk society is revealed, however, namely the complete reliance on the "judgments, mistakes and controversies of experts" (Beck 27), as contemporary risks require "theories, experiments, [and] measuring instruments … in order to become visible or interpretable as hazards at all" (27).

According to Beck, the citizens of the risk society are consequently subjected to "terrible psychological stresses" (27) and a high degree of uncertainty, a position that Adam reversely finds himself in when faced with Ellie's inexplicable infertility, which leaves the couple at the mercy of experts and the promises of natural remedies (Bradley, *Clade* 14-16), as they attempt to uncover any invisible exposures or disruptions that may be behind their unaccountable failure to conceive. Bradley then depicts both the dependence on expert knowledge and the ensuing sense of uncertainty that is characteristic of Beck's risk society, in a double focus on environment and domestic life that barely extrapolates present knowledge on ocean health and increasing infertility rates (Thomson, Swan and Colino). The opening chapter thereby establishes a risk society that is either directly comparable to the present or may at least be derived from concerns that the reader is familiar with.

In the following chapters, these risks are expanded into the unfamiliar, however, to encompass increasingly destructive natural disasters, a global recession (Bradley, *Clade* 30), migration crises (30, 174), mass extinction (55, 207), a pandemic of "some kind of respiratory

thing" (191), and finally a strange aurora-like phenomenon named 'the shimmer', possibly caused by "a new instability in the Earth's magnetic fields, an instability that may presage the poles flipping from north to south" (296). In accordance with Bracke's definition of the climate fiction novel, these phenomena slowly diverge from the reader's frame of reference, muddling the familiar with the unfamiliar as textual cues "stretch the reader's actual world to encompass the possibilities the textual world suggests" ("Worldmaking" 179).

The second chapter of the novel exemplifies this blurring of the reader's frame of reference well, by describing climate change developments that are already causing problems in the present, but extrapolating the scale of their destruction, as is the case in the following account of unpredictable monsoons:

> For the best part of two decades scientists have been worried abouts its growing unpredictability, and last year their worst fears were realised. The rains that usually arrived in July or August failed to appear, leaving the subcontinent to bake in record heat. Crops failed, leading to food shortages and starvation. Then in November torrential rain and massive floods killed more than a million and left another hundred million homeless. (Bradley, *Clade* 30)

As evidenced by the connection to the reader's present, where scientists currently worry about such outcomes (Schwartz), it is then not the type or manner of the environmental catastrophes that causes defamiliarization, as both droughts and excessive floods are common in real-world monsoon season, but rather the extrapolated fashion in which its consequences are depicted. A million people dead and "another hundred million homeless" are magnitudes beyond the comprehension of the contemporary reader, thus stretching the reader's world to encompass new possibilities.

Mirroring this gradual environmental disintegration is the simultaneous dissolution of the domestic setting, as Adam and Ellie succeed in conceiving, but split up when Summer is still a child, after years of resentment and miscommunication. Summer likewise becomes a single mother, and eventually ends up abandoning her autistic son Noah, while Ellie's relationship with her stepmother also dissolves following the death of her father (Bradley, *Clade* 74). By the end of the novel, an unlikely new family construction is established, however, including the daughter

of Noah's caretaker, her husband Dylan, and Ellie's new partner Amir (285). The novel thus depicts a parallel trajectory from familiar to unfamiliar in the family's domestic life, which, as Angelo Monaco also suggests, often reflects concurrent environmental developments. When Adam is on the brink of leaving Ellie, he for instance makes the following reflection, which is equally applicable to his relationship and his environmental context: "he cannot shake the feeling that he is losing something he doesn't want to lose but no longer knows how to hang onto … it's the sense that things are breaking down, spiraling out of control, and his own powerlessness to do anything about it" (39). The gradual ecological transformation is thus mirrored by the gradual erosion of domestic structures and the eventual formation of new connections.

As Abeer Khalaf's reading also suggests, the uncertain and melancholic feeling of losing something without knowing how to hang on to it may also be captured by Glenn Albrecht's term 'solastalgia', which connects environmental distress with human distress, and encompasses

> the 'lived experience' of the loss of the present as manifest in a feeling of dislocation; of being undermined by forces that destroy the potential for solace to be derived from the present. In short, solastalgia is a form of homesickness one gets when one is still at 'home'. (Albrecht 45)

Albrecht's characterization is well suited to Adam's sense of gradual loss, as he begins to feel this solastalgia-like distress even if he is still married and technically at "home", thus contributing further to the novel's slow erosion of security and stability.

As the story in this manner extends the familiar into the unfamiliar, the formal structure of the novel contributes to blurring the boundary between known and unknown, to the effect of extending the characters' experience of uncertainty and disorientation to the reader. A first example of this is found in the novel's use of tense, as *Clade*, like *The Parable of the Sower,* is written in the present tense, and even includes a diary-format chapter titled "A Journal of the Plague Year" (Bradley 185), which mimics the narrative mode of Butler's novel. In both the diary chapter and the rest of the novel, the time of the telling is never far removed from the time of the told, however, meaning that there is no guarantee of a future vantage point of security or stability. Like in *The Parable of the Sower*, the reader is thus left to make sense of the transforming world at the same pace as the characters that inhabit it.

A second formal trait that is utilized to muddle the transition between the reader's present and the destabilized future is an achronological narrative structure that relies on both analepsis and ellipses in piecing together the story events. As will be expanded upon in the following sections, Bradley's novel employs an unconventional mosaic-like narrative structure that skips ahead anywhere from a few years to a decade between every chapter, while also switching between internal focalizers, Adam's being the only point of view to recur in more than one chapter. While the order of this constant jumping-ahead is seemingly chronological, the individual chapters abound with flashbacks and moments of nostalgia, however, which muddle the transition between the reader's present and the near-future of the novel, while also bridging the gaps and omissions between individual chapters.

Looking first at Bradley's use of analepsis, the novel's opening chapter provides a good example of how achronological storytelling is used to disorient the reader's sense of time. The chapter opens in Antarctica, at a time that is presumably in the reader's immediate future, but only a few pages later interrupts the present-tense account of life in Antarctica in favor of a lengthy retelling of Adam and Ellie's first meeting six years earlier, when Adam was still writing his doctorate (Bradley, *Clade* 5-6). The flashback to Adam's past is apparently indistinguishable from the reader's past, as no narrative cues to strange events or technologies are given to indicate a separate storyworld, but in accordance with Bracke's genre definition, no attempts are made at confirming or negating this connection, as the climate novel is characterized by an extension of the "familiar world into the unfamiliar, generally without the narrator stepping in to explicitly guide readers in navigating this new space" (175). Through recurring flashbacks to a time indistinguishable from the reader's past and present, the novel thus muddles the transition into future crisis, leaving the reader to uncertainly determine where the present ends and where the fictional future begins.

