Climate Crisis and the 21st-Century British Novel

Astrid Bracke

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Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction:
Climate Crisis and the Cultural Imagination

The 2015 film *The Revenant* tells a classic tale of survival. After being left for dead, the main character – played by Leonardo DiCaprio – braves ice, snow and vicious animals to return to civilization. Though set in the 1820s, *The Revenant* also became a story about twenty-first-century climate crisis. Accepting the award for Best Actor for his role in the film, DiCaprio revealed that the crew had to move filming to Antarctica in order to get sufficient snow (DiCaprio 2016: n.p.). Climate change, he concluded, 'is real' (DiCaprio 2016: n.p.). While DiCaprio is well-known for his environmental activism, his speech illustrates the cultural currency of climate crisis today. Climate crisis has so much become part of the contemporary cultural consciousness that it forms an inherent background to twenty-first-century life. As this book demonstrates, a wide variety of literary fictions reflect this awareness of climate crisis and participate in the construction and renegotiation of the stories that surround it.

While climate crisis and the role it plays in contemporary culture are in many ways a typically twenty-first-century story, worries about the changing climate are by no means new. The eruption of Tambora volcano in Indonesia in 1815 caused worldwide harvest failures and bad weather. The 'year without a summer' is believed to have inspired both Byron's poem 'Darkness' (1816) and Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (1818).[1] In the 1840s, scholars warned that the sun might burn out and global cooling would make life on earth impossible in its current form.[2] Around the same time, the British Rainfall Organisation was set up in response to public concern that rainfall was decreasing in Britain. Such worries about the climate possibly changing emerged in a time in which great advances were made in the sciences. The scenarios sketched

by science and lay people's concerns about the weather led the Victorians to, as Francis Spufford puts it, 'invent new delicious ways for their world to end', whether due to a rise in sea levels, a passing comet or the return of the Ice Age (1996: 42). Just as postmillennial British novels tap into a long tradition of British nature writing, as I discuss below, they are also part of a tradition of writings reflecting contemporary ideas about climate. Once the study of climate change and climate crisis got under way in the late twentieth century, a cultural awareness of climate emerged that resurfaces in postmillennial British fiction.[3] The place that climate change and crisis currently hold in our collective imagination is closely tied in with the environmental movement that developed in the 1970s and 1980s. Originally largely concerned with the effects of pesticides – following Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) – and the fear of nuclear disaster, the discovery of the ozone hole in 1985 created a sense of global climate crisis that would soon develop into a discourse of its own. The hole in the thin layer of ozone covering the world became a powerful image for humankind's destruction of the environment, particularly embodying the global effects of local actions such as industry, transport and the use of chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) in aerosols.

In the early twenty-first century, a distinct cultural awareness of climate crisis has become entrenched in contemporary Western culture – so much so that a few words or an image are often enough to encapsulate what is essentially a complex issue. Most readers will recognize a character's imagination of the future as bringing 'the earthquakes, floods and droughts of a changing climate' (2016: 114) in Deborah Levy's *Hot Milk* (2016) as a familiar description of climate crisis. Similarly, they will recognize the conversation of two characters in David Szalay's *All That Man Is* (2016) as an example of climate change denial: '"Global warming," Hans-Pieter says. "What – you believe in that?" Hans-Pieter looks worried, as if he might have made some elementary mistake. Then he says, "You don't believe it?" "Do I fuck"' (2016: loc. 3558). The climate crisis shorthand that these examples use shows just how much which climate crisis has become part of the contemporary literary imagination, as I explore in this book.

Central to climate crisis discourse as it resurfaces in contemporary culture are the predictions provided by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Founded in 1988, the IPCC brings together key research on

climate change to make recommendations to policy makers and governments. Through the five reports it has published to date, its role in climate change conferences and the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize, the IPCC is not only of scientific and political importance, but also provides the images and language that shape cultural awareness of climate crisis. The list of predictions that the IPCC offers in their 2014 report is long and bleak. Some of the effects of climate crisis are water scarcity and floods, increased drought, species extinction, hunger, disease, civil wars and the displacement of peoples. Many of these predictions resurface in the stories we tell about climate crisis. Yet, perhaps paradoxically, broad cultural awareness of climate crisis exists against a background of denial, scepticism and widespread cognitive dissonance. While climate change deniers are frequently relegated to the fringes of public debates, increasing attention is given to climate scepticism in the British press. In their study of ten British daily newspapers, James Painter and Neil Gavin note a rise of climate scepticism since 2007 (2016: 447).[4] Even the extensive flooding in Britain over the past decade-and-a-half is rarely connected to climate change – despite IPCC reports and the work of the British Committee on Climate Change suggesting that increased floods are a key consequence of climate change (Sayers et al. 2015). Indeed, out of 1,200 headline flood stories published between 2001 and 2007, only fifty-five suggest a connection between floods and climate change (Gavin, Leonard-Milson and Montgomery 2011: 427).[5]

Cognitive dissonance is another way in which many people attempt to come to terms with climate change. Cognitive dissonance is knowing about climate crisis, but continuing to live life as if nothing is the matter. Timothy Clark calls this dissonance 'Anthropocene disorder': a mismatch between what we see and what is really happening (2015: 140). Such a mismatch is inherent to climate crisis, Naomi Klein suggests: '[it is] hard to keep it in your head for very long. We engage in this odd form of on-again-off-again ecological amnesia for perfectly rational reasons. We deny because we fear that letting in the full reality of this crisis will change everything. And we are right' (2014: 4).[6] Indeed, cognitive dissonance is so widespread that Kari Norgaard, following Eviatar Zerubavel, calls it 'socially organized denial' characterized by people using 'a series of cultural narratives to deflect the disturbing information and normalize a particular version of reality in which "everything is fine"' (Norgaard 2011: 207). The experience of cognitive dissonance is

aptly illustrated in Ian McEwan's *Solar* (2010), which features a climate crisis denier – Michael Beard – alongside a character who explicitly struggles with squaring crisis with day-to-day life, his girlfriend Melissa. She tells Beard that she cannot take climate crisis seriously: 'to take the matter seriously would be to think about it all the time. Everything else shrank before it. And so, like everyone she knew, she could not take it seriously, not entirely. Daily life would not permit it' (McEwan 2010: 165). The embryonic narrator in McEwan's 2016 novel *Nutshell* expresses yet another response: climate crisis fatigue. Listening to a podcast from within his mother's womb, he remarks on 'the dull old facts of altered climate, vanishing forests, creatures and polar ice' (2016: 26) – even for a foetus, climate crisis is a familiar story.

