Routledge Environmental Literature, Culture and Media

COSMOLOGICAL READINGS OF CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

UNSETTLING THE ANTHROPOCENE

Kathrin Bartha-Mitchell

ROUTLEDGE

Cosmological Readings of Contemporary Australian Literature

This book presents an innovative and imaginative reading of contemporary Australian literature in the context of unprecedented ecological crisis.

The Australian continent has seen significant, rapid changes to its cultures and land-use from the impact of British colonial rule, yet there is a rich history of Indigenous land-ethics and cosmological thought. By using the age-old idea of 'cosmos'—the order of the world—to foreground ideas of a good order and chaos, reciprocity and more-than-human agency, this book interrogates the Anthropocene in Australia, focusing on notions of colonisation, farming, mining, bioethics, technology, environmental justice and sovereignty. It offers 'cosmological readings' of a diverse range of authors—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—as a challenge to the Anthropocene's decline-narrative. As a result, it reactivates 'cosmos' as an ethical vision and a transculturally important counter-concept to the Anthropocene. Kathrin Bartha-Mitchell argues that the arts can help us envision radical cosmologies of being in and with the planet, and to address the very real social and environmental problems of our era.

This book will be of particular interest to scholars and students of Ecocriticism, Environmental Humanities, and postcolonial, transcultural and Indigenous studies, with a primary focus on Australian, New Zealand, Oceanic and Pacific area studies.

Kathrin Bartha-Mitchell is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Department of New English Literatures and Cultures, Goethe University Frankfurt. Her areas of focus are transcultural Anglophone Literature, Ecocriticism and Intergenerational Justice. She earned her PhD within the joint programme between Goethe and Monash University in Melbourne.

"Kathrin Bartha-Mitchell's *Cosmological Readings of Contemporary Australian Literature* is an important new work of Australian ecocriticism. Drawing on recent work on literature and the Anthropocene, Bartha-Mitchell's book offers a model for reading Australian literature cosmologically. Bartha-Mitchell's readings emphasise interconnections between beings, agencies and systems that work against the traditional humanistic focus of western prose fiction and offer a critical new dimension to Australian literary studies."

Tony Hughes-d'Aeth, *Chair of Australian Literature, The University of Western Australia*

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Kathrin Bartha-Mitchell

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Preface

This book is based on a thesis that I wrote jointly at Monash University (Melbourne, Australia) and Goethe University (Frankfurt, Germany). When conceiving of this project, my preoccupation with the environmental crisis was less visceral in my own life. As an urbanite, apart from warmer summers, signs of climate change seemed to be more apparent in faraway places (the Arctic, shorelines, rainforests). Yet during the years of writing, this changed; I experienced immediate environmental disruptions 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 coronavirus pandemic unfolded (which has been linked to shrinking sanctuaries for wildlife), I found myself finishing the thesis under the difficult circumstances of Melbourne's "Stage 4" lockdown.

Over the course of this project, I observed that media coverage about climate change 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 realities. 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.

With this changing reality, I was preoccupied with how to make sense of the planetary crisis, how to keep living in a world with daily news of doom, how other people and other cultures to my own perceive it, how to be 'response-able,' how to shape it. I was wondering about names we have for our surroundings and our times—nature, environment, ecosystem, climate emergency, the *Anthropocene*. The Anthropocene drew my attention because this concept entailed time and space, and an entire battleground for the origin story of this global predicament. During my quest to understand the debate, I encountered a term that had only been at the margin of my perception: *cosmos*. While it is difficult to trace all the reasons 'cosmos' fascinated me, I can name a few distinct characteristics that emerged out of my research: cosmos does not entail a centre (like 'environment'—the Old French *environer* meaning "to surround, enclose, encircle"); nor does it connote an outside to culture, like 'nature' or 'wilderness'; nor does it name just one element of our surroundings, like 'land' or 'water'. Cosmos takes a wide perspective; it encompasses outer space as well as stories within planet Earth. Cosmology connotes culturally specific understandings linked to specific places, as well as various myths and origin stories across cultures. Cosmos is a concept both of the sciences (a branch of physics) and of the humanities. The more I engaged with 'cosmos,' the more revealing it became, as it encompasses the big and small, the old and new, the near and far: it was wide enough to stretch my understanding, and distinct enough to keep it grounded.

As I was also fascinated by a specific place that was not my own (I had set foot in Australia only in my late twenties as a student), but that I grew to love, cosmological thought became helpful to understand various perspectives on Country (the Indigenous Australian concept, outlined in the Introduction) within this nation-continent.

Yet, as I aim to show in this book, foregrounding 'cosmos' is not about fashionable terms, about what concepts are now 'in' and 'out,' about a 'hip' new theory that changes everything. It encompasses ideas that—whether we call them cosmological or not—seem to exist in all cultures and places around the globe, albeit to various degrees. Such ideas are revived in times of planetary disruptions: the sense of an alive, communicative, more-than-human world; a meta-discursive 'good' order and chaos that has enabled life to flourish; a perspective that puts the human species in relation to other species, elements, forces. In this sense, 'cosmos' is not only a matter of fashion, nor discourse, nor history, but it is something essential, existential. (I thank my friend, Dafna Shetreet, for this wonderful observation and phrasing.) Cosmologies have stood the test of time. They transform, but they also remain.

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The writing of this project was financially enabled by the MIPRS and MGR scholarships of Monash University, and the DFG-Walter Benjamin postdoctoral fellowship in Germany allowed me to rework the thesis for this book. It was conceived within the Joint PhD programme between Goethe and Monash University, but it was largely written in Melbourne, on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations, who never ceded their sovereignty. I pay my respects to all Indigenous peoples, to Elders past, present and emerging, and feel grateful for having been able to work in such a beautiful place.

I would also like to acknowledge that, as a white international student largely funded by Australian scholarships, I have had unearned privilege, and am implicated in the networks of colonial power that still shape Australia today, as well as in the environmental issues I write about. I have tried to write from this self-reflexive position, bring myself into the research where possible, and pay credit to the First Nations writers whose works I explore here, as well as the academics, artists and activists that taught me. My exchange semesters at Melbourne University as a postgraduate student were particularly formative in this context, where I attended life-changing seminars by Tony Birch, Lilly Brown and Genevieve Grieves, and Philip Morrissey.

I would like to thank my PhD supervisors, Sue Kossew and Frank Schulze-Engler, for their invaluable guidance, warmth and encouragement throughout, without which the thesis would not have taken this shape. It was an honour to work with you. I would also like to thank all examiners of the thesis, Tony Hughes D'Aeth, Astrid Erll and Graham Huggan, for their important feedback that has shaped this book. My thanks also to the Monash milestone committees, especially Mridula Chakraborty, for the always kind and constructive critique; as well as the defense committee at Goethe University, especially Vinzenz Hediger and Johannes Völz, for their helpful comments during the viva. Thank you to Jennie Wawrzinek for the encouragement to pitch the thesis, as well as for the invaluable mentorship during my MA, which made so much possible. Gratitude also to the anonymous peer-reviewers of the book. Thank you to the series editor, Thomas Bristow, for the enthusiasm and helpful suggestions, Drew Stanley for the editing, as well as to Grace Harrison and Matthew Shobbrook for their kind correspondence. Other chance encounters at conferences have really helped push this work in the right direction—thank you to Jennifer Hamilton for suggesting I read Carrie Tiffany's *Everyman's Rules of Scientific Living*, to Cameron Muir for gifting me your book *The Broken Promise of Agricultural Progress*, and to Joni Adamson for being so approachable and bringing to my attention your co-edited volume, *Keywords for Environmental Studies*. Thank you to the slow reading group 'Ecofeminist Fridays', convened by Hayley Singer, which taught me so much about the field. Thank you also to the Doctoral Colloquium members in Frankfurt for their convivial feedback on the project over time. I am grateful to all my teachers, professors and colleagues that have influenced this project indirectly, among them Herr Pearson, Zeno Ackermann, Pavan Malreddy and Therese Davis; through your kindness you have made academia seem possible.

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A small part of this research has been previously published, but it has been revised for this book:

- Bartha-Mitchell, Kathrin. "Apocalyptic Climate Fiction in the Third Media Revolution: Briohny Doyle's *The Island Will Sink*." *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2022.

A preliminary version of my conceptual framework (that uses different literary texts) is:

- Bartha, Kathrin. "Cosmos vs. Anthropocene: Multi-scalar Praxis for Socio-environmental Justice with adrienne maree brown's *Emergent Strategy*." *Narratives of Scale in the Anthropocene*, edited by Gabriele Dürbeck and Philip Hüpkes. London and New York: Routledge, 2021, pp. 177–92.

Introduction

Literary Cosmology in the Anthropocene

Kosmos

Who includes diversity and is Nature,
Who is the amplitude of the earth, and the coarseness and sexuality of the earth, and the great charity of the earth and the equilibrium also
[…]

—Walt Whitman, 1860, 1867

'Kosmos' aims to capture something seemingly impossible: the abundance of nature, earth, universe. Yet calling 'cosmos' a concept does not seem to entirely do it justice. More than a cognitive idea, it comprises a vast array of individual, cultural and more-than-human phenomena. It includes procreation and evolution, a sympathetic order, mysterious soul, the planetary and the universe, and ethics and politics.

That may seem like a lot for a little word to bear,[1a] but the ancient Greek *κόσμος* (cosmos) means order, world or beauty/adornment and was conceived in conjunction with its twin, *χάος* (chaos). Cosmos did not describe the universe in general, but the universe understood as a unified system of beauty and order, which arises out of chaos (Walls, 2016, 47). It conveyed the idea that the universe appears ordered and beautiful through *reciprocity* with humans. Today, however, this seemingly simple idea has many different meanings in our vocabulary. In common use, 'cosmos' refers to the universe, and to the stars and planets beyond Earth, while 'cosmology' ('the discourse about the world-order') refers to both creation myths and 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. Recently, the term has been resurrected as a key word for the Anthropocene, our new geological epoch, the so-called 'Age of Humans,' expressing the dramatic environmental changes currently happening to our planet as a result of human influences (further explicated later). Literary scholar Laura Dassow Walls has made the crucial proposition that as "the oldest ecological vision of our planet," cosmos is capable of undoing

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the harmful separation between "culture and nature, human and environment, mind and matter, intellect and emotion" that the Anthropocene designates (2016, 47).

How can we apply the notion of 'cosmos' if it presents such a slippery trans-disciplinary term that combines the vast scales of the terrestrial and celestial, the universal and particular, scientific insights, the culturally specific as well as the transcultural? *Cosmological Readings of Contemporary Australian Literature: Unsettling the Anthropocene* defines 'cosmology' as 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 '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 material state of the world. In fact, narrative and cosmos are linked in important ways: cosmos conveys a meta-discursive order that encompasses the more-than human world. Despite the focus on order, cosmos and cosmology also include chaos and the unknown—as observers, we are inside the cosmos, our knowledge is thus necessarily partial. In line with the many scholarly contributions discussed, cosmos is understood as a constructive idea that is generative of an ethical discourse. It is employed to argue for the need to recognise that everyone and everything is interconnected, and that every constituent of an ecology has their rightful place in a co-evolutionary unfolding.

Reading six contemporary Australian literary texts, *Cosmological Readings* proposes a modern, transcultural and (dis)enchanted understanding of cosmos in the era of the Anthropocene. Rather than embracing the Anthropocene concept and its inherent decline-narrative (as in 'humans have destroyed nature'),[1b] I argue that it is highly productive to pay attention to cosmological visions within creative fiction—both for coming to terms with the planetary crisis and for reading creative texts of a particular culture. In contrast to dualistic constructions of human mastery over 'nature,'[2] cosmos evokes human entanglement with, and emplacement within, an ecosystem. The emphasis on the *contemporariness* of the cosmological worldview includes, valorises and revitalises ancient earthbound practices, worldviews and religions, while also illuminating that such cosmologies are highly modern.[3] The adjective 'transcultural' expresses that cosmological thought likely exists in most cultures—albeit to various degrees—and '(dis)enchanted' suggests the inevitably dialectic nature of the endeavour (that I revisit in part I): one that seeks to enchant anew, without the naïve sense that a holistic imagination is always unproblematic and will fix everything. As this is a work of literary criticism, the cosmological reading lens developed in this study, called 'literary cosmology,' aims to stress the importance of literature and narrative for finding ways out of the Anthropocene.

Each part is underpinned by one of the broader socio-environmental issues that the Anthropocene debate addresses: current concerns of industrialised 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, refugee and diasporic sovereignty as linked to broader concerns of environmental justice and custodianship. Yet, by means of cosmological readings, each chapter also goes beyond current predicaments to show how the selected creative texts relate to human co-becoming with the environment, as well as to justice. Key for this understanding of cosmos is the transformative potential of 'goodness,' of a sympathetic order and chaos (further explicated below), despite and beyond the Anthropocene prognosis of decline.

'Cosmos' is employed as an extension to the term 'environment.' As historians Libby Robin, Sverker Sörlin and Paul Warde have stressed, 'environment' may by now be a "politically exhausted" concept (Robin et al., 2018, 173). Although encapsulating the idea of a complex whole, unity and transdisciplinary knowledge exchange, Robin et al. point out that 'environment' is still widely associated with the notion of a 'passive nature' and is often associated with natural resources and their exploitation. This rings true if we think of, for instance, corporate greenwashing. Instead of aiming to replace the word 'environment,' the point is that a focus on 'cosmos' may shift viewpoints and inform constructive, fresh understandings that go beyond the harmful nature/culture divide. This approach is reflected in my selection of creative fiction: while the texts were chosen for their potential to wrestle with some aspect of the Anthropocene, they would not necessarily stand out as 'environmental literature' or climate fiction. In fact, only one of the six works discussed can be regarded to belong to the climate fiction genre and explicitly mentions the Anthropocene. Reading against the grain, my focus on cosmos seeks to broaden the notion of what is regarded as an environmental text, and open up new avenues for understanding 'nature' as a term in literary studies. This is not to say that terms such as nature and environment should be banned, but to stress that they are always already cultural—something that cosmos may capture more aptly.

Where the term environment may be 'tired,' the concept of cosmos provokes reciprocal meaning-making between humans and the more-than-human world, a reorientation towards materialism, and, as I argue, a new set of questions for cultural and literary studies. Moreover, a modern, contemporary and transcultural sense of cosmos explored here, one that is inevitably shaped by the planetary crisis, aims to capture a certain *zeitgeist* that is attentive to the vitality, agency and intentionality of the more-than-human world. Although forms of pagan, animist, anthropomorphising sense-making likely exist universally, this understanding may now be widely travelling—perhaps more than ever before. While the terms 'environment' and 'Anthropocene' entered the humanities through the sciences,[4] cosmos has renewed valency, I argue, precisely because it conjures up the entanglement of *culture* and nature. Cosmos evokes distributed and collective agency (understood as intentionality, will, purpose), which has been conceived in various cultures across the globe. Although my inquiry pays particular attention to already existing cosmologies—in this case, Indigenous Australian ones—a modern and transcultural conception of cosmos helps explore how notions of cosmos also partake in a globalised modernity and cannot simply be deemed pre-modern. This contemporary sense of cosmos allows me to apply cosmological readings to authors of diverse origins and cultures in a '(post)colonising' nation (Moreton-Robinson, 2003)[5] who often write in complex hybrid cultures. Paying attention to the potential of transcultural literary works to foster the idea of 'cosmos' can be more attentive, then, to authors who may be situated in Australia, but who do not all share the same history of Imperial colonialism, such as Behrouz Boochani's (2018) work. As I discuss in chapter 7, his remarkable work *No Friend but the Mountains* evokes a sense of a benevolent cosmos at odds with the violence and arbitrariness of the prison industrial complex, which renders strength and perspective in the midst of oppression.

My interest in cosmos participates in a particular cosmological discourse that has flourished in the Environmental Humanities since roughly the 2000s. More precisely, *Cosmological Readings* draws on three main fields: transcultural studies, transdisciplinary cosmological discourse, and Ecocriticism—especially Material and Anthropocene Ecocriticism (these fields are outlined in part I). The larger goal of this study is to reflect on the contemporary interest in the Anthropocene and cosmos, and to enrich the vocabulary within and beyond the Environmental Humanities.

Why Look at Cosmos in the Australian Anthropocene?

Although cosmos is understood as a transculturally circulating idea, cultural particularities are crucial for this study. In relation to the Anthropocene, Australia is an especially interesting test case for exploring ideas of cosmos because this settler-colonial nation incorporates a complex social fabric of diverse voices, some of which are associated with Western and non-Western origins. While Australia has been the locus of a long tradition of Indigenous land and water ethics,[6] it is also the third biggest exporter of fossil fuels in the world, and it has the highest extinction rates of mammals on the planet.[7] This book engages with these contrasting cosmological legacies in Australia—colonial and Indigenous—and considers their relevance for a modern multicultural 'trans-nation' (Huggan, 2007)[8] in the era of the Anthropocene. Yet this is not to suggest that Indigenous Australians can be essentialised into being especially 'environmental'; indeed, the stereotype of 'The Ecological Indian' has long been problematised.[9] Keeping in mind that Indigenous cultures are still marginalised and often violently suppressed across the globe, however, it is important to emphasise that many Indigenous cultures engage in particularly strong cosmological understandings—in the sense of the cultural characteristic of rootedness in the land that is shared by many Indigenous populations of settler-colonies. As I will show, Indigenous worldviews carry particular importance in the context of the Anthropocene: many Indigenous communities across the world are spearheading environmental movements and are continuously fighting for land rights and sovereignty. Although theories of the cosmos have been present in creative outlets transculturally, then, trans-Indigenous (Allen, 2012) worldviews that centre care for places and people are increasingly coming into focus in the context of the planetary crisis.

The Indigenous Australian principle of 'Care for Country' is crucial here: a "unique tradition of philosophical and practical ecology that has been espoused and practised by Indigenous Australians and Islanders for centuries" ("Australia Pacific Observatory," 2019), Country designates a complex whole, a collective, encompassing environment (such as land, water, sky) and social relations (human and more-than-human). As the oldest continuing cosmology on Earth, Country espouses a worldview that contrasts with the colonial legacy of prioritising resource extraction, economisation, and instrumentalisation of the land over sustainability and socio-eco-systemic health ("Australia Pacific Observatory," 2019). Scholar and Kombumerri Elder Mary Graham has argued 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 "[y]ou are not alone in the world" (2008, 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 here suggests that Indigenous cosmologies are profoundly shaped by the relationship to 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). The notion of 'law' here suggests a sympathetic cosmic order that is larger and more important than individual profit. Based on her studies with Aboriginal people, anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose has defined Country as a 'nourishing terrain,' borrowing this term from the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (Rose, 1996, 7). As she writes: "Country is a place that gives and receives life. Not just imagined or represented, it is lived in and lived with" (7). She continues:

> Country in Aboriginal English is not only a common noun but also a proper noun. People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person, they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, feel sorry for country, and long for country. […] Country is not a generalised or undifferentiated type of place, such as one might indicate with terms like "spending a day in the country" or "going up the country." Rather, country is a living entity with a yesterday, today

> and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and a will toward life. Because of this richness, country is home, and peace; nourishment for body, mind, and spirit; heart's ease. (7)

In this way, Country could perhaps be described as a collective person, as it consists of, as Rose notes, "people, animals, plants, Dreamings, underground, earth, soils, minerals and waters, surface water, and air" (7), but nevertheless it is referred to as an entity in itself.

Regarding the Anthropocene debate and its search for the origins of the planetary crisis, Australia is again a particularly striking case to examine. As one of the later 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. The example of Australia could therefore be understood to function like a magnifying glass for seeing processes that have led to the Anthropocene. What took centuries in Europe and elsewhere, happened over a mere few decades in Australia. Considering the legacy of colonialism and racial capitalism, an understanding of the Anthropocene predicaments is perhaps more legible in Australia than elsewhere. Kate Rigby (2015) 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 century and the Indigenous cultures and environmental conditions that they encountered" (22). The colonial disjunction, as Rigby points out, expresses a particularly strong nature/culture dualism, in which Australian 'nature' is something to be overcome and dominated by 'brave' settlers (10). This idea is aptly 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" (Rigby, 2015, 10). Rigby (2015, 11) describes this stereotype as having effects on current climate policy, as it expresses a culturally specific type of 'ecophobia' (Estok, 2009).

The 'clash' of environmental attitudes in Australia can be seen in the contemporary run to reduce greenhouse gases, known locally as 'climate wars.' Referring to its environmental politics, Australia has been called a 'rogue nation' that disproportionally contributes to climate change by having the highest CO_2 emissions per capita in the world and by being the largest exporter of coal and liquid gas on the planet (McKibben, 2016).[10] Since 1996, successive governments have subverted international agreements on climate change, and during the 2022 COP27 UN conference in Egypt, Australia was ranked "a very low performing country" in the climate change performing index, ranking 55th out of 63 countries on climate change policies, behind the US and China (Adam Morton, 2021). It was marked down for having "no policies or national plan on phasing out coal and gas mining"; instead, there are plans for expanding these industries by 5%, which is incompatible with the global 1.5°C target (Adam Morton, 2021). In 2022, voters removed the conservative administration, which had subsidised fossil fuels and was grouped alongside Saudi Arabia and Russia as blocking climate action (Adam Morton, 2021). While the current Labor government has installed a range of Green and independent Members of Parliament, and aims to host the 2026 UN climate summit, it is also considering whether to open hundreds of new fossil fuel projects that are, needless to say, antithetical to limiting global warming.

This is despite the continent's unique geophysical properties and vulnerability: Australia's weather patterns cross a number of climate zones, and its nonannual cycles are associated with the El Niño Southern Oscillation and the Indian Ocean Dipole, making it prone to extreme patterns, such as droughts, fires and flooding rain (Rigby, 2015, 7). As climate scientists Andrew Stock et al. (2017) point 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 heating impacts. This observation was confirmed during the catastrophic Black 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 (Griffiths, 2020). Thirty-three 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 the continent's forests burned, scientists consider the event to be "unprecedented globally" (Cox, 2020).

The fact that Australia is both a name for a nation and a continent—however porous the boundaries may be—is also relevant for this book, as it reflects both the cultural imaginary as well as the physical properties of the country/continent. Vilashini Cooppan has argued for the continent as a particularly striking unit for comparative and world literary studies, as it is "both like and unlike nation, region, area, globe, planet" (2015, 8). Continents evoke deep-time 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 fall from unity into difference, 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 dureé*, the "non-anthropocentric, non-national, pre-imperial history of place" (11).

Moreover, Indigenous place-ethics, the colonial experience and the geophysical properties of the land led to the earliest critiques of human supremacy (constructed against nature), so that Australia exhibits a remarkable tradition of environmental thought and activism: not only did the nation witness the formation of the world's first green party—the United Tasmania Group was formed in 1972—but it was also home to the first articulations of the Environmental Humanities, first called the "Ecological Humanities" by its founding scholars.[11] Today, the nation evinces a particularly strong activist tradition among the younger generations: the school strike for climate 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 grassroots campaigns, protests and student education across the country. Indigenous Australian writer and historian Tony Birch notes that "the relationship between colonialism, capitalism and environmental degradation and a consequent link to climate change is unambiguous," and that a "genuinely equitable" exchange between Indigenous knowledge and wider Australia is needed, based on the values of humility, place-care and community (2016, 361).

Cosmological Readings investigates such contrasting environmental attitudes through creative fiction and explores the power of language and the imagination to shape attitudes, behaviours and the culture at large. While the perspective from Australia can be seen as providing a unique viewpoint for coming to terms with the Anthropocene, it is also, of course, exemplary for how settler-colonial countries relate to the environment, and expressive of the trajectory of many wealthy nations.

Before further venturing into the idea of a literary cosmology, however, it first seems necessary to pay heed to the fact that a naïve and idealistic conception of a 'good,' beautiful and ordered cosmos might sideline the 'dark' and pessimistic strain in contemporary ecological thought that emphasises the importance of mourning the state of the planet. In *Dark Ecology*, for instance, Timothy Morton (2016) draws attention to the pain and grief of the status quo that do not shy away from admitting how 'badly' the environmental crisis makes us feel. Against the "hippie aesthetic of life over death," 'dark' here expresses the idea that "we want to stay with a dying world" (184–5). 'Dark' also aims to counter the myth of progress, as much as ring the alarm in the face of increasing loss and destruction. An ecology, moreover, is not a closed and orderly system. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen reminds us, nature is "not a creature of seclusion and solace, but a concept for repeated interrogation, a term without transparent explanatory force" (2013, xxii). This is something that Bruno Latour expressed with his term 'kakosmos,' which aims to stress that we are now faced with a "bad common world," a contemporary, open-ended and uncertain kind of cosmic (dis)order, which includes the destructive consequences of modernity and industrialisation that depart from the outdated model of a neatly ordered unchangeable cosmos (2004, 99). As Latour writes, kakosmos is "in polite Greek, a horrible and disgusting mess! And yet a kakosmos is a cosmos nonetheless" (2010, 481). Cohen interprets this as designating "a tangled, fecund, and irregular pluriverse humans inhabit along with lively and agency-filled objects, materials, and forces" (2013, xxiii). (I will come back to cosmos as a 'common world'—whether good or bad—in my chapters.) Similarly, the literary texts selected here tell of human co-becoming with the forces of wheat, mines, revived languages, media-technologies, disaster narratives, plants, ancestors, the prison industrial complex and rivers.

Indeed, a potentially romanticised version of cosmos could neglect the importance of 'chaos' (that I engage with in part I), and the very existence of conflict, violence, placelessness, paradox, senseless suffering. It may run the risk of obliterating cultural and ecological differences—as if we all had to read literature cosmologically to 'heal the world.' Neither does the focus on the constructive aspects of cosmos aim to go against the deconstructivist tradition in cultural criticism, which has of course generated invaluable work. Rather, I attend to cosmological imaginaries in contemporary texts to explore how the writer's imagination transcends 'the problem': by implicitly or explicitly engaging with some form of goodness, healing and justice despite and beyond systems of oppression, and by recovering (more-than) human agency. Tara June Winch's *The Yield* (2019), for example, addresses the commodification of land and water, the cheapening of 'nature' and the deep history of exploited labour, serfdom and slavery shaping Australia today. Beyond an analysis of oppression and environmental crisis, however, the novel centres regeneration: it conveys that it is 'care-full' labour that is needed to revitalise Indigenous languages, cultures and Country.

This emphasis on agency and constructiveness has become important precisely because the current trajectory of the planetary crisis can indeed be described as 'dark.' While it is crucial to not neglect fear, grief and despair as an embodied experience of the ecological crisis, it is equally crucial not to underestimate the transformative multiplying power of radical hope and love against all odds. As I show especially in part III, recent environmental thought (that draws on a long history, especially of Bla(c)k feminism) has uncovered the crucial role of pleasure, joy and humour for everyday survival, but also as a strategy for movement building. If it is impossible to foreground a 'positive' notion of cosmos only, this study includes one example that I call 'negative cosmology': Briohny Doyle's *The Island Will Sink* (2016) is concerned with the proliferation of dystopian narratives in the Anthropocene. The inclusion of this novel, a dark vision of a hyper-Anthropocene in which humanity is unable to correct its ecocidal trajectory, suggests that a cosmological lens can also foreground 'negative' visions and realities. Needless to say, 'dark' genres such as dystopia and the Gothic hold an invaluable place in environmental rhetoric and, especially, in Australian literature.[12]

While the belief in the redemptive potential of a cosmological imagination evokes the era of Romanticism, and while that tradition's "redemptive strand" (Rigby, 2004, 9) certainly resonates with my interest in cosmos, tracing it in transcultural Australian literature is less obvious and therefore does not take centre stage in this study. As Andrew Taylor notes with regards to Australian literature, for many English and colonial writers, nature has remained largely secular:

> [Nature] is not pattern or plan, embodiment of an immanent divine order, but the other: the antagonist/protagonist […] who is both lover (beloved) and enemy. […] that harmony is now not only irretrievably lost: it was never ours in the first place since it was our, European, arrival which marked its end by inscribing division in the name of patriarchal power. (Taylor, 1992, 200)

As Taylor points out, English and colonial writers in Australia often expressed different views and emotions to European Romanticists; the sense of belonging and a divine order too often was negated through the experience of alienness in the environment and the violence of Indigenous dispossession. This may be the reason early colonial descriptions of the Australian landscape frequently took a dark turn, as they were marked by anxiety, violence and absence—a trademark of the Gothic genre. Similarly, Philip Mead has argued that critics who trace the Romantic legacy in Australia run the risk of remaining within a cultural and literary history that is "encrusted with mimetic constructions" (1992, 236). Tracing the Romantic legacy to diverse Australian writers, then, runs the risk of generating Eurocentric readings. This "Romantic disinheritance" in Australia, as Taylor (1992) calls it, complicates the reduction of cosmos to Romanticism and reveals that constructions of cosmos as exclusively 'Western' or European are unhelpful.