In the following chapters, this formal muddling of the chronology of the story events is only heightened, as the other focalizers contribute with their own flashbacks and recollections, Ellie for instance recalling her childhood (Bradley, *Clade* 141) more than halfway into the plot, from a vantage point that is at least 25 years into the future from when Adam recalls their first meeting (5), hence maintaining a connection to the reader's present long after the textual world has diverged from the reader's actual world. The addition of multiple focalizers moreover results in instances of multiple frequency, with some story events being narrated more than once in the

plot, from different points of view and in different durations, as is for instance the case when Adam provides a real-time, first-hand account of barely surviving the hurricane and subsequent flooding in and around London (95-137), only to have Ellie later recall the same event simply as "the floods in England" (152), and later again to have Lijuan Li provide a brief account of the event in her diary (210). The achronological storytelling is thereby not only a key contributor to the muddling between the reader's present and the fictional future, but also a means of connecting the different focalizers and temporal settings. The lack of narrative guidance in the form of dates or descriptive overviews moreover leaves the reader in a state of uncertainty while making sense of the chronology, thus extending the characters' diffuse experience of life in the risk society to the reader.

Also contributing to the reader's sense of uncertainty is the novel's high reliance on ellipsis in its account of developing crisis, as several years' worth of story events are left unaccounted for between every chapter, leaving the reader disoriented to the full scale of the storyworld's challenges. Offhand comments such as "Most of the birds are gone now. She is not sure when they began to disappear: elsewhere there have been huge die-offs, great waves of birds falling from the skies" (Bradley, *Clade* 55) and "Since the crop failures three years ago, coffee has become increasingly expensive and difficult to get" (55) leave the reader to figure out the cause of these developments themselves, perhaps relying on knowledge of contemporary climate change to piece out its fictitious counterpart. The novel similarly omits year-marks entirely, providing only general references to the trends of decades as a whole, long after these decades have passed (141), or in the case of the diary-chapter, sticking to the indeterminable descriptors of days and months (187). In Bradley's novel, we are thus presented with a form of narration entirely opposite to Robinson's totalizing overviews that account for events down to their precise dates and guide the reader through every causal relationship and chronological connection.

Through its achronological narration, its use of the present tense, and its diffuse descriptions of climate change that stretch from Adam's prescient scientific projections to full-scale apocalyptic disasters, *Clade* thus maintains a sense of both formal and thematic uncertainty that is reflective of the living experience in a developing risk society. The impact of this uncertainty and diffusion can be summed up by the metaphor of 'boiling the frog', which Bracke uses to describe the two-step narrative structure of the climate fiction novel:

> What happens is something akin to the myth of the frog who, placed in cold water and slowly boiled, does not jump out as its environment changes so gradually and imperceptibly. The two-step process of cli-fi is most successful when readers can barely tell apart the first and second step. (175)

By formally and thematically emphasizing uncertainty, the narrative thus mimics the gradual and imperceptible transformation of climate change, a notion that is well reflected in *Clade*, where Bradley increases the references to environmental challenges incrementally in the first chapters, utilizing Marie-Laure Ryan's principle of minimal departure to stretch the possibilities of the reader's actual world, before suddenly reaching a boiling point in the fifth chapter, when the transformation of the textual world becomes irrefutable. Aptly named "Boiling the Frog," this chapter arguably represents the culmination of the preceding chapters' build-up, depicting the devastating loss and displacement of human lives following a catastrophic hurricane and subsequent flood (Bradley, *Clade* 135-137). The metaphor of the frog can thus be said to encapsulate both the formal construction of the storyworld, which enables a slow worldmaking process in accordance with Bracke's gradual narrative transformation, and the lived experience of escalating climate crisis, which, in reflection of the risk society, often eludes immediate experience before manifesting itself in erratic and local catastrophe.

Through its gradual worldmaking and its domestic representation, *Clade* thus represents the uncertainty of anthropogenic climate change, corresponding to the characterization of the climate fiction novel laid out by Astrid Bracke. A key challenge to Anthropocene fiction is not merely representing the uncertainty of contemporary experience, however, but also the changed spatial and temporal scales that climate change challenges us to operate within. In the following section, the novel's formal and thematic depiction of this challenge will therefore be considered.

Form and Function in the Anthropocene

As demonstrated in the analyses of both *New York 2140* and *The Parable of the Sower*, a shared challenge of dystopian climate fiction has been the formal and thematic representation of Anthropocene scales of time and space. Where *The Parable of the Sower* and *New York 2140* solves this representational difficulty in restricted spatial settings and within storylines that span only a few years, *Clade* on the other hand features multiple spatial settings and several

generations' worth of story events. This representation is principally achieved through its mosaic and multifocal narrative structure, but as will be demonstrated below, the novel also uses more abstract visualizations to encompass the transformed experience of scale.

Looking first at the novel's depiction of space, Bradley's narrative revolves around settings in Australia, but with each new focalizer, other locations are incorporated, enabling a broad representation of the global and local manifestations of climate change. Adam for instance introduces Antarctica from the novel's outset, providing a baseline for the warming state of the environment, before returning to Australia in chapter two, where a heatwave is causing power outages and overcrowded hospitals (Bradley, *Clade* 28, 32, 35). Later, Adam's visit to his daughter in England provides a glimpse into a "humidity he more readily associates with the tropics than with England's south-east" (96), as an indication of the climate conditions in Europe. Ellie's encounter with the Bangladeshi Amir unveils tales of governmental collapse and international refugee crisis (164-165), while Lijuan Li's narration of an initially Chinese pandemic raises concerns of mass deaths and anarchy in Asia (205, 214). This expanding spatial representation is principally made possible by the multifocal and cross-generational narrative structure, which allows for the exposure of causal relations that not only span decades, but also national borders and continents, as is suggested when the melting of Antarctic ice sheets described in the beginning of the novel later manifests itself in the collapse of the English embankments (124) and finally in "a watery graveyard of partly submerged streets and buildings" (290) in Izzie's final version of Australia (290). The broad spatial representation thus exposes the interplay between local and global manifestations of climate change, as spatially separated events are linked causally through the novel's shifting setting.

