



MONASH University

Unsettling the Anthropocene: Cosmological Readings of Contemporary Australian Literature

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Abstract

Our geological epoch is currently being renamed—we are no longer living in the Holocene, but in the Anthropocene, the so-called “Age of Humans.” The Anthropocene expresses the dramatic changes happening to our planet as a result of human influences, and conveys a time in which the binaries of ‘human vs. nature’ can no longer be upheld. What is remarkable about the Anthropocene is that although it derives from the sciences, it has triggered a cultural debate in the humanities. In recent years, the term has exploded in academia: there are few concepts that have spread so widely and so quickly across multiple disciplines, perhaps because of a shift in consciousness that the world has reached a turning point.

My thesis attempts two things: firstly, it tests how useful the Anthropocene concept is for considering literature, by reading it as an umbrella term for different socio-eco-political issues in the specific context of Australia (in terms of broad themes including colonisation, farming, mining, bioethics, technology, and environmental justice) and by applying this to readings of selected contemporary Australian literary texts. Secondly, it challenges the Anthropocene’s decline-narrative (as in ‘humans have destroyed nature’) by proposing an alternative concept of ‘cosmological readings’ that foregrounds radical interconnectedness, wholeness, and reciprocity between humans and the environment. From a wider perspective, my project seeks to contribute to the new field of the Environmental Humanities in Australia and beyond by exploring the crucial role of literature in times of unprecedented ecological crisis.

Declaration

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Bartha', enclosed within a light gray rectangular border.

Print Name: Kathrin Bartha

Date: 17. September 2020

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For my parents, Edith and Gabor

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION: THE ANTHROPOCENE—WHAT’S IN A NAME?	11
1.1 Why study Australian Literature in the Anthropocene?	19
1.2 Structure of Thesis	25
2. THEORISING COSMOS AND COSMOLOGY	31
2.1 From Chaos to Cosmos to Anthropocene?	31
Literary Cosmology: A Literature Review	47
2.2 Searching for Anthropocene Stories	53
Representing the Anthropocene: A Literature Review	56
Anthropocene Fiction and Australian Literature	61
Conclusion.....	64
3. COLONISATION/EXPLOITATION: REIMAGINING AGRICULTURE AND EXTRACTION	66
3.1 Introduction: Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Black Anthropocene	66
Farming and Mining in Australia—a unique case?	74
3.2 Recuperating the Body/Land Nexus in Carrie Tiffany’s <i>Everyman’s Rules</i>	81
Colonisation, Slow Violence, Good Intentions	86
Cosmological Readings of the (Fe)male Body/Land	89
Conclusion.....	95
3.3 Regenerating Language, Culture, Environment in Tara June Winch’s <i>The Yield</i>	96
Dismantling Destructive Land-Use	100
Regenerating Wiradjuri Cosmology	108
Conclusion.....	114
3.4 Chapter Conclusion	115
4. TECHNOLOGY/BIOETHICS: REVISING ‘HUMAN MASTERY’ NARRATIVES	117
4.1 Introduction: Defying the Technocratisation of the Anthropocene.....	117
Science and Speculative Fiction – the Prime Genre of the Anthropocene?	123
4.2 Imagining an Intensified Anthropocene in Briohny Doyle’s <i>The Island Will Sink</i>	129

New Technologies of ‘Feeling’ the Environment.....	132
Testing the Limits of the ‘Natural Disaster’ Narrative	139
Conclusion.....	144
4.3 Reconsidering Evolution in Ellen van Neerven’s “Water”	145
Beyond Species Competition: Queer Ecology, Symbiosis, Bioethics.....	150
‘Bad Environmentalism:’ From Mother to Lover Nature	159
Conclusion.....	165
4.4 Chapter Conclusion	166
5. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE/CUSTODIANSHIP: TOWARDS A SOVEREIGN COSMOPOLITICS	169
5.1 Introduction: Contextualising Environmental Justice and Custodianship	169
Sovereign Cosmopolitics and the Australian ‘Camp Logic’	173
5.2 Remembering the Opposite of Oppression in Behrouz Boochani’s <i>No Friend</i>	179
Kyriarchy vs. Cosmos	183
Cosmopolitical Ethics of Care	193
Conclusion.....	197
5.3 Cosmological Understandings of Social Justice in Melissa Lucashenko’s <i>Too Much Lip</i> ..	198
Multispecies and Social Justice.....	203
Indigenous Sovereign Cosmopolitics	209
Conclusion.....	214
5.4 Chapter Conclusion	215
6. CONCLUSION.....	217
WORKS CITED.....	224

Preface

This thesis was written within the Joint PhD program between Monash University (Melbourne, Australia) and Goethe University (Frankfurt, Germany). The nature of the program has required me to cross the world a number of times, so that this work was conceived in at least 10 different offices and libraries.

During the past years of writing, I experienced immediate environmental changes and impacts on my health. This included not only extreme heatwaves on both continents, but, most notably, Australia's Black Summer of 2019/2020 and the subsequent pandemic. During the catastrophic bush fires, Melbourne was engulfed in toxic smoke for weeks that neither our rental home nor the university office could effectively shelter us from. And as the corona pandemic unfolds, this thesis is submitted under 'Stage 4' lockdown restrictions.

Over the course of this project, I observed that media coverage about climate change and the Anthropocene increased in both countries, Australia and Germany. I experienced the change of the topic from an 'environmental concern' to one of our generation's most feared developments. But I also witnessed or participated in the emergence of global social movements, such as Fossil Free Universities, Fridays for Future, and Bla(c)k Lives Matter. These movements have given me connection, perspective, and a deeper understanding of the intricate entanglements of social and environmental justice.

It has been challenging to write this thesis in different institutions placed on opposite sides of the planet, to maintain relationships, and a healthy work/life balance amidst so much upheaval. But, above all, I feel privileged to have experienced working from within two different university systems with different cultural perspectives, and to have met many kind and supportive people. Frequently moving, shifting, and travelling around, the past years have been unsettling. Perhaps, then, this experience speaks not only to the topic of this thesis, but also to the current times. I am grateful for having had the privilege to learn and create meaning out of these experiences.

These are the times we must think; these are the times of urgencies that need stories. [...] Think we must; we must think. That means, simply, we must change the story; the story must change.

Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*

Literature is a ritual performance that repeatedly remakes the world and moves us, rhetorically and contingently, from chaos to cosmos.

Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*

Art reminds us that we belong here.

Toni Morrison, *Mouth Full of Blood*

1. Introduction: The Anthropocene—What's in a Name?

This thesis engages with the concept of and debates about the Anthropocene, and applies these to a reading of six contemporary Australian literary texts. Rather than embracing the term and its inherent decline-narrative, however, I propose that the recently revived ancient Greek concepts of *cosmos* ('the order of the world') and *cosmology* ('discourse about the world-order') provide a more productive framework for reading literary texts, as they evoke human reciprocity with the environment, rather than dualistic constructions of 'human' mastery over 'nature.' Moreover, I coin the term 'literary cosmology' to point to the ways in which 'cosmos' and 'narrative' are interlinked; to foreground the importance of literature and narrative for coming to terms with the socio-eco-political predicaments described by the Anthropocene; and to indicate the value of literary studies for contemplating tropes and figurations of this new era. Each chapter is underpinned by one of the broader socio-environmental issues that the Anthropocene debate addresses: current problems with farming and mining as linked to the history of colonisation and exploitation; the problematic narrative of human mastery of nature as reflected in contemporary questions of technological advancement; and the need for Indigenous and refugee sovereignty as linked to broader concerns of environmental justice and custodianship. Yet, by means of cosmological readings, each chapter goes beyond socio-environmental crises and explores how the selected creative texts relate to human interdependency with the environment and to issues of justice.

This Introduction gives an overview of the terms Anthropocene, *cosmos*, and my definition of literary cosmology. I will then address the question of why Australian literature is an interesting test case for reading environmental issues of concern. Finally, I outline this thesis' structure and introduce the primary texts.

The term Anthropocene stands for the 'Age of Humans,' expressing the dramatic changes currently happening to planet Earth as a result of human influences. It was first

introduced in the 1970s by the Nobel Prize-winning geologist Paul Crutzen and atmospheric chemist Eugene Stoermer, who proposed the renaming of the era as necessary to indicate the “astounding” human-made changes of the Earth, especially over the past 200 years, listing examples such as coal and gas burning, transformation of the land-surface, nitrogen levels in the Earth ecosystems, smog, extinction rates, toxic gases, losses of coastal wetlands, and human predation (17-18). Although we are still a few years away from a formal renaming, leaders of the Anthropocene Working Group (AWG)¹ have already moved “beyond asking whether such a transition has occurred to deciding when” (Adamson, et al. 2). What is remarkable about the Anthropocene is that, although it derived from the sciences, it has triggered a wide-ranging debate in the humanities and is increasingly visible in broader culture (through exhibitions, documentary films, journalism, publications, and so on).

What is in a name? The act of naming brings into being, shapes perceptions, triggers debates. The wide-spread usage of the term Anthropocene arguably represents a shift in awareness: a sense that the world has reached a turning point in recent times and that atmospheric warming is no longer a theory but a widely accepted phenomenon that has been measured, verified, and that is increasingly palpable—for example, through increasingly warmer weather, and footage of rapidly melting ice-caps in the Arctic. The Anthropocene is further marked by the understanding that the more-than-human world, or ‘nature,’² has been increasingly impacted by human actions. As historian Dipesh Chakrabarty puts it in his seminal essay, “The Climate of History: Four Theses” (2009), which was among the first to acknowledge that the Anthropocene collapses “the age-old humanist distinction between natural history and human history” (201): “Now it is being claimed that humans are a force of nature in the geological sense.

¹ A panel of 34 scientists convened by professor of palaeobiology, Jan Zalasiewicz. The role of this group is advisory; it plans to submit a formal proposal by 2021 to the International Commission on Stratigraphy, which oversees the official geologic time chart (Meera).

² This thesis uses the term ‘nature’ despite it being problematic. As much of Environmental Humanities scholarship reveals, the nature/culture divide is part of the problem. Nevertheless, I continue to use the term ‘nature’ carefully, always aiming to contextualise and precisely designate this loose term. As Deborah Bird Rose and Libby Robin put it, “in its problematic, provocative, and violent history, the term continues to challenge us, and for that reason, especially, I continue to use it” (“The Ecological”).

A fundamental assumption of Western (and now universal) political thought has come undone in this crisis” (207). The Anthropocene thus marks a time in which the binaries of ‘human’ and ‘nature’ can no longer be upheld and in which a warming climate and the rapid extinction of species and habitats necessitate a profound shift in ethical visions and practices. This crisis therefore calls for a rethinking of the relationship between binaries, such as nature/culture, human/animal, mind/matter, or sciences/humanities.

Although the Anthropocene has gained steady traction since the 1990s, it has expanded exponentially in recent years—within academia, there are few concepts that have spread so widely and so quickly across multiple disciplines. Crucially, however, the term has also proven problematic among humanities scholars who have taken issue with the universalising category, ‘human,’ as it obscures power differences of race, gender, class, ability, age, or location, and focuses on humanity to the exclusion of other species that constitute the very ecosystems needed for human survival. *Anthropos* (Greek for ‘human’) thus problematically conveys a sense of universal guilt for environmental degradation, as if it was everyone’s (and by extension nobody’s) fault, inevitable, and somehow part of human nature to devastate environments. To express the multi-faceted critiques of the Anthropocene that have arisen in roughly the past decade, the term is often modified in creative ways, displaying conceptual interventions into this arguably unhelpful universalising concept, *anthropos*. Interventions into the origin story of the Anthropocene from postcolonial, Black, feminist, queer, or social-science scholars are captured in neologisms such as the Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Black Anthropocene, and White-Supremacy Scene (which highlight the social systems of racial capitalism as central);³ the Chthulucene (which draws on the Greek root *chthonic* meaning ‘in, under, beneath the earth,’ therefore shifting attention away from ‘the human’ to the web of life that enables human existence);⁴ or the ‘Manthropocene’ (a feminist critique pointing to the commonly-found construction of humanity as male).⁵

³ The terms ‘Capitalocene’ and Plantationocene were both coined collectively (Moore, “Anthropocene” 5; Haraway, *Staying* 206.). See Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of these terms.

⁴ The term ‘Chthulucene’ was coined by Donna Haraway to critique the Anthropocene’s fixation on *anthropos* by suggesting that humans have never been self-contained, but have always lived in multi-species communities (*Staying* 101). See Chapter 2 for further explication of the term.

⁵ The term ‘Manthropocene’ was coined by Kate Raworth to point to the fact that the Anthropocene Working Group only had one female member. Since then, the working group has expanded, and at the time of the publication of her *Guardian* article, out of 36 members, 5 were women (Raworth). I discuss the related term ‘Anthropocene Feminism’ in Chapter 3.

Despite the pertinence of these neologisms, literary scholars Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Taylor have pointed out that such critiques of the *anthropos* generally overlook the fact that Anthropocene scientists refer to the single species as an agent in order to specify, rather than to universalise, the current crisis (9). They thus argue that critical humanities perspectives are broadly inattentive to the bio-geophysical systems in which humans intervene as distinct agents (9). In order to capture the different uses and critiques of the debate, humanities scholars have also proposed the use of the *anthropocene* with a small *a*, which acknowledges the many informal versions of the term and expresses the problematic attempt at defining one 'right' version and meaning of history (Ruddiman et al.).

As can be seen in this debate, the term Anthropocene has brought the sciences and the humanities into dialogue, because researchers in both modes of knowledge are now proposing definitions of the concept. For scientists, this development might imply becoming conscious that decisions—such as the naming of the Anthropocene—are also deeply political (Finney and Edwards 4). For humanities scholars, the Anthropocene might signify an increasing engagement with the sciences generally, as well as a growing awareness that environmental issues are deeply cultural concerns that have broadly been neglected in various humanist disciplines. As I further elaborate in the following chapters, there are more than twenty proposed start dates for the Anthropocene: in the sciences, these dates generally refer to physical signs in the Earth strata, commonly known as 'golden spikes,' among which the most popular candidates are the eighteenth century's Industrial Revolution (as proposed in the original report by Crutzen and Stoermer) and the 1950s Great Acceleration with the explosion of radioactive material (Lorimer 120). Yet, as expressed in the terms Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Black Anthropocene and White-Supremacy Scene, many humanities scholars have foregrounded issues of power and domination, with the 'long sixteenth century'⁶ and Early Modernity's onset of colonisation, capitalism, racism, and the transportation of plants and animals. Jaime Lorimer poignantly comments on the complex search for

⁶ The 'long sixteenth century' refers to a historic periodisation ranging broadly from 1450-1640 and is linked to the beginnings of trans-oceanic colonisation. The term is generally associated with Immanuel Wallerstein's idea of the emergence of a predominant capitalism as well as world-systems-theory. See: Immanuel Wallerstein. *The Modern World-System, Vol. I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.

names, dates, and definitions of this supposed new epoch: “Regardless of what the International Commission on Stratigraphy decides, the genie is out of the bottle” (123). In other words, while definitions of the Anthropocene might never be finally agreed on, the term has come to stand for an important transitional moment, a crisis, that demands recognition and repair across the planet.

Despite these creative interventions and necessary neologisms, for the purposes of this thesis I use the term Anthropocene with a capital ‘A,’ as I understand it to already encompass multivalent critiques. In its use of this term, my thesis proposes that the Anthropocene signifies a cultural shift in perception and physical environment that has occurred throughout the last decades. I use the term Anthropocene in a two-fold way: on the one hand, as a name for a contemporary crisis; on the other, as an umbrella term for multiple current socio-eco-political concerns that is able to capture a more complex understanding of events than the more commonly used ‘climate change’ suggests.

As explored in this thesis, the problems of the Anthropocene are not only technological and scientific—such as the transition to renewable energies or innovations in recycling—but they have socio-eco-political and, thus, cultural roots. This becomes evident when considering that, although scientific consensus has existed for decades about the need to take bold action, most societies have failed to implement the significant changes that will enable the world to stay under the 1.5 degrees Celsius warming mark set at the Paris Agreement (2016). Australia, for instance, is projected to miss its Paris Agreement target. The Climate Council reports that Australia’s target is to reduce emissions by 26-28% below 2005 levels, which is one of the weakest goals amongst developed countries, despite Australia having the highest per capita emissions, and despite it being the third largest exporter of fossil fuels in the world (“Morrison’s Colossal”). The term Anthropocene itself therefore signifies an unprecedented crisis which contains multiple socio-environmental problems and calls for strategies and responses across disciplines, institutions, and civil society.

This brief outline of what Rob Nixon has called the ‘omnivorous idea’ of the Anthropocene (“The Anthropocene”), which will be expanded upon throughout the thesis, suggests how complex and contested, but also how fruitful the Anthropocene concept can be. In this way, the multiple renamings show that the Anthropocene is a useful term because of—not despite—the lack of consensus: not because the official

scientific bodies, such as the AWG, are deciding on a definitive version of history, but because this crisis challenges humanists, scientists, artists, and civil society to work together and test the boundaries of traditional disciplines.

Crucially, the Anthropocene has not only produced a productive debate about the socio-cultural origins of this crisis, but the many scholarly responses around it—as represented in the new field of the Environmental Humanities—have also emphasised the need to offer ways out of this crisis.⁷ As the “Manifesto of the Humanities for the Environment” states: “[W]e need to move beyond rational choice and behavioural decision theories. Humanities disciplines [...] offer deep insights into human motivations, values, and choices. [...] [S]cientific understandings of the world may be of limited use for understanding the complexity and volatility of human values and motivations” (977; 981). As further outlined in Chapter 2, the Environmental Humanities foreground the unique role of the arts (including literature), history, psychology, political science, theology, literary studies, and so on, in generating positive change in the face of the unprecedented destruction of environments. In short, as a recent publication poignantly suggests, the task of the Environmental Humanities is to find ways to “live on a damaged planet” (*Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, 2017).

My thesis aims to build on the work of (environmental) humanities scholars that do not welcome the Anthropocene term so much as test its usefulness. As cultural theorist Donna Haraway has suggested, the term is to be used critically, carefully and, perhaps, rarely as it perpetuates unhelpful, inaccurate, and universal constructs of ‘humanity.’ As Haraway writes, the Anthropocene indicates a “boundary event,” a crisis, not an end result (*Staying* 160). Although the Anthropocene encapsulates a kaleidoscope of socio-eco-political crises that has now reached a planetary scale, this thesis is therefore careful not to perpetuate the Anthropocene’s environmental ‘decline-narratives,’ which Ursula Heise has defined as the tendency to think “that modern society has degraded a natural world that used to be beautiful, harmonious, and self-sustaining and that might disappear completely if modern humans do not change their way of life” (*Imagining* 7). In other words, rather than dwelling on the Anthropocene’s decline-narrative (as in ‘humans have destroyed nature’), my thesis

⁷ Chapter 2 outlines this emerging scholarly field in greater detail.

seeks to highlight the power of language, narrative, and the arts for bringing about positive change, and to point to the need for constructive narratives in the face of environmental degradation.

In this light, it is imperative to review the role of literary and cultural studies in the face of the unparalleled planetary changes. My thesis contributes to the Environmental Humanities by asking what literature and literary studies can add to discussions linked to the Anthropocene. Environmental historian Libby Robin has observed that the Anthropocene is not only a scientific hypothesis but also “a metaphor for a changing society” that requires a serious consideration of the “moral, political and ethical implications of the changes humans are making to the planet” (“A Future” 19). To point to these wider symbolic, metaphoric, and ethical implications is important for understanding how humans imagine the Anthropocene. My thesis analyses current literary works that engage with increasing socio-environmental instability and unpredictability in order to investigate the contribution of creative writers to these issues.

In Chapter 2, my theory chapter, I lay the grounds for linking the Anthropocene to the idea of cosmos—the ancient and pagan idea of the universe understood as a unified system of beauty and order, which arose out of chaos—which has recently been revived as the “oldest ecological vision” (Walls, “Cosmos” 47). Building on a handful of scholars who have re-contextualised this ancient idea for today’s predicaments, my thesis aims to make a contribution by expanding on the links between the Anthropocene and cosmos, and by inquiring how these terms relate to literary and cultural studies. As briefly outlined here and further elaborated on in Chapter 2, I use ‘cosmos’ as a lens to read aspects of the Anthropocene crisis, which has a two-fold purpose: firstly, it generates specific ideas that relate to themes of environmental aliveness and agency; interconnectedness and interdependency; origin, evolution, order and beauty; ethics and politics. Secondly, the notion of ‘cosmos’ helps investigate the function of literature and literary studies within the Environmental Humanities.

I propose the term “literary cosmology” to refer to the world-building capacity of literature and the important role of literature and literary studies (as part of the Environmental Humanities) for coming to terms with these global environmental changes. As explored throughout this thesis, and as theorised in Chapter 2, language,

narrative and cosmos are linked in important ways: I consider 'cosmology' an important term for literary studies because it indicates a world-order that humans understand through interactions with, and through forming narratives about, the more-than human world. Many of my selected creative texts show an awareness of human interdependency with the environment. Yet, rather than an 'environmental reading,' I argue that a 'cosmological reading' goes further: as the term cosmos evokes aliveness of the environment, it allows me to illuminate ideas relating to human reciprocity with 'nature;' to examine tropes and expressions of environmental agency; and to investigate visions and perspectives offered by these texts. In this way, my cosmological readings consider the importance of the cultural view of the environment, while also suggesting that the ecosystem precedes humans and arguably has an order that transcends the existence of any one species. In other words, my proposition of 'cosmo-readings' adds to 'eco-readings' by suggesting the importance of the cultural framework for the environment, while this cultural framework also forms part of a transcultural ecosystemic order. While I use the notion of cosmos and cosmology to generate readings of specific texts relating to the Anthropocene crisis, 'cosmological readings' could also potentially be applied to a broader range of texts.

The Anthropocene is a problem on multiple scales: personal, social, local, global, planetary. This thesis argues that one of literature's unique contributions is to create consciousness of different scales and to create sensitivity to multi-dimensional experience and various ways of knowing as expressed in diverse uses of language. In this context, it is noteworthy that 'aesthetics' in its original Greek meaning (*aisthetikos*) designates 'of the senses,' or 'becoming sensitive to.' I thus use the term 'literary cosmology' to mean two main things: firstly, a general *function of literature* and storytelling as assigning meaning to and shaping the material world; secondly, *a lens through which to read literature* in the context of the Anthropocene crisis, which generates questions such as the following in relation to the literary texts I have chosen to analyse: How does the text conceive of reciprocity with the environment? How does the author configure the origin, evolution, and ethics arising out of environmental changes? Does the writer recover a sense of order and beauty amidst the socio-environmental predicament? How is the text's 'cosmology' linked to transcultural and/or culturally specific understandings of a world order? Does the text imagine a

worldview that suggests the idea of cosmos? How does cosmos relate to language, narrative, and the figure of the writer?

Furthermore, this thesis seeks to contribute to the existing body of ecocritical and Environmental Humanities scholarship by arguing that the Anthropocene needs to be disentangled, examined in its symptoms, and situated in context, as we do not experience the global changes as a whole phenomenon, but we might experience specific effects, such as weather patterns indicating climate emergency, the dwindling of insects, increasing refugees, or the pollution of particular places. As outlined under the subheading “Structure,” each chapter aims to read signs of the ecological crisis and therefore starts with the broader picture of the socio-eco-political issue at hand, before investigating in what ways the texts can be said to respond to, or shape, the broader concerns of this crisis. Reading literature in the Anthropocene, I argue, widens the usually narrower focus of climate fiction, as it avoids the reduction of a kaleidoscope of issues to catastrophic weather patterns only and, therefore, allows for a broader conception of what counts as an ‘environmental text.’ In fact, many of the texts analysed in this thesis would not immediately suggest themselves as being about the environment.

Moreover, this thesis presents a case-study of a particular place—Australia—in relation to past, present, and future of Anthropocene concerns. As my theory chapter, Chapter 2, outlines in more detail, there is a growing corpus of environmental humanities scholarship about Australia, but there is currently no extensive study of the Anthropocene in relation to Australian fiction.

1.1 Why study Australian Literature in the Anthropocene?

This thesis provides a case study of Australian fiction. As the Anthropocene is a global phenomenon, it seems equally important to ground analyses in specific cultural contexts—otherwise the concept remains abstract and out of reach. As I will outline here and explore throughout the thesis, it is worthwhile to choose Australian literature as a test case for the Anthropocene, as this settler-colonial nation incorporates a complex social fabric of diverse voices, some of which are associated with Western and

non-Western origins, and because Australia has a long tradition of Indigenous land-ethics⁸ and environmental thought. Moreover, with regard to the Anthropocene debate and its search for the origins of this ecological predicament, Australia is a particularly interesting case to examine: As one of the last places to be colonised by the British Empire, the continent has seen dramatic changes to cultures and land use, that happened at a comparatively vast scale and in accelerated time, so that an understanding of environmental change is perhaps more legibly than elsewhere entwined with the legacy of colonialism and racial capitalism. As Timothy Clarke has observed, Australian history is—more clearly than elsewhere—not just a history of human beings (116). Kate Rigby has noted that Australia is shaped by a “profound disjunction between the landscape memories, environmental attitudes, conventional life-ways of the predominantly European (and mainly British) colonists who arrived in the late 18th centuries and the Indigenous cultures and environmental conditions that they encountered” (*Dancing with Disaster* 22). This stark contrast, as Rigby points out, has contributed to a particular visibility of the entanglement of social and environmental factors, “in a particularly stark, and frequently calamitous, fashion” (22). Moreover, several scholars have pointed out that both the colonial experience and the geophysical properties of the land have led to the earliest critiques of human supremacy (constructed against nature), which generated some of the earliest articulations of the need for the Environmental Humanities (Plumwood; Matthews; Robin and Plumwood). While the perspective of Australia can be seen as providing a unique viewpoint to understand the Anthropocene, it is also, of course, exemplary for how settler-colonial countries relate to the environment.

Rigby’s observation of the profound disjunction between environmental attitudes and ecological conditions in Australia rings true in the context of the current task to reduce greenhouse gases. Referring to its environmental politics, Australia has

⁸ In this thesis, I use the term ‘land’ to also include water. Indigenous scholars and activists have long advocated for the importance of securing Aboriginal water rights and the need to recognise not just the harmful politics of *terra nullius* (the doctrine that Australia was ‘nobody’s land’ and that Indigenous peoples had no concept of land ownership before colonisation), but also of *aqua nullius*—a term that points to the fact that since colonisation, the waters of the Australian continent were outside of Indigenous governance structures and thus ‘free’ for colonial claims (Marshall).

been called a ‘rogue nation’ that is disproportionately contributing to climate change⁹ by having the highest CO₂ emissions per capita in the world and by being the largest global exporter of coal and liquid gas (McKibben). Since 1996, successive governments have subverted international agreements on climate change, and Australia was recently ranked worst of 57 countries on climate change policies (Davies). The current government under Prime Minister Scott Morrison further plans on expanding the coal-industry, with the currently planned construction of what would be the biggest coal mine in the world.¹⁰ With 58% percent of the daily newspapers owned by the climate change sceptical media group News Corp (owned by Rupert Murdoch) the current government only faces a weak political opposition and has recently taken what writer Richard Flanagan calls a “disturbing authoritarian turn:”

Mr. Morrison made his name as immigration minister, perfecting the cruelty of a policy that interns refugees in hellish Pacific-island camps, and seems indifferent to human suffering. Now his government has taken a disturbing authoritarian turn, cracking down on unions, civic organizations and journalists. Under legislation pending in Tasmania, and expected to be copied across Australia, environmental protesters now face up to 21 years in jail for demonstrating. (“Australia”)

This stark contrast to Indigenous traditions of ‘Care for Country’ arguably reflects the colonial legacy of prioritising resource extraction, economisation, or instrumentalisation of the land over sustainability and eco-systemic health.¹¹ As Rigby points out, the

⁹ This thesis uses ‘climate change’ interchangeably with terms such as ‘climate heating’ and ‘climate emergency,’ in order to reflect the critiques brought forward by various environmentalists and, recently, media groups such as *The Guardian*, that ‘climate change’ is a conservative term that potentially undermines the urgency of this crisis (“Why *The Guardian*”).

¹⁰ The Adani mine is a new coal-mine currently under construction and operated by the private company Adani Mining. Situated roughly 400 km inland from the Great Barrier Reef, the extraction zone was originally proposed to span an area as large as the United Kingdom, holding three times as much coal as has ever been mined in Australia. As I explain in Chapter 3, this mine has been fiercely resisted by the Indigenous traditional owners, the Wangang and Jagalingou Native Title holders, as well as by grass-roots movements in and beyond Australia.

¹¹ ‘Care for Country’ is a “unique tradition of philosophical and practical ecology that has been espoused and practised by Indigenous Australians and Islanders for centuries” (“Australia Pacific Observatory”). While Chapter 5 problematises a naïve association with Indigenous Australians and ‘greenness,’ the principle of ‘Care for Country’ remains an important self-description brought forward by many First Nations peoples. As some of the Indigenous writers employ the term ‘Country,’ I will explicate it where relevant. Generally, the Indigenous notion of Country can be understood to designate a complex whole, encompassing environment (land, water, sky, etc.) and social relations (human and more-than-human) (“Australia Pacific Observatory”).

colonial disjunction also espouses a particularly strong nature/culture dualism, in which Australian 'nature' is something to be overcome and dominated by 'brave' settlers (*Dancing* 10). This colonial idea is, as Rigby notes, captured in the colonial figure of the "Aussie battler, struggling to make a life for himself in a land of promise but beset by droughts, fires, floods, poor soils, foot rot, and sundry plant and animal pests" (*Dancing* 10). Rigby describes this stereotype as a culturally specific type of what Simon Estok has called 'ecophobia,' which has effects on current climate policy, as politicians still display: "a specifically Australian variant of nature-culture dualism, one that is currently acting as a further barrier to the recognition of the link between weather events and climate change" (*Dancing* 10).

However, Australia also has a remarkable tradition of environmental activism. Not only did the nation witness the formation of the world's first green party, the United Tasmania Group, formed in 1972, but it was also home to the first articulations of the Environmental Humanities (with particularly strong articulations of ecofeminist thought), first called the "Ecological Humanities" by its founding scholars, among whom are Val Plumwood, Deborah Bird Rose, Freya Matthews, Libby Robin, Kate Rigby, and Tom Griffiths.¹² Today, Australia also evinces a strong activist tradition among the younger generation: the school strike for climate, for example, found an early echo in Australia, and youth organisations such as the AYCC (Australian Youth Climate Coalition) and SEED (the Indigenous Youth Climate Coalition) have been leading mobilisers for grass-roots campaigns, protests, and student education across the country.

To summarise, Australia espouses starkly contrasting understandings of the environment: on the one hand, colonial legacies of strong nature/culture dualisms with the persisting image of the matey Aussie battler; on the other, strong sovereign Indigenous traditions of 'Care for Country,' as well as avant-garde environmentalist academic and activist traditions (needless to say, these are not mutually exclusive).

Australia is also a unique case study for the Anthropocene kaleidoscope because of its geophysical properties. Australia's weather patterns cross a number of climate zones, and its nonannual cycles are associated with El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO)

¹² The first issue of the journal *Environmental Humanities* cites Plumwood, who identified the two central tasks for what she called the "ecological humanities:" to resituate the human within the environment and to resituate nonhumans within cultural and ethical domains (Rose et al. 1).

and the Indian Ocean Dipole. Moreover, it is prone to extreme patterns, such as droughts, fires, and flooding rain (Rigby, *Dancing* 7). As Australian climate scientist Will Steffen points out, although Australia is already characterised by unruly weather patterns, with the current climatic changes in air and sea, extreme weather is becoming more frequent and places Australia on the front line of climate change impacts (“Angry Summer”). This observation was confirmed during the catastrophic Black Summer or, as environmental historian Tom Griffiths called it, the Savage Summer of 2019/2020, in which the continent faced an unprecedented fire “inferno” that could not be controlled for months. Exacerbated by a severe drought and record heatwaves, the fires tore through regions that had never been prone to bushfires (such as rainforests) and raged for longer than ever before (“Savage Summer”). 33 people died, an estimated half a billion animals perished, over 3000 homes and 7000 outbuildings were destroyed, more than 10 million hectares burnt; and thick hazardous smoke enveloped towns and big cities for weeks (including Australia’s biggest cities, Sydney and Melbourne). As more than 20% of Australia’s forests burned, scientists consider the event to be “unprecedented globally” (Cox).

Moreover, the fact that Australia is both a name for a nation and a continent—however porous the boundaries may be—is relevant for this thesis, as it reflects both the considerations of the cultural imaginary as well as the physical properties. In her lyrical essay, “The Corpus of Continent,” Vilashini Cooppan considers the continent as a particularly striking unit for comparative and world literary studies: a continent is “both like and unlike nation, region, area, globe, planet, the continent [...] shapes a particular project and method of comparison” (8). Cooppan thus argues that the notion of ‘continent’ provides an important lens for studying literature because the continental imagination has also been foundational for geography, mapmaking, world literary studies, and the Australian imagination.¹³ As Cooppan points out, the fixation of the continent in Australian literature is captured in the trope of the map, which has been “repetitively, even compulsively, invoked in literature”—both in Australian and in world literature (7-8). Moreover, Cooppan makes the point that continents evoke deep-time

¹³ Cooppan references literary Australian literary examples such as Patrick White’s *Voss* (1957), or David Malouf’s *Remembering Babylon* (1993), as well as ancient and medieval publications such as Ptolemy’s *terra incognita* (2nd century AD).

and the more-than-human: “Continents are bigger, older, and deeper than human scales of time [...] there is a different kind of pathos to continents [...] the original Pangea to the subterranean explosions that splintered it, the slow drift, the ancient settlings, the land bridges across which humans and their cultures moved outward from their African cradle” (9). Fittingly for an inquiry into the Anthropocene, then, Cooppan reminds us that Australia is a designation for both an imagined and an existing continent, which is able to provide the perspective of the *longue durée*, the “nonanthropocentric, non-national, pre-imperial history of place” (11).

However, it is equally important to mention that, although Australia designates the physical boundary of a continent, these boundaries are not ‘natural’ or self-evident but often contingent and unclear. Important for this thesis’ investment in the idea of cosmos is this reciprocity of the local—the Australian continent—and the global; of culturally specific narratives and transcultural environmental states. In this way, I argue that cosmological readings can very much accommodate the study of a national literature. In the context of the Anthropocene discourse, the Australian continent, island, land, nation, or ‘trans-nation’ has to be considered in reciprocity with a transcultural and world literary perspective. Graham Huggan, for example, writes that Australian literature harbours a trans-national perspective, as “no single cultural heritage exists for Australian literature, any more than one exists for Australia. Despite this, the battle over heritage—which is also a battle over ownership—has been keenly fought” (*Australian* viii).

Reading literature through the lens of a nation inevitably generates the question of representation. Huggan has noted that “a national literature [...] beg[s] the question of cultural representativeness, and of the perceived ‘Australianness’ of the nation’s touchstone literary works” (*Australian* 8). My selection of authors aims to represent a broad spectrum of Australian voices—Indigenous, refugee, migrant, or ‘Anglo.’ However, I am also conscious of the fact that—for reasons of scope—my thesis omits the literary works of important writers and intellectuals who have made significant contributions to environmental thought and climate fiction, such as the Indigenous authors Alexis Wright and Tony Birch. Yet my thesis incorporates their invaluable perspectives and intellectual guidance where pertinent: Wright’s epic novels *Carpentaria* (2006) and *The Swan Book* (2013) are introduced in the Literature Review

(Chapter 2), and both Wright's and Birch's non-fiction publications on Indigenous knowledge and Green/Blak¹⁴ alliances are referenced where relevant.

As the next section indicates, my selected texts are set in different places in, or in association with, the Australian continent and its Oceanic or Pacific environment. These places can be found within and beyond the commonly known boundaries of Australia: rural Victoria ("the Mallee"); rural New South Wales (near a fictionalised version of the Murray-Darling river); a generic city; the remote Pacific island, Pitcairn; Brisbane/Moreton Bay area; rural Queensland; and Manus Island (Papua New Guinea), where Australia currently holds refugee detention centres.

1.2 Structure of Thesis

Taking two contemporary Australian literary texts from roughly the past twenty years as case studies for each chapter, my thesis structure is centred around different themes—or issues of concern—as reflected in the Anthropocene debate and beyond. These issues are: Colonisation/Exploitation; Technology/Bioethics; and Environmental Justice/Custodianship. Rather than adhering to a viewpoint of possible starting dates and causes, geological epochs or a chronological account of events, these general themes allow me to read signs and symptoms of the Anthropocene. Each chapter introduces key terms and critiques of the Anthropocene debate, such as the Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Black Anthropocene, and Chthulucene, so that the literary discussions are framed and sparked by the critiques of the Anthropocene debate found in the Environmental Humanities. This approach is significant because the Anthropocene has not yet been extensively explored via environmental 'matters of

¹⁴ As opposed to 'Black,' the derivation 'Blak' is a term that refers to Indigenous Australians. Coined by the Kuku and Erub/Mer visual artist, Destiny Deacon, in her 2004 exhibition "Walk and don't look blak," blak is defined as a term that "reclaims and recasts a word with myriad connotations of colonialism and prejudice" (Deacon and Russel-Cook). See also the seminal essay volume on Green/Blak relationships in Australia: Timothy Neale and Eve Vincent. *Unstable Relations: Indigenous People and Environmentalism in Contemporary Australia*. Crawley, Western Australia: UWA Publishing, 2016.

concern' generally, and because there is no expanded study of Australian Literature in relation to the Anthropocene yet.¹⁵ With this structure, I seek to achieve a reading of the Anthropocene that is easily accessible via concrete topics, which are illuminated, shaped, and uniquely informed by literary texts. The structure thus reflects what I consider to be anchors of the Anthropocene debate and investigates the following questions in relation to the selected texts: Is the Anthropocene (and its accompanying neologisms) a useful concept for reading and understanding the text? What are the metaphors, tropes and themes found and how do they relate to concepts of the Anthropocene? What is the role of language and the imagination? What is the role of literary studies in the face of unprecedented socio-ecological damage? What can literature contribute to the ongoing Anthropocene discussions?

Importantly, however, my selected literary texts do not necessarily all explicitly engage with climate change, or the Anthropocene—in fact, only one of the six texts discussed mentions these terms. Rather, this thesis aims to consider the Anthropocene as a *condition* of reading (or writing), whether there is a conscious preoccupation with the concept or not. With this approach, my thesis seeks to widen the conception of what counts as an 'environmental' text. As I understand the 'environment' as a socio-ecocultural-political entity that nevertheless has an order that precedes any one species, as suggested by my use of the term 'cosmos,' I argue that it is productive and necessary to widen the notion of what Anthropocene literature and reading is. My methodology for the succeeding chapters consists of close readings underpinned by literary and environmental humanities theory.

Chapter 2, "Theorising Cosmos and Cosmology," provides the theoretical context and has two parts: the first section maps the Anthropocene in relation to the idea of cosmos, in order to outline this thesis among extant scholarship in the critical field. Here, I contextualise the emergence of the term 'cosmos' in environmental discourse and argue that it generates new readings in addition to what the lens of 'eco' or 'environment' would otherwise generate. Rather than evoking a passive backdrop (as

¹⁵ Bruno Latour distinguishes between 'matters of fact' and 'matters of concern,' as he suggests that facts are often linked to the 'natural' realm. Yet the crises of our times show the inseparability of culture and nature, facts and values: "'Nature' isolated from its twin sister 'culture' is a phantom of Western anthropology" ("Fifty Shades" 221). In short, Latour's 'matters of concern' relate to the entanglements of facts and values. See Chapter 3 for a discussion of this notion.

often evoked by the term ‘environment’), I argue that the idea of ‘cosmos’ productively adds to ecocritical readings, by referencing notions of environmental aliveness, reciprocity, order, evolution, and ethics. Here, it seems important to emphasise that my cosmological readings by no means aim to replace ecocriticism; on the contrary, my readings build on the important work done in the field. As my readings of the primary texts show, I do not neglect the materiality that has underpinned ecocriticism, such as evident in the fields of material ecocriticism and New Materialism,¹⁶ from which this thesis heavily borrows its vocabulary and from which I draw important perspectives. In fact, it is my claim that cosmological readings combine both references to a transcultural material order *and* culturally specific socio-environmental struggles. Thus, my cosmological readings represent an exploratory attempt that aims to foreground a slightly different angle *in addition to* my ecocritical readings and, thereby, generate new perspectives. (I address the risks and dangers inherent in a cosmological approach further in the chapter to clarify my use of this term.) The section ends with a literature review, “Literary Cosmology,” which provides an overview of recent literary scholarship in relation to cosmos and environmental crisis. The second part of the chapter, “The Search for Anthropocene Stories,” outlines pertinent literary scholarship in relation to the Anthropocene and, briefly, in relation to Australian literature. While there are numerous essays that read specific aspects of the Anthropocene, there are only a handful of general inquiries into the role of literature and literary studies in relation to the Anthropocene. Published since 2015, these inquiries fall into two (not mutually exclusive) categories: scale and genre—predominantly climate-fiction, science and speculative fiction, the (eco)Gothic, and allegory. As a whole, the chapter discusses the unique contribution of literary studies to the Environmental Humanities.

Chapter 3, “Colonisation/Exploitation: Reimagining Agriculture and Extraction,” investigates two historical novels in relation to Australia’s agricultural and extractive economy: Carrie Tiffany’s *Everyman’s Rules for Scientific Living* (2006) and Tara June

¹⁶ New Materialism and Material Ecocriticism explore the ways in which, as Heather Sullivan puts it, “human and nonhuman agencies exchange energy, matter, and information” (Sullivan 403). Jane Bennett famously referred to this new attention to the material world as exploring the way ‘vibrant matter’ shapes, or interferes with, our narratives about the world; this, she argued, can lead to the political project of “encourag[ing] more intelligent and sustainable engagements with vibrant matter and lively things” (Bennett viii).

Winch's *The Yield* (2019). *Everyman's Rules* reconsiders the beginnings of scientific agriculture, specifically wheat-farming, and suggests that it operated to the exclusion of particular knowledge systems (feminist, Indigenous). Moreover, it draws attention to the formations of national agriculture in disjuncture with environmental conditions and in conjunction with ideological conceptions of race (the imagined 'white nation'). *The Yield* (winner of the 2020 Miles Franklin award), which spans three different time-scales and is written from multiple perspectives (Indigenous and non-Indigenous), considers the legacy of wheat-farming and the issue with contemporary mining practices. As both novels illuminate the history of resource exploitation and Indigenous dispossession, this chapter is framed by the Anthropocene debate's focus on racial capitalism as expressed in the terms Capitalocene, Plantationocene, and Black Anthropocene. I argue that both novels present language as a crucial tool for colonisation (Tiffany creatively explores the language of scientific agriculture), but also as a key to the regeneration of culture and land in contemporary Australia (Winch compares words and concepts of the Wiradjuri language to English). The chapter performs a cosmological reading in that it considers how both texts recuperate holistic ideas of the human place in the environment: by satirising the colonial limitations and exploring the lyrical potential of language (Tiffany), and by investigating the power of Indigenous language regeneration to enable healing, justice, and land restoration (Winch).

Chapter 4, "Technology/Bioethics: Revising 'Human Mastery' Narratives," looks to the near future by analysing two science and speculative fiction texts: Briohny Doyle's novel *The Island Will Sink* (2016) and Ellen van Neerven's novella "Water" from her collection *Heat and Light* (2015). This chapter is framed by critiques of the Anthropocene debate's technocratisation, with its concomitant problematic idea of human mastery over 'nature.' In contrast to the notion of environmental crisis as a specialist concern only, the chapter engages with the importance of considering affects, genres, and narratives of this crisis. *The Island Will Sink* explores the potential of (post)apocalyptic climate change narratives as transported through various media, especially immersive film and TV, showing their potential to warn, but also to further passivity. By contrast, "Water" portrays a young Indigenous woman and her erotic relationship with a newly discovered species, a "plant-person," that is in danger of falling prey to secret governmental extermination plans. While *The Island Will Sink* tests the accuracy, ethics,

and limitations of the commonly-found dystopian ‘natural disaster’ narrative in relation to climate change, “Water” can be read as engaging neglected genres in environmental discourse—erotics, romance, humour—with important implications for understandings of evolution and environmentalism. Comparing both of these texts, I argue that they expose the danger of an over-abundance of dystopian narratives in the Anthropocene: while such narratives have the potential to warn, they can also paralyse individuals’ responses to climate change. My cosmological reading of these texts foregrounds the importance of widening notions of the ‘environment’ and of diversifying ecocritical engagements with texts.

Finally, Chapter 5, “Environmental Justice/Custodianship: Towards a Sovereign Cosmopolitics,” analyses two texts set in the present, both of which have been awarded Australia’s most lucrative prizes: Behrouz Boochani’s hybrid text *No Friend But The Mountains* (2018) (winner of the 2019 Victorian Premiere’s prize) and Melissa Lucashenko’s novel *Too Much Lip* (2018) (winner of the 2019 Miles Franklin award). Boochani gives a partly fictionalised autobiographical account of his experiences as a Kurdish refugee in so-called Offshore Detention, on Manus Island (Papua New Guinea). Lucashenko’s *Too Much Lip* portrays the trans-generational trauma of an Indigenous Goorie family on Bundjalung country (Southern Queensland/Northern New South Wales), and their healing of old family wounds, which coincides with the regaining of custodianship over parts of a river. Although the texts are written from markedly different perspectives—one from that of the lived experience political prisoner, the other from a fictionalised Indigenous Australian family—I argue that both texts can productively be read together, as they reveal insights into the interdependency of social justice and eco-systemic health. This chapter is framed by the key concept of Environmental Justice and the questions it poses about refugee and Indigenous sovereignty, Native Title, and social justice activism. My cosmological reading illustrates the works’ holistic understandings of social justice. By explicating the term ‘cosmopolitics’ (a strongly political proposition for justice and equality as the foundation for environmental custodianship), this chapter considers the need for a new political representation that includes local sovereign knowledge, vulnerable people, as well as more-than-human entities. Moreover, I suggest that both Boochani and Lucashenko,

who are themselves prominent activists, posit the writer-figure as visionary, prophetic, and powerful custodians of environmental justice.

Despite choosing to engage with contemporary texts that were published in the last 14 years, it is important to note that this choice does not reflect a presentist view of the Anthropocene that overlooks the fact that this supposed new epoch is the latest in a very long series of earth-historical disruptions (cf. Davis 86).

I conclude the thesis by assessing the ongoing ambiguity of the term 'Anthropocene,' and by summarising my alternative uses of the concepts 'cosmos' and cosmology.' Here, I also draw conclusions about the vital contribution of literature for the field of the Environmental Humanities, arguing that fiction is often a forerunner of concepts that can articulate the things we do not yet have a cultural language for. In this way, I advocate for the importance of literary studies amidst the current environmental changes.

This thesis, then, tests the idea that literature is, as Huggan has put it, "a useful entry point into wide-ranging cultural debates and issues" (*Australian* 8). Here, it is important to note that although my thesis foregrounds the cultural debate and environmental issues in literature, I also acknowledge that literary works have a life of their own and do not just respond programmatically or instrumentally to socio-ecopolitical crises. Literary works exceed academic inquiries and research questions; they go beyond contemporary contexts and point to what is as yet unsayable.

2. Theorising Cosmos and Cosmology

This chapter explicates the relevance of the terms cosmos and cosmology, especially as they relate to the Anthropocene, and gives an overview of extant literary scholarship regarding these concepts. The first part of this chapter illuminates the etymology and uses of cosmos and cosmology in order to establish these terms' recent revival in the Anthropocene. In doing so, I draw links between cosmos and the Environmental Humanities, ecocriticism, scientific cosmology, cosmopolitics, cosmopolitanism, and my proposed notion of literary cosmology. In order to further clarify the contribution of my proposed 'cosmological readings,' the second part of this chapter provides a literature review of literary scholarship in relation to the Anthropocene concept.

2.1 From Chaos to Cosmos to Anthropocene?

(Literary Studies and the Environmental Humanities)

The word 'cosmology' derives from the ancient Greek *kosmos* (order or world) and *logia* (discourse), which describes not the universe in general, but the universe understood as a unified system of beauty and order, which arises out of chaos (Walls, "Cosmos" 47). The old *kosmos* evoked the idea that the universe appears ordered and beautiful through reciprocity with humans. However, today this seemingly simple idea has many different uses in our vocabulary: in common use, cosmos refers to the universe, and to the stars and planets beyond Earth, while cosmology refers to both mythology and creation stories, as well as to astronomy (a branch of physics). Scientific cosmology involves examining the origin and evolution of the universe—the "large-scale properties of the universe as a whole" (NASA).

The history of this word is complex: until the 19th century, the ancient Greek concept was largely forgotten and mainly remnant in the word 'cosmetics,' which carries the earliest meaning of *kosmos* through the sense of adornment (Walls, "Cosmos" 48). The explorer Alexander von Humboldt revived the term for a broad general and scientific

audience with his pathbreaking multivolume work *Cosmos* (1850), in which he employs cosmos as a unifying concept that binds together the history of the planet as a history of the physical sciences *and* a history of the mind. In *Cosmos*, Humboldt understands 'nature' as "a planetary interactive causal network operation across multiple scale levels, temporal and spatial, individual to social to natural, scientific to aesthetic to spiritual" (Walls, *The Passage* 11). As historian Laura Dassow Walls puts it:

There was no word in modern European languages for Humboldt's insight. So he resurrected and reintroduced the ancient Greek word κόσμος for the universe as both ordered and beautiful; his point was that while the physical universe exists apart from and without humans, the universe as a Cosmos, beautiful and ordered, exists only through human reciprocity with nature. ("Natural History" 196)

Thus, Humboldt sought to describe our planetary network not just scientifically, but also poetically, giving both equal value for understanding the human situatedness in the more-than-human world. As Walls describes, Humboldt equates order with the perception of scientific laws and beauty: "the doing of science combined rigorous and exacting labor with the joy of poetic creation and an almost spiritual sense of revelation" (*The Passage* 8). As Humboldt combined scientific, cultural and poetic observations, he did justice to the ancient meaning of *kosmos* as discourse about the order of the world. Walls and Andrea Wulf point out, however, that although Humboldt's work received the highest recognition globally, and across a wide inter-disciplinary and popular audience, the crises of the late 19th and the 20th century overshadowed his work so that the idea of cosmos "devolved from an ecological vision unifying cosmic, geological, organic, and human history [...] to a term for the heavens removed from our sublunary system" ("*Cosmos*" 48).¹⁷

Yet today, 'cosmos' has once again been resurrected as a key word for the Anthropocene. Walls proposes that the idea of cosmos is "the oldest ecological vision of our planet," and is capable of undoing the harmful separation between "culture and

¹⁷ Andrea Wulf writes: "Everybody learned from him: farmers and craftsmen, schoolboys and teachers, artists and musicians, scientists and politicians. There was not a single textbook or atlas in the hands of children in the western world that hadn't been shaped by Humboldt's ideas" (335). Wulf credits the forgetting of Humboldt's vision to the "anti-German sentiment" that accompanied the First World War (335).

nature, human and environment, mind and matter, intellect and emotion" ("Cosmos" 47). Although only alluding to it briefly, Walls implies here that the notion of cosmos provides a kind of solution to the decline-narrative of the Anthropocene, as this grave predicament names the "inability to think the cosmos" ("Cosmos" 48). As is conveyed in this statement, the environmental crises of the Anthropocene can be seen as deriving from powerful worldviews, or grand narratives, resulting in the failure to assign intelligence to the more-than-human world, and creating systems unable to limit the decline of ecosystems and species, wrongfully separating humans from 'nature' (and everyone associated with it), mind from matter, emotion from intellect. Instead of envisioning humanity as part of the cosmos, "the inability to think the cosmos" suggests that certain worldviews have become dominant that cast humanity as master species, rather than as dependent on, interconnected with, and situated in an eco-systemic order. As has now become increasingly clear, issues such as excessive fossil fuel extraction and the industrial use of plastic have created irreparable damages that collectively harm the stability of the biosphere and the survival of future generations. As Walls also implies, the process of defining the Anthropocene maps the creation, evolution and expected future of life on Earth. In this way, the idea of cosmology, understood as the oldest ecological vision, becomes key for addressing the practices that have led us into the Anthropocene. To put it bluntly, if the Anthropocene describes the problem, Walls suggests that the sense of 'cosmos' can provide answers, or at least avenues for finding ways out of the Anthropocene predicament.

My thesis takes up these interrelated terms: Anthropocene and cosmology. As I explain below, I understand 'cosmos' as a state of the world and 'cosmology' as a mode of reading: the 'state' acknowledges the fact that there is such a thing as a planetary eco-systemic order, and the 'mode' allows me to read literature in a particular way, posing research questions pertaining to interconnectedness, scale, or politics. Thus, as the title of this thesis including the term 'Cosmological Readings' suggests, I use cosmology as a *methodology* of reading that enables me to ask particular research questions, as well as to reflect on one of the many transcultural *functions* of literature in the Anthropocene.