Although denial, scepticism and cognitive dissonance might be seen as ways of avoiding the severity of climate crisis, they are primarily illustrations of the complexity and variety of narratives surrounding climate crisis. The complex knot of conceptions that climate crisis forms in the cultural imagination makes the study of the narratives we use to imagine and depict climate crisis so important. Public perceptions of climate change, Ursula Kluwick argues, 'are intrinsically tied to narrative strategies; whether or not we are aware of it, when we read and hear about climate change, we are offered not just facts and modes but stories' (2014: 503). These stories do not only reflect how climate crisis is imagined by a culture. They also work the other way around by influencing how climate crisis is perceived: 'Just how knowledge about climate change is represented also plays a key role in shaping the public awareness and discussion of climate change and has important implications for assessing public and governmental responses to climate change' (Daniels and Enfield 2009: 219). In turn, postmillennial British novels do not only reflect existing conceptions of climate crisis, but also participate in the construction of new narratives, providing alternatives and new ways of making sense of crisis. Consequently, climate crisis might be said to pose a challenge to the cultural imagination as well – so much so that some scholars have even suggested that climate crisis itself is a crisis of the imagination (Garrard 2009: 709; Kerridge 1998: 4). If we would be able to really imagine it, this kind of reasoning suggests, we might be more willing and better equipped to deal with climate crisis. While I find the underlying assumption that the imagination holds the key to alleviating climate crisis problematic, as I explore in Chapter 1, I would certainly agree that

climate crisis poses narrative problems. As McEwan suggested in an interview on *Solar*, he hesitated for a long time to write a novel about climate crisis. He worried that 'it just seemed so huge and so distorted by facts and figures and graphs and science and then virtue. I couldn't quite see how a novel would work without falling flat with moral intent' (Brown 2010: par. 8).[7] Nonetheless, McEwan's novel is just one amongst many works of art to have embraced the challenge of depicting climate crisis since the beginning of the twenty-first century.[8] Numerous films, novels, documentaries and artworks have tried to grapple with the realities of climate crisis and by doing so show how awareness of this crisis has become part of cultures around the world. For Terry Gifford, the spring of 2007 was the moment that 'may come to be seen in retrospect as a turning point in our perception of climate change and our engagement with global warming. It was a time when debates about our species' effects upon the global environment moved from a weekly to a daily presence in the newspapers' (2009: 245). In a similar sense, Tom Cohen points to 2011 as the year in which 'the irreversible nature of global warming was widely recognized' (2012: 128). Either way, in the twenty-first century, 'the consciousness and effects of ecocide are now a forcefully universal and pervasive condition of the imagination' (Adiseshiah and Hildyard 2013: 11). This consciousness is expressed in films ranging from science fiction and disaster movies such as *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), *Snowpiercer* (2013) and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) to animations like *Happy Feet* (2006) and *Wall •E* (2008) and documentaries including Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), *The Age of Stupid* (2009) and *Carbon Nation* (2010).[9] In literature, the rise of climate fiction, or 'cli-fi', as a uniquely distinct genre over the past decade, is often taken as an example of the permeation of climate crisis in the arts. Climate fiction includes novels such as Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, but also Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behaviour* (2012), Nathaniel Rich's *Odds Against Tomorrow* (2013) and, in a British context, McEwan's *Solar* and Jenni Fagan's *The Sunlight Pilgrims* (2016). Beyond film and literature, magazines as diverse as *Vanity Fair* and *Time* published green issues, showing how, as the editor of the former put it, 'green is the new black' (Carter 2006: n.p.).[10] The covers of *Vanity Fair*'s green issues joined celebrity culture to climate crisis discourse by depicting Julia Roberts, George Clooney, Robert Kennedy Jr and Al Gore against a leafy, green background; a scantily clad Madonna holding the globe on her back;

and Leonardo DiCaprio next to a baby seal in a polar landscape. Following the success of LiveAid in 1985, EarthAid concerts were staged around the world in 2007 to draw attention to climate crisis. The 2015 adventure game *Everybody's Gone to the Rapture* depicts a typically pastoral English landscape that is actually a post-apocalyptic world without humans. Greenpeace commissioned a work of classical music in support of their campaign to protect the Arctic in 2016. Perhaps paradoxically, climate crisis has also become a popular topic in advertising, from Nissan LEAF's polar bear – which I refer to in Chapter 4 – to the penguin in British Gas's 2015 and 2016 commercials looking for 'a warm home' (British Gas 2015) and celebrating 'free electricity' (British Gas 2016) on weekends. On most high streets, 'eco-conscious' fashion can be found, and the trend of organic and 'real' food that I discuss in Chapter 3 is likewise shaped by changing environmental sensibilities.

The widespread awareness of climate crisis that these examples illustrate forms the background to my discussion in this book. The twelve novels I explore in the following chapters function as literary case studies of cultural consciousness of climate crisis. Much as the wide range of examples above shows, in literature climate crisis has long ceased to be the remit only of genre fiction. Indeed, the premise of this book is that climate crisis has become so much a part of contemporary cultural discourses that we need not look towards 'books about climate crisis' to study cultural responses to this crisis. Precisely, texts that do not take climate crisis as their central or only topic participate in a reconceptualization of climate crisis discourses that takes place in societies and cultures as a whole. They do more than merely depict or illustrate climate crisis. Rather, postmillennial fictions are engaged in rethinking and reframing the stories we tell about climate in crisis. The twelve novels central to this book reflect changing ideas about nature and climate crisis, but themselves also participate in a reshaping of existing narratives to present new ways of imagining the natural environment in a time of climate crisis.

The postmillennial British novel and climate crisis

The twenty-first century presents an especially fruitful context for an exploration of British narratives of climate crisis. Looking back at the first

decade-and-a-half of the century reveals a distinct identity shaped by terrorism, economic recession and climate crisis. The years since 2000 have also seen an increased cultural awareness of climate crisis in literature. A deep concern with human–nature relations is not necessarily unique to postmillennial novels, as, for example, Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983), A. S. Byatt's *Babel Tower* (1996) and most of John Fowles's works demonstrate. Yet the number of works that take on climate crisis implicitly or explicitly have considerably increased since the turn of the century. In terms of scholarship, though, much terrain remains to be won. Despite the publication of some books on British postmillennial fiction and the founding of journals such as *Alluvium* and *C21 Literature*, relatively little research is done on British novels published since the turn of the century.[11] Moreover, existing research is certainly not always sensitive to the influence of climate crisis on twenty-first-century literature. In one of the first and most expansive overviews of postmillennial literature, for instance, Peter Boxall rarely mentions climate crisis. While he suggests that the 'contemporary imagination is haunted by the prospect of planetary death, of irreversible environmental disaster' (Boxall 2013: 14) and names Margaret Atwood's novels, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) and Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army* (2007) as examples of 'a new wave of disaster fiction' (Boxall 2013: 217), he does not remark on the influence of climate crisis on a wider body of literary fiction.[12]

The novels and stories that shape our understanding of climate crisis are a vital part of the larger discourse surrounding it. Storytelling is an inherently human way of making sense of the world, and this sense making, I propose, is captured particularly well in the fictional space offered by novels. In novels, past and present can be revisited, different futures can be imagined, and responses and experiences tried out. Hence, in a time of global climate crisis novels function as experimental spaces in which actual and imagined circumstances are played out, in which ethical and moral dilemmas are considered and in which the world can be understood. The privileged position that novels hold in this respect is foregrounded by Adam Trexler as well, who suggests that 'novels are artifacts that produce meaning in their own, unique ways. The imaginative capacities of the novel have made it a vital site for the articulation of the Anthropocene' (2015: 23). In a similar vein, Jennifer Ladino speculates that '[p]erhaps because it is typically less confined by expectations

of coherence or didacticism than traditional scholarship', literature contributes its own 'theories' (2012: 7).[13] Characteristics central to the novel as a genre play an important role in providing the imaginative space to explore climate crisis. The novel 'does character, and the novel does interiority' (McIlvanney and Ryan 2011: xiii) – and this emphasis is how the novel succeeds in intimately exploring experiences and emotions. Fictional characters may live through different climate crisis scenarios – both real and imagined – which shed light on the world outside the text. The environmentalist Bill McKibben makes a similar argument in his introduction to a collection of short stories on climate crisis. 'Science', he proposes, 'can take us only so far. The scientists have done their job – they've issued every possible warning, flashed every red light. Now it's time for the rest of us – for the economists, the psychologists, the theologians. And the artists, whose role is to help us understand what things *feel* like' (2011: 3, original emphasis). In what follows, then, my focus is on the narratives of climate crisis that surface in postmillennial British novels. I am concerned with how these novels function as lenses and mirrors, as agents that reflect and participate in a larger discourse. The implications that climate crisis has on the novel as a genre, though, go beyond the scope of this project. While climate crisis may undoubtedly change the form of the novel in due course, or, as Trexler proposes in *Anthropocene Fictions* (2015), is doing so already, my emphasis is on the novel as participant in cultural discourses, not so much as a genre.