My interest in cosmos, then, does not invest in the idea of cosmological order as a kind of utopian and teleological 'end-goal.' Rather, the contentious and perhaps provocative terms 'order' and 'chaos' are employed in order to engage with the deep and dark problems of the Anthropocene, *as well as* with an unpredictable, fluid and 'crazy' cosmic goodness that 'nourishes' life, to borrow Rose's definition of Country (see part I). This understanding of cosmos is marked by mysterious agencies which are always in motion, always in exchange with 'chaos.' In fact, the word universe has in it the Latin *vertere*, which designates a 'spinning' thing, an eternally mobile system (Cohen and Duckert, 2017, 20). Spinning also suggests that, in its nonlinear, unpredictable and complex way, it will always exceed understanding.

Literary Cosmology

Cosmological Readings suggests that the task of coming to terms with the Anthropocene requires not so much the search for 'environmental literature' as the development of reading methodologies and a reassessment of why we read (I explicate the genesis of these ideas in detail in part I). Literature has a fundamental role to play in generating engagements with the cosmos; through storytelling and aesthetics, it is able to speak to mind, body and spirit, and it can shape an environmental imagination despite and amidst a trajectory of decline. Indeed, the field of literary studies combines insights of multiple disciplines and perspectives and is able to offer multi-scalar reflections of and on time and place. 'Literary cosmology' has a twofold meaning. Firstly, it designates *a general function of literature* and storytelling as assigning meaning to, but also as being shaped by, the material world; secondly, it names *a lens through which to read literature* in the Anthropocene, which generates specific questions, such as:

- How does the text make sense of the origin, evolution and ethics of the current environmental predicament?
- How is the text's 'cosmology' linked to transcultural and/or culturally specific understandings of a world order?
- How does the sense of cosmos relate to language, form, narrative and the figure of the writer?

In this way, 'literary cosmology' refers to the special aptitude of literature and the arts to imagine a socio-eco-political vision, and presents the Anthropocene predicament in meaningful ways that bind individual readers into larger, more-than-human, 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).

I am not the first to employ the term 'literary cosmology': as I show in part I in detail, literary scholar Pamela Gossin (2007) has used it to describe the ways in which the novelist Thomas Hardy worked with astronomical and astrological imagery in his novels. This perhaps more literal understanding of a literary cosmology is highly productive, yet I argue that 'literary cosmology' can be understood as wider-ranging: alongside terrestrial and celestial imagery, it can also bring to the fore the entanglements of culture and nature more generally. Next to Gossin, my literary cosmology largely builds on the work by Joni Adamson and Salma Monani, as well as by George B. Handley, all of whom have made significant contributions to the intersection of cosmology, literature and the environmental crisis. Adamson and Monani have shown the importance of Indigenous cosmologies for shaping environmental discourse as well as governance. Handley has theorised 'cosmology' as both a narrative of wholeness and a methodology of reading that is capable of accommodating already-existing cosmologies, such as can be found in religious and spiritual traditions.[13] Building on these insightful approaches by

Gossin, Adamson and Monani, and Handley, I propose an understanding of cosmos that is modern, transcultural and (dis)enchanted, engendering broader notions of what constitutes 'the environment.'

Crucial for my reading lens is the idea of 'cosmic goodness' amidst the Anthropocene prognosis of decline. While inquiries into a literary cosmos often linked to the era of Romanticism and have more recently brought about highly interesting readings related to trauma (Durrant and Topper, 2020),[14] my interest here is in the transformative potential of the cosmic imagination for our *current* context. Exploring the possibility of environmental repair through creative fiction perhaps inevitably posits the power of the small-scale and ordinary for bringing about large-scale change. In contrast to grand-scale solutions such as geo-engineering (see my discussion of the 'Ecomodernist group' in part III), literary works can highlight the *everyday* as a powerful reservoir and catalyst for cultural change. Albeit with different emphases, similar ideas have been explored through conceptualisations of literature as a 'resource of hope' (Raymond Williams, 1989), as 'convivial encounter' (Paul Gilroy, 2004; Tina Steiner, 2021), as well as an 'emergent strategy' (adrienne maree brown, 2017). As I discuss with brown's attention to small-scale and embodied transformations in part III, my interest in the potential of literature (and the arts generally) to emphasise a 'cosmic goodness' designates a pragmatic survival strategy that is both individual *and* eco-systemic, cultural *and* transcultural meta-discursive.

At this point it may again be necessary to bring to awareness the potential shortcomings and dangers of such a 'literary cosmology.' Ecocriticism has been described as a 'Theory of Everything' (Timothy Clark, 2011), as it deals with the gargantuan task of analysing the ecocidal trajectory we are collectively facing, but also because almost everything could be regarded as an environmental issue. As Timothy Clark writes, even "divorce […] becomes an environmental issue if it creates two households instead of one" (86). Similarly, using the reading lens of 'cosmos' can also run the risk of becoming somewhat 'wishy-washy':[15] after all, it encompasses vast phenomena such as the origin, evolution and diversity of 'nature,' earth and universe. Keeping in mind this potential pitfall, I use cosmos and cosmology in relation to the specific context of the Anthropocene crisis in Australia. If this reading strategy proves fruitful, however, 'cosmological readings' can potentially be applied to a broader range of texts and yield insights that go beyond the themes of this book.

Structure and Corpus

After the theoretical Part I, "Context/Theory," each part takes two contemporary Australian literary texts, and is centred around different thematic complexes—or issues of concern[16]—as reflected in the Anthropocene debate: Colonisation/Exploitation; Bioethics/Technology; 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 part discusses key terms and critiques of the Anthropocene debate, such as the Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Black Anthropocene, Manthropocene and Chthulucene, so that the literary discussions are framed and sparked by anchors of the debate. Needless to say, these themes are not comprehensive: extinction, for instance, has emerged as a key concern that has generated highly important insights,[17] and that studies focused on the idea of cosmos may well engage with in the future.

Part I (with chapters 1 and 2)—"Context/Theory: From Chaos to Cosmos to Anthropocene?"—sets up the relevance of a modern understanding of 'cosmos': although it is related to the Anthropocene, it still presents an overcoming of it. Starting with an overview of the Anthropocene, the part outlines both the history and the contemporary use of cosmological thought. Relating cosmos to Ecocriticism and the Environmental Humanities, and highlighting key ideas such as chaos, order, scale and cosmopolitics, I draw on insights from the sciences, trans-Indigenous studies and New Materialism. I then put forward the conception of cosmos as modern, transcultural and (dis)enchanted, using the example of the explorer Alexander von Humboldt.

Part II (with chapters 3 and 4)—"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* (2005) and Tara June 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 conjunction with ideological conceptions of race (the imagined 'white nation') and in disjuncture with environmental conditions. Spanning three different time-scales and written from multiple perspectives (Indigenous and non-Indigenous), *The Yield* considers the problematic legacy of wheat-farming and mining. As both novels illuminate the history of resource exploitation and Indigenous dispossession in Australia, this chapter is framed by the Anthropocene debate's focus on racial capitalism as expressed in the terms Capitalocene, Plantationocene and Black Anthropocene. As I show, 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 the strategies with which 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), respectively.

Part III (with chapters 5 and 6)—"Bioethics/Technology: 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 the collection *Heat and Light* (2015). This part is framed by critiques of technocratic responses to the Anthropocene, with its concomitant problematic idea of human mastery over 'nature.' In contrast to the notion of environmental crisis as a specialist concern only, this part stresses the need to engage grassroots civic society. This involves an attention to storytelling in its widest sense (including narratives, tropes and affects) that profoundly shapes the planetary crisis. *The Island Will Sink* explores the potential of dystopian 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. Whereas *The Island Will Sink* tests the accuracy, ethics and limitations of the commonly found apocalyptic 'natural disaster' narrative, I read "Water" as engaging neglected genres in environmental discourse—romance, survival and humour. My cosmological reading foregrounds the relevance of widening notions of the environment and of diversifying ecocritical engagements with texts. I propose that the literary texts expose the dangers of an over-abundance of dystopian narratives in the Anthropocene: although apocalypticism has the potential to warn, it can also paralyse responses, and further passivity and despair.

Finally, part IV (with chapters 7 and 8)—"Environmental Justice/Custodianship: Towards a Sovereign Cosmopolitics"—analyses two works set in the present: Behrouz Boochani's hybrid text *No Friend but the Mountains* (2018) and Melissa Lucashenko's novel *Too Much Lip* (2018). Boochani gives a partly fictionalised autobiographical account of his experiences as a Kurdish refugee in Australia's island prison system on Manus Island (Papua New Guinea). Lucashenko's *Too Much Lip* portrays the intergenerational 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 of a political prisoner, the other from a fictionalised Indigenous Australian family—both reveal insights into the interdependency of social justice and eco-systemic health. Because traditionally humanist issues, such as social justice, refugee rights, land rights and sovereignty, are still at the margins of what is perceived as an environmental issue, I highlight the ideas of Environmental Justice, custodianship, sovereignty and cosmopolitics. My cosmological reading illustrates the works' holistic understandings of social justice and considers the need for a new political representation that includes local sovereign knowledge, vulnerable people, and more-than-human entities. I suggest that both Boochani and Lucashenko, who are themselves prominent activists, position the writer-figure as visionary, prophetic, and a powerful custodian of justice.

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; the Brisbane/Moreton Bay area; rural Queensland; and Manus Island (Papua New Guinea), where Australia currently holds refugee detention centres. The diversity of places reflects my investment in the idea of cosmos as local *and* global, showing that cosmological readings can very much accommodate the study of a national literature in reciprocity with the transnational, planetary and world-literary.

Reading literature through the lens of a nation, however, inevitably generates the question of representation. Huggan has noted that this "beg[s] the question of cultural representativeness, and of the perceived 'Australianness' of the nation's touchstone literary works" (2007, 8). My selection of authors aims to represent a broad spectrum of Australian voices—Indigenous, refugee, migrant and 'Anglo.' The centrality of the local Indigenous perspective is reflected in my curation of texts, as half of the authors selected in this study are written by Indigenous authors.

Beyond identities, however, these texts were first and foremost selected based on thematic fit. As 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, each chapter starts with the broader issues, before investigating how the texts respond to, or shape, the aspects of this crisis. I am also conscious of the fact that—for reasons of scope—this book omits the literary works of important Australian writers, such as Alexis Wright and the earlier-cited Tony Birch, who have made significant contributions with regards to Indigenous perspectives on the climate emergency in Australia and beyond. Yet I incorporate their invaluable guidance where pertinent: both Wright's and Birch's non-fiction publications on Indigenous knowledge and (uneasy) Green/Blak[18] alliances are consulted throughout.

Moreover, the selected works belong to a diversity of genres. Although limited to prose novels, my corpus includes historical fiction, science and speculative fiction, climate fiction, and fictionalised life narrative that includes poetry. All my chapters also contain literary texts that are partly written in a realist mode. This variety reflects a discussion that has emerged in Anthropocene Ecocriticism, which asks whether genre fiction is particularly apt for expressing concerns of the Anthropocene. As I will illustrate particularly in part III with my discussion of climate fiction, science fiction and speculative fiction, the Anthropocene has provoked a reconsideration of form (predominantly scale and genre), 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 heating can be narrated on a human scale, many scholars and authors responded to these concerns with the fact that the Anthropocene has been very productive for writers, and that literature is conspicuously *good* at moving across different scales and engaging readers in holistic ways. Numerous writers and critics have argued, moreover, 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 worldview. Although this may be true to a certain extent, my readings show that realism can very much live up to the task of productively engaging with the Anthropocene, as the realist mode can include complex focalisation and more-than-human narrators. Although the selected works are limited to contemporary fiction, they are in no way meant to convey a presentist understanding of the Anthropocene that overlooks the fact that this supposed new epoch is the latest in a very long series of earth-historical disruptions (see Davies, 2016, 86). Contemporary fiction inevitably reflects a certain *zeitgeist*, yet it is clear that the definition of contemporary is broad in this case: it refers to fiction from roughly the past 17 years, and includes examples of historical fiction.

'Cosmo-readings' add to 'eco-readings' by exploring the sense of a sympathetic order and chaos; tropes, genres and expressions of (more-than-) human agency; and ethical visions offered by these texts—especially pertaining to social and multispecies justice. My literary cosmology considers the importance of the cultural view of the environment, while also suggesting that the ecosystem precedes humans and has an order that transcends the existence of any one species. Although *Cosmological Readings* investigates specific issues relating to the planetary crisis, I also acknowledge that literary works have a life of their own and do not just respond programmatically or instrumentally to problems. Literary works exceed academic inquiries and research questions; they go beyond contemporary contexts and point to what is as yet unsayable.

Notes

1a Thank you to my examiner, Tony Hughes D'Aeth, for this expression and observation.

1b Ursula Heise has defined a decline-narrative 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" (2016, 7).

2 This book uses the imperfect 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 it carefully, always aiming to contextualise this loose term. As Deborah Bird Rose puts it, "in its problematic,

provocative, and violent history, the term continues to challenge us, and for that reason, especially, I continue to use it" (Robin and Rose, 2004).

3 A practical example for this can be seen in Australia's current discussion on increasing the general deployment of Indigenous burning practices, to prevent mega-fires. See, for example, Victor Steffensen's *Fire Country: How Indigenous Fire Management Could Help Save Australia* (2020).

4 As Robin, Sörlin and Warde (2018) show, although the origin of the term environment dates back to the 1600s, its popularity can be traced back to a post-War world order. Starting in 1948 with the onset of the Cold War, Robin et al. 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).

5 Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2003) speaks of Australia as a "postcolonizing society," choosing to emphasise the active side of the position ("I Still"). In fact, many voices have contested the notion that the prefix 'post' is applicable to Australia, given its ongoing conflicts over land, Australia's failure to become an independent republic or the lack of recognition afforded to Indigenous peoples within Australian society (O'Reilly, 2010).

6 From here on, I often use the term 'land' to also include water. Indigenous 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, 2017). Moreover, the separation of land and water can be considered arbitrary. As recently argued by Dilip Da Cunha (2018), for instance, separating land from water is a conceptualisation that forgets that we live in a "ubiquitous wetness."

7 See for example: Euan Ritchie. "'Gut-Wrenching and Infuriating': Why Australia is the World Leader in Mammal Extinctions, and What to Do about it." *The Conversation*, 18 Oct, 2022.

8 Australian literature harbours a trans-national perspective, Huggan writes, 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" (2007, viii).

9 The term goes back to Shepherd Krech's book *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*. New York: Norton, 1999. While naïve associations with Indigenous Australians and 'greenness' need to be problematised (discussed in part III), the principle of 'Care for Country' remains an important self-description brought forward by many First Nations peoples. As some of the Indigenous writers and scholars selected here employ the term 'Country,' I will use it in the context of these works.

10 This book 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*," 2019).

11 Among these founding scholars were Val Plumwood, Deborah Bird Rose, Freya Matthews, Libby Robin, Kate Rigby and Tom Griffiths. 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., 2012, 1). For an outline of the field, please see part I.

12 This ecophobia is visible, for instance, in colonial Gothic tradition, which often expressed colonial fear of an 'alien' environment and the guilt of dispossession (although, of course, the Gothic tradition is much more diverse and complex than 'colonial' is able to capture). Early on in the colonising project, the Australian landscape as a radical other became an object of all kinds of fantasies reflecting individual anxieties and collective alienation; it may therefore not be a coincidence that Gothic representations became a popular and prolific way of telling stories from within Australia, which was, however, initially mainly written for the British gaze (Turcotte, 2009, 280). Scholarship has long established new branches of the Gothic with postcolonial directions, such as the Postcolonial Gothic, Aboriginal Gothic, Magical Realism and so on—although these genre categories also remain contested.

13 Walls has primarily written on Humboldt's and Henry David Thoreau's use of cosmos, for instance: "'The Value of Mutual Intelligence': Science, Poetry, and Thoreau's Cosmos" (2017). Adamson and Monani have developed the notion of 'cosmovisions' and applied cosmopolitical readings in a number of essays, as well as in the collection *Ecocriticism and Indigenous Studies* (2017). Handley turns to already-existing cosmologies in Caribbean literature as well as in theological contexts. See especially "Climate Change, Cosmology and Poetry: The Case of Derek Walcott's *Omero*" (Handley, 2015) and "*Laudato Si*' and the Postsecularism of the Environmental Humanities" (Handley, 2016).

14 In "Cosmological Trauma and Postcolonial Modernity," Sam Durrant and Ryan Topper define cosmological trauma as a "rupture within a non-Western, non-secular belief system—for example, the breakdown of animist worldviews that canonical African texts such as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* […] take to be central to the trauma of colonization" (Durrant and Topper, 2020, 192).

15 I thank the examiner of my thesis, Tony Hughes D'Aeth, for this expression and observation.

16 Coined by Latour, 'matters of concern' expresses the entanglement of facts and values. While facts are often linked to the scientific realm, the crises of our times reveal the inseparability of the two: "'Nature' isolated from its twin sister 'culture' is a phantom of Western anthropology" (2015, 221). In short, Latour's 'matters of concern' expresses the idea that most environmental problems are crises of values.

17 See for instance Deborah Bird Rose, Thom van Dooren and Matthew Chrulew, editors. *Extinction Studies: Stories of Time, Death, and Generations*. New York: Columbia UP, 2017.

18 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, 2020). See also the seminal volume on Green/Blak relationships in Australia: Timothy Neale and Eve Vincent, editors. *Unstable Relations: Indigenous People and Environmentalism in Contemporary Australia*. Crawley, Western Australia: UWA Publishing, 2016.

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Part I

Context/Theory

From Chaos to Cosmos to Anthropocene?

The Anthropocene 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's ecosystems, smog, extinction rates, toxic gases, losses of coastal wetlands, and human predation (Crutzen and Stoermer, 2000, 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., 2016, 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 because it suggests a fundamental change needed in *human* behaviour, consumption habits, attitude to life and so on.

What's in a name? The act of naming brings into being, shapes perceptions, triggers debates. The widespread 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 and verified, and that is increasingly palpable. The Anthropocene is further marked by the understanding that the more-than-human world, or 'nature,' has been increasingly impacted by human actions. Historian Dipesh Chakrabarty argues in his seminal essay, "The Climate of History: Four Theses" (2009), 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. A fundamental assumption of Western (and now universal) political thought has come undone in this crisis" (207). The Anthropocene 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 calls for a rethinking of the relationship between binaries, such as nature/culture, human/animal, mind/matter or

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sciences/humanities. The Anthropocene contains a paradox: while pointing to the detachment of ‘human’ from ‘nature,’ it simultaneously amalgamates ‘nature’ and ‘human’ into one, affirming their unity.

Although the Anthropocene has gained steady traction since the 1990s, its use has expanded exponentially in recent years—there are few concepts that have spread so widely and so quickly across multiple disciplines. Crucially, however, the term has also proven highly contentious 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’) conveys a sense of universal guilt for environmental degradation, as if it was everybody’s (and nobody’s) fault, inevitable, and somehow part of human nature to lead unsustainable and ecocidal lives. To express the multifaceted 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 and Black Anthropocene (which highlight the social systems of racial capitalism[2] as central); 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); or the ‘Manthropocene’ (a feminist critique pointing to the commonly found construction of humanity as male).[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 (Menely and Taylor, 2017, 9). They 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 difficult attempt at defining one ‘right’ version and meaning of history (Ruddiman et al., 2015). As Haraway has suggested, the term Anthropocene is to be used critically, carefully and perhaps rarely, as it perpetuates unhelpful, inaccurate and universal constructs of ‘humanity.’ The Anthropocene indicates a “boundary event,” a crisis, not an end result (Haraway, 2016, 160).

For the purposes of this book, I use the term Anthropocene, as I understand it to already encompass multivalent critiques. The Anthropocene is also employed as an umbrella term that is able to capture a more complex understanding of events than the more commonly used ‘climate change’ suggests. Although the Anthropocene encapsulates a kaleidoscope of disaster and decline, the cosmological readings performed in this book point to the need for constructive narratives in the face of environmental degradation. Instead of dwelling on the losses of the Anthropocene, my engagement with cosmos seeks to go beyond a victim/perpetrator or nature/culture paradigm, as it explores various forms of agency despite and beyond environmental devastation.

As can be seen in the Anthropocene debate, and as mentioned above, the naming process 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 more conscious that decisions—such as the naming of the Anthropocene—are also deeply political (Finney and Edwards, 2016, 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 profoundly cultural concerns that have broadly been neglected in various humanist disciplines. There are more than 20 proposed start dates for the Anthropocene: in the sciences, these dates generally refer to physical signs in the Earth's 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, 2016, 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'[4] and Early Modernity's onset of colonisation, capitalism, racism and the transportation of plants and animals. As argued with the neologisms, 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-political roots. In short, they are *cultural* issues. 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). The Anthropocene itself thus signifies an unprecedented planetary crisis that contains multiple socio-environmental problems and calls for strategies and responses across disciplines, institutions and civil society. Lorimer poignantly comments on the complex search for names, dates and definitions of this supposedly new epoch: "Regardless of what the International Commission on Stratigraphy decides, the genie is out of the bottle" (2016, 123). In other words, while definitions of the Anthropocene may never be finally agreed on, the term has come to stand for an important transitionary moment, a crisis, that demands recognition and repair across the planet.

This brief outline of what Rob Nixon (2014) has called the 'omnivorous idea' of the Anthropocene, which will be expanded upon throughout this book, suggests how complex and contested, but also how fruitful the Anthropocene concept can be. 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.

This study explores contemporary expressions of 'cosmos' as they relate to the Anthropocene narrative, while still presenting an overcoming of it. Laura Dassow Walls' earlier-cited proposition that cosmos is "the oldest ecological vision of our planet," that is capable of undoing the harmful separation between "culture and nature, human and environment, mind and matter, intellect and emotion," is important for linking cosmos to the Anthropocene (2016, 47). Understanding cosmos as "the oldest ecological vision" implies that it contains a kind of solution to the decline-narrative of the Anthropocene because this grave predicament names the "inability to think the cosmos" (48). Conveyed in this statement is also that the Anthropocene can be seen as deriving from powerful worldviews, or 'grand-narratives,' resulting in the failure to assign intelligence and agency to the more-than-human world. 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 the master species, rather than as dependent on, interconnected with and situated in an eco-systemic order. Moreover, the process of defining the Anthropocene maps the creation, evolution and expected future of life on Earth; cosmos regains momentum for addressing the very practices that have led us into the Anthropocene. To put it simply, if the Anthropocene describes the problem, cosmological worldviews help to find ways out of it. In this vein, geographer Jamie Lorimer has proposed the alternative term 'Cosmoscene.' Following the recent reviving of cosmological thought in philosophy, as practised by Isabelle Stengers, Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour, Lorimer places the starting of this age in a tentative 'after' of the Anthropocene: "The Cosmoscene would begin when modern humans became aware of the impossibility of extricating themselves from the earth and started to take responsibility for the world in which they lived—turning to face the future" (2015, 4). Although the Anthropocene has prompted a reconsideration of cosmological thought, the inherent meanings of cosmos have stood the test of time. The Anthropocene may pass, but cosmos remains.

Notes

1 A panel of 34 scientists convened by Jan Zalasiewicz, professor of palaeobiology. The role of this group is advisory; it plans to submit a formal proposal to the International Commission on Stratigraphy, which oversees the official geologic time chart (Meera, 2019).

2 '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, 2020, 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 (2018).

3 The terms Capitalocene and Plantationocene were both coined collectively (Moore, 2016, 5; 2017; Haraway, 2016, 206). The '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. The 'Chthulucene,' coined by Donna Haraway (2015, 2016), critiques the fixation on *anthropos* by suggesting that humans have never been self-contained, but have always lived in multispecies communities (2016, 101). The 'Manthropocene' was coined by Kate Raworth to point to the fact that the AWG 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, 2014). See Part II for a deeper discussion of the Capitalocene, Black Anthropocene, and Plantationocene.

4 The 'long sixteenth century' refers to a historic periodisation ranging broadly from 1450 to 1640 and is linked to the beginnings of transoceanic colonisation. The term is generally associated with Immanuel Wallerstein's idea of the emergence of a predominant capitalism as well as world-systems theory (Wallerstein, 2011).

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1 Cosmos Within and Beyond the Environmental Humanities

'Chaosmos' and Anthropocene

If a newly enlivened sense of 'cosmos' is flourishing in the Anthropocene, it seems necessary to define the relationship between the two 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, 2009, 222). In this way, the Anthropocene could be called a 'negative cosmology' because it presents a decline-narrative that maps the harm done to the biosphere, rather than supporting the fact that sustainable human cultures and practices do and can exist. Moreover, as a term that was influenced by Earth-systems science, the Anthropocene is linked to 'cosmos' and 'chaos' in that it expresses the understanding that there is indeed an order, or a stability, 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 stability, or order (the Holocene), and increasing environmental instability and uncertainty (the Anthropocene), which echoes the ancient Greek use of cosmos as a materially and metaphysically interwoven system that emerged out of chaos. Rather than moving out of chaos to order, then, the trajectory of the Anthropocene appears to move from order to chaos.

Yet order and chaos are not antagonists. Rather, they exist on a spectrum, as partners, in process. This idea was captured by James Joyce in his neologism *chaosmology*, which denotes "a larger continuum" (Beaulieu, 2016, 201; Joyce, 1939, chapter 8). In fact, Earth-systems science, which has generated the term Anthropocene, does not evoke a pre-given harmonious order either, that generic 'humans' disturb and throw into chaos, but it relies on the analysis of feedback loops for the very understanding of the workings of ecosystems. In this sense, disturbance of, or deviation from, an order can be understood to form an intrinsic part of the functionality of a system. This is suggested by the notion 'eco-systemic resilience,' which scientists have defined as "the inherent ability to absorb various

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disturbances and reorganize while undergoing state changes to maintain critical functions" (Sasaki et al., 2015, 395). Similarly, ecocritical scholar Greg Garrard notes about the cultural understanding of 'natural balance': "in ecology, the reassuring notion of the 'balance of nature'—a biological myth of Eternal Return—has been replaced by the disorienting idea of perpetual flux within broad geographical limits" (2016, 64, citing Kricher, 2009).

Chaos theory as it emerged in the sciences has been studying complex systems and their unpredictable behaviour over time. Unpredictability, nonlinearity, and 'sensitive dependence' (commonly known as the butterfly effect) that nevertheless follows certain rules constitute the paradox that chaos theory puts forward (Bishop, 2017). Needless to say, these scientific insights also have philosophical and socio-cultural dimensions; it is hardly surprising, then, that this has also generated highly productive theories for the humanities.

One example is Édouard Glissant's notion of a 'chaos-world' (*chaos-monde*) which explores chaos as a relevant idea for the movement of cultures in globalised modernity. Glissant, who developed much of his work based on the Caribbean experience and its creole cultures, calls 'chaos-world' "the shock, the intertwining, the repulsions, attractions, complicities, oppositions and conflicts between the cultures of peoples in the contemporary world-totality" (1996, 54). Refuting that cultures are essentialist, Glissant stresses the importance of spontaneity, openness and unpredictability inherent in the 'chaotic' encounters of cultures:

> [W]hat I am saying is that the relations between the world's cultures, today, are unpredictable. We have lived for a long time under the pressure and the precious teaching of the West, in systematic thought whose main ambition was predictability. All systematic thought aims at predictability. (55–6)

Glissant's insistence that transcultural encounters in our contemporary world are open-ended and flexible highlights the wealth of knowledge and innovation existing in cultures that have fuelled—but not necessarily profited from—global prosperity. As Glissant writes:

> [I]t is one of the givens of the chaos-world that acceptance of one's surroundings or suffering in one's surrounding are equally valid as pathways and means of knowing one's surroundings. And that consequently the negativity of suffering is just as much a constituent of identity as spontaneous, joyful or victorious acceptance. (1996, 57)

In this sense, 'chaos' (and by Glissant's extension, suffering) does not signify 'nothingness,' but represents the grounds for highly creative ways-of-being, a nothingness that is not nothing.