Yet how can we define cosmology if it is such a slippery trans-disciplinary term that combines the vast scales of the terrestrial and celestial, the universal and particular,

transcultural scientific insights (currently the Big Bang Theory) and culturally specific local cosmologies? In this thesis, I use 'cosmology' to refer to a narrative of wholeness and interconnectedness grounded in the planetary ecosystem that both the sciences and humanities have a role in revealing. Narratives are usually thought of as human creations, but the notion of 'cosmos' operates at the intersection of human construction and material reality: eco-systemic order is not 'merely' a narrative, just as climate change is not 'only' a story, but a state of the world. In fact, narrative and cosmology are linked in important ways, as I explore throughout the thesis. I consider cosmology a valuable term because it suggests a meta-discursive narrative that encompasses human interactions with the more-than human world: as I will explain in this section, cosmos and cosmology include ideas of creation stories and evolution; external order, truth, and beauty; a process of becoming conscious of this order; ethics and politics in upholding this order (as even the vulnerable have their place, function, intention, and intelligence within this order); and the unknown (as observers, we are inside the cosmos, our knowledge is thus necessarily partial). Cosmology can therefore be loosely understood as a terrestrial discourse (although it can encompass culturally different narratives) in that it argues for the interconnectedness of the universe/pluriverse, and in that it suggests the fact that the Anthropocene accelerates the knowledge that ecosystems need to be protected in order for life to flourish. I argue that literature has an important role to play in communicating the sense of an order and that a renewed interest in cosmos emerges out of the many predicaments of the Anthropocene. Therefore, I use 'cosmos' as a 'positive' term, in that it seeks to create an ethical discourse arguing for the need to recognise that everyone and everything is interconnected and that every constituent of the cosmos has their rightful place in a co-evolutionary unfolding.

It first seems necessary, however, to define the relationship between the Anthropocene and cosmology more clearly. The Anthropocene has been called a "negative universal," as it describes the human species as a perpetrator so that humanity is only united through the sense of a shared catastrophe (Chakrabarty 22). In this sense, the Anthropocene could be called a 'negative cosmology' because it presents a decline-narrative that maps the harm done to the biosphere, rather than support the fact that sustainable cultures and practices do and can exist. Moreover, as a term that was influenced by Earth-systems-science, the Anthropocene is linked to 'cosmos' in that

it expresses the understanding that there is indeed an order to our planetary ecosystem and that certain behaviours are threatening the order, causing it to fall increasingly into chaos and unpredictability. The process of defining the Anthropocene conveys the challenge of thinking of the planetary ecosystem in terms of relative former order (the Holocene), and increasing environmental instability and uncertainty (the Anthropocene), which echoes the ancient Greek use of cosmos as a materially and spiritually interwoven system that emerged out of chaos. In short, rather than moving out of chaos to order, the trajectory of the Anthropocene appears to move from order to chaos. In this sense, the Anthropocene could even be called a *chaosmology*, to borrow James Joyce's term, as it expresses a moment of crisis in which the balance from Holocene (order) tips into increased unreliability.¹⁸ However, although the Anthropocene is linked to the idea of cosmos in myriad ways, the differences are telling: if the Anthropocene describes the predicament caused by socio-political factors, cosmology provides tools to rethink and learn from sustainable practices. Grounded in eco-systemic facts, a sense of cosmos expresses the potential for changing the decline-narrative of the planetary ecosystems towards healing and justice. Thus, along with Walls and others discussed below, I consider 'cosmos' and 'cosmology' useful because they challenge readers and writers to, on the one hand, become aware of the importance of the cultural view on the environment, while on the other, suggesting that the ecosystem precedes humans and arguably has an order that transcends the existence of any one species.

Drawing on Walls, Joni Adamson, and George B. Handley (introduced below), I propose the term 'literary cosmology' to point to the important role of literature in the Anthropocene and the world-building capacity of literature. While literary works can be said to create their own cosmos, as worldviews create their own narratives, they are not written in a vacuum and, therefore, also reflect on an external cosmos, responding to the systems in place. I use 'literary cosmology' to mean two things: Firstly, *a general function of literature* and storytelling as assigning meaning to and shaping the material

¹⁸ As Alain Beaulieu writes, "Joyce's neologism 'chaosmos' expresses the fact that chaos and cosmos (disorder and order) are not opposites, but part of a larger continuum: 'every person, place and thing in the *chaosmos* of Alle anyway [are] connected'" (Beaulieu 201, citing Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, chapter 8).

world, as well as coming-to-terms with the human place in the bigger cosmological unfolding; secondly, as *a lens through which to read literature* in the Anthropocene, which generates specific questions such as the ones already mentioned in the Introduction: How does the text conceive of reciprocity with the environment? How does the author configure the origin, evolution and ethics arising out of environmental predicaments? Does the writer recover a sense of order and beauty amidst the decline-narrative of the Anthropocene? Does the text imagine a worldview that suggests the idea of cosmos? How does cosmos relate to language, narrative, and the figure of the writer? How is the text's 'cosmology' linked to transcultural and/or culturally specific understandings of a world order? Therefore, I use 'literary cosmology' to refer to the ways in which literature and the arts are able to recover a socio-eco-political vision, and to present the Anthropocene predicament in meaningful ways that bind individual readers into larger collectives. Considering that all cultures and religions engage in oral or written storytelling, it is obvious that the broad meaning of 'literature'—whether sacred or secular—creates and upholds stories of creation, evolution, and ethics (although, of course, literature can do much more than that; it can also present unethical worlds, lies, and 'negative cosmologies,' as I argue in my discussion of *The Island Will Sink* in Chapter 4). Hence, my use of 'literary cosmology' allows me to pose specific questions and to consider one of the many functions of literature in the Anthropocene.

However, it is important to stress that there is a tension inherent between one universal story of the planetary ecosystem and the many different local stories of specific ecosystems and socio-eco-political experiences within it. This tension is at the core of the Anthropocene debate, and it is the humanities' unique contribution to have complicated what first appeared to be one meta-narrative of "Humans vs. Nature." Yet I argue that the idea of cosmos, as expressing an interconnected planetary earth-system that humans interact with in culturally specific ways, is still valuable as a given universal. It is at the intersection of these 'stories'—the global and the local, the culturally specific and transcultural—that both the Anthropocene and cosmology can be placed. Moreover, as numerous scholars have pointed out, the Anthropocene presents the problem of reconciling divergent scales of space and time (discussed in the literature review below). I consider the term 'cosmology' important because it, too, evokes

interwoven scales: fabrics of the global and local; past, present, and future; stories as ethical guidelines and markers of community; and the unknown.

Both scientists and humanists use the term ‘cosmology’ to describe or create the narratives of planetary and universal order. In this thesis, my aim is to explore the role of the humanities—specifically the role of imaginative literary works—for fostering a sense of cosmos in the context of the Anthropocene. ‘Cosmology’ here needs to be placed in relation to the emergence of the new field of the Environmental Humanities. The Manifesto of the Humanities for the Environment Initiative defines Environmental Humanities as “a rapidly developing research field that involves tens of thousands of researchers globally and is currently organised into diverse disciplinary associations for the study of literature, art, history, and philosophy of the environment” (Holm et al. 978). While recognising that “science can monitor, measure and to some extent predict the biogeophysics of global change,” Environmental Humanities scholars have identified the responsibility of the humanities to work with this knowledge of the human factor as the main driver of the Anthropocene (Holm et al. 979). The emergence of this new field and term thus shows how both the sciences and the humanities have to work together in producing the knowledge needed for today’s ecological emergency. Thus, it is the claim of the Environmental Humanities that ecological degradation is preceded by, and deeply entangled in, predominantly social, political and cultural issues—something that the term Anthropocene does not seem to sufficiently capture.

Yet it is also vital to stress that the field of literary studies has not re-oriented itself to the environment only with the onset of the Anthropocene. Ecocriticism has been examining the relationship between literature and the environment for at least 50 years since it emerged in North America in the 1970s. Ecocriticism can be understood as an umbrella term for critical approaches that explore the relationship between the human and non-human (Marland 846). The term was coined in the context of increasing concern about the damage to the biosphere (think Cold War and nuclear pollution); hence, its underlying aim is to analyse and challenge “ecocidal attitudes” (Garrard 61). While ecocritics have long been concerned with the human place in the environment, it is only more recently that scholars have been reviving cosmology as a term needed to reevaluate the role of literature and the imagination in increasingly irreversible climatic and ecological damage. In other words, while the practice is not new, the urgency is: the

Anthropocene seems to have accelerated not only the pace of global problems but also the search for the contribution of humanists. Handley, for example, argues that in the age of the Anthropocene, “we do not need new stories or ethics so much as we need new readings that assess the cosmological reach of literature” (“Climate Change” 334). By using the notion of cosmology, Handley goes beyond the potential of literary studies to merely critique; instead, he emphasises the ethical potential and world-building capacities of literature:

If the development of ecocriticism over the past twenty years has taught us anything, it is the implicit faith that stories can shape our sense of humanity and moral responsibility within an ecological context. They do this, we trust, by placing facts within a world of relation, within an imagined cosmos, in which a trusting reader is invited. Pushed to its most important implications, in other words, ecocriticism wants stories to become cosmologies. (“Climate Change” 335)

Handley’s invocation of faith in stories and the need for shared values therefore conjures ecocriticism and the Environmental Humanities as contributing not just academic critique but as fostering the potential for healing and social change.

Similarly, Bruno Latour has written about this changing role of the humanities. In the context of being a philosopher of science who spent decades researching the history of science and deconstructing its methodology, Latour found himself confronted with the sheer fact of widespread climate change denial, science scepticism, and extreme environmental degradation. In his essay “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?” (2004), Latour argues that in light of climate change, academics engaged in criticism might use their power to *constructively* critique in addition to the important practices of analysing and critiquing:

The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naïve believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather. (246)

Here, Latour proposes that it is important to not just deconstruct a framework and be done, but to propose ethical possibilities for change and exchange. Similarly, my cosmological readings do not by any means seek to replace the ‘negative’ tasks of critique, analysis, and deconstruction, but my approach seeks to offer *additional*

constructive frameworks that can generate new readings. Latour's idea of providing "arenas in which to gather" also evokes religious scholar Bron Taylor's notion of an "environmental milieu," which he identifies as a diverse community "in which environmentally concerned officials, scientists, activists, and other citizens connect with and reciprocally influence one another" (13-14). Taylor observes the following shared ethics of the current environmental milieu: ecological and mutual interdependence, feelings of belonging and connection to nature, the notion of the sacred, evolutionary and ecological understandings that stress continuity and kinship, and humility about the human place in the universe (13). Similarly, Handley calls for the importance of faith in stories and the imagination to guide us through dark times: "It is precisely the risk of loss and disorder and the inherent complexity of systems that make faith necessary. If it weren't for such faith, why else would we find stories worth telling? Or scientific research worth doing? Or climate change a concern?" ("Climate Change" 337). Although I will test and problematise such instrumental notions of literature (especially in Chapter 4), for the purpose of this chapter, the point is to see that the Anthropocene has prompted a call for ethics, community, and activism to offer countering narratives to the seemingly powerful decline-narrative of the Anthropocene.

I employ my notion of 'cosmological readings' as a kind of extension—not a replacement—to 'ecocritical readings' and, thus, of the idea of the 'environment.' As historians Paul Warde, Libby Robin and Sverker Sörlin argue, although the popularity of the term 'environment' is a trans-disciplinary achievement, it may by now be a "politically exhausted" concept (173). In contrast to an 'environmental' approach, I argue that the term 'cosmos' suggests aliveness, agency, and intentionality in the more-than-human world. While the terms 'environment' or 'Anthropocene' entered the humanities through the sciences, I propose that the notion of 'cosmos' has renewed valency as it emphasises the entanglement of culture and nature, and the reciprocity of meaning-making between humans and their environments. As Libby Robin, Sverker Sörlin, and Paul Warde argue, the notion of an 'environment' encapsulates the idea of a complex whole, of unity, and of trans-disciplinary knowledge exchange. Although the origin of the term dates back to the 1600s,¹⁹ the authors trace its growing popularity

¹⁹ According to the online *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), the noun 'environment' entered English print in 1603 in a translation of Plutarch's *Morals* and used to mean "The action of circumnavigating,

back to a post-War world order. Starting in 1948 with the onset of the Cold War, they argue that 'environment' is a "crisis concept" that came to outdo related foci such as conservation, preservation, or biosphere, and that would later encompass emerging terms of sustainability, ecological modernisation, biodiversity, climate, ecosystem service, or Anthropocene (23-24). However, the authors also suggest that the concept has its limitations: as it is still widely associated with the notion of a 'passive nature,' and is often framed in relation to 'natural resources,' the word may be "politically exhausted," as it no longer suggests urgency or crisis (173). In contrast, I propose that a focus on 'cosmos' shifts viewpoints and generates productive readings that go beyond terms such as 'eco,' 'green,' or 'environmental.' Where 'environment' may be overused (for example, in corporate 'greenwashing') and runs the risk of referring to the human/nature dualism, 'cosmos' conveys reciprocal meaning-making between humans and the more-than-human world and provokes new sets of questions for reading literary texts, such as those proposed earlier.

As mentioned earlier, the notion of cosmology conveys a sense of an external truth which is revealed on multiple scales. In fact, scientific cosmology is known for researching on multi-scalar levels, the macro- and microscopic. Astronomer and mathematician Bernard Carr, contributor to the scientific anthology *The Philosophy of Cosmology* (2017), writes that cosmology involves both extremes, the extension of knowledge outwards to progressively larger scales and inwards to progressively smaller ones (40):

The outward journey into the macroscopic domain and the inward journey into the microscopic domain [...] have revealed ever larger and smaller levels of structure in the Universe: planets, stars, galaxies, clusters of galaxies and the entire observable Universe in the macroscopic domain; cells, DNA, atoms, nuclei, subatomic particles and the Planck scale in the microscopic domain. (41)

As Carr shows, the micro- and macroscopic are intimately linked such that they "constantly throw light on each other. Indeed, physics has revealed a unity about the Universe which makes it clear that everything is connected in a way which would have

encompassing, or surrounding something; the state of being encompassed or surrounded" ("Environment").

seemed inconceivable a few decades ago” (42). The phenomenon of interconnected scales is also known through the term ‘fractal.’ Likewise, humanists have described the cosmological perspective to harbour the coming together of divergent scales. For example, in his transcultural study *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (1985) anthropologist Mircea Eliade argues that traditional and archaic cultures participated in a cosmology that expresses the intention for terrestrial events to mirror the celestial, or the transcendent ‘cosmos.’ Eliade suggests that a sense of cosmos is enacted not by seeing this external reality as apart, but as inter-relating with humans: “If we observe the general behaviour of archaic man, we are struck by the following fact: neither the objects of the external world nor human acts [...] have any autonomous intrinsic value. Objects or acts acquire a value, and in so doing become real, because they participate [...] in a reality that transcends them” (3-4). Similarly, Anthropocene scholars, especially literary scholars, have contributed to a renewed interest in multi-scalar narratives (discussed below). In short, both the sciences and humanities suggest that the sense of cosmos forms a consciousness of multiple scales, bringing them together through relationships of interconnectedness, unity, and plurality.

Similar to the quest of relating to an external reality and truth, philosopher Isabelle Stengers writes that the sense of an external order, of cosmos, provides important frameworks for politics. In her ground-breaking essay “The Cosmopolitical Proposal” (2005), Stengers coins the term ‘cosmopolitics,’ defining it as an “operator of equalization,” because there is “no representative of the cosmos” (995). As Stengers writes,

Cosmos, meaning a “cosmic order” can protect us from an “entrepreneurial” version of politics, giving voice only to the clearly-defined interests that have the means to mutually counterbalance one another, we now see that politics can protect us from a misanthropic cosmos, one that directly communicates with an “honest” or “sane” reality, as opposed to artifices, hesitations, divergences, excessiveness, conflicts, all associated with human disorders. (1000)

Stengers here suggests that the idea of cosmos conveys the sense that there exists external order outside of human ‘chaos’ through the facts, economies and givenness of ecosystems. This order acts as a kind of truth (“‘honest’ or ‘sane’ reality”) in the form of a planetary ecosystem that functions as everyone’s *oikos* (Greek for ‘habitat’ from which

the term 'ecology' derives). As Stengers writes, "[t]he world order is therefore not an argument, it is what confers on the participants a role that 'de-psychologizes' them, that causes them to appear not as 'owners' of their opinions but as authorized to attest to the fact that the world has an order" (1000). Stengers concludes that there is no detached knowledge, as all relevant knowledge is formed in the context of a planetary eco-systemic order. The question that emerges for Stengers, then, is how we can include the voices of the "victims of the commons" in politics (1002). Cosmopolitics, thus, takes on the issue of incorporating and articulating a sense of the unknown, and representing the vulnerable constituents of the cosmos (996).

Since cosmos, cosmology, and cosmopolitics are crucial reference points for this thesis, it is also important to mention the interrelated notion of cosmopolitanism, which has been foundational for the fields of postcolonial and transcultural literary and cultural studies, and which profoundly informs this thesis. Cosmopolitanism—deriving from the Greek *kosmos* ('world') and *polites* ('citizen')—is both a very old and a far-ranging idea, spanning from ancient Greece, when the word was coined, to European totalitarianism (both Hitler and Stalin used the term derogatively), into present-day thought. However, it has mainly been conceived of as a humanist concept.²⁰ Cosmopolitanism has enabled complex understandings of culture, identity and individuality, universalism and particularity. Central keywords of this field include citizenship, human rights and obligation (Kant); progressive thought (Rawls); dialogue (Held); conversation and intellectualism (Appiah); cultural Imperialism (Said, Clifford, Appiah, Pratt); patriotism (Appiah); distance and irony (Turner); and virtue (Nussbaum) (Patell 4-8). Pheng Cheah has made the important point that cosmopolitanism and human rights are the two primary ways in which 'humanity' and the 'global' have been conceived (3). Cyrus Patell explains that, in common usage, a cosmopolitan refers to someone who is "worldly," therefore at home everywhere; yet a cosmopolitan can also be understood as someone who is "not fully comfortable—never fully at home—

²⁰ An exception to the rule can be seen in Ursula Heise's idea of 'eco-cosmopolitanism' (2008), which refers to the idea that we need both, a sense of place and a sense of planet; a sense of place is attentive to cultural distinctive perspectives on the environmental, whereas a sense of planet pays attention to "animate and inanimate networks of influence and exchange," thus, ecological networks beyond cultures. In this sense, eco-cosmopolitanism envisions "individuals and groups as part of planetary 'imagined communities' of both human and nonhuman kinds" (*Sense of Place* 60-61).

anywhere" (3-4). Martha Nussbaum describes cosmopolitanism as an "exile from the comfort of patriotism and its easy sentiments" (6-7, also cited in Patell 5). Cosmopolitans thus draw on multiple cultural attachments and defy narrow understandings of 'culture' and 'nation,' implicitly making a case for the benefits of cultural diversity, migration, and what could be called cultural-environmental evolution. However, cosmopolitanism has also changed from being an ethical 'ideal' to being attentive to 'involuntary' cosmopolitanisms, such as can be found among displaced peoples and refugees (I address the notion of a steadily growing number of refugees in Chapter 5).²¹ Thus, by and large, cosmopolitanism has primarily been a discourse of culture and humanism, paying little attention to the immanence of the material and cultural.

Importantly, discussions of cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitics experienced a shift in the 21st century. Whereas cosmos was formerly taken for granted as a stable entity, Stenger's idea of cosmopolitics widens the discussion on cosmopolitanism: her cosmopolitics can be said to be comprised not only of cosmopolitanism, but also of the sense of a physical cosmos that expresses agency, will and intention. As Stengers points out, with the emphasis on climate change or—as she prefers to call the awareness of the planet as actor—"the intrusion of Gaia," the agency and forcefulness of cosmos has become ever more pronounced. As Stengers writes, "the climate, far from being self-stabilizing, has been discovered to be a ticklish, ominous, and fearfully complex reality, which is now threatening us" ("Autonomy" 383).²² Stengers here suggests that we can no longer regard the world, globe or planet as merely a backdrop for cultural exchange; rather, it directs, interacts, and suggests meaning and values to humans, expressing

²¹ See James Clifford's concept of "discrepant cosmopolitanism," which foregrounds travelling groups, such as migrant workers and refugees ("Traveling Cultures"); Homi Bhabha's concept of "vernacular cosmopolitanism," which aims to balance the tension between universalism and particularity through paying attention to an 'everyday' cosmopolitanism ("Unsatisfied"); and Peter Nyers' concept of "abject cosmopolitanism," which centres refugees and asylum seekers ("Abject"). As a group, these works are often called 'cosmopolitanisms from below.'

²² The ancient Greek goddess, Gaia, became patron of the scientific Gaia theory developed by British chemist James Lovelock and American microbiologist Lynn Margulis in the 1960s and 1970s. Gaia theory holds that the Earth's biogeochemistry is an active and adaptive control system that self-regulates and therefore creates the perfect conditions for life to flourish. The hypothesis helped to expand evolutionary theory and explain questions such as how the oceans are kept in balance; or why our atmosphere contains high levels of nitrogen and oxygen. Initially ignored and then ridiculed by scientists such as Richard Dawkins, the theory has recently experienced a resurgence as a model for the Anthropocene. Within the humanities, this resurgence has been helped by the science philosophers Stengers, Donna Haraway, and Latour, who continuously cross-pollinate each other's ideas.

what appears to be a ‘behaviour’—an aliveness and intention of its own. In this way, Stengers insists that cosmos (and her reviving of Gaia as a cosmological figure) is valuable because it does not ‘other’ humanity as a kind of master-species. Instead, Gaia suggests the immanence of humanity and the planet:

Gaia—as the one who is “intruding”—is not, however, meant to express scientific knowledge. Climate disorder may well concern all inhabitants of the earth, but the term intrusion specifically designates “us,” and “our stories, of which we humans are the only true protagonists, as the ones who are intruded on. (“Autonomy” 386)

Stengers here argues that it is our own stories—our own cosmologies—that we need to confront, as they have the power to shape the material world. This understanding of cosmos is comprised of human ‘stories’ that shape the material world as well as the responsiveness of the earth-system: Gaia is a force that “interrupts.” In this way, considerations of cosmopolitanism now can no longer background the physical environment as stable, as it profoundly informs human situatedness and citizenship(s). In this sense, the ideas of cosmopolitanism and cosmos are very much compatible and inform each other; as I have just outlined, the discourse surrounding cosmopolitanism has gained a new dimension with the onset of an increasingly unpredictable cosmos/socio-environment.

The ideas of cosmos and Anthropocene have also been linked in recent thought that proclaims a cultural return to the pagan, sacred, and divine, such as reflected in the fields of ‘new animism,’ and the already mentioned ‘new materialism.’ I will briefly take the example of Arne Johan Vetlesen’s philosophical book *Cosmologies of the Anthropocene: Panpsychism, Animism, Limits of Posthumanism* (2019) to illustrate the resurgence of old cosmologies. Vetlesen argues that the “connection between the two [the Anthropocene and cosmology] is an intimate one, yet rarely stated as such, as a matter of cause and effect” (3). Drawing on thinkers such as Thomas Nagel, Alfred North Whitehead, Karen Barad, and Bruno Latour, Vetlesen argues that, in contrast to the devastations of the Anthropocene, which have been enabled through the worldview of anthropocentrism, there is a cultural shift towards a cosmology which “signifies the new, and anything but fake, facts on the ground brought about in its course” (3). By “facts on the ground” Vetlesen refers to an increasing awareness of the intricate entanglements

of nature and culture, as well as of the aliveness and agency of the more-than-human world. These, as Vetlesen argues, can be summarised through the “oldest cosmology in human history, referred to as either animism or panvitalism, or—put philosophically—as panpsychism” (10). Panpsychism here stands in contrasts with a mechanistic worldview, holding that “everything that exists exhibits mind, by which is meant [...] mentality, interiority, intelligence, and purposiveness” (10). My cosmological approach is, therefore, also informed by thinkers in the field of new animism, new materialism, and material ecocriticism, as I draw on the vocabulary of agency, intelligence, purposefulness, as well as on the wider idea of the aliveness of the material world.

As we can see with the above-cited scholars invested in the problems of the Anthropocene, the Environmental Humanities go beyond critique of this term to include the need for ethics, external order/truth, and the unknown. If these appeals to the power of literature, the arts, and the humanities may sound like an overstatement, it seems only fitting that Handley points out that stories must also be understood as “inadequate and contingent” (“Climate Change” 335), which highlights the importance of examining extant narratives for their adequacy, truth and value to act as cosmologies. The field of literary studies is particularly invested in examining individual and collective narratives and in scrutinizing them for truth value. It is at the intersection of the faith in the power of stories *and* critical scrutiny of narratives that the role of ecocriticism in the Anthropocene can be placed. I aim to generate ‘cosmological’ readings, which can help articulate the value of literary narratives and of literary studies. The field of literary studies combines insights of multiple disciplines and perspectives and is able to offer multi-scalar reflections of the place, time, and interactions of humanity with the planet. Thus, through its association with both mythology, literature and ethics, as well as astronomy and bio-geo-chemistry, ‘cosmos’ is able to capture cultural narratives *and* material existence; culturally diverse *and* transcultural viewpoints. I argue throughout this thesis that the term has allure because it proposes the arguably much-needed narrative of wholeness and interconnectedness, as well as it emphasises the importance of the cultural outlook on the environment.

For instance, the scientific discipline of cosmology has indicated the interdependence between the sciences and humanities. Mathematician and cosmologist George F.R. Ellis argues that cosmology is an exceptional science in that it pushes science

to its limits. Ellis holds that scientific cosmology, as a theory dealing with physical cosmology and related mathematical and physical issues, cannot deal with the major themes of the origin of life and the nature of existence without considering “major themes in philosophy and metaphysics, perhaps relating them to issues of meaning and purpose in our lives” (4). Moreover, cosmology has to be speculative because many theories such as the existence of ‘multiverses’ cannot be tested and because the nature of dark matter, dark energy, and quantum fluctuation is largely unknown. Importantly, Ellis shows that the new frontier of scientific cosmology now has to consider research into the brain, consciousness, and the mind generally—something that many cosmologists consider to lie outside of their discipline (34). As Carr explains this new frontier of physics:

The mainstream view is that consciousness has a purely passive role in the Universe. In fact, most physicists assume that it is beyond their remit altogether because physics is concerned with a ‘third person’ account of the world (experiment) rather than a ‘first person’ account (experience). They infer that their focus should be the objective world, with the subjective element being banished as much as possible. (61)

Although arguments about the need for cosmologists to include the brain and mental experiences have been around for a while,²³ Carr argues that physics of the last few decades has itself hinted that the mind may be a “fundamental rather than incidental feature of the Universe” (61). Moreover, Ellis suggests that questions about the purpose, meaning, and existence of life are of great interest to the public, but they cannot be answered by a science that is occupied with the physical conditions of life only, so that he concludes: “philosophers of science should team up with scientists to clarify the boundaries of science” (34). As this detour to scientific cosmology shows, the idea of ‘cosmology’ necessarily includes multiple disciplines.

With my proposition of the need for the term ‘literary cosmology’ in the Anthropocene, I suggest that literature similarly has a role to play in generating philosophical engagements with the cosmos; through storytelling, it is able to speak to

²³ Carr quotes Noam Chomsky’s *Reflections of Language* (1975); Roger Penrose’s *Shadows of the Mind: A Search for the Missing Science of Consciousness* (1994); and Andrei Linde’s “Inflation, Quantum Cosmology and the Anthropic Principles” (2004).

intellect, embodiment, affect, aesthetics, and it can shape the need for environmental consciousness amidst environmental devastations. I am not the first to employ the term 'literary cosmology:' as I explain in the next section, literary scholar Pamela Gossin uses it to describe the ways in which Thomas Hardy worked with astronomical and cosmological imagery in his novels. Yet, I argue, we need a more encompassing term that expresses the idea that literature can engage with the same such questions, if often in a hidden, more implicit fashion. Moreover, I suggest we need a term to capture the function of literature and literary studies in times of accelerated ecological crisis in order to address both the devaluation of the humanities²⁴ and the great need for the humanities in the Anthropocene.

Literary Cosmology: A Literature Review

In this literature review, I largely build on the work of Laura Dassow Walls, Joni Adamson and George B. Handley, who have written several essays invested in cosmology. Walls and Handley use 'cosmology' more broadly, but Adamson uses the term mainly in relation to Indigenous cultural production. While this link is crucial, I believe the term 'literary cosmology' can and should be broadened: reading literature in the Anthropocene from writers with culturally diverse backgrounds allows me to consider one of the transcultural functions of literary studies. In this way, the lens of literary cosmology allows me to go beyond the immediate association of cosmology with ancient or Indigenous worldviews only, to point to the fact that, as Handley has suggested, cosmology is a valuable function of literary texts generally: one that might be activated more strongly with the pronouncement of the Anthropocene.

Walls, Handley, Adamson and Salma Monani use the notion of cosmology in relation to literary works in a number of essays.²⁵ In the Introduction to the collection

²⁴ See, for example, Simon During. "Precariousness, Literature and the Humanities Today." *Australian Humanities Review*, vol. 58, 2015, pp. 51-56; or Maebh Long. "Precarity, the Humanities and Slow Death." *Australian Humanities Review*, vol. 58, 2015, pp. 93-99.

²⁵ Walls has primarily written on Humboldt's and Henry David Thoreau's use of cosmos. Works that are not discussed in this chapter are: "'The Value of Mutual Intelligence:' Science, Poetry, and Thoreau's Cosmos." In: *Thoreau at 200: Essays and Reassessments* (2017); "Articulating a Huckleberry Cosmos:

Ecocriticism and Indigenous Studies: Conversations from Earth to Cosmos (2017), Adamson and Monani use the term “cosmovisions” to describe the

conceptions of entangled human relations with more-than-human worlds. [...] From ancient Indigenous story cycles and farmers’ almanacs to contemporary novels, such narratives have long worked as an imaginative force for thinking about “the origins and [ongoing evolutionary] transformations of the world and its inhabitants.” (19, citing Cruickshank’s *Do Glaciers Listen* [2005])

‘Cosmovision’ here describes “philosophical engagements and ethics” (24). With the help of Ecuador’s Constitution (2008), Monani and Adamson describe ‘cosmopolitics’ as an “intergenerational, evolutionary space and time required not just for the survival of all species, but for the recognition of the ‘rights’ to life for all humans and nonhumans” (22). Stressing the imperative to go beyond essentialist and romanticised notions of “The Ecological Indian,”²⁶ Adamson and Monani suggest that many Indigenous works present the cosmos and its “pluriverse” of beings as “sentient ‘you,’” as persons to have relations with (18). This idea of a pluriverse contrasts with notions of the universe and universal (18). While indigenous cultures cannot and must not be essentialised, they argue that many indigenous peoples have advocated for a politics that reflects the immanence of the spiritual and the physical. Via Marisol De la Cadena’s study of Latin American

Thoreau’s Moral Ecology of Knowledge” In: *Thoreau’s Importance for Philosophy* (2012); “Geography, Literature, and the Spaces of Interdisciplinarity” In: *American Literary History* (2011).

Adamson has developed the notion of ‘cosmovision’ and applied cosmopolitical readings in a number of essays. Not discussed in this section are: “Indigenous Literatures, Multinaturalism, and Avatar: The Emergence of Indigenous Cosmopolitics.” In: *American Literary History* (2012); “Environmental Justice, Cosmopolitics, and Climate Change.” In: *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Environment* (2013); “Indigenous Cosmopolitics and the Reemergence of the Pluriverse.” In: *Howling for Justice* (2014); “Cosmovisions: Environmental Justice, Transnational American Studies, and Indigenous Literature.” In: *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* (2014); “We Have Never Been Anthropos: From Environmental Justice to Cosmopolitics.” In: *Environmental Humanities: Voices from the Anthropocene* (2016).

Monani has contributed two essays to the collection *Ecocriticism and Indigenous Studies* (2017), co-edited with Adamson: “Science Fiction, Westerns, and the Vital Cosmo-ethics of The Sixth World;” and co-written with Shelley Niro: “Resistance and Hope in Mohawk Cinema: Iroquois Cosmologies and Histories.”

Handley has written about cosmologies in a number of essays. Not discussed in this section are: “LDS Theology and the New Story of the Universe.” In: *Living Cosmology: Christian Responses to The Journey of the Universe* (2016).

²⁶ Adamson and Monani here refer to: Shepherd Krech. *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*. New York: Norton, 1999.

“indigenous cosmopolitics,”²⁷ the authors point out that well ahead of important climate summits, such as the Paris Conference (2015), Indigenous groups have brought this cosmic understanding to the political arena: the 2010 Bolivia summit “World’s Peoples Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth” (DRME) led to the formulation of the “Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth” (19). In this context, Adamson has also described cosmopolitics as a “movement” spearheaded by Indigenous groups (“Whale” 33). Thus, Adamson and Monani use the notion of ‘cosmos’ mainly in relation to Indigenous worldviews and activism; however, they also indicate the need for cosmopolitics in transcultural contexts, developing their argument with Stenger’s and Latour’s understanding of cosmopolitics as “‘a common good world’ that brings together the pluriverse of peoples and natures” (22, citing Latour, “Whose Cosmos” 237).

In a few essays and a forthcoming book,²⁸ Handley uses ‘cosmology’ more broadly as what seems to be both a narrative of wholeness, as well as a methodology of reading. In his essay “Climate Change, Cosmology and Poetry: The Case of Derek Walcott’s *Omero*” (2015), he argues that the Anthropocene needs cosmologies “whereby we can imagine and then enact a new sense of answerability and belonging in a world that is much broader and more collective than we can know or imagine” (341). Handley thus proposes that cosmologies are narratives that express the hope for order and wholeness “in direct response to the dispersing threat of chaos, rupture, and fragmentation. To read literature as cosmologies means to engage in a perpetual process of re-envisioning our sense of the world after considering each time the abyssal gaps that emerge in our imagined world” (335). Thus, Handley uses ‘cosmology’ as a kind of method and process that is capable of accommodating and making sense of “values, beliefs, and experiences that continue to give moral shape to human lives” (333). His example is Derek Walcott’s poetry which, according to Handley, achieves both: shaping a moral response to the human impact on the planet and keeping cultural and historical differences visible to the reader, thereby offering the complexity of ‘cosmos’ (334). Rather than understanding cosmology as an entirely new way of seeing and being,

²⁷ Marisol De La Cadena. “Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections Beyond ‘Politics.’” *Cultural Anthropology* 25, vol. 2, 2010, pp. 334-370.

²⁸ From Chaos to Cosmos: Literature as Ecotheology, date has not yet been announced.

however, Handley stresses the need to work with existing cosmologies to “reimagine our responsibility in and for the world” (342). In this way, ‘cosmology’ is not only understood as a particular kind of story, or a new story that demands an ethical response, but also as a kind of methodology of reading. As Handley puts it, “it is not what we read but how” (347).

In a more recent essay, a commentary on Pope Francis’s stance on climate change titled “*Laudato Si*” and the Postsecularism of the Environmental Humanities” (2016), Handley engages with the interrelatedness of cosmology and religion to make the pragmatic point that the majority of people and cultures are embedded in, and are motivated by, sacred traditions of reading, and that environmentalism needs to take this fact into account, if it aims for broader impact (278). Moreover, he argues that environmentalism borrows from and depends on “the moral and metaphysical temper of religious discourse” (278). Via Pope Francis, Handley thus proposes that religion can be a tool and partner in the environmental struggle, and that “each culture assumes a knowing that is inherently valuable in the ecosystem of planetary experience” (280). In this way, reading sacred and secular texts is similar: “The rituals of religious life, like the rituals of reading and interpreting, restage and reimagine the world” (283). Handley thus suggests that the Environmental Humanities are ‘postsecular’ in the sense that they intersect with ethics, values, and the need for transformation and change, as he concludes:

In this sense we can think of work in the environmental humanities as cosmological; it repurposes the chaos of each breeze, each shift in season, each death and each birth, each trace of evidence of human impact in a warming world, and converts these experiences and details into a contingent and newly ordered cosmos. [...] Such conscientiousness, it seems, is not the fruit of new information but of a concerted practice of reinterpreting and revivifying what we thought we knew. (283)

His essay therefore echoes the fact that humanity already has numerous cosmologies. Hence, Handley uses ‘cosmology’ to point to the existence of diverse narratives and to transcultural eco-systemic wholeness.

A somewhat different, perhaps more literal, approach to ‘literary cosmology’ — one that uses this very term as a chapter title — is represented by Pamela Gossin’s literary study *Thomas Hardy’s Novel Universe: Astronomy, Cosmology, and Gender in the*

Post-Darwinian World (2007). I consider Gossin's usage as an example for a number of other publications that have drawn on the interconnections or representations between literary production and the sense of the cosmic—however, these “literary cosmologies” do not refer to ecological crisis.²⁹ Drawing on the author's background in the history of science, popular astronomy and cosmology, Gossin's study aims to trace how Hardy uses the universe “literally and personally—in reference both to his understanding of past and contemporary astronomy and cosmology and in relation to the internal spaces of Hardy's mind” (xiv-xv). Hardy extensively used astronomical concepts and deep cosmic metaphors creating “‘novel’ universes,” in which “the fates of his female characters are directly linked to their knowledge and skills in observational astronomy” (xvii). Gossin draws attention to the multi-scalar elements embedded in ‘cosmos’ that enabled Hardy to explore the nexus of “inner awareness, perception, psychology, and personality, and outer life of nature and culture” (230). Moreover, Gossin uses the term ‘literary cosmology’ to make the important point that literary and scientific histories are intertwined: ancient, early modern, or modern understandings of scientific cosmology are part of the literary tradition, so that historians of science would miss a vast range of valuable sources if they stayed oblivious to the literary tradition of cosmology:

The histories of archaeoastronomy and ancient and medieval astronomy and cosmology [...] would scarcely exist as fields if their practitioners had not acknowledged the importance of—and widely used—literary source materials. Indeed, for those time periods, and across many cultures, literature and astronomy share much of the same history within many of the same artefacts and texts. (22)

In this way, Gossin's book is a trans-disciplinary achievement that demonstrates that the separation between the humanities and the sciences, literature and astronomy, and culture and nature can be understood not as a ‘natural’ phenomenon, but as a historical development.

While I agree with Gossin, Walls, Adamson and Monani, and Handley that it is productive to explore how the notion of cosmology changes the way we understand

²⁹ See, for example, the chapter “Literary Cosmology: Plato, Tobin, Major Turner.” *Mathematics, Culture, and the Arts*, edited by Emily Rolfe Grosholz. Cham: Springer, 2018. See also: Priscilla Costello. *Shakespeare and the Stars: The Hidden Astrological Keys to Understanding the World's Greatest Playwright*. Newburyport, MA: Ibis, 2016.

literary practices, I argue that the association of the cosmic with ancient or Indigenous worldviews obscures the fact that cosmology can also illuminate a valuable function of literary texts *generally*: one that might be activated more strongly with the pronouncement of the Anthropocene. The case of Humboldt is instructive here. In describing the history of Humboldt's use of cosmology, Adamson and Monani write that Humboldt was primarily influenced by indigenous Latin-American worldviews: "It is especially important to note that Indigenous cosmovisions influenced Humboldt rather than the other way around" (22). While this is undeniably true, a recent extensive and popular biography by Andrea Wulf titled *The Invention of Nature* (2015) also traces the influence of European Romanticism, and especially of Goethe's profound influence on Humboldt's work. Wulf argues that before Humboldt ventured on his first voyage to the Americas, he was deeply influenced by the philosophical and literary exchange with intellectuals such as Kant or Goethe. As a writer, Goethe was also drawn to the scientific world, but he remained insistent on the importance of the imagination and subjective experience when trying to understand the systems of the more-than-human world. As Wulf writes,

He had developed, for example, a colour theory in which he discussed how colour was perceived—a concept in which the role of the eye had become central because it brought the outer world into the inner. Goethe insisted that objective truth could only be attained by combining subjective experiences (through the perception of the eye, for example) with the observer's power of reasoning. (36)

Humboldt then developed such ideas into "his own interpretation of nature," bringing together "exact scientific data with an emotional response to what he was seeing" (36). Wulf, therefore, argues that Humboldt was influenced by both Latin American Indigenous peoples and European artists and intellectuals, eventually leading to his summative work *Cosmos*. Thus, as we can see with the case of Humboldt and in the context of considering the history of cosmology, it seems important to also mention the Romantic movement in Europe, which was invested in recovering the intelligence of the more-than-human world in the face of a fast-moving Industrialisation and its concomitant exploitation of peoples and environments, as well as the importance of the subjective, cultural view on the environment. As we can see, then, the critique of

globally exploitative developments has often been fuelled by various artists, writers, thinkers as well as by Indigenous peoples (these categorisations, needless to say, are not mutually exclusive). While it seems important to be aware that many Indigenous cultures in particular engage in cosmic understandings (in the sense of the cultural characteristic of rootedness in the land as shared by many indigenous populations of settler-colonies), and keeping in mind that Indigenous worldviews are still marginalised despite important political interventions, theories of the cosmos have been present in literature transculturally. In this way, it may be helpful to unsettle binaries of 'Western' and 'Indigenous' worldviews—even if this binary construction remains complex in many contexts, especially in cultures inheriting the logic of Imperial colonialism. Arguably, then, paying attention to the potential of transcultural literary works to foster the idea of 'cosmos' can be more inclusive of authors that do not share the history of Imperial colonialism, but nevertheless experience the devastating socio-eco-political developments we now call the Anthropocene.

2.2 Searching for Anthropocene Stories

This literature review contextualises literary scholarship in relation to climate change, a term that has received much more attention than the Anthropocene, in order to discuss a selection of pertinent publications specifically concerned with literary studies and the Anthropocene. I will then give a brief overview of the developments in Australian literary theory in relation to the Anthropocene.

In the context of socio-environmental calamities, it seems crucial to pay attention to the imaginaries about current ecological crises and to how literature makes sense of something as complex, divisive, and all-encompassing as the concept of the Anthropocene. However, the field of literary studies has predominantly been occupied with climate change, rather than the more complex kaleidoscope of the ecological crises gathered under the Anthropocene. The current category of 'cli-fi' (climate fiction), coined by the writer Dan Bloom in 2007, draws attention to the emerging corpus of fictions dealing with climate change, which is increasingly being taught in schools and academia around the world. Arguably, climate fiction cannot be understood as a genre

in the old-fashioned scholarly sense, since it does not organise narrative along plot formulas or stylistic conventions, but rather denotes a general theme (Johns-Putra, "Cli-Fi"). However, if genre can be understood as a theory of interconnection, kinship and contingently bound discursive constellations (as opposed to a unified collection of features), then climate fiction might be seen as a new 'world literary' genre (Siskind 346). This genre has by now assembled a set of standard, mostly Anglophone, texts that have attracted the attention of both academic and non-academic readers, such as Margaret Atwood's dystopian trilogy *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), *MaddAddam* (2013); Ian McEwan's *Solar* (2010); or Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behaviour* (2012). Yet scholarship concerned with this genre arguably neglects to consider more diverse understandings of ecological crises, as its focus on climate has often favoured imaginations of catastrophic future worlds. Even if climate change may appear the most pressing contemporary concern, I argue that the environmental changes of the Anthropocene denote more complexity than the concentration on climate change allows for.

All too often, climate fiction has favoured narratives of apocalypse. Yet, as Tony Birch has pointed out, the concentration on future catastrophe overlooks the ways in which climate change is already at work:

For Indigenous people, the impact of climate change is not a future event. It has occurred in the past, and it is occurring now. [...] Are these narratives of impending apocalypse something of a Western fetish? And do these stories lull people into thinking that a fictional future ravaged by climate change (by each of us, actually) is nothing more than a disaster narrative produced for our entertainment? ("It's Been, It's Here")

As Birch also suggests, disaster narratives often neglect to incorporate Indigenous viewpoints that have a cultural memory of changes in climate, and that, in Australia at least, have a culturally engrained ethics of custodianship that the concentration on climate disaster seems to marginalise. Further, Adam Trexler has pointed to the problem of the canonisation of very few climate fiction texts by mostly Western Anglophone writers: "This preselected canon obscures some of the most important questions about climate fiction, excluding wider arguments about how climate change is imagined, the role of the novel in the face of the Anthropocene, and the formal possibilities of fiction

in that confrontation” (11). One problem, he argues, is the conflict between popular and literary markets, as well as the question of genre (12-13).

Because it is difficult to represent the magnitude of climate change, a number of critics and writers have remarked that there is an astounding appetite for genre literature in cli-fi. Ursula Heise has pointed out that climate change is so challenging for narrative because it requires the “articulation of connections between events at vastly different scales,” other than individual, family, and nation (*Sense* 205). Robert Macfarlane has suggested that climate change is so difficult to narrate due to its slow, gradual changes and the fact that it is not always visibly apocalyptic (“The Burning Question”). Amitav Ghosh has asserted that “serious literary fiction,” often steeped in the realist tradition, is failing to address this crisis: “the very gestures with which it conjures up reality are a concealment of the real” (“Where is”). In lieu of realist fiction, Ghosh proposes that genre fiction (fantasy, horror, science fiction) is potentially more apt to express the contemporary experience (*The Great* 24). Similarly, Trexler argues that genre is a way to measure innovation: “Many pre-existing genres [Trexler lists Science Fiction, Chiller Fiction, Teen Fiction and Suspense novels] offer extraordinary resources to think about complex issues like climate change” (13). Thus, numerous writers and critics have argued that realism cannot live up to the challenge of narrating climate change, which might be explained by the fact that realism predominantly rests on an anthropocentric world view. While acknowledging the disastrous effects of the Anthropocene must necessarily result in a rethinking of anthropocentrism—which other genres might be able to explore more efficiently—I argue that it seems equally important not to dismiss the achievements of works that can fall under the category of ‘realism’ or that employ realist modes (in fact, all my chapters contain literary texts that are partly written in a realist mode).

In this context, it seems legitimate to ask whether Anthropocene stories exist as such. Given its wide array of predicaments scattered across space and time, this thesis argues that the task of ‘finding’ Anthropocene fiction involves not so much the search for new literature as the development and reassessment of reading methodologies. The notion of the Anthropocene challenges readers and writers to do both: to read environmental issues of concern (as reflected in my chapters’ general environmental issues), as well as to develop questions, lenses, or frameworks (as reflected in my

cosmological readings). The following literature review considers how the Anthropocene has been approached in seminal literary and cultural scholarship.

Representing the Anthropocene: A Literature Review

Although this thesis engages with the idea of the Anthropocene and its concomitant debate, it firstly needs to be stated that the boundary between Anthropocene scholarship and ecocriticism cannot be drawn clearly, as the Anthropocene is also widely seen as an umbrella term for various different ecological issues. A literature review, therefore, needs to acknowledge the multiple recent volumes in the field of the Environmental Humanities, that often include reflections on literary studies or literary works, and that implicitly or explicitly engage with the Anthropocene debate, even if it is not front and centre of the inquiry. Examples are Huggan and Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (2011), De Loughrey, Didur and Carrigan's *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches* (2015), Heise, Christensen and Niemann's *Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities* (2016), Oppermann and Siovino's *Environmental Humanities: Voices from the Anthropocene* (2017), Parham and Westling's *A Global History of Literature and the Environment* (2017), Tsing, Buban and Gan's *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* (2017), Johns-Putra, Squire and Parham's *Literature and Sustainability* (2017), and Slovic, Rangarajan and Sarveswaran's *Routledge Handbook of Ecocriticism and Environmental Communication* (2019). My thesis acknowledges this tension between one single term and the multitude of issues subsumed under its umbrella by engaging with a wide array of scholarship: although this literature review represents explicit literary and ecocritical engagements with the Anthropocene, my readings of the creative texts consider publications in the Environmental Humanities generally.

While there are numerous essays that read specific authors or aspects of the Anthropocene, there are only a handful of general inquiries into the role of literature and literary studies in relation to the Anthropocene. As mentioned in the Introduction, these inquiries were roughly published since 2015 and seem to fall into reflections on two main dimensions: scale and genre—predominantly climate fiction, (eco)Gothic,

science and speculative fiction, and allegory. Examples for scale are Clarke's *Ecocriticism on the Edge* (2015); Tavel, Clarke and Wittenberg's *Scale in Literature and Culture* (2017); and Menely and Taylor's *Anthropocene Reading* (2017). Examples for genre are Trexler's *Anthropocene Fictions* (2015); Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble* (2016); Ghosh's *The Great Derangement* (2016); Moreton's *Dark Ecology* (2016); De Loughrey's *Allegories of the Anthropocene* (2019); Heise's "Science Fiction and the Time Scales of the Anthropocene" (2019) and Vermeulen's *Literature and the Anthropocene* (2020). Many of these publications also address both aspects together: scale *and* genre. This literature review chronologically presents a selection of these publications. The focus on genre and scale is significant and can be considered one of the main contributions of literary studies to the Anthropocene debate. As Nils Bubandt, Heather Swanson, and Anna Tsing have argued, "Genres [...] help us see future possibilities, rather than the development of tensions and debates. [...] [T]hey show us ways to make new processes of field formation happen. [...] They give traction to attempts to create new assemblies of advocates, experts, and artists" (162). Chapter 4 further focuses on the explicit relationship between Anthropocene theory and genre, especially science and speculative fiction.

Timothy Clark's *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept* (2015) circles around "the inevitable question of scale," arguing that the Anthropocene enacts the demand to think of human life at much broader scales than the level of the individual and societal, "challenging us to think counter-intuitive relations of scale, effect, perception, knowledge, representation and calculability" (13). As Clark argues, the Anthropocene fosters awareness of the "derangement of scale," thus drawing attention to the ways in which humans are profoundly influenced by scales that escape human perception (125). Clark coins the term 'Anthropocene disorder' to describe the inability to comprehend the competing perspectives of environmental issues, resulting in confusion over how one should act to "save the world" (131). While the Anthropocene dissolves "into innumerable issues," Clark mainly focuses on the planetary or large-scale, as the Anthropocene represents "the demand made upon a species consciously to consider the impact as a totality upon the whole planet" (16).

Adam Trexler's *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* (2015) surveys over 150 novels from the past 50 years. However, Trexler uses the term

Anthropocene as somewhat synonymously with climate change, and, similarly to Clark, primarily foregrounds issues of larger scale. Trexler chooses the term Anthropocene over climate change to indicate that atmospheric warming is no longer a theory but a concept that has now “arrived,” meaning that it marks a widespread cultural transformation towards an understanding that “climate change is upon us” (4-5). Following Crutzen’s and Stoermer’s coining of the term Anthropocene, Trexler regards the greenhouse effect as the “principal impact” of the Anthropocene, thus, using the Anthropocene concept as synonymous with global warming: “*Anthropocene Fictions* emphasises the real agency of atmospheric warming and the novel” (1; 7). Although mentioning different phenomena associated with the Anthropocene (the expansion of human population, human exploitation of the planet’s land surface, the transformation of waterways), Trexler mainly focuses on climate change novels, with special attention paid to establishing a disciplinary relationship between environmental criticism and science studies (17; 19). Because climate fiction is not the result of a literary school, Trexler writes, “no singular influence or unitary ‘idea’ connects all climate fiction. Climate change itself is a remarkably broad series of phenomena in the nonhuman world, politics and the media” (10-11). Hence, he argues that an entry point into making sense of this central question is genre: “Many pre-existing genres offer extraordinary resources to think about complex issues like climate change” (13).

Trexler’s and Clark’s studies show a tendency to favour the large-scale, and to embracing the Anthropocene term. A contrasting approach is presented by Donna Haraway’s *Staying with the Trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene* (2016), an idiosyncratic academic publication that ends with a speculative fiction chapter in order to illustrate the crucial role of the imagination for finding ways out of the Anthropocene—a term that is viewed as deeply problematic. To express a critique of the Anthropocene term, Haraway coins the previously-mentioned term ‘Chthulucene’—named after the Greek word *chthonios* which means “of, in, or under the earth and the seas”—in order to foreground the need to go beyond the misleading Anthropocene dualism of ‘human vs. nature’ (101). The Chthulucene critiques the Anthropocene’s fixation on *anthropos* (‘human’) by suggesting that humans have never been self-contained but have always lived in multi-species communities. Haraway traces the use of this ancient Greek *anthropos* to meanings of the “sky-gazing” human, which suggests

a looking away from the earth and, thus, a certain contempt for the earth that favours of a world 'beyond' (53). In this way, Haraway responds to the favouring of the Anthropocene's large-scale narrative by taking an opposite approach: borrowing Latour's term of the "earthbound," Haraway argues that there is a great need to foreground the web of life that makes human life possible (41). Haraway writes on the complicated task of narrating the Chthulucene and the Anthropocene's problematic dating process:

One must surely tell of the networks of sugar, precious metals, plantations, indigenous genocides, and slavery, with their labor innovations and relocations and recompositions of critters and things sweeping up both human and nonhuman workers of all kinds. The infectious industrial revolution of England mattered hugely, but it is only one player in planet-transforming, historically situated, new enough, worlding relations. The relocation of peoples, plants, and animals; the levelling of vast forests; and the violent mining of metal preceded the steam engine. (48)

As Haraway argues here, systemic changes to production and organisation of labour occurred well before the invention of the steam engine and included human and nonhuman "workers" alike. With the approach of "thinking with" creatures on a smaller, more earthbound scale, Haraway joins Stengers and Latour's earlier mentioned proposition for the need to tell "Gaia stories" (41). While acknowledging the importance of 'big' narratives and theories, such as the Anthropocene or the Capitalocene, Haraway thus considers these large concepts as unhelpful, as they "teeter constantly on the brink of becoming much Too Big," potentially and problematically feeding into unhelpful meta-narratives (50).