This book explores the imaginative capacities of the postmillennial novel in a British context. While writing about the non-human natural environment is by no means unique to Britain, the form that it takes and the stories that are part of it are connected to the distinct physical environment from which they develop. A relationship of identity exists between a people and the landscapes they see as their own. In a British, especially English, context, this is the kind of landscape embodied by scenes of rolling hills and the white cliffs of Dover – even rain. Rain, Melissa Harrison suggests, 'is co-author of our living countryside; it is also a part of our deep internal landscape … Fear it as we might, complain about it as we may, rain is as essential to our sense of identity as it is to our soil' (2016: xii). The narratives that spring from this relationship of identity between people and the landscape are different for different cultures. American literature, for instance, is characterized by other narratives: not that

of the pastoral, but that of wilderness; not that of a densely urbanized country, but that of the continuing lure of the great outdoors. The same might be said about other European countries: though Germany, like Britain, experienced a trend of Romantic nature writing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this was tied much more to the mountains and forested landscape than to landscapes more familiar to the British countryside. While in terms of urbanization and its struggles with water the Netherlands shows similarities to Britain, the kind of narratives typical of British literature are absent from Dutch literature which lacks a tradition of nature writing altogether.[14]

While of the four narratives explored in this book the second, that of pastoral, most explicitly engages with the British nature writing tradition, the tradition underpins the other three narratives as well. The narrative of collapse responds to the loss of the idealized landscape, as I discuss in Chapter 1. Of the four narratives in this book, that of collapse is, moreover, most explicitly engaged with climate crisis. In this narrative, climate crisis is not just a shaping force, but the tipping point that leads to extensive and irreversible environmental, societal, economic and political changes. Characteristic of this narrative is the connection that it creates between the present and the future, often placing collapse in uneasy proximity to the readers' present. Pastoral is undoubtedly one of the most visible remnants of the British nature writing tradition in twenty-first-century fiction. It is also the most derided of the four narratives I discuss. As I explore in Chapter 2, scholars critique the pastoral for its problematic use in service of class and race issues, and question the contemporary usefulness of a narrative primarily associated with idealization. Nonetheless, twenty-first-century ideas about the British countryside remain heavily in debt to idealizing narratives, from one of Britain's most popular television shows – *Countryfile* – to the most popular domestic holiday destinations: the seaside and countryside.[15] Pastoral's continued use in imaginations of the British landscape consequently makes an exploration of the pastoral narrative not only significant, but also worthwhile. The third narrative in this book explores the space that is generally seen as the opposite of the pastoral landscape: the city. The narrative of urban nature is consequently, much like environmental collapse, premised on the pastoral narrative. Increased urbanization and the effects of climate crisis make urban nature ever more significant to many Brits' everyday experiences of nature.

Indeed, for them, their most immediate natural space is not the countryside, or hills and mountains, but rather urban parks, gardens or the shrubs by the side of the road. Since the turn of the century, urban natural environments – and with that, the stories we tell about urban nature – have received increased attention through gentrification and regeneration, but also through farmers' markets, 'real' foods, rooftop gardening and other ways in which nature emerges in the city. After the more localized environments central to the pastoral and urban nature narratives, the final and fourth narrative literally goes to the ends of the world to depict climate crisis. Postmillennial narratives about polar nature explore the intersections created by, on the one hand, the centenaries of the last important British polar expeditions and, on the other, the significance of the Arctic and Antarctic as spaces of climate crisis. The result of this intersection is a narrative that looks back and forward, that combines the sense of nationalism, exploration and environmental destruction common to nineteenth-century polar journeys with an awareness of environmentalism, extinction and melting poles. Seen together, then, the four narratives at the heart of this book are examples of the wide variety of climate crisis narratives circulating in the postmillennial imagination. They are also, moreover, dominant narratives that hold currency outside of literature, as examples of the broader cultural context as each of the chapters illustrates.

I deliberately use the term 'narratives' for the stories that circulate around environmental collapse, pastoral, urban and polar. The concept provides a particularly productive way of thinking about the stories we tell about climate crisis. 'Narratives' emphasizes the extent to which our experience of nature and climate crisis, as well as the opinions, reports and productions that surround it, are narrated – which is not to say fictional. Rather, perceiving climate crisis and nature as narrated means being aware of recurring patterns, of stereotypical images and of familiar structures. Moreover, using the term 'narratives' foregrounds the extent to which narratives and the act of narrating are central to the human experience of the world. As narratologists emphasize, humans make sense of the world around them, of relationships and events, by telling stories. This holds for day-to-day events as much as for climate crisis and the environment surrounding us in general. Describing pastoral as a narrative, for instance, entails a foregrounding of certain elements that have become familiar in descriptions of the countryside, such as the idea of nature as a retreat, or

of nature as idyllic and separate from the city. Climate crisis narratives are consequently not only representations of climate crisis, but also function as frameworks through which people interpret the world around them. At the same time, the concept of narratives is not rigid and provides the flexibility to adapt and transform – just as the four narratives that I am concerned with in this book are engaged in a reconfiguration of how we think and talk about nature. Narratives, then, may consist of a core of familiar elements, while being always fluid. A 'narrative' is explicitly neither a genre, nor can the term be used interchangeably with 'novel'. 'Narrative' is a theoretically more neutral term than 'genre' and a novel may contain several different narratives. Hence, although I foreground a certain narrative in relation to certain books, the selected narrative is by no means the only one. In Gerard Woodward's *August* (2001), for instance, the pastoral narrative is dominant. Yet the polar narrative surfaces as well when the journey to the family's holiday destination is described as being 'undertaken much in the spirit of Scott's journey to the South Pole – great excitement, but an underlying fear that the pristine acres of snow will carry the blemish of Norwegian footprints' (Woodward 2011: 64). Similarly, when a character in *Cloud Atlas* (2004) mentions the convenience of stoneless avocadoes in the city-state in which Sonmi~451 lives, they draw on the narrative of urban nature. In this narrative, food becomes a way of connecting to nature, even when, as the character puts it, 'nature was more trouble than it was worth' (Mitchell 2004: 339).

In its concern with the relationship between climate crisis and narratives, this book is part of a growing body of scholarship that seeks to combine ecocriticism and narratology. Such 'econarratology', as Erin James calls it, 'maintains an interest in studying the relationship between literature and the physical environment, but does so with sensitivity to the literary structures and devices that we use to communicate representations of the physical environment to each other via narratives' (2015: 23). The emerging field of econarratology, then, argues that the form in which a story is told works in tandem with the ways in which the human and non-human worlds are represented. Reading literature at the intersections of ecocriticism and narratology entails being aware that a textual, novelistic landscape is never just a representation, but always determined by the literary and narratological elements that shape it – just as extratextual landscapes are the product of their historical, political,

cultural and environmental circumstances. Importantly, a criticism which focuses more on form than ecocriticism has hitherto done does not necessarily result in less emphasis on the depiction of nature, as Bonnie Costello suggests: 'a [rhetorically oriented] criticism can involve real-world concerns in that it reveals the entanglement of nature and culture, the interplay between our desires, our concepts, and our perceptions, and possibilities for renewal and vitality within that entanglement' (2003: 14).