Similarly, Deborah Bird Rose has considered the meaning of 'nothingness' when coming to terms with the extinction crisis of the Anthropocene, developing what we could call a cosmology of death. In contrast to the emptiness of extinction, she argues that this crisis may help us reconsider the creative necessity, or what James Hatley calls the 'gift' of death that is in balance with life (2000, 212; also cited in Rose, 2011a, 20). As we are faced with exponential extinctions, however, there is indeed a destructive kind of nothingness, something Rose terms 'double death' (Rose, 2011b). Double death here designates that we are faced with exponential death that uncouples the necessary balance and creates an emptiness that does not fold back into life. Extinction is a double death, because it not only points to the exponential dying of creatures, but also of their future existence. Rose here conveys the creative necessity of 'chaos,' of death and suffering, as fundamental for new life to emerge and flourish. Yet, in light of human-caused extinction, this requires that we hold both in view: the understanding that suffering and death are a prerequisite for creation *as well as* the undeniable existence of needless suffering and highly destructive death (for instance, the extinction crisis).

A world view that embraces aspects of chaos, the 'dark' and 'messy,' such as Glissant, Rose and the earlier-cited Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bruno Latour have foregrounded, is fundamental for my conceptualisation of cosmos, which is interested in both an eco-systemic 'chaosmos' *as well as* culturally diverse meaning-making. In its insistence that there *is* such thing as a sovereign order, my employment of cosmos and chaos, however, also challenges Glissant's 'chaos-world.' Glissant (1996) writes that:

> [i]n the planet-wide encounter of cultures, that we experience as chaos, it seems that we no longer have any landmarks. Everywhere we look, we find catastrophe and death throes. We despair in the chaos-world. But this is because we are still trying to discern in it a sovereign order that would once again bring the world-totality back to a reductive unity. (45)

In contrast to the idea that there are no more "landmarks," the Anthropocene crisis seems to re-emphasise the existence of a sovereign order in the form of a planetary ecosystem that is now at peril of turning a large part of the earth uninhabitable for humans. Yet, crucially, this planetary ecosystemic order is one that is defined by open-endedness, unpredictability, suffering, uncertainty, but also unexpected *possibility*. This shift from certainty towards uncertainty, mystery and 'craziness' is something Rose terms 'ecological existentialism' (Rose, 2011a, 2): "there is no predetermined essence of humanity, no ultimate goal toward which we are heading; we experience what appear to be open ways of being and becoming human" (43). Drawing on philosopher Lev Shestov and Lucien Levy-Bruhl, craziness here conveys a "vision of a world in which life exceeds knowledge, and in which mutability and uncertainty are blessed emanations of life" (6). Paradoxically, then, the focus on various experiences and aspects of 'chaos' can also foreground the 'goodness' of a cosmic order—albeit one that is fluid and open-ended.

Downscaling for Social Change

Yet how can we translate chaosmological insights more practically? In her ground-breaking essay "The Cosmopolitical Proposal" (Stengers, 2005), in which the term 'cosmopolitics' was coined, Isabelle Stengers was preoccupied with what we might call the 'downscaling' of cosmos into the political. Defining 'cosmopolitics' as an "operator of equalization," which captures the fact that there is "no representative of the cosmos" (995), Stengers argues that the sense of an external order, of cosmos, can give great orientation in politics:

> 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. (2005, 1000)

Stengers here suggests that 'cosmos' captures the sense that there is such a thing as an 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 continues:

> The 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. (2005, 1001)

The question that emerges for Stengers is how to include the voices of the "victims of the commons" in politics (2005, 1002). The concept of cosmopolitics, thus, takes on the issue of incorporating and articulating a representation of the vulnerable constituents of the cosmos (996). It thus scales down the existence of a common order, or what Stengers calls "'honest' reality," to the level of politics, exploring its implications for decision-making bodies.

As Stengers points out in another essay, 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 cosmic (dis)order have become ever more pronounced: "the climate, far from being self-stabilizing, has been discovered to be a ticklish, ominous, and fearfully complex reality, which is now threatening us" (2017, 383). 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 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. (Stengers, 2017, 386)

It is our own stories—our own cosmologies—that we need to confront, Stengers holds, 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."

The importance of downscaling for a cosmos has also been a central concern of the Anthropocene debate, as it presents the problem of reconciling divergent scales of space and time: personal, social, local, global, planetary, past, present and future. Literary scholar Timothy Clark has described the Anthropocene as creating a "derangement of scale," which calls for reading strategies that foreground multiple scales (2012, 150). At the heart of the Anthropocene debate lies the question, of how to bring together the vast scale of a changing planetary ecosystem with the anthropocentric scale of social and individual responsibility (Dürbeck and Hüpkes, 2021, 1). Haraway (2015) has proposed that the decision to name the new epoch Anthropocene (and not Eurocene, for example) itself evokes a scalar story. This scalar narrative device can be seen in common visual representations of the Anthropocene that, as Stacy Alaimo has noted, often employ the view from above, favouring the macro-scale and a "view from nowhere" that forecloses embodied perspectives (2016, 146). Importantly, however, as Dürbeck and Hüpkes write, "anthropocentric conceptions of 'scale' can help strengthen not only scientific and philosophical but also social engagement" (2021, 1). This 'translation' into the human scale, as they point out, necessarily includes mediation, as "the Anthropocene is accessible only through technological means, narrative and mediated representational forms" (1). Horton has made the important point that cosmic thinking—in particular, microcosmographies—enables an understanding of scales "without producing a totalizing perspective," which casts the 'human' as villain or saviour, for example (2017, 45). In this sense, cosmic thought can be understood as a 'mapping device' (45) that can help find new perspectives while avoiding universalist thought: "It aggregates and conjoins without homogenizing" (48).

Yet even before the Anthropocene debate, humanists have long described the cosmological perspective as a bringing together of divergent scales. As Zach Horton writes: "Mystic, literary, and scholarly works have long sought to provide such trans-scalar access to the many scales that touch us, as well as those we touch" (2017, 40). In *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (1954), for instance, anthropologist Mircea Eliade argued 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 interrelating 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)

While this pertains to the *socio-cultural* construction of scale, science has often devoted itself to exploring its *materiality*. A quick detour to the sciences may be helpful to illustrate the fact that cosmic thought operates at the intersection of what we consider 'culture' and 'nature,' provoking interdisciplinary insights. Scientific cosmology is known for researching on multiscalar 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. (Carr, 2017, 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 seemed inconceivable a few decades ago" (2017, 42). Related to this is the phenomenon of fractals: repeating patterns that emerge on different scales. Both the sciences and humanities, then, suggest that the sense of cosmos forms an awareness of multiple scales, bringing them together through relationships of comparison, interconnectedness, unity, incommensurability and plurality.

Mathematician and cosmologist George F. R. Ellis has pointed out that the science of cosmology is exceptional in that it pushes the discipline to its limits because it is faced with the role of the mind. As a theory dealing with physical cosmology and related mathematical and physical issues, scientific cosmology 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" (Ellis, 2017, 4). 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. (Carr, 2017, 61)

Although arguments about the need for cosmologists to include the brain and mental experiences have been around for a while,[1a] Carr points out that physics of the last few decades has itself hinted that the mind may be a "fundamental rather than incidental feature of the Universe" (2017, 61). Questions about the purpose, meaning and existence of life are of great interest to the public, Ellis holds, but they cannot be answered by a science that is occupied with the physical conditions of life only, and so he concludes: "philosophers of science should team up with scientists to clarify the boundaries of science" (2017, 34).

Literature and literary studies, in particular, have been examining the fundamental role of 'first person' or lived experience for understandings of the world. Within literary criticism, the nexus between mind/brain and scientific 'third person' accounts of the world, in particular, is the subject of innovative approaches. The notion that particular human experiences are fundamental for understanding the environmental crisis, and for changing it, is particularly salient for literary and cultural studies, a discipline that brings together various disciplinary insights and that explores the power of the *imagination*.

Cosmos in the Environmental Humanities and Ecocriticism

The renaissance of 'cosmos' is tightly linked to the new field of the Environmental Humanities (from here on EH). The EH manifesto defines the field 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., 2015, 978). While recognising that "science can monitor, measure and to some extent predict the biogeophysics of global change," the manifesto identifies the responsibility of the humanities to work with this knowledge of the human factor as the main driver of the Anthropocene (979). Crucially, the emergence of EH—which roughly coincides with the peak of the Anthropocene debate—has not only produced ideas about the socio-cultural origins of this era, but also emphasised the need to offer ways out of it:

> [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. (Holm et al., 2015, 977, 981)

The field foregrounds 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 devastation of environments. As a recent publication poignantly suggests, the task of EH is to find ways to find the *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* (Tsing et al., 2017).

Similarly, Latour has written about this changing role of the humanities. Having been 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?" (Latour, 2004a), he argues that in light of the climate emergency, academics engaged in criticism might use their power to *constructively* critique in addition to the vital 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, literary scholar George B. 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? (2015, 337)

Although instrumental notions of literature and literary studies have their limitations, the point here is to see that the EH have prompted a call for ethics, community and activism, offering alternatives to the terrifying prospect of environmental decline.

It is also necessary, however, to stress that the field of literary studies has not just reoriented itself to the environment with the onset of the Anthropocene. Ecocriticism has been examining the relationship between literature and the environment for at least 50 years. Coined in the context of growing concern about the destruction of the biosphere during the Cold War, the term 'ecocriticism' emerged in North America in the 1970s, aiming at challenging "ecocidal attitudes" (Garrard, 2016, 61). Since these early formulations (often called first-wave Ecocriticism), which designate a focus on "'nature writing,' non-human nature and wilderness experience, American and British literature, and 'discursive' ecofeminism" (Slovic, 2010, 4), the 2000s saw an increased interest in *global* concepts of place "in fruitful tension with neo-bioregionalist attachments to specific locales," (which came to be known as Ecocriticism's 'second wave') (7). More recently, Ecocriticism has experienced what could be called a transcultural turn (subsumed under a 'third wave') which seeks

> to overcome the limiting, isolating focus on specific cultures as unique phenomena. The impulse to study human experience in relation to the more-than-human world and to compare human experience across cultures, in particular, struck us as an altogether different tendency than we had observed during the first two 'waves' of the field. (Slovic, 2010, 4)

My investigation into cosmos fits into this third wave, as it explores transcultural and travelling ideas of cosmos, various genres, as well as different forms of 'activism.' More precisely, this book's focus on cosmos developed from ecocritical investigations into the Anthropocene, which have mainly been preoccupied with the question of what literary and cultural studies can contribute to the Anthropocene debate.

The 2010s witnessed the emergence of what we might call 'Anthropocene Ecocriticism',[1b] which can be defined by its engagement with materiality and temporality of the Earth, scale and narrative, activism, and a wider pool of disciplines used to bring these knowledges together (Parham, 2021, xii). Anthropocene Ecocriticism also entails highly significant reflections on new media, as in the new field of Ecomedia, as well as more established literary preoccupations with categories such as genre, narrative and scale.[2] The abundance of recent ecocritical publications with various foci such as climate, EH, transculturality, affect, posthumanism and Material Ecocriticism suggests that overviews of these relatively new areas are very recent.[3] Another aspect that stands out when surveying recent volumes concerns the term 'environment': the proliferation of specific foci, such as the Anthropocene or elements (water, air, fire, earth etc.), seems to suggest that we are entering a period of greater differentiation of the term 'environment.' The ever more complex phenomena we are experiencing seem to require an ever more expansive vocabulary or further differentiation.

Material Ecocriticism (also explicated at more depth in the next chapter) is also particularly important for *Cosmological Readings*, as it embraces insights from other disciplines (such as quantum physics, biology and feminist theories), and proposes non-anthropocentric conceptions of language and reality (Iovino and Opperman, 2014, 2). This has been informing narrative theory, leading to the formation of 'econarratology.'[4] The relatively recent subfield of Empirical Ecocriticism, for instance, examines the social *and* physiological influences of environmental narratives (such as in film, literature and other media) on audiences (Schneider-Mayerson et al., 2020). Empirical Ecocriticism draws attention to the growing scientific evidence that our bodies are the basis for understanding human characters, environments, more-than-human beings and inanimate objects (Weik von Mossner, 2017, 3). As Alexa Weik von Mossner writes: "When we read […] we literally map those movements onto the motor cortices of our brains as the mental processing of action verb activates the respective. Not only is our cognitive potential shaped by our physical experience, but even the *perception* of narratives is embodied, leaving traces on our biological make-up. As Alexa Weik von Mossner writes: "When we read […] we literally map those movements onto the motor cortices of our brains as the mental processing of action verb activates the respective 38 *Context/Theory* neurons" (2017, 3). A recent publication explores implications of these cognitive insights for the cosmic imagination: Marco Caracciolo's *Embodiment and the Cosmic Perspective in Twentieth Century Fiction* (2020) argues that "even as these cosmic realities [such as subatomic particles, DNA molecules, microbes or stars] seem to elude or resist ordinary modes of embodiment, the body still emerges in—and shapes—the ways in which we imagine them" (3). While my cosmological readings are less concerned with narratology than with genre (part III explores the workings of dystopia, apocalypse, romance, survival and humour), they are informed by these recent insights that map the mind and the imagination as embodied and embedded. Narratives can be considered powerful forces for individuals and society—even though they may not always operate consciously.

Literary Cosmology: A Genesis

Although Ecocriticism has long been concerned with the human place in the environment, it was only recently that 'cosmos' was revived in literary criticism. This may partly be due to the rediscovery of Alexander von Humboldt's *Kosmos* (1845–62) in Anglophone Ecocriticism.[5] More importantly, however, it may be thanks to the already-mentioned turn to materiality and the more-than-human world. Recent investigations into cosmology have not only been concerned with the content and form of cosmological narratives, but also their *function and reach*—for both individuals and society.

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" (2015, 334). Going beyond the potential of literary studies to merely critique, Handley emphasises the world-building capacities of cosmologies:

> 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. (2015, 335)

If Handley's appeals to the power of literature, the arts and the humanities may sound like an overstatement, it seems only fitting to note, as Handley does, that stories must also be understood as "inadequate and contingent" (2015, 335). This scepticism highlights the significance of examining extant narratives for their adequacy, truth and value to act as cosmologies. Literary studies has long been interested not just in truth-value but also, for instance, in lies, unreliability, and the grey zone of truth and deception, in both individual and collective narratives. The power of stories is, of course, also contingent on political change as well as scientific advancements. My study focuses on constructive narratives in a *particular* context: the one of the Anthropocene and the danger of a 'single story' (Adichie, 2009) of socio-environmental decline. It is at the intersection of the faith in the power of stories and critical scrutiny of narratives that *Cosmological Readings* are placed.

Building on the work of Handley, Joni Adamson, Salma Monani and Pamela Gossin, I now outline the genesis of my 'literary cosmology' in greater detail. In the Introduction to the collection *Ecocriticism and Indigenous Studies* (2017), Joni Adamson and Salma Monani employ the terms 'cosmovisions' and 'cosmopolitics' to describe the extent to which different forms of literature, such as ancient Indigenous story cycles, farmers' almanacs and contemporary novels, have long mixed philosophy and ethics for envisioning evolutionary origins and transformations (Adamson and Monani, 2017, 19–24). Drawing on Marisol de la Cadena's 'indigenous cosmopolitics' (2010) as well as Ecuador's Constitution from 2008, Adamson and Monani define 'cosmopolitics' as both a movement spearheaded by Indigenous groups as well 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" (2017, 22). They argue that many Indigenous works present the cosmos and its "pluriverse" of beings as a "sentient 'you'" and that many Indigenous groups have advocated for a politics that reflects the immanence of the spiritual and the physical (18). Well ahead of important climate summits, such as the 2015 Paris Conference, Indigenous groups have brought this cosmic understanding to the political arena, for instance the 2010 Bolivia summit World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, which led to the formulation of the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth (19). While using the notion of 'cosmos' mainly in relation to Indigenous world views and activism, they also indicate the need for cosmopolitics in transcultural contexts, developing their argument with Stengers' and Latour's understanding of cosmopolitics as "'a common good world' that brings together the pluriverse of peoples and natures" (22, citing Latour, 2004b). Although my study is equally interested in exploring 'cosmovisions' and cosmopolitics—the nexus of philosophy, ethics, evolution and transformations—it goes beyond associations of the concept with 'Western' and 'non-Western' cultures.

Like Handley, I use 'cosmology' more broadly to denote both a narrative of wholeness and a methodology of reading. In his essay "Climate Change, Cosmology, and Poetry: The Case of Derek Walcott's *Omeros*" (2015), Handley argues that the Anthropocene needs cosmologies that help us imagine and enact a new sense of responsibility and belonging (341). Cosmologies are here understood as narratives that express the hope for order and wholeness in the face of increasing rupture and fragmentation (335). Rather than understanding cosmology as an entirely new way of seeing and being, Handley stresses the need to work with existing cosmologies to "reimagine our responsibility in and for the world" (342). His example is Walcott's poetry which, according to Handley, achieves the balance between universalism *and* cultural and historical differences (334). This approach, then, understands 'cosmology' not as a particular kind of story but mainly as a methodology of reading. My study develops this reading methodology further, as I generate particular questions, some of which were cited in the Introduction. As Handley puts it, "it is not what we read but how" (347).

In an essay on Pope Francis's stance on climate change, "*Laudato Si'* and the Postsecularism of the Environmental Humanities" (Handley, 2016), Handley argues that the majority of people and cultures are motivated by sacred traditions of reading, and that environmentalism needs to take this fact into account, if it aims for broader impact (278). Handley here makes the important point that environmentalism often borrows from and depends on "the moral and metaphysical temper of religious discourse" (278). My conceptualisation of cosmos, at times, evokes this temper, as some of my select texts indeed reflect on certain cultural traditions of the 'sacred.' Tara June Winch's *The Yield* (2019), for instance, ponders the sacredness of seeds, Melissa Lucashenko's *Too Much Lip* (2018) centres on the protection of a 'sacred' river, and Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend But the Mountains* (2018) wrestles with belief systems amidst the violence of imprisonment. In this way, *Cosmological Readings* affirms the observation that the EH are 'postsecular' in the sense that they intersect with ethics, values and the need for transformation and change (Handley, 2016, 283). However, my readings of contemporary literary texts also go beyond this link to the religious, as they explore embodied and embedded experiences that do not necessarily refer to a spiritual value system. For instance, Carrie Tiffany's *Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living* (2005) gestures towards what could be called a poetic world view, but its primary concern is perhaps the examination of colonialism and its language. Similarly, Briohny Doyle's *The Island Will Sink* (2016) contains glimpses of a cosmic world view, but its primary object is the unethical uses of media-technologies and the exploitation of apocalypticism.

A more literal approach to 'literary cosmology'—one that uses this very term as a chapter title—is represented by Gossin's 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 works and the sense of the cosmic, mainly understood as astronomical and astrological imagery.[6] Drawing on the history of science, popular astronomy and cosmology, Gossin's study traces 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 used such metaphors and imagery to create "'novel' universes," in which "the fates of his female characters are directly linked to their knowledge and skills in observational astronomy" (xvii). Like Gossin, my readings draw attention to the multi-scalar elements embedded in a sense of cosmos, that enable an exploration of "inner awareness, perception, psychology, and personality, and outer life of nature and culture" (230). Expanding Gossin's approach, I ask how 'cosmos' relates to language, narrative, genre, order, chaos, justice and politics. This includes inquiries into materiality, while it also considers broader socio-eco-political implications for generating change.

Notes

1a 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).

1b Mainly through essays and monographs that grappled with the meaning of the term. As time passes, more collected volumes provide overviews and entry points into this rich new field, firmly enshrining the Anthropocene as a key concept for literary and cultural studies. Examples for recent collections include Menely and Taylor's *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times* (2017); the special edition of *C21 Literature* edited by De Cristofaro and Cordle, "Literature of the Anthropocene" (2018); and Parham's *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Anthropocene* (2021).

2 Examples of publications concerned with Anthropocene scale are the already-mentioned *Narratives of Scale in the Anthropocene*, 2021; Vermeulen's *Literature and the Anthropocene*, 2020; De Loughrey's *Allegories of the Anthropocene*, 2019; Heise's "Science Fiction and the Time Scales of the Anthropocene," 2019; Tavel Clarke and Wittenberg's *Scale in Literature and Culture*, 2017; and Menely and Taylor's *Anthropocene Reading*, 2017. Examples for publications concerned with Anthropocene genre are Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble*, 2016; Ghosh's *The Great Derangement*, 2016; Moreton's *Dark Ecology*, 2016; Clark's *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, 2015; and Trexler's *Anthropocene Fictions*, 2015.

3 See for example, Johns-Putra and Sultzbach's *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Climate*, 2022; Hubbell and Ryan's *Introduction to the Environmental Humanities*, 2021; Cohen and Foote's *The Cambridge Companion to Environmental Humanities*, 2021; Cooke and Denney's *Transcultural Ecocriticism: Global, Romantic, and Decolonial Perspectives*, 2021; Bladow and Ladino's *Affective Ecocriticism: Emotion, Embodiment, Environment*, 2018; Clarke and Rossini's *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Posthumanism*, 2016; Cohen and Duckert's *Elemental Ecocriticism: Thinking with Earth, Air, Water and Fire*, 2015; and Iovino and Oppermann's *Material Ecocriticism*, 2014.

4 The term goes back to Erin James' *The Storyworld Accord: Econarratology and Postcolonial Narratives*, 2015.

5 Alice Jenkins, for instance, has argued that Humboldt's *Kosmos* can be regarded as a proto-ecocritical text: despite having largely been forgotten by "Anglophone studies of nineteenth-century literature and science," *Kosmos* should be included in the ecocritical canon, as it can "broaden our understanding of the widely divergent streams that make up ecocritical history" (Jenkins, 2007, 89).

6 See, for example, Emily Grosholz's chapter "Literary Cosmology: Plato, Tobin, Major Turner" (2018). See also: Priscilla Costello, *Shakespeare and the Stars: The Hidden Astrological Keys to Understanding the World's Greatest Playwright*, 2016.

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2 Cosmos Today

Modern, Transcultural, (Dis)enchanted

This chapter dives deeper into my argument for the productiveness of a modern, transcultural and (dis)enchanted conception of cosmos. While it is predicated on various traditional ideas and also draws on pre-modern thought, I argue that a modern, transcultural and (dis)enchanted sense of cosmos is highly useful for understanding our *zeitgeist*—one that embraces diverse experiences of globalised modernity (such as hybridity, diaspora, urbanity), but one that nevertheless acknowledges the existence of a planetary ecosystem that creates a universal context. To illustrate this modern relevance, I explicate the recent 'turn' to new materialism (including its Indigenous critique), the transculturation of cosmos (using the example of Alexander von Humboldt) and a '(dis)enchanted' cosmos (as linked to 'low theory').

Modern Cosmos: Turning to New and Old Materialism

The modern resurgence of cosmological thought is closely linked to the so-called material turn. Various academic discourses have extended posthuman thought to attend to the expressiveness of materiality, as reflected in fields and areas such as New Materialism, New Animism, Ecofeminism/Material Feminism, Actor-Network Theory, Object Oriented Ontology, biosemiotics and, most importantly for this study, the already mentioned Material Ecocriticism, which stresses the idea that matter and narratives are inseparably entwined (Iovino and Oppermann, 2014, 1). Pioneered by scholars such as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour, Rosi Braidotti, Jane Bennett and Karen Barad, all of these areas have in common that they seek to destabilise anthropocentric hubris by stressing the agency and expressivity of, for example, organisms, technology, ecosystems, animals, discourses and evolution. Although not necessarily drawing on exactly the same discourse and terminology inherent in 'cosmos,' these fields and scholars use similar ideas. Rather than understanding agency as an individualistic act, such theories have stressed that agencies come into existence through 'intra-action' (Barad, 2007), and are expressed in 'trans-corporeal' (Alaimo, 2008) ways. In the context of environmental degradation, the idea that human agency is only

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one of many agencies—if albeit a powerful one—has put common misconceptions under scrutiny, such as the assumption that "human agents (knowingly or inadvertently) create ecological problems, but can readily solve all of them at will with the right technology" (Phillips and Sullivan, 2012, 446). Stressing more-than-human agency, then, has an environmental activist stance: it posits that humans are not in control, and cannot necessarily fix the planetary crisis after certain 'tipping points' have occurred.

As illustrated with the Indigenous Australian understanding of Country earlier, cosmological views often put forward the idea of *collective* agency. This can be seen, for instance, in the resurgence of Gaia theory in the Anthropocene. Developed by chemist James Lovelock and 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 theory has recently experienced a resurgence as a model for the Anthropocene. As Latour writes in *Facing Gaia* (2017), James Lovelock's 'Gaia' (named after the ancient Greek goddess) captures the way in which the biosphere gathers countless agents that function in their own way, with their own goals, but which together co-create the ideal climate for life to flourish. Latour argues that with the Gaia metaphor, Lovelock strikes a balance between vitalism ('a ghost is at work') and reductionism ('it's just chemistry'): Gaia is not meant to represent a holistic or hierarchical super-organism, a God creator who makes his congregation act blindly through laws of nature; rather, she *assembles* uncountable deities in the earth-system (97). As Latour puts it: "There is only one Gaia, but Gaia is not one" (2017, 97).

Arne Johan Vetlesen's recent philosophical book *Cosmologies of the Anthropocene: Panpsychism, Animism, and the Limits of Posthumanism* (2019) has made the important point that the connection between the Anthropocene and cosmology "is an intimate one, yet rarely stated as such, as a matter of cause and effect" (3). In contrast to the devastations of the Anthropocene, which was made possible through the world view of anthropocentrism, Vetlesen argues that 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). "Facts on the ground" here refer 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 contrast to a mechanistic world view, holding that "everything that exists exhibits mind, by which is meant […] mentality, interiority, intelligence, and purposiveness" (10). The idea of Material Ecocriticism that all matter is "storied matter" (Iovino and Oppermann, 2014, 1) becomes particularly fruitful for my inquiry into literary texts, as it is concerned with the collective, entangled effort of "material and discursive agencies at work in the world's becoming" (Iovino and Oppermann, 2014, 10). With its emphasis on entangled agency, vitality, hybridity and biosemiotics, Material Ecocriticism insists that "all matter […] is 'storied matter'" (Iovino and Oppermann, 2014, 1):

> material phenomena are knots in a vast network of agencies, which can be "read" and interpreted as forming narratives, stories. Developing in bodily forms and in discursive formulations, and arising in coevolutionary landscapes of natures and signs, the stories of matter are everywhere: in the air we breathe, the food we eat, in the things and beings of this world, within and beyond the human realm. (Iovino and Oppermann, 2014, 1)

Importantly, however, the notion of 'newness' in New Materialism has brought about critiques that reveal the fact that academic philosophy has been historically and notoriously exclusive. As the Māori scholar Brendan Hokowhitu writes:

> the nomenclature of 'new' is simply offensive in the broader realm of multiple realities because it's [*sic*] claims to temporal ownership of ideas that already existed in multiple Indigenous philosophies reminds me of the doctrine of discovery where already discovered lands only became meaningful through a white captive narrative. (2020, 132)

Hokowhitu argues that the 'turn' to materialism was only necessary for cultures that turned away from it in the first place, but it neglects Indigenous thought, which has long argued for, and developed cultural forms around, material agency. This argument exhibits the tension between philosophical materialism and Indigenous thought and, perhaps, cultural studies at large. While this critique of philosophy and the problem of 'newness' is itself not new, the point here is to show that a modern conception of cosmos is important because culturally specific ideas of cosmos contain an air of pre-modern paganism.