The collection, *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times* (2017), edited by Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Taylor, presents one of the few essay collections on the explicit relationship between literary studies and the Anthropocene. The editors read the Anthropocene as a literary object and geo-historical event that "unsettles" reading practices and methodologies, posing the following important question: "how [do] we justify the resources dedicated to our work—reading, teaching, and writing about literature—in an age of neoliberal austerity and STEM ascendance" (10)?³⁰ While

³⁰ STEM refers to Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.

the contributions to the volume do not provide a unified answer, the editors propose that diversity may be literary studies' strength, a discipline that includes "cultural critics and aesthetes, biographers and textual editors, empiricist historians and speculative theorists" (10):

It turns out that when your object of concern is something like the Anthropocene—multiform, multiscalar, multicausal, multitemporal, a commitment to methodological consistency may be exactly the wrong approach. [...] (Y)ou will see psychoanalytic, philological, and deconstructive gestures. Our readers unpack metaphors and metonymies. They examine the affordances and limits of genre. [...] They stage experiential predicaments. They critique. They take up narratological problems: superpositioning, catastrophe, the vortex. They read forms, signs, fossils, structures, traces, symptoms. They tarry with the negative and hold out hope for messianic reversal. (13)

Instead of a single solution, the editors assess that the strength of literary studies lies in its very commitment to complexity, diversity, contradiction, and "the labor of translation" (13). In this way, the collection points to the challenges for literary studies ("the literary mediation of geohistory, the relation of literature to other (inhuman) media, narrative form and unconformity, the identity of the Anthropos, the formalization of scale variance and scale change"), concluding that the Anthropocene emerges as a *condition* under which all reading must proceed (14).

Elizabeth De Loughrey's insightful *Allegories of the Anthropocene* (2019) draws attention to the entanglements of scale and the genre of allegory, arguing that allegory is a fundamental form and trope of the Anthropocene because of its capacity to "represent both historical and scalar relations" (4-5). De Loughrey observes that allegory is currently ubiquitous in metonymic and substitutive cries such as "Save the Planet" (planet here stands for humanity) and in the figuration of a universal *anthropos* that stands in for harmful systems and practices of a minority of humans. As De Loughrey puts it: "Allegory is more than the use of rhetorical tropes. It is the animation of universalizing figures such as planet, species, nature, and the human into narrative—and thereby into space and time" (5). In other words, allegorical figurations express a grappling with the complexity of the Anthropocene through conjuring narratives. Drawing on Walter Benjamin, De Loughrey argues that allegory gains importance in

acute historical crises that cannot always be grasped by the senses and, thus, need to be acted out through narrative figurations (5; 11):

Clearly the Anthropocene dictates that we need multiscalar theorizing of the human: allegory provides its disjunctive narrative. Jameson has demonstrated that allegory is constitutive to the cartographic drive [...]: “The world system is a being of such enormous complexity that it can only be mapped and modelled indirectly, by way of a simpler object that stands as its allegorical interpretant.” (15, quoting Jameson 169).

Thus, as De Loughrey concludes, allegory is the fundamental rhetorical mode of the Anthropocene because it bridges the rift between part and whole, past and present, time and place (18).

Pieter Vermeulen’s *Literature and the Anthropocene* (2020) gives an overview of the unique contributions of literary studies for confronting the Anthropocene, as separated into four main aspects—narrative, affect, imagination, and writing: “the centrality of narrative as a meaning-making device; literature’s *affective* affordances as an aesthetic construct; its license to imagine possible scenarios; and [...] literature’s constitutive engagements with questions of writing, inscription, and action” (20). While narrative has an analytical function, literature’s “emotionalizing strategies” are more able to engage with ecological entanglements than scientific writing (22). Vermeulen stresses that literature’s unique “world-making capacities” have the power to not only shape fictional realities, but also to “add unanticipated possibilities to the world” (24). Moreover, literature’s self-reflexive engagement with writing and reading throws into relief the ways in which the Anthropocene is also “a matter of reading and writing, of decoding and inscription” (25-26).

Anthropocene Fiction and Australian Literature

I will now give a brief overview of the developments in Australian literary theory in relation to the Anthropocene. While there is a growing corpus of ecocriticism and Australian literature, there is no extensive reading of Australian fiction in relation to the Anthropocene debate yet. This section chronologically introduces select publications that consider readings of the Anthropocene in particular relation to Australia.

Clark's earlier cited *Ecocriticism on the Edge* (2015) contains a chapter with a "test case" for reading Australian literature: "Postcolonial Ecocriticism and de-humanizing reading: An Australian test case." Arguing that there are no real precedents for reading at the scale required by the Anthropocene, Clark proposes that the Anthropocene has generated new ways of reading (123). While the "first" (traditional) readings tended to examine notions of the individual, social or national, the "second" (new) ways of reading include multi-scalar perspectives that enable a bigger picture of, for example, Australia's invasion and conquest (129). As an example for his reading experiment, Clark takes the iconic nationalist writer, Henry Lawson (1867-1922), arguing that "[i]n the changed light of the Anthropocene, Lawson emerges no longer as an icon of Australian nationalism but as a fascinating writer of environmental conflict and degradation, and, to a degree unknown to himself, of the effects of these in terms of cultural and personal self-conceptions" (118). Thus, Clark's 'new' reading reveals the ways in which Anthropocene lens generates previously overlooked aspects, such as Lawson's portrayal of ecophobia, which produces "new ironies of retrospect" of ecological devastation as an "agent of rapid colonization and conquest" (118-124). This 'new' reading also includes considerations of Lawson's depiction of the microscopic (for example seeds and plants) and the macroscopic (for example climate change) (129). Clark names these 'new' readings as "anti-human," as they foreground the effects of "diverse elements of geography, psychology, politics, environment and chance in to the working of a disciplinary formula" (130).

Graham Huggan's article "Australian Literature, Risk, and the Global Climate Challenge" (2015) follows Ulrich Beck's employment of the "risk perspective." Distinguished from the apocalyptic perspective, the notion of 'risk' reveals how "crises are already underway all around, and while their consequences can be mitigated, a future without their impact has become impossible to envision" (88, quoting Heise, *Sense* 142). Taking two social realist texts of risk—Kate Grenville's *The Idea of Perfection* (1999) and Tim Winton's *Breath* (2008)—Huggan reads texts that would otherwise not be considered climate fiction to make the important point that

a good climate change novel may not be “about” climate change at all, or at least about the deliberate attempt to thematize its main issues; rather it may take place within the general context of climate change, a context marked by a high degree of uncertainty and contingency, and by a strong ethical awareness of the issues at stake in the social staging of risk in a globally interconnected world. (88)

Significantly for this thesis, then, Huggan counteracts the “worrying trend” of figuring climate change as the one main problem that supersedes all others (88). As Huggan helpfully points out, climate change is so all-encompassing that it requires multidisciplinary approaches, which includes literature’s unique ability to move “across different scales” and literary criticism to access different semantic levels (92-93).

Andrew Milner’s essays and book chapters “Changing the Climate: The Politics of Dystopia” (2009) and “The Sea and Eternal Summer: An Australian Apocalypse” (2014) mainly refer to the Anthropocene in relation to science fiction and notions of utopia, dystopia, and apocalypse, as Milner argues that science fiction is an apt genre for the thought experiments needed to imagine climate change. The co-authored essay “Ice, Fire and Flood: Science Fiction and the Anthropocene,” offers a case study of science fiction’s “practical capacity to represent three main kinds of possible catastrophic future development: plague, nuclear war, and extreme climate change (Milner et al 14). However, as the authors hold, “if there is a problem with Science Fiction it is that, by comparison with plague or nuclear war, climate change is a relatively slow process” (Milner et al. 20). As Milner’s works show, often-discussed works of Australian climate fiction include iconic Australian science fiction novels such as Nevil Shute’s *On the Beach* (1957), or George Turner’s *The Sea and Summer* (1987), in which political and environmental scenarios of climate change or nuclear pollution are set in the near future.³¹ More recent Australian novels concerned with climate change are Alexis Wright’s epic mining novel *Carpentaria* (2006), and the speculative fiction novel *The Swan Book* (2013), which have found a great echo in recent literary scholarship across the globe.³²

³¹ See for example: Ruth Morgan. “Depictions of Climate Change in 1980s Australia.” *Australian Humanities Review*, vol. 57, 2014, pp. 38-55.

³² See for example: Jessica White. “Fluid Worlds: Reflecting Climate Change in *The Swan Book* and *The Sunlit Zone*.” *Southerly*, vol. 74, no. 1, 2014, pp. 142-163.

Two recent notable collected volumes testify to the growing importance of environmental concerns and ecocriticism in relation to Australia: Neumeier, Braun and Herche's *Nature and Environment in Australia* (2018) employs a truly interdisciplinary approach, as the volume contains historical, geographical, ethical, legal, anthropological, linguistic, literary, and cultural perspectives. As the editors point out, the very nature of considering the environment invites "inter- and transdisciplinary reflections in different but interrelated contexts at the intersection of the humanities and the social sciences," so that the volume's aim is to show the very inseparability of environmental issues (2). Neumeier and Tiffin's *Ecocritical Concerns on the Australian Continent* (2020) takes a similarly broad approach to illuminating the complexity of the environment by encompassing bold multi-disciplinary perspectives, fieldwork, a reconsideration of colonial art and literature, and personal accounts, thereby widening the term 'ecocriticism' from a literary studies concept to a wider idea characterised by the cross-fertilisation of diverse disciplines (1). Both these volumes also testify to the leading role that Australia has played in postcolonial ecocriticism, and in the emergence of the Environmental Humanities.

Conclusion

This literature review has shown that the Anthropocene has generated discussions among literary scholars about genre, scale, tropes and figurations, and the self-reflexive act of reading and writing. While literary critics initially expressed anxiety as to whether the Anthropocene and climate change can be narrated on a human scale, many of the cited scholars and authors have responded to these claims that literature is conspicuously good at moving across different scales, while literary criticism is particularly good at considering different semantic levels on multiples scales. As I have also discussed, there is great potential for going beyond a focus on climate fiction to consider how the Anthropocene potentially broadens ideas about what constitutes 'the environment.' Moreover, as multiple ecocritical scholars of Australia have argued, Australia has been foundational to the field of the Environmental Humanities, particularly because of the country's strong awareness that the environment cannot just

be seen as a passive backdrop, but that it can be considered as a crucial agent in colonisation and, therefore, that it can be seen as equally important for the regeneration of culture and climate.

This thesis aims to add to these discussions by arguing that, in its complexity, the Anthropocene lens enables both, a reconsideration of environmental issues (as reflected in my chapter titles) and a review of frameworks, lenses, and methodologies of reading (as reflected in my use of cosmos). I argue that my proposed term, 'literary cosmology,' provides a helpful additional framework of reading literature in the context of the Anthropocene because it not only evokes many of the literary aspects discussed (scale, narrative, tropes), but it also reframes the 'environment' as an active, alive, agential, wilful, intentional 'cosmos' that generates productive considerations of order, chaos, origin, evolution, interconnectivity, reciprocity, beauty, truth, ethics, citizenship, and politics.

3. Colonisation/Exploitation:

Reimagining Agriculture and Extraction

3.1 Introduction: Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Black Anthropocene (Beyond Racial Capitalism)

This chapter analyses two historical novels that reassess colonisation through the lens of agricultural and extractive practices. Carrie Tiffany's *Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living* (2005) revives the ambition and failure of wheat-farming in the Victorian inland in the interbellum years. Tara June Winch's *The Yield* (2019), which spans different time-scales, reconsiders the Indigenous legacy of land cultivation under and beyond colonisation. Both novels reframe the history of farming and mining in the context of socio-environmental degradation and can thus be read as reflecting the developments that led to the Anthropocene. This includes not only the exploitation of Indigenous land, water, culture, and labour, but also pollution, soil and water-degradation through unsustainable practices. However, this chapter does not suggest that industrial agriculture and extraction are *per se* the 'evil root' of the Anthropocene; rather, it foregrounds the novels' contemplation of farming and mining practices as representative of a new front line of coming to terms with colonisation and exploitation—this time in the context of a planetary environmental crisis.

Wheat is a telling example in this context; as a crop that was imposed by the colonial government on the driest continent in the world, and facilitated by chemical fertilisers such as superphosphate (sourced in former colonial protectorates on Pacific islands), it became one of Australia's most valuable agricultural products and is until today a major source of Australia's export revenues (however unpredictable the future may be). The crop is also a cultural signifier: wheat was thought to be a 'white' crop and is thus entangled with Australia's project to build a 'white nation.' Moreover, mining revenues constitute Australia's top exports (iron ore, coal, gold, petroleum gas), and have long enriched the nation.

Throughout my reading, I test the idea that racial capitalism is the main driver for the Anthropocene, as proposed in a number of recent publications, and as expressed through the debate's focus on the neologisms Capitalocene, Plantationocene, and Black Anthropocene.³³ Although each of these terms takes a slightly different angle (the Capitalocene centres on global economic structures of exploited labour; the Black Anthropocene adds that exploited labour was and is predominantly carried out by racialised bodies; the Plantationocene stresses that this economy also includes the exploitation and damage of the more-than-human world), they each argue that the main driver of the planetary crisis is the capitalist exploitation of human and more-than-human labour. Therefore, all three terms reveal the Anthropocene debate's centralising of racial capitalism. While the interest in racial capitalism is not new, what is new is that, within the context of the Anthropocene, scholars propose that human history is legible as deep time in earth strata, or in ecosystems across the globe. In short, what is new is the sense that, more visibly than ever before, time is written into place. As Rick Crownshaw puts it, the Anthropocene "describes the return and remembrance of knowledge historically dissociated, but what returns is not just cultural matter but also biological, physical, and chemical matter, as socio-economic modifications of Earth systems (and indeed Earth systems' modifications of the socio-economic) manifest themselves cumulatively and latently" (Craps et al 501). As Crownshaw argues, the Anthropocene fosters the awareness that human history manifests itself in matter which "returns" and therefore reshapes history and memory in new ways. This idea conveys that matter now appears to be a feedback loop on socio-eco-political systems in place. As the entanglement of environment and history, mind and matter, culture and nature suggests, human time can be said to have a certain cosmological dimension, as it is immanent and manifested in place. In this way, I propose that the Anthropocene debate's focus on human history and deep time might even be called 'cosmological history,' as the environment or, indeed, the cosmos, appears to enact a certain agency.

³³ 'Racial capitalism' was coined in Eric Williams' classic *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944) and aimed at expanding "Marx's and socialism's relative neglect of the physical violence and ideological processes of slavery, racism, and nationalism" (Saldanha 5). Saldanha notices a renewed interest in racial capitalism in the context of the Anthropocene debate in the fields of postcolonial theory, new-materialist feminism, and critical race studies, citing Chakrabarty's "Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change" (2012), Mirzoeff (2016), and Yusoff (2019).

However, while the debate's focus on racial capitalism has generated important insights into the deep history of commodification and exploitation of land and labour, I argue that the focus on racial capitalism also has its limitations, as it tends to present capitalism as a monolithic system and often ignores the history of exploitation present in other systems (e.g. socialism). My reading of the creative texts complicates the notion of racial capitalism, as the novels show that violence can be perpetuated across all social strata and societal systems—with complex implications for understanding the nature of power and accountability. More importantly still, my reading offers the unique perspective that literature brings to the debate's question of what socio-economic systems have led to the crisis of the Anthropocene: by drawing attention to the relationship between history, land, and language, I argue that the texts illuminate not just the role of language for colonisation and exploitation, but they also convey the power of language to regenerate and care for land and people. *The Yield* in particular suggests that language is not only a system through which we can understand the mechanisms of colonisation (its crucial suppression of Indigenous cultures), but that, in its reciprocity with particular places, language is also alive and holds the key for potential regeneration and custodianship of the land. In this way, I read the (partly) historical novels to go beyond analysing oppression, as they point to the power of language, the imagination, and careful labour to heal socio-environmental harm. Beyond an assessment of systematic damage, then, my cosmological reading points to the ways in which the novels reinscribe wholeness, belonging, and potential repair into the Australian landscape, something I call 'cosmological' rather than environmental, as it stresses the reciprocity of meaning-making between 'humans' and 'environment.'

In the following pages I briefly explain the Capitalocene, Plantationocene, and Black Anthropocene, in order to set-up my analysis of how my select creative texts can be positioned in relation to the theory of racial capitalism.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the term 'Capitalocene' was coined to emphasise that, above all, the Anthropocene is not an issue of 'humans,' but an issue of power.³⁴ Jason W. Moore argues that the Capitalocene is a necessary neologism, as no

³⁴ As Jason W. Moore writes, it is hard to trace who used the term first, as it seems to have been coined collectively: "'The Capitalocene' seems to be one of those words floating in the ether, one crystallized by several scholars at once—many of them independently. I first heard the word in 2009 from Andreas Malm.

other term “captures the basic historical pattern of modern world history as the ‘Age of Capital’” (*Anthropocene* 6). The Capitalocene here names a system that, as Moore puts it, “organizes Nature:”

If it has been nothing else, capitalism has been a system of getting nature—human nature too!—to work for free or very low-cost. Capitalism’s “law” of value—how and what it prioritizes in the web of life—has always been a law of Cheap Nature. (*Anthropocene* 11)

‘Cheap Nature’ thus carries a twofold meaning: “to make Nature’s elements ‘cheap’ in price, but also to cheapen, degrade, and render inferior nature in an ethico-political sense” (*Anthropocene* 2). Examples for this cheapening process can be seen in what Moore names the “Four Cheaps: food, energy, raw materials, and human life” (*Anthropocene* 11). Importantly, however, Cheap Nature is at an end: “cheapening nature cannot work much longer to sustain extraction and production in and of the contemporary world because most of the reserves of the earth have been drained, burned, depleted, poisoned, exterminated, and otherwise exhausted” (Haraway, “Anthropocene” 160). In this sense, Haraway and Moore convey that the Anthropocene designates an end-point to the Capitalocene.

Regarding the setting of a date for the Anthropocene/Capitalocene, Donna Haraway and Moore argue that the originally proposed eighteenth century is misleading; instead, they recommend Early Modernity (the long sixteenth century), as it shows the beginnings of the “capitalist world-ecology” (Moore, *Anthropocene* 7).³⁵ Whereas the Industrial Revolution occludes the geographies of capital and power, they argue, a focus on Early Modernism links the development of global economic structures in relation to colonisation, which enables a wider historical perspective: “English coal’s rapid ascent after 1530 directs our attention to the relations of primitive accumulation and agrarian class structure, to the formation of the modern world market, to new forms of commodity-centered landscape change, to new machineries of state power” (“The

The radical economist David Ruccio seems to have first publicized the concept, on his blog in 2011. By 2012, Haraway began to use the concept in her public lectures. That same year, Tony Weis and I were discussing the concept in relation to what would become *The Ecological Hoofprint*” (*Anthropocene* 5). Other prominent publications, such as Naomi Klein’s *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs Climate* (2014), have made similar points, but do not necessarily employ the term ‘Capitalocene.’

³⁵ As opposed to a world-economy, world-ecology expresses the dependency on exploited ‘Cheap Nature.’ With this term, Moore draws on world-systems theory.

Capitalocene” 16). Implicitly, Moore here suggest that setting the date to the 1800s is Euro- or Anglo-centric. In other words, because the Capitalocene is a global crisis, Moore and Haraway argue, it is imperative to direct our attention to the beginnings of transnational and transoceanic economic structures oriented around profit and based on the exploitation of certain peoples.

Parallel to the Capitalocene, the term ‘Plantationocene’ draws attention to the long consequences of human and more-than-human labour exploitation. Again coined collectively, this term draws on the work of postcolonial, Black, Caribbean, and Indigenous thought which centres the plantation and its practices of trans-continental slave labour as a foundational site of Early Modernism.³⁶ The Plantationocene captures “the devastating transformation of diverse kinds of human-tended farms, pastures, and forests into extractive and enclosed plantations, relying on slave labor and other forms of exploited, alienated, and usually spatially transported labor” (Haraway, “Anthropocene” 162). Haraway stresses that versions of the Plantationocene still shape our contemporary economy across the globe in the form of globalised factory meat production, monocrop agribusiness, and “immense substitutions of crops like oil palm for multispecies forests and their products that sustain human and nonhuman critters alike” (“Anthropocene” 162). Haraway here draws attention to ongoing practices of mono-cultures at the expense of biodiversity, the commercialisation of crops through companies such as Monsanto,³⁷ and the ongoing exploitation of labour. Hence, the Plantationocene term also aims to capture the labour sourced from the more-than-human world, which expands the definition of ‘labour.’ As Jennifer Hamilton writes:

What of the labour of the plants and animals that are turned into food for human consumption? What of the human-machine assemblages that process the food? What of the labours of the once living, whose fossilised remains are mined for our energy? Indeed, in what kind of political economy could the sun be valued as a labourer? (“Labour” 185)

³⁶ As Donna Haraway notes, the term ‘Plantationocene’ was collectively generated by participants of a workshop at the University of Aarhus in October 2014. Participants included: Noboru Ishikawa, Anna Tsing, Donna Haraway, Scott F. Gilbert, Nils Bubandt and Kenneth Olwig (*Staying* 206).

³⁷ Monsanto was the world’s largest biotechnology corporation which was bought and incorporated into the Bayer company in 2018. As the prominent environmental scholar and food sovereignty activist Vandana Shiva writes: “[Monsanto] controls large parts of the soybean and cotton seed supply through patents and through having acquired seed companies across the world” (*Views from the South* 104).

In this way, the Plantationocene can be understood as a kind of physical site—perhaps the most salient embodiment—of the Capitalocene, which stresses the idea of labour as a multi-species effort of life-sustaining, but potentially also life-destroying, power.

The term ‘Black Anthropocene,’ coined by geologist Kathryn Yusoff, points to the problem of universalising the ‘human’ by drawing attention to the structural racism that has informed extractive practices.³⁸ Expressing critiques of the Anthropocene’s “wilful blindness” towards race, the term indicates, as Yusoff puts it, the disproportionate material “proximity of black and brown bodies to harm,” organised by “historical geographies of extraction, grammars of geology, imperial global geographies, and contemporary environmental racism” (xii-xiii). As Yusoff continues:

[The Black Anthropocene] is predicated on the presumed absorbent qualities of black and brown bodies to take up the body burdens of exposure to toxicities and to buffer the violence of the earth. [...] White Geology continues to propagate imaginaries that organize Blackness as a stratum or seismic barrier to the costs of extraction, across the coal face, the alluvial planes, and the sugar-cane fields, and on the slave block, into the black communities that puffer the petrochemical industries and hurricanes to the indigenous reservations that soak up the waste of industrialization and the sociosexual effects of extraction cultures. (xii-xiii)

Yusoff here draws attention to the ways in which the discipline of geology is linked to extraction, and how the labour of extraction is linked to racialised bodies. Moreover, the Black Anthropocene echoes the frequently made critique that the Anthropocene “suddenly proclaims concern with the exposures of environmental harm to white liberal communities” (xiii). To put it bluntly, now that the long consequences of colonisation, slavery, genocide, and labour exploitation increasingly affect even the wealthy in every nation through the palpably changing climate, for example, the Anthropocene is pronounced as the ‘fault of all humans.’ Yet, as Yusoff points out, this notion of universal guilt is problematic, as “imperialism and ongoing (settler) colonialisms have been ending worlds for as long as they have been in existence” (xiii).³⁹ A similar critique has also been proposed by Indigenous scholars, such as Kyle White and Tony Birch, who have argued

³⁸ For the purpose of brevity, I omit the discussion of Nicholas Mirzoeff’s related term ‘White-Supremacy-Scene,’ which similarly points to the links between geology and race (“It’s Not the Anthropocene”).

³⁹ The next chapter addresses the problems with apocalyptic narratives at length.

that climate change can be seen as intensified colonialism, and therefore presents a “déjà-vu experience” for Indigenous communities (Whyte 159; Birch, “It’s Been”).⁴⁰

However, while the focus on global economic structures and world historic tendencies indeed seem paramount for understanding what led to this ecological crisis, it seems equally crucial to acknowledge that there are multiple forms of capitalisms across the world: despite global patterns, not every nation partakes in capitalism in the same way (some societies not at all) and capitalist ideologies have been present in most existing communist states. Moreover, the term ‘Capitalocene’ runs the risk of fetishising supposedly ‘pure’ systems, such as socialism (implicit in the opposite to capitalism). In other words, capitalism is not a monolithic system, but exists in various local degrees, forms, and inflections. Similarly, every nation has its own racial constructions with nuances and specificities, so that terms such as the ‘Black Anthropocene’ at times fall short at specifying, contextualising, or problematising the white/black binary—often by insufficiently testing its usefulness for countries outside the (settler-)colonial paradigm—so that they run the risk of falling into a generalist victim-discourse.

Importantly, moreover, in their focus on the socio-economic aspect, all three terms—the Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Black Anthropocene—neglect the role of language and culture for the formation and perpetuation of social systems. Yet, language, culture, and included issues such as gender and class-inequality, have been crucial tools for colonisation of various places—how else to explain the fact that before colonisation, Australia had 250 distinct languages, whereas only 13 indigenous languages are currently being acquired by children.⁴¹ Thus, while a broad-brush analysis is inevitably part of a global crisis such as the Anthropocene and can be useful for sparking transcultural discussions and movements, paying attention to the unique historic and cultural context of particular places is indispensable for testing big theories, and crucial for finding local responses to global predicaments. Throughout my discussion

⁴⁰ Whyte argues that “as Indigenous peoples, we do not tell our futures beginning from the position of concern with the Anthropocene as a hitherto unanticipated vision of human intervention [...] for the colonial period already rendered comparable outcomes that cost Indigenous peoples their reciprocal relationships with thousands of plants, animals and ecosystems” (159). Chapter 4 further examines this notion.

⁴¹ Although another 100 or so languages are spoken to various degrees by older generations, and although many languages are in the process of being revived, as I later discuss with *The Yield* (“Indigenous Australian Languages”).

of the novels, I consider how the Capitalocene, Plantationocene, and Black Anthropocene can be understood in relation to Australia, and how the local context and my select creative texts productively test these concepts for their validity and usefulness. How, for example, do these discussions translate to Australian history and its contemporary grappling with the climate emergency, one of the highest extinction rates in the world, droughts, dry rivers, the opening of new mega-coalmines, and unprecedented firestorms? Grounding my discussion in the specific socio-eco-political context of Australia avoids a generalist account of humanity and allows for nuances and productive local insights within this seemingly all-encompassing crisis. Moreover, I ask the important question of what the unique perspective of literature can offer to local and transcultural perspectives.

Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living (from here on *Everyman's Rules*) is based on a historical science-train, the Better Farming Train, which toured Australia in the 1920s and 1930s in order to bring scientific advice to farmers. The novel portrays a young couple determined to bring advice, progress, and productivity to remote farmers in the dry Australian inland. In the following discussion of the text, I consider the ways in which the novel humorously examines the history of wheat cultivation by investigating the language of a wholly instrumentalised, commodified, and gendered relationship to the land and by evoking a time when the colonial attempt to farm inland Australia was subject to trial and error, rather than dialogue with Indigenous peoples. In contrast, *The Yield* portrays an Indigenous family with a history of wheat-farming and attachment to the land that is once again in danger of becoming co-opted—this time for a mine. By regenerating the Wiradjuri language, *The Yield* explores two different cosmologies of time, place, and care. Both novels can be read as reflecting the developments that have led to the Anthropocene today: this not only includes the dispossession of Indigenous land, language, culture, and labour, but also the destruction of local ecologies and, as Tony Birch puts it, the ongoing “wasteful use of natural resources such as water and soil” (“Climate Change”). Indeed, these novels warrant a comparative reading, as both are set on wheat-farms adjacent to the Murray-Darling River and (implicitly) indicate a nation that is subject to both climate and cultural change.

In the context of the currently pressing national crises of the Adani mine⁴² and the Murray-Darling River,⁴³ I argue that both novels, and particularly *The Yield*, make important contributions to contemplating the crucial role of language for Australian colonisation, but also to foregrounding the relationship between language, land, and regeneration. In this way, my reading of the texts offers something that the theories of racial capitalism arguably do not achieve: it points to the transformative and regenerative potential of language, culture, art and literature.

The next section starts by contextualising Australian extractive and agricultural economies in a global context to point to the specificity and uniqueness of Australia as a nation and continent.

Farming and Mining in Australia—a unique case?

In times of climate change and the declaration of the Anthropocene, certain agricultural and extractive practices—such as fossil fuel usage and animal mass husbandry—have

⁴² The Adani mine is a new coal-mine currently under construction and is operated by the private company Adani Mining. Situated roughly 400 km inland from the Great Barrier Reef, the extraction zone was originally proposed to span an area as large as the United Kingdom, holding three times as much coal as has ever been mined in Australia (Talukdar). Although the mine covers the Wangang and Jagalingou (W&J) Native Title land and despite strong grass-roots opposition, led by the W&J families, the mine is currently under construction. The crisis has reverberated internationally, recently culminating in the Friday's for Future movement in Germany criticising *Siemens* for entering business with Adani, and the United Nations contacting the Australian Government regarding the violation of Indigenous rights. As the campaign website "Adani: No means no" outlines, despite the company's decision to proceed, the mine has not yet cleared all legal hurdles, so that the W&J are now collaborating with 'Australian Lawyers for Human Rights' for a litigation (citing Kristen Lyons, et al.). The fight against the mine has such gravity that it challenges, as the authors argue, "Australia's native title system and the notion that compliance with industrial projects is the pathway to development for Indigenous people (Kristen Lyons, et al. 6).

⁴³ The Murray-Darling River is Australia's longest river system (with ca. 2750 km the 15th largest in the world) and has been under pressure of intensive irrigation for cotton and agriculture for decades. However, in 2019 these pressures reached a peak, when the river partly ran dry. This not only caused mass-scale dying of fish and left entire towns without water, but it also represents, according to the Indigenous Barkandji people, "the biggest threat to their continued survival on country since the sheep invaded" ("Death on the Darling"). Although billions of dollars have been poured into rescuing the rivers and streams of the Murray-Darling Basin from environmental collapse, journalists have uncovered mismanagement, corruption, and unsustainable irrigation along the river as the main drivers of the crisis (Gribbin and Jaspers; "Pumped"). The severe drought of the last years has further added to the water emergency the country now faces. This crisis has also been linked to problems with the Native Title system: although the Federal Court recognised the Barkandji people's connection to Country in far western NSW covering 128,000 m², their Native title only delivered limited land repossession ("Death on the Darling").

increasingly come under pressure. In their suggestion of the Anthropocene as a term, Crutzen and Stoermer list conventional extraction and agriculture as among the driving factors of the ecological crisis, noting the occurrence of more nitrogen due to the application of fertilisers in all terrestrial ecosystems (17). As a consequence, Crutzen and Stoermer recommend the eighteenth-century Industrial Revolution as a landmark date as “this is the period when data retrieved from glacial ice cores shows the beginning of atmospheric concentrations growth of several ‘green-house gases,’ in particular CO₂ and CH₄ [and the invention of] the steam engine in 1784” (17-18). In addition to the now common-sense call to rapidly transition away from fossil fuels, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report concludes that while industrialised agriculture, forestry, and other land use contribute to around a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions, climate change is additionally accelerating the stresses on global food and water-security, putting them under severe risk (“World Food Security”). Similarly, the UN global assessment report has identified specific practices, such as mass-husbandry and the spread of mono-crop plantations, as one of the primary causes of extinction and biodiversity loss around the world (“IPCC Report”).

Many historians have pointed out that Australia is uniquely placed in the global context of agriculture and mining, which can be traced back to the immense scale and fast-motion in which colonisation changed land-use. In a recent essay, geographer Bill Pritchard argues that, in comparison to other continents, Australia is the

only temperature zone [sic] large landmass country where invasion and colonization occurred after the Industrial Revolution had commenced. This timing ensured that rural landscapes were converted almost directly into the service of imperial purposes. [...] These imperatives hastened and intensified the removal of Aboriginal people as owners and custodians of their traditional landscapes, and ensured that a peasant smallholder class of farmers never evolved in Australia. (23-24)⁴⁴

Although Pritchard here omits a comparison of the earliest example of this very economic system—the Caribbean sugar plantation—as a test-case for transnational

⁴⁴ Pritchard draws, among others, on historian Philip McMichael’s *Settlers and Agrarian Questions: Foundation of Capitalism in Colonial Australia* (1984) and Harriet Friedmann and McMichael’s development of the global-scale theorisation of the food regimes concept. See “Agriculture and the State System: The Rise and Fall of National Agricultures, 1870 to the present.” *Sociologia Ruralis*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1989, pp.93-117.

plantation and slave economies, he makes the important point that in contrast to Australia, the Americas were colonised before the Industrial Revolution.⁴⁵ Pritchard's proposition of Australia's uniqueness, then, suggests the extremely fast pace and immense scale of Australia's colonial transformation. As Pritchard further argues, this colonial land-use is still deeply enshrined in Australian political policy and can be seen in the example of the concept of Torrens title, as I will illustrate later in the chapter (24). Moreover, it is also worth considering that Australia's colonial development happened not only on the backs of First Nations peoples, but also at the cost of small farmers in other countries: today, around 70% of agricultural produce is exported and contributes to 13% of Australia's export revenue (Hughes-d'Aeth, "Dark Emu"). Although this development can also be seen elsewhere (for example, in Europe)⁴⁶ what is remarkable about the Australian case is its sheer vast scale and accelerated tempo: what took centuries in Europe, happened over a mere few decades in Australia.

Although today's prime export products are based on mineral wealth, national identification with agriculture is strong. Australia's first and famous export products were wool (through the extensive pastoral economy) and, later, wheat. As environmental historian Cameron Muir argues, the change from wool to wheat exemplifies the political will of the time to develop the agricultural sector over pastoralism in order to "settle" Australia and "civilise" the frontier (21). Wool, especially, is still important for the national narrative, as environmental historian Libby Robin writes:

Even when the land was running on mineral wealth in the 1960s, I was taught at school that the country was the land of the Golden Fleece, and we lived "off the sheep's back." The [...] golden fleece of Greek myth was an important symbol of ancient civilization in a land where no hard-hooved animals had grazed before the arrival of the British, and where the settlers were slow to recognize the even more ancient civilization of the Aboriginal people they displaced. ("Domestication in a Post-Industrial World" 48)

⁴⁵ There are multiple books about plantations and sugar in the Caribbean; see for example: Bill Ashcroft, et al. (editors). *White and Deadly: Sugar and Colonialism*. Commack, NY: Nova Science, 1999.

⁴⁶ While the E.U. subsidises the agricultural sector, the number of farmers is steadily decreasing (European Union).

As is suggested here, although Australia is overwhelmingly urban, and has been for most of its modern history, there is a strong national identification with the rural, the 'outback' or the 'bush' (the concomitant myths of the 'bushman,' or the 'Aussie battler' are well recorded).⁴⁷ Thus, agriculture—and its contemporary expression of the culinary—seems to indicate the constitutive importance of land and water resources for modern Australia. As Tony Hughes d'Aeth poignantly puts it: "[A]griculture in Australia is a religion—it is as much a religion as it is an industry" ("Dark Emu").

However, the long-existing national Australian narrative of colonisation as 'progress,' and of native plants and Indigenous knowledge and technology as inferior, is currently being rewritten not just through the re-discovery and corrective work of historians and writers, but also through a changing climate and an increasingly public interest in regenerative agriculture. As mentioned earlier, in Australia, industrial agriculture evolved in line with both broader colonial patterns as seen across the globe, as well as in unique ways. Robin notes that the perceived alienness of the environment by the European colonisers was a contributing factor for importing European crops, plants, and animals:

Since the eighteenth century, domesticated animals and plants have been systematically borrowed from other places to civilize the land and to "improve" its value and the place of the Australian colonies, and later the nation, in international trade. In a place that yielded no recognized agricultural products, the newcomers imported foodstuffs familiar to them and grew Old World crops and livestock. (48)

Thus, while importing crops and livestock occurred in most colonies, the timing of Australia's colonisation (the colony entered the international trade market relatively late) as well as its geo-physical properties (the perceived emptiness and distance) also made this colonisation process unique.

⁴⁷ The bushman myth usually revolves around the male, anti-authoritarian, Anglo, hardy, independent, sport-loving, 'mateship'-valuing bush ranger, with the historical figure Ned Kelly as one of its primary epitomes. As Sara Cousins writes: "The literature of the writers and poets such as Henry Lawson, A.B Banjo Paterson, Steele Rudd, epitomized the idea of the bushman as a resourceful larrikin who tamed the landscape, was resilient in the face hardship and heroic in overcoming the odds—which were inevitably stacked against him. [...] These images served to colonize the landscape, suppress frontier violence, carve out an economic independence and legitimacy based on exploitation of natural resources, and code nationalistic sentiment as a purely masculine domain" (2-3).

Industrial wheat-farming in Australia first emerged in South Australia around 1850, primarily servicing the gold-boom markets. It then spread throughout other parts of the colony from the Darling Downs in Queensland, through western New South Wales, across northern Victoria to South Australia, and into the south of Western Australia, which to date has the biggest wheat-belt (Hughes d'Aeth, *Like Nothing* 23). As Hughes d'Aeth points out, the Western Australian wheat-belt is grown on an area of land larger than England, and its 'clearing line,' which designates the area that has been cleared of native flora for the farming of grain and livestock, can be seen on satellite maps, presenting the most visible sign of the human impact on the planet (*Like Nothing* 1). By the 1870s, Australia had become a major exporter of wheat and wool. In the twentieth century, the 'cash crop' wheat was generally attractive: it could be grown across a broad area of plains that didn't need much clearing; it was suited to mechanical harvesting; and it was widely traded internationally (Muir 94). Countries like Australia or the U.S. exalted in productivity because access to ever more land was granted (Muir 94). Today, wheat is the most important individual grain crop produced in Australia (Department of Agriculture 5). However, the annual average wheat production and export volumes vary significantly from year to year, as yields are highly dependent on climatic conditions, and since the late 1990s productivity went downward in Australia.⁴⁸

Although *Everyman's Rules* depicts the Mallee as a kind of 'shadow-place,'⁴⁹ marked by soil-degradation and plagues, it is important to note that the use of nitrate fertilisers created devastation reaching far beyond the borders of Australia. Australia drew its supplies for 'superphosphate' from Pacific islands, such as Nauru and Banaba, where, as Banaba scholar Katerina Teaiwa writes, it ravaged society and environment:

⁴⁸ Because of new competitors (such as the Black Sea region and Argentina), as well as the severe droughts in the Eastern states of the past years, yields have dropped so significantly that Australia even imported wheat from Canada (Department of Agriculture 14). See also: Calla Wahlquist. "Australia to import wheat for the first time in 12 years as drought eats into grain production." *The Guardian*, 14 May 2019.

⁴⁹ Val Plumwood coined this term to draw attention to the places we rely on (for food production, for example), but "don't know about, don't want to know about and in a commodity regime don't ever need to know about" ("Shadow").

[T]he economic, social and environmental impacts on the indigenous peoples and lands of Nauru und Banaba have been devastating, and both communities are today some of the most socially and economically challenged in the region; the Banabans, resettled *en masse* to Fiji, now a precariously managed minority. (378)⁵⁰

However, this fact is largely absent from broader consciousness in Australia. As Teaiwa observes: “Islands such as Banaba, once critical for Australian agriculture, are absent in Australian public memory but the effects of Banaba’s environmental and social ruining endure” (372).

In Australia, wheat was ostensibly planted to feed a growing population, but it was also grown for ideological reasons. Agriculture was considered to be the “big fix” for the violent, nomadic frontier culture of pastoralism, and in this context, wheat was pushed as a suitable crop to ‘civilise’ the colony (Muir 10). While pastoralism had failed to create settlements and the colonial government was worried about the effects of emptiness and distance on ‘civilisation,’ scientific agriculture was thought to deliver “a new class of technically educated, semi-professional workers and small landholders for the new century. It would be a mode of production more suited to a modern state than squatting or mining” (Muir 4). Moreover, wheat was considered a crop for ‘white’ people, and with the help of the right crops, livestock, and regulated labour structures, scientific agriculture was seen as a means of building a European nation (Muir 4). Muir points to the president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Sir William Crookes, who argued in 1898 that ‘civilised’ nations needed to increase their wheat production because wheat was the plant that gave white people superior brains (4). Importantly, Muir points out that the cultivation of wheat is also entangled with the 1835 doctrine of *terra nullius*, which holds that Australia was ‘nobody’s land’ and that Indigenous peoples had no concept of land ownership before colonisation:

⁵⁰ Today, Nauru and Christmas Island are known for hosting Australia’s infamous refugee detention centres. See Chapter 5.

[T]he British had to use a number of principles to convince the other European powers [*terra nullius*] was a legitimate claim. [...] The two major points on which the British could claim sovereignty were that the people were not Christians or ruled by Christians because it was against British law to take possession of a Christian land, and the other was the manner in which the native inhabitants used the land [...] the breaking of the soil, turning it over, became the point of difference. (92)

Although Aboriginal Australians did engage in agriculture, Muir here draws attention to the fact that next to religious faith, the legal ground for *terra nullius* rested on the denial of these practices, as well as on the notion of tilling. This emphasis on tilling was drawn from liberal philosophers such as John Locke's *Treatises of Government* (1689), who wrote: "As much as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates and can use the product of, so much is his property" (cited in Muir 92). Hence, the cultivation of wheat was culturally significant for the colony: wheat carries strong biblical and 'moral' connotations, as domesticated wheat emerged from West Asia's Fertile Crescent, the geographical heart of the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Muir 97).

Although agriculture was crucial to the nation-building project, today, politicians tend to prioritise the mining sector over agriculture, as extraction is often the more short-term profitable option. In fact, the National party—traditionally representing the agricultural class—has come under pressure for losing their farming constituency, as farmers are increasingly expressing their resistance to the party's backing of coal and gas projects at the expense of farmable land.⁵¹ Moreover, farmers are becoming increasingly more vocal about the climate emergency and the current political failure to implement policies to counter this development: campaigns such as the "Farmers for Climate Action" have drawn attention to the record-breaking droughts and consequent fire-storms that have occurred in the last few years. This "unlikely shift," as a journalist put it, is occurring because farmers experience the land and its cycles "first hand" ("Australia Drought").

Hence, it is possible to say that the gradually more palpable environmental unpredictability severely unsettles current agricultural and extractive practices, and therefore revises the perception of colonisation as 'progress' and 'civilisation.' As

⁵¹ In an interview, the leader of the Nationals, Michael Mc Cormac, was unable to "think of a single time when the Nationals had backed farmers over miners" (Manning).

environmental historian Tom Griffiths notes, agriculture and mining can be seen as “the new front line of the ideological war about the British colonisation of Australia” (“Reading”). In this sense, the idea of the land as mainly a tradable commodity and a ground for ever-increasing productivity is increasingly being unsettled through socio-environmental changes. In fact, emerging fields such as the energy humanities or environmental justice studies have suggested the need to render visible the socio-environmental impact of extraction and problematise extraction as a cultural practice. Matthew Henry proposes that “extractive fictions represent a critical means of delineating energy’s embeddedness within the cultural imagination of modernity [and] permit readers’ insight into the uniquely local dimensions of extractive capitalism” (406). This new orientation also expresses the idea that the humanities can no longer ignore the socio-eco-political power of the fossil fuel industry. In other words, although the socio-environmental practices of agriculture and extraction have been marginalised in the humanities, environmental humanists have foregrounded the unique capacity of the arts and literature to illuminate specific local experiences, elucidate long-term consequences, and inform the notion of agriculture and extraction as cultural practices.

My chapter reads the tension surrounding current agricultural and extractive practices as evident in the novels: while Tiffany seems implicitly critical of wheat as a ‘white’ crop in contradistinction to the ecological properties of the Mallee, Winch shows that farmable land is often destroyed for extractive purposes, leaving land irreparable, and communities displaced. Going beyond an ‘environmental’ lens, however, I read the selected novels cosmologically—through the lens of radical interconnectedness—as they defy a one-dimensional, instrumentalised and commodified relationship to land and reveal the fact that environmental issues require a holistic approach in order to be understood and repaired.

3.2 Recuperating the Body/Land Nexus in Carrie Tiffany’s *Everyman’s Rules*

Everyman's Rules is the debut novel of Carrie Tiffany, a former park ranger and agricultural journalist, who emigrated from England to Australia as a child. The novel was published to great acclaim, winning multiple Australian prizes, and was shortlisted for prestigious international prizes such as the Orange Prize for Fiction. Set in the interwar period from just before the Great Depression until the start of World War II, *Everyman's Rules* centres on the Mallee, a flat and low-lying, semi-arid region which encompasses parts of rural Victoria, and the South-Australian and New South Wales border, inclusive of the Murray River (part of the Murray Darling river system), which is the country of the Latji Latji, Paakantji (Barkindji), Ngiyampaa, Mutthi Mutthi, Wemba Wemba, Tati Tati and Barapa Barapa Indigenous peoples. Despite sandy soils, the Mallee used to be known for agricultural output (wheat and barley) and for fruit plantations growing along the only source of fresh water, the Murray River. However, the Mallee has also been, as Emily Potter and Brigid Magner put it, "a place of collapse, darkness, and despair" that saw the "bitter endurance and the failure of colonial dreams," as water insecurity, plagues, and dust storms drove many farmers to ruin, so that it "remains a region strongly associated with the archetypal [colonial] experience of 'battling' the land, and not always winning" (3). Today, the Mallee is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, such as rising salinity, decreased rainfall, and species loss. In fact, Potter and Magner point out that Mallee communities were declared "Australia's first climate change refugees" (4).

Everyman's Rules portrays the historical Better Farming Train which toured the Mallee in the early twentieth century in order to promote scientific agriculture and educate farmers about health and domestic affairs. Adapted from a Canadian model, the train was government-funded and jointly operated by the Victorian Departments of Agriculture, Railway, Education, and Public Health. Making 38 tours of the Mallee, the train consisted of different cars, including wagons for livestock fodder, veterinary equipment, animals, lecture platforms, display tables for agricultural utensils, and also featured a domestic "women's section," which aimed to educate on needlework, cookery, and child health. The novel makes the train's travelling experts its central protagonists: Jean Flanagan, a needleworker; Robert Pettergree, a soil expert who is known for his uncanny ability to identify soils by taste, making him "the most

knowledgeable man in Victoria;” and Mr. Ohno, a Japanese chicken expert who specialises in de-sexing poultry (31).

The novel is written from the first-person intradiegetic perspective of the young seamstress, Jean, and her experiences in the women’s part of the train, before she leaves it with her fiancé, the ‘soil taster’ and scientist Robert, and a cow, Folly, to settle in Wycheproof. In this remote town, the young couple starts what resembles an experiment farm typical of colonial Australia, attempting to grow wheat with the help of superphosphate fertiliser, while scientifically recording results. Strengthened by his confidence and scientific expertise, Robert is enthusiastic about the productivity enabled by superphosphate:

Imagine the poor soil of the Mallee chemically fertilized to produce at its utmost capacity. Imagine wagonloads of superphosphate being transformed into trainloads of wheat. Imagine, Jean, the harsh backblocks of the Mallee becoming the breadbasket of the nation. What greater challenge could a man have? (39)

Despite the initial success of a few good harvests, however, wheat yields eventually dwindle. The novel describes multiple plagues befalling the area: a mouse pest (“They ate the grain from its bags, inside out. They ate the Ford’s upholstery. They ate the eyelids of a sleeping baby. They ate the kitchen curtains. They ate every chaff bag in the district. They did not eat the superphosphate” [131]); a drought (while flash floods befall other parts of rural Victoria); and dust-storms and sand drift (Australia indeed suffered from a ‘dust bowl’ in the 1930s in Mallee soil was blown all the way to Melbourne).⁵² These bitter experiences indicate that there are many more contributing factors to productively growing crops than scientists and politicians had foreseen—something Robert is eventually ridiculed and despised for by other farmers in the community.

With Indigenous practices deemed inferior or non-existing, the novel conveys the often-bitter experiences settlers were enduring in Australia’s interior. Despite the

⁵² As Warde, Robin, and Sörlin write about the sand drift: “[In Australia] city skies darkened with storms of topsoil and people ran from the land, ashamed, in the night. [...] [E]cologist Francis Ratcliffe, who travelled to inland Australia in the years of ‘drifting sand,’ was moved by the plight of the long-suffering farming families in the impossible climate: ‘The essential feature of white pastoral settlement—a stable home, a circumscribed area of land, and a flock or herd maintained on the land year-in and year-out—are a heritage of life in the reliable kindly climate of Europe. In the drought-risky semi-desert Australian inland they tend to make settlement self-destructive’” (73-74).

learning experiences the characters undergo, the wheat experiments ultimately lead to resignation. When Jean notices that their mono-plantation also reduces biodiversity—not least since their beloved cow, Folly, ultimately dies from having been poisoned from exposure to superphosphate—she concludes: “‘I think it’s the wheat,’ I say. I don’t know where this thought came from but suddenly it seems somehow true, obvious even, that with more wheat there will be fewer animals and that the small creatures—frogs, skinks, birds—will be the first to go” (143). Noting that the moisture and protein content of the yielded wheat is low, Robert’s scientific report also concludes: “The sand drift in the Mallee has devastated grain growing and raises the question whether this area is in fact suitable for any form of cultivation” (164). Eventually, Robert answers the question “‘What is the Mallee?’” with: “‘A small area of land surrounded by mortgage’” (147). With the increasingly hopeless harvests and Jean’s miscarriage (which is implied to be partly caused by the drought), the couple also falls apart. The novel ends with Robert unexpectedly joining the war: ironically, he is picked up by the very same train they arrived with, now converted for army-recruitment purposes. Although the Mallee is “no place for a woman on her own” (223), Jean decides to stay behind and invites a female friend to join her on the farm: “Perhaps together we can grow a different crop—something that belongs here” (224). Moreover, she resolves to re-establish her relationship with her friend and former colleague, Mr. Ohno, who had formerly expressed interest in marrying her and who is held captive at an internment camp because of his Japanese heritage. As this ending insinuates, WWII and its aftermath heralds a new time in which land and community care increasingly becomes the task of women⁵³ and formerly excluded immigrants. Jean’s narrative perspective first reveals, as one reviewer rightly describes it, a “thoughtful and observant, and slightly naïve” character who is eager to support her husband by assisting him with recording scientific results of the wheat yield and by baking ‘test loaves’ (Ball “Review”). However, as the novel progresses, and true to the *bildungsroman* tradition, Jean is growing into her own independence, empowerment, and vision.

Although the novel dramatises tragic subjects such as Jean’s still-birth, its tone is predominantly amusing. Humour is often achieved through clashing perspectives on the

⁵³ This thesis uses ‘women’ as a term that includes anyone identifying as a woman—be they cis, non-trans, trans, and anyone else.

progress-abiding belief in building a ‘modern’ civilisation, and the reader’s contemporary perspective of long socio-environmental consequences. As the title of the novel—*Everyman’s Rules for Scientific Living*—suggests, the language of colonial Australia presumes progress, productivity, and linear notions of civilisation and modernity, and expresses the oddness of scientific certainty in the face of settlers’ incapacity to comprehend the complexity of multiple, delicate, and unique ecosystems the Australian continent harbours. The title’s rules that “everyman” (a clearly gendered term that is repeated in the rules) ought to know, are spelt out by Robert for the *Agricultural Journal*:

1. CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIETY FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF MUTUAL BENEFITS.
2. THE ONLY TRUE FOUNDATION IS A FACT.
3. KEEP UP-TO-DATE.
4. AVOID MAWKISH CONSIDERATION OF HISTORY AND RELIGION.
5. KEEP THE MIND FLEXIBLE THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT AND TESTING OF NEW HYPOTHESES.
6. CULTIVATE THE COMPANY OF WISER MEN—MEN WHO ARE STICKERS—NOT SHIRKERS.
7. DISSEMINATE. THE LABORS AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF MEN OF SCIENCE MUST BECOME THE PERMANENT POSSESSION OF MANY.
8. BRING SCIENCE INTO THE HOME. (43)

Here, the capitalisation produces the effect of ‘shouting,’ which conveys the tone of almost bullying certainty. Moreover, the scientific language of the time reveals an ideology built around binary hierarchical constructions, such as fact and reason over emotion, civilisation over wilderness, or science over humanities (“mawkish consideration of history and religion”), therefore revealing a world-view built on the domination over, and the exclusion of, certain knowledge systems. While the novel focuses on the exclusion of knowledge connoted feminine (I focus on this aspect below), it also implicitly shows the ways in which science was often placed in contradistinction to Indigenous knowledges. According to these scientific rules, land is not a place with a human and ecological history of its own, but a *terra nullius*.

In fact, there are no Indigenous characters in the novel, and Indigenous presence is completely annulled by the protagonist. Jean observes: “It is hard to imagine the Mallee before it was cleared. A scribble of thin trees giving off their skeleton light, birds crying into the dry blue air. Now everything is in boxes. The men of the Mallee toil within the straight fence lines of their paddocks” (95). While Jean conveys a kind of wilful

blindness to the existence of First Nations, the characters' denial is mostly visible in implicit attitudes towards native vegetation, which is regarded as inferior:

There are native grasses too, clearly poorer in comparison. Wallaby grass, *Amphibromus nervosus*—and it looks nervous indeed, thin stems all elbowed and bent about. [...] Robert feeds it no additives; he says it just grows, endlessly, everywhere, wallabies spreading the seeds. (39)

The novel thus recreates a time in which Indigenous presence was systematically and purposefully constructed as absence, as the ideology towards First Nations is displaced onto the 'natural' world, legible only in attitudes towards native vegetation. Rather than depicting the multiplicity of knowledge traditions, the above-cited scientific ideology is portrayed as both hierarchically normative and deceptively limited.

As Muir has noted, histories of agriculture have been dominated by economic and technological theories, whereas the social sphere—class and gender relations, politics, or cultural outlook—has been neglected, although they fundamentally shape agriculture (4). The depiction of science and agriculture as always already cultural makes the novel especially valuable for analyses by environmental humanists. The next section explores the ways in which the novel can be placed in relation to the Anthropocene debate.