The current cross-pollination between ecocriticism and narratology has been slow to develop. One reason for this, James proposes, lies in the origins of the two fields: 'one (ecocriticism) originated in part as a reaction against the dominance of discursivity emerging from structuralism, while the other (narratology) helped to secure that dominance in the first place' (2015: 4).[16] Ecocritics, then, might have feared an emphasis on textuality rather than the actual, physical environment, while narratologists have been remarkably unconcerned with the concept of space so central to ecocriticism. As David Herman puts it, classical narratology viewed 'temporality as the hallmark of narrative and space as more or less optional accompaniment' (2002: 267).[17] Econarratology consequently provides a refinement of narratology by highlighting the long-neglected dimension of space, showing how, as Herman proposes, spatial references play a 'crucial, not an optional or derivative, role' (Herman 2002: 264).

Yet, as a growing body of critical work attests,[18] an econarratological approach forms a natural extension of both ecocriticism and narratology. When ecocritics study the ways in which humans perceive and represent nature, they are essentially concerned with the ways in which the natural world is narratologically conceived – while never losing sight, of course, of the fact that this world externally exists. An early example of a work sensitive to both narratological form and natural environments is Joseph Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival* (1974), a proto-ecocritical study of tragedy and comedy as genres more or less suitable to depicting environmental crisis. Genre, Meeker holds, determines the representation of the environment in a text. While tragedy emphasizes loss and death, perhaps leading to defeatism, comedy is open to mistakes and false starts, and provides the space for alternatives and a playfulness perhaps better suited to thinking about climate crisis. In the tradition of Meeker, Heise discusses Douglas Adams's and Mark Carwardine's radio documentary

and book *Last Chance to See* (1989/1990) as an example of a species extinction narrative that uses comedy in service of environmentalism. Elegy and tragedy, she suggests, prevent the environmentalist imagination from envisioning a possible future for nature and instead focus on its end (2010: 69). Increased ecocritical attention to narratives and narrative structures is moreover reflected in the wider field of the environmental humanities. Environmental humanities scholars emphasize the social, cultural and human dimension of climate crisis (Neimanis, Åsberg and Hedren 2015: 70) and explore which narratives are more or less suitable to a time of crisis (Heise and Carruth 2010: 3).

At the intersection of ecocriticism and narratology several questions emerge. How does genre shape and determine a text's representation of the natural world, or its depiction of climate crisis? What is the role of a work's structure in its portrayal of climate crisis? In *Cloud Atlas* (Chapter 1), for example, the combination of six different storylines creates a sense of ongoing climate crisis that started centuries ago and is set to continue in our future. In *Everland* (Chapter 4), the combination of a historical and contemporary narrative likewise creates connections between past and present that show the similarities between early twentieth-century exploration and contemporary environmentalism. Another question is what the effect is of narrative perspective. To what extent does a first-person narrator lead to a more or less intimate view of the non-human natural world? How do narrative perspective and focalization reinforce or contradict experiences of the environment? In *August*, as I discuss in Chapter 2, the narrator repeatedly destabilizes the idealizing image that the focalizing characters present of the countryside. Furthermore, what is the role of temporal cues in the reader's interpretation of climate crisis? In *The Carhullan Army* the temporal setting is deliberately left vague, leaving it to the reader to piece together a sense of when exactly the novel is set. The novel employs this technique, I argue in Chapter 1, in order to create an uncomfortable proximity between the future and the present, which never lets the reader relax in the knowledge that environmental collapse is safely in the distant future. Finally, which spatial cues does a narrative offer to help readers make sense of the environment of the novel? In *The Carhullan Army* the familiar landscape of the Lake District makes the environment in the novel especially eerie: it is familiar, yet strange, ravaged by environmental collapse and political instability.

Some of the questions Trexler asks in *Anthropocene Fictions* also express econarratological concerns – even though he does not explicitly frame his project as econarratological. He is, however, concerned with the effects of climate change on narrative and novelistic form: 'how', he wonders, 'did climate change make new demands on the novel itself, forcing formal and innovative experimentation?' (2015: 10). James, conversely, also addresses the effects of narratives on the reader's experience of the world outside of the text. 'How might', she asks, 'the process of mental and emotional transportation to virtual environments catalyze real-world understanding among readers for what it is like for different people in different spaces and times to live in, imagine, and interact with the world?' (2015: 34). The postmillennial novels explored in this book similarly point to the world outside of the text, inviting the reader to reflect on her actual environment through her engagement with a textual and/or fictional environment. Through its emphasis on content and form the econarratological approach I apply is consequently particularly fruitful in foregrounding the techniques that novels employ to create an imaginative space in which to think through climate crisis, ranging from the unreliable narrator in *God's Own Country* (Chapter 2) to the effect of genre in the historical polar novels discussed in Chapter 4.

In its engagement with narratology, this book provides an extension of ecocriticism – it also does so through close readings of postmillennial novels. Ecocriticism has been hesitant to study contemporary novels – especially those novels that do not count as obvious examples of climate fiction. While most ecocritics are no longer plagued by Dominic Head's 1998 suggestion that the novel is a problematic form for ecocriticism,[19] the emphasis in the field remains on non-fiction, poetry and realist novels written before the twentieth century – with the exception of a recent flurry of works on modernism.[20] The broad cultural awareness of climate crisis that I sketched above, however, invites the ecocritical engagement with twenty-first-century British literary fiction that is slowly developing. Indeed, the study of novels such as those explored in this book is also part of a necessary legitimization of the ecocritical project. Climate crisis does not only play a role in nature writing or genre fiction, but shapes all forms of culture and literature.[21] The neglect of some genres or literary periods would suggest a denial of climate crisis's importance to human experience that ecocriticism is keen to avoid.

Against the background of the centrality of climate crisis to the twenty-first century, this book deliberately focuses on authors associated with that century:

those authors who have risen to prominence since 2000, or are expected to do so. With the exception of Graham Swift, whose first novel was published in 1980, the debut novels of all of these authors were published around or after 2000. Although these works do a particularly good job at showing how postmillennial British novels reflect and interject in contemporary climate crisis discourses, the twelve novels selected for this book are by no means the only fictions to do so. Instead, they point to a larger corpus of texts concerned with similar issues, and exploring similar narratives. David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army* (2007) and Sam Taylor's *The Island at the End of the World* (2009) are central to my exploration of the narrative of environmental collapse in Chapter 1. Other postmillennial novels that use this narrative are Sarah Moss's *Cold Earth* (2009), Antonia Honeywell's *The Ship* (2015), Jenni Fagan's *The Sunlight Pilgrims* (2016) and Clare Morrall's *When the Floods Came* (2016). The three works that I discuss in the chapter on pastoral – Gerard Woodward's *August* (2011), Ross Raisin's *God's Own Country* (2008) and Graham Swift's *Wish You Were Here* (2011) – are part of a larger tradition of postmillennial novels drawing on the pastoral narrative, such as Sarah Hall's *Haweswater* (2002), Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and Will Cohu's *Nothing But Grass* (2015). Similarly, the narrative of urban nature that I focus on in Chapter 3 goes beyond *The Translation of the Bones* (Francesca Kay 2011), *NW* (Zadie Smith 2012) and *Clay* (Melissa Harrison 2013) and includes the novels of Jon McGregor, Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005), Rachel Cusk's *Arlington Park* (2006) and A. L. Kennedy's *Serious Sweet* (2016), amongst others. Finally, the popularity of polar fictions at the beginning of the twenty-first century that I discuss in Chapter 4 brought forth not only Jeremy Page's *The Collector of Lost Things* (2013), Rebecca Hunt's *Everland* (2014) and Ian McGuire's *The North Water* (2016), but also Michelle Paver's *Dark Matter* (2010), Amy Sackville's *The Still Point* (2010) and Tony White's *Shackleton's Man Goes South* (2013).