Perhaps more interesting is Bradley's representation of time, however, which in the novel unfolds itself at multiple scales, in an interplay between the uncertain present moment, cross-generational developments, and the deeper scale of geological time. Having already accounted for the novel's depiction of immediate experience above, through its use of the present tense, we proceed to consider the novel's cross-generational focus, which is achieved through the novel's previously mentioned use of shifting internal focalization that not only spans different focalizers and spatial locations, but also different temporal settings, as each chapter is separated by several years' worth of omitted story events.

The result of these shifts in focalization and temporal setting is a narrative structure that spans four generations, aptly mirroring the title of the novel, as the word 'clade' originates from the Greek word for 'branch', *kládos*, used in biology to describe "a group of biological taxa (such as species) that includes all descendants of one common ancestor" ("Clade"). An example of this could be a clade of apes, consisting of gorillas, chimpanzees, and humans as a group with a common, primate ancestor. In biology, 'cladistics' is then the method by which such groups are mapped into phylogenetic trees, after which it becomes possible to trace the development and transformation of a species over time, and to hypothesize connections between present species and their ancient ancestors (UC Museum of Paleontology). In *Clade,* this biological model is used as a template for the narrative structure, which takes its outset in Adam, and from there branches out to several groups of other focalizers that all connect to Adam by either blood or proximity, as illustrated in figure 1 below. As evident from figure 2, *Clade's* narrative structure diverges somewhat from the biological clade it shares its name with, however, the implications of which will be considered below.

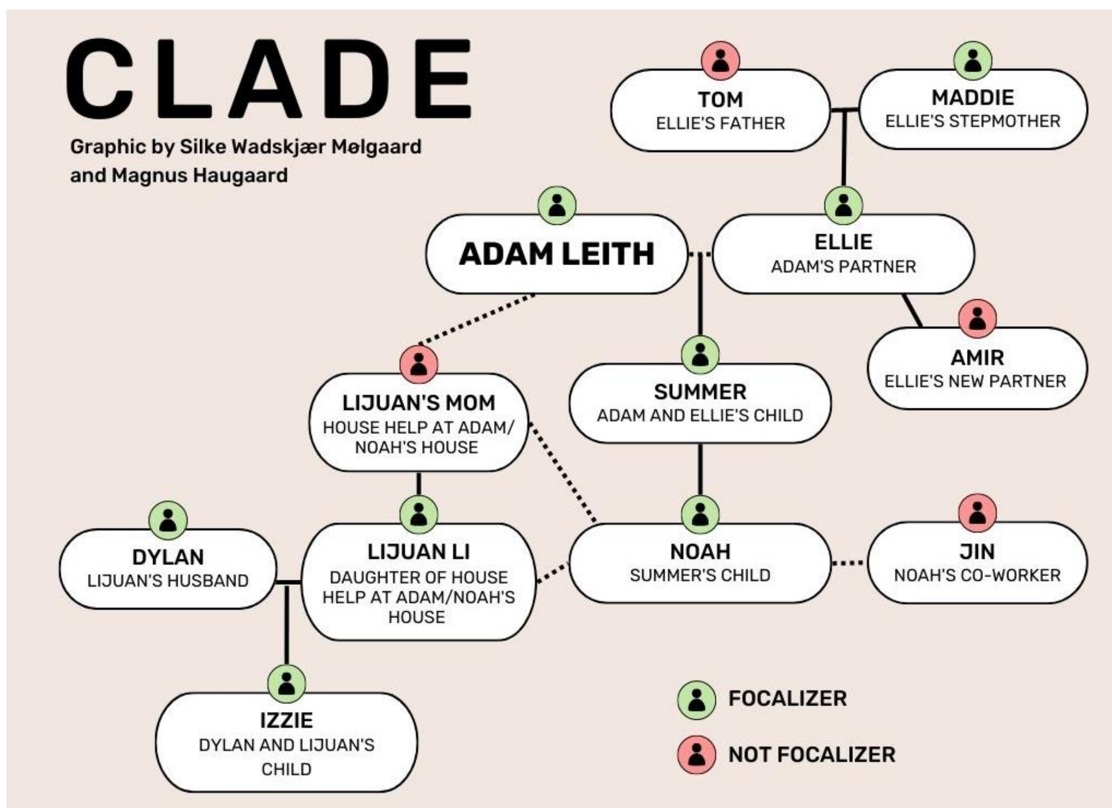

Figure 1. Central characters of *Clade.*

Figure 2. Examples of biological clades. All highlighted areas constitute a clade. Source: UC Museum of Paleontology. "Understanding Phylogenies." *Understanding Evolution*, https://evolution.berkeley.edu/evolution-101/the-history-of-life-looking-at-the-patterns/understanding-phylogenies/. Accessed 23 May 2023.

Like the biological clade, which is often a branch of a larger network and may contain branches itself, *Clade*'s larger narrative structure contains every biological or proximate relation to Adam, while its third chapter, also titled 'Clade', fittingly depicts a smaller branch of focalizers, consisting of Ellie, Summer, and Maddie, who gather to spread the ashes of their shared connection, Tom (Bradley 73). The narrative always returns to the central character of Adam, however, who is the focalizer of three chapters that provide glimpses into different stages of his life, and whose death concludes the novel (294). Adam's name moreover manifests his centrality and ancestral role, as the connotation to the biblical Adam, ancestor of humankind, aligns with the narrative's positioning of Adam as the connection between the remaining focalizers and the origin from which the narrative takes its outset.

While the novel attempts to mirror the biological clade through its branching narrative structure that always connects back to Adam, it interestingly also challenges the biological understanding of a clade, as Adam is neither the oldest of the focalizers, nor biologically connected to all of them, wherefore the narrative model does not perfectly align with the biological model. In naming the narrative 'clade' yet diverging from the closed genetic relations of a scientific clade, the novel then appears to suggest alternative hypotheses of human interconnection that allow for both biological relations and spontaneous ones, as climate disaster erodes and fuses domestic structures.

This bringing together of disconnected systems is similarly reflected in the act of utilizing scientific terminology as a descriptor for a literary form, an interdisciplinary combination that seems to foreground the inability of scientific data and narrative to

independently represent something as multifaceted as the Anthropocene, a point which Gregers Andersen also makes in his definition of climate fiction as a genre which vitally supplements science, because it enables readers to experience what it might be like to *live* inside the datasets projected by panels such as the IPCC (1). Accordingly, the narrative clade provides a glimpse into the diverse human experiences that make up the disembodied phylogenetic trees of evolution, the novel serving as a snapshot of a time of human transition. While the full objective of Bradley's experimentation remains ambiguous, the joining together of separate entities, whether in the form of spontaneous family structures or borrowed terminologies, suggests new connections and opportunities for representation in the Anthropocene.