Although not necessarily using the language of 'cosmos' and 'cosmology,' similar points have been made with regards to the power of Indigenous Australian claims for sacredness in modern Australia. Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs argue in *Uncanny Australia* (Gelder and Jacobs, 1998) that "Aboriginal claims for sacredness in modern Australia may seem like minor events, but they have radically disturbed the nation's image of itself" (book cover). With the examples of Coronation Hill, Hindmarsh Island, Uluru and the repatriation of sacred objects, Gelder and Jacobs draw attention to the power of First Nations' claims for sacredness which can "'shake' the entire nation" (21): "Far from being left behind as a relic or a residue, it may even be able to determine aspects of Australia's future; far from being out of place in Australia, it sometimes seems to be all over the place" (1). Gelder and Jacobs, in short, point to the modernness as well as the power of what could be called a cosmological claim.

Cosmologies on the Move: The Transculturaltion of Cosmos

Not only are cosmologies of contemporary pertinence, they also hold value and meaning *across* cultures. In order to illustrate the transculturality of cosmos, and the fascinating history of the term, it is helpful to consider the example of German explorer Alexander von Humboldt. Until the nineteenth century, the term 'cosmos' had largely been forgotten. With his pathbreaking multivolume work *Kosmos* (1845–62), Humboldt revived it for a broad general and scientific audience, in which cosmos is employed as a concept that binds together planetary history as a history of the physical sciences *and* the humanities, giving both modes of knowledge equal value (Walls, 2016, 196). Humboldt writes: "we behold the present and the past reciprocally incorporated, as it were, with one another; for the domain of nature is like that of languages, in which etymological research reveals a successive development" (*Kosmos*, cited in Walls, 2021, 44). In other words, Humboldt draws an analogy between nature and language, observing that they both contain a temporality that captures information about the past in the present. Combining scientific, cultural and poetic observations, Humboldt did justice to the ancient meaning of *kosmos* as discourse about the order of the world that includes the reciprocity of human culture with particular places. Profoundly influenced by various Indigenous peoples of South America, *Kosmos* defines '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, 2009, 11). The volumes contained hundreds of nature and cosmic illustrations (for instance, of mountain profiles, iso-thermic lines, and planetary systems) and were written in different styles and genres identified by commentators as an unusually complex hybrid of nature observation and travel narrative (Clark, 2012, 13–16). The importance of visualisations for a sense of cosmos here also points to the long history of 'cosmograms' that were drawn throughout history, which could be understood as aesthetic predecessors to scientific maps. Despite the immense global success of Humboldt's work—he received the highest recognition across a wide interdisciplinary and popular audience[1]—the conflagrations of the late nineteenth and the twentieth century, especially the world wars, overshadowed his work.[2] Subsequently, the unifying idea of cosmos developed into a term mainly used for the large-scale universe (Walls, 2009, 48; Wulf, 2015, 335).

Our discussion has hitherto mainly contextualised 'cosmos' and 'cosmology' as related to 'trans-Indigenous' (Allen, 2012), ancient Greece, Romanticism, world views and practices and the Material Turn in academic thought. Yet 'cosmos' is wider-ranging than that: as indicated in the Introduction, forms of pagan, animist, anthropomorphising sense-making likely exist in most cultures (albeit to various degrees). Because ideas of 'cosmos' have such multifarious histories around the world, and circulate globally in modern forms, the term arguably unsettles binary constructions of

'Western' and 'non-Western.' In this sense, 'cosmos' could be understood as a transcultural concept that is widely travelling—perhaps more than ever before. Transculturality (a set of approaches rather than a unified theory) holds that in a globalised world, cultural specificities are increasingly mobile. Prominently theorised by scholars such as Fernando Ortiz, Mary Louise Pratt and Wolfgang Welsch,[3] transcultural approaches ('trans' here designating 'across and beyond') are attentive to how these cultural specificities move into the shared realm and coexist with culturally specific knowledges and belief systems. Transculturation occurs in 'contact zones,' as coined by Pratt in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992): a 'contact zone' is a social space that enables the intermingling of two or more cultures. They are "spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (33). Against purity and authenticity of cultures, transculturality encompasses concepts such as creolisation, hybridity, syncretism and transnationality (Schulze-Engler, 2009, ix), and foregrounds that culture is always, and has always been, moving and developing, and that globalisation fosters an increasing diversity that is understood as largely productive. Transculturality can be understood to be a consequence of the "inner differentiation and complexity of modern cultures" (Welsch, 1999, 19). *Cosmological Readings* posits that the sense of cosmos, as a widely travelled as well as a local concept, thrives in this interchange of cultures, ideas and place-based knowledges. It expresses that a sense of planetary consciousness is both individual and collective, cultural and transcultural, unifying and diversifying at the same time.

The case of Humboldt is again instructive for illustrating the transculturation of cosmological ideas, and the necessity of travel—and mobility at large—for fostering a 'sense of planet' (Heise, 2008). In describing the history of *Kosmos*, Joni Adamson and Salma Monani write that Humboldt was primarily influenced by Indigenous Latin-American world views: "It is especially important to note that Indigenous cosmovisions influenced Humboldt rather than the other way around" (2017, 22). While this is undeniably true, a recent popular biography by Andrea Wulf titled *The Invention of Nature* (2015) also traces the influence of the European Enlightenment on Humboldt's intellectual urge for travel: before Humboldt ventured on his first voyage to the Americas, Wulf shows, he was deeply influenced by a philosophical and literary exchange with Goethe. Goethe was drawn to the scientific world, and ventured into the endeavour himself to explore his ideas of emergence and development (Bakhtin, 1986, 28); he remained insistent on the importance of subjective experience and the imagination for accessing the more-than-human world (36). For Goethe, the functioning of the eye became a symbol as well as a material anchor for this understanding. The way humans perceive colour, for example, involves the merging of the outer and the inner world (Wulf, 2015, 36).

Mikhail Bakhtin notes that throughout most of Goethe's oeuvre, Goethe was insistent on the inseparability of time and place:

> Everything—from an abstract idea to a piece of rock on the bank of a stream—bears the stamp of time. Therefore, everything is intensive in Goethe's world; it contains no inanimate, immobile, petrified places, no immutable background that does not participate in action and emergence (in events), no decorations or sets. On the other hand, this time, in all its essential aspects, is localized in concrete space, imprinted on it. In Goethe's world there are no events, plots, or temporal motifs that are not related in an essential way to the particular spatial place of their occurrence, that could occur anywhere or nowhere ("eternal" plots and motifs). Everything in this world is a time-space, a true *chronotope*. (Bakhtin, 1936–38 [1986], 42; italics in the original)

Profoundly influenced by this dialectic understanding between 'nature' and embodiment, time and place, and local and planetary, Humboldt developed similar notions into his own understandings of *kosmos*. As *Kosmos* mixes emotional observation with scientific insights, it insists on the inseparability of the outer and inner world. Bakhtin's following observations about Goethe also perfectly fit Humboldt's approach: "[e]verything is visible, everything is concrete, everything is corporeal, and everything is material in this world, and at the same time everything is intensive, interpreted, and creatively necessary" (42–3). *Kosmos*, for instance, includes volumes that explore the role of culture and language for understanding our planetary ecosystem. Humboldt worked "simultaneously across three axes: deep space, deep time and deep mind" (Walls, 2021, 43). In the face of a fast-moving industrialisation and its concomitant exploitation of peoples and environments, scholars and artists such as Humboldt and Goethe were often preoccupied with the role of the subjective, affective and cultural view on the environment.

Humboldt has, however, rightly been critiqued by postcolonial and transcultural scholars, such as Pratt, for his complicity in colonial conquest.[4] This can be seen by the fact that no other name has been given to geographical places as much as Humboldt's (Clark, 2012, 1), which shows that critiques of Humboldt are certainly right. It is also noteworthy, however, that Humboldt was a 'troublemaker' for both North American and European imperialists, whose critique of globalised exploitation of peoples and places became notorious, sometimes achieving great successes (under Humboldt's influence, slavery was banned in Prussia), but also putting him under close scrutiny by his funders and under censorship (Nassar, 2023). A prominent abolitionist, whose famous dictum was that "the people of the earth can only belong to one species" (cited in Clark, 2012, 12), Humboldt repeatedly affirmed the importance of the political aspect of his work, as he writes: "This part of my book is much more important to me than all those tedious astronomical determinations, experiments on magnetic intensity or statistical data" (cited in Clark, 2012, 4).

While Humboldt doubtless remains an ambivalent figure, who reveals not only the necessity but also the ambiguity of travel, the point here is to show the transculturation at work: *Kosmos* was influenced by various South American Indigenous theories, as well as by the cultural European tradition Humboldt belonged to; in this respect, the nineteenth-century revival of the term and concept can be seen as a product of transculturation which, however, occurred in the highly unequal contact zone of colonial conquest. Because Humboldt's *Kosmos* was shaped by multiple strands of Indigenous, scientific and European thought, the idea and eventual usage of 'cosmos,' therefore, unsettles binaries of 'Western' and 'Indigenous' world views (even if this dualistic construction remains complex in many contexts, especially in cultures inheriting the logic of colonialism). Importantly, then, my conception of cosmos aims to go beyond ancient, pagan and Romantic notions to explore the modern relevance of the term: cosmos is a captivating concept because it expresses the 'impurity of culture,' which is always processual, always travelling and, with increasing globalisation, possibly more mobile than ever before. At the same time, 'cosmos' also expresses that culture is *not* exclusively human, and therefore always bound to specific places in which specific entangled agencies confluence to shape particular (moving) cultures.

It is crucial, however, to hold this balance of universal and particular, widely travelled and local, so that the sense of a universal 'cosmos' is not used at the expense of localised knowledges and does not continue the tradition of erasing certain knowledges. The Anthropocene debate, in particular, has brought forward many Indigenous critiques, moving them into the centre of attention across the board. North American Indigenous scholar Kyle Whyte has argued, for instance, that the climate emergency can be seen as an intensification of colonialism, and therefore presents a "déja-vu experience" for Indigenous communities (2017, 159). As Whyte writes, "the colonial period already rendered comparable outcomes that cost Indigenous peoples their reciprocal relationships with thousands of plants, animals and ecosystems" (2017, 159). Whyte points to the importance of kinship, understood as an ethic of shared responsibility (2021, 40). The emphasis on kinship here conveys that the Indigenous cosmological understanding of more-than-human agency need not be understood as neutral, but as predicated on relationships of care, reciprocity and mutual flourishing. Importantly, then, far from a marginal philosophy, Indigenous cosmologies are increasingly entering the sciences, as well as the global political stage.

Disenchanted Cosmos: Humble, Multiple, 'Low Theory'

So far, I have stressed the contemporariness and the transculturality of 'cosmos,' but what about its '(dis)enchantedness'? As S. M. Eisenstadt has argued in *Multiple Modernities* (2000), although most cultures were shaped by the project of modernisation, globalised modernity looks different everywhere and has brought about distinctive inflections. Nevertheless, there are some commonalities to be found across the modern world, as Eisenstadt argues: the sense of human agency and autonomy; a future orientation (as in the expectation of increasing prosperity and well-being); high reflexivity about social and political order; a multiplicity of visions, social roles and belonging; and the notion of human mastery of nature, including human nature (40–3). Importantly Eisenstadt defines one other characteristic of globalised modernity to be the "'disenchantment' of the world, inherent in growing routinization and bureaucratization" (8). Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer had made a similar point in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947): "The disenchantment of the world means the extirpation of animism" (2). Drawing on Max Weber, they pointed out that animism has only been repressed rather than extirpated (albeit to various degrees in different cultures), so that modernity could never fully rid itself of pagan world views (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1947, 14).

Of course, a certain re-enchantment of the world is part of the point of resurrecting cosmos in the Anthropocene, and has often been in the interest of ecocritical scholarship,[5] because an extreme form of instrumentalising an othered 'nature' has led to the planetary crisis. Yet the prefix '(dis)' that I employ alongside 'enchanted' seeks to convey a *cautious* enchantment, so as not to create an overly naïve idea that the enchanted imagination is the solution for everything, or that 'cosmos' is a new totalisable system, a new 'hip' theory. As Stacy Alaimo suggests, instead it may be more helpful "staying low, remaining open to the world, and becoming attuned to strange agencies" (2016, 173). Alaimo draws on Jack Halberstam's 'low theory,' which they define as a "theoretical model that flies below the radar, that is assembled from eccentric texts and examples that refuse to confirm the hierarchies of knowing that maintain the *high* in high theory" (2011, 16, italics in the original; also cited in Alaimo, 2016, 7). My perhaps awkward use of '(dis)enchanted,' stands for the impossibility of neatly resolving the dilemma of industrialisation: while its effects could be regarded as altogether 'bad' for the environment, it doubtless has also fuelled countless positive aspects—such as mobility and wealth—although, of course, in a highly unequal manner. Countering the myth of return, '(dis) enchanted' seeks to express caution with regards to the wish to return to a premodern past and suggests the implausibility of demonising all processes and protagonists of different experiences of modernity. Put differently, we have a duty not to be naïve.

Much rather, in its attention to more-than-human agency, the aim of this study's framework—cosmos—is to express epistemological humility. As Cohen and Duckert put it in *Veer Ecology* (2017), a volume which assembles essays based on a range of verbs:

> Thinking ecologically is after all a ceaseless spur and a doing, a way of apprehending from the thick of things, not the cementing of an extant body of knowledge into perduring form or a sedate collation of facts to be glimpsed from some exterior point of view. (2)

Cosmological understandings, in this sense, imply a doing that is attentive to the world, that is about *Staying with the Trouble* (Haraway, 2016) and remaining *Down to Earth* (Latour, 2018). Cosmological thought and practice may open us up to the strange realities that will always exceed a totalisable system, to remain with the humbling troubles of this earth. As Lawrence Buell puts it in the interrogative essay "Can Environmental Imagination Save the World?" (2016): "The short answer is 'Yes, but.' Environmental imagination is a crucial but insufficient resource against global warming and other forms of looming planetary degradation. Without it, no way; with it, perhaps" (407). The imagination is not the only tool—but it is a crucial one.

Notes

1 As 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" (2015, 335).

2 The reasons for this forgetting of *Kosmos* and its ancient meaning are, surely, complex. Andrea Wulf credits the "anti-German sentiment" that accompanied both world wars (2015, 335).

3 Whereas Fernando Ortiz developed the concept of 'transculturation' in the 1940s in his seminal *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (1940) to explore "how 'weaker' cultures developed a capacity to move beyond a trajectory of straightforward 'assimilation' and to accomplish a fusion of old and new elements," (Schulze-Engler, 2009, xi), Wolfgang Welsch conceives of transculturality as the "permeation of cultures" and of "determinants common to all cultures" (Welsch cited in Schulze-Engler, 2009, xii).

4 Mary Louise Pratt argues that Humboldt surveyed Spanish colonies with an "imperial eye," exploring them as a "capitalist vanguard" (Pratt cited in Clark, 2012, 21). Several postcolonial critiques therefore show, as Rex Clark puts it, "the history of the sciences as a history of imperial conquests" (2012, 23). Since Pratt's influential study was published, however, her argument has come under pressure for having neglected other works of Humboldt's in which he is very much concerned with addressing colonial injustices. Aaron Sachs, for instance, argues that Pratt's study never accounts for the passages in Humboldt's work in which "he railed against Spain's hoarding of agricultural land, destruction of nature, violence against native peoples, and, especially, its brutal slave system" (Sachs, 2003, 118). Similarly, Mexican historian Edmundo O'Gorman has argued that *Kosmos* played a great role in placing the 'New Continent' within the scope of German idealism and universal history (Clark, 2012, 9). Humboldt played the role of 'defending' Latin America from claims of inferiority, proving early 'anti-Americanism' wrong by scientifically arguing against the notion "that the 'New World' is […] a younger, immature part of the world, because the earth everywhere is subject to the same physical transformations" (Clark, 2012, 10). Humboldt therefore placed the idea of the unity of cosmos and of humanity against racism (Clark, 2012, 10).

5 See, for instance, Iovino and Oppermann, who write: "Visible at all levels of the natural world (from atoms to complex structures […] 'compound individuals'), the power of matter to create and transmit 'stories' through the interchange of forces and forms resonate […] with the postmodern emphasis on the reenchantment of nature" (2014, 12).

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Part II

Colonisation/ Exploitation

Reimagining Agriculture and Extraction

The Anthropocene has put certain agricultural and extractive practices 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 (2000, 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 show the beginning of a growth in the atmospheric concentrations of several 'greenhouse gases,' in particular CO_2 and CH_4 [and the invention of] the steam engine in 1784" (17–18). In addition to the now common-sense call to transition rapidly away from fossil fuels, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report concludes that while industrialised agriculture, forestry and other land-use contribute around one-quarter of greenhouse gas emissions, climate heating is accelerating the stresses on global food and water security, putting them under severe risk ("World Food Security," 2019). Similarly, the UN global assessment report has identified specific practices, such as mass-husbandry and the spread of monocrop plantations, as one of the primary causes of extinction and biodiversity loss around the world (IPCC, 2019).

Farming and Mining in Australia—a Unique Case?

Australia is uniquely placed in the global context of agriculture and mining because of the immense scale and fast motion at which colonisation changed land-use. 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 to this day a major source of Australia's export revenues (however unpredictable the future may be). The crop was 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.'

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Geographer Bill Pritchard has argued that, in comparison to other continents, Australia is the only large landmass country without a peasant smallholder class. In Australia, "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" (2018, 23–4).[1] Although Pritchard omits a comparison with the earliest example of this very economic system, the Caribbean sugar plantation,[2] as a test case for transnational plantation and slave economies, he makes the important point that in contrast to the Americas, Australia was colonised *after* the Industrial Revolution. After the largely successful removal of Aboriginal people as custodians of specific lands, this "ensured that a peasant smallholder class of farmers never evolved in Australia" (24). Pritchard's proposition of Australia's uniqueness suggests that Australia may have been shaped by capitalist structures even stronger than elsewhere on the globe. 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 Torrens title that I will explicate in the chapters (24).

Yet Australia's colonial development happened not only on the backs of First Nations peoples, but also at the cost of small farmers globally: today, around 70% of agricultural produce is exported and contributes 13% of Australia's export revenue (Hughes-d'Aeth, 2018). Although this development can also be seen elsewhere (for example, in Europe),[3] what is remarkable about the Australian case is its sheer vast scale which greatly influences the global stage. Tony Hughes-d'Aeth points to a stunning fact that makes this unusually vast scale visible: the Western Australian wheat-belt is grown on an area of land larger than England, and its 'clearing line' (the area that has been cleared of native flora in order to grow grain and hold livestock) can be seen on satellite maps, presenting the most visible sign of the human impact on the planet (2017, 1).

Today's prime export products are based on mineral wealth, and mining revenues (from iron ore, coal, gold and petroleum gas) constitute Australia's top exports and have long enriched the nation. Despite this, and despite the fact that Australian populations are and have long been largely urban, national identification with agriculture is strong. Australia's first and famous export product was wool. Wool 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. (2017, 48)

As Robin shows, there is a strong national identification with the rural, the 'outback' or the 'bush' (the concomitant myths of the 'bushman,' or the earlier-mentioned 'Aussie battler,' are well recorded).[4] In fact, agriculture—and its contemporary expression of the culinary—are still strongly constituting Australian identity. As Hughes-d'Aeth (2018) poignantly puts it: "agriculture in Australia is a religion—it is as much a religion as it is an industry."

One contributing factor for importing European crops, plants and animals was the alienness of the environment as perceived by the European colonisers. As Robin notes: "Since the eighteenth century, domesticated animals and plants have been systematically borrowed from other places to civilize the land and to 'improve' its value" (2017, 48). Although 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 geophysical properties (the perceived emptiness, distance and alien agricultural products) also made this colonisation process distinct. 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, 2017, 23). 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, 2014, 94). Countries like Australia and the USA exalted their productivity because access to ever more land was granted (94). Today, wheat is the most important individual grain crop produced in Australia (Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, 2018, 5). Since the late 1990s, however, productivity has trended downward in Australia, as yields are highly dependent on climatic conditions (14).[5]

It is important to note that the use of nitrate fertilisers created 'shadow-places' within but also far beyond the borders of Australia. 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" (2008, 146–7). 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:

> [T]he economic, social and environmental impacts on the indigenous peoples and lands of Nauru and 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. (2015, 378)

While Nauru and Christmas Island are known today for hosting Australia's infamous refugee detention centres (see chapter 7), the history of the islands is largely ignored by 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" (374).

Wheat was ostensibly planted to feed Australia's growing population, but it was also grown for ideological reasons. As Cameron Muir argues in *The Broken Promise of Agricultural Progress: An Environmental History* (2014), 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 (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" (4). Moreover, with the help of the right crops, livestock and regulated labour structures, scientific agriculture was seen as a means of building a European nation (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, then, the cultivation of wheat is 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. Muir notes that there were two major principles used to convince European powers that *terra nullius* was a legitimate claim: firstly, that Indigenous peoples were not Christians or ruled by Christians; and secondly, the manner in which the native inhabitants used the land (92). Although Aboriginal Australians did engage in agriculture, the legal ground for *terra nullius* rested on the denial of these practices as well as on the notion of tilling: "the breaking of the soil, turning it over, became the point of difference" (92). This emphasis on tilling was drawn from liberal philosophers such as John Locke, who wrote in his *Treatises of Government* (1689): "As much as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates and can use the product of, so much is his property" (cited in Muir, 2014, 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 (97).

Despite this strong colonial legacy, 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 rediscovery and corrective work of historians and writers, but also through a changing climate and an increasingly public interest in regenerative agriculture. Politicians, however, have tended 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.[6] 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," 2019). The gradually more palpable environmental unpredictability, then, severely unsettles current agricultural and extractive practices, revising the perception of colonisation as 'progress' and 'civilisation.'

The following chapters read the tension surrounding current agricultural and extractive practices as evident in the novels analysed. Carrie Tiffany's *Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living* (2005) revisits the ambition and failure of wheat-farming in the Victorian inland in the interbellum years. Tara June Winch's *The Yield* (2019) reconsiders the Indigenous legacy of land cultivation under and beyond colonisation. Whereas 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. Indeed, in the context of the currently pressing national crises of the Adani mine[7] and the Murray–Darling River,[8] the 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. As 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" (2020). As in particular *The Yield* shows, these 'new' battlegrounds are represented by the opening of giant mining enterprises on Aboriginal land and by the split in the population this creates.

Beyond Racial Capitalism: The Role of Language and Culture

Throughout my reading, moreover, I test the idea that racial capitalism is the main driver for the Anthropocene, as proposed in a number of recent publications centred around the earlier-introduced terms Capitalocene, Plantationocene and Black Anthropocene. Although each of these terms takes a slightly different angle (the Capitalocene[9] centres global economic structures of exploited labour; the Black Anthropocene[10] adds that exploited labour was and is predominantly carried out by a racialised underclass, who are also more likely to bear the consequences of environmental degradation; the Plantationocene[11] stresses that this includes the exploitation of the more-than-human world), they each argue that the main driver of the planetary crisis is capitalism. Helpfully, all these concepts also stress the importance of labour as a multi-species effort of life-sustaining, but potentially also life-destroying, power. While the interest in racial capitalism is not new, what is new is that human history is now legible as deep time in earth strata. 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., 2018, 501).

Crownshaw argues that the Anthropocene fosters the awareness that human history manifests itself in matter which "returns," reshaping history and memory in new ways. In this sense, 'returned matter' now appears to function as a feedback loop on extant socio-eco-political systems. As the entanglement of environment and history, mind and matter, culture and nature suggests, human time can be said to have a cosmological dimension, as it is immanent and manifested in place. This conjures up cosmological thought, as 'matter' appears to enact a certain agency.

While the focus on global economic structures and world historic tendencies, such as racial capitalism, is indeed paramount for understanding what led to this ecological crisis, it seems also important 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. So, capitalism is not a monolithic system, but exists in various degrees. In their focus on the socio-economic aspect, moreover, all three concepts—the Capitalocene, Plantationocene and Black Anthropocene—neglect the role of language and culture for the formation and perpetuation of social systems. However, language and 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? (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," 2020].)

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 earlier, however, the humanities have shaped the awareness of the long history of violent social *systems*, thus undermining the potentially dangerous Anthropocene narrative of anti-humanism, anti-modernity and resource scarcity. This has 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). While a broad-brush analysis is inevitably part of a global crisis such as the Anthropocene and can be useful for sparking transnational discussions, 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. In this vein, my readings complicate the notion of racial capitalism, as the novels show that violence is not confined to social strata but is perpetuated in multiple forms and settings (such as gender violence and slow violence)—with complex implications for the nature of power and accountability.

Both 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 was a key driver of the ecological crisis in Australia. 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. And both 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 key role of language and culture.

This focus on language and culture foregrounds the unique perspective that creative works can bring to the ecological crisis: by drawing attention to the relationship between history, land and language, the texts illuminate the role of language not just for colonisation and exploitation, but also for the regeneration of lands and waters. Beyond an assessment of systemic damage, then, my cosmological readings point to the capacity of the novels to reinscribe wholeness, belonging and repair into the Australian landscape. I call this 'cosmological' rather than environmental, as it stresses the co-dependent meaning-making between 'humans' and their socio-cultural as well as material 'environment.' Environmental issues require a holistic approach in order to be understood and repaired.

Notes

1 Pritchard draws, among others, on historian Philip McMichael's *Settlers and the Agrarian Question: 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.

2 There are multiple books about plantations and sugar in the Caribbean; see for example: Pal Ahluwalia, Bill Ashcroft and Roger Knight, editors. *White and Deadly: Sugar and Colonialism*. Commack, NY: Nova Science, 1999.
3 While the EU subsidises the agricultural sector, the number of farmers is steadily decreasing (European Union, 2018).
4 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 writers and poets such as Henry Lawson, A.B. Banjo Paterson, Steele Rudd, epitomised the idea of the bushman as a resourceful larrikin who tamed the landscape, was resilient in the face of hardship and heroic in overcoming the odds—which were inevitably stacked against him. […] These images served to colonise 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" (2005, 3).
5 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 several years, yields have dropped so significantly that Australia even imported wheat from Canada (Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, 2018, 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.
6 In an interview, the leader of the Nationals, Michael McCormack, was unable to, as *The Monthly* reports, "think of a single time when the Nationals had backed farmers over miners" (Manning, 2019).
7 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, 2019). Although the mine covers the Wangang and Jagalingou (W&J) Native Title land and despite strong grassroots opposition led by the W&J families, the mine is currently under construction. The crisis has reverberated internationally, recently culminating in the Fridays 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).
8 The Murray–Darling River is Australia's longest river system (with *c.*2750 km the fifteenth largest in the world) and has been under pressure from intensive irrigation for cotton and other 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" (Norman and Janson-Moore, 2019). 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, 2019; *ABC Four Corners*, 2017). The severe drought of the last several 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 New South Wales covering 128,000 m^2, their Native title only delivered limited land repossession (Norman and Janson-Moore, 2019).

9 The Capitalocene names a system that, as Moore puts it, "organizes Nature" (2016, 11). 'Cheap Nature' carries a twofold meaning: to make resources cheap in price, and to degrade them (2). Examples for this can be seen in the "four cheaps" of food, energy, raw materials and human labour (11). Importantly, however, Cheap Nature is at an end "because most of the reserves of the earth have been drained, burned, depleted, poisoned, exterminated, and otherwise exhausted" (Haraway, 2015, 160).

10 The term indicates, as geologist Kathryn Yusoff puts it, the globally disproportionate exposure to harm for black and brown bodies: "[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" (2018, xii–xiii). Moreover, the Black Anthropocene takes issue with how the naming of the Anthropocene "suddenly proclaims concern with the exposures of environmental harm to white liberal communities" (xiii). Put differently, now that the shadow sides of colonisation, slavery, genocide and labour exploitation increasingly affect the wealthy in every nation through the palpably changing climate, the Anthropocene is pronounced as the 'fault of all humans.'