Terminology: Climate crisis and Anthropocene

Throughout this book, as in the title, I use the term 'climate crisis' rather than the currently more popular term 'Anthropocene'.[22] As I'll explain, I avoid the latter term not because I don't think it has value, but rather because I feel that it has

become too much of an umbrella term in literary circle, while lacking precision. Of course, 'climate crisis' and 'Anthropocene' are not interchangeable terms. 'Anthropocene' refers to a geological epoch, while climate crisis refers to an event. Yet, in their temporal and spatial scale, I'd argue, both concepts encapsulate that the issues facing us today are global and span the past, present and future.

As a geological term, 'Anthropocene' was popularized in the early 2000s by the chemist Paul Crutzen, although the coining of the term is attributed to Eugene Stoermer in the 1980s. According to Crutzen and others, we are now living in a geological time when human activities are altering global processes on such a scale that this can be compared to the changes taking place at the turn of previous geological epochs. A working group tasked with debating the usefulness of 'Anthropocene' as a geological term proposed in August 2016 that the current geological moment is indeed distinct from the Holocene. The starting point of this new period is the mid-twentieth century, and a majority of the members of the working group agree that the radioactive elements from nuclear bomb tests provide the 'signal' that ushered in a new epoch (Anthropocene Working Group 2016: n.p.). While the process is still ongoing to officially add the Anthropocene to the geological timescale,[23] the working group's recommendation reflects the wide use of the concept in geological studies. In ecocritical circles, the term 'Anthropocene' has become a frequently used cultural concept, rather than a geological one. Although these discussions generally start with a mention of Crutzen's work and his definition, ecocritical use of 'Anthropocene' tends to quickly morph into shorthand for 'everything is different now' or 'this changes everything'. More importantly, the ecocritical embrace of 'Anthropocene' as a critical concept neglects the problematic and provisional nature of the term in geological circles. While the inclusion of the Anthropocene on the geological timescale has been recommended, a main point of critique remains the timespan. Crutzen (2002) and many ecocritics suggest the Industrial Revolution as the starting point. The working group, on the other hand, proposes the mid-twentieth century as the starting point, as do scientists studying sediments and ice cores (Waters et al. 2016).[24] A period of a little over fifty years might be too short to count as a geological epoch, yet according to the working group's convenor, many of the changes that define the Anthropocene are irreversible (Carrington 2016: par. 11), thereby legitimizing the group's recommendation.

Two high-profile ecocritical books that use the term in their title demonstrate the problems that arise around using 'Anthropocene' as a cultural concept. In his *Anthropocene Fictions*, Adam Trexler uses the term 'Anthropocene' in an attempt to move beyond, as he puts it, 'the narrow questions of truth and falsity with regard to climate science' (2015: 4). Anthropocene, he suggests, reflects the 'firm position that climate change is upon us' (2015: 5). While I'd argue that the at times problematic discourses surrounding the terms 'climate change' and 'climate crisis' do not discount their use, Trexler's wish to bypass these terms in favour of the currently more novel 'Anthropocene' is understandable. His book is premised, however, not much on the geological concept, but on the idea that the Anthropocene is culturally significant, and indicates 'a *cultural* transformation' (2015: 5, original emphasis). Timothy Clark's *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept* (2015) is another work that employs 'Anthropocene' as a cultural and critical concept. For Clark, the Anthropocene presents a break in how literature and other cultural artefacts are studied. 'Critical reading in relation to the Anthropocene', he argues, 'becomes a measure of an irreversible break in consciousness and understanding between the past and present' (2015: 131). Of course, this claim could very well also be made about the general awareness of climate crisis that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century – an awareness that has fuelled ecocriticism since its earliest beginnings. Moreover, by emphasizing a 'break', Clark ties himself problematically to the issue of dating the Anthropocene. Interestingly, he notes that the term 'Anthropocene' has become a catchphrase that has become 'already rather free from the restraints of geological terminology' (2015: 3). The term 'threshold', used by Clark and others to indicate the radical break that the Anthropocene entails, is also potentially problematic. Much like 'Anthropocene' itself, the ecocritical use of the term has drifted away from the geological term. In terms of climate crisis, a threshold is not a break from the past, but rather 'a relatively small change in one element of climate [that] led to abrupt changes in the system as a whole. In other words, pushing global temperatures past certain thresholds could trigger abrupt, unpredictable and potentially irreversible changes that have massively disruptive and large-scale impacts' (AAAS Climate Science Panel 2014: 15–16). For Clark, the Anthropocene itself functions as a 'threshold concept', 'an indeterminate but insidious threshold at which many

actions previously normal or insignificant have become, often in all innocence, themselves destructive, simply by virtue of human numbers and power' (2015: 61). In this sense, he suggests that threshold is a breaking point, a point of no return at which changed realities and increased awareness make everything different. Understood from the point of view of climate science, on the other hand, a threshold is not a massive breaking point, but rather the final drop, as it were, that makes the bucket overflow.

Consequently, throughout this book, I will be using the term 'climate crisis' rather than 'Anthropocene' to denote both the physical realities as well as the contemporary discourses surrounding humankind's effects on the environment. These discourses have made it symbolic for our age, and therefore more than only an event. Indeed, in using the term 'climate crisis' I echo the argument made by Frederick Buell, who proposed in the early twenty-first century that we have been for some time 'dwelling in crisis', in other words, aware of the fact that climate crisis is happening and changing our environment. It is precisely this awareness that is central to the book and that would, I believe, not require the concept 'Anthropocene' as a critical lens.[25]

In this book

The novels discussed in this book show that imaginations of climate crisis rarely stand on their own and are frequently tied in with other issues. As such, the novels reflect the complexity of climate crisis: it is neither only a natural issue nor crisis, but a consequence of economics, politics, cultures and societies, which are in turn also shaped by it. Within this network, climate crisis is often loosely or explicitly connected to other issues, including concerns for food safety and the subsequent rise of farmers' markets, economic collapse in general and changes to the countryside as a result of, for instance, cattle disease and tourism. While climate crisis is an issue in its own right, and as such runs through all four chapters of this book, in the cultural imagination and in postmillennial British novels it often ties in with, underpins and runs parallel to other concerns. The book is framed by chapters concerned with two of the best-known narratives of climate crisis: those of environmental collapse and polar. These narratives are explicitly engaged with grasping the large temporal and spatial scale of

climate crisis, depicting not only what forms climate crisis may take, but also the specific sites it is played out in, particularly the Arctic and Antarctic. These two chapters bookend two narratives that much more emphasize the smaller and immediate scale on which many Westerns experience their non-human natural environments. In depicting more immediate landscapes, and focusing on the small and medium scale, rather than the large, the narratives of pastoral and urban reflect narratologists' suggestions that human minds are rarely capable of comprehending the large scale – as I discuss in Chapter 1 – and that medium-scale narratives might consequently be better suited to, literally, bringing home climate crisis. Chapters 2 (pastoral) and 3 (urban) explore what happens to familiar landscapes in a time of climate crisis. Both narratives are part of a larger framework of climate crisis discourse, even though their concern with this crisis is frequently implicit. Rather, they demonstrate how developments running parallel to and in tandem with climate crisis shape twenty-first-century experiences of the non-human natural environment.