The clade-like cross-generational narrative structure moreover foregrounds the Anthropocene theme of ancestry, as the temporally separate focalizers are all connected by their ties to Adam, familial or otherwise. Whereas *The Parable of the Sower* and *New York 2140* both foregrounded Salk's question of whether we are being *good* ancestors, *Clade* contrarily depicts some of the difficulties in becoming so, as many of Bradley's characters are too wound up in their own problems to even look out for the next generation. Adam's role is then once again comparable to that of his biblical namesake, whose downfall to mortality makes him a similarly flawed ancestor. In a climate that is already coming apart, *Clade*'s Adam is too angered by his research to be a good parent to Summer (Bradley 37), Summer in turn abandons Noah in hopeless anticipation of "the end" (131, 137), and after giving birth to Declan, Maddie consciously abandons activism, choosing instead to ignore the increasingly erratic disasters: "it seemed natural to try to shut them out, to concentrate on the fact that here and now they were safe" (61). As a consequence, many of the children in the novel feel set adrift from previous generations, as exemplified by both Summer and Noah, who inherit a world that their parents have done little to improve, and in which they must now fend for themselves.

In the closing chapters, the novel recenters the importance of future generations, however, as Adam becomes a better ancestor to Noah and Izzie than he ever was to Summer, Izzie remembering him fondly as "the closest thing she has ever had to a grandparent" (295). The novel thereby does not always represent *good* ancestors, but it foregrounds the distractions and challenges that we must overcome in order to become so and uses its cross-generational narrative structure to remind readers of the legacy that will be left behind for future generations. In thus pointing ahead, the novel moreover expands the biological clade from primarily being a means

of tracing backwards to being a model through which we might imagine connections to past *and* future generations.

A final and important function of the cross-generational narrative structure is arguably its ability to consider the "vast temporal and spatial scales of climate crisis" (Bracke, "The Novel" 88), as the several generations' worth of story events also encompass several generations' worth of climate change effects. Gradual developments that would scarcely be noticeable over the course of a few years are compacted and clarified when represented at 5- or 10-year intervals, thus enabling a representation of the radical changes caused by global warming and the long-term scales of its destruction. Uncannily, a secondary and now obsolete meaning of 'clade' can be derived from the Latin *clādes*, which translates to "disaster", "destruction", "loss", "calamity", or "defeat" ("Clādes"). Bradley can thereby be said to employ a narrative structure like a biological clade to encompass the vast scale of loss and destruction inherent to climate crisis, thus bringing together separate etymologies and meanings of 'clade' in its cross-generational study of environmental transformation, similar to how it brings together hybrid family structures and scholarly terminologies.

In *Clade*'s representation of time, environmental transformation is also considered at a broader scale than the few generations spanned by the novel's story events, however, as the actions of the novel's characters are arguably dwarfed by the grander prospect of deep time. This geological scale of time is established in the novel's very first chapter, where Adam studies the climate of past epochs in his Antarctic research (Bradley, *Clade* 19), is continued in Ellie's fascination with the ancient history of bees (147) and is extended into the future when Noah discovers an alien signal at the observatory in which he works (257). In all these glimpses into deep time, a recognition of the relative insignificance of single human lives is prominent, as exemplified by Noah's reflections upon making his discovery:

> It will be five hundred years before the message reaches SKA-2165, another five hundred before anyone hears back. He will be gone by then, as will Adam, Ellie, Lijuan, Dylan, Jin, Amir, all of them vanished into the distant past, their passage through the world remembered, if at all, by a handful of video recordings, a scattering of data traces. (285)

In this prospect of geological time, Noah melancholically wonders if there will even be any humans left to receive a reply in a thousand years (285), a feeling that Izzie also experiences when she, upon learning of Adam's death, looks up into the stars and accepts her insignificant role in the "movement of time, a river flowing ever on, removing them from the past (297). Whereas Robinson's novel infuses its glimpses into deep time with agency, as the geological formation of the bight of New York is argued to have been an agent in producing social change, just like the "people of this era" is argued to have made a difference (603), Bradley rather embraces the deep sense of temporal vertigo that Robert Macfarlane also describes, focusing instead on how humans may find solace in perceiving themselves as part of something infinitely larger than a human lifespan. This feeling is particularly embraced by Noah, as his observation of the stars fills him with a "feeling like vertigo. Like flight" (251), the observatory offering him "a place in which it was possible to lose himself in communion with the beyond" (253), but also by Adam, who likewise admires and recognizes the "indifferent majesty of the change that is taking place" (*Clade* 134). Bradley then foregrounds acceptance and explores new ways of relating to the world, as climate change requires his characters to come to terms with transformations that are larger than their own lifetimes or those of their immediate ancestors.

As demonstrated above, *Clade* thereby employs both present-tense fragments, a cross-generational narrative structure, and glimpses into the vastness of deep time in its representation of the temporal scale of environmental transformation. Interestingly encompassing all of these levels is Ellie's art installation, which attempts to capture the essence of the bee as the species is on the brink of extinction, much like *Clade* attempts to capture a sense of our environment in the midst of its collapse. Like the process of climate change, the ongoing collapse of beehives is both global and local, and

> there appears to be no pattern to the process, no single factor that can be isolated as a cause. In some places the problem seems related to the release of genetically engineered plants into the wild, but elsewhere it seems to be about infections overwhelming already stressed colonies, or the build-up of pesticides or other toxins. The collapses are either due to a convergence of factors or, perhaps more alarmingly, some kind of spontaneous event. (Bradley, *Clade* 166)

In order to capture the essence and scale of what is happening to the bees, Ellie therefore approaches the transformation much like Bradley approaches the scale of climate change, combining close-up fragments of "the yellow of the fur, the glistening transparency of the wings" (182) with archival footage from a few generations back, suitable to capturing the "quality of mute strangeness and unrecoverability she requires" (169), and finally images of "fossils of bees, bodies in stone dating back 140 million years, evidence that they existed alongside the dinosaurs" (177). Ellie's artwork is thus a collection of fragmented forms, capturing the bees at different scales and points in time, just like the novel itself, which in its hybrid construction attempts to capture environmental transformation through macro- and micro-perspectives. Ellie's project is in many ways also reminiscent of the mapping of a clade, which in bringing together different entities hypothesizes connections and makes it possible to perceive the zoomed-in individual experience of the present in the context of ancestors as ancient as the dinosaurs.