Colonisation, Slow Violence, Good Intentions

Despite *Everyman's Rules*' only implicit allusions to the interconnections between wheat and 'whiteness' (through the absence of Indigenous people and characters' emphasis on building a 'modern civilisation'), the novel continuously draws links between wheat and alleged morality. The push for wheat is portrayed to derive from the levels of government (the Victorian Department of Agriculture setting annual targets) as well as from scientific bodies. Robert connects farming to patriotism and morality, which is meant to 'elevate' an inferior soil: "He explains the moral and patriotic duty of the farmer who comes across a ruined soil to repair it, and he shows us how. He shows us superphosphate" (29). As is suggested here, the Australian landscape was widely considered lacking in beauty and productivity, so that the passage conveys that scientific

agriculture in Australia had moralistic undertones.⁵⁴ Moreover, the novel explicitly evokes that this notion of progress is also deeply gendered: “Men bring progress. They are so sure of progress they measure it constantly—number of acres cleared in a day, bushels of hay cut, pints of milk produced, acres of seed sown, tons of firewood cut” (8). The women of the Mallee, by contrast, are urged to reproduce: “Our talks were about being modest and having babies. The teacher showed us a map of Australia and drew a big rectangle inside the middle of it with a ruler. See this—all empty. And whose job is it to fill up the empty continent with lovely, healthy babies?” (14). As these passages indicate, industrialised agriculture is portrayed as ideologically entangled with colonialism and patriarchy.

At first glance, *Everyman's Rules* seems to emphasise that the colonial relationship to land was hierarchically carried out from ‘above;’ however, as the novel unfolds, Robert's character is instructive of a more complex motivation for desiring progress—which has consequences for an understanding of the Capitalocene. Despite being admired for his knowledge, Robert is presented as a solitary ‘geek’ who is socially and emotionally cold, if not clumsy. When Jean agrees to marry Robert, she knows only a little about him, and it is not until the middle of the novel that his background is revealed: born in Yorkshire (England), Robert witnessed two of his siblings die from *spina bifida*, a condition young Robert has heard the doctor say and eventually looks up in an encyclopaedia: “*A fatal infant deformity where the back is open and components of the spinal column are missing. Seen in the slums and amongst the working class. Poor diet in mothers, esp. lack of grain and fruits (viz. organs) are thought to be causal*” (90). As a kind of coping mechanism for his trauma, young Robert picks up the habit of always carrying soil in his pockets and tasting it (91; 93). The detour the novel makes to illuminate Robert's past illustrates that his desire to be a scientific agriculturalist emerges from experiencing abject poverty. In other words, his reverence for scientific agriculture is uncovered to be mainly motivated by a deep drive to avert hunger and malnutrition.

Robert's character generates important insights for the theories of the Capitalocene and Plantationocene. While these theories foreground the ways in which

⁵⁴ Gerry Turcotte points to the Australian Gothic as an expression of the tradition of considering the Australian landscape as melancholic, ugly or even grotesque (“Australian Gothic”).

the novel indeed portrays a colonially-induced structural relationship in which ‘nature’ is rendered ‘cheap’ (workers, soils, other species, and women are regarded as inferior), Robert exemplifies that these structural systems were not only and not necessarily always driven from ‘above.’ Rather, *Everyman’s Rules* suggests that, next to the desire to gain societal status, striving for progress and modernity also emerged with the wish to reduce scarcity as experienced by the working-class, the poor, and marginalised. Robert’s background of abject poverty thus complicates the nature of power and accountability; although societal organisation and power structures inevitably shape individuals’ lives, the novel generates understanding and empathy for what would otherwise remain an unlikeable character. Importantly, then, while *Everyman’s Rules* can be said to illustrate that Australian settler-colonialism operated through patriarchal and racial capitalism, which tends to “abstract in order to extract” (Nixon, *Slow Violence* 41), science and modernity are not demonised. In other words, the reader’s insight into Robert’s childhood, as well as Jean’s naïve participation in the farm-enterprise enable a more complex understanding of power, accountability, and the processes of modernity.

Considering the complicated power-structures that may have led to the Capitalocene/Plantationocene/Black Anthropocene, Rob Nixon’s concept of ‘slow violence’ appears as a crucial adjunct to these terms. In his important study *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), Nixon argues that environmental degradation often *is* slow violence, as drought and soil degradation, for example, are “not spectacular and therefore difficult to oppose” so that we are faced with “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space” (6; 2). The idea of slow violence therefore “widens the field of what constitutes violence” (10). Where the Capitalocene and Plantationocene remain general—spanning trends and generalising tendencies across the globe—the idea of slow violence shapes perception for the complexity of structural violence, the specific effects of which may appear invisible at any given time and place. Similar to racial capitalism, then, the notion of slow violence points to the importance of perceiving violence beyond individual accountability. What slow violence foregrounds, however, is that violence can occur in all socio-eco-political systems. Hence, Robert’s character conveys that systems of oppression can be dispersed across all classes and systems and can often include good intentions—albeit still remaining violent.

Moreover, *Everyman's Rules* exposes the dangers of the nature/culture dualism and the concomitant hierarchising of particular knowledge systems—in this case, the supremacy of scientific ‘facts.’ As the author, Tiffany, has said, she was interested in exploring “[t]he knowledge that you might push onto a place, scientific and ontological knowledge, rather than the knowledge that comes from the place itself. I’m interested in what the flow of knowledge in one direction creates in the landscape” (“On Burning”). In the novel, Robert seems to be motivated by the idea of ‘bettering’ the environment and of making it more productive, as he locates the solution to poverty not to lie in social justice, but in the capacity of the earth to yield more productively—with disastrous consequences, as the Mallee soil does not ‘yield’ as expected. This evokes the recent redefinition of pollution as a feedback loop on socio-environmental systems in place. Pollution has been defined as not only a material or ‘physical’ phenomenon, but as expressive of multiple kinds of oppressions. As Serenella Iovino writes: “Tracing pollution through the bodies of living organisms and living land as in a litmus test, this keyword signals the stories of political failures, socio-ecological decline, and the discriminatory practices that infiltrate uneven societies” (168). As Iovino suggests here, poor social relationships can have negative consequences for ecologies. In this way, the novel’s depiction of agricultural failure and pollution, its slow violence, can be read as resulting out of the oppression of certain kinds of people and knowledges and dualistic human/nature constructions. Thus, by drawing attention to the failures of abstract knowledge not bound to time and place, *Everyman's Rules* implicitly conveys the uniqueness of the Australian ecology and the importance of Indigenous knowledges.

While the novel as a whole draws attention to the complexity of structural violence, settler ignorance about Indigenous land-care, and the entanglements of environment and culture, its main focus is the oppression of knowledge connoted female, as I discuss in the next section.

Cosmological Readings of the (Fe)male Body/Land

Towards the end of *Everyman's Rules*, Jean assesses the broader patterns of their experience:

At the time each of these problems seemed separate and surmountable: drought, mice, sand drift, poor yields. But to read it all together, it makes us look naïve. The newspapers are thinner these days. The Mallee is emptying out—fewer people, less news. (169)

Jean here implies that the couple has not been able to comprehend the larger properties and complexities of the land. In retrospect, their experiments seem immature, which conveys that a more complex understanding of the environment emerges from the lived experiences on a particular land, as well as from the ability to perceive broader, interconnected patterns. As this quotation suggests, *Everyman's Rules* imagines a time before European settlers were familiar with the term 'environment,' before the consequences of chemical fertilisers were broadly understood, and before certain systems of land-use became so dominant they would eventually inform a planetary crisis. As introduced in Chapter 2, historians have traced the term 'environment' back to the onset of the Cold War, arguing that the term became so popular because it encapsulates the idea of a complex whole, of unity, and of trans-disciplinary knowledge exchange. By recalling a time when settlers were grappling with different understandings of the land—scientific, economic, emotional—the novel conjures up the development of an environmental consciousness. However, beyond the sense of an environment, which can evoke a "passive backdrop" (Robin et al 173), I argue that *Everyman's Rules* can additionally be described with the word 'cosmic,' as it grapples with embodied and embedded experience, reciprocal meaning-making with specific places, and multi-scalar knowledges as expressed in different language registers.

In fact, as already indicated above with the scientific rules in capital letters, the novel continuously satirises the reduction of language, animal- and land-use to economic and ideological means. For example, the train's sheep expert, Mr. Talbot, tests the semen of different breeds for productivity, presenting his results to the other train-personnel:

‘The rational management of breeding amongst stock can be quite simply compared to the rational management of human sexual behaviour leading to an improved and efficient human race. A healthy and vigorous sexual union, and I of course mean here *licit* sex—taking place in marriage—is as beneficial to the farm family and the nation as the healthy and appropriate union of well-chosen stock in the joining paddock.’ (48)

Agricultural sheep reproduction is here compared to human desire—to comical effect. This reduction of desire to instrumental use, such as progress, economic efficiency, and nation-building, is represented as strongly gendered: the ‘male’ way of seeing is continuously evoked through normative and, for the contemporary reader, antiquated language, whereas female characters tend to integrate more diverse knowledges. This gendered difference is expressed in Jean’s uses of different language registers; while Jean is Robert’s scientific assistant and becomes fluent in scientific writing, many of her observations in the novel are lyrical. Through the reconstruction of a wholly gendered society, then, the novel questions the domination of reductionist, positivist, and commodified views of the ‘man’/land relationship and contrasts it with diverse and complex uses of language, such as scientific writing, poetic contemplations, and vivid dialogues. In this way, the novel establishes a link between land- and language-use.

In fact, it is specifically via reflections on embodied experience—gender, eroticism, sexuality, childbirth—that Jean comes to draw a parallel between the land and the body. Embodied knowledge becomes ever more prominent to Jean, whose awareness of these interconnections is heightened after stillbirth:

At six months a stillborn baby is wrapped and disposed of—I don’t know where. But I do know that a baby is more than its body, it is fluid too and the meaty surrounds that gave it life. Some of the baby is in the paddock where I lay and bled. I look for a stain—a sign—but it must all have soaked away. In a few months the cultivator will come through. A few more months and the ground will be hidden again under the wheat. I touch my belly. It is still loose—this cannot be explained by science. Archimedes said when a person gets out of the bath the levels will go back to normal—no more displacement. But not with this. With this, when everything is measured and taken away, nothing will be the same again. (185)

It is through her experience of giving birth on the land and the attachment to her child that is “more than its body” that Jean comes to implicitly parallel the body and the land. Jean wonders where the child’s body is “disposed of” and notices that some of it has

gone into the ground where she gave birth. Yet Jean also experiences the body of her stillborn child as something going beyond the physical: the agency of the land/body, which “cannot be explained by science,” here gestures to a greater mystery and belonging. Rather than coming to terms with the ‘environment,’ then, Jean’s narration could be more aptly described as grappling with the holistic, or ‘cosmic,’ as her surroundings express an aliveness through their active participation: the earth soaks away the blood and will cover the spot where she lay with new growth. Thus, the entanglement of the body and land suggests reciprocity, aliveness, and collaboration, and exemplifies the ways in which *Everyman’s Rules* constructs embodied experience not only as a cornerstone for environmental consciousness, but also as constitutive of world-views.

As *Everyman’s Rules* dwells on embodied difference, it conjures up one of the main critiques found in the Anthropocene debate: the idea that there is such a thing as an undifferentiated *anthropos* that relates to an othered ‘nature.’ As Claire Colebrook notes, “[nowhere] is this shift from indifference to difference more intense than in the problem of feminism” (3). In her essay “We have always been Post-Anthropocene: The Anthropocene Counterfactual” (2017) Colebrook writes:

I would like to make a claim for feminism as a critical labor of difference and indifference. Feminism draws attention to differences that have been deemed not to make a difference, but it has also just as frequently denied what have been declared to be constitutive differences (gender differences, historical differences, religious difference). (9)

Here, Colebrook points out that feminism arose both from the devaluation of women’s differences (discrimination) and from the denial that such differences matter and generate different needs (as in maternity leave). Moreover, feminists have long drawn attention to the fact that earth and ‘nature’ have often been feminised, so that the idea of domination, exploitation, and inferiorisation of the environment is embroiled with patriarchy. The term ‘Anthropocene Feminism’ was thus coined to capture the ways in which the critiques brought forward in the Anthropocene debate have been present in feminist and queer theory for decades, particularly in ecofeminism and feminist science studies (Grusin iii). Rather than suggesting that the female body is closer to ‘nature,’ *Everyman’s Rules* conveys that the body/land nexus is suppressed by most male

characters (with the exception of Mr. Ohno). As Jean's experiences of gender constraints and child-bearing ultimately change her perception of the land, *Everyman's Rules* suggests that these differences matter: they widen Jean's understanding of the land, inform her ethics, and have palpable results for land-care. The 'feminist' notion of land-care puts forward the importance of nurturing, as opposed to abandonment, as the end of the novel shows Robert leaving the farm and marriage to voluntarily join the war.

In contrast to embracing the sermon of progress and efficiency, Jean's lived experiences propose that life comes at a certain expense, that women's experiences, such as pregnancy and birth, have always been close to strain, burden, death. These strenuous experiences of the female body are paralleled with the exhaustion of the Mallee soil and the limited capacity to produce. In this way, the novel's insistence on embodied and gendered differences can be again read as complicating racial capitalism, as the idea of growth and productivity is linked not just to a racialised, but also to gendered notions of the body/land. Colebrook exemplifies the importance of gendered understandings through a critique of the idea that the Anthropocene is 'good,' as purported by the Ecomodernist group.⁵⁵ As Colebrook argues, the Ecomodernists essentially present the idea of a life without expense:

the idea of a life that could develop to its utmost potentiality without incurring debt or death to itself is both what drives technological-industrial investment and generates the delusional idea of a life without expense, loss, or misprision; the notion of generating more (in the final instance) than one initially takes, the dream of a pure ecology in which everything serves to maximize everything else and in which there is no cost: it is this logic (or the logic of logic, of the pure counterfactual, or pure *techné* without *physis*) that marks all that has stood for humanism, posthumanism, a certain dream of history and of utopian sexual difference. (17)

Colebrook argues that, rather than considering the socio-environmental devastations and the limitations of growth as an essential feedback-loop signifying the need to correct course, the 'good' Anthropocene further enshrines a hierarchised human/nature or

⁵⁵ The Ecomodernist assertion that the Anthropocene is 'good' is explained and critiqued in detail in the next chapter. Essentially, it argues that the Anthropocene represents a positive new epoch that expresses a kind of apotheosis of human technological achievement and capability, and that humanity should continue its course as long as it leaves more room to 'wild' and 'natural' places.

techne/physis separation. Similarly, through the cyclical experience of birth, death, mourning, drought, and plagues, Jean's lived experience resists the notion of the body/land as nothing but a passive ground, a vessel that can hold endless productivity, progress, pollution and that can be abandoned without consequences. Thus, while the novel partly feminises the consciousness of interconnectivity between the Mallee soil and the female body, this consciousness, or perhaps wisdom, is not presented as 'naturally' given to women, but as arising out of experiencing a similar degradation.

Everyman's Rules explores different kinds of knowledges and different stages of knowing, as expressed in different uses of language. True to a *bildungsroman*, Jean's development from innocence towards an increasingly complex understanding of the land is ultimately empowering, as she learns the multi-dimensionality of human understanding through learning different knowledge systems and language registers. This discrepancy of differing perspectives—one of colonial, scientific, and patriarchal authority, the other of the lived reality Jean experiences—is mainly achieved through the antiquated language the author revives from the archives: direct quotations from scientific and governmental pamphlets of the time are contrasted with lyrical accounts, vivid dialogue, and realist description. Yet, beyond different kinds of knowledges, the novel implicitly also suggests different *stages* of understanding. Toni Morrison has argued that a good education usually occurs through a progression of different kinds and stages of comprehension:

In all of our education, whether it's in institutions or not, in homes or streets or wherever, whether it's scholarly or whether it's experiential, there is a kind of a progression. We move from data to information to knowledge to wisdom. And separating one from the other, being able to distinguish among and between them, that is, knowing the limitations and the danger of exercising one without the others, while respecting each category of intelligence, is generally what serious education is about. ("The Source" 307)

As Morrison identifies the progression from data, information, and knowledge to wisdom, she implicitly also points to the importance of differentiating between facts and values. As environmental humanists have often stressed, environmental crises are so complex because they represent value conflicts with vastly different stake-holders. However, facts and values have been put into a false dualistic opposition, as facts are

often thought to equal science, whereas values tend to be placed in the realm of the irrational and whimsical. In this context, Bruno Latour has suggested that the role of the humanities scholar could be to investigate this relationship between facts and values (“Why” 232). Similarly, *Everyman’s Rules* evokes different knowledges and language registers through the collection of scientific data, data interpretation, and—finally—Jean’s complex understanding of the body/land nexus. In this way, *Everyman’s Rules* insinuates that an ethical relationship to land and people emerges through embodied and embedded experience as expressed through a diversity of language registers: embodied in cultural, gendered, individual, linguistic difference, and embedded in a particular ecosystem.

Conclusion

Beginning with a summary of the socio-eco-political reasons for growing wheat in Australia, which reveals the entanglement of nature/culture, environment/human, and agriculture/society, I have argued that *Everyman’s Rules* complicates and expands the focus on racial capitalism as the main driver of the Anthropocene crisis. While the Capitalocene and Plantationocene illuminate aspects of this literary portrayal of Australian history (reductionism of land, instrumentalism of the labour of women and animals, domination of abstract over Indigenous knowledges), the novel complicates capitalism as the main problem by revealing that slow violence can potentially occur across different socio-political systems and among all societal strata, and by revealing the role of culture and language and its included issues of gender-inequality .

Moreover, I have argued that *Everyman’s Rules* satirises reductionist relationships to what is connoted ‘natural’ (land, animals, women) by contrasting colonial with lyrical language, and by showing that gendered differences matter. This illustrates that *Everyman’s Rules* grapples with the sense of a complex whole ‘environment,’ something I call ‘cosmic’ rather than environmental because of the novel’s insistence on embodied and embedded difference, and multi-scalar knowledges. The ‘cosmic’ thus emphasises the novel’s employment of lyrical language that evokes the entanglements between body, land, and language. In this context, I have argued that

the novel reflects two key feminist critiques of the Anthropocene: firstly, the notion that a universal *anthropos* is unhelpful because situated and gendered differences have always shaped world-orders; and secondly, the idea that endless productivity is a destructive fantasy that marginalises the importance of reciprocal care and responsibility for each other. The novel thus fosters the feminist notion of reciprocal care as a life-giving and life-sustaining force.

As mentioned earlier, *Everyman's Rules* ends with the resolution "to grow something else, something that belongs here." The discussion of *The Yield* picks up the ways in which contemporary agricultural practices and land-ethics are currently rethought and reimagined in the broader public—with the help of Indigenous writers, scholars, and language/memory activists.

3.3 Regenerating Language, Culture, Environment in Tara June Winch's *The Yield*

The Yield, which won Australia's most prestigious literary prize, the 2020 Miles Franklin award, is Tara June Winch's second novel. Winch, a Wiradjuri woman who lives in France, gained prominence through her literary debut novel published at the age of twenty-three, the critically acclaimed *Swallow the Air* (2006), which became part of the HSC (high-school) syllabus and won Winch a mentorship with Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka, who partly mentored Winch during the creation of the book (Yates 2). Winch has said that *The Yield* was arduous in the making and that the novel is a "love letter to the past and the future of Australia" ("TJW answers"). Spanning 200 years of Australian history and reaching into the present day, *The Yield* indeed feels epic, timely, and urgent. As Winch puts it, "I wanted to play with themes that are massive" and symbolic of Australian history ("Talking Ideas").

The Yield is set in Wiradjuri country in the fictitious "Massacre Plains," the wheat-belt at the border of New South Wales along the fictitious "Murrumbidgee River." Although the geography of Massacre Plains and the Murrumbidgee River is fictional, Winch points out that the names of Massacre and Poisoned Waterhole Creek are indeed "actual

placenames in Australia and are a reminder of the atrocities inflicted upon Indigenous people during colonisation” (341). The novel is written from three different voices: August Gondiwindi, the contemporary protagonist and “prodigal daughter” who returns to her childhood home, Prosperous House, to attend her grandfather’s funeral after a decade of living overseas; the elder-figure Albert Gondiwindi, August’s grandfather, a Wiradjuri farmer who was raised in a nearby mission; and Ferdinand Greenleaf, a German Lutheran minister who founded the mission and farm (“Talking Ideas”). These three perspectives are narrated through different literary forms: August is written from a realist third-person perspective, Albert’s voice is delivered through entries in his creative dictionary, and Greenleaf’s perspective is epistolary, told in form of a long serial letter addressed to a scholar at the British Society of Ethnography at the onset of World War I (1915). All three characters are directly connected: Albert, who is part of the Stolen Generations, was largely raised in Greenleaf’s mission, and August eventually finds both Albert’s creative dictionary and the reverend’s serial letter, which is accompanied by a small dictionary of 150 Wiradjuri words with their English translations (the appendix to the novel). This interconnectedness is made visible spatially: the mission church is turned into a farm worker’s quarters, which is also the premises that the mine aims to acquire and that August and the environmental activists defend. All characters and places thus seem highly symbolic for different stages of land-use in Australia.

August, who is soon exiting her twenties, “with nothing to show,” (6) is physically and mentally unwell upon arrival; as the novel suggests, she has depression and anorexia (in a similar way to Robert from *Everyman’s Rules*, August eats earth as an expression of her trauma [30]). Winch traces her condition back to the Wiradjuri *ngarran*, which means “to be weak, hungry and depressed at the same time” (“The Garret”). Having fled the painful experience of losing her sister, Jedda, (the novel eventually reveals that Jedda was abused and murdered), August returns to her beloved grandmother, Elsie, in preparation for her grandfather’s funeral.⁵⁶ However, Albert’s

⁵⁶ The name Jedda is freighted with cultural significance: the 1955 film *Jedda* (directed by Charles Chauvel) was the first Australian film to focus on an Indigenous character, and the first to star two Indigenous actors on screen. Jedda, an Aboriginal girl, is raised by a white family on a cattle station in the Northern Territory. After, as a young woman, Jedda elopes with an Indigenous man, Marbuck, they eventually die by falling off a cliff. The film problematically evokes the colonial idea of a dying race. Tiffany’s choice of the name, Jedda, thus seems somewhat satirical.

funeral is not the only profound change undergoing Prosperous House: a Rinepalm Mining company has federal approval to build “a two km, 300-metre deep tin mine, a boon for the local economy” (292), which would demolish both the Goondiwindi’s and their neighbour’s house, Southerly, belonging to the well-off settler family, Fallstaff.⁵⁷ Despite local protests and resistance, the majority of the economically depressed Massacre Plains seems to be in support of the mine; a town in which “[h]alf a town of wives tended counters and half a town of husbands were suicidal with farm debt, and most sons and daughters seduced by a living wage, signed up as army cadets” (14). Although the novel does not directly mention climate change, various socio-environmental devastations are strongly evoked; due to an ongoing drought, dry river, and weary livestock, residents experience “tipping points” towards desperation (13).

While the town is resigned to the building of the mine, the Gondiwindis and Falstaffs are told that their properties will be demolished. The mining company has gained land-access through a loophole: in the context of the Soldier Settlement scheme, the Crown leased land to farmers for only 99 years, so the properties are no longer technically owned by the families.⁵⁸ The only possible way to regain custody of their land, August learns, is through making a Native Title case—something that initially seems impossible to the family due to loss of language and culture. However, after finding Greenleaf’s letter, Albert’s dictionary, and formerly stolen cultural objects, August realises that Prosperous mission was indeed a place in which Wiradjuri language and culture survived clandestinely. As the conflict around the tin-mine escalates, the Gondiwindis finally join protesters through direct action. Ultimately, however, it is not only the resistance that brings a surprising halt to the mine, but also different coinciding events relating to cultural heritage: August and her aunt locate Albert’s dictionary and Greenleaf’s letter, and a mining digger stumbles upon a culturally significant mission cemetery, so that archaeologists declare Gondiwindi milling techniques to be around eighteen thousand years old and to rewrite world-history, as they are evidence of the oldest ongoing civilisation. All these findings are key for starting the Native Title case

⁵⁷ The name Falstaff also seems highly symbolic. In Shakespeare’s *Henry IV* plays, Falstaff is the fool.

⁵⁸ After World War I, the Returned Soldiers Settlement Act (1916) enabled returned soldiers to apply for ‘Crown Lands’ on affordable terms, enticing them to “make improvements to the land, which was often in poor condition” and enabling a source of income (“World War I”).

needed to guarantee the families' ownership of their lands. However, it is the Wiradjuri language recorded in Albert's dictionary that finally serves as the strongest confirmation for ongoing Indigenous presence:

The evidence of their civilisation, after so many years of farming, was difficult to find on the surface of the land. But they said it was embedded in the language of Albert's dictionary, that with the Reverend's list and all the words that Albert wrote, and other old people remembering the words too, that it would now be recognised as a resurrected language, brought back from extinction. (307)

The novel ends with the Gondiwindis awaiting a trial with the mining firm, which, although potentially lingering "in the courts for months or years more," already results in significant losses for the company, as their shareholders withdraw money (307). Despite this open-ended court case, the family finds itself reunited: August is "still there in Massacre Plains, in the Valley with her nana and Aunt Missy and Aunt Mary too. All the family, all the Gondiwindi mob" (308). As this ending suggests, the dual processes of grieving for her grandfather and fighting the mine offer August purpose and healing, teaching her that she was part of "a big, big story" (308). It is thus the Wiradjuri language and its encapsulated culture that revives August: after finding the dictionary she is "ravenous" (245), realizing that she had been "looking for those words that she'd understand, that would explain what it all meant" (308).

Indigenous Mununjali author Ellen van Neerven has noted that Winch's novel reflects the *zeitgeist*, as it can be categorised as an anti-mining novel "in the wake of the approval of the Adani coal mine in central Queensland" ("The Yield"). I would add that *The Yield* could also be classified more broadly as an activist novel, as it reflects on the importance, difficulty, and nature of direct action. Although Blak/Green⁵⁹ relations are represented to be deeply fraught—full of nuances that non-Indigenous 'greenies' often seem blind to—August eventually agrees with a particularly eloquent activist, Mandy, on her observation on what makes people act: "We have to learn it [history] is personal—we learn that through looking after the land" (299). Speaking from an

⁵⁹ As explained in the Introduction, the term 'Blak' refers to Indigenous Australians. For a closer discussion of Blak/Green relations, see Chapter 5.

Indigenous perspective, Elsie accordingly observes: “Without protest, we wouldn’t have our rights, none of us would have civil rights, the vote, decent working week” (299).

As the plot, structure, and the “Author’s Note” suggest, *The Yield* reflects historically common Indigenous experiences, including the prohibition of language and culture. Winch writes: “the government and churches banned and discouraged the use of the native tongue. They did this by forcibly removing children from their families, where they were taken into missions and institutions in order to expunge the Indigenous culture” (339). As Winch also explicates in the “Author’s Note,” *The Yield* draws on the existing language of the Wiradjuri people (currently in the process of being revived),⁶⁰ government records, and studies of prominent historians such as Bill Gammage, Eric Rolls, Yuval Noah Harari that prove “the history and sophistication of Indigenous Australians” (342). Moreover, the novel draws heavily on Bruce Pascoe’s book, *Dark Emu*, and ideas of regenerative agriculture, which I discuss later in this chapter.

The next section considers in what ways *The Yield* explores colonised agriculture, extraction, and exploited labour, and how it can be positioned in relation to racial capitalism.

Dismantling Destructive Land-Use

The Yield establishes two co-existing understandings and enactments of Country operating in Australia: one Indigenous and one colonial.⁶¹ Colonised land is represented as a lived vision of Darwinism: “The country, after all, was an experiment of survival of the fittest, of the unravelling. Darwin was even the name of a town in the north” (84). The “unravelling” here indicates the undoing of socio-environmental fabrics of interconnectedness through the right of the strongest. By contrast, the Wiradjuri notion of Country is conveyed as nourishing, formative, but also demanding. As I explore

⁶⁰ The Author’s Note points to the fact that it was reclaimed and preserved through Stan Grant, a prolific Wiradjuri television presenter, political journalist, and writer (339).

⁶¹ The Indigenous Australian concept of Country is explained in the thesis’ Introduction. In *The Yield*, notions of Country are represented to also include family relations, as Albert writes: “When our people say Where is your country they are asking something deeper. Who is your family? Who are you related to? Are we related?” (34)

throughout this analysis, the recalling of this violently silenced Indigenous understanding is central to the novel. Importantly, however, while these two philosophies co-exist and are largely at odds with one another, they are not described in simplistic dualisms, which is conveyed through Albert's complicated but altogether positive relationship to wheat, as comes to the fore in one dictionary entry:

wheat—yura My entire life has been *galing* and *yura*. Even in the Boys' Home we used to have to bless our meals, mostly served with johnnycakes, or dense bread. [...] Every person knows bread one way or another. The Gondiwindi had their own flours, and they were meant especially for the body of the Gondiwindi. We have always worked in the wheatfields too, my daddy did, and his daddy too, and if the world ever stopped turning it'd be the last grain on earth, I reckon. Prosperous acres were fertile for the most part and although us mob lived on rich land—we never became rich. (33, emphasis in the original of all cited dictionary entries)

While certain grains and their transformation into forms of bread may be universal, Albert points out that the Gondiwindi had their own grain and bread that was cultivated over millennia and thus was probably more adapted to their bodies. Although the novel only insinuates the disadvantages of wheat (by indicating pollution), its racially charged symbolism is evoked when Albert recounts he had to unlearn the thought that he was “just a second-rate man raised on white flour and Christianity” (81; 2). Yet Albert also wishes to be buried in the wheat-field, “the last yield, before it's dug open” (312). Albert thus does not demonise wheat, but partly identifies with it. As comes to the fore in his dictionary, Albert records a complex ethics of land-care, which integrates tradition and modernity, and which is marked by the persistence of Indigenous law despite destructive colonial practices.

This complex understanding of land-care is also mirrored in Albert's cultural hybridity—his capacity to integrate Christian and Wiradjuri cosmologies. While Wiradjuri culture remains more important to Albert, both cultural belief systems inform his heritage: he often contemplates Bible verses and challenges his granddaughter to read the entire scripture by scrutinising every single sentence. The problem with modern, co-existing, and at times clashing cultures is represented not to lie in the diversity of belief systems but in the rigidity of whitefellas: “Worship came easy—so this

news about a fella Jesus from the desert on the other side of the world who had all the instructions for heavenly ascent—well, that was alright with us. Problem is they didn't let the Aborigine straddle the world he knew best—no more language or hunting, or ceremonies" (41). In contrast to colonial understandings of the world, Indigenous worldviews are represented as flexible and earthbound: "He [Albert's ancestor] told me that Biyaami is the creator, but we don't worship Him or His son. We worship the things He made, the earth" (254). Moreover, Indigenous worldviews are portrayed as incorporating complex perspectives: "Seeing two things at the same time. Here and there, close and far, now and before" (288). Hence, Albert represents a knowledgeable and highly skilled elder figure who dialectically navigates both: colonial and Wiradjuri land-care, Christian and Indigenous cosmologies, without losing sight of the violence of dispossession and the resulting power-distribution.

In fact, Albert is drawn as a deeply spiritual man, a "time traveller" who is in continuous conversation with ancestors: "I am writing because the spirits are urging me to remember, and because the town needs to know that I remember, they need to know now more than ever before" (2). Albert converses with ancestors in English and Wiradjuri, learning language and culture, which suggests that he is a translator, a binding force between different languages, cultures, and cosmologies. As he writes about the Indigenous understanding of time and space:

The story goes that the church brought it [time] to us, and the church, if you let it, will take it away. I'm writing about the other time, though, deep time. This is a big, big story. The big stuff goes forever, time ropes and loops and is never straight, that's the real story of time. (2)

Here, Albert suggests the immanence of time and place, the material and spiritual, and establishes nonlinear time as opposed to the linear time concepts taught in the mission. These multi-faceted dimensions of caring for Country are made explicit to August, when she finds his library books: "Christianity. Plants. Animals. Cosmology. War. Art History. Farming. She thought she understood then that Poppy was really up to something with these books—he was trying to explain something big" (187). As August here suggests, her grandfather's quest was the bringing-together of multi-disciplinary knowledge and the regeneration of Wiradjuri culture and cosmology for keeping people and land alive and flourishing.

Importantly for this chapter's investigation of the Capitalocene, Albert stresses that Wiradjuri land-care encapsulates a wholly different notion of ownership that contrasts with the commodification and simplification of the environment under (post)colonisation:

husk, of seeds—*galgan* All life comes from the seed—*yurbay*. When you harvest you make sure you keep your husks safe. There are companies like the mining company trying to own the seeds. This is a scary thing to me, people trying to put a price on the farmers' seeds. In Mexico, in India, everywhere crops are grown—even in this country there's a monopoly of bad guys trying to own the seeds. Can you imagine! Owning the centre of life, one company! (203)

Albert criticises the appropriation of fundamental life-forms, such as seeds, by a few companies (now known as biopiracy), and the dangers inherent in what Vandana Shiva has termed 'economic totalitarianism' (123). This critique of the commodification and reductionism of Country is emphasised throughout the entire novel, for example, when Albert writes that the ancestors taught him "that the plants were our mothers and so I was only to use them for the Gondiwindi, not for selling, just for living. Remember that, wherever you go and touch the trees and plants, they are sacred" (32). Moreover, Albert stresses that people do not own Country, but are owned by it: "their lore said that even during change, the land still owned them" (31). Albert therefore defies the idea of land as private property and implicitly draws attention to the lack of protective Indigenous ownership laws—not just trans-nationally, but specifically in Australia.

In this context, it is worth recalling Australia's legal basis of land-ownership—as introduced earlier in the chapter with Pritchard—to illustrate how deeply enshrined the commodification of land is in contemporary Australia. Pritchard argues that Australia's land-use is unique because rural landscapes were converted directly into the service of imperial purposes and thus betray an unusual *absence* of a traditional land-holding class (24). Scholars have pointed to the legal principle of the Torrens title to illustrate that this colonial land-use is still prevalent today. Developed during the Australian frontier wars, Torrens title validates the state as an actor in property rights and has been employed to simplify dealings involving land. This contrasts with pre-Enlightenment systems, in which ownership of land was often proven through a "chain of deeds protected by common law which grounded people and families to a parcel of property they proved title over

through a deed” (Pritchard 30). Australia pioneered this system of land ownership, which would spread across the globe: invented in colonial South Australia in 1858, where it meant to prevent further disputes over land, the Torrens title was adopted in Canada, Fiji, the Dominican Republic, Ireland, Israel, Malaysia, New Zealand, the U.S., and other nations. However, as its history suggests, Torrens title is also deeply tied to the dispossession of Indigenous land, and critiques have been expressed that this process is a “handmaiden for the ready exchange of land to the highest bidder, which in the contemporary context is associated with foreign investors acquiring land” (Pritchard 30). This transformation of land into capital has been interpreted as a “dephysicalisation of property: land is an entry on a register, rather than a deed that proves ownership in terms of the soil, water and vegetation of *terra firma*” (Nicole Graham 22; also cited in Pritchard 30). Similarly, as explained earlier with *aqua nullius* and the colonial legacy of water rights, for many farmers in Australia, water is a tradable commodity available to the highest bidder. In short, since colonisation, Australia evinces a particularly strong tradition of considering land and water as commodities that are determined mainly by their world-economic market value. As such, Pritchard points out, it is at odds with considerations of heritage, agricultural expertise, sustainability, or broader socio-environmental concerns.

The Yield addresses the systematic commodification through the conflict between farming and mining. With a wink to the controversial contemporary Adani Mine, the novel seems to confirm that it is indeed ‘easy’ to sell land to the most profitable bidder—in this case, the tin mine. Indeed, the novel establishes the extractive industry as performing the opposite of land-care: one-way exploitation. Aunt Mary informs August about the destructive impact of mining:

‘You know what they’re mining, Aug? [...] T-I-N—tin. You know what that looks like? [...] This whole thing...’ she stretched her arms beside her, fingers spread wide, and then turned on the spot, shuffling her feet in a circle, ‘is gone.’

‘How big?’

‘Two kilometres.’

‘They can’t.’

‘They can.’ [...]

‘What’s a tin mine look like?’

‘Big hole.’

‘Is it bad?’

'Member Wizard of Oz?'
 'Yeah.'
 'Member Tin Man?'
 'Yeah.'
 'Well there's a reason he doesn't have a heart, darl.'
 'What's that mean?'
 'That tin don't love anyone or anything back.' (65-66)

As the novel describes soil degradation, mercury pollution, drought, heat, and economic depression, current practices of extraction are framed as a taking and profit-making that does not "love back," which suggests it neither brings sustainable benefits for wider society, nor the environment. In fact, Albert relates mining to one-way enrichment:

Underneath the earth—*ngunhadar-guwur* What's down there? Why those mining mob want to rip it all out and then it all belongs to them? I think all those shiny things *ngunhadar-guwur* shouldn't belong to anyone, only our mother. I think that currency should return, make a balm from the wound. It's strange, isn't it? That word, *fortunes*. I think we don't have that word at all. (41)

While the word 'fortunes' is not dwelled upon, Albert emphasises that it evokes a taking from the land without giving back. This contrasts with the ethics of reciprocity, labour, respect and care he purports.

However, as already mentioned, *The Yield* continuously foregrounds alternatives to this reductionist colonial order by reconstructing cosmological understandings of the world:

Soil, earth, dirt—*manhang* [...] I read that inside the soil there are the same number of microbes as there are stars in the universe, and how if you farmed the soil you took the chance of rain away with the nutrients. [...] *Manhang*—that's where the body goes eventually, and everything else from the *manhang* to the stars is eternally alive with our spirits. (81)

Albert here communicates a cosmic idea of *manhang*, elevating the idea from earth as 'dirt' to earth as a complex alive organism that reflects the diversity of the universe. This conjures up multi-scalar layers of meaning, as "the little things [...] are big things" (207). While *The Yield* describes Albert's project to aim at explaining "something big," however, his dictionary entries often also encompass practical advice and, therefore, emphasise the labour and effort inherent in caring for Country. Albert addresses farming

techniques, harvesting, eating, applying, healing, hunting, and controlled grass-burning to prepare the soil or to avoid mega-fires. To take one example:

Flour made from millet seed—*buwu-nung, dargin* When the millet plant is late flowering and the seed heads have turned golden brown, then you can cut the heads off and save the mature seeds for planting again—these are the swollen ones and will come away easiest from the cluster. The rest of the seed head needs to dry in the sun for a few days, and then the seeds should fall away easily. Next grind the seed as fine as you like, you can grind them rough for porridge or into *bawu-nung* for making bread. This is our harvest, since forever. (205-206)

As this entry suggests, rather than establishing Country as nourishing and healing only, the novel also emphasises the inherent *work* of caring. In this way, Albert's dictionary evokes the ancient genre of the Georgic (starting in 8 BC with Hesiod, and later, Virgil), which has recently been brought to attention for having been utterly neglected by ecocritics. In contrast to Romanticism (a field that has been much revisited in ecocriticism), the Georgic is concerned with, as David Fairer puts it, "harnessing nature to human use;" with the challenges, frustrations, and uncertainty of labour, and with practical tools and technology (engrafting, cultivation, and so on) (204). In contrast to the Romantic notion of an untroubled, harmonious, and innocent 'nature,' the Georgic emphasises struggle, attentiveness to mundane detail, and the fruit of experience. The genre thus reflects the give and take, the reciprocal educational effect of "nature's demands," and the "individuality of living things" (Fairer 208). Similarly, Albert's dictionary conveys the labour of "encouraging new life, however small" (Fairer 209) and, thus, contrasts with an often-romanticised idea of harmony with an uncultivated 'nature.'

As Albert's careful labour shows, the novel thus goes beyond analysing oppression to emphasise the need of cultivation, repair, and healing. Although *The Yield* addresses exploited labour of especially Indigenous people on wheat-plantations that has contributed to the nation's wealth (it explicitly refers to the slavery debate in Australia [196]), it stresses the care needed to regenerate Indigenous language, culture, and land-rights. This conjures up the case made by many Environmental Humanities scholars, who have argued for the need to move beyond academic critique towards

communicating solutions. Jennifer Hamilton, for example, has made the important point that the history of the exploited labour evokes the labour needed for renewal:

[T]he environmental crisis is not a magical side effect of industrial civilization. This situation was built, not conjured. Imagining the crisis as collectively *wrought* invokes the sweaty, material and embodied effort invested in making the crisis and invites speculations as to what kinds of labour it will take to actively create a different future. (“Labour” 183)

In other words, recalling the (exploited) labour that has led to the environmental crisis sparks awareness of the possibilities of working our way out of the Anthropocene. Similarly, the novel suggests the philosophical, linguistic, systemic, and practical changes required for regenerating the land. By drawing attention to the multi-dimensional consequences of colonisation, *The Yield* proposes that agriculture and mining are deeply cultural practices that can and, indeed, must be revised—a notion that is becoming increasingly popular in Australia.

As the “Author’s Note” indicates, *The Yield* explicitly draws on Pascoe’s non-fictional national bestseller *Dark Emu* (2014), from which Winch derived many of the native plants and cooking techniques. *Dark Emu* overturned the national narrative that pre-colonisation First Nations people were hunter-gatherers who did not engage in agriculture. While this overturning may not be news to intellectual circles,⁶² what is new is the popularisation of this information: as a storyteller, Bunurong man, culinary entrepreneur, and memory activist, Pascoe has extensively toured the country, has appeared on national television, and released a children’s version of the book.⁶³ Based on journals and diaries of explorers, colonists, and environmental historians, Pascoe argues that for European colonists, “five things signified the development of agriculture: selection of seed, preparation of the soil, harvest of the crop, storage of surpluses, and large populations and permanent housing” (19). First Australians, as Pascoe proves, did exactly this: they harvested seeds to produce flour and bake, created villages, prepared the soil through techniques of terracing, systematically farmed yam roots, used

⁶² Griffiths points out that, since the 1960s, historians have collectively dismantled the national silencing of Aboriginal history, sovereignty, land management, and warfare (“Reading Bruce Pascoe”).

⁶³ However, *Dark Emu* has also generated conservative attacks on Pascoe, such as those collected on the website “Dark Emu Exposed,” where Pascoe’s work is critiqued by such dubious methods as doubting his ancestry.

sophisticated fire techniques to clear areas of land and control bigger bush fires, and so on. While these facts may seem self-evident, Pascoe concludes that “Aboriginal people did build houses, did cultivate and irrigate crops, did sew clothes and were not hapless wanderers across the soil, mere hunter-gatherers” (156). This insight can be considered revolutionary in a country in which Indigenous history has systematically been silenced. As Tom Griffiths puts it, *Dark Emu* “blows away” the myth of nomadism, *terra nullius*, and the simplified terms ‘hunter-gatherers’ or ‘agriculturists,’ reviving “those categories triumphantly: Aboriginal peoples, he argues, were farmers” (“Reading Bruce Pascoe”). As a highly skilled farmer and Indigenous Elder, then, Albert’s character in *The Yield* can be seen as allegorical for a contemporary Australia that seems on the brink of deep socio-environmental change. *The Yield* thus goes beyond racial capitalism, by offering perspectives on Indigenous culture and language that can be regarded as alternatives to the Capitalocene, Plantationocene and Black Anthropocene, elements of which, indeed, are portrayed to continue to shape contemporary Australia.

The next section analyses the heart of the novel—the power of language and culture—via its reflections on the similarities and differences between Wiradjuri and English.

Regenerating Wiradjuri Cosmology

The Yield establishes the regeneration of language as crucial for socio-environmental flourishing and individual healing. As Winch reminds readers in the “Author’s Note,” the suppression of languages was a crucial tool of colonisation:

Before colonization there were two hundred and fifty distinct languages in Australia that subdivided into six hundred dialects. The Wiradjuri language is a Pama-Nyungan language of the Wiradjuri subgroup and has been reclaimed and preserved through the efforts of Dr Uncle Stan Grant Snr AM and linguist Dr John Rudder. (339)

By the same token, Winch reminds the reader of the ongoing importance of language: “[c]ultural knowledge, community history, customs, modes of thinking and belonging to the land are carried through languages. In the last two hundred years, Australia has

suffered the largest and most rapid loss of languages known to history. Today, despite efforts of revitalisation, Australia's languages are some of the most endangered in the world" (340). Significantly, *The Yield* was released in 2019, the UN International Year of Indigenous Languages, which Winch establishes as the key: "I believe it is a relevant moment to read a book in the old language, the first language—because as Albert says in the opening pages 'That is the way to all time, to time travel! You can go all the way back'" (Yates 2). In short, while language was a key tool of colonisation, Winch points out that it is also a key tool of regeneration.⁶⁴

In *The Yield*, Albert emphasises that Country—time, place, social relations—is not just known through language, but that language also creates and keeps it alive: "The map isn't the thing, this country is made of impossible distances, places you can only reach by time travel. By speaking our language, by singing the mountains into existence" (34). Here, Albert indicates that Indigenous language is so crucial for rejuvenation of the land because it emerged from a particular place and, therefore, contains important information about this place. Moreover, language records memory, which is key to the whole novel, as August recalls Albert's words: "*There are few worse things than memory, yet few things better*; he'd said. *Be careful*" (9). As the dictionary continuously stresses, language sustains life because language is "time travel." Beyond information, then, language contains memory, situated knowledge, and wisdom.

In fact, the aliveness of Country is indicated through the return of the Wiradjuri language and the ongoing existence of song-lines, as Albert writes: "These lines are our early map-making. They measure our places, our impossible distances and they are passed down through story songs and dances. The lines are there, but sometimes the *gudhi* [song] is lost. The Gondiwindi lost the *gudhi*, only now it's coming back to us again" (103). With the help of Albert's dictionary, the Reverend's list of words, and old people remembering expressions, the Wiradjuri language is eventually "recognised as a

⁶⁴ Winch seems to also have been influenced by the prolific Indigenous Noongar writer Kim Scott, who has similarly pursued Noongar language regeneration in and beyond his literary works. Scott writes: "On the one hand, I explore and create narratives in English, and let the work find its own way according to largely aesthetic, 'literary' considerations. On the other, I try to revitalize my ancestral language by bringing together archival linguistic knowledge and descendants of the linguist's informants' in ways that [...] attempt to help a contemporary Noongar community" (58).

resurrected language, brought back from extinction” (307).⁶⁵ Quite different to the emphasis on cultural extinction, then, the novel does something interesting: it posits that it is during times of climate change, which has been interpreted as an intensification of colonisation (Whyte 159), that the regeneration of Indigenous culture, land, and language occurs most powerfully. In this way, *The Yield* conveys the devastations of the Anthropocene as an acknowledgement of the land’s agency and of Indigenous knowledge—one that ultimately can work favourably for First Nations.

Crucially, however, the novel does not suggest that language and culture are ‘pure.’ Indeed, just as Albert’s cultural, spiritual, and agricultural education are hybrid, the language employed in *The Yield* goes back and forth between English and Wiradjuri, and contains within itself different registers, such as the formal 19th century English of Reverend Greenleaf’s letters, or Aboriginal English variations. This conveys the idea that language is not just a system, but is also alive, as it can develop, hybridise, and create something new. As Albert points out, culture and language cannot entirely die, which is indicated through the ongoing existence of song-lines: “The lines are there, but sometimes the *gudhi* [song] is lost” (103). As is suggested here, song-lines always exist, and because language and culture cannot wholly perish either, the songs will eventually return in some way. This hybridity and flexibility become evident through the novel’s keyword, *baayanha*:

yield, bend the feet, tread, as in walking, also long, tall — *baayanha*
Yield itself is a funny word—yield in English is the reaping, the things that man can take from the land, the thing he’s waited for and gets to claim. A wheat yield. In my language it’s the things you give to, the movement, the space between things. It’s also the action made by Baiame [spirit that rules the Gondiwindi] because sorrow, old age and pain bend and yield. The bodies of the ones that had passed were buried with every joint bent, even if the bones had to be broken. I think it was a bend in humiliation just like we bend at our knees and bow our heads. Bend, yield—*baayanha*. (25)

Albert here contrasts the English notion of reaping, as in taking, claiming, owning, and the Wiradjuri *baayanha*, indicating a relationship between humans and land (“space

⁶⁵ As Winch notes, preserved languages often rely on colonial documents, such as missionary records, station landholder records, local police documents (339).

between things”) based on the reciprocity of giving and taking. Moreover, the connotation of bending and folding signifies a moving towards the earth, which conveys humility. Interestingly, the words ‘humility’ and ‘human’ share the same root: the Latin *humus* meaning ‘earth.’ By contrast, *anthropos* (as inherent in Anthropocene) signifies the ‘sky-ward looking human’ (Haraway, *Staying* 53). Hence, *baayanha* denotes more than ‘harvesting;’ it also encapsulates the ethics of reciprocal respect and earthbound humility. *Baayanha* could thus be read as a humble act, whereas the Anthropocene’s *anthropos* evokes the hubris of not being ‘of this earth.’

At first glance, the novel establishes the difference between the English and the Wiradjuri words; however, upon closer examination, ‘yield’ and *baayanha* are not so different after all. The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines the verb ‘yield’ to have the following meanings: firstly, “to supply or produce something positive such as a profit, an amount of food or information;” secondly, “to give up the control of or responsibility for something;” thirdly, “to bend or break under pressure;” fourthly, “to stop” (“Yield”). However, the noun ‘yield’ refers mainly to “profit” as in “a profit or an amount esp. of a crop produced” (“Yield”). Surprisingly, then, the verb form indicates that Wiradjuri and English are similar in the meanings of give, take, and fold (“give up control” and “bend or break”). However, as the noun-form of ‘yield’ denotes, the contemporary use of the English word is strongly linked to ‘profit’—a key word for commodification. Hence, while both languages hold the memory of a complex reciprocity of give, take, and falling or bending towards the earth, the contemporary English use of the word reveals that the link to ‘profit’ is particularly strong today. Through the contemplation of the shimmering terms ‘yield’ and *baayanha*, the novel thus seems to reveal that new meaning can emerge from “the space between the two,” from lived relationships, and from the comparison between languages, cultures, ethics, and cosmologies.⁶⁶ In other words, as

⁶⁶ By ‘shimmering,’ I initially meant a kind of nuanced, multi-faceted, and complex aliveness. Upon closer investigation, Deborah Bird Rose has used this term as an important concept that she learned about from Aboriginal people in the Victoria River region of Australia’s Northern Territory. As Rose writes, “I use the concept of shimmer [to frame her chapter] because I believe it is susceptible to a ‘reciprocal capture’ with Western thought. For philosopher Isabelle Stengers, ‘reciprocal capture’ is ‘an event, the production of new, immanent modes of existence’ in which neither entity transcends the other or forces the other to bow down. It is a process of encounter and transformation, not absorption, in which different ways of being and doing find interesting things to do together” (“When All” G51, citing Stenger’s *Cosmopolitics I* [2010]). Rose also cites the Yolngu term *bir’yun*, which translates as ‘brilliant’ or ‘shimmering:’ “*Bir’yun* is the shimmer, the brilliance, and the artists say, it is a kind of motion” (G53, via Howard Morphy’s anthropological essay “From Dull to Brilliant” [1989]).

the similarities and differences of the terms suggest, and as embodied by Albert, the novel does not purport purism, but embraces modernity, collage, and collaboration if it serves the regeneration, continuation, and flourishing of life. Equally, however, the novel stresses that the particularities and differences of languages matter; far from being replaceable and dispensable, the revitalisation of Indigenous languages is invaluable for a modern Australia, as it integrates the knowledge that emerged from and evolved in this place.

Another crucial difference—or nuance—is inherent in the words *baayanha* and *gulbarra* (understand): as is suggested on the book-cover, the notion of reciprocity is front and centre of the novel and seems to present the heart of Wiradjuri ethics. As Albert writes, reciprocity is a sign of respect and equality:

Respect—yindyamarra I think I've come to realise that with some things, you cannot receive them unless you give them too. Unless you've even got the opportunity to give and receive. Only equals can share respect, otherwise it's a game of masters and slaves—someone always has the upper hand when they are demanding respect. But *yindyamarra* is another thing too, it's a way of life—a life of kindness, gentleness and respect at once. (106)

Albert here stresses the importance of equality and justice within reciprocity. However, reciprocity is extended by care: “**understand—gulbarra** [...] Love thy neighbour that's a commandment from the Bible, *bilingalgirridyu ngaghigu madhugu*—that's our commandment, it translates to: I will care for my enemy. They both mean *gulbarra*” (42). Hence, beyond the Biblical emphasis on ‘love,’ *gulbarra* stresses ‘care,’ which denotes the effort and labour inherent in protecting someone or something. As August and her aunt write in the Foreword to their eventual publishing of Albert's dictionary, the effort of keeping people and ecosystems flourishing—despite and beyond colonisation—can be seen as the highest expression of care:

Maybe you are looking for a statue, or a bench by the banks of the Murrumbidgee to honour the people who have lived by the river. Better, there is water returning, nudging what was dead. Better the burralgang [brolga] congregate here often. Better these words and better we are still here and that we speak them. (310)

August and Aunt Mary here evoke the discussion around what counts as a civilisation. As Robin has pointed out, the narrative of ‘civilisation equals sedentary agriculture’ has largely been normalised but is unfitting for places like Australia, where it has led to disastrous consequences for Indigenous Australians, as the policy of *terra nullius* is, in part, based on the notion that there were no visible signs of agriculture and ownership (“Domestication” 46-47). While *The Yield* frequently conjures up different complex considerations of civilisation, August and Mary here specifically imply that rather than conventional landmarks and monuments, for the Gondiwindi, civilisation signifies the survival, health, and well-being of people and environment, and the importance of culture for upholding these ethics of care. It is the aliveness and lived expression of language, then, that brings ethics into existence and that serves as the ultimate proof of civilisation, as “[e]vidence of civilization [is] hard to find on the surface of the land” (307).