11 Drawing on postcolonial, Black, Caribbean and Indigenous thought, the concept captures the *physical site* of capitalism: extractive and enclosed plantations that rely on various forms of slave labour (Haraway, 2015, 162). Globalised factory meat production and monocrop agribusiness can be understood to be a continuation of such agriculture (Haraway, 2015, 162). The Plantationocene also draws attention to ongoing practices of monocultures at the expense of biodiversity, and the commercialisation of crops through companies such as Bayer-Monsanto.

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3 Remembering the Language of Colonial Agriculture

Carrie Tiffany's *Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living*

Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living is the debut novel of Carrie Tiffany (2005), a former park ranger and agricultural journalist, who emigrated from England to Australia as a child. She has since published award-winning novels that explore what we may call iconic Australian themes: *Mateship with Birds* (2012) is, similar to her debut, a historical novel about a farmer and birdwatcher in the Australian bush; and *Exploded View* (2019) delves into the car and the road from the point of view of a young girl who is suffering sexual abuse. *Everyman's Rules* was published to great acclaim, winning multiple national prizes. 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 Tato 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" (Potter and Magner, 2018, 3). Today, the Mallee is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, such as rising salinity, decreased rainfall, and species loss. In fact, Mallee communities were declared "Australia's first climate change refugees" (4). The novel depicts the Mallee as a kind of 'shadow-place,' marked by soil degradation and plagues.

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 to educate farmers about health and domestic affairs. Adapted from a Canadian model, the train was government-funded and

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jointly operated by the Victorian Departments of Agriculture, Railway, Education and Public Health. Touring the Mallee 38 times, the train consisted of different cars, including wagons for livestock fodder, veterinary equipment, animals, lecture platforms and display tables for agricultural utensils. It 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 (Tiffany, 2005, 31).

The novel is written from the 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 which Mallee soil was blown all the way to Melbourne).[1] 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.

The novel conveys the often-bitter experiences settlers were enduring in Australia's interior. Despite the 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 are 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). At the end of the novel, 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). 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, World War II and its aftermath heralds a new time in which land and community care increasingly becomes the task of women 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, 2005). 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 stillbirth, its tone is predominantly amusing. Humour is often achieved through clashing perspectives on the 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 titular 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 POSESSION 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. 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 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 nervous—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)

As this passage suggests, the novel is set at a time in which Indigenous presence was systematically and purposefully suppressed. Although there are no Indigenous characters in the novel, colonial ideology seems noticeable in the descriptions of the native flora: native grasses are "clearly poorer in comparison." Instead of valuing a multiplicity of knowledge traditions, the scientific rules spelled out by Robert are shown to be deeply hierarchical and limiting.

As Cameron 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 (2014, 4). The depiction of science and agriculture as always already cultural makes the novel especially valuable for exemplifying concerns of the Environmental Humanities.

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" (Tiffany, 2005, 29). As is suggested here, the Australian landscape was widely considered lacking in beauty and productivity,[2] so that the passage conveys that scientific agriculture in Australia had moralistic undertones. 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'; as the novel unfolds, however, 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, italics in the original)

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. 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 help foreground the ways in which 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 the upper classes. 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 the 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, 2011, 41), science and modernity are not demonised. 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' is crucial to understand the workings of these systems. 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—'slow violence' shapes perception for the complexity of structural violence, the specific effects of which may appear invisible at any given time and place. Similarly to racial capitalism, the notion of slow violence points to the importance of perceiving violence beyond individuals. In this sense, 'slow violence' stresses the long and often invisible consequences of structural violence. Robert's character, then, conveys that systems of oppression are not bound to classes, and 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" (2013). 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: "'[P]ollution' signals the stories of political failures, socio-ecological decline, and the discriminatory practices that infiltrate uneven societies" (2016, 168). As Iovino suggests here, poor social relationships often have negative consequences for ecologies. In this way, the novel's depiction of agricultural failure can be read as resulting out of the oppression of certain kinds of people and knowledges and dualistic human/nature constructions. 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.

The (Fe)male Body/Land: lived experience and lyrical language

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. (Tiffany, 2005, 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 in a particular place, as well as from the ability to perceive broader, interconnected patterns. As this quotation suggests, the novel 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 outlined in the Introduction, 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 transdisciplinary 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., 2018, 173), *Everyman's Rules* can additionally be described as 'developing a cosmological consciousness' 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 by 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.' (Tiffany, 2005, 48)

Agricultural sheep reproduction is here compared to human desire—to comical effect. This reduction of desire to instrumental uses, 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, *Everyman's Rules* 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.

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 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. 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). Colebrook writes, in her essay "We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene: The Anthropocene Counterfactual" (2017):

> 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 based on their differences (discrimination) as well as 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 fact that critiques brought forward in the Anthropocene debate have been present in feminist and queer theory for decades, particularly in material feminism, ecofeminism and feminist science studies (Grusin, 2017, 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 childbearing 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. As the end of the novel shows Robert leaving the farm and marriage to voluntarily join the war, the 'feminist' notion of land-care conveyed in the ending puts forward the importance of nurturing and care, as opposed to abandonment.

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. This 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.[3] 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 *techne* without *physis*) that marks all that has stood for humanism, posthumanism, a certain dream of history and of utopian sexual difference. (2017, 17)

Rather than considering the socio-environmental devastations and the limitations of growth as an essential feedback loop signifying the need to correct course, Colebrook argues that the 'good' Anthropocene further enshrines a hierarchised human/nature or *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 and pollution and that can be abandoned without consequences. 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.

Multi-Scalar Knowledge, Diverse Language, New Readings

Everyman's Rules explores different kinds of knowledges, as expressed in diverse uses of language. Jean's development from innocence towards an increasingly complex understanding of the land is ultimately empowering, as she learns the multidimensionality 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: as illustrated throughout my discussion, direct quotations from scientific and governmental pamphlets of the time are contrasted with lyrical accounts by the narrator, vivid dialogue as well as realist description.

Yet, beyond different kinds of knowledges, the novel implicitly also suggests different *scales*, or 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. (2019, 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 various environmental humanists have stressed, environmental crises are so complex because they represent value conflicts with vastly different stakeholders. 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, Latour has suggested that the role of the humanities scholar could be to investigate this relationship between facts and values, also termed 'matters of concern' by Latour (2004, 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, which eventually shapes 'new' values. *Everyman's Rules* insinuates that an ethical relationship to place and people emerges through embodied and embedded experience as expressed through a diversity of language registers: embodied in cultural, gendered, individual and linguistic difference, and embedded in a particular ecosystem.

Literary scholar Timothy Clark (2015) has observed that there are no real precedents for reading at the scale required by the Anthropocene, so that the Anthropocene has generated new ways of reading (123). He proposes that 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). Clark takes the iconic nationalist writer, Henry Lawson (1867–1922), as an example, arguing that:

> In 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)

This 'new' reading reveals that an 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" (118–24). Similarly, Tiffany's humorous and affecting novel produces such "ironies of retrospect," so that *Everyman's Rules* serves, as Hughes D'Aeth has put it, as a "fable for the Anthropocene" (2023, 291).

Altogether, however, the novel complicates 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), it draws attention to the role of culture and language, and their included issues—in this case, gender inequality. *Everyman's Rules*, then, 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 understanding of reciprocal care as a life-giving and life-sustaining force.

Tiffany unveils the socio-eco-political reasons for growing wheat in Australia and points to the entanglement of nature/culture, environment/

human and agriculture/society. As the novel satirises reductionist relationships to what is connoted 'natural' (land, animals, women), it contrasts colonial with lyrical language, showing that gendered differences *matter*—in a figurative and literal sense. As *Everyman's Rules* grapples with the sense of a complex whole 'environment,' it could be termed 'cosmological' rather than environmental because of the insistence on embodied and embedded difference, a multi-scalar knowledge and perspectives, as well as an eco-systemic order that co-shapes cultural meaning.

As mentioned earlier, *Everyman's Rules* ends with the resolution to "grow a different crop—something that belongs here" (224). The following discussion of *The Yield* picks up the discussion, revealing how 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.

Notes

1 As Robin, Sörlin and Warde 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 features 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 reliably kind climate of Europe. In the drought-risky semi-desert Australian inland they tend to make settlement self-destructive'" (2018, 73–4).

2 Gerry Turcotte (2009) points to the Australian Gothic as an expression of the tradition of considering the Australian landscape as melancholic, ugly or even grotesque.

3 The Ecomodernist assertion that the Anthropocene is 'good' is explained and critiqued in detail in part III. 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.

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4 Resisting Mining and Regenerating Country through the Wiradjuri Language

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 23, the critically acclaimed *Swallow the Air* (2006), which became part of the HSC (high-school) syllabus and won Winch a mentorship with Nobel prizewinner Wole Soyinka, who partly mentored Winch during the creation of the book (Yates and Penguin Random House Australia, 2019, 2). Winch has said that *The Yield* (2019a) was arduous in the making and that the novel is a "love letter to the past and the future of Australia" (2019b). 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 (Lucashenko and Winch, 2019).

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 "Murrumby River." Although the geography of Massacre Plains and the Murrumby 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" (2019a, 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 (Lucashenko and Winch, 2019). These three perspectives are narrated through different literary forms: August is written from a third-person perspective, Albert's voice is delivered through entries in his creative dictionary, and Greenleaf's perspective is epistolary, told in the 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

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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 also 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 seem highly symbolic for different stages of land-use in Australia.

August, who is soon exiting her twenties, "with nothing to show" (Winch, 2019a, 6), is physically and mentally unwell upon arrival; she has depression and anorexia (in a similar way to Robert from *Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living* [Tiffany, 2005], August eats earth as an expression of her trauma [30]). Winch traces her condition back to the Wiradjuri *ngarran*, which means "weak, hungry, depressed" (Winch, 2019a, 33). 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.[1] However, Albert's funeral is not the only profound change befalling Prosperous House: the Rinepalm Mining company (a portmanteau of Australian mining billionaires, Gina Rinehart and Clive Palmer) has federal approval to build "a two km, 300-metre deep tin mine, a boon for the local economy" (Winch, 2019a, 292), which would demolish both the Gondiwindis' house and their neighbour's house, Southerly, belonging to the well-off settler family, Falstaff.[2] 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[3], the Crown leased land to farmers for only 99 years, so the properties are no longer technically owned by the families. 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 this 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 culturally significant objects in the mission cemetery, which leads archaeologists to declare Gondiwindi milling techniques to be 18,000 years old and to rewrite world-history—as it provides evidence of the oldest ongoing civilisation. All these findings are key for starting the Native Title case needed to guarantee the families' ownership of their lands. It is the Wiradjuri language recorded in Albert's dictionary, however, that finally serves as the strongest confirmation of 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 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 the Wiradjuri language and its encapsulated culture, then, that revives August: after finding the dictionary she is "ravenous" (245), realising that she had been "looking for those words that she'd understand, that would explain what it all meant" (308).

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" (van Neerven, 2019). 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 various forms of direct and indirect action. Although Blak/Green[4] relations are represented to be deeply fraught, full of nuances that non-Indigenous 'greenies' often seem to not fully comprehend, August eventually agrees with a particularly eloquent activist, Mandy, on her observation about what makes people act: "We have to learn it [history] is personal—we learn that through looking after the land" (Winch, 2019a, 299). Speaking from an 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),[5] government records, and studies of prominent historians such as Bill Gammage, Eric Rolls and Yuval Noah Harari that prove "the history and sophistication of Indigenous Australians" (342). Moreover, the novel draws on Bruce Pascoe's *Dark Emu: Black Seeds—Agriculture or Accident?* (2014) and ideas of regenerative agriculture, which I discuss later in this chapter.

Dismantling Destructive Land-Use

The Yield establishes two co-existing understandings and enactments of Country operating in Australia: one Indigenous and one colonial.[6] 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" (Winch, 2019a, 84). The "unravelling" here indicates the undoing of socio-environmental fabrics of interconnectedness through the survival of the fittest. By contrast, the Wiradjuri Country is conveyed as nourishing, formative, but also demanding. It is this recalling of a violently silenced First Nations understanding that 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 quoted 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 were cultivated over millennia and 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 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 world views 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 world views 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 ethics, 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 multifaceted 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 and transcultural knowledge and the regeneration of Wiradjuri culture and cosmology for keeping Country alive and flourishing.

Importantly for this part'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' (2000, 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 transnationally, but specifically in Australia.

In this context, it is worth recalling Australia's legal basis of land-ownership—as mentioned earlier in the part introduction 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 landholding class (2018, 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" (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 USA 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" (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, 2011, 22; also cited in Pritchard, 2018, 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. Since colonisation, then, Australia evinces a particularly strong tradition of valorizing land and water as resources 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 this systematic commodification through the conflict between farming and mining. With a wink to the controversial contemporary Adani Mine (see the introduction to this part), 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.' (Winch, 2019a, 65–6)

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 for 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)

Although 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, *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 the cosmic concept 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, in particular fractal thought, as "the little things […] are big things" (207).

While Albert's project aims at explaining "something big," his dictionary entries often also encompass practical advice, emphasising the labour and effort needed in land-care. 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. (205–6)

Rather than establishing Country as nourishing and healing only, this entry suggests the inherent *labour* of caring. In this way, Albert's dictionary evokes the ancient genre of the Georgic (starting in the eighth century 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 time 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) (2011, 204). Unlike the pastoral notion of an untroubled, harmonious and innocent 'nature,' the Georgic emphasises struggle, attentiveness to mundane detail and the fruit of experience. The genre reflects the give and take, the reciprocal educational effect of "nature's demands," and the "individuality of living things" (Fairer, 2011, 208). Similarly, Albert's dictionary conveys the labour of "encouraging new life, however small" (Fairer, 2011, 209), contrasting with an often-romanticised idea of harmony with an uncultivated 'nature.'

As Albert's careful labour shows, the novel 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 [Winch, 2019a, 196]), it stresses the care needed to regenerate Indigenous language, culture and land-rights. This conjures up the earlier-mentioned position inherent in the Environmental Humanities declaring the need to move beyond academic critique towards communicating solutions. Literary scholar Jennifer Hamilton, for example, has made the important point that the history of 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. (2015, 183; emphasis in the original)

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. This does not just involve human labour, but a recognition of multispecies and elemental ‘doing’ that keeps the ecosystem thriving. As Hamilton continues so evocatively:

> 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? (2015, 185)

Similarly, the novel suggests the philosophical, linguistic, systemic and practical changes required for regenerating Country. By drawing attention to the multidimensional consequences of colonisation, *The Yield* conveys 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 historians,[7] 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, appeared on national television and released a children’s version of the book.[8] 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” (2014, 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 sophisticated fire techniques to clear areas of land and control bigger bush fires, and so on. 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). While this insight may seem self-evident to some, it can be considered revolutionary in a country in which Indigenous history has systematically been silenced. As environmental historian 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” (Griffiths, 2020). In this way *The Yield* can be seen as allegorical for a contemporary Australia that seems on the brink of deep socio-environmental change. Altogether, then, the novel goes far beyond a critique of 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 as continuing to shape contemporary Australia.

Regenerating Wiradjuri Cosmology

I now turn to the heart of the novel—the keyword 'yield.' Via its reflections on the similarities and differences between Wiradjuri and English, *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 major 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. (2019a, 339)

By the same token, Winch reminds the reader of the ongoing importance of language:

> Cultural 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 and Penguin Random House Australia, 2019, 2). In short, while language was a key tool of colonisation, Winch points out that it is also a key tool of repair.[9]

In *The Yield*, Albert emphasises that Country—time, place, social relations—is not just known through language, but 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" (Winch, 2019a, 34). Here, Albert indicates that Indigenous language is so crucial for rejuvenation because it emerged from a particular place and, therefore, contains important information about this place. Moreover, language records memory, which is central 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 songlines—Aboriginal routes that cross the country, linking important sites, people and practices ("Marlaloo Songline," undated). 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. (Winch, 2019a, 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 resurrected language, brought back from extinction" (307).[10] 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, 2017, 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 nineteenth-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 songlines: "The lines are there, but sometimes the *gudhi* [song] is lost" (Winch, 2019a, 103). As is suggested here, songlines 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 Country ("space 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, 2016, 53). Hence, *baayanha* denotes more than 'harvesting': it also encapsulates the ethics of reciprocal respect and earth-bound humility. *Baayanha* could thus be read as a humble act, whereas the Anthropocene's *anthropos* evokes the hubris of not believing oneself to be 'of this earth.'

At first glance, the novel establishes the difference between the English and the Wiradjuri words; upon closer examination, however, '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," undated). However, the noun 'yield' refers mainly to "profit" as in "a profit or an amount esp. of a crop produced" ("Yield," undated). 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"). Yet, as the noun-form of 'yield' denotes, the contemporary use of the English word is strongly linked to 'profit'—a central word for commodification. 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[11] terms 'yield' and *baayanha*, the novel seems to suggest that new meaning can emerge from "the space between the two," from lived relationships, and from the comparison between languages, cultures, ethics and cosmologies. As 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, reciprocal cooperation 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. (Winch, 2019a, 106)

Albert here stresses the centrality 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 nga-ghigu madhugu*—that's our commandment, it translates to: I will care for my enemy. They both mean *gulbarra*" (42). Beyond the biblical emphasis on 'love,' *gulbarra* stresses 'care,' which denotes the 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 re-garded as the highest expression of care:

> Maybe you are looking for a statue, or a bench by the banks of the Murrumby 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 unfit 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 (Robin, 2017, 46–7). 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 in reciprocity with Country, 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" (Winch, 2019a, 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, emphasis in the original)

Reading is conveyed to be a process of mutuality 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.[12] 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. (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 are fundamental; they hold the potential of rejuvenating Country.

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 devastation of the Massacre Plains. Yet beyond an analysis of oppression and environmental crisis, my focus on cosmology has foregrounded the transformative and regenerative agenda of the novel: *The Yield* points to the careful labour needed to revitalise Indigenous language, culture and land, with positive consequences for the entire nation-continent and, in the face of the Anthropocene, the planet. This includes the revised understandings of grains, crops, soil and water from commodified 'things' to agents in a cosmic order and, thus, conveys a holistic understanding of environment, society and individual. The novel's 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 will care for people. By drawing attention to reading and artistic expression in general, *The Yield* proposes that language, art and culture have the power not only to colonise and destroy, but also to change the trajectory of decline in the Anthropocene.

Notes

1 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. When, 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.

2 The name Falstaff also seems highly symbolic. In Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays, Falstaff is the fool. As the novel unfolds, members of the Falstaff family indeed seem to act foolishly; in particular, Eddie, who is the same age as August, reveals that he has internalised racism by believing his family "saved" the Gondiwindi family (Winch, 2019a, 218).

3 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," 2020).

4 As explained in the Introduction, the term 'Blak' refers to Indigenous Australians. For a closer discussion of Blak/Green relations, see part IV.

5 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 (Winch, 2019a, 339).

6 The Indigenous Australian concept of Country is explained in the Introduction. In *The Yield*, Country explicitly also includes 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?" (Winch, 2019a, 34).

7 Griffiths points out that, since the 1960s, historians have collectively dismantled the national silencing of Aboriginal history, sovereignty, land management and warfare (Griffiths, 2020).

8 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.

9 Winch seems to have been influenced also 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 linguistics' informants' in ways that […] attempt to help a contemporary Noongar community" (2011, 58).

10 As Winch notes, preserved languages often rely on colonial documents, such as missionary records, station landholder records and local police documents (Winch, 2019a, 339).

11 By 'shimmering,' I initially meant a kind of nuanced, multifaceted and beautiful motion, an 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" (Rose, 2017, G51, citing Stengers' *Cosmopolitics* [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" (Rose, 2017, G53, via Howard Morphy's anthropological essay "From Dull to Brilliant" [1989]).

12 Another example of the etymological link between reading and reaping can be found in the German words 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*).

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Part III

Bioethics/Technology

Revising Human Mastery Narratives

Human mastery of nature via technology is a powerful but deceptive narrative. Indeed, one of the central tenets of the Anthropocene critique is the very notion that humans will find a way out of this predicament through technology. Many of the starting dates of the Anthropocene that scientists have proposed centre on technologies of some kind:

- The sixteenth-century 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
- The 1950s' so-called Great Acceleration with the amassing of nuclear weapons and damages

In their original proposal of the term Anthropocene, Crutzen and Stoermer explicitly name the centrality of technology, as they identify "the growing role played by mankind's brainpower and technological talents in shaping its own future and environment" (2000, 17). It is worth pausing over one term here that expresses this assumption: the 'noösphere,' a concept the authors sourced from the Russian geologist V.I. Vernadsky. The noösphere was coined in 1924 to mean:

> the increasing power of mankind as part of the biosphere … the world of thought, to mark the growing role played by mankind's brainpower and technological talents in shaping its own future and environment. (Crutzen and Stoermer, 2000, 17)

While Vernadsky's noosphere uses the term 'consciousness' and implies a collapsing of dualisms such as human and natural history, mind and body, or culture and nature,[1] Crutzen and Stoermer interpret this through the words "brainpower and technological talents." This suggests the prominent understanding of human activity as mainly informed by rationalism and scientific thought, above all other dimensions of humanity.

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Yet, as spheres such as technology and biology are becoming entangled—which has culminated in the pronouncement of a fourth industrial revolution[2]—the narrative of human mastery over an othered 'nature' via rational power has become increasingly untenable. The new media are a case in point. In the young field of 'ecomedia,' for instance, scholars are increasingly attending to the ways in which the media no longer only *represent* life but have become technologies *of* life that also shape and regulate it (Zylinska, 2017, 1). Donna Haraway calls these new realities humanity is faced with 'naturaltechnical worlds,' arguing that 'we'[3] are now called upon to *care* for the successes and failures of 'technoculture' (2014, 242).

In this sense, bioethical and biopolitical questions are becoming increasingly important, as the ever-more sophisticated tools humans invent increasingly influence biological organisms, such as stem cells, embryos, crops and plants, humans, or even the extinct. While the term 'bioethics' has a fascinatingly complex history,[4] today it is mainly employed to indicate different ethical and political approaches to biopolitical issues, such as cloning, germline genetic therapy or gene-modified crops (more broadly, genetically modified organisms—GMOs). Bioethics and biopolitics are close to the idea of cosmos; composed of 'bio', 'ethics' and 'politics,' the terms carry the nature/culture, fact/value entanglement in their very names. In this sense, bioethics and technology could be understood to have become agents themselves in a cosmological order that has long blended the boundary between organic and technological, living and non-living.

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 suggested by the 'Ecomodernist' group, a centre-right US think-tank that is associated with the Breakthrough Institute. Their 2015 manifesto, which has been heavily critiqued,[5] proposes that humans need to further "decouple" themselves from nature by means of technological advancement (Asafu-Adjaye et al., 2015, 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 with the natural world" (7). By strengthening 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 asserts that a "good Anthropocene" can be achieved by further intensifying the supposed separation from 'nature' by means of social, economic and technological powers.

The idea of human mastery, then, suggests the false notion that nature is distinctly apart from human beings, an object to be readily exploited and profited from. Yet this very idea of distance between humans and their environment, which the Ecomodernists wish to further enhance, fails to accommodate for the fact that technologies are inseparably entwined with culture. As this example shows, the narrative of progress is often engrained in science and technology. A fixation on progress, however, cannot accept that the Anthropocene might signify a loss, so that emotional responses to problems, such as extinction, seem disallowed and repressed. As pointed out in many critiques, the Ecomodernists follow the delusional logic of the nature/culture divide and have surprisingly little to offer to the trajectory of socio-environmental decline—such as the highly dangerous loss of biodiversity—that humanity is faced with in the Anthropocene.

This deceptively straightforward but ultimately illogical solution to what have been called 'wicked problems' (problems that are uniquely difficult to conceptualise and solve because they have uncertain boundaries)[6] reveals the extent to which scientific and technological expertise frequently 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" (2016, 123). A certain 'scientisation' of environmental matters can also be seen in the fact that the climate emergency has often been framed as a question of technological innovation—as in the necessary transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy. Also frequently evoked is the idea that, in the future, there will be technological inventions, 'big fixes,' which will solve ecological problems. While technological reform in the production of energy is, of course, a crucial step to reducing greenhouse gases, there is much more required in tackling environmental issues, as the kaleidoscope of the Anthropocene problems conveys. In short, structural issues need social change.

In fact, the scientisation of climate change can be politically dangerous. Climate scientist and geographer Michael Hulme has made the crucial 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" (2009, 332; also quoted in Holm et al., 2015, 989). In his book *Why We Disagree about Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity* (2009), Hulme outlines the development of climate change perception. He 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 heating 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 corals or coral larvae that can cope with higher water temperatures are planted into areas where current coral species are dying (Readfearn, 2017). *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 CO_2 that is the ultimate cause of the problem. (Readfearn, 2017)

As Hulme and others have argued, then, while the techno-scientific work is crucial, small-scale and culturally diverse responses to complex problems are equally important for changing the culture that has led to the Anthropocene.

The technocratisation and managerial tenor of the climate and Anthropocene run the risk of creating a "political log-jam" (Hulme, 2009, 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 political "leaps," as activist and writer Naomi Klein has called them,[7] an overemphasis on mega-solutions neglects engaging with the complexity of environmental issues, including considerations of social justice. As it has become increasingly clear that humanity has all the necessary scientific facts regarding the severity of change, but is still failing to act fast enough, 'stories' become key.

Where Are the Stories about Climate Change? Science and Speculative Fiction in the Anthropocene

Various writers and scholars have pointed out that the most difficult questions of our time can be effectively and uniquely explored through stories. Yet, as mentioned earlier, climate change presents great challenges for narration. Novelist Amitav Ghosh has asserted that "serious literary fiction," often steeped in the realist tradition, is failing to address this crisis. In lieu of realist fiction, Ghosh proposes that genre fiction (fantasy, horror, science fiction) is potentially more apt to express contemporary experience (2016b, 24). While this scepticism of realist fiction and literary fiction are debatable and highly contentious, it is interesting to note that many writers have pointed to the particular technical difficulty of narrating climate change. As climate fiction writer James Bradley notes: "to write about those larger economic and historical phenomena is extremely difficult without ignoring the particularities of the experience of climate change for individuals" (2017).

However, Bradley argues that climate fiction is lagging behind non-fiction nature-writing because “experience is no longer a guide” and because the ‘new’ awareness of the natural world “demands we move outside of a human frame of reference” (2017). This evokes the problem of scale introduced in part I.

In this part, I explore two science and speculative fiction (SF) texts, acknowledging the fact that attention to genre is still helpful—particularly when engaging with climate change, the Anthropocene and the illusion of human mastery over ‘nature.’ Briohny Doyle’s climate fiction novel *The Island Will Sink* (2016) and Ellen van Neerven’s speculative novella “Water” from the collection *Heat and Light* (2015) are both set in the not-too-distant future. Whereas *The Island Will Sink* tests the limitations of employing dystopian, (post-) apocalyptic and disaster narratives for responding to the climate emergency as transmitted through various different media, “Water” presents a counter-narrative to this dominant apocalypticism, in the mode of romance and humour. The aim is to present one of the main contributions of literary studies to the Anthropocene debate and to the planetary crisis at large: the attention to storytelling, genre, mode, narrative and affect[8].