The fragmented nature of both Ellie's art installation and the novel's formal representation of time is moreover reflective of the position humans must take in relation to what Timothy Morton names 'hyperobjects', a term used to refer to "things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans" (*Hyperobjects* 1), as can be said of global warming, or entities such as neoliberalism or the solar system (1). While Timothy Morton has generally been criticized by econarratologists for his pessimistic view of the capabilities of human narratives and has therefore also played a marginal role in this thesis thus far (James and Morel 184), his terminology on hyperobjects is nonetheless useful for unfolding Ellie's experience in trying to capture the beehive collapses.

According to Morton, hyperobjects are *nonlocal*, in the sense that they manifest themselves locally, but cannot be directly understood through their local manifestations (1), and they "involve profoundly different temporalities than the human-scale ones we are used to" (1), while also slipping in and out of human perception, meaning that "We can only see pieces of hyperobjects at a time" (70), and for periods of time may be unable to perceive them, even if they continue to exist in some high-dimensional space (70). While we will never be able to fully comprehend a hyperobject such as global warming, the only way of understanding them is thus through its fragmented manifestations. This position is evident from Ellie's bee-installation, which attempts to represent the bees through zoomed-in fragments and temporally disjointed

images, but also from the novel's representation of climate change as a long string of present-tense disasters that each only make up a part of the picture, but in their totality still fails to add up to the hyperobject itself.

The experience of trying to grasp this larger entity is described in the novel by Adam, who is frustrated at his failure to fully comprehend the situation: "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" (Bradley. *Clade* 131). Morton likens this experience to a sort of ecological PTSD, in which we try to return to a place of anticipation before the traumatic event itself but are unable to do so, because we are already inside the event; a figurative car crash from which attempting to swerve or establish an overview is impossible because it is already unfolding (*Being Ecological* 14). Upon connecting this notion with Bracke's characterization of the climate fiction novel, the function served by the fragmented narrative thereby neither becomes to warn nor call to action, as such a function presumes a lost point of anticipation, but rather becomes to process the experience of living inside of crisis, as Bracke similarly contends that we are already dwelling inside disaster ("Worldmaking" 171).

In correlating Bracke's terminology to that of Morton, a discrepancy ensues, however, as Morton's terminology conveys the impossibility of representing the spatial and temporal scales of a hyperobject such as global warming in a human narrative form such as the traditional novel, whereas Bracke upholds the ability of climate fiction to innovatively do so ("The Novel" 89). While the fragmented nature of Bradley's narrative may thus be reflective of the fragmented way in which we experience a hyperobject such as global warming, the novel's broad representation of spatial locations and its hybrid representation of immediate experience, cross-generational time, and deep time, may nonetheless be perceived as a creative means of encompassing the expanded causalities of the Anthropocene. Upon approaching Bradley's novel in the genre framework of climate fiction, *Clade* thereby becomes an excellent example of how cli-fi novels formally and thematically foreground the experience of uncertainty that is inherent to the contemporary risk society, while also attempting to come to terms with the changed temporal and spatial scales of climate change, through models and narrative structures that span disciplines and decades.

A Tentatively Hopeful Dystopia

As evidenced by the reading above, James Bradley's *Clade* is both formally and thematically an archetype of Astrid Bracke's climate fiction novel, and our interpretation of the novel accordingly also mirrors many of Bracke's observations. In its representation of climate change, it employs an unmistakably dystopian representation of environmental crisis, however, warranting a consideration of the novel's relation to the dystopian literary tradition, as *Clade*'s near-future projections certainly live up to the basic definition of a dystopia as a text which depicts a society worse than the present, yet connected to it by either extrapolation or analogy (Moylan, *Scraps* 43-44, 196).

That Bradley's novel draws on dystopian and apocalyptic imagery is exemplified both through copious descriptions of environmental destruction, many of which are detailed above, and through the social and domestic breakdown that follow in its wake. While Moylan's critical dystopia emphasizes resistance to such breakdowns, many of Bradley's characters are shown to lose hope in the face of growing climate concerns, however, as Summer exemplifies by going from actively combating climate change: "she helped raise money for refugees, joined the marches and occupations, even spent some time on one of the coalmine blockades" (90), to feeling only resignation; breaking into people's houses, taking pills, and generally suppressing the troubles of the world (86-87). Bradley thus depicts a bleak near-future dystopia that infuses both the environmental, political, and domestic sphere, and which almost intentionally avoids avenues of counteraction, as the novel often references concurrent environmental activism, such as innovative green technologies and climate protests (99-100, 90), but seldom depicts its characters engaging with it.

While the novel fulfills the basic definition of a dystopia, *Clade* then hardly complies with Sargent's and Moylan's criteria for the critical dystopia, as it does not offer any resistance narratives, nor does it present the reader with a utopian enclave holding out against overwhelming forces. Characters may mention environmental concerns, but little to no opposition is raised against them, and frustration is more often channeled into anger than activism, as Adam's reactions particularly testify to (38). Within a dystopian genre purview, *Clade* must thus fall outside Moylan's definition of critical dystopian fiction, reflecting instead the traits of what Moylan terms the 'classical' dystopias of the past. Such dystopias do not "formally and politically" (*Scraps* 189) foreground their social critiques through utopian

resistance narratives, but rather rely on readers to find hope outside of the text itself, as the texts merely detail the horrors of what society could become without timely "hopeful reorientation" (*Scraps* 276).

While *Clade* does not foreground social criticism through an emphasis on activism, it may nonetheless still encourage a 'hopeful reorientation' of its readers, by detailing the conditions of a 'worse' society in a manner that produces cognitive estrangement, and hence encourages reflection on contemporary practices. In *Clade,* cognitive estrangement is arguably a primary effect of the extrapolated natural disasters, which, as previously mentioned, are familiar in nature, but are estranging in their excessive force, or in their uncanny manifestation in unpredictable locations, as is the case when England becomes the site of a tropical storm (96). *Clade* likewise contrasts these unfamiliar scales of disaster with allusions to familiar political difficulties, as climate negotiations have "reached an impasse yet again" (35), encouraging reflection among readers, even if the characters of the novel do not engage with these political impasses. Likewise, the depiction of recognizable domestic life in an environmental context that is altogether estranged, may also enable critical reflection on domestic habits and behaviors.