In conjunction with language, *The Yield* also establishes the importance of reading, which is linked to *baayanha*: “He [Albert] wrote that in his dictionary—how he noticed the soil, then read about something else, and everything snowballed after that. How the things he needed to know opened up to him once he opened his eyes. Once *he* was seen” (308). Reading is conveyed to be a process of reciprocity during which the world opens up, as Albert ‘sees’ and is being seen. Albert also implicitly parallels reading and harvesting: what seems to connect these terms is the *reciprocity* of meaning-making of self and ‘other,’ human and environment.⁶⁷ It is this connection between land and language, then, that seems to inform *gulbarra* (understanding). Yet, rather than privileging verbal and written language, *The Yield* gestures towards a wider conception of language and reading to include artistic expression in general, as Albert recounts being moved after learning that the post-War city of Warsaw was rebuilt based on drawings by an Italian artist: “The people left were thinking about moving the city somewhere else, rebuilding a new Warsaw. But then they had all these paintings of the city, these great detailed things by the *bundadhaany* [artist] Bernardo Bellotto, and they rebuilt the city from paintings done generations before the city was bombed to bits”

⁶⁷ Another example of the etymological link between reading and reaping can be found in the German word for reading (*lesen*) and ‘harvest’ (*die Lese*). Also human body parts have served as spatial measurements and suggest the etymological links between the body, land, and language: in English there is the measurement ‘foot,’ in German there is ‘ell’ or ‘cubit’ (*die Elle*).

(311). In this way, the novel points to the world-building and world-sustaining capacity of language and art. Far from being a side-product of civilisation, or a luxury of a materially satisfied world, *The Yield* suggests that ‘care-full’ language and art hold the potential of rejuvenating land and society.

Conclusion

I have argued that the Anthropocene debate’s focus on racial capitalism productively illuminates aspects of the novel, such as the commodification of land and water as exemplified by the Torrens title; the cheapening of ‘nature’ as exemplified in the exploitative ‘taking’ from the land through mining; and the deep history of exploited labour, serfdom, and slavery as exemplified through the socio-environmental devastated Massacre Plains. Yet my reading of *The Yield* goes beyond an analysis of oppression and environmental crisis to show the transformative and regenerative agenda of the novel: I argue that *The Yield* points to the careful labour needed to revitalise Indigenous language, culture, and land. This includes the revised understandings of grains, crops, soil, water from commodified ‘things’ to agents in a cosmic order and, thus, conveys a holistic understanding of environment, society, and individual.

Moreover, I have argued that *The Yield* establishes Indigenous language as crucial for regeneration because language contains memory, situated knowledge, and wisdom about a particular place and people, and is closely linked to the revival of culture and custodianship. Far from being purist, however, Albert embodies and purports that modern Wiradjuri language is alive, flexible, and creative, which shows that a culture cannot go extinct. With the example of the words ‘yield’ and *baayanha*, the novel stresses the respect inherent in reciprocal care (giving to and taking from the land), which conveys the aliveness of Country. Thus, the emphasis on reciprocal care evokes the agency, intention, and will of the more-than-human world and conjures up the sense of the cosmic: rather than a passive environment, a cared-for land appears to have benevolent effects on people. By drawing attention to reading and artistic expression in

general, the novel implicitly suggests the idea that art and literature have the power to change the decline-narrative of the Anthropocene.

3.4 Chapter Conclusion

The term Anthropocene runs the risk of demonising general human activity, such as farming and the uses of precious metals, which conveys the dangerous idea that the human species somehow stands apart from other species, not belonging on Earth. As discussed with the terms Capitalocene, Plantationocene, and Black Anthropocene, however, humanities scholars have shaped the awareness of the long history of violent social systems and uneven distribution of harm, thus undermining the potentially dangerous narrative of anti-humanism, anti-modernity, and resource scarcity the Anthropocene is likely to convey. In this way, the humanities have transformed the discussion from the Anthropocene as a scientific discourse (humans vs. nature) to an issue of global injustice (systemic violence vs. eco-systemic health).⁶⁸ However, I have argued that the debate's focus on racial capitalism is also limiting, as it tends to neglect more complex understandings of power and violence, and the importance of language and culture for societal structures.

In this context, I have thrown into relief the work that literature and literary studies achieve: both novels focus on the importance of language not just as constitutive of processes of colonisation, oppression, and exploitation, but also of revitalising culture and environment. Furthermore, I have argued that the novels point to the power of language for connecting humans to land: while *Everyman's Rules* investigates the workings of lyrical, multi-scalar language for the consciousness of the body-land nexus, *The Yield* emphasises that Indigenous languages and their encapsulation of culture, memory, and land-care are so crucial for Australian regeneration, as they emerged from the land and therefore contain crucial information for the country's ecological repair. In turn, *The Yield* also illustrates that the oppression of Indigenous languages and cultures

⁶⁸ This global injustice is more commonly known through the terms 'environmental justice,' 'environmental racism,' and 'climate-apartheid,' as explained in Chapter 5.

were key drivers of the ecological crisis in Australia. Hence, both novels suggest that language is not only a system that emerged from particular places, but it is also alive and a bridge between humans and their environments. In this way, the two novels respond to a one-dimensional, instrumental, and commodified view of the land by reinscribing the cosmological sense of a holistic environment—one that includes the important role of language and culture.

4. Technology/Bioethics: Revising ‘Human Mastery’ Narratives

4.1 Introduction: Defying the Technocratisation of the Anthropocene

This chapter discusses two works preoccupied with questions of technological and biological advancement, exploitation, and environmental degradation in the science and speculative fiction mode set in the not-too-distant future: Briohny Doyle’s novel *The Island Will Sink* (2016) and Ellen van Neerven’s novella “Water” from her collection *Heat and Light* (2015). *The Island Will Sink* is set in a dystopian city in which the wealthy few live relatively sheltered lives in technologically savvy buildings, continuously consuming climate change through the media. The ubiquitous narrative of the ‘natural disaster’ takes centre stage in the novel, as the Pacific island Pitcairn is in the process of sinking as sea levels rise, an event that is highly anticipated and transmitted visually through television and cinema. “Water” stages the discovery of a new species, the ‘plantpeople,’ who are in danger of being exterminated in the face of a sand-mining project, but who form unexpected bonds with the local Aboriginal community in their quest to protect people and land. Whereas *The Island Will Sink* self-consciously tests the limitations of dystopian, (post)apocalyptic and disaster narratives for responding to climate change as transmitted through various different media, “Water” can be read as presenting a counter-narrative to this dominant apocalypticism through its exploration of erotics, humour, and activism. I read both texts as reflecting the dangerous Anthropocene narrative of ‘human mastery over nature’ via unethical uses of technology, science, and new media. While Doyle heightens this dualism through a portrayal of cinematic transcendence over climate disaster, presenting what I call a ‘negative cosmology,’ van Neerven counters the notion of human mastery by evoking the collaborative evolution of species and a cosmology of bioethical care.

This introduction begins by outlining the human mastery narrative and the technocratisation of climate change as can be found in the Anthropocene debate. The second part of the introduction presents one of the main contributions of literary studies

to the Anthropocene debate – the attention to narratives, genres, modes, and affects⁶⁹ for counteracting destructive meta-narratives, such as human mastery and apocalypticism. This contextualisation in the Anthropocene debate seeks to demonstrate how the pronouncement of the Anthropocene partly led to an intensified perpetuation of the nature/culture divide—something that was strongly criticised by scholars of the humanities. My discussion of the two literary texts takes up this critique of the dualistic construction of ‘nature vs. culture’ by showing the interconnections between these supposed binaries. While *The Island Will Sink* reveals the ways in which media-technologies are always already entangled with narratives, the figures of the ‘plantpeople’ in “Water” explicitly undermine the nature/culture binary by virtue of being hybrid creatures.

The narrative of the alleged human mastery of nature through technology can be regarded as one of the most prominent anchors of the Anthropocene debate. In the quest to define a starting point for this new era, many dates were proposed that centre on technologies of some kind: the sixteenth-century’s onset of colonisation and the weaponry that furthered European domination of the ‘new world;’ the nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution in Britain and the prominence of the steam engine; or the so-called Great Acceleration of the 1950s with nuclear technology. In their original proposal of the term Anthropocene, Crutzen and Stoermer explicitly name the centrality of technology when referring to humanity as a species, as they identify “the growing role played by mankind’s brainpower and technological talents in shaping its own future and environment” (40). Importantly for this chapter, our current time has recently been described as experiencing a fourth Industrial Revolution. Building on previous revolutions, such as automated mass production, electric power, and information technology and electronics, this fourth revolution can be characterised “by a fusion of technologies that are blurring the lines between the physical, digital and biological spheres” (Schwab). As this description of the fourth Industrial Revolution suggests, the notion of human mastery over ‘nature’ becomes increasingly less tenable, as lines between spheres such as technology and biology are becoming increasingly blurred.

⁶⁹ I use Nicole Seymour’s definition of ‘affect’ as a broader term for emotions: affect is corporeal, collective, and/or performed (20).

Bioethics, or biopolitics, the terms I use in this chapter, are intimately connected to technology, as the ever-more sophisticated tools humans invent increasingly influence biological organisms, such as stem cells, embryos, crops and plants, humans, or even the dead beyond extinction. The term biopolitics is close to the idea of cosmos, as the term (composed of ‘bio’ and ‘politics’) indicates the nature/culture entanglement. Bioethicist and sociologist James J. Hughes defines biopolitics as having four distinct but interrelated meanings. First emerging in the 1920s and present among eugenicists of the Third Reich, it was not until the 1960s that the term became more commonly used, when scholars researched the relationship between evolutionary biology and politics (Hughes 22). Michel Foucault subsequently used the term to indicate how institutions develop ‘biopower,’ meaning how knowledge about bodies and populations is gathered and institutionalised, so that powerful governing bodies ensure obedience, control and productivity in capitalism (Hughes 22). The third use of the term describes the influence of public policy on medicine, public health, and biotechnology (Hughes 22). Today, ‘bioethics’ is used to indicate different political approaches to biopolitical issues, such as cloning, germline genetic therapy, or gene-modified crops (GMO). This chapter discusses the linking of narratives of evolutionary biology and politics that have recently become amplified with the Anthropocene debate.

Although bioethical and technological issues pose complex questions of the assumed human mastery over the planet, some scholars have argued that the challenges of the Anthropocene are mainly *about* technology and can consequently be ‘fixed’ through technology. This is implicitly suggested by the manifesto of the ‘Ecomodernist’ group, which is associated with the Breakthrough Institute, a centre-right US think-tank. Their manifesto (2015), which has been critiqued by many scholars,⁷⁰ proposes that humans need to further “decouple” themselves from nature by means of technological advancement (Asafu-Adjaye, et al. 31). The authors are in favour of grand-scale technological projects such as nuclear power, GMO or mass-scale agriculture and recommend “intensifying many human activities—particularly farming, energy extraction, forestry, and settlement—so that they use less land and interfere less

⁷⁰ See for example the special section of *Environmental Humanities* 7.1 (2016), containing responses to the Ecomodernist Manifesto by scholars such as Bruno Latour, Rosemary-Claire Collard, Jessica Dempsey, Juanita Sundber, Bronislaw Szerszynski, and Eileen Crist.

with the natural world” (7). By intensifying human activities in these domains, the authors assert that there will be more land that can be left alone, so that there is both “nature used and nature spared” (7). This decoupling from nature has allegedly already been occurring through technology, which has made humans “less reliant upon the many ecosystems that once provided their only sustenance, even as those same ecosystems have often been deeply damaged” (7). While it remains unclear how humans can survive without the ecosystem that provides food and water, the Ecomodernist logic thus asserts that a “good Anthropocene” can be achieved by further intensifying the supposed separation from ‘nature’ by means of social, economic, and technological powers. Moreover, the Ecomodernist Manifesto reveals the ways in which the narrative of progress is often engrained in science and technology. However, this fixation on progress cannot accept that the Anthropocene might signify a loss, so that emotional responses to problems, such as extinction, seem disallowed and repressed. As many scholars in the Environmental Humanities have pointed out, the Ecomodernists follow the delusional logic of the nature/culture divide.

This deceptively straightforward but ultimately illogical solution to what have been called ‘wicked problems’⁷¹ shows how scientific and technological expertise has often become the focal point for a vast range of environmental issues. Jamie Lorimer has observed that the Ecomodernists’ tone is indicative of a larger approach of some of the deciding bodies of the Anthropocene: “The technical, managerial tenor of this approach is symptomatic of the broader discourse amongst members of the AWG [Anthropocene Working Group], who suggest that the diagnosis of the new epoch could (and should) offer opportunities for enlightened and modern forms of planetary stewardship” (123). Furthermore, a certain ‘scientisation’ of environmental matters can be seen through the ways in which climate change is often framed as a question of technological innovation, as in the necessary transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy. While technological reform in the production of energy is, of course, a crucial

⁷¹ ‘Wicked problems’ are uniquely difficult to conceptualise and solve because they have uncertain boundaries. As Timothy Morton writes, “if we ‘solve’ global warming, we will never be able to prove that it would have destroyed the Earth [...]. Wicked problems have uncertain boundaries because they are always symptoms of other problems” (*Dark Ecology* 36-37).

step to reducing greenhouse gases, there is much more required in tackling environmental issues, as the kaleidoscope of the Anthropocene problems conveys.

In fact, the scientisation of climate change can be politically dangerous. Climate scientist and geographer Michael Hulme has made the important point that framing complex environmental changes as “mega-problems” caused by mega-technology necessarily demands “mega-solutions,” which has resulted in a “political log-jam of gigantic proportions, one that is not only insoluble, but one that is perhaps beyond our comprehension” (332; also quoted in Holm, Poul, et al. 989). Outlining the development of climate change perception, Hulme writes: “I began to see the bigger picture of how climate change had been initially constructed as an environmental science ‘problem,’ but how this idea of climate change was now increasingly interpreted and reinterpreted in different ways by different social actors” (xxxii). One example of the dangers of overemphasising techno-fixes for climate change can be seen in the debate around marine restoration projects on the Great Barrier Reef: the technology of “assisted evolution,” or “assisted gene flow,” names the attempt to grow corals in laboratories, so that coral or coral larvae that can cope with higher water temperatures are planted into areas where current coral species are dying (Readfearn). *The Guardian* quotes scientists involved in these projects, who consider these practices worth pursuing, but who worry that they potentially carry harmful messages to the public: “The biggest danger of moving in this direction is the potential that some will see this as being a way to engineer our way out of the problem—using it as an excuse to not act on the rising CO₂ that is the ultimate cause of the problem” (Readfearn). Hence, as Hulme and other environmental humanists have argued, while the scientific work is, of course, crucial, small-scale and culturally diverse responses to complex problems are equally important for finding ways out of the Anthropocene. My reading of the creative texts analysed in this chapter, which are concerned with unethical uses of technology and biopolitics, seeks to foreground the significance of cultural narratives—and, thus, the nature/culture entanglement—for responding to the challenges of the Anthropocene.

To summarise, the idea of human mastery suggests the false notion that nature is distinctly apart from human beings, an object to be readily profited from. Yet this very idea of distance between humans and their environment, that the Ecomodernists wish to further enhance, seems to have made possible the exploitation of resources,

pollution, and sanctuaries for human and non-human species in the first place. Moreover, the scientisation, technocratisation, and managerial tenor of climate change and the Anthropocene run the risk of creating a “political log-jam,” (Hulme 332) because the stress on top-down mega-solutions can be overwhelming for citizens and policy-makers. While it is, of course, important to achieve big societal “leaps,” as activist and writer Naomi Klein has called them,⁷² an over-emphasis on mega-solutions neglects engaging with the complexity of environmental issues, including considerations of social and intergenerational justice. Once we accept the notion that we cannot only think of environmental issues through the lens of expert scientific knowledge, but that environmental movements and a shift in values are just as crucial for change, narratives and stories become key. This emphasis on storytelling for socio-eco-political and cultural change has been proposed by seminal scholars of the Environmental Humanities, as it has become increasingly clear that humanity has all the necessary scientific facts regarding the severity of climate change but has failed to act fast enough. This thesis argues that the most difficult questions of our time can be effectively and uniquely explored through stories; and this chapter specifically pays attention to the importance of narratives, genres, affects, and literary tropes regarding environmental crisis.

The next section elucidates the importance of the science fiction genre for the Anthropocene. My two chosen texts are written by Australian authors whose science fiction mode explores different notions of the future. *The Island Will Sink* self-awarely and playfully reflects on the importance of narratives in the Anthropocene; in particular, it tests the limits of an especially ubiquitous narrative about climate change—disaster and apocalypse—by playing with numerous multi-media articulations of the apocalyptic in relation to the media, such as films, video-games, TV, and, via its engagement with the reader, through books. By contrast, “Water” portrays an erotic relationship between a ‘plantperson’ and a human, and contemplates the affects and genres of desire, erotics, romance, and humour, so that the novella can be read as presenting underexplored narrative modes for environmental discourse and activism.

⁷² See, for example, The Leap Project, a non-profit organisation that advocates for systemic change through social movements (co-founded by Naomi Klein and Avi Lewis): theleap.org/.

Science and Speculative Fiction – the Prime Genre of the Anthropocene?

As mentioned in the literature review (Chapter 2), science and speculative fiction (SF) seems to have an especially prominent relationship to the Anthropocene debate. This might be because one of the purposes of renaming the epoch is to underline that there are no precedents to look to, to pronounce novelty. As I show in this section, numerous environmental humanists have pointed to SF as a genre and mode that is particularly effective in mobilising concerns of the Anthropocene, as it not only has the potential to prefigure and warn, but also to radically reimagine the present. In order to better contextualise my discussion of the selected creative texts in this section, I will now give a brief overview of this scholarship, before I consider the limitations of this genre category.

Although the Anthropocene's periodisation debates have triggered a reconsideration of history (as exemplified in the last chapter), the Anthropocene has equally been concerned with future narratives and the speculative, which points to the unprecedented nature of the crisis. Bruno Latour has commented on this absence of precedents: "The common-sense reflex of historians consists in saying that what appears unprecedented to us has already happened many times. The interest of the work of researchers focusing on the Anthropocene is precisely that it challenges the argument that there is nothing new under the sun" (*Facing Gaia* 44). As an example of the unparalleled changes happening to the planet, Latour quotes scientists Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, who point out the planet's altered state of atmospheric nitrogen: "The early-twentieth-century invention of the Haber-Bosch process, which allows the conversion of atmospheric nitrogen to ammonia for use as fertiliser, has altered the global nitrogen cycle so fundamentally that the nearest suggested geological comparison refers to events about 2.5 billion years ago" (Lewis and Maslin 172; also cited in *Facing Gaia* 45). In light of these unparalleled changes, the SF genre seems particularly apt to imagine the meanings of such devastations. While the effects of anthropogenic destructions are already happening and are widely mediated, the implications of the Anthropocene are often described as yet to fully unravel and take

their toll on our global social and political order—as a kind of future haunting the present.

As Lorimer points out, scientific questions posed by the Anthropocene require a certain amount of science fiction, or acts of speculation, because the very proposal for accepting the Anthropocene—the visibility of the anthropogenic changes to the earth layers—relies on “future geologists living on, returning to, or visiting the Earth [...] blessed with the sensoria and apparatus capable of interrogating the planet’s strata” (128). As an example, Lorimer lists several non-fiction publications by journalists and scientists that employ the SF mode to shock and warn: Jan Zalasiewicz’s *The Earth After Us* (2008), Alan Weisman’s *The World Without Us* (2007), Mark Lynas’ *Six Degrees* (2007), Peter Ward’s *The Flooded Earth* (2012), James Hansen’s *Storms of my Grandchildren* (2009), and Art Bell and Whitley Strieber’s *The Coming Global Superstorm* (2001) (129).

Similarly, in their essay on early Anthropocene conferences in the humanities, “Less Than One But More Than Many: Anthropocene as Science Fiction and Scholarship-in-the-Making” (2015), Heather Anne Swanson, Nils Bubandt, and Anna Tsing interpret the very idea of the Anthropocene as a “science-fiction concept,” as it “pulls us out of familiar space and time to view our predicaments differently. This allows us to explore emergent figurations, genres, and practices for the transdisciplinary study of real and imagined worlds framed by human disturbance” (149). As the authors argue (via Ursula Le Guin), SF is a particularly useful genre with which to consider the Anthropocene because paying attention to genres can help move the debate *beyond* tensions to outline new disciplinary formations and directions needed:

The genres we identified do not attempt to bound fields; instead they show us ways to make new processes of field formation happen. When we consider the big question of the Anthropocene field—can scientists and humanists work together on urgent issues?—genres matter. They give traction to attempts to create new assemblies of advocates, experts, and artists. [These are] the genres we identified: the carnival (Berlin); the everyday uncanny (Milwaukee); multiple perspectives (Rio); description (Kyoto); and field reports (Santa Cruz). (162, place names refer to Anthropocene conferences)

Taking a broad approach, the authors thus suggest that genres push research further than critiques and debates; via reflections on affect, scale, figurations, and metaphors, genres indicate the types of collaborations needed.⁷³

In “Science Fiction and the Time Scales of the Anthropocene” (2019), Ursula Heise points to SF’s particularly explicit relationship to scale and, therefore, disproves anxieties of the novel as unable to meet the challenges of representing the Anthropocene: “Neither is scale in and of itself a problem for a genre whose settings include entire planets, solar systems, and galaxies. Indeed, given the ingredients of the genre, one way of describing science fiction is a continuation of the epic tradition in the age of the novel” (281). Through an extensive survey of SF novels, Heise identifies the particular narrative devices of time travel, time leaps, and serial protagonists, species narrative, time collages, and time palimpsests to illustrate the ways in which “science fiction has developed a variety of techniques over the last century for addressing the anisochrony⁷⁴ that deep-time narrative entails” (299). Importantly for this thesis, Heise also links the achievements of the discussed SF texts to the modern epic and the sense of the cosmic:

most of them [SF texts discussed] do not invoke a transcendental order to legitimize their moral ideas, and typically they do without extraordinary human protagonists. But considering these works in the tradition of epic elements foregrounds the way in which they take up premodern forms of narrative: cosmologies, myths, origin stories, and narratives about the emergence and eventual disappearance of species, places, or civilizations. (300)

As Heise thus argues, many SF novels investigate larger narratives of evolution, myths, cosmologies, origins, and species. With the Anthropocene, Heise proposes that such narratives have now moved to “mainstream fiction” (300).

While SF is doubtless a crucial genre for the Anthropocene, however, it seems equally important for this chapter to problematise the categories of ‘future’ and ‘science’ that are often taken for granted, but that, as feminist and Indigenous scholars

⁷³ The publication *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene* (2017), edited by Anna Tsing, et al., is a great example of such a research collaboration oriented around genre.

⁷⁴ Anisochrony is “the difference between the duration of the narrated events and the duration of the narration itself. [...] SF has sometimes reduced this gap at least marginally through the popular format of the trilogy or even longer series” (Heise, “Science Fiction” 283-284).

have brought to the fore, have fraught histories. I will briefly introduce two of these critiques, to better contextualise particularly my discussion of “Water,” by the Indigenous Mununjali author van Neerven.

Le Guin’s famous essay “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction” (1986) is instructive for a feminist critique of the SF genre, as Le Guin takes issue with the patriarchal telling of history that is often reflected in the genre: “The mammoth hunters spectacularly occupy the cave wall and the mind, but what we actually did to stay alive and fat was gather seeds, roots, sprouts, shoots, leaves, nuts, berries, fruits, and grains” (353). Le Guin coins the term ‘carrier bag stories’ in order to indicate the need of feminist counter-narratives. Drawing on Virginia Woolf’s notion of ‘bottle stories,’ Le Guin here points to the need of different ‘containers’ that can hold untold stories—a metaphor conjuring the gathering of seeds, nuts, fruits, etc. As Le Guin writes, carrier bag stories may give a more nuanced view of science and technology, which are often used as an “unexamined shorthand standing for the ‘hard’ sciences and high technology founded upon continuous economic growth” (356):

If however, one avoids the linear, progressive, Time’s-(killing)-arrow mode of the Techno-Heroic, and redefines technology and science as primarily cultural carrier bag rather than weapon of domination [...] then science fiction [...] is a way of trying to describe what is in fact going on, what people actually do and feel, how people relate to everything else in this vast sack, this belly of the universe. (356)

Le Guin here critiques the notion that science and technology stand apart from cultural ideas and values (such as economic growth and gender), arguing that the SF genre as a whole requires feminist perspectives that defy the techno-heroic narrative of domination. Similarly, Octavia Butler is attributed with using the SF genre in unique ways not only to explore the future via science and technology, but also to think through the African-American experience. As author Junot Díaz puts it: “Butler’s greatest imaginative gift [...] was her ability to estrange the African diasporic experience in the New World in a way that got at its horror and strangeness” (“Remembering”). In fact, Donna Haraway cites both Le Guin and Butler as instructive and formative for Anthropocene discussions because of their ability to tell visionary fiction of earthly survival, recuperation, “wounded flourishing,” and “germinating” the world (*Staying* 120). Similar to the above

mentioned essay by Swanson, Bubandt and Tsing, and along with other SF writers and scholars,⁷⁵ Haraway thus goes beyond regarding SF as a genre or metaphor to also understand it as methodology: “a mode of attention, a theory of history, and a practice of worlding” (213). Significantly, Butler and Le Guin have both inspired a new generation of social and environmental justice movements (Haraway, *Staying* 213). A particularly pertinent example is Adrienne Maree Brown’s *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (2017), which is a kind of organisational handbook for environmental justice activism inspired by Butler’s *Parable* series. Thus, writers such as Le Guin and Butler have widened dominant ideas of SF, advocating for the entanglements of science and technology with culture. Similarly, *The Island Will Sink* and “Water” foreground the intricate relationship between science, media-technologies, and narratives, therefore drawing attention to the importance of the cultural outlook on technology, bioethics, and the Anthropocene.

Importantly for this chapter, the SF genre has also been critiqued for having marginalised Indigenous works that may portray different conceptualisations of time and space, and that may defy the category of ‘future.’ As Indigenous studies professor Grace L. Dillon suggests in *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction* (2012), critics have often overlooked First Nations’ writers’ SF texts. However, this genre has been crucial for Indigenous writers, who have often explored the limitations of science and linear time (2). As Dillon puts it, SF has tended to “disregard the varieties of space-time thinking of traditional societies,” tending to narrate colonialism as an “adventure story,” so that many works are not easily identifiable as being set in the past, present, or future, as they blend time-scales (2). In this way, Indigenous writers employing the SF mode have recovered and rethought the past in a new light: for example, by exposing the ways in which the genre has been profoundly intertwined with Darwinian evolution, eugenicist theory, and colonial ideology, which displays the ideas of “competition, adaptation, race and destiny” (2). As a kind of sub-genre of science fiction, then, Indigenous SF engages in space-time thinking, which in North America has been called “Native slipstream” (2-3). Dillon’s suggestion that SF is an overlooked but emerging mode for North American Indigenous writers and artists

⁷⁵ Haraway lists Judith Merrill, Margaret Atwood, Joshua LaBare, Veronica Hollinger, and John Clute (213).

rings true for the Australian context too, where Indigenous artists and authors seem to increasingly use devices and techniques common to the SF genre.⁷⁶ In fact, van Neerven's interconnected stories of *Heat and Light* are separated into three parts that are set in the past ("Heat"), future ("Water"), and present ("Light"). While "Water" is the most recognisable SF story, the other parts equally add to the notion of nonlinear time, as the three parts spill over into each other, and the collection as a whole seems to question linear notions of time with its organisation of past, future, present. *Heat and Light* can thus be said to 'slipstream' linear progression and exemplifies how Indigenous viewpoints might challenge simplified notions of place. However, applying the SF categories to Indigenous texts may also be problematic: Indigenous writer Ambelin Kwaymullina has made the point that "Eurocentric genre categories are difficult to apply to works that were not created out of a Eurocentric worldview, because the very notion of what is speculative and what is not relies on assumptions about the real" ("Edges").

As both my selected texts are set in the not-too-distant future, they can largely be categorised as belonging to the SF genre, although their differences are important: while *The Island Will Sink* fits into the more conventional conceptions of SF, as the novel explores the advances and effects of new media-technologies, "Water" is less interested in developments of science-technologies than in bioethical explorations that can be read as reflecting Indigenous philosophies of evolution and multi-species ethics. Notwithstanding these differences, I argue that it is productive to read "Water" in the context of larger Anthropocene debates, and particularly in comparison to *The Island Will Sink*, as it enables insights into the colonial legacy of a particularly strong nature/culture division.

Thus, SF is an important genre that has mobilised not just Anthropocene theory, but also literary engagements with environmental crisis. While paying attention to the possibilities and central premises of genre is crucial for the following discussion, my cosmological reading of both texts aims to additionally foreground the importance of considering a diverse and holistic range of narratives generally for responding to the

⁷⁶ Recent examples are the television drama show *Cleverman* (2016-2017); Hannah Donnelly's *Sovereign Apocalypse* zine and visual art; Ambelin Kwaymullina's Young Adult trilogy *The Tribe Series* (2012, 2013, 2015), Alexis Wright's *Swan Book* (2013), Claire Coleman's *Terra Nullius* (2017) and *The Old Lie* (2019), and van Neerven's "Water."

demands of the Anthropocene. As I argue, through a comparison of the texts, it is especially by paying attention to affects and genres in relation to the environment (such as the arguably marginalised desire, pleasure, erotics, and comedy) that productive discussions about ecocriticism and positive developments for socio-environmental movements can be arrived at. As I will show, narratives and affects about the environment profoundly shape human capacities to make sense of, respond, and shape the future of this socio-environmental crisis.

4.2 Imagining an Intensified Anthropocene in Briohny Doyle's *The Island Will Sink*

The Island Will Sink, Doyle's debut novel, is set in the near future in the 'Bay Heights' area of an unspecified city that has been significantly altered through climate change. It tells the story of Max Galleon, a prolific film director, and his family. The Galleons belong to the affluent few who live in a technologically advanced eco-building, built to be "flood-proof, fire-proof, rape and pillage-proof [...] optimised to withstand any one of over five thousand disagreeable scenarios, from the mundane to the catastrophic" (8). The house itself has built-in digital technology that constantly registers the well-being of bodies, tracks pulse, temperature, nutrition, muscular level, and accordingly suggests actions like exercising, eating, and drinking.

Max has been creating disaster films for decades, with titles such as *Shock Wave* (parts 1, 2, and 3); *Burn, No Future*, and *Then Rest* (48). Not only is he obsessed with the content of disaster films, but he has also pioneered its form: "immersive disaster cinema" uses a suite of technology that enables spectators to experience films with the sense of touch and physical feedback by wearing haptic devices (headsets and suits). Throughout most of the novel, Max and his artistic partner, Jean Di Vito, are in conversation about a new film idea that aims to blur the boundary between fiction and reality by capturing the sinking of Pitcairn Island, an event that is anxiously anticipated, closely monitored and subject to numerous speculative theories across the world. Although climate change has normalised a life of chaotic weather, storms, tsunamis and fires, the gradual sinking of Pitcairn attracts the focal attention of the novel's

protagonists, as it is unclear what this event will bring: once the island has completely submerged, it is suspected to generate a global micro-catastrophe chain, setting in motion exponential sea level rise, “rogue waves, floods, earthquakes, ice storms, final catastrophe,” potentially leading to a global mega-catastrophe (77). Though experts warn that this could mark the beginning of absolute reorganisation of the earth’s climate, the population is split into believing this prognosis and into considering it as “just another doomsday catastrophe” (81).

Although Pitcairn takes centre stage of *The Island Will Sink*, and characters contemplate interpretations of its history, the reader is given little factual knowledge about it. Pitcairn is an existing small island group that forms the last British Overseas Territory in the Pacific. Almost all inhabitants (currently around 50) are said to be descendants of the *Bounty* ship mutineers (1789) and the Tahitians that accompanied them to settle the island that same year. In the early 2000s, the island made international news through scandals of abuse, which found one third of the male population implicated in sexual assaults, including the mayor. The British government—still the sovereign of this island—consequently established a remote island prison, where those found guilty served their sentences.

The novel centres around the planning of Max’s next blockbuster disaster film, which is accompanied by many conversations about the ethics and aesthetics of disaster, catastrophe and (post)apocalypse. Max is hesitant to follow through with the plan to use the footage of Pitcairn’s sinking, as he has been affected by the criticism of a younger filmmaker, Sullivan, who argues that Max uses catastrophe as a pleasurable experience, therefore diminishing people’s capacity to respond to and be affected by real disaster: “The viewer of your films is passive. You’re a pornographer...That’s the kind of catharsis you mean, right?” (53). Instead, Sullivan has a vision for a cinema of empathy. His criticism increasingly affects Max, so that at the end of the novel, the two, who were initially rivals, collaborate to use haptic immersion in a film of “total empathy” (291); thus, a film in which disaster is not only aesthetically beautiful, but an experience that makes the audience empathise wholly with the victims of Pitcairn’s sinking.

The novel’s chapter structure follows the components of a conventional Hollywood film, titled “Establishing Shot,” “Romantic Subplot,” “Action Sequence,” and “Director’s Cut Ending.” With the exception of the “Romantic Subplot,” all sections of

the book are told from Max's perspective: a first-person narrator with intra- and homodiegetic focalisation, which locates him on the inside of the story, has the effect that the reader becomes privy to his decision-making process. Importantly, the novel's structure also takes the liberty to present two different endings, as a Director's Cut usually refers to an altered version that is released later by the director. While "Action Sequence" ends in what could be called a post-apocalypse, as Pitcairn sinks but does not cause a global mega-catastrophe ("The island sinks [...] and yet we go on" [285]), the small chapter "Director's Cut" ends in an apocalypse: during the premiere of the film that Sullivan and Max eventually present, the empathetic immersion into disaster is so overbearing that the audience is in crisis, falling ill, while the planet's crust opens "like a zipper" and what appear to be giant waves are set in motion, seemingly denoting chain-events of the mega-catastrophe (297). The last scene depicts Max escaping the chaos by running behind the screen, to enter a parallel universe, which then turns into a filmic sequence itself. The novel's double ending suggests that apocalypse presents a problem for narration; because it could be understood to be the end of a story, apocalypse can only be made sense of from the outside, through removed spectators. By contrast, post-apocalypse is presented as necessary and inevitable, as if to say that while the world has seen many catastrophes and survivals, the whole of humanity has never experienced one totalising catastrophe. Because narration relies on survivors, Doyle exposes and critiques the limitations of awaiting apocalypse.

The book received great critical acclaim, with critics praising Doyle's artful bringing together of environmental issues, philosophy, the effect of our increasingly digital lives on the capacity to cope with a changing environment and managing to strike a balance between elegant and humorous prose within dark satire (Gerrans). Yet Doyle's novel has also been noted for its "information-rich and strenuously expository" and its "world-building," (Owen Richardson) so that readers have a hard time finding their way into this strange world. One critic rightly remarked that all relationships are represented as distant and cold, which makes it hard to find an emotional entry point into the novel (Sullivan). This observation also applies on the level of plot and style: the novel's flamboyant writing style and structure are at times challenging for the understanding of plot. Nevertheless, the novel is a worthwhile inclusion in this thesis, as it contains many

vivid insights, ideas, and images that address key issues of contemporary experiences of media-technologies, climate change, the Anthropocene, and narratives.

In fact, *The Island Will Sink* merits a reading in the context of the Anthropocene debate, as it uses the term itself, but an altered version of it: the “Praeteranthropocene” is defined as a time in which “science has finally declared that human beings are no longer capable of remedying the negative impact they’ve made on the planet” (232). While scientists have already affirmed this “point of no return” of atmospheric CO₂ pollution in 2007 (Slezak), the prefix *praeter* is Doyle’s invention, a Latin adjunct meaning ‘beyond,’ or ‘more than.’ For the purposes of this essay, they are treated as the same because the implications of *praeter* are arguably already present in the meanings of the Anthropocene.

The next section discusses the novel’s portrayal of the notion of ‘human mastery over nature’—a narrative that is a relic of the Holocene, as the novel’s children point out. Although this story of human mastery is shown to be outdated, I argue that *The Island Will Sink* explores the ambiguity of new media-technological experiences as enabled by haptic technology, revealing its two-fold potential: on the one hand, these new ‘feeling-devices’ enable innovative understandings of the environment (with potential ecological benefits); on the other, new media can also further the exploitation of suffering and encourage passivity in consumers (as I discuss with the ‘disastrous sublime’).

New Technologies of ‘Feeling’ the Environment

All characters in *The Island Will Sink* are entwined with science or technology of some kind: Max with disaster films; his wife, Ellie, with the science of consciousness; their teenage son, Jonas, with survival video games; and their daughter, Lilly, with the ubiquitous mascot for energy conservation, the digital cartoon character Pow-Pow the panda bear, whose playful notifications help control the family’s sustainability practices. The narrator continuously hints at the inseparable connections of humans and technology, for example, when Max describes his own mind as “prosthetic and enhanced” because he has outsourced part of his memory and is fully aware of his

dependency on technology (114). Yet, although a scientifically and technologically advanced society forms the backdrop, the novel's focus does not lie on techno-scientific possibilities of 'fixing' the climate (which is already beyond points of no return), but on novel ways of experiencing the environment through new media. As such, the novel conveys the need for examining new media, their embedded narratives and physical consequences.

In fact, *The Island Will Sink* presents the Anthropocene as a time of heightened uncertainty, in which characters are increasingly aware of the delusions of the narrative of human mastery over 'nature' via science and technology. This misconception appears numerous times in Max's conversations, for example:

Once upon a time we wanted to see humanity triumph over nature, raising the sword and fighting until the best man discovered the way. We believed there would eventually be something we could do to prevent nature winning. [...] We used to love knowing there was an Antarctic Temperature Research Team. It felt like someone was taking care of us. Some hero. (58)

As this passage suggests, although Max is living a technologically refined existence, he is also becoming conscious of the end of the heroic story of geo-engineering and techno-fixes. This is seemingly thanks to his children: for a generation raised with ecological crises, the notion of human mastery seems to be a mere relic of the Holocene. Jonas and Lilly are coming of age at a time in which uncertainty is inescapable and normalised. Indeed, Jonas keeps a "Timeline of Misconception," marking all the things humanity once knew to be true but now knows to be false (147). The sense of uncertainty as a new *zeitgeist* is expressed in many distressing conversations and in emotional distance between parents and children, pointing to a deep inter-generational rift, as Max explains: "My son is afraid of everything, not because the future's uncertain, but because it's always certain to be uncertain" (147). Technology can no longer 'fix' ecological instability, it can only help mitigate some of the chaos, as is conveyed through the refined living conditions the novel exhibits: eco-architecture, clothes, and vehicles are assets of the affluent and deliver partial shelter. Representing this new epoch in a way that signifies instability echoes Deborah Bird Rose's definition of the Anthropocene as the "Age of Uncertainty," a kind of caesura in Western thought triggered by extreme

ecological calamities (*Wild Dog* 3). Towards the end of the book, Max recognises the frailty of humans in relation to technology or even ideas: “Just because something is humanly designed doesn’t mean it will be complete, or accurate, or even successful...that goes doubly for knowledge” (276). In this way, *The Island Will Sink* repeatedly questions the narratives of human mastery and the supposed technological transcendence over ‘nature.’

Moreover, the novel plays with numerous multi-media articulations of apocalypse in relation to the media, such as films, video-games, TV, and, via its engagement with the reader, through books. Therefore, the novel points to the importance of narratives in contemporary engagements with the environment. When pondering constant connectedness, Ellie notes: “We’re all connected now, of course, but they’re not the right kinds of connections. All the obsessive self-surveillance. Just look at my husband. It leads to new diseases of the mind” (153). While this view may be common among environmentalists—to regard technology and new media as potentially disrupting the immediacy of connecting to the here and now—the media have also become one of the most prominent channels for enabling a reflection on climate change. Thus, the novel dramatises the ways in which the media and various narratives are part of the environment—an obvious fact that has led to its own field of enquiry in communication studies: ‘ecomedia.’ This term has propelled inquiries of media in relation to the environment in two ways: firstly, as questioning the environmental impacts of our technology when in production and usage; secondly, as questioning ideas about the environment conveyed through the media (Ziser 75). As media theorist Joanna Zylińska has proposed, media and its different narratives have become “a technology of life” that not only represent life “but also shape and regulate it—while also documenting or even envisioning its demise” (1). Thus, as Zylińska points out, not only are media representing, documenting, and envisioning life, but they also actively form and influence the material world.

One major way in which the novel addresses the power of the media is through both the premediation and reproduction of catastrophic events through haptic immersive cinema.⁷⁷ As Max’s artistic partner, Jean, puts it: “We captured the whole

⁷⁷ The term ‘premediation’ was coined by media-theorist Richard Grusin to indicate “the remediation of future events and affective states” (*Premediation* 6, also cited in Michael Richardson 15).

thing [the flooding and storm on Pitcairn]. We have footage of the destruction from the inside. And Sullivan! Sullivan had the genius idea of donning a sensation recorder and actually live-capturing the haptics of the event” (243). Thus, the aim of the eventual haptic technology film is to serve the simulation of complete immersion and enable an affective experience of Pitcairn’s sinking. Through this immersive technology, the novel’s filmmakers aim to achieve, as Michael Richardson has put it, “a collectivized experience of catastrophe that is haptic, affective, and cognitively overwhelming” (14). As a justification for this extreme cinema, Max cites his belief in disaster as cathartic: “Disaster is something that we feel a primal attraction to. [...] In uncertain times, experiencing disaster is cathartic” (53). Moreover, Jean cites the human need to make sense of disaster through closeness to, and distance from, disaster:

We could be recording the sensation of actual disasters and selling them back to the people. Disaster nostalgia! Imagine the level of realism. A new *cinéma vérité*. That’s the real catharsis: reliving an event you have already survived. But more cinematic! Sharpened, and narratively resolved. A perfectly rehearsed traumatic re-enactment. Who has time to understand the implications of their experience as it is happening? (234)

Thus, the filmmakers hope for the revelatory potential of disaster—now with a new focus: reliving and premediating eco-catastrophe.

The novel’s technology of haptic cinema evokes the recently coined notion of a ‘third media revolution’ as a revolution of feeling. Drawing on Alfred North Whitehead’s 1929 suggestion that data is “potential for feeling,” Andrew Murphie suggests that this third media revolution can be characterised through the developments in media-technologies that enable environments to be ‘felt’ (27). Building on the dramatic changes of the first and second media revolutions that profoundly altered cultures around the world (first, the invention of writing; second, the invention of the printing press, and other forms of reproduction, such as photography, telegraphy, film, and computing), the third media revolution likewise changes worlds dramatically. As Murphie writes:

The third media revolution pivots on the understanding of data as potential for feeling. [...] This includes computational data but also every other aspect of world (human and nonhuman) as data. In the third media revolution's generative movements, sensors, computational data, and algorithms feel out other sensors, computational data, and algorithms. Yet this is also a feeling or fielding with the world at large. (27)

Citing advances in artificial intelligence; virtual, augmented and mixed realities; bots, automation of skill; voice and facial recognition; language processing; quantum computing; and new sensate access to the previously imperceptible, Murphie argues that the third media revolution involves a new quality in the collisions of media and 'worlds,' dramatically intensifying the power of media-technologies for shaping the world (29). This, to Murphie, can have positive or negative consequences: as this media revolution designates a "'becoming-environmental' of power," technologies (and the powers behind them) can more easily 'colonise' environments (such as drone warfare), but, at the same time, new technologies can also enhance an understanding of the environment. Murphie cites the following examples for a potentially enhanced ecological consciousness: "Wolves are found to have dialects when howling. Plants have many means of communication, feeling and sociality, including via networks of mycelia (fungus threads) under the ground. [...] This is the more 'ecological' voice of the third media revolution" (30). Thus, as this 'revolution of feeling' indicates, new media-technologies can be used as tools of domination and mastery; yet they can also enable ever more profound understandings of the various forms of intelligences that constitute an ecosystem.

Importantly, Murphie's proposition of a third media revolution evokes the turn to affect within environmental discourse, as "[c]ognitivism simply cannot grasp what is going on" (23). In this context, feminist philosopher Stacy Alaimo has proposed the term 'ecodelic'—the feeling of oneness with the world common both to psychedelic and ecological consciousness—to point to a particular consciousness the Anthropocene crisis fosters, as "the Anthropocene subject [is] immersed and enmeshed in the world" (103). As Alaimo suggests, this insight asks us to embrace "a paradoxical ecodelic expansion and dissolution of the human, and aesthetic incitement to extend and connect with vulnerable creaturely life and with the inhuman, unfathomable expanses of the seas" (114). Murphie similarly suggests that it is specifically the crisis of the

Anthropocene that enhances the notion that environments can increasingly be felt: “For example, in climate change, carbon dioxide emissions can be understood as agents of feeling, felt transformatively by the world at large, transforming not only the world at large, but what it is to feel in the world in many ways (heat, obviously, but also entire felt modes of living, for humans or other creatures)” (23). Thus, as Alaimo and Murphie have pointed out, the current ecological crisis can amplify a feeling of oneness with the world; yet it can also amplify its exploitation through human abuses of technological power.

While *The Island Will Sink* portrays the environmental crisis as promoting immersion, ‘environmental feeling,’ or even ecodelia (the novel describes an ecological cult worshipping objects and believing that objects contain knowledge and memory), Max and Jean initially seem to be more exploitative, as their aesthetic portrayal seeks to create what could be called ‘blockbuster sensationalism’ and, in this way, aesthetically transcends the reality of Pitcairn’s sinking. Because disaster has become a “meme” (conveying that it is marked by oversaturation and cliché) Max and Jean initially seek to give renewed valency to disaster by creating the effects of a “disastrous sublime,” an idea that Max draws from his love for old disaster cinema (181). The technique of creating this sublime immerses the viewer in disaster, but then enables “academic distance from trauma” (51):

The aim is to strip back all sense of identity. For the viewer to attain a state of pure consciousness, so close to the calm euphoria felt at the onset of death, while maintaining an emotional core which then allows the subject at the end of the movie to disconnect and re-enter their lives. Complete surrender while you’re watching, because it will all be over too soon. (51)

Haptic technology not only aims to involve different senses, but it also seeks to extend them, as Max expresses with his phrase, “beyond the limits of the basic human senses” (51). The aim to create a flooding of the senses, followed by an identity crisis (“strip back all sense of identity”), and finally a kind of transcendence over the object of contemplation (“academic distance”) echoes the traditional description of the sublime as defined by Immanuel Kant or William Wordsworth. Doyle’s allusion to this particular understanding of the sublime, which has long been criticised for its aesthetic

exploitation and its distance from the object, exposes the issue that disaster narratives potentially disengage the audience.⁷⁸ The detachment from events through ongoing colonial ideology and disaster narratives that the novel explores could also be called the techno-sublime in the Anthropocene, which, rather than engaging with suffering or alleviating it, seeks to aesthetically transcend ecological catastrophes.

By contrast, the cinema of empathy is presented as potentially enhancing emotional connection. When Max eventually collaborates with the proponent of empathetic cinema, Sullivan, and creates a physical immersion in empathy—a kind of empathetic sublime—his cinema oversteps human boundaries and makes people ill. The ‘overdose’ of empathy conveys the idea that physical limitations serve a function, that the body is intelligent, and that a degree of emotional distance is necessary.

In this way, *The Island Will Sink* dwells on a kind of binary between the disastrous techno-sublime and empathy as the primary media-technological engagements with the environment. Although this binary evokes old philosophical questions and generates interesting conversations in the novel, the pitting of the sublime against empathy suggests that these two emotional experiences are the main, or indeed, the only possible emotional responses to films or other aesthetic experiences. If this were true, consuming disaster narratives of climate change, for example, would result either in passivity and despair (through acquiescence to the sublime) or activism (motivated through empathy). Yet humanities scholars have increasingly pointed to the spectrum of different emotions when processing film and other media. The turn to affect includes the neuro-scientific insight that we do not just perceive aesthetic objects and narratives in the mind, but also in the body. For example, in *Affective Ecologies: Empathy, Emotion and Environmental Narrative* (2017), Alexa Weik von Mossner examines diverse ranges of emotions to understand the role of affect in environmental narratives, including humour, irony, hope, or pleasure. However, as if human responses to aesthetic objects create two poles, *The Island Will Sink* proposes a supposed battle between the two emotions. In this regard, the cinema of immersion and the cinema of empathy remain

⁷⁸ Immanuel Kant. "Analytic of the Sublime." Sections 25-29. *The Critique of Judgement*. 1790, various editions; William Wordsworth. *The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind: An Autobiographical Poem*, 1850, various editions. For an example of a modern critique of the sublime, see Patricia Yaeger. "Toward a Female Sublime." *Gender and Theory*, edited by Linda S. Kauffman, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989.

trapped in dualism, because they do not take into consideration the complex spectrum and the ultimate unpredictability of human emotion.

To summarise, this section has analysed the ways in which the novel's portrayal of haptic cinema illustrates advances in media-technologies that enable environments to be increasingly 'felt.' Yet, rather than an engagement with the ethical potential of these new technologies (such as the enhancement of socio-ecological understanding), the premiere of the film of Pitcairn's sinking in the genre of the 'empathetic sublime' shows that complete empathetic immersion in disaster overwhelms the sensory limitations of the human body and, thus, disengages viewers through a pre-mediated trauma. In this way, *The Island Will Sink* portrays an exploitative dimension of new media-technologies. The next section further explores the ways in which Doyle investigates disaster and apocalypse as *the* most dominant 'blockbuster' narratives in relation to climate change.

Testing the Limits of the 'Natural Disaster' Narrative

The Island Will Sink dramatises the ethical problem of depicting disaster as an aesthetically sublime event. There are numerous references that liken media consumption to a contemporary form of cannibalism; by putting the fictitious anticipated sinking of Pitcairn front and centre of the novel, disaster narrative is linked to colonial ideology. For example, as Max seeks to exploit Pitcairn, his wife compares his project to colonialism:

Funny to think it's an actual place. [...] It seems so unreal to me. Or rather, so much a part of my life here that it can't exist concretely somewhere else. [...] You're more of a colonial reconnoiturer. Once you're done with that island, it will belong to the empire. People will have total access to it because of your film. Even after it sinks. (100)

Ellie here alludes to Max's practice of engaging with Pitcairn through already anticipating its demise and historicising it ahead of its time. This practice of awaiting disaster conjures up the commonly-held colonial assumption that Indigenous peoples (and certain animals) are destined to go extinct and be replaced by settlers. Ellie's

observation is also meta-textual, as the reader is given so little information about Pitcairn that it is indeed easy to forget the fact that Pitcairn is not a fictitious island. Aside from Max's self-interest in benefitting from suffering, his film project thus expresses domination of and contempt for Pitcairn's people, animals and ecosystem. This detachment and transcendence over the objects of contemplation—the island and its inhabitants—only serves the viewers and is thus inherently violent because their suffering here attains an allegedly higher purpose, as if the artwork is worth the devastation.

As the above quotation exemplifies, Max and Jean's fascination with disaster is continuously criticised by the women and children in the book and, therefore, linked to masculinity. His doctor, Gabrielle, observes: "[E]rasing the mundane, the joyful [...] is another homage to your obsession with disaster" (121). As is suggested here, the focus on disaster obscures attention to the effort and pleasures of everyday life, and the labour of care. Moreover, Ellie remarks that Max's two obsessions—his comatose brother and Pitcairn—have much in common:

"They are both impassive, and yet so much depends on them. On some decoding of them. On working out their past and future. You interact with them like you are playing one of Jonas' games, and yet they are totally uncommunicative, sinking, sullen."

"Alone," I add.

At this, Lilly, who I'd forgotten was even there, swings around to lay a blazing, admonishing look on her parents.

"Pitcairn isn't alone, she scoffs. It's an ecosystem." (101)

Rather than seeing Pitcairn like her parents—as a passive object—Lilly introduces her parents—and thereby also the reader—to the word 'ecosystem,' which seems to undermine the subject/object dualism the planned film seems to intensify. In this way, the novel continuously links the men's disaster-obsession to their privilege of detached contemplation.

While showing the unethical stance of Max and Jean, *The Island Will Sink* also satirises their historical interpretation of disaster in relation to the Anthropocene. Jean elaborates on Pitcairn's history, interpreting it as having symbolic meaning for all of humanity:

The island is an allegory for the whole of human history, culminating in our present predicament. [...] Long before the *Bounty* boys arrived, Pitcairn was just part of a group of small islands that formed a mutually beneficial system of trade, enabling growth. But overdevelopment and greed interfered. Environmental resources were depleted. Starving, the native population turned to cannibalism to survive. [...] With cannibalism, the population stabilised. [...] New growth pushed its way through the degraded soil. It looked for a moment as though there would be peace. Then the pirates arrived. [...] The pirates became settlers [...], they automatically recreated the same hierarchical regime that they once took to the sea to escape. Worse still, they unwittingly colonised the island for the empire they hated. (211)

Jean here echoes the idea of the Anthropocene as a universal allegory for the “whole of human history,” which implies that the island’s sinking is the fault of *anthropos*—of humanity in general. Pitcairn’s sinking is, therefore, seen as a kind of judgement on a “cursed place”—as if its demise was well deserved. This scapegoat-like role of Pitcairn’s sinking of a ‘human’ sin enables “a fresh start” and the “end of all this madness” (211). The perspective of Pitcairn’s inhabitants, however, never occurs in the novel, it always remains an elsewhere. Hence, the novel ironises and implicitly criticises Jean’s illusion of universal interpretations of history and links it to the totalising colonial project itself, which suggests that humanity inherits only one kind of culture.

In this way, *The Island Will Sink* implicitly reflects on Australia as part of Oceanic colonial history. Rose has argued that settler/invasor-societies have to grapple with a strange situatedness that has detached morality from time and place, proposing that a future-orientation is foundational for the colonial project: “we are here not only by violence, but also by a misguided and misleading hope for the future” (*Reports* 5). This posits a unique challenge, Rose holds, because ethics emerge from context-specific situations and require the lessons from time and place.