In Chapter 1, environmental collapse is both caused and exacerbated by political and economic crises. In this chapter, I use the narratological concept of the principle of minimal departure – which suggests that readers always interpret a text's temporal setting in relation to their own present – to discuss the sense of immediacy that characterizes environmental collapse narratives. By leaving the reader in uncertainty as to when a novel is set, or by suggesting close proximity to the initial readers' present, the novels discussed in this chapter leave their readers with an uncanny feeling about the projected environmental collapse. This chapter, moreover, sets the stage for an exploration of the boundaries and indeed the function of narratives in a time of climate crisis in general. The three novels in which the environmental collapse narrative recurs explicitly, either through their form or their content, challenge the usefulness and reliability of narratives in the depiction of collapse and crisis. As such, the chapter engages with ecocritical scholars who have put great faith in the cultural imaginary, as well as critics from the environmental humanities who have argued for the need for new narratives of nature in a time of crisis.

Chapters 1 and 2 are both concerned with narratological time, and as such form companion chapters. While the first chapter looks ahead and is concerned primarily with what might lie in store, the second chapter is concerned with a narrative generally associated with the past: pastoral. More

than any of the other chapters in this book, this chapter emphasizes the extent to which narratives of climate crisis tap into, are informed by and run parallel to developments that have also significantly altered how we imagine the non-human natural environment. The emphasis in this chapter, then, is on how a pastoral narrative has emerged in the early twenty-first century that is far more sensitive to climate crisis than traditional pastoral. Combining ecocriticism, narratology, rural studies and the wider field of pastoral studies, Chapter 2 emphasizes the importance of temporal cues to the pastoral narrative, for instance, in the framework narrative of *Wish You Were Here*. It also discusses the trajectory from the countryside as primarily a productive landscape to a landscape perceived much more in aesthetic terms as depicted in *August*, *Wish You Were Here* and *God's Own Country*. Finally, the chapter introduces the concept of 'pastoral traces': descriptions or narratological features of the novels that prevent full immersion in the pastoral retreat and demonstrate that the pastoral return is always embedded in the retreat. Postmillennial British novels participate in a rethinking and reframing of the pastoral narrative that takes into account its idealizing side, yet shows how the narrative can nonetheless be made productive for a time of climate crisis.

In the second half of the book, narratological space, rather than narratological time, is foregrounded[26] – even though in its concern with the historical novel, the polar narrative too is rooted in the past. The urban chapter (Chapter 3) forms the natural counterpart of the chapter on pastoral, illustrating the traditional dichotomy of country and city. Yet, just as the chapter on pastoral demonstrates that such divisions have become unfeasible, Chapter 3 positions the city as a space of not only a unique kind of nature, but also a site of climate crisis. Through engagements with urban nature, but also through the local food movement, twenty-first-century urbanites seek a reconfiguration of their relationship with nature which in the past only the countryside seemed to offer. Drawing on ecocriticism, narratology and urban studies, the chapter explores how postmillennial British fiction engages in a rethinking of urban nature that is in line with much recent sociological scholarship and urban regeneration. It describes the different environments that are typically urban, yet are also experienced as natural: the urban wasteland one of the characters in *The Translation of the Bones* seeks solace in, or the secret garden that a young boy discovers in *Clay*. This chapter also emphasizes how these natural

spaces are tied in with urban issues of socio-economic status. Experiences of nature, it shows, are shaped by factors such as social standing, profession and race. This is replicated in recent food movements that, explicitly or implicitly, suggest that a reconnection to nature through food is only available to the happy, economically privileged, few. Finally, Chapter 4 uses imagery perhaps most familiar to contemporary climate crisis discourse: that of the Arctic and Antarctic as literal sites of climate crisis. Space consequently plays an important role in this chapter, as the physical polar landscape functions not only as a symbol of human-nature relations, but has served and continues to serve as a canvas for ideas of gender and nationhood. As one of the most political chapters in the book, Chapter 4 addresses the extent to which historical settings reflect contemporary Britain's place in the world and its attempts to reinvent itself post-Empire. Rather than leading to a sense of escapism from the present crisis, the historical settings of *The Collector of Lost Things*, *Everland* and *The North Water* foreground the roots of contemporary crisis, and draw at times uncomfortable parallels between Victorian and early twentieth-century exploration and hunting and contemporary environmentalism. Twenty-first-century novels, then, reflect and interject in familiar and new discourses of nature and echo a broader cultural consciousness of climate crisis. They moreover function as vehicles for making sense of a new and complex world. This book explores the various ways in which literary fictions provide the imaginary space for authors and readers in which to think through the new realities that crisis brings.

1

Collapse

The 2014 science fiction film *Interstellar* depicts a planet that is suffering from freak weather, extreme drought and hunger. It falls to the hero, played by Matthew McConaughey, to not so much save the earth, but to find a new place in the universe for humankind. While *Interstellar*'s earth is characterized by a dry and dusty landscape, the planet that humankind eventually settles on is futuristic – humans live in giant bubbles – and at the same time pastoral in depicting a typically Midwestern countryside, albeit one made slightly weird by the existence of several suns in the sky. In presenting the possibility of terraforming as a solution to the destruction of earth's environmental systems, *Interstellar* is an apt example of the popularity of environmental collapse as a narrative in contemporary culture. Since the turn of the century, dozens of films have appeared that in some way or another depict environmental collapse, whether as a key challenge to be overcome (*Wall •E*, 2012), or as setting for a future world (*Mad Max: Fury Road*). In literature, a similar trend is underway, as reflected in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy and other works of climate fiction (or cli-fi), such as Nathaniel Rich's *Odds Against Tomorrow* (2013) and Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behaviour* (2012).[1] *Interstellar* exemplifies many of the problematic elements of these depictions of environmental collapse. While the makers of *Interstellar* were supposedly careful not to include anything in the film that would violate physical laws ('Interstellar – Trivia' 2014), the inherent techno-optimism of the film – expressed by its tagline 'Go further' (*Interstellar* 2014) – hints at a denial of the severity of climate crisis that is unhelpful in understanding its true scale and magnitude. Many climate fictions similarly seek a balance between capturing crisis as well as offering a sense of hope. In Atwood's trilogy, this is exemplified by the continual existence of humans after the waterless flood and even in the flood-ridden New York depicted by Rich a new society is formed.

In this chapter, I explore three postmillennial British novels that engage with the challenges of depicting environmental collapse. My focus is primarily on two central elements: first, on the temporal distance between the time of the novels' initial readers and that of the stories themselves, and second, on the importance of narrativity. Temporal cues are particularly important in describing environmental collapse because they determine to what extent the reader feels that this collapse is imminent or, conversely, reassuringly far away. David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army* (2007) and Sam Taylor's *The Island at the End of the World* (2009) rely on what Marie-Laure Ryan has termed 'the principle of minimal departure' to, especially in Hall's and Taylor's novels, refuse the sense that collapse is far away and instead create a sense of eerie proximity. At the same time, all three novels challenge the possibilities and limits of narratives and narrativity. As such, this chapter engages with ecocritical and environmental humanities' debates about the importance of storytelling in a time of climate crisis.