Despite falling outside the typical categorization for critical dystopian fiction, James Bradley appears hopeful that precisely such reflections may ensue, as he emphasizes his critical ambitions for *Clade,* arguing in an interview about the novel that "fiction can open up space for change" (Henderson par. 7), and that simply portraying the estranged experience of living inside climate crisis may contribute to a critical consideration of what remains to be done: "it seemed to me that if I could give readers a way of imagining what it might be like to live in a climate-changed world it might help them think about the problem more effectively" (Henderson par. 6). Interestingly, Bradley perceives his own work in extension of that of Kim Stanley Robinson, arguing that his fiction shares Robinson's aim of inspiring social change, but that inspiring change "doesn't necessarily require us to imagine alternative modes of social and economic organisation in the way somebody like Kim Stanley Robinson does" (Henderson par. 7). While Bradley's novel challenges the critical dystopia's explicit emphasis on utopian transformation, it may thus still fulfill the broader dystopian ambition of enabling its readers "to find their way within – and sometimes against and beyond – the conditions that mask the very causes of the harsh realities in which they live" (Moylan, *Scraps* xii).

Through a less optimistic narrative structure that closer resembles that of the classical dystopia, Bradley is thus hopeful that *Clade* may yet enlighten readers and clarify the consequences of continued inaction:

> For although many of the worst effects of climate change and overpopulation are now unavoidable that doesn't mean we are powerless, or that there is no longer anything to be done. There is a difference between saving some of the coral reefs and saving none of them, a difference between sea levels rising 50 metres and them only rising a metre, a difference between a world in which we confront the forces that are driving the destruction of our world and a world in which they continue unchecked. (Bradley, "Writing on the Precipice" par. 35)

Bradley thus remains hopeful of human agency in producing change, albeit such hope is only tentatively available to the characters of his novel.

What arguably keeps Bradley's novel from becoming defeatist in its dystopian representation, is, as Angelo Monaco also suggests in his reading, its utilization of comic narrative traits, such as its open ending, which refuses predetermined conclusions, even if prospects are bleak. Despite the general pessimism of the novel, enabled in part by its narrative structure that allows disaster after disaster to be depicted in short succession and without respite, Bradley manages to leave readers with at least a glimmer of hope in Izzie's closing reflection on her life and her future, "a future that may be wonderful or terrible or a thousand things in between. And she realises that whatever else happens, this is not an end but a beginning. It is always a beginning" (Bradley, *Clade* 297). In the midst of disaster, Bradley then upholds the possibility of meaningful human existence, in an ending that directly mirrors the novel's beginning, as Izzie's closing chapter and Adam's opening chapter are both set during a solstice celebration, reminding readers that "Humans have observed the solstice for tens of thousands of years" (4), and that human life endures, even if transformed, in accordance with Meeker's claim that "to evolution and to comedy, nothing is sacred but life itself" (34).

In this enduring focus on survival, Bradley's novel is clearly also exemplary of an adaptation narrative, as Jeffrey Barber similarly contends, in which humanity must adjust itself rather than its environment and discover new means of co-existing with the world, as is evident

from the increasing reliance on virtual technologies that infuse the changing world with beauty and memories:

> I've been thinking about what it must have been like out here before the change began, what the forest was like when there were still birds, so I called up a simulation in my overlays and walked out among the trees to listen. 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, *Clade* 206)

This acceptance of the changed world is moreover mirrored by the final reconciliation between the characters, as Noah makes peace with Summer before she passes away (283), Ellie and Adam learn to communicate as they both age (153), Izzie appears to have achieved a harmonious relationship with her parents (295), and as the unlikely family enclave all gather to celebrate Noah's discovery (283). Albeit far from revolutionary, the novel thus closes on a positive note, as they after their traumatic experiences have survived and established a community, much like the comic hero, whose "victories are all small, but he lives in a world where only small victories are possible" (Meeker 24).

While Bradley's novel lacks the utopian horizon of *The Parable of the Sower* and *New York 2140*, *Clade*'s dystopian visions are then framed by rhetorical traits typical to the mode of comedy, which nonetheless emphasize human endurance amidst environmental crisis and upholds an open-ended outlook, because, in the words of Adam, "what else is there to do, except hang on, and hope?" (23).

Coming to Terms with the Anthropocene

As evidenced by the readings above, *Clade* is the novel that most carefully considers the relation between domestic and environmental crisis out of the three ecodystopias surveyed in this thesis. In *Clade's* focus on domestic experience, it closely mirrors Astrid Bracke's outline of the climate fiction novel, as it uses a fragmented and achronological narrative structure to encompass the uncertainty and vulnerability of life in a developing risk society, and both formally and thematically foregrounds the vast spatio-temporal scale of climate change. It moreover employs dystopian extrapolation to illustrate the estranging social and environmental consequences of

global warming, while framing these consequences in a comic rhetorical mode that centralizes adaptation and reconciliation.

Albeit employing a similar dystopian narrative framework to Butler and Robinson's novels, *Clade* arguably challenges the cautionary function of the dystopian literary tradition the most, in its emphasis on adapting to the dystopian context rather than resisting it. Instead, it gives the reader access to everyday life in a time of crisis, "allowing the reader to empathise and experience with fictional people who are adjusting to an Anthropocene world" (Bracke, "The Novel" 99). In doing so, it provides a space in which to think through what it will feel like to be human in a changed environment, an experience that Rowland Hughes and Pat Wheeler argue cannot be obtained from climate change data alone, "even if the long-term implications of that data are terrifying enough in themselves" (2). Science and narrative are accordingly fused in Bradley's hybrid narrative structure, which offers a snippet of the human experiences that go into evolutionary models or projections of climate change. By offering this experience, novels like *Clade* may then help readers to "think about the problem more effectively" (Henderson par. 6), as is Bradley's hope, or simply to aid us in accepting the uncertainty and unknowability of what lies ahead, while foregrounding human capability of endurance, community, and survival, as we recognize the vast scale of the processes that we are part of.

Dystopian Climate Fiction in the Anthropocene: Towards a Conclusion

Having now considered three examples of dystopian climate fiction and their representations of environmental crisis, it is possible to return to the opening question of this thesis, which asked how these fictions are adapting their formal expression and thematic content to address the new anxieties of the Anthropocene, and moreover which continued social function they may be able to serve, as the reader's environmental context has become increasingly uncertain since the 20th century heyday of dystopian cautionary tales. As evidenced from the individual analyses above, contemporary ecodystopias provide diverse answers to these questions, utilizing different formal structures to suggest varying social functions, but upon holding the three examples together, it may nonetheless be possible to outline some of the developments in both form and function that ecodystopias are embracing to encompass the challenges of the Anthropocene. It will moreover be possible to assess the usefulness of this thesis' broad theoretical approach, which, in accordance with our genre- and rhetoric-oriented

econarratological methodology, introduced a dual genre terminology as a means of understanding the hybridity of Anthropocene literature, as well as a rhetorical emphasis on comic modes of apocalypse as an aid to understanding the continued suitability of apocalyptic discourse in environmental representations.