New World settler societies loosen moral accountability from the powerful constraints of place and time. In detaching people from place these societies enable action to escape feedback from the place. Settlers imagine themselves free to depart, indeed many of us make a virtue of departing, and both geographical and economic mobility are fuelled by people’s efforts to escape the results of their actions, to search yet again for a better future. In detaching people from continuity in place they also loosen people from the feedback of time. (5)

Here, Rose points to the ideological overlaying of cultures and nations; rather than understanding the uniqueness of a place, colonisers forced their own interpretations of past, present, and future onto places and peoples. Similarly, characters in *The Island Will Sink* become complicit in destroying the potential for a liveable future on Pitcairn and beyond in the first place, as Max and Jean choose to concentrate on apocalyptic narratives instead. While this mechanism of ‘displacement’ and scapegoating of others may be a common psychological and sociological strategy for coping with uncertainty, then, Doyle’s novel evokes the colonial practice of future-orientation and anticipation of disaster, which paralyzes agency and justifies violence in the here and now.

In its hyper-active obsession with ‘disaster,’ the novel also conjures up the problematic idea of the ‘natural disaster’—a term that has itself been criticised by ecocritical academics. For example, in *Dancing with Disaster* (2016), Kate Rigby critiques the modern view that disasters are purely ‘natural’—by which we often mean they have causes external to the human sphere of influence—to illustrate that disasters are always hybrid. Although non-human forces may largely be at play, the impact of a so-called natural disaster depends on various factors: anthropogenic alterations of the land (wetlands can mitigate sea rise, for example); warning systems; vulnerability (unequally distributed among ethnicity, gender, class, ability or age); or generally the aftermath of a disaster (13-14). This modern myth of the ‘natural disaster,’ Rigby suggests, currently acts “as a further barrier to the recognition of the link between extreme weather events and climate change in this country [Australia]” (20). Thus, Rigby points out that the term ‘natural disaster’ exacerbates the nature/culture divide by suggesting that disasters emerge from purely external elemental forces. In this context, Rigby explicates that the natural disaster is a misnomer: ‘disaster’ derives from the Italian *dis-astro* and was used in astrology to designate the ill-starred placement of planets (20). By contrast, Rigby proposes ‘eco-catastrophe’ as a more suitable term, as ‘catastrophe’ avoids the nature/culture binary and is also linked to the ancient Greek *catharsis*, denoting the cleansing effect of a tragedy, or a sudden change of direction (*kata*—down or against; *strophe*, turn) in the sense of a revolution (17). ‘Catastrophe’ is closely connected to the meaning of apocalypse, which designates illumination (from the ancient Greek *apokaluptein*: to uncover)—thus, a revelation that accompanies experiencing a tragedy.

Doyle's own academic work, including her PhD project, which investigated forms of apocalyptic narratives, has found its way into the many perspectives the novel dramatises. In her essay, "The Postapocalyptic Imagination" (2015), Doyle argues for the critical potential in post-apocalyptic fiction. In contrast to apocalyptic narratives, which have been widely criticised for their political and religious agendas (for example, by often punishing and saving a select group of people), Doyle favours the post-apocalyptic for its radical potential to "explore dangerous possibilities" (91). Because it emphasises the possibilities that emerge with the decay, the disaster, the ruin, post-apocalypse is distinct from utopian or dystopian literature: where utopias and dystopias seem to search for alternatives by setting positive and negative examples, post-apocalypse is interested in the fragment and on uncertainty over the "artifice of revelation" (101): "Precisely because of its inability to resolve or reveal, it becomes a site to express polyvalent critiques of the present and explore fears and fantasies about the future" (103). The ruin, the drifter or nomad communities (scattered through an apocalyptic event) are tropes of these narratives, as Doyle writes, which deliver perspectives from the margins of society (105). Yet *The Island Will Sink* is not as clear-cut; it could be categorised as dystopian, apocalyptic, and post-apocalyptic, which reveals that these genres often go hand in hand. Although society is saturated by catastrophes, few revelations are found, as the effects of these catastrophes have largely been mitigated for the wealthy, so that characters often seem not more but less engaged. In fact, there is a paradox at the heart of the novel: while it parodies and implicitly criticises the proliferation of apocalypse and disaster, the novel itself reproduces such narratives. Disasters are largely mitigated through technology and often cannot 'reach' the main characters physically, who are free to passively contemplate the aesthetics. Humans are separate from 'nature,' and their technology mostly perfects this separation: herein lies the novel's darkest dystopia.

As discussed in my literature review in Chapter 2, a number of critics have pointed to the fact that climate fiction generally abounds in dystopia, (post)apocalypse and disaster, which has triggered scholars to ask what the effects of this over-saturation are for finding ways to act in this unprecedented crisis. Elizabeth De Loughrey has argued that apocalypse "positions humans outside of the natural world or narrates change in nonhuman nature as extraordinary, which is to say exceptional to human experience"

(“Ordinary Futures” 363). De Loughrey here implies that apocalypse in relation to environmental crisis runs the risk of perpetuating the human/nature divide by understanding socio-environmental change as extraordinary. Moreover, ecologist and geographer Jared Diamond has proposed that a society fascinated by doom tends to be unable to correct a disastrous trajectory (*Collapse* 13, also cited in Holm et al 1984). The *Humanities for the Environment Manifesto* argues on similar lines:

Public responses [about the new human condition] range from denial to despair, and from alarmism to instinctual belief in our ability to cope. News of tragedy, disaster and pending doom travels fast in our connected world, while positive action and amelioration seems less likely or more naïve. However, paradoxically, cultures of alarmism and denial go hand in hand. (1983)

As the authors note here, and as seems to be illustrated throughout *The Island Will Sink*, alarmism is closely linked to passivity. Thus, multiple environmental humanists have argued that while disaster and apocalypse narratives may be effective warning-strategies, they can be dangerous if they become too dominant, as they may paralyse people’s sense of agency, marginalise long-existing successful activism, and obscure an understanding of the continuous reciprocal becoming of humans and their environment.

Conclusion

My discussion of *The Island Will Sink* has firstly examined how the novel reflects on the narrative of technological mastery of ‘nature’ as an outdated story of the Holocene. While technology can no longer give the illusion of ‘fixing’ socio-environmental predicament, I have shown the ways in which the novel explores the potential inherent in new media-technologies to engage with environments through ‘feeling.’ Yet, rather than focusing on the ethical potential of these new technologies (such as the enhancement of socio-ecological understanding), the eventual premiere of Pitcairn’s sinking ends in the breakdown of the audience and in catastrophic environmental effects, so that the novel remains caught between the supposedly two main affective responses to eco-disaster—the sublime and empathy. As I have argued, however, this

sense of ‘being stuck’ between these two affects seems reductive, as it only represents a fracture of complex, affective responses to a cinematic experience. Therefore, I have proposed that the novel displays a dystopian vision that does *not* account for the multiple and diverse affects and narratives that inform human engagements with the environment.

Moreover, I suggest that the novel’s contemplation of disaster narrative has ambiguous effects: on the one hand, it gives room for the reader to reflect on the ethics and dangers of disaster narratives as every-day occurrences in the media, and successfully conveys the warning that an over-exposure to apocalyptic narratives does not necessarily further people’s understanding but that it can paralyse responses to climate change. On the other hand, the novel reproduces such narratives and, hence, can be regarded as remaining caught in critiques without providing visions. Yet, from a wider perspective, *The Island Will Sink* encourages the reader to consider disaster *as* a narrative, so that one is led to ponder the power of stories to shape environments. Crucially, then, the novel as a whole conveys the sense that in the Anthropocene, narratives have immense power as they underpin the latest developments in media-technologies and are, therefore, ubiquitous in our interaction with the environment. I conclude that the novel represents a kind of ‘negative cosmology:’ while it illuminates the importance of narratives and contains glimpses of different, more holistic notions of the environment (especially encouraged by the children’s perspectives), its portrayal of aesthetic exploitation reproduces the human/nature binary and disables broader considerations of human/environmental reciprocity and agency. The novel, thus, provides a dark vision of an intensification of the Anthropocene’s dangerous narrative of human mastery over ‘nature.’

4.3 Reconsidering Evolution in Ellen van Neerven’s “Water”

Ellen van Neerven is a young author, who was only twenty-four when *Heat and Light* (2014) was published. The debut text was received with great acclaim and won prestigious prizes, such as the David Unaipon Award. By now, van Neerven has been

hailed as a “literary star” (Kadmos 15). As already mentioned, *Heat and Light* is not easy to categorise; verging between short story collection and novel, it has simply been marketed as ‘fiction.’ In fact, the text resists categorisation: Separated into three parts, the sixteen stories can be classified as set in the past (“Heat”), future (“Water”), and present (“Light”). “Heat” and “Light” both contain interconnected short stories, while the futuristic “Water” is a novella. The three parts of this collection can be seen as interrelated, but also stand alone. While “Water” is clearly written in the SF genre, the other two ‘mini-cycles’ contain elements of realism, magic realism, and the gothic (Kadmos 3).

With the temporal organisation of past, future, and present, and with spectral appearances in the land, *Heat and Light* seems to play with and disrupt linear notions of time and space. Largely set in Southern Queensland (Brisbane and surrounds) and Northern New South Wales, the five short stories that comprise the section “Heat” weave together inter-generational stories about the Kresinger family, which has the effect of a “deconstructed family tree” (van Neerven, “Five Questions”). At its centre is the memory of the narrator’s grandmother, Pearl, an iridescent and powerful woman who seems partly mythical in her connections to storms and wind, and in her strong effects on people. The ten stories in the section “Light” explore different themes of youth in present-day Australia, such as family, friendship, love, travel, or school. As a whole, the narrators of *Heat and Light* discover family secrets, start employment or university, go travelling, explore friendships and sexuality. Yet the stories also address larger societal issues, such as mental illness, sexual violence, and racism. As the majority of perspectives are about formative events of youth, the collection has the air of a *bildungsroman*, of characters coming into themselves through vivid relationships with places and kin. Van Neerven has characterised many of these stories as marked by the emotions of desire and longing, and their effects on identity (“An Interview” 296).

The middle section, the novella “Water” that is the focus of this chapter, is set in the near future, in which the Australian government plans to create a large island called “Australia 2” by 2028, a place to which Indigenous people from all over the country should move. The government devised this idea as a kind of restitution, a giving back of land. The project is led by the Prime Minister, Tanya Sparkle, the ambitious and popular second female leader in office (after “J.Gill,” an allusion to the ex-Prime-minister Julia

Gillard), who aims to advance Native Title, and believes in reconciliation and in a future in which “Aboriginal people will get back what they lost and more” (72). The plan is to

create new land between the twenty or so islands off the Brisbane coastline, joining them to create a super island. This is where Aboriginal people can apply to live. In the application criteria they are required to show how they have been removed or disconnected from their country—priority given to those who don’t even know where they’ve come from. Queensland’s the first state to implement the policy, with other states to follow. The community will be effectively self-governed, like the Torres Strait. (74)

The story begins with the narrator’s first journey to one of the islands, Russell, where the young narrator in her 20s, Kaden, is starting employment as a “cultural liaison officer” for one of the “re-forming industry” companies, seeking to alter the shape of the islands by merging them. Kaden, a young Indigenous woman, feels guilty for what she retrospectively calls her “naïve” interest for this job, as the Australia 2 plans are unpopular among the Indigenous community. “Yes I know,” Kaden says to her cousin, “they’re half our problems [...] but it’s much better money” (74). Kaden, who after her father’s suicide was raised disconnected from her Aboriginal side of the family, was initially motivated to apply in the hope she would get the chance to work with Aboriginal people; however, she comes to realise that her role implies negotiating between the re-forming industry and a curious new species they call the “sandplants,” a kind of plant-human hybrid that was discovered when the sand-mining began. The narrator feels uncomfortable with the media representation and the objectifying terms scientists employ – “sandplants” or “specimens” – preferring to call them “sandpeople” or “plantpeople” (75). Kaden is critical of the information gathered on these creatures, as she is aware of how much information is unknown, unrecorded, and possibly manipulated.

Kaden’s evolving relationship with one of the plantpeople is central to the novella. As she is told by her new employer, plantpeople formed when the companies started experimenting with “islandising” and “mining the sea” (76). They have bright green human-like heads and bodies, but their limbs are part roots, or can transform into roots. When Kaden first meets them, she is alarmed “how startlingly human-like they are, and how alarmingly unhuman they are. Green, like something you would see in a

comic strip, but they are real. [...] Am I blind not to notice much difference? Of course there is the body of them, shaped like a post, covered in prickles except for the hands” (78). Kaden mostly engages with their leaders: Larapinta,⁷⁹ who is female, and Hinter, who is male, although they look androgynous and their gender is not predetermined, but communicated (78). As plantpeople have their own language, they acquire English as a second tongue, alongside which they also learn human emotional intelligence. Larapinta continuously seeks to improve her language skills by reading novels and encyclopaedias on her e-reader. The plantpeople are a thorn in the side of the developers of Australia 2, as they live between the water and the islands and can put their roots down—

that is, they firm their roots to an area, into the ground, and are hard to persuade to move; you can’t get them away. Milligan tells me there are a few that actively voice their opinions within the community, speaking out against the government and their plans. (76)

They inhabit Russell Island but since being occupied by the government, they “split to the closest islands” (77). Kaden’s role involves mediation: she asks plantpeople for their needs and delivers a “formula” that is mixed by the botanists in the governmental Science Office. Initially, Kaden believes that the formula contains nutrients for plantpeople to bathe their roots in, but eventually learns that the scientists mix in chlorine—an increasingly high dosage—so that they are made docile. When Kaden is informed about this by the botanist, she is outraged at his lack of ethics and his ignorant response: “We’re talking about plants here” (94). Kaden, by contrast, understands that plantpeople are neither human nor plant, but beings of their own right; she is respectful of their intelligence and quickly forms a relationship. The novella focuses on the attraction between Larapinta and Kaden, which develops into an erotic relationship. This ‘falling in love’ is made somewhat literal: when Kaden walks alone along the beach, she is stung by a jellyfish and, while in pain, Larapinta comes to help. The two gradually

⁷⁹ Larapinta is an industrial suburb located in the southern regions of Brisbane. Larapinta means ‘flowing water’ in the Arrernte language and was so named because the north and west of the suburb are bounded by Oxley Creek. Recently, however, sandmining and industrial development have resulted in a change to the main stream of the creek (Queensland Government).

develop their relationship, with Larapinta frequently accompanying Kaden on her boat, going back and forth between islands.

However, towards the end of the novella, Kaden is informed by her Aboriginal family that plantpeople are ancestral beings that speak their Indigenous language. Her family, with whom she has reconnected, tell her that the totem of their family, the dugong, is linked to their emergence:

Uncle looks directly at me and speaks naturally in the same language, and I feel goosebumps up my arm. 'Jangigir,' he says then.

I stumble over my words. 'Are they...Indigenous?'

'They are our old people. Spirits. Something happened when the dugai brought the sea up. They rose with it.' [...]

'Their knowledge goes back, big time, bub. They've helped us piece back our language. And they're going to help us stop this—' He points to the television, which has changed to the news, Australia 2 the lead story once again. (113)

Kaden's uncle tells Kaden about a secret resistance plan that the Aboriginal community has been devising together with the plantpeople to "lay siege to Ki Island and abolish the infrastructure, using the combined forces of men and jangigir" (121). The plan is to "defend and attack" the island, with the jangigir functioning as soldiers—an organised resistance which Kaden decides to join. The novella ends with the execution of the resistance plan: When Kaden ultimately breaks into the Science Centre, she dilutes the formulas and steals weapons, thus sabotaging her employer, the government. Kaden watches the action from a boat, her observations oscillating between present and future tense:

In that time, even from here, I will hear the sounds of the jangigir overcoming the guards on Ki and ripping up the underwater wires and machinery. They will form a circle protecting Ki Island. [...] The water is rising around us and I can feel the force in the leaping waves and what we're about to do. (123)

The novella thus closes on a hopeful note, as Kaden anticipates that the plan will be successful.

"Water" is written from a first-person intradiegetic perspective, which expresses the sense of limited knowledge, uncertainty, and curiosity that Kaden undergoes. As this perspective betrays physical and cognitive limits to absolute knowledge, the narrator

can only infer what others think, so that Kaden seems to exemplify a coming-to-terms with environmental ethics. Kaden's capacity to inhabit uncertainty and the unknown, and her journey towards taking responsibility stand in contrast with the dominant politics of her surroundings. This becomes especially evident in her careful use of language, as I will outline in greater detail below. The following section discusses "Water" in the context of the recently coined notion of 'Queer Ecology,' arguing that the novella plays with rigid dualisms such as nature/culture, male/female, human/nonhuman and, thus, conjures up larger narratives within evolutionary science and the Environmental Humanities.

Beyond Species Competition: Queer Ecology, Symbiosis, Bioethics

"Water" revolves around the ambiguous, indeterminate boundaries of species and the hybridity of entanglement. The setting of the story on and close to seawater appears as significant for this awareness of multi-species interdependence. The beach has long been interpreted as a liminal space of "indeterminacy and flux" in which boundaries between land and sea, human and nonhuman, time and space merge, and in which the presence of ancestors are evoked (De Loughrey 354). As the encounter with a new species is accompanied by unresolvable questions of sameness and difference, the novella tells of the responsibility of developing (bio)ethics.

Before first stepping on the islands, and not yet knowing that plantpeople are linked to ancestors, Kaden stands out from other employees, as she is careful to use respectful language. After working more closely with plantpeople, however, Kaden cannot help her curiosity and repeatedly asks Larapinta about their species.

I don't want to be rude but I say, "What would you say you are? And where do you come from?"
 She looks at me. "Can you answer that about yourself?"
 "I guess not."
 "For us it is the same." (87)

When Larapinta first seduces Kaden and the two have physical contact, Kaden is insecure, her attraction to Larapinta too disconcerting. "'You're not...' I can't offend her,"

Kaden thinks. ‘What you expected?’ Larapinta finishes her sentence” (96). Kaden’s initial confusion and attraction increasingly leads her to re-evaluate societal definitions:

To understand, I give myself the first question. What is a plant? A plant is a living organism. A plant has cell walls with cellulose and characteristically they obtain most of their energy through sunlight. Plants provide most of the world’s molecular energy and are the basis of most of the world’s ecologies, especially on land. Plants are one of the two main groups into which all living things have been traditionally divided; the other is animals. The division goes back at least as far as Aristotle, who distinguished between plants which generally do not move, and animals which often are mobile to catch their food.

The second question is harder. It is: What is a human? (96-97)

While the second question remains unanswered, Kaden’s attempt to answer the first question reveals the insufficiency of the broad category ‘plant.’ European science and philosophy have traditionally separated largely into ‘animals,’ ‘plants,’ and ‘humans,’ which emerges as an incommensurate understanding when Kaden meets these creatures. By drawing attention to the difficulty or absurdity of ‘defining’ plants. Kaden also seems to suggest that it may be just as reductive to define other species, such as humans.

In fact, Larapinta’s poetic counter-perspective continually unsettles Kaden’s initial eagerness to define the ‘new’ species and, through this more-than-human perspective, stresses the limits of human cognition in relation to larger elemental forces: “Humans never see what’s coming. Everything is seasonal, cyclical, dependent on environment and weather conditions. Would I love you in the winter, when my toes are frost? Would I love you in the summer, when the wind comes tumbling on me?” (96). Through poetic language, then, Larapinta teaches Kaden to embrace ambiguity and mystery. When Kaden eventually discloses that she knows about the origin of the plantpeople—that they are ancestors—Larapinta again directs her answer away from fixing the meaning of what plant people are towards considering that they have a larger significance—even if it may remain mysterious: “She [Larapinta] doesn’t know how they, as jangigir, came to be in the form they are in, but they know their purpose” (118). In this way, Larapinta repeatedly resists being essentialised and defined, so that the question of what their people ‘are’ ultimately remains unanswered. The notion of an undefined “purpose,” however, here conveys their agency and right to exist. As comes

to the fore in this scene, therefore, Larapinta seems to teach Kaden a sense of ecology that is defined by a multi-species community and that designates an abundance of relations that is beyond human capacity to imagine.

Kaden's employer, the scientist Milligan, however, refutes the right of plantpeople to exist. During a confronting conversation with him, Kaden takes offense:

[Milligan:] "They're not entirely human, though, are they? Not close. We've been having these debates for years. About scientific testing on animals for medical research. At the end of the day, we have to put humans first."

[Kaden:] "So that's science? Science is biased to the human race? This is sounding like social Darwinism, like the twisted justification of treating black people worse because of their race and skin colour." (94)

Similar to *The Island Will Sink*, which reflects on the narratives inherent in science and technology, in "Water," the reader is continuously reminded of the history of Social Darwinism and its role in the process of colonisation. In order to make Milligan understand his lack of ethics, Kaden draws attention to the pitfalls of Darwinism when applied to the social realm: black people were once seen as inhabiting a 'lower' evolutionary state, a kind of species of their own. But Milligan's "school of thought," as he calls it, does not give this analogy much significance and he remains condescending (94).

Moreover, Milligan betrays a heteronormative understanding of biology and ecology by warning Kaden to be careful of getting involved with plantpeople, as they are "attractive" and "mimic" human behaviour:

[S]ome people in close proximity can find themselves getting quite attached. Now that's fine, in the same way that of course we get attached to our cat or dog [...]. But there have been cases of sexual attraction. Some lost souls. Now, strictly off the record here, as a male I find, say, Larapinta, slightly of an attractive quality, it's natural, she's more human-like than the others in the ways she looks. And females may feel the same way about Hinter. But it is unnatural if you take it that couple of steps further. [...] You're a little naïve; I know such things might seem strange and unlikely to you, but it can happen. It could have deadly effects."

I don't think Milligan knows, in our culture, *deadly* means really good. I decided not to tell him that. (97-98)

Milligan here naturalises heterosexuality, as he warns Kaden that it is “illegal to be in any way romantically involved with them” (97). The reader, however, knows that Kaden identifies as “queer” (95) and that plantpeople are born androgynous, only communicating their gender later in life. This scene, then, pokes fun at Milligan’s patriarchal, heteronormative, and anthropocentric understanding of ‘nature.’ In fact, as indicated with the wordplay of “deadly,” Milligan misses the pleasure and freedom inherent in Kaden and Larapinta’s erotic relationship.

This exchange evokes the notion of ‘Queer Ecology,’ which has emerged as a fruitful inter-disciplinary term, drawing attention to “the way discourses of nature have been used to enforce heteronormativity, to police sexuality, and to punish and exclude those [...] who have been deemed sexually transgressive” (Sandilands 170). Queer Ecology, put simply, aims to queer the nature/culture divide by pointing to the irony of using ‘nature’ as a measurement for heterosexual purity and sacredness, while disregarding the existence of same-sex eroticism of animal species or nonhuman sexual and gender diversity. Yet Queer Ecology also has wider implications for understandings of the environment. As Alex Johnson writes: “Instead of talking about nonconformity, I want to talk about possibility and unnameably complex reality. What queer can offer is the identity of *I am also*. I am also human. I am also natural. I am also alive and dynamic and full of contradiction, paradox, irony” (“How to Queer”). Here, Johnson’s notion of ‘queer’ conveys the idea that we do not yet have the language and understanding to capture all the myriad ways of being (non)human (including, for example, asexual, multi-gendered, or dimorphic modes of reproduction), and that “what we don’t know about the living world will always be far greater than what we do know” (Erickson and Mortimer-Sandilands 12). Thus, the lens of Queer Ecology generates the capacity to see the irony of humans using the more-than-human world in whatever convenient way that suits. However, despite Kaden identifying as queer, she also notes that the word ‘queer’ is “an old-fashioned word” and “will always be loaded” (95). Although the novel uses the term ‘queer,’ then, it thus also points out the term’s limitations: ‘queer’ implies the idea of difference and anti-normativity, to the detriment of conveying the existing diversity of genders, sexualities, or means of reproduction.

In the same way as Kaden reminds Milligan of the link between Social Darwinism and colonisation, it is important to point out the relationship between Queer Ecology and colonialism. As Greta Gaard observes about the nature/culture dualism:

When nature is feminized and thereby eroticized, and culture is masculinized, the culture-nature relationship becomes one of compulsory heterosexuality. [...] Colonization can therefore be seen as a relationship of compulsory heterosexuality whereby the queer erotic of non-westernized peoples, their culture, and their land, is subdued into the missionary position—with the conqueror “on top.” (“Towards A Queer Ecofeminism” 131)

Gaard here suggests that paying attention to the intersections of the legacy of colonial hierarchies in gender and sexuality helps to see the conceptual links of an ideology that still influences realities today (131). Moreover, Catriona Sandilands draws the important connection between queer ecology and narratives of evolution. As she writes, queer ecology “disrupt[s] prevailing heterosexist discursive and institutional articulations of sexuality and nature, and also [helps] to reimagine evolutionary processes, ecological interactions, and environmental politics in light of queer theory” (169). Importantly for this thesis’ engagement with cosmology, reviewing such narratives about the evolution of today’s environment is important: not only does it shape world views—or cosmologies—but it also determines responses to the myriad socio-eco-political problems of the Anthropocene.

In its widest sense, ‘evolution’ aims to provide a cross-cultural description of humanity and its origins (Sagan 113). At its emergence, evolution ‘naturalised’ humanity, as Dorian Sagan puts it: “Evolution repositions humans as mortals within a temporal continuum; it connects us integrally, not only with all animals but also with our microbial ancestors, and with the chemical composition of an evolutionary hydrogen-rich cosmos” (113). Although mostly associated with Charles Darwin, evolution is a complex, interdisciplinary theory; Darwin did not discover natural selection but was the first to present it “methodically, and with multifarious evidence” (Sagan 113-114). Darwin’s account became especially prominent in the 1930s, when, under the term Social Darwinism and associated with German National Socialism, it merged with genetics, eugenics and statistical tools that explained evolution based on small mutations that proved advantageous in different environments (Sagan 115). Today,

however, the offspring of Darwin's theory, Neo-Darwinism, is widely criticised for overemphasising the importance of natural selection over the inheritance of acquired characteristics and for their mathematical understanding of models of change, which excludes fields such as cell and planetary biology, geochemistry, or microbial ecology (Sagan 115). In the (neo-)Darwinian view of evolutionary theory, "evolution worked through the passing of desirable traits to offspring," so that every species was seen to have evolved on their own (Tsing et al., *Arts* M23).

However, there is a paradigm shift occurring in biology. In the "big new story," as the editors of *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* (2017) suggest, "cross-species interaction has been shown as essential to development, evolution and ecology" (M23). As anthropologist Tim Ingold puts it, evolution is a process that also incorporates *environmental* conditions and cross-species relations, as it "can occur without reference to genetic change through cumulative transformations wrought through the actions of the organisms themselves on the conditions of the development under which they and their successors grew to maturity" (12; also quoted in Nash 408). Thus, rather than understanding evolution as species competition only, the "big new story" shifts the narrative away from competition and individualism towards interaction, cooperation, and a larger multi-species community.

One keyword to understand this shift from linear evolutionary descent towards a kind of horizontal gene-exchange is 'symbiosis,' coined by the prolific biologist Lynn Margulis, who is also the co-creator of Gaia theory.⁸⁰ As zoologist Margaret McFall-Gai describes, Margulis pioneered a symbiotic understanding of evolution and development: "Based on what she could see, Margulis hypothesized that the organelles of complex cells arose from endosymbiosis—that is, that the coordination and cooperation of simple bacteria were the foundation of more elaborate forms of life" (M53). In the 1980s, with more discoveries about cell organelles, Margulis' work was confirmed and garnered much support: "The reordering reflected what new technologies highlighted: that the earth's biological diversity is far more microbial than

⁸⁰ Although Margulis is the co-creator of Gaia theory, many scholars—including Latour—present her as James Lovelock's "side-kick" (*Facing Gaia* 92). The fact that she is under-cited and under-credited has been linked to the fact that she is a woman (McFall-Gai M60).

ever imagined” (McFall-Gai M54). Crucially, then, symbiosis re-discovered the story of cooperation over competition:

[B]efore Margulis’s work, symbiosis was seen as a rare exception in a world dominated by unmitigated competition. Margulis showed, instead, that symbiosis was the “norm”—and a core form of relationality. Importantly, she was able to do so by focusing on microbes. (McFall-Gai M60)

Symbiosis argues, then, that animals, plants, or fungi form through *relations* with microbes rather than genetic script (McFall-Gai M61). Here, the narrative of collaboration is emphasised over the narrative of the survival of the fittest, which has recently led to reconsidering the metaphor of the ‘tree of life’ to a ‘web of life’ because notions of ‘origin,’ descent, and reproductive transmission of genes can no longer be said to be accurate (McFall-Gai M54). Margulis emphasises that while natural selection has an “editorial or stabilising function” and remains apt to describe “descent with modification from common ancestors,” as an over-arching sole model of evolution it is reductive because it cannot “in principle explain or ‘create’ anything” (Sagan 115). In this way, symbiosis (also playfully called ‘sympoiesis’ and ‘symbiogenesis’ by Haraway as a ‘making’ or ‘creating with’ [*Staying* 5]) redeems the narratives of ‘fight or flight’ and ‘survival of the fittest,’ by positing that a central force of evolution is cooperation.

Interestingly, this shift away from competition towards cooperation also appears in the recent resurgence of Gaia theory (introduced in Chapter 2). Latour, for example, argues that Gaia is a fitting myth to assign to the Earth-system, as this ancient Goddess transports the sense of *collective* creative intelligence, without assigning too much power to an over-arching creator (*Facing Gaia* 98). As Latour notes, this collective intelligence is something James Lovelock (the co-founder of Gaia theory) called “interest:”

For Lovelock, organisms, taken as the point of departure for a biochemical reaction, do not develop “in” an environment; rather, each one bends the environment around itself, as it were, the better to develop. In this sense, every organism intentionally manipulates what surrounds it “in its own interest”—the whole problem, of course, lies in defining that interest. (*Facing Gaia* 98)

In a footnote, Latour then adds: “‘Interest’ here is taken in its etymological sense as what is situated ‘in between,’ between two entities—while keeping in mind that intentionality, will, desire, need, function, and force are only different figures for what is arrayed along a gradient expressing the same power to act” (*Facing Gaia* 98). This “interest” of every species, defined as the ‘in between,’ or as the tension between two actors, seems to be dramatised through the erotics of Larapinta and Kaden. Their desire conveys a relationality that blurs and multiplies the notion of inside and outside, subject and object, human and nature. Kaden’s “interest” and desire is also frequently conveyed with the analogy to food:

How much of what it means to be human will sway deep in my mind like a ship. I see her eyes are open, those green unhuman eyes, watching, looking at me, but not. Her mouth is alive. I suck on her bottom lip, surrender my teeth. She makes a noise that I could only interpret as arousal but in the weeks I’ve known her I’ve never heard her display in utterance. To feel she is human now is a lie, I must be with who she is. I feel her mind crackle on mine as our foreheads touch, I feel what is between her eyes. (102)

“Everything is new for me,” she says, “I am renewal.” (103)

Here, desire is not only portrayed as a life force that informs evolution, but also as humanity’s most immediate relation to the environment—in the form of food. Throughout “Water,” the interconnections between the species are depicted through Kaden’s discovery of how much ‘person’ the plant is and how much she herself is plant. In fact, towards the end of the novella, Kaden discovers she was named after the Indigenous name for ‘orchid,’ which seem to carry special importance for rituals, as Kaden observes a ceremony in preparation for the resistance movement, in which petals are dropped into the sea (117). As it slowly emerges that Larapinta is not just Kaden’s lover, but also associated with food and ancestry, their relationship conveys desire, playfulness, and love as quintessential, life-sustaining forces. However, this narrative of desire, interest and symbiosis in “Water” is not revealed to be part of a ‘big new story’ in biology, but it is part of an old Indigenous story.

Beyond desire, “Water” also emphasises the bioethical principle to protect what cannot be completely understood. As is reflected in Kaden’s eventual support of the secret plan to protect plantpeople and the island, it is through the personal experience

of pleasurable relationships with various species that Kaden comes to enact sacrifice, obligation, and activism. For Kaden, this sense of responsibility arises out of a multi-species awareness of evolutionary kinship and what could be called cosmic ‘wholeness,’ as plantpeople express their sovereign place in the island’s ecosystem. In this way, Kaden’s journey conjures up the emergence of the international “Rights of Nature” movement. Fuelled by the globally increasing environmental degradation, this movement reflects the increasing engagement with transnational bioethical laws. As the movement’s website puts it:

When we talk about the “rights of nature,” it means recognizing that ecosystems and natural communities are not merely property that can be owned, but are entities that have an independent *right to exist and flourish*. Laws recognizing the rights of nature thus change the status of natural communities and ecosystems to being recognized as *rights-bearing entities* with rights that can be enforced by people, governments, and communities. (“What is Rights of Nature?”)

Thus, in the face of global processes of commodification, this movement has identified the effectiveness of employing ‘legal personhood’ for particular entities, such as national parks or rivers. Many countries have already implemented legal personhood for rivers: for instance, New Zealand’s Whanganui, India’s Ganges and Yamuna, and Ecuador’s Vilcabamba. These examples demonstrate the growing importance of bioethical efforts that not only assign intelligence to the more-than-human world, but also move to personify and subjectify living systems. While this, of course, has ambivalent consequences (the move to personify could also be considered anthropocentric), the point here is to draw attention to the growing bioethical activism as well as to the growing body of scholarship concerned with recognising not only the agency and intelligence, but also the ‘rights’ of the more-than-human world. A good scholarly example is the collected volume *The Language of Plants: Science, Philosophy, Literature* (2017), edited by Monica Gagliano et al., in which science and humanities scholars focus on the lack of attention generally given to plants and their exclusion from bioethics: “animal protection movements have existed in the West at least since the 19th century, and some form of animal rights are enshrined in legal systems of numerous countries. Conversely, many people would still regard the notion of plant rights as whimsical” (x). The editors deduce a shift in science in recent decades: where

previously the focus lay on understanding the structure of organisms (“immediate mechanical, physical, physiological, and biochemical molecular factors”), now plants and other species are considered in how they interact in their surroundings—in an ecology of species (xvi).

To summarise, “Water” focuses on desire, love and pleasure as quintessential life-forces that inform Kaden’s understanding of evolution and the cosmos at large. The novella conjures up the evolutionary narrative of symbiosis, which emphasises kinship and collaboration (symbiosis) over competition and suggests myriad possibilities of being and relating that defy rigid binary definitions of gender and sexuality, nature and culture. In this way, “Water” conveys that evolution can be understood not only as a linear event of ‘natural’ selection, but also as a cultural development that involves consciousness, knowledge, aesthetics, intention, and cooperation. The next section discusses the ways in which the novella can be read as defying the dominant disaster narrative, as it engages with underexplored affects and tropes for environmental discourse that go beyond doom and gloom, hope or despair.

‘Bad Environmentalism.’ From Mother to Lover Nature

The novella’s captivating image of the plantpeople, and the entanglement between the fate of the plantpeople and Kaden’s community, evoke the obligation to protect vulnerable entities of the cosmos. However, this environmentalism is arguably enacted in unconventional ways: rather than reinforcing a hope/despair binary, “Water” proposes the idea that proactive engagements for human and environmental rights emerge from the experience of pleasurable relationships and from the involvement with a local community. This contrasts with *The Island Will Sink*’s portrayal of environmentalism, which is largely satirised: as is suggested through the energy-saving panda mascot, Pow-Pow, who is constantly reminding the family to save energy, environmentalism is presented as didactic, ‘annoying,’ and ineffective, as it mostly rests on individual self-optimisation rather than collective and large-scale action. This inherently moralistic portrayal of environmentalism, I argue, is not uncommon; in fact,

it can be made sense of with Nicole Seymour's recently coined notion of 'Bad Environmentalism.'

In *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age* (2018), Seymour applies this term—Bad Environmentalism—to works that fall outside of what she calls 'mainstream environmentalism' with its "sanctimony, sincerity," and its focus on "hope or despair" (2). As Seymour argues, "despair and hope, gloom/doom and optimism are often merely different sides of the same coin, a coin that represents humans' desire for certainty and neat narratives about the future" (3-4). By contrast, 'bad environmental' artworks explore often neglected dimensions of human-environment interactions, such as "absurdity, irony, irreverence, ambivalence, camp, frivolity, indecorum, awkwardness, sardonicism, perversity, playfulness and glee" (4). As Seymour writes,

[T]hese works [Seymour analyses a range of works, such as the nature program parody *Wildboyz*] show, for example, individuals performing drag in response to sea level rise rather than (just) wringing their hands over it; they profile endangered species while poking fun at them. I argue that these works thereby respond not just to the current environmental moment but to mainstream environmentalism itself, challenging how the movement typically reacts to problems such as sea level rise or species endangerment, and questioning its broader ideals of nature. (4)

Hence, 'bad environmental' works, Seymour proposes, draw attention to basic assumptions of 'mainstream environmentalism:' "that reverence is required for ethical relations to the nonhuman, that knowledge is key to fighting problems like climate change" (5). As Seymour argues, along with gloom and doom, these conventional ideals of environmentalism often encompass "guilt, shame, didacticism, prescriptiveness, sentimentality, reverence, seriousness, sincerity, earnestness, sanctimony, self-righteousness, and wonder—as well as the heteronormativity and whiteness of the movement" (4-5).⁸¹ In other words, Seymour points out that environmentalism has conventionally been exclusionary of a variety of socially marginalised groups, and has

⁸¹ Seymour quotes Sarah Jaquette Ray's broad definition of environmentalism, "as a description of nature, as a social movement, and as a code of behavioral imperatives," with conventional environmental issues such as "wilderness protection, recreation, a strictly aesthetic appreciation of nature, protection of endangered species, and nostalgic attachment to a preindustrial, 'pastoral' world" (Ray 11; 121; Seymour 14).

employed a range of affects that privilege individuality, purity, and self-righteousness to the detriment of irony, humour, playfulness, and creativity. While Seymour insufficiently defines the categories of 'mainstream Western environmentalism' (what is 'Western environmentalism' and 'mainstream' appears to be quickly changing in public discourse, as can be seen in the emergence of new popular global movements, such as the School Strike for Climate), I argue that the notion of Bad Environmentalism nevertheless hits a nerve. It productively names a key problem of what could be called 'old-school' environmentalism: a lack of self-criticism, a righteous pathos, a focus on supposed purity, and an implicitly exclusionary politics. Bad Environmentalism remains a useful coining, I argue, as it identifies many pitfalls of prevailing aspects of environmentalism.

In this context, it is possible to read "Water" as not so much responding to a perceived mainstream, but as conjuring up a long tradition of Indigenous Australian activism. This activism may exist in relation to, but it also can be seen as independent of discourses of environmentalism. In fact, "Water" can be said to follow the logic of both/and rather than either/or: its affective fabric reveals sincerity *and* humour; indignation *and* playfulness; sentimentality *and* irony. As I explore in this section, then, it is this delicate balance that makes "Water" a remarkable text.

Although humour is notoriously hard to define, "Water" can be considered 'funny.' Multiple times, for example, the near future is evoked with an eye-winking commentary on current trends; such as the reverence of Aboriginal spirituality: "Aboriginal spirituality is on its way to becoming the most popular religion. In the churches now it's only white guys preaching" (73). At other times, Larapinta's character appears as comical, for example, when, in order to learn human language and in order to attain more emotional intelligence, she reads Mills & Boon romance novels from which she aims to learn the arts of seduction:

[Larapinta:] 'I have been thinking...a lot. I have enough intelligence; what I'm lacking is the emotional intelligence...But I think we do have what you call a "sparkle".'

[Kaden:] 'It's a spark. It's not a fucking *sparkle*.'

She's not taken aback at my outburst. 'Finally. A political statement.' [...]

'Are you menstruating now?' Larapinta asks.

'I am due to.'

'Does it affect your sexual activity?'

‘No, not really.’
 ‘Good,’ she says, and she winks. [...] ‘We’ll get a bottle of nice wine.’
 ‘Are you talking about seduction?’ A thought comes to my head. I’m
 being seduced by a plant. ‘It’s foolish, Larapinta.’ (96; 99-100)

As these passages show, the novella’s tone could be described as self-awarely ironic and humorous. As Larapinta is both Kaden’s lover *and* ancestor, her figuration somehow seems to convey an image of both: ‘mother’ *and* ‘lover earth.’⁸² However, the relationship between Kaden and Larapinta is also portrayed as sincere, as the novella conveys that it is Kaden’s love for Larapinta that aids her decision to join the resistance—despite the painful knowledge that Larapinta will sacrifice herself:

For so long I’d been alone with all these questions about who I was and I hadn’t even realised how much I was hurting. I was empty. Not able to connect with anyone. And then, under the strange, intense circumstances, I was drawn to Larapinta; somehow she had understood me, she made me want more for myself. (114-115)

It is this trusting relationship with Larapinta that helps Kaden decide to join the resistance. Therefore, the novella portrays a sincere and a humorous relationship between the couple and—by extrapolation—with the cosmos.

Significantly, then, through Kaden’s development, “Water” conveys the notion that what is loved will be protected and that it is through pleasurable relationships that socio-environmental movements can become most effective. This idea has recently been explored in activist literature. For example, Adrienne Maree Brown’s *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good* (2019) draws on Black feminist liberation traditions (such as by Audre Lorde or Toni Cade Bambara) centred around pleasure and self-care in order to aid socio-environmental justice. Brown defines ‘pleasure activism’ as “the work we do to reclaim our whole, happy, and satisfiable selves from the impacts, delusions, and limitations of oppression and/or supremacy” (13). As Brown argues, it is by actively cultivating pleasurable and joyful relationships on a personal and on a

⁸² In fact, there is growing interest in ecosexuality as an underexplored, yet productive art and activist field. See, for example, Beth Stephen’s nature/romantic documentary *Goodbye Gauley Mountain: An Ecosexual Love Story* (2013); Elizabeth M. Stephens and Annie Sprinkle’s “Ecosex Manifesto” (2011); and Serena Gaia Anderlini-D’Onofrio and Lindsay Hagamen’s *Ecosexuality: When Nature Inspires the Arts of Love* (2016).

collective level that socio-environmental change can be advocated for most effectively. Moreover, Brown suggests that a focus on pleasure and humour undermines scarcity thinking, as “[p]leasure activists believe that by tapping into the potential goodness in each of us we can generate justice and liberation, growing a healing abundance where we have been socialized to believe only scarcity exists” (13). Similarly, “Water” suggests this reciprocity between personal liberation and collective movements, as it is mainly through her relationship with Larapinta that Kaden experiences comfort, joy, and belonging to a larger community again. Hence, far from being trivial, the experiences of pleasure, desire, and erotics are portrayed as the key to Kaden’s transformation and reintegration into her family and a larger movement.

Similar to the centrality of affect in activist theory, ecocriticism has increasingly turned to affect in order to diversify ideas of ‘the environment.’ As Seymour puts it: “This turn toward affect can help us think beyond the content or even the form of environmental artworks, to the feelings and reactions they depict, elicit, and exhibit—and, thus, to think through the question ‘What makes an art-work environmentalist?’ in nuanced ways” (22). Seymour proposes that attention to affect enriches criticism, allowing for not just a more inclusive scholarship (which also incorporates, for example, an examination of popular art and media), but also a less prescriptive and instrumentalist ecocriticism. As Seymour points out, instrumentalism is well established in the ecocritical field:

[I]nstrumentalist scholarly approaches can overlook or overshadow the textual potentialities beyond inciting “ecological advocacy” [...]—bearing witness to crisis, enacting catharsis, serving as cultural diagnoses, and so on. That is, instrumentalism potentially marginalizes artworks that do not articulate obvious or recognizable environmentalist agendas but that nonetheless have something to tell us. (26-27)

Although Seymour concedes that a certain degree of instrumentalism is understandable and not always avoidable—given that many ecocritics are also activists and since the field was established in response to ecocidal attitudes—this instrumentalism, she argues, needs to be questioned as it “threatens to replicate the didactic and prescriptive tendencies of mainstream environmentalism and potentially detracts from the real job of criticism: to see how cultural works present us with problems and make things messy

rather than neatly resolving them” (28). In other words, although a certain instrumentalism may be inescapable for ecocriticism (and Seymour admits that her own book is partially instrumentalist), it is important that criticism also encompasses more than ‘an ecological agenda,’ especially if it is to push environmental thought further. Thus, Seymour’s notion of Bad Environmentalism is significant as it rightfully seeks to diversify ideas around what constitutes ‘the environment.’

Similarly, I have argued that rather than replicating the dominant disaster narrative, “Water” presents an effective counter-example to doom and gloom, hope and despair, by employing the arguably still neglected affects of pleasure and humour. This could be seen as an expression of the long Indigenous perspective on apocalypse and survival cited earlier by Whyte, who argues that for Indigenous peoples, climate change presents a *déjà-vu* experience and an intensification of colonialism (159). The memory of survival, then, can be said to generate different genres, affects, and attitudes. As literary scholar and ecologist Joseph Meeker observed in his essay “The Comedy of Survival” (1972), the destructive tendencies of civilisations are often put into the tragic; by contrast, comedy is a mode that more frequently reflects survival and biological entanglement: “As comedy sees it, the important thing is to live and to encourage life even though it is probably meaningless to do so. If the survival of our species is trivial, then so is comedy” (13). As Meeker argues, a consideration of the genre of comedy has implications for evolutionary narratives:

Evolution itself is a gigantic comic drama, not the bloody tragic spectacle imagined by the sentimental humanists of early Darwinism. Nature is not “red in tooth and claw” as Tennyson would have it, for evolution does not proceed through battles fought among animals to see who is fit enough to survive and who is not. Rather, the evolutionary process is one of adaptation and accommodation, with the various species exploring opportunistically their environments in search of a means to maintain their existence. Like comedy, evolution is a matter of muddling through. (15-16)

Meeker here points out that comedy can be seen as a kind of antidote to aggression, with the benefits of survival. Moreover, Meeker suggests that the notion of survival is crucial to evolutionary theories of symbiosis: “to evolution and to comedy, nothing is sacred but life itself. [...] When the existence of many species, including our own, and

the continuity of the biological environment are threatened as they are now, we can no longer afford the wasteful and destructive luxuries of a tragic view of life" (16). As Meeker argues here, and as discussed in relation to the portrayal of apocalypse-obsession in *The Island Will Sink*, apocalypse and disaster infatuation can be seen as a privilege of distanced and detached contemplation, whereas the necessity to 'go on,' to find strategies of survival that may rest on compromise, is often reflected to us through humour. Moreover, Meeker's observation about genre and evolution evokes the idea that the cosmic and the comic are very much compatible. Although the cosmic is often evoked through the emotional experience of the sublime, the cosmic also has a more profane dimension, as the evolution of species is often told through the genre of the comic. My reading of "Water" thus proposes, via Seymour and Meeker, that the novella diversifies narrative and affective engagements with the environment by employing marginalised affects and genres, such as pleasure, erotics, and humour. This has broader implications for personal liberation, political coalitions, and socio-environmental activism at large.

Conclusion

My 'cosmological' reading of "Water" has, firstly, discussed how the novella activates a contemplation of gender, sexuality, and evolutionary narratives. This reveals the fact that understandings of the environment are always bound to narratives and are always already political. As I have argued, the lens of 'Queer Ecology' shapes awareness of the ways in which "Water" depicts the diversity of genders and sexualities in the human and more-than-human world. Moreover, the novella conjures up evolutionary narratives, such as the still prevalent Darwinism with its emphasis on competition, and—through an engagement with Indigenous understandings—the science of symbiosis. As I conclude, "Water" portrays evolution not so much as a linear event of origin and descent, but as a cultural development that includes emotions, aesthetics, and cooperation. From a larger perspective, the captivating figures of the plantpeople can be seen as conveying for the contemporary push to recognise the intelligence and bioethical rights of the more-than-human world.

I have further proposed that “Water” fits into the categories of a ‘bad environmental’ text, as its affective fabric of humour, playfulness, and erotics arguably present rare depictions of human/environment interactions. As Larapinta is both lover and ancestor, her figuration seems to extend the idea of ‘mother earth’ to ‘lover earth.’ While this renewed orientation towards genres and affects, such as pleasure and irony, can be seen in environmental activist literature (as introduced through Brown’s *Pleasure Activism*), academia has also pointed to the blind spots of ecocriticism and environmentalism, with its dominant ‘ecological agenda’ of crisis and catharsis and its relative neglect of more diverse environmentalisms. With the help of Seymour’s *Bad Environmentalism* and Meeker’s astute observations on genre, then, I have pointed to the merits of diversifying both environmentalism and ecocriticism. In this sense, my ‘cosmological reading’ has foregrounded two main aspects: on the one hand, it has emphasised the importance of *narratives* of evolution, gender, and sexuality for responding to the environment. On the other, it has focused on the need to diversify responses to the ecological crisis that go beyond tragedy, disaster, and apocalypticism. If a focus on desire, play, and fun can appear whimsical and mundane in the context of complex socio-politico-ecological problems, these emotions could also be understood as a frequently overlooked but most immediate way in which humans relate to the environment, and an effective way of organising resistance to the dangerous developments of the Anthropocene.

4.4 Chapter Conclusion

As exemplified with the ‘Ecomoderns,’ who purport the narrative of human mastery over nature, the Anthropocene has brought about technocratic responses, which further enshrine the human/nature dualism and convey the false impression that current institutions and politics are adequately handling the climate emergency. The

Environmental Humanities have responded to this technocratisation by arguing that environmental problems are as much issues of socio-cultural origin as of technological questions and, therefore, require a broad search for solutions that includes attention to grassroots movements, indigenous voices, and social justice. In times of global ecological crises, the Environmental Humanities are on the rise precisely because of this growing awareness that environmental calamities can be remedied through social change alongside innovative technologies.

Through a discussion of media-technologies and bioethics, my reading of the two texts has foregrounded the entanglements of culture and technology. By focusing on the role of one particularly magnetic narrative—the one of natural disaster—*The Island Will Sink* suggests that it is so important to focus on stories in their particular multi-media appearances because narratives are not only part of our environment, but also actively shape it. While *The Island Will Sink* draws the Anthropocene as a dystopian time of a potentially heightened human/nature dualism, “Water” explores evolutionary, queer, and Indigenous narratives that counter the arguably still dominant Darwinian notion of competition and the rights of the strongest. In this way, I have proposed that, by drawing attention to the affects and genres of survival, resilience, and resistance, the novella offers a refreshing aesthetics for environmental thought that defies the privileged complacency of dooms-day-thinking. Moreover, through the speculative figures of the plantpeople, “Water” performs a fascinating thought-experiment that conveys the notion that the more-than-human world constantly challenges human language and cognition through its infinite complexity.

My cosmological reading of the texts results in the insight that dystopia and cosmos are difficult to combine: the dystopian world of *The Island Will Sink* presents a dark vision of an intensified Anthropocene, in which humans are free to contemplate disasters without understanding their own agency. Although the novel entails glimpses of cosmological alternatives, I conclude that *The Island Will Sink* presents a ‘negative cosmology,’ as it focuses on the privilege to be so scared, detached, and materially secured, that people become complacent with the destructive patterns of the Anthropocene. By contrast, van Neerven’s novella presents the notion that we fight for what we love. The mode of SF enables both texts to challenge and reframe present-day

developments by presenting extreme manifestations of harmful worldviews (Doyle), and by providing visionary fiction of the power of pleasure and resistance (van Neerven).

5. Environmental Justice/Custodianship: Towards a Sovereign Cosmopolitics

5.1 Introduction: Contextualising Environmental Justice and Custodianship

By showing that social and environmental well-being are interdependent, this chapter reads two texts that portray this sense of mutual flourishing: Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains* (2018) and Melissa Lucashenko's *Too Much Lip* (2018). Written from two cosmopolitan perspectives, these texts tell of the lived experience of flight and migration and the struggle with ongoing colonial dispossession. *No Friend but the Mountains* (from here on *No Friend*) gives an autobiographical and partly fictionalised account of a refugee caught in so-called 'Offshore Detention,' or as Boochani prefers to call it, the "island prison" of Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, designed to "punish" asylum seekers who have attempted to reach Australia by boat (xxvii). *Too Much Lip* portrays the trans-generational trauma of a Goorie family, the Salters, on Bundjalung country (Queensland/New South Wales border) and their healing of old family wounds, which coincides with regaining custodianship of and preserving part of a local river that has had cultural significance to their family for generations. Although the books are written from markedly different perspectives—one from that of a political prisoner, the other from that of an Indigenous Australian family—both texts can productively be read together, as they reveal insights into the interconnectedness of human rights and land rights. I read both works in the context of justice and custodianship, and through the key words 'sovereignty' and 'cosmopolitics,' as they display protagonists with a double consciousness: that human flourishing is tied to the environment—meaning to physical, mental, spiritual, economic, and political freedom and well-being. As I show, both works portray cosmological understandings of humans' place on the land and what could be called a holistic sense of social justice.

Environmental Humanities scholars have continuously drawn attention to the interconnections between the exploitation of people and the degradation of land. Some of the gravest effects of Anthropocene issues, like climate change, are so-called 'knock-

on' or domino-effects that go in tandem with environmental degradation, such as health decline, social tension, war, or mass-migration. On the other hand, the oppression of people has often preceded the exploitation of resources. In this sense, the current crisis encompasses the increasing de-stabilisation of climate, environments *and* social orders. This chapter, then, seeks to illuminate social justice as an environmental concern. This approach is significant because traditionally 'humanist' issues, such as social and intergenerational justice, land rights, or sovereignty, are arguably still at the margins of what is perceived as an 'environmental' issue. In this Introduction, I explicate the terms 'environmental justice,' 'custodianship,' 'sovereignty,' and 'cosmopolitics,' and the ways in which they are significant for environmental movements, the field of the Environmental Humanities, and the Australian context.