Throughout this chapter, I explicitly do not describe the narrative of environmental collapse as an apocalyptic narrative. In this respect, I respond to the environmental humanities' call for new narratives of nature in a time of climate crisis, and at the same time react against the predominance of the apocalyptic narrative in many discussions of climate crisis, especially in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century ecocriticism. In emphasizing the narrative of environmental collapse rather than that of apocalypse, my discussion responds to literary works that move away from the latter, as do the novels in this chapter. Apocalypse is, as Lawrence Buell suggested in 2003, 'the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal' (Buell 1995: 285). Yet, the apocalyptic narrative is also highly problematic, not least because it has the tendency to reduce complex issues to 'monocausal crises involving conflicts between recognizably opposed groups' (Garrard 2011: 105). Apocalyptic narratives are also ill-suited to contemporary climate crisis because they have come to be associated too much with the fictions of disaster films or science fiction. A 2006 report by the British think tank Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) suggests that depictions of environmental crisis that rely on the apocalyptic narrative often exclude 'the possibility of real action or agency by the reader or viewer' (Ereaut and Segnit 2006: 7). Perhaps due to the popularity of apocalyptic narratives

in films, apocalypse's 'sensationalism and connection with the unreality of Hollywood films also distances people from the issue' and even 'positions climate change as yet another apocalyptic construction that is perhaps a figment of our cultural imaginations, further undermining its ability to help bring about action' (Ereaut and Segnit 2006: 7). Consequently, as the authors of the report argue, people are less inclined to act on environmental collapse, or see it as a reality, and instead delegate it to fiction and films, essentially denying the crisis that is taking place. The result is frequently a kind of apocalypse or crisis fatigue: 'environmental warnings have often taken on an apocalyptic tone … it is to be expected that the public greets them with a certain weariness' (Hamilton 2010: xi). Apocalyptic narratives, to put it differently, present a world that is falling apart, giving viewers and readers a sense that at least the 'real' world is fine – much as the film *Interstellar* does by providing a way out.[2] Indeed, the failure of apocalypse to materialize has made the narrative a political liability (F. Buell 2003: 201) and climate sceptics have used such 'false' prophecies of apocalypse to argue that climate crisis is by no means as urgent as environmentalists suggest. Yet traditionally, apocalypse does not denote the end of the world event that sceptics critique. Biblical apocalypses, Sarah Dillon notes, 'describe, reveal, or predict cataclysmic events but only and always with the structural guarantee of a postcataclysmic continuance, be it in this world or the next' (2007: 376). In those instances, apocalypse has become a way of life, as F. Buell also suggests about contemporary environmental circumstances (2003: *passim*). Nevertheless, the popular idea of apocalypse as 'the end of the world' might stand in the way of productive, rather than defeatists, engagements with climate crisis. The environmental collapse narrative that *Cloud Atlas*, *The Carhullan Army* and *The Island at the End of the World* present is an example of such a more productive approach.[3] Environmental collapse holds none of the connotations of 'end of the world' that makes popular apocalypse so problematic. Rather, typical of the narrative of environmental collapse is that climate crisis coincides with and leads to socio-economic and political collapse, despite which, however, one or several people survive, allowing for the story of what happens after the collapse to be told.[4] In the remainder of the chapter, I focus on how postmillennial British novels navigate issues surrounding imagining and narrating environmental collapse in more detail, starting with a discussion of the importance of time and temporal cues in the depiction of environmental collapse.

Environmental collapse and the challenge of narrative time

Richard Kerridge suggests that '[t]he inability of political cultures to address environmentalism is in part a failure of narrative' (1998: 4), arguing that the political failure to act is inherently related to the literary difficulty of imagining apocalypse and environmental crisis (2010). In other words, if we were able to imagine environmental collapse with more certainty, people would be more likely to take action because they would know what to prevent. In a similar vein, L. Buell argues that 'environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imaging nature and humanity's relation to it' (1995: 2). The difficulty, even impossibility, of imagining environmental crisis in narrative recurs in ecocritical and environmental humanities scholarship. The scale of environmental crisis is frequently seen as the major stumbling in this respect: 'the Anthropocene', Timothy Clark writes, 'enacts the demand to think of human life at much broader scales of space and time' than that typically offered by narratives (2015: 13).[5] Similarly, Greg Garrard argues that '[n]one of the traditional forms in literature, film, or television documentary is unproblematically suited to capturing the geographical and temporal scale, complexity, and uncertainty of climate change in particular' (2009: 709).[6] But while conventional narrative forms and realism are often dismissed as unsuitable to depicting environmental collapse,[7] more experimental narratives may also be highly problematic. Alexa Weik van Mossner's discussion of Dale Pendell's *The Great Bay: Chronicles of the Collapse* (2010) demonstrates this especially well. The novel favours geological and climatic timescales over human ones, yet in doing so runs the risk of 'losing readers' empathic engagement with characters they understand well enough to care about their hopes and goals' (Weik von Mossner 2014: 205). Indeed, the true challenge in representing climate crisis and environmental collapse may not be finding or developing new genres, but rather unifying the temporal and spatial scale of environmental crisis with a scale more suitable to human understanding. Nevertheless, much ecocriticism and environmental humanities scholarship argues the other way around, and tries to bring the human on the scale of environmental crisis. In his readings of scale, Clark suggests an ecocritical analysis that interprets narratives on the global as well as the personal and national scale. His example, Raymond Carver's short story

'Elephant', becomes more than a story about the demands of family, or about consumerism. Placing the story in a 600-year time frame results in a reading in which seemingly personal and small-scale events, such as discussions about car ownership, come to demonstrate 'the oppressive, all-pervading and destructive effects of being born into a fossil-fuel-based infrastructure as aggressive as an occupying army' (Clark 2015: 104). While this argument may succeed in putting relatively small-scale developments on a larger global scale, it similarly runs the risk of creating a sense of dissociation of the kind Weik von Mossner identifies in relation to Pendell's novel.

The difficulties – if not impossibilities – imagining the global scale entails are foregrounded by cognitive narratologists. Human minds are best at grasping events and environments on a medium scale – or what David Herman terms 'person-level experiences' (2002: 81). Humans' mental capacities, he argues, 'are optimally suited for navigating situations and events that are encountered at a particular spatiotemporal scale or degree of resolution' (2002: 81). Indeed, narratives themselves, Herman suggests, are 'instruments for sense making that are optimally calibrated for molar minds' (2002: 83). The medium-scale rather than the large-scale may hence be much easier to grasp, which suggests a gap between the scale that climate crisis is played out on and the much smaller scale on which human minds operate. In the three novels I explore in this chapter, this gap is bridged by the use of temporal markers. On the one hand, these markers help readers determine when in the future the novels are set. On the other hand, the use of temporal markers leads to the realization that the environmental collapse depicted in the fictions is much closer to the present than we might be comfortable with. As such, temporal cues create narratives of environmental collapse on a medium scale, a scale that might be much more effective than the large scale frequently called for. In focusing on time, this chapter forms a counterpart to both Chapter 4, which emphasizes the spatial dimensions of polar narratives, as well as Chapter 2, in which time is explored as a key feature of pastoral narratives. Indeed, pastoral and environmental collapse are two sides of the same coin: pastoral is often framed by nostalgia and a connection to the past, whereas environmental collapse, even though it has become our present, is often explicitly discussed in terms of the future. Moreover, pastoral is popularly

associated with retreat to an idealized landscape, while environmental collapse brings disaster and destruction and the realization that the ideal is forever lost.