Focusing first on the form and function of dystopian climate fiction in the Anthropocene, this thesis has suggested a range of objections to Brian Stableford's proposition that dystopian literature is losing its critical usefulness in its attempt to take on the challenge of climate change (287). Upon approaching our selected novels through a combined genre framework of climate fiction and critical dystopia, we uncovered a number of continued functions served by dystopian narrations of climate crisis. In Octavia E. Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* and Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140*, and to a lesser degree in James Bradley's *Clade,* we saw how the critical dystopia upholds belief in human agency amidst crisis, charting routes of intervention and hopeful transformation, even if global warming is already inescapable. By utilizing cognitive estrangement, multi-oppositional and open-ended resistance narratives, and a variety of metafictional strategies, critical dystopias imagine means of navigating and addressing contemporary problems. This ability of dystopian novels to visualize and criticize the potentially harmful outcomes of contemporary practices was identified as a potentially useful means of 'staying with the trouble', and thus of encouraging continued environmental action, as the inevitability of climate change, in the words of Bradley, "doesn't mean we are powerless, or that there is no longer anything to be done" ("Writing on the Precipice" par. 35). Robinson's playful repurposing of the past moreover suggested that many of the tools we require to begin intervening in our ecological future are already available to us, the critical dystopia itself being an established form that may continue to aid us in our approach to contemporary challenges.

Upon examining all three novels in the additional genre framework of climate fiction, further capacities of the ecodystopian narrative framework were uncovered, as both *Clade, The Parable of the Sower,* and to a lesser extent *New York 2140* were revealed to provide accounts of people living and dwelling in climate crisis. Such accounts may aid readers in processing their own uncertain environmental context, as dystopias in the Anthropocene increasingly become sites of comparison and association to the developing risk society of the real world. Slow worldmaking processes contributed to extend the reader's world to the textual worlds of the novels, and the genre framework of climate fiction moreover revealed the usefulness of all three

novels in making sense of the transformed scales of time and space in the Anthropocene, a comprehension that in *The Parable of the Sower* was mostly achieved through its content, but in the later novels of *New York 2140* and *Clade* was also achieved through an experimentation with form and narrative conventions.

Throughout the thesis, we furthermore discovered evidence to challenge Booker's concern that dystopian narratives may become "mere spectacles of misery that, if anything, simply encourage audiences to feel better about the present" (*Critical Insights* 11). This concern was contested by the distinct hopefulness of the critical dystopian narrative form, and in particular by the three novels' reliance on comic rhetorical modes in their framing of apocalyptic environmental crisis. The comic mode's emphasis on adaptation, survival, reconciliation, and human agency was discernible in all three narrations of ecological crisis, suggesting that the dystopian narrative form does not have to succumb to the doom of the tragedy, in spite of the foreboding prospect of climate change.

Based on these findings, we therefore also argue that dystopian climate novels continue to offer useful contributions to "our collective accounting of the Anthropocene" (Trexler 237), whether as cautionary tales, guides for intervention, or simply as spaces in which we may be able to process the experience of ongoing domestic life in the midst of climate crisis. That being said, the narrative innovation of both Robinson and Bradley's novels suggests that achieving these functions may require increasingly hybrid and inventive forms of narration, as the complexity of the Anthropocene also challenges established structures and conventions.

Because of this increasing complexity and hybridity, we moreover argue that our intersecting theoretical approach between the two genre scholarships of climate fiction and critical dystopia has been useful in encompassing the various roles that ecodystopias may play, and the complex ways in which the dystopian literary tradition is now merging with genres of ecofiction and literary fiction as writers attempt to come to terms with the Anthropocene present. Our work to relate the genre scholarships of climate fiction and critical dystopia also revealed potential courses for further research, however, as we discovered that scholarship in both econarratology and ecocriticism has thus far paid little regard to the rich critical tradition of utopian studies, despite this scholarship's long occupation with the type of narrative frameworks that now characterize representations of climate change.

This lack of attention appears to stem from a continued disregard for "genre fiction", such as the broader category of science fiction that these novels often fall within, as evidenced by claims such as Adam Trexler's that "there was entirely too much science fiction, of course" (6) that needed to be sifted out in his outline of a climate fiction canon (6), Astrid Bracke's careful dissociation with the less "literary" dystopian, apocalyptic, and science fiction genres (170), and Frederick Buell's similar need to distinguish *The Parable of the Sower* for being "unusual in its literary quality" in comparison to the rest of Butler's fiction that would necessarily have belonged with the "unserious" popular fiction discussed in a previous chapter (287). Buell thus includes Butler's novel *in spite* of Butler's history as being a writer of science fiction, on behalf of the argument that it "resists rather than exhibits many of the features of its genre. Indeed, it reads more like a work of realistic, even naturalistic, fiction than like an extrapolative fantasy" (287). Within ecocriticism, a reluctance to engage with 'extrapolative fantasies' may thus have prevented a serious consideration of utopian genre scholarship, which the approach of this thesis seeks to contest, as we join an emerging group of scholars in arguing that "genre fiction is arguably a possible 'resource' for thinking through 'complex issues like climate change" (Mackenthun 4), and that climate fictions, as Adeline Johns-Putra also suggests, might more usefully be approached simply as "fiction concerned with anthropogenic climate change" (267), to more seamlessly encompass the often dystopian, apocalyptic, or science-fictional representations that mesh with what some would consider "highbrow or literary climate change fiction" (268). In accordance with such arguments, this thesis has foregrounded not only the usefulness of more readily including 'genre fiction' in considerations of literary representations of environmental crisis, but also the usefulness of existing scholarship on such genre fiction, as these terminologies and critical traditions may broaden our understanding of how literature engages with the challenges of the Anthropocene, at a time when real life increasingly resembles the science fiction novel or dystopia.