Justice has become an important term for environmentalists. The term Environmental Justice (EJ) has drawn attention to the inseparable connection between social and environmental degradation. EJ refers to a global network of local resistance movements acting against the disproportionate impact of environmental devastations on the poor and marginalised. The term itself originally emerged from the grass-roots activism of communities of colour in the United States around the 1970s, who demonstrated that lower socio-economic classes and predominantly ethnic minorities are disproportionately exposed to pollution and health risks (Di Chiro 100). Yet the fight for environmental justice precedes the term: as Joan Martinez-Alier points out, environmental movements of marginalised groups "started long ago on a hundred dates and in a hundred places all over the world" (172). In fact, the quest for justice has already been brought to the multi-national stage: 1991 saw the first EJ-Summit and the First National People of Colour Environmental Leadership Summit, held in Washington DC, where the movement's intersectional vision was formulated: the seventeen Principles of Environmental Justice (Di Chiro 101).⁸³ These principles then led to Agenda 21, an action plan for moving the world into a sustainable future, which later informed the guidelines for the Rio +20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development of 2012 (Di Chiro 102). EJ has recently expanded to embrace subcategories such as 'Climate

⁸³ The Principles of Environmental Justice have served as a defining document for EJ grassroots movements. See the principles here: www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.html.

Justice’ (a prominent banner for climate activists concerned with the unequal distribution of harm), and ‘Multispecies Justice,’ (used to indicate that, in our age of mass- extinction, justice has to be extended to the more-than-human world). Regardless of whether EJ is an established field or not, its language is present in art, activism, and academia. For example, Australia’s first Indigenous climate youth organisation, SEED, continually uses the term ‘climate justice,’ referring to the fact that Indigenous Australian cultures are uniquely affected by climate change and that climate change is linked to colonisation. This uniqueness refers to, for example, the threat of many areas becoming uninhabitable due to rising temperatures and the loss of cultural traditions due to displacement.⁸⁴ EJ, then, stands for a practice-oriented approach: in examining the entanglement of environmental and social issues, scholars and activists propose that solutions must be found in tandem.

In addition to justice, custodianship is an important term accompanying the human-environment nexus. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a ‘custodian’ as “a person who has responsibility for taking care of or protecting something.” The term derived from the 18th century use of “custody, on the pattern of guardian” (“Custodian”). In Australia, ‘custodian’ is often used in Acknowledgements of or in Welcomes to Country, as now widely practised in public events, publications, or institutional declarations. ‘Custodianship’ here evokes the already introduced Indigenous concept of ‘Care for Country,’ which the Humanities for the Environment Initiative understands as a “unique tradition of philosophical and practical ecology that has been espoused and practised by Indigenous Australians and Islanders for centuries” (“Australia Pacific Observatory”). On the one hand, I employ the term ‘custodianship’ in relation to Australian literature because it captures the Indigenous tradition of guardianship for concrete places. On the other, I investigate custodianship as a wider, transcultural ethic that evokes responsibility of care as crucial in times of globally accelerating ecological devastations.

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which the Anthropocene crisis accelerates and exacerbates issues that have long existed in Australia, such as the Indigenous struggle for land rights and sovereignty, and restrictive and violent immigration

⁸⁴ See SEED’s website for a list of campaigns, which include “Land Rights Not Mining Rights,” “Protect Country,” and “Don’t Frack the NT:” www.seedmob.org.au/.

practices such as ‘Offshore Detention,’ which can be seen as a legacy of the White Australia policy.⁸⁵ I argue that in the Anthropocene, however, these ‘older’ issues increasingly bring into focus a formerly neglected dimension: the ecological one. Here, it seems important to briefly contextualise both literary works in relation to the Anthropocene. Boochani has not identified as a climate or environmental refugee; in fact, his work reveals little about the reasons for his flight from Iran, other than an allusion to being a “child of war,” presumably to the Iran-Iraq war between 1980-88 (257). The fact that Boochani does not classify himself as a certain kind of refugee is telling, in that it points to the insufficiency of categories such as ‘economic-migrant’ or ‘climate-refugee.’ Instead, I read Boochani’s mytho-poetic critique of the “prison logic” as exemplary for the plight of migrants stuck in statelessness, imprisonment, and abuse: a predicament experienced by ever more people. In other words, I read *No Friend* as a text that can speak to multiple causes of migrations and injustices that are occurring at an increased rate in the Anthropocene. Like Boochani’s refugee status, his text is hard to categorise; although marketed as memoir, *No Friend* also contains many fictionalised sections and poetic insertions. Moreover, as suggested in the title—*No Friend but the Mountains*—Boochani constantly refers to the environment, or what I call the cosmos, and uses the terms ‘ecology’ and ‘ecosystem’ a number of times, conveying that interactions with the more-than-human world are crucial for survival. As I argue, Boochani constructs the cosmos as a counter-force to the submission and violence of the prison.

Similarly, *Too Much Lip* is not ostensibly ‘about’ an environmental issue. The novel is centred on the protagonist, Kerry Salter, and her struggle to return to and become closer to her family. Triggered by the death of the grandfather and the impending desecration of the family’s sacred river and its island, the Salters find themselves assembled and united in the quest to protect the river from an impending sale. Upon first view, the novel would not necessarily suggest itself as being about an

⁸⁵ Immediately following Federation in 1901 and lasting between 1958-1973, Australian governments designed policies which aimed to keep Australia white and British—although terms such as ‘white’ were avoided to minimise international condemnation. As Benjamin Jones writes, the White Australia policy was “not a single government directive but a series of acts with a common goal.” Such acts included the Immigration Restriction Act, the Pacific Island Labourers Act, or the Post and Telegraph Act (“Australian Politics Explainer”).

environmental issue: the planned ‘development’ of the river is primarily (and ironically) about the construction of a prison.⁸⁶ The river’s impending sell-off to the prison-industry, however, can be seen as an ecological issue in that it restricts the human rights of freedom, self-determination, and custodianship. With the trope of the prison, the novel allegorically evokes the construction of the colonial state of Australia, so that it portrays the Salters’ struggle as a common First Nations’ experience, in which colonial ideology affects both human and environmental health, often in reciprocity. The end of the book reveals an unexpected turn of events for the family, in which accidents and coincidences, the help of ancestors, and organised resistance finally enable the family to heal. My cosmological reading allows me to explore the interconnectedness between the novel’s characters and the places they care for. I argue that it is only the cosmological understanding that each family member belongs to something greater and that every individual healing process is crucial for the whole, that enables the river to be protected. The next section introduces the importance of sovereignty for the Australian context and explains the framework of ‘sovereign cosmopolitics’ for a reading of both texts.

Sovereign Cosmopolitics and the Australian ‘Camp Logic’

My chosen texts both engage a cosmopolitical perspective which comprises not only cosmopolitanism, but also the sense of a physical ‘cosmos’ that expresses agency, order, and lawfulness. Both Boochani’s and Lukashenko’s protagonists can be said to explore a ‘cosmic’ consciousness, and both display Indigenous and cosmopolitan identities that are close to their own: Boochani identifies as Indigenous Kurdish, and Lukashenko’s protagonist is, like herself, a Goorie woman of the Bundjalung nation. In common use, a cosmopolitan refers to someone who is “worldly,” therefore at home everywhere. Yet, as Cyrus Patell writes, a cosmopolitan can also be understood as someone who is “not

⁸⁶ A 2018 report by the Australian Law Reform Commission confirmed older statistics, that, as a percentage of the Australian population, Indigenous Australian incarceration is still the highest in the world (Zillman). Moreover, human rights abuse in juvenile detention centres have been repeatedly reported, such as in Don Dale in the Northern Territory, from where footage of child abuse was leaked in 2016 (Gordon and Fitz-Gibbon). Although protests and outrage have been expressed across the board, Don Dale remains in use. A 2019 Royal Commission report confirmed that 100% of children detained in the Northern Territory are Aboriginal (“100% of children”).

fully comfortable—never fully at home—anywhere” (3-4). The identity of both protagonists fits Martha Nussbaum’s description of cosmopolitanism as “exile from the comfort of patriotism and its easy sentiments” (23). However, both characters can also be seen as ‘involuntary cosmopolites,’ as they tell of the experiences of flight, displacement, and dispossession. Thus, both works display multiple, if uneasy attachments: Boochani to his native Iran and Kurdistan, Manus Island, and Australia, as well as to intellectual traditions of cosmopolitanism and transnationalism; and Lucashenko’s protagonist moves between her rural Indigenous upbringing (the fictitious towns of Patterson and Durrongo) and urban life in Brisbane. In this way, both novels represent complex identities that draw on multiple cultural attachments and defy narrow understandings of culture, nation, and environment, implicitly making a case for the benefits of cultural diversity, migration, and what could be called cultural-environmental evolution.

As I have already indicated in Chapter 2 of this thesis, Isabelle Stengers’ notion of cosmopolitics, which suggests the immanence of human politics and the environment or the cosmos, has widened the discussion of cosmopolitanism, a link I explore in this chapter. Stengers suggests that we can no longer regard the world, globe or planet as merely a backdrop for cultural exchange; rather, the planet directs, interacts and suggests meaning and values to humans, expressing an aliveness, behaviour, and intention of its own. Boochani’s and Lucashenko’s remarkable works illustrate this interconnectedness. The authors’ active engagement within and beyond their literary works, moreover, makes it worthwhile to consider the politics arising out of their engagement inside and beyond their novels.

As both authors also use the idea of sovereignty—the indestructible sense of self-determination—more or less explicitly, I explore the texts’ employment of this idea in relation to the body, the imagination, critical intellect, and the larger ecosystem. The term ‘sovereignty’ is bound to historical and ongoing injustice and is particularly relevant for (post)colonial and settler-colonial issues regarding human and land rights. While the notion of Indigenous Australian sovereignty is central for the analysis of *Too Much Lip*, as it portrays Indigenous resistance in the face of ongoing dispossession, I argue that *No Friend* also merits consideration in these terms for two main reasons. Firstly, Australia’s Offshore Detention regime has been linked to the struggle for Indigenous land and

human rights and to the landmark legal case won by Eddie Mabo, which resulted in the Native Title legislation. Secondly, Boochani can be said to successfully assert his sovereignty in the public through his remarkable work, be it journalistic or creative, despite being imprisoned from August 2013 to November 2019.⁸⁷ 'Sovereignty' derives from the Latin *superanus*, meaning 'chief' or 'ruler,' and describes the right and power of a governing body over itself. The term sovereignty is most commonly used in politics and legal language, where it is usually referred to in the context of 'state sovereignty,' a primary organising principle of global politics, which denotes the ability to exercise control over a territory within recognised borders (Thomson). I examine the notion of sovereignty not just as a legal or political concept, but as the inherent human and eco-systemic right to flourish beyond governmental regimes. In this way, I show how the creative texts explore sovereignty as encompassing the right to self-determination regardless of legal or socio-political statuses.

The term sovereignty is especially prominent in post- or settler-colonial countries. The editors of the collection *Sovereignty: Frontiers of Possibility* (2013) argue that while European nations' sovereignty was reciprocally consecrated at Westphalia in 1648 and is mainly regarded as an achievement of violence or of violence fatigue, for many minorities, colonised or Indigenous peoples, violence is not a plausible solution (Evans et al. 2). Settler-societies have often established an "alternative sovereignty" within the same country (referring to alternative human rights standards) and actively engaged in assimilation (4). Yet sovereignty has also been claimed as a central idea for Indigenous peoples, as it indicates a state of wholeness and self-determination that was never ceded to the colonisers. In Australia, the term is used in complex ways: Indigenous Eualeyai/Kamillaroi author and lawyer Larissa Behrendt argues that, when Aboriginal people speak of 'sovereignty,' they evoke a "set of political, economic, social, and cultural aspirations" (175). Even if the idea of sovereignty may not "loom large in the minds of most people," as Wiradjuri scholar Wendy Brady suggests, sovereignty is now increasingly moving to the centre of attention in Australia (140). This seems evident in the "Uluru Statement from the Heart:" written at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention by a community of Indigenous Australians from across the nation, the

⁸⁷ Boochani was able to take up an invitation to a literary festival in New Zealand, after which he was able to receive refugee status in July 2020.

statement calls for a national representative body, and uses the word 'sovereignty' a number of times, defining it as designating spirituality as well as land ownership:

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. [...] This sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or 'mother nature,' and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty. It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown. ("Uluru Statement")

Importantly, sovereignty in Australia is also linked to the 1993 Mabo decision, to Native Title, and to human and land rights generally. The significant legal case won by Torres Strait Islander Eddie Mabo in 1992 belatedly recognised that the settler-Australian construction of *terra nullius* was false, with the consequence that Native Title legislation was generalised for the entire nation with the Native Title Act in 1993. The case had challenged the notion that "sovereignty delivered complete ownership of all land in the new Colony to the Crown, abolishing any rights that may have existed previously" ("Mabo Case"). However, many scholars have pointed out that the Mabo High Court decision both affirmed and denied sovereignty. As Geoff Rodoreda summarises: "For while the High Court acknowledged native title rights to land in Mabo, it also confirmed the British Crown's acquisition of sovereignty to Australian territory upon settlement, and declared that that claim to sovereignty could not be challenged in any Australian court" (166). Native Title therefore became a regime of limited property rights, which can be won in complicated legal procedures, but which can also be easily undone by governments. While many Aboriginal people have benefited from Native Title determinations, the majority of Aboriginal people living in Australia today were offered no compensation because most have been dispossessed of their traditional lands and because such dispossession makes proving claims and ancestry difficult, or their rights have been putatively extinguished by land grants to settlers (Rodoreda 166). In this vein, *Too Much Lip* portrays the lived experience of struggling for Indigenous legitimacy and sovereignty throughout multiple generations that have experienced various legislations.

While sovereignty has been a central term for Indigenous Australians, in this chapter, I show that sovereignty is also a productive concept for understanding the ways in which Boochani asserts his freedom—both in his fiction and through his persona. As Boochani identifies as Indigenous Kurdish on his own dispossessed lands, and as his prominent use of the word *Kyriarchy* suggests (as explained below, this concept, which is centred on the notion of sovereignty, refers to intersectional oppression), Boochani seems highly invested in the idea of sovereignty. This chapter thus explores the entanglements of refugee and Indigenous sovereignty the books purport. I argue that *No Friend* can be understood as asserting sovereignty in the form of taking the freedom to contemplate the system of oppression and resist it. In fact, it is remarkable how successfully Boochani has claimed sovereignty: although offshore prisons intend to remove refugees from public consciousness, and despite technical difficulties (his book was written on his mobile phone via WhatsApp correspondence), Boochani has been documenting human rights abuses at the detention centre since the beginning of his imprisonment and has become one of Australia's most prominent authors and journalists who has been awarded a number of important literary prizes. In 2019, the title of Honorary Associate Professor was conferred on Boochani by the University of New South Wales.

When considering both Indigenous and refugee contexts, the idea of sovereignty is, as I will show, crucial for understanding Australia's carceral logic: its history and contemporary presence of "camps." Suvendrini Perera has analysed the technologies of subordination inherent in the colonial camp which have segregated Australia's Indigenous peoples (missions, outstations, and penal settlements), as well as in the internment camp, which contains refugees and asylum seekers (detention and offshore processing centres) ("What is a Camp?"). Scholars such as Perera, Lara Palombo, and Lana Zannettino have linked the refugee camp to the settler-colonial history of racialised punishment and exclusion of certain communities from the nation. They understand the Australian refugee camp as a practice that reasserts "white diasporic sovereignty," which excludes indigenous sovereignty and controls the development of non-white diasporic sovereignties (Zannettino 1096). Similarly, Anoma Pieris has analysed the architecture of what she calls the "Pacific Carceral Archipelago" which "produces a variety of temporary environments where civil and legal rights are suspended" (255).

It is important to note the temporal co-incidence of the beginning of Australia's immigration detention policy with Mabo's landmark win: both occurred in 1992. Australia first adopted its mandatory detention policy in 1992 with bi-partisan support, which ensured that "all persons entering or remaining in the country without a valid visa are compulsorily detained" (Zannettino 1097). The legislation was varied in 1994, to strengthen the mandate for imprisonment: asylum seekers arriving in Australia without prior authorisation could now be incarcerated for up to seven years (Zannettino 1097). In 2001, following the *Tampa* affair,⁸⁸ and shaped in response to the question of how to deal with asylum seekers who are intercepted in Australian waters, the Howard government developed the so-called Pacific Solution policy, which ordered that intercepted asylum seekers would be removed to detention centres in Nauru and Papua New Guinea, where claims for refugee status would be processed (Khoo 95). Moreover, as part of the Pacific Solution, thousands of islands were excised from Australia's migration zone so that they would no longer count as Australian territory, with the consequence that asylum seekers arriving on such islands would no longer operate under the Australian legal system and be able to legitimately claim asylum (Khoo 95). While changes have been made since the introduction of the policy (mainly regarding the improvement of detention conditions and reforms for detained children) the commitment of successive governments to Nauru and Manus has been unbroken. Although it has been argued that "pro-refugee campaigns present the most sustained and powerful social movement Australia has seen in 20 years" (Sparrow), systemic change is yet to be achieved.

The temporal convergence of mandatory detention policies with the Mabo decision seems to suggest that increasingly successful claims for sovereignty by Indigenous peoples and people seeking asylum—regardless of legislation and prohibitions to arrive by boat—have posed a threat to a large section of Australian settler-society. One case in point that illustrates this link is Khoo's astute observation of the conspicuous 'post-apology' language among politicians in regard to offshore

⁸⁸ The Tampa affair refers to the 2001 incident in which the Australian government refused entry to the Norwegian freighter, MV Tampa, which had rescued a small fishing boat with 438 refugees mostly from Afghanistan. The refugees were transported to the island nation Nauru and some were later granted entry to New Zealand. The incident triggered a diplomatic dispute between Australia and Norway and political dispute in the lead up of the 2001 Australian federal election.

detention. She points out that after Kevin Rudd's Apology of 2008 to the Stolen Generations in his landmark 'Sorry speech,' Rudd repeatedly made "'no apology' for the fact that he had to make some tough decisions. [...] Since then, Rudd's political opponents have made similar statements of being 'unapologetic' for their own asylum seeker policies" (94). As comes to the fore in these conspicuous uses of language, Indigenous and refugee sovereignty seem to be linked in complex ways and are productive to explore together. Creative activist interventions in which Indigenous Australians have issued passports for detained refugees can be seen as exemplary for this link: they show not only the solidarity between these two marginalised groups, but also the interconnected legacies of colonialism for Indigenous peoples and refugees. As Indigenous South Coast Yuin man Lyle Davis puts it: "I didn't cede my sovereignty, so I don't know what gives the white Australian Government the right to say who can or can't come into this country" (Faa).

As I will show, *No Friend* and *Too Much Lip* challenge the 'carceral logic' through various means. Both texts convey that it is crucial to engage with refugees' and Indigenous' narratives because their unique perspective enables an understanding of the consequences and lived of governmental policies. Both texts, then, reveal the unique and productive insights that situated knowledge produces: it is here that theories and legislations 'live' and against which they need to be measured.

5.2 Remembering the Opposite of Oppression in Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend*

Written in seemingly impossible circumstances—typed on WhatsApp and sent to overseas translators and editors—Boochani's *No Friend* is a technical and literary achievement which can be regarded as an intervention into Australian literature. As one reviewer poignantly remarked: "This book should land like a brick through the lounge-room window of—to quote [former prime-minister] John Howard's immortal summary of Australian aspiration—the 'comfortable and relaxed'" (CG, "Behrouz Boochani"). *No Friend* won several awards, among them one of Australia's most lucrative literary prizes, the 2019 Victorian Premier's Literary Award, which has brought a socially marginalised

refugee into the centre of Australian culture and global attention. Boochani, who was formerly known for his remarkable journalism and activism from Manus Island, as well as through a documentary film based on footage he secretly filmed on his mobile phone,⁸⁹ can now be considered an Australian writer and successfully confronts Australian citizens with the tangible effects of their country's policies. In fact, Boochani repeatedly emphasises that Manus Island *is* Australia, as it is a product of Australian society, and because Australia is morally implicated in what happens in the offshore prison.

Written as a translation collaboration from Farsi to English, *No Friend* has been marketed as memoir, but also appears to have fictional elements, blending prose and poetry, and merging recognisable events—such as the 2014 Manus prison riot⁹⁰—with dream-like and stream-of-consciousness sequences. The text is framed by an affecting Foreword by the Australian writer, Richard Flanagan; an extensive multi-authored “Translator’s Tale: A Window to the Mountains,” describing the complex writing process involving various collaborators and multi-perspectivity and introducing reading guidelines; and a supplementary essay, “Translator’s Reflections,” written by Boochani’s translator, Omid Tofighian. Tofighian argues that *No Friend* has elements of magical realism (“Translator’s Tale” xxix), and what he coins as “horrific surrealism,” a term meant to indicate Boochani’s new language which fuses “reality [...] with dreams and creative ways of re-imagining the natural environment and horrific events and architecture” (“Translator’s Reflections” 367). Tofighian also points out that the book “fuses literature with political commentary and language from different scholarly discourses” (“Translator’s Tale” xxvi). Moreover, Tofighian and numerous reviewers have argued that the book defies the conventional refugee literature industry, centred around empathy, to present a more complex, generative, and political mix of embodied experience, poetic reflection, and scholarly critique of a system that criminalises refugees. Tofighian suggests that the book might better be categorised as “clandestine

⁸⁹ *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* (2017) was co-directed with Arash Kamali Sarvestani and written by Arnold Zable. It won an Audience Award at the Sydney Film Festival for Best Documentary.

⁹⁰ *The Guardian* summarises the governmental inquiry about the reasons for the riot: “Failure to properly process claims for refugee status and an overcrowded, insecure facility led to widespread frustration and two days of rioting, report says” (Doherty). During this uprising, one prison inmate, Reza Barati, was killed. At the time of the publication of *No Friend* in 2018, 12 people had lost their lives in offshore prisons (Tofighian, “Translator’s Tale” xii). Instances of self-harm still occur regularly.

philosophical literature, prison narrative, philosophical fiction, Australian dissident writing" (372); and Richard Flanagan has categorised it as "World prison literature" alongside Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died* and Martin Luther King Jr's *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (vii). Thus, with his experimental work, Boochani and his collaborators challenge the literary industry by moving beyond expectations of abjection and pity. Framed by his editors' and translator's reflections, *No Friend* reveals that the work is densely intertextual, even hypertextual, as it invites the reader to critically engage with the text beyond the first reading and to bring it to collective awareness. "This place really needs a lot of intellectual work," Boochani has said, "universities need to get involved" (xv). As *No Friend* could hardly have been published without a number of engaged collaborators outside Manus prison, it seems fair to say the book is the product of literary activism. It is here that the evocative title, *No Friend but the Mountains*, a Kurdish saying which is also present in documentary films,⁹¹ seems paradoxical: quite to the contrary, Boochani has made many friends far beyond the mountains.

The first five chapters of *No Friend* portray the protagonist's journey to Manus Island, the off-shore prison centre set-up by the Australian government in 2001. Starting with the clandestine truck drive to the shore of Kendari, Indonesia, the protagonist (from here on referred to as 'Behrouz,' as separate from 'Boochani,' the author)⁹² embarks on a boat journey towards Australia. The journey of the group of refugees on a small vessel venturing out on the perilous ocean eventually ends abruptly when the boat is caught in a storm and breaks, which results in the near-drowning of all, and the death of a child. Fortunately, a British cargo ship is able to rescue the group and eventually contacts the Australian Navy. With the arrival of the navy boat, all refugees are transported to Christmas Island, Australia, where they remain imprisoned for a month and are given the 'option' of returning (no one does), before signing the "voluntary deportation form" for Manus Island.⁹³ The subsequent chapters, and the majority of the book, focus on the

⁹¹ There are two documentary films about the situation of Kurds bearing this title: *Good Kurds, Bad Kurds: No Friends But the Mountains* (2000), directed by Kevin McKiernan and *No Friend but the Mountains* (2017), directed by Kae Bahar and Claudio von Planta.

⁹² Even though the book was marketed as autobiography, the fictional and creative components of this book compel me to distance Boochani from his protagonist Behrouz, so that the following analysis avoids the reduction of the book to 'merely' Boochani's autobiographical experience.

⁹³ Under Australian law, it is the mode of travel, not the reason for flight, that determines whether one is allowed to seek asylum or not. This policy was established in 2013 under the Abbott government and is commonly known as the 'Stop the Boats' policy.

experience of imprisonment on Manus Island, where the group of prisoners is among the first to arrive shortly after the establishment of the prison (presumably around 2012). These chapters portray the many years Behrouz experiences in Manus prison, richly painting a picture of, on the one hand, the extremely degrading living conditions, with the preclusion of privacy (even in the bathroom); insufficient food; oppressive heat and insects; the violence of Australian prison guards; solitary confinement; self-harm; insufficient medical treatment; and deaths of prisoners. However, the book also emphasises the resilience and creativity of prisoners through portrayals of community and “brotherhood” (the prison system separates men from women), improvised games and entertainment, and organised resistance. Moreover, *No Friend* is preoccupied with the unexpected beauty of the island, as the prison is surrounded by what Behrouz calls “jungle,” lush vegetation, the ocean, stars, and animals like the native Chauka bird, crabs, or cats. Horrifically violent experiences often clash with the beauty of the surroundings that Behrouz continuously contemplates. *No Friend* therefore portrays and critiques the logic of Australia’s prison system, while reflecting on the importance of beauty, the imagination, and mystery, drawn from the embodied experience of being on Manus Island. In fact, Tofighian has notes that Boochani is “adamant that had the refugees not established a relationship of respect with the environment and animals the oppressive force of the prison would have killed them a long time ago; nature works with the prisoners to combat the system” (“Translator’s Tale” xxiv). I will return to this statement throughout the discussion of the sense of ‘cosmos’ that, as I argue, Boochani puts forward.

The next section analyses the mechanics of the Kyriarchy, which are portrayed to contrast with the workings of the ‘cosmos.’ As I will argue, the cosmos acts as an alternative system of external truth and order, giving stability and sanity in the face of a violent and ‘artificial’ system of oppression. I suggest that Boochani’s reflections on the Kyriarchy de-naturalise the violence of Australia’s “prison logic” and manage to name an oppressive system that might otherwise have remained impalpable—“a faceless totality” (McHugh-Dillon). In this way, *No Friend* offers tools not only to survive, but also to resist—inside and outside the prison.

Kyriarchy vs. Cosmos

After Behrouz reaches Manus prison, he is preoccupied with making sense of the prison system. Throughout the book, it becomes increasingly clear to him that the prison can be described as a systematically designed method of oppression with a clear purpose and logic—even if arbitrariness, opacity, and unpredictability are part of its mechanics. Before one even learns about Behrouz’s biography (for example, the reasons for his flight are only indicated on page 261), observations about this system, and contemplations on what it contrasts with, abound. In an interview, Boochani has stated that his main aim in writing the book was to “create new language and concepts to dismantle the system.”⁹⁴ Eventually, on page 124, after many deliberations on the qualities and effects on people entrapped by this system, it is named as the Kyriarchy:

The developments over the months slowly but surely prove to everyone that the principle of The Kyriarchal System governing the prison is to turn the prisoners against each other and to ingrain even deeper hatred between people. [...] We are a bunch of ordinary humans locked up simply for seeking refuge. In this context, the prison’s greatest achievement might be the manipulation of feelings of hatred between one another. (124)

A footnote informs the reader about the origin of the term ‘kyriarchy:’ coined in 1992 by feminist theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, the theory describes “interconnected social systems established for the purposes of domination, oppression and submission” (124). Tofighian further explains that “we have applied this term for the purposes of labelling the complex structure underlying Australia’s detention regime. The technique of capitalising the phrase is employed to personalise the system and give the impression that it exercises agency” (124). The system has the aim of producing suffering, as Behrouz observes: “What is important from the perspective of The Kyriarchal System is that I endure affliction” (311).

From this point on, the term ‘Kyriarchy’ is repeatedly used in the book, though its etymology is not explained further. In the context of sovereignty, however, this idea

⁹⁴ Personal correspondence at the event “Re-treating Literature and Politics through *No Friend but the Mountains*” (Monash University, 2019), in which audience members were able to ask Boochani questions through a WhatsApp call.

merits attention. Kyriarchy comes from old Greek, combining Lord/master (*kyrios*), with governing (*archo*), therefore referring to the governance of a master. However, in modern Greek, the term is used for 'sovereignty,' thus signifying a semantic shift over time from the rulership of an external master to the *internal* ability to govern oneself. In coining the term, Schüssler Fiorenza emphasises intersectional forms of oppression: Kyriarchy describes a "complex pyramidal system" with those on the bottom of the pyramid experiencing the "full power of Kyriarchal oppression [...]. To maintain this system, Kyriarchy relies on the creation of a servant class, race, gender, or people" (*Prejudice* 14). Tofighian explains that the concept was chosen as a translation from the Farsi *system-e hakem*, meaning "'oppressive system,' 'ruling system,' 'system of governmentality,' or 'sovereign system'" ("Translator's Tale" xxvii). The act of naming this oppressive system is crucial here: "Naming has special aesthetic interpretative and political function in the book" (Tofighian, "Translator's Tale" xxvi). Therefore, the oddness of the word Kyriarchy—it is neither widespread in common nor in academic use—seems to have the effect of othering the system of oppression, making it stand out as a bizarre, sadistic artifice, or a "game"—as Behrouz frequently refers to it—that prisoners have to learn in order to survive (125). The act of naming it 'Kyriarchy,' then, de-naturalises and de-mystifies what may seem like an otherwise overwhelming totality.

The Kyriarchy is represented as encompassing intersectional systems that have been institutionalised and operate on many different scales, or, as Behrouz describes it, as "micro-control and macro-control governmentality" (209). It first appears as forceful acts of violence (deportation, entrapment, deprivation), but, through its mechanisms, it is gradually internalised by prisoners (through conflicts and mistrust with each other, and a fall back to nationalism). While Australian staff appear as the cruellest, or the most "lost" to the system (314), the local Manus people employed (called "Papu" by the prisoners),⁹⁵ sit somewhat on the fence, as they "have little care for maintaining orders by following the prison's rules and militarized logic" (144). The Papu are underpaid, especially in comparison to their Australian colleagues, so that Behrouz remarks that they are even more "encouraged to ignore the rules of the prison" (145). Thus, while

⁹⁵ As a footnote in the book explains: "'Papu' is an age-neutral honorific for males particular to Manus Island. Refugees incarcerated in Manus Prison use the term in a gender-neutral way to refer to all locals" (147).

the purpose of this system was clearly designed and manufactured—the aim is to take away the human rights, sovereignty, and agency of people seeking asylum—the system can also be reproduced by oppressed people. If not resisted, the Kyriarchy replicates itself and transcends the power of any one individual, and then it “confines the mind of the prisoner” and becomes a “spirit” of its own (208).

Moreover, the Kyriarchy works through the coupling of arbitrariness and opacity with strict rules. One example is the food-deprivation Behrouz describes: food is theoretically served three times a day, but often a meal has “run out,” or, at other times, “treats” become randomly available (204). Behrouz describes these volatile acts of ‘generosity’ enacted by cooks that occasionally provide milk for every prisoner:

He pours out some milk, lifts the cup, takes a really close look at it, and, if he concludes that the amount he has poured is below the level that The Kyriarchal System has determined as exactly right, then he will add a few extra drops. The cooks have become so skilful that they usually fill exactly half the cup in one go. If it so happens that a cook miscalculates and the milk exceeds half a cup, he puts the cup of milk aside and prepares another with more precision. [...] There is a stupidity in this practice, and by the end of breakfast the few cups of milk that are filled a little over halfway accumulate at the side of the counter. At the end of the shift the cook throws out all the spoiled milk. (204-205)

Behrouz illustrates that this logic the prisoners try to constantly fathom suddenly collapses when at other times, a full cup, or a quarter cup is poured—for no apparent reason. “A recipe for torment,” observes Behrouz, “long nights of starvation, hungry stomachs, empty guts, and the multifaceted, twisted interaction with the cooks as they serve milk, fruit juice and the various foods. Even the most shrewd prisoners are incapable of unravelling these entanglements” (207).

At other times, Behrouz describes the system’s opaque logic through harsher scenes, for instance when a prisoner is denied the possibility of speaking to his dying father on the phone for no given reason other than it is “against the rules,” with disastrous consequences for the prisoner’s mental health (225). As Behrouz reveals, then, the prison system is partially successful in inflicting hopelessness and harm on the prisoner’s psyche: through ubiquitous control (not even the toilet block is free from cameras), it aims to couple the loss of freedom with the loss of dignity. In its harshest consequence, the Kyriarchy’s “appetite for spawning violence” (305) is revealed in

scenes of self-harm, which occur repeatedly. As Behrouz puts it, deprivation of necessary resources “drives prisoners to extreme distrust so that they become lonelier and more isolated, until the prison’s Kyriarchal Logic triumphs with their collapse and demise” (126).

By portraying techniques of manipulating and exploiting the body, intentional opacity, and the fact that prisoners are constantly put in the position of making sense of these techniques, Behrouz explains how prisoners become “critical theorists” who attempt to unlock the logic of the Kyriarchy (208):

Every prisoner is convinced that they or their group are the critical theorists of *the* systemic foundation, the chief analysts of the system’s architecture. But the greatest difficulty is that no-one can be held accountable, no-one can be forced up against the wall and questioned, no-one can be interrogated by asking them, ‘You bastard, what is the philosophy behind these rules and regulations? Why, according to what logic, did you create these rules and regulations? Who are you?’ (209)

The system therefore has the purpose of preoccupying minds through its twisted logic. As it remains impervious to prisoners, the Kyriarchy gives “you the sense you don’t understand and can’t rebel” (210). Similar to Hannah Arendt’s observations about the banality of evil in the systems of the Third Reich,⁹⁶ the rules and regulations are upheld through bureaucratic and hierarchal thought patterns: “No person who is a part of the system can ever provide an answer—neither the officers nor the other employees working in the prison. All they can say is, ‘I’m sorry, I’m just following orders’” (209). Prisoners continuously ask themselves who is to be held responsible; yet the system achieves its aim of obscuring personal accountability and fosters unpredictability.

While Behrouz is unflinching in his portrayal of the harmful effects of the system, however, the book is equally adamant that resistance to the system is strong and that many prisoners manage to keep alive the sense that there is an alternative to this system. This alternative is presented as the ability to maintain kindness, joy, and resistance. Throughout *No Friend*, then, an alternative ‘system’ to the Kyriarchy is continuously conveyed, although not named. While this alternative remains slippery, I suggest one could call it ‘cosmic,’ as it describes elemental forces that Behrouz locates

⁹⁶ See: Hannah Arendt. *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963). Various editions.

in “nature” and in people (236). In fact, Behrouz constantly reflects on the more-than-human world, the imagination, dreams, and the body in a wider ecosystem, which suggests that refugees belong to something larger. This implicit counter-idea to the Kyriarchy establishes the opposite to the insatiable level of violence obsessed with generating suffering. In this sense, the Kyriarchy sharply contrasts with the cosmic: Kyriarchy is an “abstract idea;” (xxvii) that represses interconnectedness; and a system that establishes a “savage law” (50). The text’s employment of words like ‘savage’ for the prison-industrial complex also inverts the stereotypes of natural/wild/primitive equalling ‘savage.’ For Behrouz, this savagery stands for the artificiality of the Kyriarchy. By contrast, the cosmic is implicitly portrayed as a given eco-systemic order, and an essential element of human consciousness that gives perspective and distance beyond the Kyriarchy, helping the incarcerated people survive the futile “game.”

In its most straightforward sense, this sense of the cosmic is continually conveyed through Behrouz’s contemplations of the ocean, sky and the prison’s lush surroundings. After having been rescued by a Navy ship, Behrouz observes in verse:

Following days of hardship, it is like a dream/ Night descends, bringing
bright skies that contrast the darkness of the previous night/
Serene/Gracious/ The moon is more beautiful than before/ It has nestled
within the embrace of the sky/ It is watching over us/ There is no trace
left of that deranged moon, that brutal moon/ [...] Everything is calm/
Everything in its rightful place/ Perhaps the sky/ Perhaps the moon/
Perhaps the stars know that it is no longer necessary to inflict violence
upon us [...] They know that they have to transform into beauty, into
benevolence/ They must reflect our thoughts/ Our thoughts full of
dreams and excitement/ All over the deck of that warship sit human
beings/ They are human beings who still wear the scars of dying/ The
scars from when death clawed at their faces. (64)

The cosmic is here described as ambiguous: on the one hand, it has a will of its own and acts independently of human experiences. On the other, it reflects and echoes the refugees’ experiences in complex ways, putting memory into place and bringing calmness to enable reflection on experience. In other words, the cosmos is here described as both transcending human lives *and* as reacting to human experience, which evokes my earlier discussion of the cosmic as having a double dimension that encompasses the transcultural *and* the culturally specific. Behrouz seems comforted by

this double position the cosmos seems to express, it being a stable entity beyond humans who wear “the scars of dying” *and* mirroring the refugees’ experience of survival: “Everything is calm/ Everything in its rightful place.” The point here is not to suggest that Behrouz constructs elemental forces as benevolent and benign only; on the contrary, elemental forces are sometimes shown to test people, like the ocean which puts Behrouz “on trial” and expresses indifference about who survives and who does not (71). Rather, the point is to show that despite physical entrapment, Behrouz engages with a sense of ‘cosmos’ intellectually, emotionally and spiritually, finding a freedom in its rhythms, order, and expressions that contrasts with the arbitrariness of the prison logic. These rhythms of elemental forces are represented to contain a kind of external order (as discussed in Chapter 2, the notion of external order is also something that philosophers of cosmos have pointed to). This is not to suggest that Behrouz necessarily conveys belief in a ‘higher power’—for example, the futility and “absurdity” of the easy possibility of dying on the open ocean seems, paradoxically, to drive him and give him courage (30-31). Instead, what emerges throughout *No Friend but the Mountains* is a two-fold sense of the cosmic: firstly, it serves as a kind of external order, stability, or sanity, indicating an order that exists beyond and despite human suffering; and secondly, the cosmos is contemplated through observing beauty, joy, belonging, and benevolence.

While on the open ocean in the refugee boat, Behrouz remarks that geographical location is unreliable, but that the sky gives orientation:

Maybe we have done nothing but travel in circles while remaining adjacent to the Indonesian shore. [...] But during this journey I have seen the moon rise on both the left and right side of the sky. When on the high seas, one is ignorant of geographical location. It has no meaning out there. The eye is too preoccupied with water, water, water. [...] Only the sky is reliable; one can trust the sky, the fixed stars, trust the position of the moon. [...] The truth-telling of the moon, its magical brightness, provokes in me the fear of having gone astray, of displacement. But the truth has another face, a form of comfort, something to be found beneath the surface of terror. (60-61)

Despite the harsh news the “truth-telling of the moon” might bring, it also brings a sense of sanity, a firmness to hold onto in the face of terror. Another pertinent example of the centrality of this alternative cosmological system can be found in the book’s title—*No*

Friend but The Mountains—which refers to the Kurdish mountains and the “songs of resistance sung there” (Coetzee), but could also be read as evoking the Romanticist legacy of the more-than-human world as a source of consolation.

While the evocation of the cosmic is ubiquitous in the book, it is also enigmatic, as Behrouz’s many poems suggest. Behrouz suggests that the ‘cosmic’ gives prisoners “subconscious” knowledge, while maintaining the creative potential of mystery: “Maybe there is also a form of interaction taking shape, a connection between something internal and profound in my unconscious and the totality of the landscape. An unconscious potential full of unattainable and distant images” (257). Thus, the exact aims and meanings of the ‘cosmic’ remain hard to pin down, as mystery seems to be one of its essential components.

More palpable, however, is the effect of beauty on Behrouz and other prisoners (which is part of the original meaning of the word ‘cosmos’). As already mentioned, Boochani has described Manus Prison as “the most beautiful prison in the world” that has helped the prisoners survive.⁹⁷ To be sure, Behrouz refers to the surrounding, not the “soul-destroying” prison itself (110). When he first sees Manus Island from the airplane, it appears pristine: “Manus is beautiful. It looks nothing like the island hell that they tried to scare us with” (101). Later, it is especially aspects of the lush vegetation, the “jungle” penetrating into the prison, in which prisoners find comfort (110):

Beside the large water tanks is a massive metal tunnel, which looks more like a chicken coop. Between that metal tunnel and the water tanks is a pristine and cosy area, like a magnificent garden, with yellow and red flowers as solace for the eyes. A strip of wood from a coconut tree has fallen there, and long flowers that resemble chamomile have grown around it. I sit there on that strip of tree, sit there among the flowers. I feel full of life. [...] We can find comfort that we are in the company of the sea every day. (101)

The thriving of the “jungle” and the proximity to the ocean is not only a comfort to Behrouz, but also a reminder of freedom: “The tall coconut trees that line the outskirts of the camp have grown in rows/ But unlike us, they are free/ Their grand height allows them to peep into the camp at all times/ To know what is going on in the camp” (112).

⁹⁷ Quote from Tofighian, during the event “Re-treating Literature and Politics through *No Friend but the Mountains*” (Monash University, May 2019)

Moreover, the “jungle” also confronts the prisoners with abundance and joy, as evinced with a majestic mango tree, which challenges fences and is beloved among prisoners for its lush fruit:

Right there, right by the fences, a mango tree with the most magnificent trunk grows straight up. This tree challenges the prison fences. [...] When one experiences the sight of such a tree, joy takes hold, joy from a tree overflowing with goodness, joy from the abundance of its blessings. [...] Without a doubt, the feeling that transfixes the hungry prisoners is something that transcends the experience of simply gazing on its beauty. [...] A tranquillity emanates out of its very essence. It is a symbol of the majesty of nature, a grand power that reaches through to the depths of the prison. (236)

Here, Behrouz draws attention to the fact that the beauty and abundance of the tree have an effect far beyond being soothing and comforting: the abundance serves as a reminder of the innate ‘goodness’ of the cosmos, therefore, presenting a “power” that puts the pettiness and scarcity-logic of the Kyriarchy into perspective.

Although Behrouz calls this transcendent power “nature,” (236) this power of generosity and abundance is not just described as being upheld by the nonhuman; it is also maintained by certain people, conveying the idea that people are not separate from ‘nature’ but reciprocal with it—an idea that is inherent in the notion of cosmos. One such person is a fellow Kurd, Reza Barati, called “The Gentle Giant” by other prisoners. His authoritative and generous presence has a strong influence on the community: “In contrast with many others, when The Giant gets hold of some fruit he offers it to others without expectations, a gesture of courtesy in the manner of a child, with all the emotion that colours the world of children. [...] When people don’t have the capacity to comprehend noble behaviour they become haunted with despair and confusion” (240). Similarly, a strong feminine figure Behrouz names Golshifteh,⁹⁸ who shares the perilous boat journey with Behrouz, instils strength, generosity, and positive energy within fellow refugees. While fiercely protective of her two children if necessary, Golshifteh is also generous, loving, and gracious towards all other passengers by taking on the role of distributing water and food fairly among the refugee group (67). “The power of Our Golshifteh is a unique form of glory and royalty; she is a representative of our

⁹⁸ This character is named after the famous Iranian actress Golshifteh Farahani (47).

community worthy of standing up to those emotionless and formal soldiers” (67). Similar to the abundance of the mango tree, Golshifteh’s presence disrupts the scarcity economics imposed by the Kyriarchy, giving dignity and strength to all other refugees, and serving as a reminder of humanity’s potential. In fact, Behrouz repeatedly invokes Goddess-like mythical feminine figures (e.g. 129), casting femininity as a much-needed element of kindness and strength that he has become more acutely aware of in the experience of the removal of women from his life. Through many such contemplations of the ‘feminine,’ then, the book also shows the workings of the Kyriarchy as including the imposition of gender violence.

Moreover, the character Behrouz names “Maysam the Whore” becomes famous for cultivating the opposite of suffering through the pursuit of pleasure and playfulness.⁹⁹ Being extraordinarily skilful and funny, Maysam the Whore and his friends entertain the others: “Like professional circus performers, or the sidekicks of a street theatre troupe, accompanied by clapping and eccentric but sometimes comedic antics, they invite everyone” (134). After a dance performance, Maysam proclaims: “‘Because we are incarcerated men and there are no women in this prison, from this moment on I hereby ordain gay sex completely permissible.’ This sentence hits like a typhoon and the scene erupts with laughter and cheer” (140). Behrouz remarks that “[t]hese celebrations are a form of resistance that says, ‘It’s true that we are imprisoned without charge and have been exiled, but look here, you bastards...look at how happy and cheerful we are’” (136). In this way, *No Friend* conveys that in the sense of ‘cosmic’ joy, benevolence, and humour lies a freedom the Kyriarchy cannot destroy.

The book’s notion of cosmos also conjures up the importance of belonging, a feeling of being part of a larger eco-systemic collective that serves as a counter-force to severed belonging. This sense of belonging might be called ‘placefulness,’ as it counters the Kyriarchy’s over-emphasis of what Perera has called “dis-placement” and dispossession that runs the risk of defining refugees through a pitiful lens only (*Australia* 6). As Behrouz’s frequent use of the word ‘ecosystem’ suggests, therefore, *No Friend* conveys that every constituent has its rightful place in the cosmos, serves a purpose, and nothing and nobody goes to waste. This is contrasted with the Kyriarchy, which

⁹⁹ In this context, Boochani and Maysam seem to use this otherwise derogatory term, ‘whore,’ as the embracing of a sexual identity, a kind of self-appropriation of the term, rather than an insult.

treats the prisoner as waste, as a “defenceless piece of meat [...], subjecting it to the system until what is left is thrown away” (303). Behrouz’s observations here conjure up the term ‘throw-away-culture’ in relation to the treatment of people seeking refuge—a link that has been drawn by anthropologist Ghassan Hage, who noticed that Australian politicians often employ a language in relation to refugees that conjures up ‘waste’ that cannot be recycled. Hage observes the conspicuous use of language among Australian politicians: “I was struck by the uncanny resemblance in the language used by the Australian government when it was dealing with refugee boats heading towards the Australian coast and the language used to refer to oceanic waste. More precisely, the way the government spoke of the people smugglers who ‘dumped’ refugees in the oceans was very similar to the language used to speak of people illegally dumping toxic waste” (Hage).¹⁰⁰ By contrast, the “diversity of the Manusian ecosystem” (295) is described to help prisoners recall that they belong and are inherently free, a sense that is strengthened in reciprocity with the environment:

Standing face to face with the awe of the boundless heavens/ The
freedom of standing face to face with the stars/ The freedom of standing
face to face with the immensity of the ocean/ The freedom of standing
face to face with the splendour of the jungle/ The freedom of the
dignified coconut trees. (299)

The contemplation of the cosmic here helps prisoners “become indifferent to the mercilessness of prison” (299). In this way, in many such instances in the book, the confrontation with beauty, abundance, and benevolence provokes the opposite effects that the Kyriarchy has on prisoners: it generates the capacity for kindness, joy, and generosity that serves as a reminder of an external order, freedom, belonging, and sovereignty of all living things that enables creativity and resistance. To summarise, it is fair to say that the novel’s evocation of the cosmic is more than a romanticist legacy: it is presented as a necessity for survival that generates perspective, knowledge, and vision despite physical entrapment. The next section further investigates belonging, custodianship and sovereignty.

¹⁰⁰ See Hage’s book: *Is Racism an Environmental Threat?* Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2017.

Cosmopolitical Ethics of Care

Before returning to Boochani and his claims for sovereignty, it is important to mention that Behrouz describes different kinds of resistances and assertions of sovereignty aside from his own that are gathered in *No Friend*. One night, Behrouz climbs on top of the roof for some air and solitude, and happens to witness a strange scene in which a nearly naked prisoner he names “The Prophet” has a confrontation with a Papu prison guard for unknown reasons. The Prophet makes strange animal-like noises and poses, bellowing “like a leopard,” taking the form of a dog, or raising “his right leg up as high as it can possibly go [above the head], then bash[ing] it down against the ground” (272). When more prison guards appear, The Prophet manages to climb on a coconut tree and yells:

We are all human beings. Humans caring for other humans. This is the righteous path. And this is the affliction of humankind. Humans caring for humans. Humans against incarceration. Not humans antagonising humans. And not even humans against this very coconut tree. This coconut tree is also a human being. This coconut tree is my beloved. Is it not the case that the wicked among us killed my wife? However, this coconut tree tonight ascends into the abyss of the starless heavens, this coconut tree embodies the soul of my wife. Yes. My companions. *Humans caring for humans, and not humans antagonising humans*. [...] I welcome you to acknowledge this. (276)

Observing this affecting scene, Behrouz remarks: “This prisoner is incredible, what an extraordinary being. He is unbelievable. Looking at his ribs just moments ago I felt a strange sense of pity and revulsion, but now I am stunned by the frighteningly formidable being that has emerged” (272). Behrouz describes how affecting The Prophet’s behaviour is for the Papu prison guard: “Without a doubt his Papu state of mind is searching to answer the question: what the hell is this phenomenon? And he is wondering about the source of this man’s power, wondering which muscles, wondering about the nature of those muscles” (273). Here, Behrouz suggests that the magnificence of The Prophet’s movements and words have unsettlingly strong effects on the guards, disrupting the everyday functionality and normality of the incarceration business. This scene conveys Boochani’s complex role as a writer, witness, and activist, who gathers a

number of different creative resistance acts that collectively shape the notion of 'refugee sovereignty.'

As is suggested in the name of 'The Prophet,' *No Friend* explores epistemic privilege amongst physical disadvantage and degradation. The figure of 'The Prophet' evokes prisoners as guardians of a clairvoyant perspective that is continuously established against the danger of ignorance. This epistemic privilege is described by Tofighian in his supplementary essay to *No Friend* with the notion of 'double consciousness,' borrowed from W.E.B. Du Bois, as coined in his work *Souls of Black Folk* (1903). With reference to the African American psychological challenge of always looking at one's self through the eyes of a racist society and "measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity," 'double consciousness' describes the internal conflict experienced by subordinated groups in an oppressive society (Du Bois 2). Du Bois argued that African Americans can hold a kind of "meta-perspective," or the potential for second-sight, who may see through the "misconceptions, manipulations and machinations of white communities in America and acquire an epistemically privileged position" (Tofighian, "Behrouz Boochani" 538). As is suggested by Du Bois, then, the culture of the oppressors is disadvantaged and 'blinded' by privilege to socio-political structures. Du Bois' modification of Plato's Allegory of the Cave (Du Bois uses the allegory of the veil) inspires a renewed retelling by Tofighian, who, in his appendix to *No Friend*, writes a short philosophical narrative describing two islands, one of which holds people as prisoners, and one in which "the mind is free to know and create" (359). Surprisingly, Tofighian then reveals that "the first island is the settler-colonial state called Australia, and the prisoners are the settlers. The second island contains Manus Prison, and knowledge resides there with the incarcerated refugees" (359). With this retelling, Tofighian proposes that refugees can hold a unique perspective, vision, and creativity that serves all of Australian society. By witnessing and writing about the resistance of The Prophet, Boochani thus implicitly also posits the writer-figure as a clairvoyant witness, truth-teller, and activist for social justice.

The idea of epistemic privilege among disadvantaged people is also evoked in Stengers' notion of 'cosmopolitics.' As discussed in Chapter 2, Stengers proposes that the sense of a cosmos fosters a kind of level playing field: because there is "no

representative of the cosmos,” the cosmos acts as an “operator of equalisation” (“Cosmopolitical Proposal” 995). As Stengers writes:

Cosmos, meaning a “cosmic order” can protect us from an “entrepreneurial” version of politics, giving voice only to the clearly-defined interests that have the means to mutually counterbalance one another, we now see that politics can protect us from a misanthropic cosmos, one that directly communicates with an “honest” or “sane” reality, as opposed to artifices, hesitations, divergences, excessiveness, conflicts, all associated with human disorders. (1000)

Here, Stengers suggests that an eco-systemic order conveys the existence of an external order outside of human ‘chaos,’ which can act as a kind of “honest” or “sane” reality. “The world order is therefore not an argument,” Stengers writes, “it is what confers on the participants a role that ‘de-psychologises’ them, that causes them to appear not as ‘owners’ of their opinions but as authorised to attest to the fact that the world has an order” (1000). Stengers concludes that there is no detached knowledge, as all relevant knowledge is formed in the context of a planetary eco-systemic order, so that the question emerges of how we can include the voices of the “victims of the commons” in politics (1002). Cosmopolitics, then, takes on the issue of incorporating and representing the vulnerable constituents of a ‘cosmos’ (996). Similarly, in *No Friend*, Behrouz’s and fellow prisoners’ ideas of a ‘good commons’—an alternative cosmic order—is continuously conveyed to be built on beauty, kindness, tenderness, and care as powerful antidotes to the Kyriarchy. As a whole, then, *No Friend* testifies to the political need to bring refugees’ voices into the centre of attention, conveying that their clairvoyance is crucial for transforming society and politics.