As both texts are written in the SF mode, and as SF stories seem to have an especially prominent relationship to the Anthropocene, a quick glance at the genre specifics is important. As a genre and mode, SF is particularly effective in mobilising concerns of the Anthropocene, as it has the potential not only to prefigure and warn, but also to radically reimagine possible futures. Donna Haraway, for instance, cites the prolific SF writers Ursula Le Guin and Octavia Butler as instructive for Anthropocene discussions because of their ability to tell visionary fiction of earthly survival, recuperation, “wounded flourishing” and “germinating” the world (Haraway, 2016, 120). Although the Anthropocene’s periodisation debates have triggered a reconsideration of history, futurity and the speculative have equally been surfacing, which points to the unprecedented nature of the crisis.[9] The effects of anthropogenic destructions are already happening and are widely mediatised, yet 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 Jaime Lorimer has pointed out, scientific questions posed by the Anthropocene require a certain amount of science fiction, 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” (2016, 128).[10] Related to temporality, another key aspect of SF is scale and the cosmic. SF settings include planets, solar systems and galaxies, and, as Ursula Heise argues, continue the tradition of the epos in the age of the novel (2019, 281). With the Anthropocene, Heise argues, SF has been propelled into the ‘mainstream’ (300).[11]

While speculative and future scenarios are doubtless a crucial genre for making sense of the Anthropocene, it is also necessary to problematise the categories of 'future' and 'science' that are often taken for granted, but that hold fraught histories and ideologies. Important (Black) feminist critiques, such as brought forward by Butler and Le Guin, have taken issue with the patriarchal and racialised telling of history that is often reflected in the genre.[12] Similarly, 'mainstream' SF has been critiqued for marginalising Indigenous works that may portray different conceptualisations of time and space. As Indigenous studies professor Grace L. Dillon points out in *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction* (2012), although Indigenous writers have explored the limitations of science and linear time in the SF mode, critics have often overlooked such narratives (2). As Dillon puts it, the conceptualisation of the genre has tended to "disregard the varieties of space-time thinking of traditional societies," frequently narrating colonialism as an "adventure story" (2). Indigenous writers employing the SF mode, however, have recovered and rethought the past in a new light: for example, by exposing the Darwinian understandings of evolution, eugenicist theory and colonial ideology (2). Dillon's suggestion that SF is an overlooked but important mode for North American Indigenous writers and artists rings true for the Australian context too, where Indigenous authors seem to increasingly use techniques common to the SF genre.[13] Similarly, van Neerven's *Heat and Light* can be said to 'slipstream' linear progression and exemplifies how Indigenous viewpoints might challenge simplified notions of place. Applying such genre categories to Indigenous texts, however, may also be problematic: for instance, Indigenous Australian 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" (2014).

Similarly, *The Island Will Sink* and "Water" explore the intricate relationship between science, media-technologies and narratives, drawing attention to the cultural outlook on technology, bioethics, future and place. Whereas *The Island Will Sink* fits into the more conventional conceptions of SF and climate fiction (outlined in chapter 5), "Water" is less interested in developments of science-technologies than in bioethical explorations that can be read as reflecting Indigenous philosophies of evolution and multispecies ethics. Notwithstanding these differences, it is productive to read these texts together, as it enables insights into the colonial legacy of a particularly strong nature/culture division.

In addition to paying attention to the premises and possibilities of genre, mode and affect, the following reading stresses the need for a more diverse range of narratives for responding to the demands of the Anthropocene. Paying attention to formerly neglected affects and genres in relation to the environment (such as romance, humour and survival) enables productive discussions about contemporary environmentalism. Narratives and affects about the environment profoundly shape human capacities to shape the future of this socio-environmental crisis.

Notes

1 Crutzen and Stoermer quote the following sentence by Vernadsky: "… the direction in which the processes of evolution must proceed, namely towards increasing consciousness and thought, and forms having greater and greater influence on their surroundings" (2000, 17, quoting Vernadsky's *The Biosphere* (1998 [1926]) without page number).

2 Building on previous revolutions, such as automated mass production, electric power, and information technology and electronics, this revolution has been characterised "by a fusion of technologies that are blurring the lines between the physical, digital and biological spheres" (Schwab, 2016).

3 By 'we' Haraway refers not to the species as a whole, but, loosely, to the people inheriting the logic of technoculture—among which she counts herself. As she writes about the artist Patricia Piccinini's work: "Like me, she is the offspring of white settler colonies, their frontier practices, their ongoing immigrations, and their bad memories and troubled discourses of indigeneity, belonging, appropriation, wasteland, progress, and exclusion" (Haraway, 2014, 243).

4 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 (2016, 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, 2016, 22). The third use of the term describes the influence of public policy on medicine, public health and biotechnology (22).

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

6 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" (2016, 36–7).

7 See, for example, The Leap Project, a non-profit organisation that, in contrast to the Ecomodernists' notion of 'technological leaps,' advocated for systemic change through social and political movements (co-founded by Naomi Klein and Avi Lewis): https://theleap.org/.

8 Affect is here understood as a broader term for emotions: affect is corporeal, collective and/or performed (Seymour, 2018, 20).

9 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" (2017, 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, 2015, 172; quoted in Latour, 2017, 45).

10 Lorimer (2016, 129) 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).

11 As Heise writes, science fiction displays aspects of the epic, which "take up premodern forms of narrative: cosmologies, myths, origin stories, and narratives about the emergence and eventual disappearance of species, places, or civilizations" (2019, 300).

12 In order to capture the need of feminist counter-narratives, Le Guin's famous essay "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction" (2015 [1986]) coins the term 'carrier bag stories' (which draws on Virginia Woolf's term 'bottle stories,' which captures the need for different 'containers' that can hold untold stories), a metaphor conjuring the gathering of seeds, nuts, fruits etc. (365): "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). As Le Guin notes, '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). 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 we need feminist perspectives that defy the techno-heroic narrative of domination. Similarly, Octavia Butler is attributed with using the 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" (2017). Significantly, Butler and Le Guin have both inspired a new generation of social and environmental justice movements (Haraway, 2016, 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, that I will engage with in my discussion of van Neerven's "Water."

13 Recent examples are Claire Coleman's *Terra Nullius* (2017) and *The Old Lie* (2019); the television drama show *Cleverman* (2016–17); Ambelin Kwaymullina's Young Adult trilogy "The Tribe" series (2012, 2013, 2015); and Alexis *Wright's Swan Book* (2013).

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5 Testing the Limits of Apocalyptic Climate Fiction

Briohny Doyle's *The Island Will Sink*

Briohny Doyle has emerged as a strong new voice of Australian climate fiction. While her second novel, *Echolalia* (2021), explores the everyday effects of climate change and its interrelations with motherhood and family life, this chapter analyses Doyle's debut *The Island Will Sink* (2016), an arguably underrated novel (which was, in fact, shortlisted for the Small Press Network's Most Underrated Book Award 2017) about the power of mediated trauma through new technologies such as video games, immersive film and digitised everyday life. The novel fits into the futuristic branch of the relatively new genre of climate fiction, which Axel Goodbody and Adeline Johns-Putra define as marked by "the widespread collective anxiety around humanity's impact on its environment that marks the Anthropocene" (2019a, 230–2). Although the boundaries of this genre are not easy to draw,[1] it refers to the relatively new development of fiction that is catalysed by the anxiety of climate change. Concerned with anthropogenic climate heating, climate fiction became especially popular around 2013 (the shortened term 'cli-fi' was coined by the journalist Dan Bloom in 2007) and, according to Goodbody and Johns-Putra, employs two major modes: the realist present and the catastrophic future, which is often apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic or dystopian (2019a, 234). The second of these characteristics fits *The Island Will Sink*, which is set in the near future and self-consciously plays with (post-) apocalypse, testing out different narrative strands and simultaneously critiquing these in sophisticated conversations between characters. This preoccupation with apocalypse and disaster evokes a trend in climate fiction: the tendency "to reflect a degree of detachment from catastrophist visions of the future" (Goodbody and Johns-Putra, 2019a, 233).

As Goodbody and Johns-Putra also argue, our understanding of climate is always already mediated because the very data of climate change evolved from the production of scientific facts, involving observation, experimentation, statistical analysis and peer review (2019a, 235). Whereas this point underlines the necessity of scientific mediation, *The Island Will Sink* explores the *aesthetic* mediation of climate change. Because we have come to rely upon aesthetic mediation for communicating the urgency of climate change, the novel suggests that the contemplation of dominant aesthetics,

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affects and narratives is crucially important work. Representing a hyper-active obsession with aesthetics, however, the novel also dramatises the failure to create a place-based environmental memory, as individual and collective memory is shown to be divorced from lived experience in a given ecosystem. The novel inhabits the paradox of, on the one hand, critiquing the over-exposure to apocalypticism, while, on the other, contributing to this proliferation. It therefore illuminates the dangers of an 'overdose' of dystopian affects: while such emotions have the potential to warn, they can also exploit and paralyse individuals' responses to climate change. Testing the accuracy, ethics and limitations of apocalypse in different media (and, therefore, engaging in ekphrasis—in this case, the literary exploration of video games, TV and film), the novel implicitly grapples with the potential of literature to represent and reflect on climate change.

Critical discussions have so far concentrated on the importance of affect for the 'third media revolution' (explained below) (Murphie, 2018, 32). Michael Richardson has argued that the novel plays with the notion of premediation ("the remediation of future events and affective states" [Grusin, 2010, 6])[2] and the question of what premediated trauma of climate apocalypse means for the body (Richardson, 2018, 15). My discussion extends these helpful analyses by reading *The Island Will Sink* to also reflect on Australia's history. I read the novel as a 'negative cosmology' that imagines an intensified Anthropocene in which humans have perfected the illusion of a separate environment that was especially prevalent during the colonisation of Australia. Yet, by creating a supposed battle of the now perhaps clichéd affects of the sublime and empathy, I show that the novel also falls into the trap of understanding human responses to climate change as a binary of 'hope vs. despair.' These affects, however, do not account for the diversity of emotional experiences present when engaging with the environment or with creative works. Because *The Island Will Sink* satirises the limiting belief that the problem of climate change is that people don't 'care' enough, it affirms Goodbody and Johns-Putra's observation that much of recent climate fiction "include[s] characters and plots expressing both scepticism about the efficacy of well-meant, but naïve, direct-action eco-activism, and distrust of the political motives of proponents of radically progressive climate policies" (2019a, 233). As a genre that appeals to educated readers, climate fiction is likely not convincing anyone of the existence or urgency of climate change.[3] Instead, *The Island Will Sink* gestures towards an implicit aim of climate fiction: the creation of collective environmental memory.

Imagining an Intensified Anthropocene

The Island Will Sink is set in the near future in the 'Bay Heights' area of an unspecified city that has been significantly altered through climate change, and in which the wealthy few live relatively sheltered lives, continuously consuming climate change through the media. The ubiquitous narrative of 'the' apocalypse takes centre stage, 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. Max Galleon, a prolific film director, and his family 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" (Doyle, 2016, 8). This setting is evocative of George Turner's *The Sea and Summer* (1987), a science fiction novel on a climate-changed Melbourne, in which the impoverished 'swill' live in towers, contrasted with the affluent few in eco-homes.

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* (Doyle, 2016, 48). Not only is he obsessed with the content of disaster films, but he has also pioneered the 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 heating 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 expected 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). Experts warn that this could mark the beginning of an absolute reorganisation of the Earth's climate, yet the population is split between believing this prognosis or considering it as "just another doomsday catastrophe" (81).

Although Pitcairn takes centre stage in *The Island Will Sink*, and characters contemplate interpretations of its history, the reader is given little factual knowledge about it. As some basic knowledge about the island is helpful for my interpretation of the book, it is worth recalling that 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 planning of Max's next blockbuster disaster film 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 of this 'trauma porn,' 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. This experiment eventually fails, as the total empathy overwhelms the audience's senses, making them ill and instigating what seems to be an apocalypse itself.

Doyle's novel uses an altered version of the term Anthropocene: 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). Scientists have already affirmed this "point of no return" of atmospheric CO_2 pollution in 2007 (Slezak, 2016); the prefix *praeter*, however, is Doyle's invention, a Latin adjunct meaning 'beyond' or 'more than.' This suggests that any one singular term aiming to name this new era may always be inadequate, as it designates a global predicament so large and complex any one term will fall short. The Anthropocene is represented 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. (Doyle, 2016, 58)

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 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. These generational differences and the paradoxes of parenthood represent another genre characteristic of climate fiction (Johns-Putra, 2019a, 9). Max's children Jonas and Lilly are coming of age at a time in which uncertainty is inescapable and normalised; Jonas keeps a 'Timeline of Misconception,' marking all the things humanity once knew to be true but now knows to be false (Doyle, 2016, 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 intergenerational 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 (2011, 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" (Doyle, 2016, 276).

The 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, with the effect that the reader becomes privy to his decision-making process. Importantly, the novel's structure takes the liberty of presenting two different endings, as a Director's Cut usually refers to an altered version that is released later by the director. Whereas "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 overwhelming 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. This 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 double ending points to another 'cli-fi' trope: the sense that it "resists the sort of resolution which comes with normal plots and their expectation of closure" (Goodbody and Johns-Putra, 2019a, 236).

The Island Will Sink is both a work of realism and an exploration of the limits of climate change representation through the sublime, on the level of content as well as form. As Richardson poignantly puts it:

> For Doyle, the mediation of catastrophe is not simply a question of theme or plot but of style and the capacity of the text itself to mediate the future. […] [T]he narrative cuts and jumps, reality and unreality become difficult to demarcate. (2018, 15)

Stylistically, the employment of, and the simultaneous breaking with, realism, resonate with the notion of 'Anthropocene realism,' which combines the "familiarity of traditionally realist representation with the internal critique of realism, that expresses awareness that the shock of climate change cannot entirely be understood" (Johns-Putra, 2019b, 257). The novel therefore continuously grapples with the irrepresentability of the climate emergency: this is suggested by the nesting of narrative strands, the interest in the techno-sublime, as well as the preoccupation with multimedia representations that fail to create an environmental memory.

Having chosen Pitcairn as an icon, the filmmakers are obsessed with creating an image that evokes a particularly Australian preoccupation with islands, which Suvendrini Perera has termed the 'insular imagination' (Perera, 2009).[4]

Waiting for Disaster

The Island Will Sink continuously directs the reader's attention to the settler-colonial context of Pitcairn. As Max seeks to exploit Pitcairn, his wife Ellie 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 reconnoitrer. 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. (Doyle, 2016, 100)

Ellie alludes to Max's engagement 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. (The 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 from and transcendence of the objects of contemplation—the island and its inhabitants—only serves the viewers and is inherently unethical because their suffering here attains an allegedly higher purpose, as if the artwork is worth the devastation.

Max and Jean's fascination with disaster is continuously criticised by the women and children in the book and, therefore, linked to masculinity. Gabrielle observes: "[E]rasing the mundane, the joyful […] is another homage to your obsession with disaster" (121). As suggested here, the focus on disaster obscures attention to the effort of everyday life, which involves both the labour and pleasure of care—a traditionally female domain. Ellie remarks that Max's two obsessions—Tom and Pitcairn—hold an ethical conundrum:

> '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 the colonial project.

While showing the unethical stance of Max and Jean, their historical interpretation of disaster in relation to the Anthropocene is also problematised. 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, and disregards the unequal consequences of climate change—its ‘slow violence.’ Pitcairn’s sinking is, therefore, seen as a kind of judgement on a “cursed place”—as if its demise was well deserved. The sinking of Pitcairn, so the logic goes, would generate “a fresh start” and the “end of all this madness” (211). This scapegoat-like role of Pitcairn expresses the myth of return: the naïve notion that it is possible to go back to an imagined pre-colonial past. The perspective of Pitcairn’s inhabitants, however, never occurs; 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 so often suggested that humanity inherits only one kind of culture—a linear, Eurocentric modernity.

Implicitly, the novel reflects on Australia as part of a larger colonial history involving also Oceania. In this context it is interesting to engage with Rose’s argument that settler-societies have to grapple with a strange situatedness that has detached morality from time and place, and 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” (2004, 5). This posits a unique challenge, Rose holds, because environmental 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)

Although this observation risks a certain demonisation of mobility, and of global modernity at large, the point here is to consider the colonial practice of ideologically overlaying unique cultural eco-systemic contexts; instead of respecting uniqueness, 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 in the first place, as Max and Jean choose to concentrate on apocalyptic narratives, instead of engaging with Pitcairn’s inhabitants. This future-orientation and anticipation of disaster, paralyses agency and justifies violence in the here and now.

In its hyperactive obsession with ‘disaster,’ the novel also conjures up the problematic idea of the ‘natural disaster’—a term that has itself been criticised for exacerbating the nature/culture dualism. For example, Kate Rigby in *Dancing with Disaster* (2016) 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 eco-disasters are always hybrid forms of culture and nature. Although more-than-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). Rigby explicates that the natural disaster is a misnomer, as it derives from the Italian *dis-astrato* 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' not only avoids the nature/culture binary, but 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)—a revelation that accompanies 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: whereas utopias and dystopias seem to search for alternatives by setting positive and negative examples, post-apocalypse is interested in the fragment and in 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, revealing 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 the adult characters seem not more but less engaged. In fact, there is a paradox at the heart of the novel: while parodying and implicitly criticising the proliferation of apocalypse and disaster, it reproduces such narratives. Disasters are largely mitigated through technology and often cannot 'reach' the main characters physically, who are free and privileged to passively contemplate aesthetics.

Humans are separate from 'nature,' and their technology mostly perfects this separation: herein lies the novel's darkest dystopia.

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. Elizabeth De Loughrey, for example, 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" (2015, 363). Moreover, ecologist and geographer Jared Diamond has proposed that a society fascinated by doom tends to be unable to correct a disastrous trajectory (2005, 13; also cited in Holm et al., 2015, 984). 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. (Holm et al., 2015, 983)

As the authors note here, and as seems to be illustrated throughout *The Island Will Sink*, alarmism is closely linked to passivity. 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.

Exploiting New Technologies of 'Feeling'

All characters in *The Island Will Sink* are entwined with science and 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. Max's house itself has built-in digital technology that constantly registers the well-being of bodies, tracks their pulse, temperature, nutrition and muscular level, and accordingly suggests actions like exercising, eating and drinking. These technologies which seek to optimise individual consumption, however, are represented as futile and almost laughable in the face of the magnitude of climate change. Helpful or not, the entanglements of humans and machines are continuously evoked, 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 (Doyle, 2016, 114). Max represents what media theorists have called a 'networked ego,' whose hyper-connectivity resembles "a cellular, networked, biological and metabolic connectivity […] without an earlier sense of individual privacy" (Hoskins, 2016, 16).

Not only does the novel explore individual memory,[5] but also collective memory is represented as a key concern of climate change. This is suggested through haptic immersive cinema and its ostensibly dominant affects of the sublime and empathy. As Max's artistic partner, Jean, puts it: "We captured the whole 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" (Doyle, 2016, 243). Haptic technology film is here employed to simulate complete immersion and enable an affective experience of Pitcairn's sinking, through which the filmmakers aim to achieve "a collectivized experience of catastrophe that is haptic, affective, and cognitively overwhelming" (Richardson, 2018, 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" (Doyle, 2016, 53). Moreover, Jean cites the human need to make sense of disaster through closeness to, and distance from it:

> 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? (Doyle, 2016, 234)

The filmmakers hope for the potential of revelation inherent in apocalypse, now with a new focus: reliving and premediating eco-catastrophe. Rather than enhancing socio-ecological understanding, the novel explores the search for a disembodied and disembedded 'total memory' of climate change.

As Murphie has argued, the novel's representation of haptic cinema evokes the recently coined notion of a 'third media revolution' as a revolution of feeling. 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 enables environments to be increasingly felt, as Murphie argues:

> 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). (2018, 23)

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, this revolution involves a new quality in the collisions of media and "worlds" (Murphie, 2018, 29). This, to Murphie, can have positive or negative consequences: 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. In this sense, the current media-technological revolution, which coincides with the environmental crisis, has the potential of amplifying alienation from, and connectivity with, the more-than-human world.

Alienation is the focus of *The Island Will Sink*: Max and Jean's aesthetic portrayal aims to create what could be called 'blockbuster sensationalism' as it seeks to aesthetically transcend the reality of Pitcairn's sinking. This representation conveys the perhaps pessimistic idea that in our "broadcast era," affect is short lived, and, problematically, advances historical amnesia (Hoskins, 2016, 15). Because disaster has become a "meme" in *The Island Will Sink*—conveying that it is marked by oversaturation, cliché and irony—Max and Jean initially seek to give it renewed valency by creating the effects of a "disastrous sublime," an idea that Max draws from his love for old disaster cinema (Doyle, 2016, 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)

The aim to create a flooding of the senses, followed by an identity crisis, and finally a kind of transcendence over the object of contemplation suggests the traditional description of the sublime as defined by Immanuel Kant.[6]

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,[7] exposes the fact that disaster narratives potentially disengage the audience. This detachment could also be called the techno-sublime in the Anthropocene, which, rather than alleviating suffering, seeks to aesthetically transcend it. By contrast, the cinema of empathy is presented as potentially enhancing emotional connection. Yet 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 that physical limitations serve a function, that the body is intelligent and emotional distance is necessary. Moreover, this portrayal also suggests the fallacy that if people only were more empathetic, climate change would be 'solved.'

Although empathy is partially satirised, *The Island Will Sink* still dwells on this arguably unhelpful binary between the disastrous techno-sublime and empathy as 'the' primary affective engagements with the environment of the digital age. The pitting of the sublime against empathy asserts that these two affects 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 in either passivity and despair (through acquiescence to the sublime) or activism (motivated through empathy). Yet, recent scientific findings have pointed to the spectrum of different emotions when processing film and other media and to the neuro-scientific insight that we do not just perceive aesthetic objects and narratives in the mind, but also in the body. Alexa Weik von Mossner's *Affective Ecologies: Empathy, Emotion and Environmental Narrative* (2017), for example, examines diverse ranges of emotions to understand the role of affect in environmental film and literature, including humour, irony, hope or pleasure.[8] As if human responses to aesthetic objects create two poles, however, *The Island Will Sink* proposes a supposed battle between the sublime and empathy. Although satirising this battle, the novel remains trapped in dualism, because it does not take into consideration the complex spectrum and the ultimate unpredictability of human emotion. Falsely separating mind and memory, body and environment, the novel presents a dystopian vision of an intensified Anthropocene.

From a wider perspective, the novel conveys that narratives matter because they shape individual and collective memory. As these contemplations occur in the form of literature, which entails first- and second-order observations,[9] *The Island Will Sink* has ambiguous effects: on the one hand, it gives room for the reader to affectively experience the dangers of an 'overdose' of disaster narratives. On the other, it encourages the reader to consider disaster *as* a narrative—one that was prominent in the formation of settler-colonialism—so that one is led to ponder the power of this narrative to shape environments. As a whole, the novel conveys the sense that in the Anthropocene, affective narratives have immense power; through multi-medial repetition, they can become part of individual and collective memory.

In this sense, *The Island Will Sink* could be understood as a 'negative cosmology': although it contains glimpses of more holistic understandings of the environment (especially encouraged by the children's perspectives), it altogether provides a dark vision of an intensified narrative of human mastery over 'nature.' Drawing the Anthropocene as a dystopian time of a potentially heightened human/nature dualism, the novel only provides hints of hope and survival, as if they were reserved for another story.

As I show in the next chapter, Ecocriticism is increasingly turning to such 'other stories,' by drawing attention to formerly neglected narratives, affects, memories and genres—such as survival, resilience and resistance—that may be able to defy the arguably privileged complacency of doomsday-thinking. While dystopian narrative should of course not be demonised, as it remains an important genre of environmental rhetoric,[10] research into affective Ecocriticism suggests that it is pivotal to also shift attention to formerly neglected memories of human reciprocity, interdependency and even liberation, goodness and justice.

Notes

1 As precursors to the recent climate fiction corpus, Goodbody and Johns-Putra (2019b, 2) cite Jules Verne's *The Purchase of the North Pole* (1889) or Alexander Döblin's *Mountains Oceans Giants* (1924). Similarly, Andrew Milner and J.R. Burgmann have argued that 'cli-fi' has a 'much longer history than is commonly allowed, one that arguably stretches back to antiquity' (2018, 1). Within this 'prehistory of climate fiction,' they distinguish between anthropogenic and thiogenic, geogenic or xenogenic climate fiction (1).

2 Grusin used this term to describe the tendencies of American and global media after 9/11 to anticipate further threats through mediations of possible wars.

3 Matthew Schneider-Mayerson's empirical study "The Influence of Climate Fiction," for instance, finds that climate fiction "readers are younger, more liberal, and more concerned about climate change than nonreaders of climate fiction" (2018, 473).

4 Perera reads the "space of shifting coastlines and watery foundations as the site of an unattainable desire for insularity" she terms "*terra Australis infirma*" (2009, 1).

5 Individual memory is explored through a subplot which involves a shady scientist character, Dr Gabrielle Stern, who exploits Max's comatose brother Tom. Having the alleged scientific goal of 'optimising' the process of suffering by making it technologically possible to edit unwanted scenes from memory, Gabrielle aims to achieve a kind of transcendental consciousness free from pain. This experiment conveys the age-old dualism of mind over body, culture over 'nature,' with the consequences of inflicting harm: Max and Tom are both exploited—Tom by becoming wholly objectified, and Max by being tricked into romantic feelings. The experiment eventually fails (Doyle, 2016, 96).

6 Immanuel Kant. "Analytic of the Sublime." Sections 25–9. *The Critique of Judgement.* 1790, various editions.

7 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.

8 For another constructive engagement with formerly marginalised environmental affect see also: Nicole Seymour. *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2018.

9 As Astrid Erll has argued, literature involves a double observation: "it gives us the illusion of glimpsing the past […] and is—often at the same time—a major medium of critical reflection upon these very processes of representation" (2008, 391).

10 Recent ecocritical studies have illuminated this importance, see for example: Diletta De Cristofaro. *The Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Novel: Critical Temporalities and the End Times* (2020); and Justyna Poray-Wybranowska. *Climate Change, Ecological Catastrophe, and the Contemporary Postcolonial Novel* (2021).

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6 Reconsidering Evolution and Queering Environmentalism

Ellen van Neerven's "Water"

Ellen van Neerven's debut, *Heat and Light* (2014), is a remarkable collection. Published when the author was only 24, the text was received with great acclaim and won prestigious prizes, such as the David Unaipon Award. Van Neerven has since then published poetry, and creative non-fiction on a wide range of topics, most recently the memoir *Personal Score: Sport, Culture, Identity* (2023). *Heat and Light* is not easy to categorise; verging on both short story collection and novel, it has simply been marketed as 'fiction,' as it resists categorisation: separated into three parts, the 16 stories can be classified as set in the past ("Heat"), future ("Water") and present ("Light"). "Heat" and "Light" both contain interconnected short stories, whereas the futuristic "Water" is a novella. The three parts of this collection can be seen as interrelated, but also stand alone. Whereas "Water" is written in the speculative fiction (SF) genre, the other two 'mini-cycles' contain elements of realism, magic realism and the gothic (Kadmos, 2018, 3).

With the temporal organisation of past, future and present, and with spectral appearances in the land, *Heat and Light* playfully disrupts 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 intergenerational stories about the Kresinger family. 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 (2016, 296).

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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” (van Neerven, 2014, 72). The plan is to create new land between the 20 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—with priority given to those who don’t even know where they’ve come from. Queensland is 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 in 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 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,[1] 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 it is 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 she 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 develop their relationship, with Larapinta frequently accompanying Kaden on her boat, going back and forth between islands. Towards the end of the novella, however, 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, homodiegetic perspective, which expresses Kaden’s sense of limited knowledge, uncertainty and curiosity. 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 cosmological 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.

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 the ocean appears as significant for this awareness of multispecies interdependence. The beach has long been interpreted as a liminal space of “indeterminancy and flux” (De Loughrey, 2015, 354) in which boundaries between land and sea, human and nonhuman, time and space merge. As the encounter with a new species is accompanied by unresolvable questions of sameness and difference, the novella tells of the responsibility of caring for kin and 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." (van Neerven, 2014, 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 lead 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? (96–7)

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 living things largely into 'animals,' 'plants' and 'humans,' which emerges as an insufficient 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.

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 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 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 plantpeople 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, conveys their agency and right to exist. As comes to the fore in this scene, Larapinta teaches Kaden a sense of ecology that is defined by a multispecies community and that conveys an abundance of relations that is beyond the 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 offence:

> [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)

Similarly 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. (97–8)

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.' 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 interdisciplinary 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, 2016, 170). Queer Ecology 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 relations 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. (2011; italics in the original)

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, 2010, 12). Queer Ecology, then, generates the capacity to see the irony of humans using the more-than-human world in whatever convenient way suits them. Although the novel uses the term 'queer,' it also draws out its limitations: despite Kaden identifying as queer, she notes that it is "an old-fashioned word" and "will always be loaded" (van Neerven, 2014, 95). 'Queer,' then, implies the idea of difference and anti-normativity, to the detriment of the actually existing diversity of genders, sexualities or means of reproduction.