While genre scholarship may aid us in decoding the social functions and formal structures of contemporary dystopian ecofiction, we also argue for the usefulness of considering rhetorical conventions, however, as modes such as tragedy and comedy reveal different ways of imagining and relating to our environment that historically have influenced our ecological behavior, as "cultural images describing what we might be have helped us become what we are" (Meeker 7). Markku Lehtimäki, whose rhetorical approach to econarratology we founded our

analyses on, also problematizes contemporary rhetorical analysis, however, questioning whether "In the Anthropocene, heroic, tragic, or comical stories of individual survival… may simply not suffice" (94). In this thesis, we have encountered traces of this challenge, as Morton's terminology on hyperobjects for instance refuses the anthropocentrism and assumed overview of such prescriptive structures ("Poisoned Ground" 44), and as Buell's "inside without an outside" similarly presumes a point of perception from which distinguishing between inevitable and preventable disaster no longer makes sense ("Global Warming" 266).

While these objections may prove inescapable as the consequences of anthropogenic climate change become more noticeable, the texts analyzed in this thesis have nonetheless been demonstrated to draw on conventional rhetorical modes, and to represent climate change through patterned stories of human survival. Astrid Bracke upholds the continued usefulness such human-centered narratives, arguing that "Human minds … are best at grasping 'person-level experiences'" ("The Novel" 99), and that while alternative narrative forms "might more effectively depict large temporal and spatial scales, they much less allow readers and viewers to empathise, almost co-experience crisis with the characters of novels" (98-99). While the spatio-temporal scales of climate change may exceed the capabilities of tragedy and comedy, climate change is, to the human reader, nonetheless best accessed through human experience, making a continued attention to the rhetorical modes used to frame this experience appropriate. In this thesis, the comic mode has in particular been highlighted for its suitability to environmental representation and has been argued to constitute an especially useful framework for apocalyptic and dystopian fiction, as a means of maintaining hope and agency amidst ecological transformation.

Although this thesis has only considered three examples out of a continuously expanding category of fiction, it has revealed multiple strategies employed in dystopian fiction to intervene in the Anthropocene, but also to move beyond a solely cautionary role. In *The Parable of the Sower*, the 1990s cautionary tale was argued to take on a new function as a space for processing contemporary challenges, in *New York 2140,* a focus on agency and creative repurposing of the past shifted the emphasis from warning to hope, and in *Clade*, unfolding environmental disaster was explored as a changed context for enduring domestic life and human relation to the world. Further scholarship could advantageously explore additional functions and subcategories of such fictions, a task that would moreover be well suited to the methodological approach of

econarratology, which offers more methodological directions than this thesis has been able to encompass. In econarratology's work to explore the relationship between narratives and physical environments, recent econarratological scholarship has considered how narrative may better represent the non-human (James and Morel 6), how narrative reflects the ethical dimensions of environmental representation (8), and how the cognitive processes by which readers engage with narratives are formally established (11), all approaches that would contribute to a widened understanding of ecodystopias' formal adaptation to representing contemporary environmental concerns.

Finally, this thesis has also contributed to the larger task of mapping the capacity of narrative, and in particular the form of the novel, in the Anthropocene. Our work has suggested that while climate change challenges us to comprehend increasing complexity, hybridity, and a widened spatio-temporal scale, the novel remains an effective form in which to creatively portray these conditions, whether through collective focalization, genre blurring narrative structures, or temporally vast storylines. The dystopian climate novel moreover offers an insight into future human experience that, according to Gregers Andersen, at the moment is absent from other forms of climate change discourse:

> By depicting humans in worlds resembling those forecast by the IPCC, climate fiction provides speculative insights into how it might be to feel and understand in such worlds. And these are basically insights we as contemporary humans cannot obtain anywhere else. (1)

Whether this ability to process human experience in the Anthropocene will eventually eclipse the dystopian climate novel's origin as cautionary tale remains to be ascertained, but for now, they may help us to stay with the trouble, and to remind us that all is not yet lost.

Conclusion

This thesis examined *The Parable of the Sower* by Octavia E. Butler, *New York 2140* by Kim Stanley Robinson, and *Clade* by James Bradley, with the aim of assessing their representations of environmental crisis and determining the developing narrative form and social function of climate dystopias in the Anthropocene.

Based on an econarratological methodological approach, the thesis focused on the three novels' use of genre and rhetorical mode in their environmental representations, employing a hybrid genre terminology between critical dystopia and climate fiction in assessing the shifting role of contemporary ecodystopias. Through this broad approach, we revealed multiple formal strategies employed by the three novels to serve both familiar and emerging social functions.

Our analyses suggested that contemporary dystopian climate fiction upholds the cautionary and critical function of the dystopian literary tradition, while also embracing new formal structures and social functions that better address the shifting conditions of the Anthropocene. By utilizing cognitive estrangement, metafictional reflection, and multi-oppositional open-ended resistance narratives, we found that contemporary ecodystopias draw on genre traits typical to the critical dystopia and thereby aid readers in imagining continued courses of intervention and environmental action at times of crisis and transformation. Mirroring the genre traits of climate fiction, contemporary climate dystopias were additionally found to utilize hybrid and innovative narrative structures to encompass the vast spatio-temporal scales of climate change. They were moreover found to formally reflect the uncertainty of contemporary risk society by emphasizing slow worldmaking processes that blur the boundaries between past, present, and future. Their depictions of domestic experience at times of crisis were finally also found to provide occasions for comparison and identification that make them suitable as spaces for processing our changing climate reality and imagining new ways of co-existing with our environments. In the Anthropocene, dystopian climate fiction may then both provide cautionary projections that encourage continued activism, as well as imaginative spaces for processing human experience in altered ecological contexts.

In assessing the form and function of *The Parable of the Sower*, *New York 2140* and *Clade,* we furthermore identified the rhetorical mode of comedy as a highly useful strategy for communicating environmental crisis, as the comic mode's emphasis on agency, reconciliation, and adaptation provides an ecologically responsible framework for understanding humanity's role in relation to the rest of nature. While writers continue to produce narratives that examine human experiences of climate change, assessing the rhetorical modes used to represent these experiences will thus remain a productive avenue for econarratological scholarship.

Finally, we also considered the usefulness of approaching contemporary climate dystopias through a hybrid genre terminology between climate fiction and critical dystopia. We

found this broad approach to provide valuable insights into the ways in which dystopian fiction now engages with ecofiction and literary fiction in its attempt to represent and come to terms with life in the Anthropocene. Our approach revealed that the scholarly tradition of utopian studies has thus far been marginalized in econarratological and ecocritical examinations of climate dystopias, which this thesis sought to address, by demonstrating the usefulness of its terminology, and the continued relevance of the fictions it engages with.

As anthropogenic climate change continues to challenge the imaginative processes by which we relate to the world, this thesis has thus demonstrated the capability of climate dystopias to navigate these challenges, and to remind us that in the increasing uncertainty of the Anthropocene, meaningful intervention may yet be possible.

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