Beyond epistemic privilege of humans, however, Boochani also draws attention to the sovereignty of the more-than-human world. In a personal essay in *The Guardian*, “‘The man who loves ducks:’ the refugee saving animals on Manus,” (2017) Boochani illustrates how some prisoners extend the ethics of kindness and care—the opposite of the Kyriarchy—to animals. Boochani describes the remarkable presence of Mansour Shoushtari, a 43-year old former animal rights activist from Iran, who “conflicts with the prison in fundamental ways,” as he continued to care for animals around the prison:

At sunset he puts the leftover food from the dining area onto a plastic dish and gives it to the crabs that live underneath the containers and tents. When I asked him why he feels obliged to feed the crabs he gave me a look that made me feel embarrassed for questioning him. He said: "The crabs have been living here on this island for ages – they were here before the prison was built. However, by constructing this prison we humans have violated their territory. They have every right to eat our food." ("The Man")

Boochani goes on to describe how Shoushtari has been feeding stray dogs from behind the fences and even took care of a malnourished dog inside the prison. When Boochani asks Shoushtari why he cares for animals, he answers: "It's love. In my opinion one does not need to give reasons for love. Love is a personal matter, love is an existential state. But in my view if a human being does not love animals they are incapable of loving human beings" ("The Man"). As Boochani reports, Shoushtari is an important personality for both prisoners and prison guards: "Getting to know Shoushtari has been a blessing and inspiration. For the short time I was in his presence I forgot about all the violence and hardship associated with this prison; my love for life increased after I spent time with him" ("The Man"). As Shoushtari suggests, love and care are so existential and inherent to life that he seems to find it trivial to articulate these values as particularly special. Importantly, then, Boochani presents multiple forms of sovereignties, including the sovereignty of animals and human acts of care for people, animals, and places. As these acts go beyond care for humans, they could also be termed 'sovereign acts of custodianship.' This echoes the kind of cosmopolitan custodianship that Indigenous Australian author Alexis Wright conjures up in her essay "We all smell the smoke, we all feel the heat: This environmental crisis is global" (2019). Although not explicitly using the term 'custodianship,' Wright speaks of the importance of "speaking kindly" and "gently" to particular places, concluding: "We would do well to see the world as a sacred site that is holy, speak to our planet with kindness, and protect it as such" ("We all"). Wright here conveys Indigenous traditions of care: speaking "gently" to places and taking care of "relatives," ("the rivers and mountains, the animals, birds and the natural world") are all associated with Indigenous traditions of custodianship. And yet Wright also speaks of the importance of conceptualising a transcultural ethics of place—something that, I argue, could also be described with the notion of cosmopolitics.

The need for a transnational cosmopolitical conception of place ethics is also the subject of Rob Nixon's essay "Environmentalism and Postcolonialism," in which he considers the contribution of postcolonial thinkers to have widened an ethics of place. In his analysis, Nixon quotes Paul Gilroy's discomfort with Raymond Williams's ideas of "rooted settlement" and "natural communities," as developed in his seminal work *The Country and the City* (1973). For Gilroy, Williams's implied "eco-parochialism" is dangerous because it runs the risk of reproducing racial constructions of 'original' communities and places (200). As Nixon writes: "Gilroy's unease with the implications of Williams's remarks dramatizes the need for us to recuperate, imaginatively and politically, experiences of hybridity, displacement, and transnational memory for any viable spatial ethic" (200). Similarly, *No Friend* conveys the importance of centralising marginalised experiences of hybridity, displacement, and transnationalism for socio-economic-political systems in and beyond Kurdistan, Iran, Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, and, especially, Australia. As shown through the repeated descriptions of prisoners as "critical theorists" that attempt to unlock the logic of the Kyriarchy (209), a cosmopolitical custodianship can also be understood as performing the intellectual labour of carefully contemplating and resisting the Kyriarchy. In this way, *No Friend* describes custodianship and sovereignty to be based on situated knowledge of one or multiple places, as well as on the reciprocity of the physical cosmos with the human imagination.

Conclusion

As argued in this analysis of *No Friend*, Boochani proposes a holistic understanding of human rights and the rights to belong to one, or multiple, places. This is revealed through the prisoners' contemplation of their physical environment, which continuously conveys human situatedness in ecosystems. Behrouz's cosmos is marked by a two-fold sense: firstly, it acts as a kind of external truth and order, giving stability and sanity in the face of violent and 'artificial' human systems created to dominate and exploit others; secondly, the experience of beauty, abundance, and grace instils the capacity for survival, joy, and care in prisoners. The cosmic thus has the effect of restoring what I

have called a ‘placefulness’ in prisoners—the sense of sovereignty and inherent belonging despite and beyond a system that treats certain people as ‘placeless,’ as ‘waste.’ In this way, Boochani is able to uphold the opposite of oppression: a sense of freedom and self-determination amidst a vivid ecosystem.

Furthermore, I have argued that the book depicts a cosmopolitical perspective which comprises not only the sense of a physical ‘cosmos,’ but also the notion of a cosmopolitan custodianship—the right to care for multiple places. This cosmopolitics proposes that situated knowledge holds unique insights into any given ecosystem; yet it can also be upheld by the displaced and marginalised. In this way, I have argued that *No Friend* explores epistemic privilege amongst physical disadvantage and degradation. Far beyond pity, then, *No Friend* suggests that it is crucial to engage with refugees’ narratives because their unique perspectives enable an understanding of the consequences of policies and, thus, articulate a strongly political proposition for the human right to belong—regardless of migration and flight. The notion of prisoners as cosmopolitical guardians is continuously established against the danger of ignorance, and evoked as a power that productively unsettles Australia’s ongoing ‘white diasporic sovereignty.’ Therefore, *No Friend* suggests that paying attention to refugees’ perspectives is crucial for generating societal change and, ultimately, for transforming politics and ecologies. Boochani’s work, then, is a testimony for a strongly political ethics of care, with the writer-figure as a powerful witness and custodian.

5.3 Cosmological Understandings of Social Justice in Melissa Lucashenko’s *Too Much Lip*

Too Much Lip is Melissa Lucashenko’s sixth novel and the winner of Australia’s most prestigious prize, the 2019 Miles Franklin award. At the centre of the novel is Kerry Salter, who arrives at her family home, after having been gone for a long time, in the fictitious Durrongo (Southern Queensland) on a stolen Harley motorbike, with \$30,000 stolen cash from a bank robbery. Lucashenko intended to write Kerry as a rebel, outlaw, and heroic Black figure (“Miles Franklin Shortlist”); and indeed, her energetic and funny character immediately comes alive in the reader’s mind and fuels the pace of the novel:

“Kerry resisted the urge to elevate both middle fingers as she rode past the astounded locals, past the produce store” (6). As this quotation conveys, *Too Much Lip* deploys what Lucashenko has called a “hillbilly sensibility:” “I really strongly wanted to pen a high-energy antidote to the deathly depression which it’s easy for us to slide into in this racist, heterosexist country” (“Q&A”). The novel is centred around anger; nearly every character is angry, down to the small dog, Elvis, about whom Kerry’s brother, Ken, says: “‘He’s got anger issues.’ ‘Show me someone who don’t, brah, and I’ll lick their crack for em,’ Kerry joked” (12). But *Too Much Lip* also goes beyond anger: Lucashenko, who was partly inspired to write the book through her work with criminalised, incarcerated women, has said that she aimed to convey the heightened wit, emotions, and humour she experienced with these women (*The Book Show*). This is expressed in one of Kerry’s observations: “For the straight world, crime was a problem or an abstraction, but for people like her, crime was the solution. Not that she called it crime; she called it reparations” (152). The need to fight back and the productive uses of anger and humour for the “right things at the right time” (Lucashenko, *The Book Show*) lie at the heart of the novel, as one of the section titles suggests: “If you don’t fight, you lose” (149).

As suggested in the quotations above, and as Lucashenko has rightly put it, *Too Much Lip* is “both a low-brow and a high-brow book” (*The Garret*). Although it has won Australia’s most prestigious prize, it not only portrays, but it also speaks to, the criminalised underclass, as the novel is full of slang and colloquialisms. The novel continuously illustrates poverty in contemporary Australia: “Meat was strictly for pay week, same as shop-bought grog and smokes were. Off-pay week was hungry week, sniffing around friends’ and rellos’ houses for someone who’d scored a food parcel, or a job or had had a win at bingo” (119). While *Too Much Lip* seems to address an Indigenous audience, it also challenges non-Indigenous readers, as Lucashenko uses words of the Bundjalung language without translating them (by comparison, Lucashenko’s previous novel, *Mullumbimby* (2013), includes a glossary of terms). Moreover, the novel has been categorised as belonging to Aboriginal realism (van Neerven, “The Yield”). The novel’s realist style could be described to lie in its extradiegetic perspective using different people and animals as focalisers (although focusing predominantly on Kerry), which enables a kind of multi-perspectivity, as well as a concentration on social dynamics. In this way, Aboriginal Realism could be defined

through its focus on multi-species relations, realistic dialogue, and the sense of human belonging to the land.

Too Much Lip dramatises the funeral of Kerry's grandfather, Pop, a "patriarch" and local legend, about whom family members have complicated feelings, and the simultaneous threat of the desecration of the family's sacred river. This river, underwritten by complex family history, is in danger of being sold off to the corrupt mayor of the local shire, Jim Buckley, who aims to hand the "state forest" area to a Chinese consortium who will develop it together with the state government as a jail (37). When the Salters—whose inner circle is constituted by the widowed mother, Pretty Mary, and her four children Ken, Kerry, Black Superman, and the missing daughter, Donna, as well as Ken's anorexic teenage son, Donny—want to lay Pop to rest according to Aboriginal protocol and spread his ashes into the river, they find the river fenced off and the funeral hindered. Throughout the novel, several members of the family resolve to fight Buckley's plans. The eventual success in regaining custodianship over the river, however, unfolds not only because of proactive resistance, but also thanks to a number of strange coincidences and personal developments, involving accidents, ghostly visitations, and family reconciliation. When Kerry resolves to break into the council building, mainly with the aim of regaining her stolen money that Buckley had found in a mishap, she is led by her ancestor Granddad Chinky Joe's ghost, who compels her to take historical objects that had been stolen from her people. Meanwhile, Ken, who is known to have had personal feuds with Buckley, openly protests against the construction of the prison, hand-in-hand with other green groups and anarchists. After a near-death accident Kerry has on her motorbike, by almost hitting a kangaroo, she is led to rethink her options and drops into the local real estate agent, where she unexpectedly finds her missing sister, Donna, who is working under a different (white) identity and has become a successful real estate agent. Donna's reunion with the rest of the family presents the climax of the book and instigates a healing process for the family. As Donna reveals, she had run away as a teenager because Pop had sexually abused her, and after a violent burst of anger, in which she had stabbed him with scissors, feared she had killed him. While the quest to protect the river is central to the novel, it is equally preoccupied with personal developments. As the novel thus conveys, winning custodianship is interdependent with the family's reconciliation.

Although the roles of good and evil seem clearly demarcated in what could be described as an environmental justice fight, Lucashenko also disrupts binary or essentialist constructions of identity and gender, and continuously provokes intellectual flexibility. Throughout the book, it slowly emerges that the Salter family has been entwined with Buckley's family for generations; and Kerry, who previously only partnered with Black women, falls in love with a white man, Steve, who joins the fight. A certain level of anger is shown to have its place: "'Fuck all that anger management crap. I need to be angry to defend our island!'" (270). Yet the male characters especially seem to suffer under warped versions of masculinity, excessive "hardness," and harmfully channelled anger (295). Kerry's "alpha-male" brother, Ken, seems to have, as Kerry puts it, a "monopoly on anger," and his character is continuously underwritten by the looming threat of violence (15). However, the anger present in the family is shown to have arisen through the violence of colonisation. As is slowly revealed, Pop, once a successful boxer, was himself abused in the mission, which instigated a circle of trans-generation violence. The novel thus makes a point about tracing back abuse across generations, showing the pervasive effects of multi-generational trauma. Although Pop became a "patriarch" and an abuser himself, Pretty Mary continuously remembers Pop's service for the family; as an ATSIC (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) Councillor, with a good salary, he had managed to buy the family's first home—a fact that is continuously brought to mind by Pretty Mary (13). As Uncle Richard (an Elder figure within the family) reminds the Salters, there was a point in "growing hard," because it enabled survival: "'We had to grow hard just to survive, had to get as hard as that ol' rock sitting there. But the hardness that saves us, it's gonna kill us if it goes on much longer. People ain't rocks'" (295). The novel is especially careful not to relativise or excuse violence: "'Yes, of course it's trauma. But that's no excuse, eh', Black Superman said sharply. He was sick to the marrow of hearing people defend the indefensible, or deny it even existed, when the evidence was right there, clear for anyone to see. 'What matters is what we do for our jahjams [children] now. About breaking the cycle'" (218). Thus, without excusing violence, *Too Much Lip* shows the importance of coming together for a shared purpose: looking after the river.

In an interview, Lucashenko has stated that while writing the novel, she "realised it had to be a book about the redemption of Ken" ("Miles Franklin Literary Award"). The

painful and difficult process of reintegrating Ken, and the quest to help him catalyse his anger for productive means, presents another climax of the novel. In fact, it is only after this dramatic reintegration has taken place that the Salters learn about the fortunate turn of events: thanks to Donna's initiative, the Independent Commission Against Corruption has arrested Buckley after finding \$30,000 bribes in his house (which, as the reader knows, was actually Kerry's money that she had stolen and then lost). Meanwhile, Donna reveals that she is the new owner of Patterson Real Estate and has managed to gain custody for two years over the river property sight: "And I can tell you right now, there ain't gonna be no medium-security prison involved" (307). Kerry then observes: "Maybe you could dismantle the master's house with the master's tools, after all. She could see it now. Donna in the corner office, leaning back in her leather armchair, running the whole shebang" (308). The novel ends with the Salters celebrating their reconciliation and their regained custody over the river.

According to Lucashenko, *Too Much Lip* was one of the hardest books to write, as it deals with serious subject-matter and issues that became "true to life." Although she initially intended it to be fictitious, Lucashenko learned that there was indeed a very large jail proposed on Bundjalung land, which the local community was "unhappy about" (*The Book Show*). As Lucashenko's experience of merged fiction and reality suggests, this double struggle of attending to family and community healing, while also protecting the land, seems an all-too-common experience for Indigenous Australians. The following section investigates the ways in which the novel constructs the socio-environmental nexus cosmologically, as a relationship of reciprocity and wholeness. I argue that the term 'cosmology' is productive for two main reasons: firstly, it aptly captures the holistic ways in which Lucashenko portrays human situatedness in an ecosystem that continuously acts in symbiotic and sympathetic relationship to human flourishing. Secondly, in contrast to terms such as 'ecological,' 'green,' or 'spiritual,' I propose that the term 'cosmological' is effective because it avoids the pitfalls of essentialising Indigenous peoples as closer to 'nature' and inherently more 'green.' Rather, as I will show, the Salters' relationship to their river is portrayed to arise out of modern experiences of dispossession, displacement, and ongoing environmental injustice, as well as out of cultural traditions of custodianship.

Multispecies and Social Justice

Too Much Lip focuses on the significance and mysterious effects of the Salters' sacred river for reconciling the family and regaining custodianship. The river, and Granny Ava's island, are presented to be healing, as they continuously bring the broken family together:

All the years Kerry had been away, this place was where her mind had flown to. Many a night at Trinder Park or at Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre had really been spent beneath Granny Ava's pine. Not dozens, or hundreds, but thousands of times she had come in her imagination to this spot on the island where the fruit bats nested and where cormorants perched on fallen logs, their wings high, surrendering to invisible enemies. [...] If anywhere had healed her, it was this place; the Salter holy water flowed past Mount Monk and Durrongo, on down the flood plain through Patterson and then across to the ocean at faraway Brunswick Heads. (28)

The river is inextricably tied to ancestors: it is where the Salters come to speak to each other and find guidance. As Kerry observes: "She'd always understood that Granny Ava hadn't really died. She was the bend in the river. She was the grave lying deep in the forest behind the giant pine. Was the tree itself. She was the presence constantly invoked whenever an example was required of discipline, courage, tenacity, culture" (32).

Yet, despite the Salters' special bond to what they call "Ava's Island," this tie to the land and water is not portrayed as an essentialist Indigenous quality; rather, it is informed by tradition as much as by modern family history, which includes the experience of displacement. When the family buries Pop, Kerry reflects:

Ah well, it's only right. He might not have known exactly where he was from, buggered up by missionary like so many others, but he knew he was a saltwater man, at least. And the borrogura calls us all back in the end, that great mother lode. The moon pulls the ocean and the ocean pulls us and everything is always pulling at everything else whether we know it or not, just like Grandad Chinky Joe insisted to the very end. The dugai [white people] can flap their jangs as much as they like, Pretty Mary had reported him saying, but us mob got the law of the land, granddaughter, and that's that. We's in everything: the jagun, the trees, the animals, the bulloon. It's all us, and we's it too. And don't ever let the dugai tell ya different. They savages, remember. (131)

As Pop never found out where he was from, ties to the land are not represented as being passed on through traditional Indigenous ownership only, but also through a larger belonging to the land that persists despite displacement. Similarly, the novel portrays attachment to the river not as romantically given, but as full of contention and pain, and as constantly endangered of being severed. As Kerry observes, the river enables a process of healing, by suggesting the right balance between anger and surrender: "Surrender to everything except the power of the water. [...] She would melt into the water and everything hard would melt with her. [...] Let it decide whether she lived or died" (198). The beauty of the river thus soothes characters' emotions, but its looming desecration also incites anger; it is at the river that characters resolve to fight the plan to build the prison.

Importantly, then, the river—and its impending privatisation and potential devastation—is continuously shown to create the need to reconcile, to "pull" at characters (131). This comes to the fore in a scene towards the end of the book, in which, after Donna discloses the abuse she suffered, the reconciliation process appears to be so difficult that the family feud threatens to erupt into renewed violence: "'I'm not leaving till he's put that bloody gun down,' said Kerry. She was steaming about [...] [t]he island, fast slipping away into history as the family turned on each other. [...] But ah, Jesus. Her Uncle was right, and this unholy mess belonged to them all" (273). As Uncle Richard reminds the family, the river and the law of the land require that Donna be reintegrated and that the family comes together:

"Can't be at a Law Place when there's still bad blood between anyone. So I wanna bring sissy back in like she should have been welcomed back in the first place."

He addressed Donna directly. "You been a long time gone, my niece. A real long time. We've missed you. We never forgot you, and this place," Uncle Richard indicated the river, the island, "the Old People, nobody here ever forgot you, neither. This punyarra jagan, the river, Granny and Grandad's island—everything here owns you, you know? This river your goomera, this jagan your body. I'm just sorry you had to be away so long from your blood's country where you belong. And I'm especially sorry I wasn't there the other week to welcome you home the right way, too, and to tell you I believe your story." [...]

Donna nodded gravely, twice. Didn't let on she'd come back to the river twice, over the years. (292)

As this paragraph suggests, the river is precious to each individual family member—even Donna has secretly visited it—and it is the river in reciprocity with the family that seems to direct and require Indigenous Law to be upheld. In order to successfully attain custodianship, the novel conveys, the family is required to come together and 'move on,' as Uncle Richard puts it: "We aren't talking about forgiveness. That's the dugai [white] way. But can we at least keep on going as a family?" (295). Rather than a Christian framework of forgiveness, then, the need to reconcile is portrayed to be activated through what could be called cosmic interconnectedness, which comes to characters' consciousness mainly through interactions with the river.

Moreover, the novel is framed by multiple interactions with animals: encounters with crows, sharks, and dogs begin and end the narrative. Throughout the novel, it becomes clear that humans and animals are interconnected through familial webs of relation, kinship, interdependency, and responsibility, as the Salters have totems and continuously return their attention to particular animals. The novel starts with a scene in which Kerry encounters three crows, who speak Bundjalung and challenge her to consider that her life is entangled in structures that are bigger than she can understand:

"How the hell do you lot know where I've been?" Kerry retorted [...].

"Us waark [crows] see all that happens. We see the platypus in his burrow at midnight. We see the dingo bitch in her lair under the new moon; we see—"

The third crow butted in, impatient.

"Oh shuttup ya bloody blowhard. Make me sick, truesgod! Old Grandfather Pelican went and told our aunty second cousin he seen ya get lost at the bridge." (8)

As this scene suggests, the animal world is constantly observing the novel's characters. In fact, the end of the novel shows the resolving of an old family debt with a shark, called the "Doctor," who had spared the pregnant great-grandmother, Ava, when she swam to an island in the river in order to avoid her fifth child from being taken away by the colonial authorities and in order to raise her child in relative freedom. Uncle Richard initiates this reconciling conversation with the shark: "'Jingeri, wardham nanang.' [...] 'We remember your clan's kindness'" (309). In return for letting Granny Ava pass unharmed, the shark had required a debt for his kindness: "whiteman's meat. She tried her best to get the dugais to follow her into the river that day, but they turned back" (309). In a plot twist reminiscent of William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, in which the treaty of promised flesh is broken through a juristic clause involving blood, Uncle Richard tricks the shark through his own words: "'If it's blood you're owed, then it's blood you'll have,' the old man said. [...] 'Eat blood, and be satisfied' [...] 'Trickster!' the shark roared in frustration" (311). In this way, characters are constantly reminded of multi-species inter-dependency and a cosmic order that operates on larger scales than individual characters may be aware: "The beginnings which are endings which are beginnings again. Was that what Granny Ruth had meant when she said: *everything is connected up, bub, always, whether you can see it or not*" (62).

Although never explicitly spelled out, the novel's emphasis on the continuity of Indigenous Law (or, as Uncle Richard puts it, "Law place[s]" [292]) conjures up Stenger's sense of cosmopolitics, as 'cosmos' here refers to the power of the more-than-human world that seems to direct, interact, and suggests meaning and values to humans, expressing an aliveness, behaviour, and intention of its own. Uncle Richard's notion of "Law places" also evoke the Australian Indigenous philosopher Mary Graham's essay "Some Thoughts About the Philosophical Underpinnings of Aboriginal Worldviews" (1999), which suggests that the basic precepts of Aboriginal philosophy can be summed up by two premises: the notion that the land is the law, and the idea that "You are not alone in the world" (181). As Graham writes: "The land, and how we treat it, is what determines our human-ness. Because land is sacred and must be looked after, the relation between people and land becomes the template for society and social relations" (182). Graham suggests here that an Indigenous understanding of humanity is profoundly informed by its relationship to the land, a bond which serves as a

“template” for society. This “collective responsibility to land,” as Graham continues, “is vital if people are even to attempt to transcend ego and possessiveness; the point is that land always comes before ego and possessions” (188). Similarly, Uncle Richard, who mediates the dangerously violent family feud of the Salters, emphasises that the family “[c]an’t be at a Law Place when there’s still bad blood between anyone,” so that individual family members need to overcome their painful disputes in order for the collective ‘good’ to be sustained. This ‘collective good’ seems to apply to both—the family’s reconciliation and the protection of the river. As Uncle Richard conveys, the notion of Indigenous, or what could be called cosmopolitical, ‘law’ transcends human law, as it designates a larger order that guarantees human and environmental flourishing beyond individual feuds and governmental regimes. In this way, the novel’s “law place” (the river) reminds the family of a cosmic order, a common good, and a kind of ‘sanity’ that the family can return to in order to remember what is important for survival and well-being. And indeed, the Salters’ eventual reconciliation coincides with winning custody over the river. In this way, *Too Much Lip* portrays the quest for individual healing and social justice as intricately bound to the regaining of land rights.

And yet, the Salters are also aware of the contentious translation from their Indigenous law into what could be called the ‘spirituality industry’ for non-Indigenous people. In one scene, Pretty Mary, a born-again Christian and professional tarot reader, is called to a young couple’s new house in Patterson, as their wooden structure is infested with termites—a bad omen they believe exists because of the history of dispossession on their recently purchased land. When called for assessment and advice, Pretty Mary requests the notable sum of \$200. After the ‘exorcism,’ she humorously addresses Kerry: “‘Careful, bub. If they don’t get them stumps out, Pop might come back!’ She raised both arms, making high, wailing ghost noises, then exploded into raucous cackles” (168). Here, Pretty Mary suggests she knows how to capitalise on the spiritual perception of her Indigeneity, making money out of what Kerry continuously calls “whitenormalsavages.” Hence, this scene reveals the characters’ awareness of essentialist constructions of Indigeneity as inherently spiritual and satirises underlying fears of Indigenous Law as wholly ‘other.’

Moreover, the notion of cosmopolitics revises preconceptions of Indigenous peoples as ‘natural’ harbingers of environmentalism. In this context, it seems important

to emphasise that the Salters' apparent 'greenness'—their interest in preserving the river and resisting the "prison logic"—is not constructed as essentialist. As indicated with Pretty Mary's 'exorcism,' *Too Much Lip* consciously addresses the problematic association of Indigeneity with 'greenness' by satirising notions of purity in relation to Indigeneity and the environment. Kerry, for instance, who had until recently chosen to live in the city, jokes about being 'impure:' "Bless me Father, she thought as the water lapped her temples, for I have gone to the city and sinned there, and then sinned some more by not returning home. Not that she believed in sin. Not really, not like Pretty Mary did. People did what they needed to to survive, that's all" (28). Kerry's brother, Black Superman – who is a successful lawyer and, like Kerry, queer – returns to the city at the end of the novel, but is chosen as the new Elder by Uncle Richard. What could be called Black Superman's and Kerry's 'cosmopolitanism,' therefore, avoids casting Indigenous resistance as necessarily emerging from a 'natural' attachment to the rural. Indigenous author and scholar Tony Birch has observed that "Indigenous knowledge has never been posited as more 'valuable' than during times of global environmental crisis, first in the 1970s and 1980s and, more recently, in the context of discussions of the Anthropocene and catastrophic climate change," but also that urban Indigenous knowledge has been marginalised (Birch summarised in Vincent and Neale 17). As Birch writes:

Despite being a relatively large population, Indigenous people living in cities have historically been afforded little visibility except as the dependent, threatening or tainted (with the menace posed by the 'half-caste menace' remaining self-evident, even if the language has changed over time). ("Climate Change" 375)

As indicated here, rural Indigenous knowledge has been valued especially throughout ecological crises, whereas urban Indigeneity has been framed in terms of 'purity' and degeneration. However, *Too Much Lip* subverts the idea that custodianship over the river can only happen from the supposedly 'pure' position of living close to rural and, perhaps, more traditionally-oriented communities. The novel thus suggests that custodianship need not exclude complex situatedness: as the characters of Kerry and Black Superman convey, modern custodianship can mean attachment to and care for multiple places and communities.

In this way, the Salters' interest in preserving the river and in resisting the "prison logic" is not represented as essentialist, but as partly arising out of traditional and modern contexts, including the lived experience of social injustice and displacement. As Pretty Mary's 'exorcism' suggests, this holistic, cosmological, or ecological understanding is often cast as otherworldly, unrealistic, or 'merely' spiritual to the detriment of being taken seriously. I propose that in comparison to the terms 'spiritual,' or 'ecological,' reading the novel through a 'cosmopolitical' lens is productive in three main ways; firstly, it avoids uneasy associations with Indigenous peoples as inherently more spiritual and 'green' than other people. Secondly, 'cosmopolitics' maintains the sense of both, a modern *and* a traditional understanding of human situatedness in the cosmos—one that is not just traditionally derived, but that is always already in the process of being negotiated, adapted and renewed within a modern context. Thirdly, 'cosmopolitics' involves the cosmopolitan idea of multiple worlds and, thus, suggests that modern custodianship can be enacted through an attachment to one or multiple places and communities—in fact, in the case of the 'city-dwellers' Kerry, Black Superman, and Donna, productively so. In other words, 'cosmopolitics' avoids an othering of Indigenous Australian Law, as all cultures can be said to partake in cosmologies of some kind.

The next section examines how *Too Much Lip* translates the cosmology portrayed in the text into politics, by suggesting the importance of sovereignty. The novel's sense of what I call a 'sovereign cosmopolitics,' designates the need for custodianship in the Anthropocene.

Indigenous Sovereign Cosmopolitics

In *Too Much Lip*, the protection of the river is neglected by the Land Council,¹⁰¹ which is too busy attending to Native Title claims to pay attention to this urgent matter (99). In contrast to Native Title, Ken voices the importance of sovereignty to his friend while

¹⁰¹ Land councils are Australian community organisations that are commonly formed to represent Indigenous Australians of a particular region.

protesting in front of the council: “‘Sovereignty’s gotta be the priority, Hairyman,’ Ken counselled. ‘Treaty first for the Goorie man. Then we can talk socialism’” (205). Ken’s continual participation in the protests seems to be fuelled by the Salters’ sense of sovereignty that exists despite colonial policies and legislations. Moreover, Ken expresses a more flexible idea of culture and family than Native Title allows:

She [Pretty Mary] and he wore matching red T-shirts which read: *Protect Our Sovereign Waters*. Ken, like every other Salter, knew with crystal clarity—had always known—that the waters around Ava’s Island belonged to their Bundjalung mob [family, nation]. Just exactly who constituted that mob, though, and who now fell outside of it, was a little less clear than it ought to be. (206)

Despite the complications of precisely determining family relations, Ken suggests the need to move beyond matters of identity, in order to be able to effectively protect the river: “[W]e go direct action. We rip that gammon fence down as often as they wanna put it up. We go camp on our country and bloody well fight for it!’ [...] The ancestors were with them again” (206). Hence, for the Salters, the idea of sovereignty is central, and present on their banners, whereas Native Title is conveyed as being less effective.

As numerous sovereignty scholars have pointed out, and as is suggested in *Too Much Lip*, the importance of sovereignty can be traced back to the frustration with Australia’s Native Title legislation. As lawyer and novelist Nicole Watson argues, Native Title rights and interests “linger at the bottom of the hierarchy of Australian property rights” (Watson 285, also quoted in Rodoreda 167). Rodoreda refers to the Native Title Tribunal’s statistics to illustrate its pitfalls: “nearly 30% of the Australian landmass has been recognised as ‘Aboriginal land’ under the terms of the Native Title Act. Native Title holders have rights for the use and enjoyment of traditional country. However, in no sense can they be regarded as sovereign owners of the land” (167). Thus, while the Mabo decision and Native Title claims have often proven disappointing for Indigenous ownership, the idea of sovereignty has become a central tenet that was denied in the Mabo decision. In fact, as cited earlier with the Uluru Statement, treaty-processes that stress the sovereignty of Indigenous Australians are currently in full swing.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Next to the earlier mentioned “Uluru Statement from the Heart,” current examples for Indigenous-led projects to initiate treaties is the Treaty Advancement Commission in Victoria (Allam “Victoria”).

Sovereignty has a very practical and context-bound dimension that evokes, as Behrendt argues, a “set of political, economic, social, and cultural aspirations” (175). Behrendt argues that, for her, growing up in an Australian Aboriginal community, the idea of sovereignty was inherent:

I had heard the language of “sovereignty,” had heard the word expressed as part of my father’s politics, as a central part of the politics of the Aboriginal people who influenced me ideologically—Michael Mansell, Gary Foley, Kevin Gilbert—and I understood from an early age that the concept of “sovereignty” referred to and flowed from a distinct history, a distinct culture, a distinct community, distinct identity. I had heard the history of how, as the first peoples, we never conceded our land and our sovereignty remained. (163)

Behrendt here exemplifies how crucial the concept is for Indigenous peoples, but also how culturally specific sovereignty is, concluding that the most pertinent question to ask in relation to sovereignty is in regards to its practical application: “when Aboriginal people say they want to exercise their sovereignty, what does that mean in practice?” (164). This question can, according to Behrendt, be described with a spectrum of claims including

the right not to be discriminated against, the rights to enjoy language, culture, and heritage, our rights to land, seas, waters, and natural resources, the right to be educated and to work, the right to be economically self-sufficient, the right to be involved in decision-making processes that impact upon our lives, and the right to govern and manage our own affairs and our own communities. (164)

This sovereignty ‘from below,’ as the authors of *Sovereignty: Frontiers of Possibility* (2013) argue, can be distinguished from the land rights movement of 1976 and from Native Title, as it exists independently of legal status, ever-changing policies, and efforts of recognition (Evans et al. 7). Therefore, sovereignty goes far beyond a juridical concept; it has become the “on-the-ground determinant of everyday existence” (7).

As Geoff Rodoreda writes in *The Mabo Turn in Australian Fiction* (2018), the sovereignty movement is expressive of a new generation of Indigenous academics, activists, lawyers, and artists “who have been working to remove the question of sovereignty from insulation and containment, to speak sovereignty, to un-silence it” (169). Rodoreda proposes that contemporary Indigenous writers such as Alexis Wright,

Kim Scott, and Melissa Lucashenko are asserting claims to Indigenous sovereignty in their fiction, creating two kinds of sovereignties: “imagining sovereign political spaces and asserting sovereignty of the mind” (5). As a case in point, Rodoreda takes Lucashenko’s novel *Mullumbimby* (2013), which dramatises Indigenous struggles over a Native Title claim. The protagonist, Jo, comes to learn that it is “care for kin and lived experiential relations with the material world that constitute belonging on country rather than legal ratification through white courts” (Brewster 250, quoted in Rodoreda 230). Similar to Boochani’s implied notion of sovereignty, *Too Much Lip*, too, seems to be concerned with care for people and custodianship of one or multiple places—irrespective of legislations and policies.

If the novel continuously depicts a complex understanding of human/animal/place relationships, one of the biggest battle sites for competing understandings of the land is the realm of politics. As indicated earlier, Stengers’s term ‘cosmopolitics’ captures the intersection of translating the existence of a ‘cosmic order’ into politics. This order is ‘cosmic’ in so far as humans do not just interact with human perspectives, but also with elemental forces, ‘things,’ and other species. To borrow Latour’s interpretation of Stenger’s cosmopolitics, politics can no longer mean to be operating “in an exclusive human club” (“Whose Cosmos” 454). The difficulty, then, lies in not only incorporating culturally different understandings of this order into politics, but also translating the, as Stengers writes, “shadows of that which does not have a political voice, cannot have or does not want to have one” (996). Thus, in addition to cultural differences, Stengers argues that cosmopolitics refers to the task of bringing together these “multiple, divergent worlds” (995). In her work, Lucashenko has continuously portrayed the interconnections between race and class suppression. As Lucashenko has put it in an interview:

Prison is fundamental to keeping poor people poor. The poorest of the poor. Australia hasn’t changed in this respect over two centuries. This mentality of chucking people away when they’re inconvenient started in Britain and has continued until today. Except these days it’s extremely big business.” (“Miles Franklin Literary Award”)

As this quotation and the novel as a whole suggest, Lucashenko’s work is deeply political, as the novel makes a point of revealing the entanglements of intersectional

oppression—especially race, class, and gender issues in contemporary Australia. Yet, similarly to Boochani, Lucashenko does not just portray oppression, but she also reveals the strength and ‘epistemic privilege’ of the criminalised underclass. In other words, although Lucashenko conveys the centrality of listening to the perspective of what Stengers would call “the victims of the cosmos” (1002), Lucashenko refutes an overemphasis on victimhood. As Lucashenko has asked: “If so much of modern Australian literature about us fixed upon our victimhood, *then what and who do such stories serve? Who benefits?* Is it an act of misplaced respect which talks about our dispossession but not our survival?” (“I Pity”). The notion of sovereignty therefore not only underlines the indestructible sense of self-determination, but also honours Indigenous strength, survival, and wisdom arising out of this struggle.

Like Boochani, Lucashenko can be regarded as having an incisive presence in Australian literature: as a writer, activist, educator, and commentator, she seems to embody what Nixon has called a ‘writer-activist.’ Nixon proposes that writer-activists often help dismantle injustices through “testimonial protest, rhetorical inventiveness, and counterhistories in the face of formidable odds” (6). In this way, writer-activists play a political, imaginative, and strategic role. As Nixon writes:

Writer-activists can help us apprehend threats imaginatively that remain imperceptible to the senses, either because they are geographically remote, too vast or too minute in scale, or are played out across a time span that exceeds the instance of observation or even the physiological life of the human observer. (*Slow Violence* 15)

Too Much Lip can be said to uncover the ‘slow violence’ of socio-environmental injustice: the novel makes the multi-generational trauma of colonial violence palpable, but also bears witness to multiple forms of resistance. Moreover, Lucashenko can also be described as a writer-activist as the novel invites broad participation: as mentioned earlier, the novel addresses both a high and a low-brow audience, Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers. In fact, Lucashenko has described her mission as a writer to “civilise mainstream Australia” (“Miles Franklin Literary Award”), which suggests that paying attention to the lived experience of Indigenous peoples is crucial for educating and changing the nation. Yet *Too Much Lip* also goes beyond illuminating contemporary concerns of the Australian nation. As I have shown, the novel can be read as exemplary

of the socio-environmental nexus and, therefore, of larger issues that shape the Anthropocene, such as environmental justice, Indigenous sovereignty, and green/bla(c)k relations.

Conclusion

I have proposed that *Too Much Lip* presents a 'cosmic' sense of human embeddedness in an ecosystem. This is portrayed through the Salters' interactions with the river, animals, and ancestors: as the family's love for the river repeatedly suggests, the novel conveys that the more-than-human world seems to co-shape, co-direct, and in some ways help enable the family's regaining of custodianship. Through the long process of reintegrating Ken and Donna, the Salters' healing process demonstrates the indispensable role of each family member. Similar to Boochani's text, then, *Too Much Lip* evokes a sense of 'placefulness'—the inherent right of every constituent of the cosmos to belong—as an antidote to severed belonging. Moreover, I have suggested that the term 'cosmopolitics' avoids the pitfalls of assigning an inherent 'greenness,' spirituality, traditionalism, rurality, or essential otherness to Indigenous peoples, because the term's focus on 'politics' suggests the constant renegotiation and renewal in modern contexts.

Furthermore, I have argued that *Too Much Lip* suggests the need to translate the sense of cosmos (the holistic understanding of socio-environmental flourishing) into politics. As I have demonstrated, the novel's emphasis on sovereignty is exemplary of a broader Indigenous movement currently visible in Australia that emerged from the restrictiveness and limitations of Native Title. In contrast to the 'recognition' that Native Title aims to afford through complicated legal proceedings, the emphasis on sovereignty expresses the indestructible sense of self-determination, which includes political, economic, cultural, and ecological rights, as well as the Indigenous legacy of survival. Thus, the Salters' struggle presents what I have called a 'sovereign cosmopolitics:' eventually, it is through individual and social healing, political action, but also through partly mysterious workings of the 'cosmos' (the river, animals, ghosts, coincidences), that the prison is resisted and the river protected. Like Boochani, Lucashenko may be

regarded as a 'writer-activist' who, within and beyond her literary works, not only testifies to the trials of the most marginalised members of society, but also illuminates their sovereign power and spirit.

5.4 Chapter Conclusion

Although not self-consciously positioned within climate change or Anthropocene frameworks, I have read *No Friend* and *Too Much Lip* as depicting exemplary socio-environmental justice struggles of the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene accelerates issues that have long been at the forefront of social justice advocates—in the case of the two works analysed, these issues represent justice for refugees and Indigenous sovereignty. Boochani's book can be read as exemplary of the current and projected unprecedented numbers of refugee and mass-migration and the rekindling of nationalism. Lucashenko's novel portrays the continuous trespassing on Indigenous country: as most evident in the current national crisis of the Adani Mine, mining licenses and 'development' projects continue to regularly breach sovereign lands and undermine Native Title agreements. However, as *Too Much Lip* illustrates, and as the earlier-mentioned movements, such as SEED, show, environmental justice is at the forefront of climate movements. Both texts, then, offer unique insights into and critiques of Australia's prison-industrial complex, specifically of refugee prison camps and disproportionate Indigenous incarceration.

Rather than falling into the decline-narrative that the Anthropocene runs the risk of perpetuating, however, my 'cosmological reading' of the texts has foregrounded the ways in which the texts defy resignation by recovering a sense of order, abundance, beauty, healing, and sovereign belonging despite systems of oppression. Both texts thus conjure up the sense of eco-systemic order, or cosmic situatedness, that offers perspective amidst desperation; in both texts, it is the experience of cosmic beauty, abundance and 'goodness' that provides the means for survival and resistance. By recognising that everyone and everything has its place in the broader cosmological unfolding, and by proposing that nothing and nobody goes to 'waste,' the sense of the cosmic, I have argued, also emphasises belonging and purpose, giving meaning to

senseless suffering. In this way, the notion of ‘sovereign cosmopolitics’—the indestructible sense of self-determination and the freedom to enact care—expresses a communal sense of land that requires a new politics of representation that includes the voice of the vulnerable and the politically voiceless.

As my readings of *No Friend* and *Too Much Lip* reveal, the genre of fiction enables writers to communicate the often-invisible entanglements of various different scales such as the social and environmental. In this sense, literature allows a uniquely situated engagement with people and particular places, while also illuminating transcultural or ‘Anthropocene’ issues. This engagement of the local and translocal is something that Weihsin Gui has described with the term “literary cosmopolitics.” Gui describes literary cosmopolitics as “the imagination and representation of sustained political engagement between local and translocal cultural particularities through fiction and poetry” (2). Taking into account Stengers’ proposal of the need to “slow down” in order to understand the complex demands of human situatedness in a cosmos, it could be said that literature is uniquely apt at slowing down—and deepening—reasoning “and creating [the] opportunity to generate a slightly different awareness of the problems and situations mobilising us” (“Cosmopolitical Proposal” 994). A cosmopolitical perspective, thus, assigns meaning to the connectedness of the human experience with a local and translocal ecosystem that sustains it.

6. Conclusion

As this thesis has shown, the term ‘Anthropocene’ still sits uneasily amidst the designations for the current socio-environmental crisis. In academia, few other concepts have reverberated so fast and extensively across so many disciplines; beyond academia, however, the term has arguably not fully established itself. The idea of the Anthropocene may be increasingly visible in broader culture, such as in art-galleries, documentaries, and podcasts, where it seems to be used as a challenging and, perhaps, intellectual concept that brings a new spin to the otherwise ubiquitous term ‘climate change.’ However, as illustrated in this thesis, the Anthropocene concept remains deeply ambiguous and elusive—which may be the reason that it has not taken hold as an alternative term to climate change. Its presence seems to follow the logic of both/and, rather than either/or: it has both entered the broader culture *and* has remained obscure. In its reference to geological time and space, it both appears to be big enough to convey the vastness of this crisis, *and* it is misleading in its focus on universal and indeterminate ‘human guilt.’ It productively conveys the sense that the material world has agency *and* it perpetuates the unhelpful human/nature binary. It has both triggered a productive trans-disciplinary debate *and* it disseminates the dangerous narratives of anti-humanity, anti-modernity, and scarcity economics.

Because of its two-fold nature, I have employed the concept as a helpful critical supplementation to the reductiveness of ‘climate change,’ but I have used it critically, situating it among other alternative terminologies. The term Anthropocene might not be long-lasting—it may soon even become outdated in academia, never having properly ‘arrived’ in popular consciousness. If that is the case, the Anthropocene and its debate will still have been worthwhile examining, I propose, because the term captures a *zeitgeist* in which societies across the globe are increasingly reckoning with the changes happening to Earth. In this sense, the term might be remembered as a transitional period, a time in which official scientific bodies were struggling to find names and ways to translate knowledge into political change. Via author Kim Stanley Robinson, Donna Haraway has proposed that this transitional period may be remembered as “The

Dithering,” a “state of indecisive agitation” (*Staying* 102, citing Robinson’s novel 2312), which describes the current squandering of time among policy makers, despite a race against the clock. Going beyond the notion that we live ‘in’ the Anthropocene, then, this thesis has proposed that the term can be productive when used critically, as one of many.

In this way, this thesis has drawn attention to the importance of diverse frames of reference that can shed light on a crisis that still evades language. In fact, one of the contributions of the humanities, as exemplified by this thesis, is that language has enormous power: it can shape consciousness and lead to material change. My choice to examine the alternative framings of cosmos and cosmology, rather than the Anthropocene alone, have challenged me to read aspects of environmental change through the lens of radical interconnectedness. In contrast to the arguably overused term ‘environment,’ which runs the risk of isolating one factor—the environment as a supposedly separate entity—my approach of engaging notions of cosmos and cosmology demonstrates that the category ‘environment’ can most productively be understood holistically and, importantly for this thesis, in reciprocity with the socio-cultural and political realm. In fact, my employment of the term ‘cosmos’ aims to demonstrate that part of the problems that have led to the Anthropocene is the very notion of a separate ‘nature.’ As Lawrence Buell has argued, an “environmental-ethical revolution” is only possible if the interdependence of human and environmental flourishing is collectively remembered (417). This idea of interdependence, I argue, is aptly captured in the term ‘cosmos.’ In this sense, my chapters have examined not only conventionally perceived ‘environmental’ topics, such as agriculture, extraction, and bioethics, but also themes that are less strongly associated with ecology, such as technology, social and intergenerational justice, and sovereignty. This approach has sought to foreground the entanglements of environment with culture, language, narrative, affect, science and technology, ethics, and politics. As a literary scholar, my notion of ‘literary cosmology,’ in particular, aims to capture literature’s unique capacity to illuminate this interconnectivity. As environmental historian Tom Griffiths has put it: “Story is [...] the most powerful educational tool we possess [and] a way of allowing for multiplicity and complexity at the same time as guaranteeing memorability” (“Humanities,” also cited in O’Gorman et al 448).

However, inevitably given literature's complexity, there are more nuances in the selected literary texts than the lens of cosmos and cosmology has enabled me to investigate. Despite this, my cosmological readings have, I suggest, generated productive and innovative ways of exploring these texts. In my discussion of Winch's *The Yield* and Tiffany's *Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living*, for example, my cosmological reading highlights the ways in which the novels explore the power of language in relation to land-care. Both novels respond to the colonial legacy of a one-dimensional, instrumental, and commodified view of the land by satirising colonial language and employing an alternative, lyrical language (Tiffany), and by reinscribing holistic understandings of the land as expressed in the Wiradjuri language (Winch). My cosmological approach, then, foregrounds the ways in which language holds the potential for a modern custodianship that includes Indigenous knowledge: while *Everyman's Rules* examines the workings of lyrical language for a localised understanding of agriculture, *The Yield* emphasises that Indigenous languages (and their encapsulated culture, memory, and land-care) are crucial for Australian regeneration, as they contain critical information for the ecological repair of particular places.

My discussion of Doyle's novel *The Island Will Sink* has led to the insight that dystopian texts may defy a reading that seeks to explore radical interconnectedness, as the novel imagines a dark world in which people have perfected their illusion of hyper-separation from the environment—with disastrous consequences. In contrast, my cosmological reading of van Neerven's "Water" examines the novella's portrayal of evolutionary narratives that highlight collaboration, desire, and playfulness over the dominant idea of species competition. In this chapter, moreover, my cosmological approach has generated reflections on the discursive level—that is, on the ways in which environmental crises have predominantly been narrated. With *The Island Will Sink*, this led to an investigation of the novel's portrayal of the particularly dominant 'natural disaster' narrative. In my analysis of "Water," this facilitated the exploration of the affects linked to the genres of romance, humour, resistance, and survival, which are arguably under-explored in environmental discourse. As I conclude, Doyle's portrayal of the potentially paralysing effects of an over-abundance of disaster narratives suggests the need to diversify notions of the environment, ecocritical engagements with texts,

and approaches to activism: approaches that go beyond the conventionally portrayed reactions of guilt and purity, doom and gloom, hope and despair.

My cosmological reading of Boochani's *No Friend But the Mountains* and Lucashenko's *Too Much Lip* has explored yet another, perhaps the most literal, aspect of 'cosmos.' Here, cosmos does not just 'stand for' radical interconnectedness, but it also illuminates the texts' employment of the sense of the cosmic, which includes not only the eco-systemic awareness of elemental forces and animals (such as heavenly bodies, the sky, ocean, rivers, trees, animals), but also generosity, humour, strength, and 'goodness' in people. In both texts, I argue that the cosmic gives the protagonist the notion of a larger, benevolent, and 'sane' reality that allows for a perspective on the pettiness and artificiality of systems of oppression. Hence, my cosmological reading emphasises the ways in which the protagonists defy resignation by recovering a sense of eco-systemic order, abundance, beauty, and sovereign belonging that provides avenues of survival, resistance, and healing amidst (histories of) enforced subjugation. In this way, my investigation into the notion of 'cosmos' demonstrates how understandings of the environment are always already political: both texts reveal a sense of the cosmos in which every member of society, every constituent of an ecosystem, has its inherent purpose and right to belong, which includes the right for self-determination and the right to care for one or multiple places—something I call 'placefulness' and 'sovereign cosmopolitics.'

Altogether then, and in contrast to the Anthropocene concept, the lens of cosmos and cosmology has helped me examine the entanglements of the idea of 'the environment' with language, memory, affect, genre, narrative, evolution, tropes, figurations, symbolism, ethics, and politics. This illustrates the achievements of literary works, as well as of literary studies as a discipline: through the capacity to integrate multiple disciplines, knowledges, and languages, literature can slow down—and deepen—reflection and illuminate the often-overlooked aspects of language and culture in the formation of individuals, society, and environment. Via Rob Nixon's notion of 'slow violence,' I have argued that literature is in the unique position of making invisible processes visible on multiple scales and of fostering an understanding of the long-felt consequences of environmental degradation—a form of slow violence—which are often dispersed over time and place. Moreover, my exploration of a particular place,

Australia (however porous its boundaries may be), has enabled specific situated insights into the national history, imaginary, and current challenges the continent and nation face. I have argued that it is especially during this time of ecological devastations that renewed attention to Indigenous languages, knowledges, and land-care practices are emerging—perhaps more strongly than ever before. Examples for this shift can be seen in the country's current discussion on increasing the general deployment of Indigenous burning practices, to prevent mega-fires;¹⁰³ and in the already-cited fact that 2020 is the first year in which two Indigenous authors were nominated for Australia's most prestigious national literary award, the Miles Franklin.¹⁰⁴

From a wider perspective, my analysis has also explored the contribution of literary studies to the wider field of the Environmental Humanities. In a time of global ecological devastations such as ours, the Environmental Humanities are on the rise precisely because of the growing awareness that social and environmental issues are inseparable and, thus, that solving environmental calamities is enabled through social change as much as through new technologies. As the Manifesto of the Environmental Humanities entitled "Humanities for the Environment—a Manifesto for Research and Action" (2015) notes: "We need to move beyond rational choice and behavioural decision theories, which do not capture the full range of commitments, assumptions, imaginaries, and belief systems" (Holm, Poul, et al. 977-978). As indicated here, and as exemplified by my arguments in this thesis, humans are shaped by and shape the material world—the planetary ecosystem—through beliefs, values, and stories, as well as through science and technology. In this sense, the Environmental Humanities suggest that narratives and belief-systems have enormous power and that the analysis and exploration of narratives is crucially important work: it enables writers, and perhaps readers, to resist the power of ideas and systems that might otherwise appear 'natural' and inevitable.

¹⁰³ See, for example, Victor Steffensen's *Fire Country: How Indigenous Fire Management Could Help Save Australia*. Victoria: Hardy Grant Travel, 2020.

¹⁰⁴ The two nomination were Winch's *The Yield* (the winner of the award) and Tony Birch's *The White Girl* (2019).

In this context, the Environmental Humanities may be seen as bringing a new perspective to literary studies as much as literary studies can illuminate aspects of the Environmental Humanities. As the Manifesto further states:

We need to define and understand how and why, in the face of non-imminent or non-palpable danger, humans choose to act as we do and what it would take to make us change direction. Our research questions must function at individual, institution and social levels: How do individuals respond to calls for change in individual or collective behaviour? How can social innovation help redress institutionally ingrained patterns and path dependencies? And how do societies develop resilient responses to threats of crisis and collapse? (981)

As discussed in Chapter 3, the problem of the instrumentalisation of the humanities is a valid concern that has been discussed by scholars for many years. Nevertheless, I argue that the Manifesto's proposal of a new set of questions that have emerged with the global ecological crisis provides a necessary and welcome new task for humanities disciplines (*a* task, not the only one), thereby pointing to productive new directions for a rearticulation of the role of the humanities in the 21st century.

The global development of the emerging field of the Environmental Humanities is complicated by the fact that different regions of the world may employ different terms for 'the environment,' and by the fact that the term Environmental Humanities does not translate well into other languages,¹⁰⁵ which reveals that one key challenge seems to be the diversity of understandings of what constitutes the 'environment.' Another challenge is that "the development of dedicated EH [Environmental Humanities] teaching programs has not taken place at the same pace as research in the field, including research centres, journals, and book series" (O'Gorman, et al. 429). This challenge can be traced back to the fact that it is difficult to establish teaching in an area that is "not yet widely recognized by students or employers" (430). Alongside an exciting new research field, then, the prospect of building new teaching programs also offers an opportunity to reflect on innovating academic publishing and communication strategies. This may include modernising research outlets; for example, academics could be

¹⁰⁵ The article "Teaching the Environmental Humanities" cites the German *Umweltgeisteswissenschaften*, for example, which "sounds awkward and narrow to some and has not yet gained any currency" (O'Gorman et al 442).

supported to also publish shorter pieces outside of academic journals and to explore multi-media outlets, such as podcasts. Additionally, academics might innovate teaching methodologies, for instance by seeking creative and intellectual exchange with activist movements. This is not to say that this work has not already begun: the new research of the Environmental Humanities is already productively “experimental, engaged, creative, and public-facing” (O’Gorman et al. 430).

As an example of the new direction of the Environmental Humanities, this thesis has engaged with this experimental, engaged, and creative research pathway in order to propose a new approach to literary studies, in particular: one that is deeply concerned with aspects of global environmental change, while, at the same time, taking into account the particularity of specific places, cultures, and languages. Future studies that engage the Environmental Humanities in relation to literature may well venture into the important work of transcultural and comparative engagements with multiple places. Such projects can then draw on work that illustrates regional specificity, such as this thesis. Thus, a ‘literary cosmology’ approach can illustrate the interconnectedness of culture and environment, the sciences and the humanities, and local ecologies and the planetary ecosystem, in an accessible way. The notion of literary cosmology, then, seeks to convey the idea that fiction is often the forerunner of concepts, as it is able to capture those concepts for which we do not yet have a cultural language.

Works Cited

Please note: This thesis uses MLA 8 referencing.

Primary Literature

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