In the same way that 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." (1997, 131)

Paying attention to the fact that colonial ideology is linked to gender and sexuality, Gaard's observation disentangles the still predominantly naturalised ideology of heterosexism (1997, 131). Moreover, Catriona Sandilands has made the important observation that the notion of Queer Ecology can not only disrupt heterosexist ideas and institutions, but it can also help us *reimagine* evolution, ecology and politics (2016, 169). Importantly for this book's engagement with cosmology, reviewing such narratives about the evolution of our contemporary environment is vital: it shapes worldviews and determines responses to the Anthropocene.

Although mostly associated with Charles Darwin, evolution is a complex, interdisciplinary theory. Contrary to common understanding, Darwin did not discover natural selection but was the first to present it methodically (Sagan, 2016, 113–14). Darwin's account became especially prominent in the 1930s under the term Social Darwinism.[2] 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 its mathematical understanding of models of change, which excludes fields such as cell and planetary biology, geochemistry or microbial ecology (Sagan, 2016, 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., 2017, 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), Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan and Nils Bubandt, call it, cross-species *interaction* has become fundamental (M23). As anthropologist Tim Ingold puts it, evolution "can occur without reference to genetic change […] through cumulative transformations wrought through the actions of the organisms themselves on the conditions of development under which they and their successors grow to maturity"

(2013, 12; also quoted in Nash, 2017, 408). Untethered from genetics, Ingold here stresses that evolution is also a *cultural* phenomenon. One key notion that captures this shift from linear evolutionary descent towards a kind of horizontal gene-exchange is 'symbiosis,' coined by the prolific biologist Lynn Margulis (the co-creator of the earlier-mentioned Gaia theory).[3] As zoologist Margaret McFall-Ngai 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" (2017, 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 ever imagined" (McFall-Ngai, 2017, M54). "[B]efore Margulis's work," McFall-Ngai notes, "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" (M60). Symbiosis argues that animals, plants or fungi form through *relations* with microbes rather than a genetic script (M61). This 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 (M54).[4] Symbiosis (also playfully called 'sympoiesis' and 'symbiogenesis' by Haraway as a 'making' or 'creating with' [2016, 5]) redeems the narratives of 'fight or flight' and 'survival of the fittest,' by positing that a central force of evolution is cooperation.

Importantly, then, "Water" conveys that evolution can be understood not only as a linear event of 'natural' selection, but also as a *cultural development* that involves aesthetics, interest, desire, intention and cooperation. In this way, it evokes a cosmology that generates a consciousness larger than the sum of its parts.

Interestingly, this "big new story" can also be seen in the resurgence of Gaia theory. 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 overarching creator (2017, 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. (Latour, 2017, 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. (2017, 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 the notion of inside and outside, subject and object, human and nature:

> I find myself imagining the tart taste of her mouth […] 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. (van Neerven, 2014, 101–2)

Desire is portrayed as a life force that informs evolution, but also as humanity's most immediate relation to other species—in the form of food. Throughout "Water," moreover, species connectivity is also 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 carries 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.

This playful, spontaneous and unexpected cooperation, which generates a broader pattern of flourishing that shapes a collective 'goodness,' however, is not revealed to be part of a 'big new story' in biology, but it is revealed as an old Indigenous cosmology.

Beyond desire, kinship and familial ties, the novella 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 that Kaden comes to enact sacrifice, obligation and activism. For Kaden, this sense of responsibility also arises out of a multispecies awareness of evolutionary kinship and what could be called cosmic 'wholeness,' as plantpeople express their sovereign place in the island's ecosystem.

From Mother to Lover Nature: 'Bad Environmentalism', Pleasure, Humour and Survival

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. This environmentalism is, however, enacted in unconventional ways: rather than reinforcing a hope/despair binary, "Water" proposes that proactive environmentalism emerges from the experience of pleasurable relationships and from involvement with one or more local communities. This contrasts with *The Island Will Sink*: 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 version of environmentalism is not uncommon.

In *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age* (2018), Seymour applies the 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" (2018, 3–4). By contrast, 'bad environmental' artworks explore often-neglected dimensions, such as "absurdity, irony, irreverence, ambivalence, camp, frivolity, indecorum, awkwardness, sardonicism, perversity, playfulness and glee" (4). As Seymour writes, such artworks show:

> 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)

'Bad environmental' works, 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). Along with doom and gloom, 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).[5] Seymour points out that environmentalism has employed a range of affects that privilege individuality, purity and self-righteousness to the detriment of irony, humour, playfulness and creativity. Although Seymour insufficiently defines the categories of 'mainstream Western environmentalism,'[6] Bad Environmentalism hits a nerve as it identifies many pitfalls of prevailing aspects of what could be called 'old-school' environmentalism: a lack of self-reflection, a righteous pathos, a focus on supposed purity, and exclusionary politics.

"Water" seems to fall into the category of Bad Environmentalism. It follows the logic of both/and rather than either/or: its affective fabric reveals sincerity and humour; indignation and playfulness; emotionality and irony. Although humour is notoriously hard to define, "Water" is a funny text. Multiple times, for example, the near future is evoked with a 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" (van Neerven, 2014, 73). At other times, Larapinta's character appears as comical: in order to learn human language and in order to attain more emotional intelligence, Larapinta 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)

The novella's tone is self-aware, ironic and humorous. Because Larapinta is both Kaden's lover and ancestor, her figure conjures up an image of both 'mother earth' and 'lover earth.'[7] Yet 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. (114–15)

It is this trusting relationship with Larapinta that helps Kaden come into herself. The novella therefore portrays a sincere and a humorous relationship between the couple and—by extrapolation—with the cosmos. In the context of a cosmological lens, the humorous tone indicates that the cosmic and the comic are very much compatible: although the vastness of the cosmos is frequently connected to the sublime, cosmological figures and stories often encompass the profane.

Through Kaden's development, then, "Water" conveys the idea that what is loved will be protected. It is through pleasurable relationships that socio-environmental movements can become most effective—an idea that has recently been explored in activist literature. adrienne maree brown's popular activist book *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good* (2019), for instance, draws on Black feminist liberation traditions (especially Audre Lorde and Toni Cade Bambara) that centre pleasure and self-care. 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 collective level that socio-environmental change can be advocated for most powerfully. Importantly, a focus on pleasure and humour undermines scarcity thinking: "Pleasure 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). This renewed attention to pleasure amidst a terrifying environmental crisis expresses the crisis of rationality (Alaimo, 2016, 18, 187), but it also sustains what is worth living and fighting for.

"Water" conveys this reciprocity between personal liberation and collective movements. It is mainly through her relationship with Larapinta that Kaden experiences comfort, joy and belonging to a larger community again. Far from trivial experiences of pleasure, desire and erotics are portrayed as the *key* to Kaden's transformation and reintegration into her family and a larger movement. And far from a rational attachment to place, or the mastery of it, "Water" exhibits the immense power of everyday, situated and pleasurable relationships.

Instead of replicating the predominant apocalypticism, then, "Water" presents an effective counter-example of environmentalism by employing the neglected affects of pleasure and humour. This could be seen as an expression of the long Indigenous perspective on apocalypse and survival, which seems to generate different attitudes, affects and narratives. Joseph Meeker's essay "The Comedy of Survival" (1972) has made the important observation that, while the destructive tendencies of civilisations are often put into the tragic, 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, this 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. (1972, 15–16)

Meeker points out that comedy can be seen as a kind of antidote to aggression, and it also has the benefit of survival. Survival is here understood as vital 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, and as discussed in relation to the portrayal of apocalypse-obsession in *The Island Will Sink*, 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.

In this vein, Ecocriticism is increasingly turning to the importance of affect not just for social movements but also for our understanding of ecologies. 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. (2018, 22)

Seymour points out that attention to affect enriches criticism, allowing for a more inclusive scholarship, as well as a more diverse understanding of environmentalism that goes beyond instrumentalism.

By drawing attention to the affects and genres of survival, resilience and resistance, “Water” offers a refreshing perspective on environmentalism; one that defies the privileged complacency of doomsday-thinking. Through the speculative figures of the plantpeople, the novella creates dazzling figurations that transport the sense that the more-than-human world constantly challenges human language and cognition through its infinite complexity. If a focus on desire, play and fun can appear overly whimsical and mundane in the context of complex socio-politico-ecological problems, they could in fact be understood as an effective way of organising resistance to the dangerous developments of the Anthropocene.

Notes

1 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, sand-mining and industrial development have resulted in a change to the main stream of the creek (Queensland Government, 2020).
2 Social Darwinism was especially dominant in German National Socialism, where it merged with genetics, eugenics and statistical tools that explained evolution based on small mutations that proved advantageous in different environments (Sagan, 2016, 115).
3 Although Margulis is the co-creator of Gaia theory, many scholars—including Latour—present her as James Lovelock's "side-kick" (Latour, 2017, 92). The fact that she is under-cited and under-credited has been linked to the fact that she is a woman (McFall-Ngai, 2017, M60).
4 In cultural studies, a similar understanding has been championed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of the rhizome, which was further developed by Édouard Glissant's 'poetics of the mangrove' (from *Poetics of Relation*, 1990).
5 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, 2013, 11, 121; Seymour, 2018, 14).
6 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.
7 There is growing interest in ecosexuality as an underexplored, yet productive art and activist field. See, for example, Beth Stephens' 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 Linsay Hagamen's *Ecosexuality: When Nature Inspires the Arts of Love* (2016).

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Part IV

Environmental Justice/ Custodianship

Towards a Sovereign Cosmopolitics

The exploitation of people is deeply entangled with the degradation of land. Some of the gravest effects of climate change are expected to be so-called 'knock-on' or domino effects that go in tandem with environmental degradation, such as health decline, social tension, war or mass migration. Similarly, the oppression of people has often preceded the exploitation of resources. In this sense, the current crisis encompasses the increasing destabilisation of climate, environments *and* social orders. Refugee rights, land rights and sovereignty are traditionally understood as humanist issues, yet this part investigates in what ways they can also be considered environmental concerns.

Justice has become a central tenet for environmentalists. Originally emerging from the grassroots activism of communities of colour in the United States around the 1970s, who demonstrated that lower socio-economic classes and predominantly ethnic minorities are disproportionally exposed to pollution and health risks (Di Chiro, 2016, 100), the by-now established term Environmental Justice (EJ) refers to a global network of local resistance movements acting against the disproportionate impact of environmental devastations on the poor and marginalised. 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" (2002, 172). Indeed, the quest for justice has already been brought to the multinational stage[1] and has expanded to embrace subcategories such as 'Climate 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. 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

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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.[2] EJ, then, stands for a practice-oriented approach: examining the entanglement of environmental and social issues, it proposes that solutions must be found in tandem.

Particularly in Australia, the notion of 'custodianship' is an important accompanying concept to EJ. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a 'custodian' as "a person who has responsibility for taking care of or protecting something," a term that can be traced back to the eighteenth-century use of "custody, on the pattern of guardian" ("Custodian," 2019). 'Custodian' is often used in Acknowledgements of, or in Welcomes to Country, as now widely practised in public events, publications or institutional declarations. While 'custodianship' captures the Indigenous tradition of guardianship for concrete places, as summarised in the concept of 'Care for Country,' this part also investigates it as a wider transcultural ethic that centres the responsibility of care as crucial in times of globally accelerating ecological devastations.

Sovereign Cosmopolitics and the Australian 'Camp Logic'

The Anthropocene crisis accelerates and exacerbates long-existing issues, such as the Indigenous Australian struggle for land rights and sovereignty, and violent immigration policies, such as 'Offshore Detention,' which can be seen as a legacy of the White Australia policy.[3] In the Anthropocene, however, these 'older' concerns increasingly bring into focus a formerly neglected dimension: the ecological one. The entanglements of the socio-environmental nexus are creatively explored in the two literary texts under investigation in this part. *No Friend but the Mountains* gives an autobiographical and partly fictionalised account of a refugee caught in '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 (2018, xxvii). By contrast, *Too Much Lip* portrays the transgenerational 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. Both works display protagonists with a double consciousness: that a flourishing environment is tied to human well-being—meaning to physical, mental, spiritual, economic and political sovereignty (the indestructible sense of self-determination).

Here, it seems important to contextualise both works briefly in relation to the environmental crisis. 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 the Iran–Iraq war of 1980–88 (2018, 257). While the fact that Boochani does not classify himself as a certain kind points to the insufficiency of categories such as 'economic migrant' or 'climate refugee,' I read Boochani's mythopoetic 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 the Anthropocene. As suggested in the title—*No Friend but the Mountains*—Boochani constantly refers to the environment, and he 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 will argue, Boochani constructs the cosmos as a counter-force to the submission and violence of the prison. Similarly, upon first view, *Too Much Lip* is not ostensibly 'about' an environmental issue: it portrays the protagonist's struggle to return to her family. Yet, 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: the planned 'development' will primarily (and ironically) involve the construction of a prison. The ever-expanding prison industrial complex, however, can be seen as an ecological issue in that it restricts the human rights of freedom, self-determination and custodianship, which, in turn, has effects on the environment. With the trope of the prison, the novel allegorically conjures up the construction of the colonial state of Australia, so that it portrays the Salters' struggle as a common First Nations experience (as a percentage of the Australian population, Indigenous Australian incarceration is still the highest in the world).[4]

Both works engage what may be described as a 'cosmopolitical' perspective. This comprises not only cosmopolitan[5] characters, but also the sense of a physical cosmos that expresses agency, order and lawfulness, as well as an urgent sense that granting attention, dignity and power to marginalised perspectives quite literally *matters*; they make a difference for the environment. Both Boochani's and Lucashenko's protagonists explore a 'cosmic' consciousness, and both display 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. Both books 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. Isabelle Stengers' (2005) earlier-introduced concept of cosmopolitics 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 that political demands also emerge out of the sense of a cosmological order.

Australia first adopted its mandatory detention policy in 1992 with bipartisan support, which ensured that "all persons entering or remaining in the country without a valid visa are compulsorily detained" (Zannettino, 2012, 1097). The legislation was altered 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 (1097). In 2001, following the *Tampa* affair,[8] and shaped in response to the question of how to deal with asylum seekers who are captured 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, 2017, 95). 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 not be able to legitimately claim asylum (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 detention centres 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, 2018), systemic change is yet to be achieved.

As both authors employ the term 'sovereignty' more or less explicitly, moreover, it merits closer examination. Sovereignty is bound to historical and ongoing injustice and is particularly relevant for (post-)colonial and settler-colonial issues regarding human and land rights. Deriving from the Latin *superanus,* meaning 'chief' or 'ruler,' sovereignty describes the right and power of a governing body over itself. The term is most commonly used in politics and legal language, where it is usually referred to in the context of 'state sovereignty' (denoting the ability to exercise control over a territory within recognised borders) (Thomson, 1995). Sovereignty is an especially important concept in post- or settler-colonial countries: 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., 2013, 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 become a central idea for various Indigenous peoples, as it indicates an indestructible self-determination that was never ceded to the colonisers. Eualeyai/Kamillaroi author and lawyer Larissa Behrendt argues that, for many Indigenous people in Australia, sovereignty refers to a "set of political, economic, social, and cultural aspirations" (2013, 175). Even if the idea of sovereignty may not "loom large in the minds of most people," as Wiradjuri scholar Wendy Brady puts it, sovereignty is now increasingly moving to the centre of attention (2007, 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 statement calls for a national representative body, and uses the word 'sovereignty' a number of times, which refers to 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," 2017)

As can be seen here, sovereignty is strongly linked to human and land rights generally, as well as to the 1993 Mabo decision which resulted in the Native Title legislation.[6] While many Indigenous people have benefited from Native Title determinations, the majority were offered no compensation because most have been dispossessed of their traditional land, and such dispossession makes proving claims and ancestry difficult, their rights often having been putatively extinguished by land grants to settlers (Rodoreda, 2018, 166). In this context, sovereignty became key.

While Indigenous Australian sovereignty is central for the analysis of *Too Much Lip*, as it portrays Indigenous resistance in the face of ongoing dispossession, *No Friend* also merits consideration in these terms for two main reasons. Firstly, Australia's Offshore Detention policies are closely linked to the Indigenous struggle for sovereignty and to the Mabo decision. (In fact, there is a temporal 'co-incidence' of the beginning of Australia's immigration detention policy with Mabo's landmark win: both occurred in 1992.) Secondly, despite being imprisoned from August 2013 to November 2019,[7] Boochani successfully asserts his sovereignty in the public realm through his persona as well as through his remarkable journalistic and creative work.

The temporal convergence of this refugee policy 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 detention. Khoo 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" (2017, 94). As comes to the fore in these conspicuous uses of language, Indigenous and refugee sovereignty are linked in complex ways and have been productively explored in conjunction.[9] Creative interventions, in which Indigenous Australians have issued passports for detained refugees, testify to 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 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, 2019).

No Friend and *Too Much Lip* challenge the ‘prison logic’ through various means. While Boochani’s book is 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. As *Too Much Lip* illustrates, however, issues of justice are at the forefront of climate movements. Both texts offer unique insights into, and critiques of, Australia’s prison-industrial complex, and thus reveal the unique and productive insights that situated knowledge produces: it is here that theories and legislations ‘live.’

My ‘cosmological reading’ foregrounds the extent to which the texts defy resignation by recovering a sense of order, abundance, beauty, healing and sovereign belonging. Both texts conjure up the sense of eco-systemic order, or cosmic situatedness, that offers perspective amidst desperation; in both texts, it is the experience of more-than-human and cosmic beauty, abundance and ‘goodness’ that provides the means for survival, resistance and flourishing despite systems of oppression. By recognising that everyone and everything has its place in the broader cosmological unfolding, and by proposing that nothing and nobody is ‘waste,’ the sense of cosmic intactness enables belonging and purpose, giving meaning to (otherwise 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, a commons, that requires a new politics of representation that includes the voice of the vulnerable and politically voiceless. Sovereignty encompasses the inherent right to flourishing beyond governmental regimes.

Notes

1 1991 saw the first EJ-Summit and the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, held in Washington DC, where the movement’s intersectional vision was formulated: the 17 Principles of Environmental Justice (Di Chiro, 2016, 101). 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 (102).

2 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/.

3 Although terms such as 'white' were avoided to minimise international condemnation, following Federation in 1901 and lasting between 1958 and 1973, Australian governments designed policies which aimed to keep Australia 'white' and British. As Benjamin Jones writes, the White Australia policy was "not a single government directive but a series of acts with a common goal" (2017). Such acts included the Immigration Restriction Act, the Pacific Island Labourers Act or the Post and Telegraph Act (Jones, 2017).

4 A 2018 report by the Australian Law Reform Commission confirmed this statistic (Zillman, 2018). Human rights abuses 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, 2018). 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," 2018).

5 A cosmopolitan refers to someone who is 'worldly'; at home everywhere. Yet, as Cyrus Patell writes, a cosmopolitan can also be understood as someone who is "not fully comfortable—never fully at home—anywhere" (2015, 3–4). The identity of both Lucashenko's and Boochani's protagonists fits Martha Nussbaum's description of cosmopolitanism as "exile from the comfort of patriotism and its easy sentiments" (2002, 7). Both books can also, however, be seen as being about 'involuntary cosmopolites,' as they tell of the experiences of flight, displacement and dispossession. Both works display multiple attachments to places: 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.

6 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," undated). While the Mabo High Court decision affirmed sovereignty, however, it also denied it. As Geoff Rodoreda puts it: "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" (2018, 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.

7 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.

8 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 to the 2001 Australian federal election.

9 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)

(2002). Similarly, Lara Palombo (2009) and Lana Zannettino (2012) 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, 2012, 1096). 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" (2016, 255).

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7 Remembering the Opposite of Oppression

Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains*

Written in seemingly impossible circumstances—typed on WhatsApp and sent to overseas translators and editors—Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains* 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, 2018). *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,[1] can be considered an Australian writer despite the fact that he never set foot in Australia and did not write his book in English, because he 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 collaboratively and translated 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 riot[2]—with dreamlike 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 (2018a, 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" (2018b, 367). He also points

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out that the book "fuses literature with political commentary and language from different scholarly discourses" (2018a, xxvi).

As Tofighian and numerous reviewers have argued, 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 philosophical literature, prison narrative, philosophical fiction, Australian dissident writing" (2018b, 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* (Flanagan, 2018, 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" (Tofighian, 2018a, xv). As *No Friend* could hardly have been published without a number of engaged collaborators outside Manus prison, it seems fair to categorise it as a 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,[3] 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 offshore 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)[4] 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.[5] The subsequent chapters, and the majority of the book, focus on the 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. *No Friend* is also 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. Tofighian has noted 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” (2018a, xxiv). I will return to this statement throughout the discussion of the sense of ‘cosmos’ that, as I argue, Boochani puts forward.

In the following, I analyse 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. Boochani’s reflections on the Kyriarchy denaturalise 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, 2018). In this way, *No Friend* offers tools not only to survive, but also to resist and perhaps even flourish—inside and outside the prison.

Kyriarchy vs. Cosmos

After Behrouz reaches Manus, 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 (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.”[6] Eventually, on page 124, after many deliberations on its qualities and the 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. (Boochani, 2018, 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" (Boochani, 2018, 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" (Boochani, 2018, 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 merits attention. Kyriarchy comes from old Greek, combining lord/master (*kyrios*) with governing (*archo*), therefore referring to the governance of a master. 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" (2009, 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'" (2018a, xxvii). The act of naming this oppressive system is crucial here: "Naming has special aesthetic interpretative and political function in the book" (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 (Boochani, 2018, 125). The act of naming it 'Kyriarchy,' then, de-normalises and demystifies 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" (Boochani, 2018, 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)[7] 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). While 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. (Boochani, 2018, 204–5)

Behrouz illustrates that this logic the prisoners constantly try to 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 multi-faceted, 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" (Boochani, 2018, 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 that 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; italics in the original)

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). Reminiscent of Hannah Arendt's observations about the banality of evil in the systems of the Third Reich,[8] 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'" (Boochani, 2018, 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 it 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 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" (Tofighian, 2018a, xxvii) that represses interconnectedness; and a system that establishes a "savage law" (Boochani, 2018, 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, 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 evoked 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. Put differently, the sense of cosmos both transcends human lives and reacts to human experience; it has a double dimension that encompasses the transcultural and the culturally specific. Behrouz seems comforted by this double position, 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. 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 seem, paradoxically, to drive him and give him courage (30–1). Instead, what emerges throughout *No Friend* is a twofold sense of the cosmic: firstly, as a kind of external order, stability or sanity, indicating an order that exists beyond and despite human suffering; and secondly, as a system of 'goodness,' which includes observations about 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. (60–1)

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, 2019, 58), but it 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 convey. 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" (Boochani, 2018, 257). Yet 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.[9] To be sure, Behrouz refers to the surrounding, not the "soul-destroying" prison itself (110). When he first sees Manus Island from the aeroplane, 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 are not only comforts to Behrouz, but also reminders 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). 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: they serve 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 more-than-human; 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,[10] 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 community worthy of standing up to those emotionless and formal soldiers" (67). Similarly 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.

In this context, the character Behrouz names "Maysam the Whore" becomes famous for cultivating the opposite of suffering through the pursuit of pleasure and playfulness.[11] Being extraordinarily skilful and funny, Maysam 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 "These 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 benevolence, joy and humour lies a freedom the Kyriarchy cannot destroy.

The book 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 overemphasis of what Perera has called "displacement" and dispossession that runs the risk of defining refugees through a pitiful lens only (2009, 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 treats the prisoner as waste, as a "defenceless piece of meat […], subjecting it to the system until what is left is thrown away" (Boochani, 2018, 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. (2017a)[12]

By contrast, the "diversity of the Manusian ecosystem" (Boochani, 2018, 295) is described as helping 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 many such instances in the book, the confrontation with beauty, abundance and benevolence provokes opposite effects to those 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. 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 and flourishing that generates perspective, knowledge and vision despite physical entrapment.

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" (Boochani, 2018, 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; italics in the original)

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 has 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 '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 *The 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, 2007 [1903], 8). Du Bois argued that African Americans can hold a kind of "meta-perspective," or the potential for second-sight, to see through the "misconceptions, manipulations and machinations of white communities in America and acquire an epistemically privileged position" (Tofighian, 2018c, 538). As is suggested by Du Bois, 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" (2018b, 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 earlier, 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" (2005, 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. (2005, 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-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" (2005, 1001). 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 takes on the issue of incorporating and representing the vulnerable constituents of a 'cosmos' (996). Similarly, in *No Friend*, Behrouz's and his fellow prisoners' ideas of a 'good commons'—an alternative cosmic order—are 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. Describing the remarkable presence of Mansour Shoushtari, a 43-year-old former animal rights activist from Iran, who "conflicts with the prison in fundamental ways," Boochani draws attention to the ways in which 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." (2017)

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. (Boochani, 2017)

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. (Boochani, 2017)

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" (2019). 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 (2019). And yet Wright also speaks of the importance of conceptualising a transcultural ethics of place—something that could also be described with the notion of cosmopolitics.

No Friend conveys the importance of centralising marginalised experiences of hybridity, displacement and transnationalism for informing sociopolitical systems in and beyond Kurdistan, Iran, Manus Island, Papua New Guinea and, especially, Australia. As prisonsers are continuously evoked as "critical theorists" that attempt to unlock the logic of the Kyriarchy (Boochani, 2018, 209), they could additionally be described as custodians who engage in the intellectual labour of carefully contemplating social systems in place. 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.

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 twofold 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 is especially upheld by the displaced and marginalised. This epistemic privilege of the marginalised, or double vision, enables an understanding of the consequences of policies and, thus, articulates a strongly political proposition for the human right to belong—regardless of migration and flight. 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 is a testimony for a strongly political ethics of care, with the writer-figure as a powerful witness and custodian.

Notes

1 *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.
2 *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, 2014). 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, 2018a, xii). Instances of self-harm still occur regularly.
3 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 Mountain*s (2017), directed by Kae Bahar and Claudio von Planta.
4 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.
5 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.
6 Personal correspondence at the event "Re-treating Literature and Politics through *No Friend but the Mountains*" (Monash University, May 2019), in which audience members were able to ask Boochani questions through a WhatsApp call.
7 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" (Boochani, 2018, 147).
8 See: Hannah Arendt. *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963). Various editions.
9 Quote from Tofighian, during the event "Re-treating Literature and Politics through *No Friend but the Mountains*" (Monash University, May 2019).
10 This character is named after the famous Iranian actress Golshifteh Farahani (Boochani, 2018, 47).
11 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.
12 See Hage's book: *Is Racism an Environmental Threat?* Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2017b.

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8 Aquatious Mobilisation of Indigenous Sovereignty

Melissa Lucashenko's *Too Much Lip*

Too Much Lip is Melissa Lucashenko's sixth novel and the winner of Australia's most prestigious literary prize, the 2019 Miles Franklin award. At the centre of the novel is Kerry Salter, who arrives at her family home, having been gone for a long time, in the fictitious Durrongo (Southern Queensland) on a stolen Harley motorbike, with $30,000 cash from a bank robbery. Lucashenko intended to write Kerry as a rebel, outlaw and heroic Black figure (Lucashenko, 2019a); 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" (2020a). 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" (Lucashenko, 2018a, 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 (2018b). 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, 2018b) lie at the heart of the novel, as one of the section titles suggests: "If you don't fight, you lose" (Lucashenko, 2018a, 149).

As Lucashenko has rightly put it, *Too Much Lip* is "both a low-brow and a high-brow book" (2019a). Although it has won Australia's most prestigious literary prize, it not only portrays, but it also speaks to, the criminalised underclass, as the novel is full of colloquialisms and slang. 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

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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" (Lucashenko, 2018a, 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). The novel has been categorised as belonging to Aboriginal Realism (van Neerven, 2019), which could be described to lie in its multi-perspectivity that uses different people and animals as focalisers (although focusing predominantly on Kerry), enabling a concentration on social dynamics. In this way, Aboriginal Realism could be defined through its focus on multispecies relations, realistic dialogue and the sense of human belonging to the land (including water).

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 (Lucashenko, 2018a, 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 agency, 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 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, continuously asking intellectual flexibility of the reader. 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 for the river. 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). The anger present in the family, however, 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-generational violence. The novel therefore makes a point about tracing back abuse across generations, showing the pervasive effects of multigenerational trauma. Although Pop became a "patriarch" and an abuser himself, Pretty Mary continuously also 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). Without excusing violence, then, *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" (2019b). 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 of 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 over the river property site for two years: "'And I can tell you right now, there ain't gonna be no medium-security prison involved'" (Lucashenko, 2018a, 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 of her books to write, as it deals with serious subject matter and issues that became "true to life": although initially intended to be fictitious, Lucashenko learned that there was indeed a very large jail proposed on Bundjalung land, which the local community was "unhappy about" (2018b). As this experience of merged fiction and reality suggests, the double struggle of attending to family and community healing, while also protecting Country, is an all-too-common experience for Indigenous Australians. In the following, I investigate the ways in which the novel constructs social justice cosmologically by evoking an ecosystem that continuously acts sympathetically to human flourishing. Water, land, animals and family members (dead and alive) become co-actants in the quest to regain land- and water-rights and to reconcile the Salter family. This chapter pays particular attention to the magnetic pull of the river and its ability to 'move' protagonists and bring the Salter family back together. Rather than a traditionally fixed connection to Country, I argue that the Salters' relationship to their river is portrayed to also arise out of fluid embodied modern experiences of displacement, ostracism and hybridity, which mobilise various forms of action. This movement between tradition and modernity, as well as between the city and country, is what determines the protagonist's 'cosmopolitics' and 'eco-cosmopolitanism,' which conveys that a highly efficient custodianship today often involves caring for *multiple* places and communities. In fact, the novel suggests that it is the very mobility of characters that is the key to winning custodianship. This mobility is mirrored through the river and its more-than-human inhabitants (animals, ancestors, elements), which are presented as more than metaphorical: they are enmeshed in the quest for social and environmental justice.

Cosmology in Motion: Multispecies Justice

Too Much Lip focuses on the significance of the Salters' sacred river in reconciling the family and regaining custodianship. The river, its flows, as well as "Granny Ava's island," are presented to be connective, as they continuously bring the broken family together, giving perspective, and bringing individual and collective healing:

> 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. (Lucashenko, 2018a, 28)

As Kerry travels in her thoughts, the river is characterised by its healing potential and its own mobility; it is not only the contained section of the river, the island, but it is also "holy water" that flows past mountains, the town and ultimately into the ocean. The river's magnetic pull mobilises characters' memories and emotions; Kerry's mind has flown to the island, the cormorant's home, countless times. As Donna experiences it: "[She] looked around at the bushland, the river twinkling at her like some favourite uncle who was always pleased to see her but who always had somewhere else to be hurrying off to as well" (289). Next to this spatial mobility, the river is also inextricably tied to ancestors and enables movement across time; it is where the Salters come to remember their family history, speak to each other and find guidance. Kerry observes:

> She'd always understood that Granny Ava [Kerry's great-grandmother] 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)

Despite the Salters' tie to the land and water, this bond is not portrayed as essentialist; it is, rather, informed by tradition as well as by modern family history, which includes the experience of displacement, violence and ostracism. Soon after arriving at her family home, Kerry visits the river:

> The bend on the river was the most sacred place the Salters knew. Right there, she thought, where the shadow of the hoop pine is blackening the water and the sand. That's where Granny Ava swam to save two lives, and made it, and now here we all are. (30)

The bend on the river is where the pregnant Ava, being chased by white men on horses with guns, had swum across in order to avoid her fifth child being taken away by the colonial authorities and in order to raise her child in relative freedom. Despite being shot at, Ava had survived the crossing, giving birth to her daughter on the island that same night. The family is scarred by this experience, as Pretty Mary recounts: "[W]hen Mum was born that night, the bullet marks on Granny come out on the baby. […] Mum wore the mark all her life. And now us Salters are scarred by that musket forever" (31). When the family buries Pop, Kerry reflects on the scarring of the family:

> 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 modern family history, as well as a larger belonging to the land that persists despite displacement. The novel thus portrays attachment to the river not as romantically given, but as full of contention and pain, and as constantly in danger of being severed.

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). Here, it is the materiality of the water that teaches Kerry embodied surrender (although also vigilance, as the flooding of the river has claimed the death of Granny Ruth), as well as the sensation of being carried so that 'hardness' can be released to its elemental power. Such descriptions contrast with scenes in which Kerry arrives on her stolen motorbike in her hated home town, already imagining departure, giving her the freedom to escape a home "where nothing ever, ever changed" (12):

> Kerry shrugged and kicked the Harley to life again, the enormous vee-engine booming like a bitch over the thistle-studded paddocks. […] But she hadn't ridden three hours to worry about a doomed waark [crow]. She was here to deliver her final goodbye to Pop, and then fuck off quick bloody smart back over the border to Queensland, well away from anything resembling Durrongo. (9)

Much of the novel recounts this red-hot anger that makes its protagonists—especially Kerry and Ken—speed:

> Call it rage, or fear, but it was more than either of those. It thrummed in her constantly, like the waves of sound that humans can't hear but animals

> can. Below consciousness. A vague hum in her muscle and bone. Alerting her to danger everywhere around her, always, unless she was drunk or high in the safety of her own locked home. It was a cool morning, but tiny beads of sweat broke out on her upper lip. (256)

As suggested here, Kerry's 'fight-or-flight' instinct is a result of intergenerational trauma. In contrast to this restlessness and anger fuelled by her past, Kerry finds peace at the river: "As her heart slowed, she lay floating easily again, a bony black starfish, and she listened. […] For the first time since she'd crossed the New South Wales border that morning, Kerry felt at ease" (33). The beauty, history and embodied experience of the river soothe characters' anger, teach calmness, "distils" family history (134). Eventually, even Ken surrenders:

> Finally giving up the idea of flight as he realised that his Uncle really wouldn't let go. The knowledge thumped Ken hard in the chest like a heavy steel blade. His ground zero, right here with this old grey man [Uncle Richard], stood beside the running water. (293)

Yet the river's history of violence and its looming desecration also incite productive forms of anger; it is here that characters resolve to fight the building of the prison, mobilising and channelling necessary action. "The months to come would need the strength of Granny Ava and Grandad Chinky Joe, and then some, if the river bend was to be protected. *I promise you both*, Jerry said silently. *I promise to try and save it*" (134). It is the past, present and future of the river that continuously creates the need to reconcile, to "pull" at characters (131). It is here that the importance of mobility—of life-sustaining movement—is evoked. This required motion involves direct political action, as well as more subtle, psychological shifts that collectively seem to 'prod' the family towards reconciliation. 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 is suggested here, the river and island are precious to each individual family member—even Donna has secretly visited it—and it is this special place that establishes a ‘good common world’ (Stengers, 2005, 995; see chapter 1) that requires 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?” (Lucashenko, 2018a, 295). Instead of a Christian framework of forgiveness, 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 liveliness of the aquatic ecosystem, which incites listening, conversations, as well as action.

The material capacity of water to erode boundaries and connect everyone and everything has been at the forefront of the Blue Humanities, a recent field that tends to the material quality in conjunction with cultural perspectives on water, in the understanding that they mutually inform one another. The naming of the field is attributed to Steve Mentz who proposes the need to go beyond a landlocked ‘green’ perspective (2009, 1). As Mentz writes: “The oceans comprise the largest and least-known space on the planet, a moving body of more-than-human power and instability” (2009, ix). As described earlier with Lucashenko, water is characterised by its moving quality, as well as by its mysterious power. Similarly, many scholars of the Blue Humanities, such as Sidney Dobrin, have argued that there is a need for more ‘fluid’ epistemologies that include material-semiotic perspectives on the agency of bodies of water. Paying attention to the material properties of water enables us to also understand how the novel constructs the river as a kind of ‘figure’—not only in the sense of trope, but also in the sense of an animated, lively being that is both material and cultural. *Too Much Lip* points to the river as both a vulnerable place to be protected as well as a powerful agent, a ‘common world’ that brings the emotionally dispersed family together. This quality of the river to be forever in motion seems to encourage the movement of characters, be it physical, mental, spiritual. This contrasts with scenes on the motorbike, as this movement is not just forward-facing—an anticipation of needing to flee—but it enables conversations that are also responsive to the past. In this context, it is interesting to note that narratives of automobility are generally characterised by a promise of a better future, and, as Gijs Mom writes, "as a risky chase after the future and its promises" (2020, 14–15).

In line with the mission of Blue Ecocriticism to point to the material/semiotic dialectic, the novel conveys that water functions as more than a metaphor. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert write in *Elemental Ecocriticism: Thinking with Earth, Air, Water, and Fire* (Cohen and Duckert, 2015):

> The elements might be described as metaphor magnets, but their ability to bond materiality and narrative is deeper than mere impress or gravitational trajectory. Through their action metaphor becomes *matterphor*, a tropic-material coil, word and substance together transported: of language but not reducible to linguistic terms, agentic and thick. (10)

This idea that water is both material and semiotic, which Cohen and Duckert so succinctly capture with their compound *matterphor*, suggests that the more-than-human world 'intra-acts' with language and culture. This movement, feedback, flux between matter and meaning, as well as the novel's interest in various forms of mobility, conjures up the meaning of the terms universe (from Latin *vertere*), which originates from ceaseless motion: "for no rest is given to its elements. […] The combinatory world they compose is universe, a cosmos that is quite literally a spinning thing (from Latin *vertere*)" (Cohen and Duckert, 2015, 21, 17; quoting Isidore de Seville). In other words, mobility is written into the very fabric of the cosmos/universe.

Although *Too Much Lip* presents a complex perspective on movement—including a 'survival mode' that in the long run may be destructive for characters—it also portrays characters' mobility as the key for regaining custodianship. This acquatious characteristic of fluidity, movement and relationality also involves animals; encounters with crows, sharks and dogs begin and end the narrative, revealing that element and inhabitant are not easily separable. 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. *Too Much Lip* 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." (Lucashenko, 2018a, 8)

As this scene suggests, the animal world is constantly observing people, all of whom are related through familial ties, but not all of which are 'harmonic.' Indeed, the first encounter with the crows depicts them ripping a snake apart (7). The end of the novel, moreover, shows the resolving of an old family debt with a shark, called the "Doctor," who had spared Granny Ava, when she swam across the river to the island. 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 multispecies interdependency and a cosmic order that operates on larger scales than individual characters may be aware of: "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).

The novel's emphasis on the continuity of Indigenous Law (or, as Uncle Richard puts it, "Law Place" [292]) conjures up a definition of Country as something that owns people, rather than the other way around, which suggests that humans are not the only ones in control: "'I thought Pop didn't really know his own country.' 'Well, no. But sometimes a country kind of grabs a person, see'" (34). Uncle Richard's notion of "Law Places" is reminiscent of the earlier-quoted definition of Country by Mary Graham, who 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" (2008, 181). In this sense, the 'good common world', the cosmos, or Law Place is always already populated with various agents (animals, humans, elements) who 'intra-act.'

Similarly, Stengers' earlier-introduced notion of cosmopolitics contains both the sense of an alive 'cosmos' that directs, interacts and collectively suggests meaning and values to humans. 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 process, being negotiated, adapted and renewed within a modern context. 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 here applies to both the family's reconciliation and the protection of the river. The notion of Indigenous 'law' transcends human law, as it designates a larger order that guarantees human and environmental flourishing beyond individual feuds and governmental regimes. It is the Law Place that reminds the family of a cosmic order, a kind of 'honest reality' or 'sanity,' to borrow Stengers' terms, that the family can return to in order to remember what is important.

And yet, the Salters are also aware of the contentious translation from their Indigenous law into what could be called the 'spirituality industry,' and of essentialised representations of Indigenous peoples as especially environmentalist. 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). Pretty Mary knows how to capitalise on the spiritual perception of her Indigeneity, making money out of what Kerry continuously calls "whitenormalsavages." This scene reveals the characters' awareness of essentialist constructions of Indigeneity as inherently spiritual and satirises underlying fears of Indigenous Law as wholly 'other.' Altogether, the novel clearly rejects the common representation of Indigenous peoples as 'natural' harbingers of environmentalism. Far from any purism, the Salters' apparent environmentalism—their interest in preserving the river and resisting the "prison logic"—is shown to be historically informed, and highly mobile. 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' casts Indigenous resistance as not necessarily emerging from a supposedly naturally given attachment to the rural.

In this context, Tony Birch has made the important point 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," while urban Indigenous knowledge has been marginalised (Birch summarised in Vincent and Neale, 2016, 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). (2016, 375)

As Birch points out, throughout ecological crises, rural Indigenous knowledge has been valued, whereas urban Indigeneity has been framed in terms of impurity and degeneration. Similar to this observation, *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. Instead, the novel suggests that custodianship need not exclude complex situatedness: as the characters of Kerry and Black Superman convey, modern custodianship can mean a mobile attachment to, and care for, multiple places and communities. In this context, Ursula Heise's idea of 'eco-cosmopolitanism' (2008) becomes helpful: while cosmopolitanism was mainly conceived as a humanist concept,[1] eco-cosmopolitanism refers to the idea that both a sense of place *and* a sense of planet are needed for environmentalism. Eco-cosmopolitanism envisions "individuals and groups as part of planetary 'imagined communities' of both human and nonhuman kinds" (Heise, 2008, 60–1). Indeed, it is the complex, flexible and mobile attachment to place—including humans, animals, elements, objects—that is shown to be the key for the family's eventual win in the fight over the river. As Pretty Mary's 'exorcism' suggests, a holistic, cosmological or ecological understanding is often cast as otherworldly, unrealistic or 'merely' spiritual to the detriment of being taken seriously.

Sovereign Cosmopolitics

In *Too Much Lip*, the protection of the river is neglected by the Land Council,[2] which is too busy attending to Native Title claims to pay attention to this urgent matter (Lucashenko, 2018a, 99). In contrast to Native Title, Ken voices the importance of sovereignty to his friend while 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 policies and legislations. 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)

Given 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). For the Salters, the idea of sovereignty is central, whereas Native Title is conveyed as 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, 2014, 285, also quoted in Rodoreda, 2018, 167). In The Mabo Turn in Australian Fiction (2018), Geoff 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, which was denied in the Mabo decision, has become a central tenet. In fact, as cited earlier with the Uluru Statement, treaty-processes that stress the sovereignty of Indigenous Australians are currently in full swing.[3]

Sovereignty has a very practical and context-bound dimension that evokes, as legal academic and writer Larissa Behrendt argues, a "set of political, economic, social, and cultural aspirations" (2013, 175). For Behrendt, 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. (2013, 163)

Behrendt here exemplifies how crucial the concept is for Indigenous peoples, but also how culturally specific sovereignty is. She concludes that the most pertinent question to ask in relation to sovereignty is in regard 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 editors of *Sovereignty: Frontiers of Possibility* (2013) Julie Evans, Ann Genovese, Alexander Reilly and Patrick Wolfe call it, 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 (7). Therefore, sovereignty goes far beyond a juridical concept; it has become the "on-the-ground determinant of everyday existence" (7).

As Rodoreda writes, 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" (Rodoreda, 2018, 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, 2013, 250, quoted in Rodoreda, 2018, 230). Similar to Boochani's implied notion of sovereignty, *Too Much Lip*, too, is concerned with care for people and custodianship of one or multiple places—irrespective of legislations and policies.

As 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 shown to be politics. Stengers' '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 Stengers' cosmopolitics, politics can no longer mean to be operating "in an exclusive human club" (Latour, 2004, 454).

The challenge 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" (2005, 996). In addition to cultural differences, Stengers argues that cosmopolitics refers to the task of bringing together these "multiple, divergent worlds" (995). 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. The Salters' struggle is aptly captured by the sense of 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.

The Sovereign Right to 'Goodness'

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. (2019b)

Similar to Boochani, Lucashenko implies that, while oppression must not be romanticised, it is important to recognise the agency, strength and epistemic privilege of marginalised voices. Although Lucashenko conveys the centrality of listening to the perspective of what Stengers would call "the victims of the cosmos" (2005, 1002), she refutes an overemphasis on victimhood. "If so much of modern Australian literature about us fixed upon our victimhood," Lucashenko asks, "*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?" (2017, 3; italics in the original). The notion of sovereignty—one that is decidedly bound to an alive cosmos—therefore not only underlines the indestructible sense of self-determination, but also honours Indigenous 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 could be called what Nixon has termed a 'writer-activist.' Writer-activists often help dismantle injustices through "testimonial protest, rhetorical inventiveness, and counterhistories in the face of formidable odds" (2011, 6).

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. (2011, 15)

Too Much Lip uncovers the 'slow violence' of socio-environmental injustice: the novel makes the multigenerational trauma of colonial violence palpable, but also bears witness to multiple forms of resistance. In fact, Lucashenko has described her mission as a writer as to "civilise mainstream Australia" (2019b), which suggests that paying attention to the lived experience of Indigenous peoples is crucial for educating and changing the nation. Lucashenko, 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.

Instead of scarcity, this sovereign power and spirit is closely tied to the conjuring of beauty and abundance in the world. In her acceptance speech of the Miles Franklin Award, Lucashenko draws on the earlier-quoted Mary Graham to make this key point:

> In 1998 Kombumerri Elder Aunty Mary Graham sat me down and said to me that the worst thing the British brought was not the fact of murderous colonialism or the theft of land. It wasn't even the forced removal of our children. The worst thing, she taught me, would be if the invaders convinced us that life was about survival, about no more than struggling to scrape a living from each other and the earth. (2020b)

Drawing on the Wiradjuri term *yindyamarra* (also a focus in Tara June Winch's *The Yield* [2019, 106]), "the effort to live respectfully in a world worth living in," Lucashenko captures the sense that "Life is meant to be beautiful." In comparison to this understanding of 'goodness,' the senseless suffering that Indigenous and refugee people endure in Australia is thrown into a light that conveys the arbitrary and artificial violence settler-colonialism continues to enact:

> I write towards a better Australia. Life is meant to be beautiful, the Old People taught—and Kevin Henry is locked tonight in a cage in Queensland for a murder he could not possibly have committed. […] Life is meant to be beautiful—and yet tonight two Australian-born children of Sri Lankan descent are not free in Melbourne. Their freedom has been sacrificed on the altar of Australian racism despite the community of Biloela wanting to bring them home. (2020b)

Too Much Lip is a testimony to the enormous power that 'goodness' holds—a goodness that is everything but naïve, as it "takes seriously our pain, and our striving to regain the practice of *yindyamarra* which reigned here for so very long" (2020b); a goodness that will continue to prevail thanks to the indominable effort and sovereign spirit of First Nations. As Lucashenko puts it with reference to Maya Angelou, "still we rise."

Notes

1 Cosmopolitanism—deriving from the Greek *kosmos* ('world') and *polites* ('citizen')—was coined in ancient Greece, and preoccupied the politics of the early twentieth century in particularly stark ways: both Hitler and Stalin used the term derogatively. Cosmopolitanism has enabled complex understandings of culture, identity, belonging, universalism and particularity, citizenship and human rights. 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.
2 Land councils are Australian community organisations that are commonly formed to represent Indigenous Australians of a particular region.
3 Next to the earlier-mentioned "Uluru Statement from the Heart," a current example for Indigenous-led projects to initiate treaties is the Treaty Advancement Commission in Victoria (Allam, 2019).

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Conclusion

The term 'Anthropocene' still sits uneasily amidst the designations for the current crisis. In academia, few other concepts have reverberated as strongly and spread as extensively across so many disciplines; beyond academia, however, the term has 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 'climate change.' However, 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. 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 an innovative transdisciplinary debate and it disseminates the dangerous narratives of anti-humanity, anti-modernity and scarcity economics.

The term Anthropocene might not be long-lasting—it may soon become outdated in academia, never having properly 'arrived' in popular consciousness. If that should be the case, examining the Anthropocene debate will still have been worthwhile because the pronouncement of this era 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 transitionary 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 transitionary period may be remembered as "The Dithering," a "state of indecisive agitation" (2016, 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, the term can be productive when used critically, as one of many.

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This book has drawn attention to the significance of 'names' that can illuminate a crisis which still evades language. One of the central tenets of the humanities at large is, of course, 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, has challenged me to read aspects of the planetary crisis through the lens of radical interconnectedness. In contrast to the term 'environment,' which runs the risk of isolating one factor—the environment as a supposedly separate entity—my approach of engaging cosmos demonstrates that the environment can most productively be understood holistically and in reciprocity with the socio-cultural and political realm. As Lawrence Buell has argued, an "environmental-ethical revolution" is only possible if the interdependence of human and environmental flourishing is collectively imagined, and remembered (2016, 417). This idea of interdependence is, I believe, 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 media, technology, social justice and sovereignty. This approach has sought to foreground the entanglements of environment with culture, language, narrative, affect, science, ethics and politics. As a literary scholar, my notion of 'literary cosmology,' in particular, aims to capture literature's unique capacity to illuminate this enmeshment of culture and nature. "Story is," as environmental historian Tom Griffiths writes, "the most powerful educational tool we possess [and] a way of allowing for multiplicity and complexity at the same time as guaranteeing memorability" (2007).

Given literature's complexity, there are inevitably more nuances in the selected literary texts than the lens of cosmos and cosmology has enabled me to investigate. Despite this, I hope that these readings have generated insights into the power of creative fiction. In my discussion of Winch's *The Yield* (2019) and Tiffany's *Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living* (2005), my reading highlighted the interrelations between language and land-care. Both novels respond to the colonial legacy of a one-dimensional, instrumental, gendered, racialised and commodified view of the land by satirising colonial language and employing an alternative, multi-scalar and lyrical language (Tiffany, 2005), and by reviving holistic understandings of Country as expressed in the Wiradjuri language (Winch, 2019). This part investigated how language holds the potential for a modern custodianship that centralises Indigenous knowledge: whereas *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 and memory) are so crucial for Australian regeneration because they emerged in particular places, and contain critical information for the ecological repair needed. Both novels suggest that language is not only a system that emerged from particular places, but that it is also alive and highly mobile, a bridge between humans and their respective modern, transcultural cosmos. 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 centralises the role of language and culture.

My discussion of Doyle's novel *The Island Will Sink* (2016) led to the insight that dystopian texts may defy a reading that seeks to foreground radical interconnectedness, but in this negativity also lies a glimpse of *something else*, something that lies outside the apocalypse narrative, but is very much part of it: a meta-reflection on narratives and the function of storytelling. In contrast, my reading of van Neerven's "Water" (2014) examined the novella's portrayal of evolutionary narratives that highlight collaboration, love and playfulness over the dominant idea of species competition and the survival of the fittest. By doing so, it stresses the fundamental role of desire, kinship and symbiosis as an Indigenous cosmology, that has also resonated with recent scientific understandings of evolution. In this part, my cosmological approach generated reflections on the discursive level—that is, on the genres, modes and affects in which the environment, as well as the current crisis, have predominantly been narrated. With *The Island Will Sink*, this led to an investigation of the potentially paralysing effects of a disaster fixation, and suggested the need to diversify stories about the climate emergency, ecocritical engagements with texts, and approaches to activism: approaches that go beyond the conventionally portrayed reactions of guilt and purity, hope and despair. While Doyle's novel does not propose alternatives, van Neerven's novella facilitates a focus on romance, humour and survival—genres and modes that remain under-explored in environmental discourse.

My cosmological reading of Boochani's *No Friend But the Mountains* (2018) and Lucashenko's *Too Much Lip* (2018) has enabled me to explore yet another, perhaps the most literal, aspect of 'cosmos': more-than-human agency of elemental forces, heavenly bodies, animals, ancestors, ghosts and coincidences, as well as human agency arising out of generosity, humour, pleasure and a belief in the 'goodness' of the cosmos. In both texts, the cosmological imagination conjures up the notion of a larger, benevolent and 'sane' reality that allows for a perspective on the pettiness and artificiality of systems of oppression. My readings here emphasised that the protagonists defy resignation by recovering a modern and mobile sense of Country (Lucashenko, 2018) and eco-systemic order (Boochani, 2018) that brings to the fore abundance, beauty and sovereign belonging. This understanding provides avenues of survival, resistance and healing amidst (histories of) enforced subjugation. Both texts explored in this part put forward culturally specific as well as transcultural understandings of a 'cosmos' in which no one and nothing goes to waste.

Altogether then, the cosmological lens has helped me examine the entanglements of 'the environment' with language, culture, memory, affect, genre, narrative, evolution, tropes, figurations, symbolism, ethics and politics. This illustrates the achievements of literary works and literary studies:

through the capacity to creatively integrate multiple disciplines, knowledges and languages and to engage with situated knowledge, 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.

The arts may be in the unique position of making previously 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. My exploration of a particular place, Australia, has enabled specific situated insights into the national history, imaginary, and current challenges the nation-continent and its surrounds face. As I have argued with my sense of a modern, transcultural and (dis)enchanted cosmos, it is especially during this time of planetary ecological devastations that renewed attention to Indigenous languages, knowledges and land-care practices is emerging—perhaps more strongly than ever before. At the same time, the interest in cosmological traditions is surfacing transculturally—so that 'cosmos' becomes highly contemporary and relevant in the context of a globalised modernity preoccupied with a dark planetary crisis.

From a wider perspective, my analysis has explored the contribution of literary studies to the field of the Environmental Humanities. Faced with global ecological devastations such as ours, this field is on the rise precisely because of the growing awareness that social and environmental issues are inseparable. Solving environmental calamities, in other words, will need to involve social change as much as new technologies. As exemplified by the readings presented in this book, humans are shaped by and shape the material world—the planetary ecosystem—through beliefs, values and narratives as well as through science and technology (which are never free from social values). 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: they enable writers, and perhaps readers, to resist the power of systems that might otherwise appear 'natural' and inevitable.

The emerging field of 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 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, institutional, and social levels: How do individuals respond to calls for change in individual or collective behavior? 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? (Holm et al., 2015, 981)

Although the problem of the humanities' instrumentalism is a valid concern that has been discussed for many years,[1] the Manifesto's proposal of a new set of questions that have emerged with the planetary crisis provides a necessary and welcome new task for humanities disciplines (*a* task, not the only one). These questions also point to a new need to rearticulate the role of the humanities in the twenty-first century.

The global development of the Environmental Humanities is, however, complicated by the fact that different regions of the world may employ different terms for 'the environment,' and by the fact that the very term Environmental Humanities does not translate well into other languages,[2] which reveals that one key challenge—and enrichment—is the diversity of languages and understandings of 'the environment.' As *Cosmological Readings* has put forward a transcultural understanding of cosmos, a task for future studies could be the bringing together of transcultural cosmological ideas and their various multilingual names, terminologies and connotations.

Another related challenge—one that reveals the centrality of language and communication—is that the introduction of dedicated Environmental Humanities teaching programmes has not taken place at the same pace as research in the field (O'Gorman et al., 2019, 429). This can be traced back to the fact that it is difficult to establish teaching in an area that is, as the collectively authored essay "Teaching the Environmental Humanities" puts it, "not yet widely recognized by students or employers" (O'Gorman et al., 2019, 430). Alongside an exciting new research field, then, the prospect of building new teaching programmes also offers an opportunity to reflect on innovating academic publishing and communication strategies. This may include modernising research outlets; for example, academics could be supported to also publish shorter pieces outside of academic journals and to engage in multimedia outlets. 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., 2019, 430).

Showcasing one of the new directions the Environmental Humanities can take, this book has explored this experimental and engaged research pathway in order to highlight the significance of creative fiction and of literary studies, in particular: one that is deeply concerned with planetary environmental change, while taking into account the particularity of specific places, cultures and languages. A 'cosmological approach' can include culturally specific and transcultural understandings of the environment, the interconnectedness of 'nature' and culture, the sciences and the humanities, of past, present and future. The idea of a 'literary cosmology,' then, suggests that fiction is often the forerunner of concepts, as it is able to capture those ideas for which we may not yet have language.

Notes

1 See Nicole Seymour (2018), for example. Seymour concedes that, in Ecocriticism, a certain degree of instrumentalism is understandable, given that many ecocritics are also activists and since the field was established in response to ecocidal attitudes, but this instrumentalism also needs to be questioned. As Seymour puts it, instrumentalism "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" (2018, 28). In this sense, it is important that criticism also encompasses more than an ecological agenda, especially if it is to push environmental thought further.

2 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., 2019, 442).

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