What Marie-Laure Ryan terms 'the principle of minimal departure' is central to the process of determining the temporal setting of *Cloud Atlas*, *The Carhullan Army* and *The Island at the End of the World*, especially when explicit clues aren't (immediately) given. Ryan argues that readers use their own world and environment as the starting point for understanding a narrative and its world: 'we construe the central world of a textual universe … as conforming as far as possible to our representation of AW [the actual or real world]. We will project upon these worlds everything we know about reality, and we will make only the adjustments dictated by the text' (1992: 51). *Cloud Atlas* consists of six stories, of which the first two are set in the past, the middle two more or less in the present, and the final two in the future. While the principle of minimal departure plays a role in the way readers determine the settings of all six stories, the two future sections are most interesting in respect to the environmental collapse they suggest will happen in the initial readers' future. In the first of the two future stories – 'An Orison of Sonmi~451' – the reader is quickly transported into the future world when she is confronted with concepts unknown in the contemporary world, such as a 'silver egg-shaped device … called an orison' (Mitchell 2004: 187). Another temporal cue that transports readers into the future are the first words of the section: 'Historians still unborn will appreciate your cooperation in the future' (Mitchell 2004: 187). The rest of the narrative confirms that Sonmi's story is set a few centuries into the future, as readers encounter androids, a world largely uninhabitable and a language in which brand names have become generic. Indeed, throughout the entire section, language plays on the principle of minimal departure: the reader recognizes words such as 'nikes', 'nikons' and 'disneys' and deducts that these have become the words for shoes, cameras and films. By making brand names generic, the story achieves an uncanny sense of familiarity, transporting the reader into a future that is both recognizable and strange. In the sixth and temporally most distant story of *Cloud Atlas*, 'Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After', language is one of the clearest markers of futurity as well. In the future, this section of the novel suggests, language has eroded, as the first sentence demonstrates: 'Old Georgie's path an' mine crossed more times'n I'm comfy

mem'rying', an' after I'm died, no sayin' what that fangy devil won't try an' do to me' (Mitchell 2004: 249). The story is being told by Zachry's son – though from Zachry's perspective – demonstrating how in novels such as *Cloud Atlas*, *The Carhullan Army* and *The Island at the End of the World*, '[t]he present is the object of a future memory' (Currie 2010: 5). Incidentally, the future sections in *Cloud Atlas* aren't the only ones that make the reader expect future disaster. In the sections set in the past, historic settings and events become markers for the future themselves. From the beginning of the novel onwards, characters such as Adam Ewing, the protagonist of the first story, remark on the destruction seemingly inherent to the human race. The readers of the novel are aware of Ewing's future and can thereby interpret his remarks as a kind of prophecy – not only in terms of the initial readers' past, but also in terms of their future.

In *The Carhullan Army* and *The Island at the End of the World* fewer cues are given as to the temporal setting of the textual world. In both novels, I want to argue, the representation of future environmental collapse depends on the way in which the principle of minimal departure is used. In fact, both novels play with this principle, by rarely or not at all making explicit when exactly they are set, and therefore how far into the future the reader has to travel to access the textual world. The effect of this is that the novels create an eerie sense of immediacy in which far-reaching environmental collapse and various sociopolitical crises can never be safely relegated to the more distant future. In the absence of a structure of the kind in *Cloud Atlas*, the reader of *The Carhullan Army* has to rely more on temporal cues. Hall's novel begins with a notice about a transcript – 'record no.498' – that has been recovered (Hall 2007: loc. 6). A link is hence created here between the future of the narrative – a time in which the record is recovered – and the time in which the novel is set. A doubling of the future takes place, as it were, where a future is added to the narrative set in the reader's future. Initially, however, few clues are provided to suggest the temporal setting. The first pages describe that the prisoner – 'Sister' – was the last woman to go looking for Carhullan and that she left an as-yet unspecified place in 'a wet rotting October' (Hall 2007: loc. 20). When a cue does appear that suggests the narrative is set in the future, it is a cue that connects political collapse to environmental collapse: 'Each year after the Civil Reorganisation summer's humidity had lasted longer, pushing the colder seasons into a smaller section of the calendar, surrounding us constantly with

the smog of rape and tar-sand burning off, and all of us packed tightly together like fish in a smoking shed' (Hall 2007: loc. 28). Interestingly, when musing on the weather, the narrator adds another temporal dimension, one that brings the setting of the narrative even closer to that of the actual world that the novel's initial readers inhabit. Sister remembers her childhood in which the weather had been cooler, the seasons more distinct: 'I still recall the fresh ticking of hail on my face in March as I stood to catch the bus for school. And autumn blusters, when objects large and small were bellowed back and forth. The deep-vein chill of January' (Hall 2007: loc. 28.) Only later, by piecing together Sister's family history and particularly the passing down of a gun from the Second World War, can the reader approximate when the novel is set. When she leaves the city for Carhullan, Sister packs an old Second World War gun that used to belong to her father. He held on to it in spite of the weapons amnesty, telling her that this gun used to belong to her great-grandfather who was at Osterley, site of the training school of the Home Guard. Depending on the length of a generation, Sister's great-grandfather serving in the Second World War would place the novel in the 2040s or early 2050s.[8] A later reference to events at the turn of the century makes the earlier date more likely. On her hike to Carhullan Sister walks through a village she visited with her father on one of their hikes when she was a child. It had consisted of a working school and farms that 'had survived the troubles at the turn of the century' (Hall 2007: loc. 273). Given the abandonment of the village in the novel's present, and the rapid decline of the countryside and its settlements, it seems more likely that Sister saw the school and farms at a date closer to the turn of the century – perhaps in the early 2020s – than at a later date, for instance in the late 2030s.[9] Both dates are only a few decades from the novel's publication in 2007 and the initial readers' actual world in the late 2000s or early 2010s.

Passages like the one about the abandoned village emphasize that the textual world of Hall's novel is an extension of the actual world of the novel's first readers. This sense of extension is further foregrounded by a reference to flags of the United States and the United Kingdom hanging from the same flagpole (Hall 2007: loc. 422). In the *Carhullan Army*, the United Kingdom has become largely dependent on American food and is 'little more than a dependent colony' (Hall 2007: loc. 483). Contemporary readers will recognize the sense of connection between the two flags – and two nations – as an echo

of the unequivocal, and heavily criticized, support of the United Kingdom for the United States during both the war in Afghanistan, started in 2001, and that in Iraq, started in 2003. Further cues to the recognizable, actual world of the readers are provided by references to the The Hague Tribunal (Hall 2007: loc. 2467) and a region Sister's father's generation had called the Lake District (Hall 2007: loc. 105). The weather, too, befits that of a world similar to our own, as well as the extensive flooding predicted for our future. The sense of immediacy that the novel achieves depends not only on temporal cues – through which the reader may interpret Sister's world as similar to her own – but also spatial cues. References to the Lake District and towns in Cumbria contribute to the eerie proximity the novel suggests to its first readers' present. The sense of familiarity that the landscape in *The Carhullan Army* evokes is also a result of narrative layering: underneath the narrative of environmental collapse is that of the pastoral. The dystopian landscape of Hall's novel, Deborah Lilley argues, relies on the pastoral conventions it presents and disrupts (2016: 65). Or, in the context of this chapter, the environmental collapse narrative intersects with and builds on that of the pastoral. Essentially, the novel develops the tension between past and present, ideal and reality that, as I explore in Chapter 2, is so central to pastoral. Lilley, too, acknowledges that the pastoral may be made productive in a time of climate crisis or environmental collapse. In *The Carhullan Army*, the dystopian pastoral landscape, she argues, might even point to ecological alternatives.[10] The novel, then, is not only an apt example of what I term 'the narrative of environmental collapse'. It also foregrounds the connections between the environmental collapse narrative and that of the pastoral and, importantly, how the pastoral narrative frequently underpins, runs parallel to or intersects with narratives more readily associated with climate crisis.

While there are differences between the readers' actual world and the textual world of *The Carhullan Army*, these are hardly explicitly flagged by the narrator, and never explained in much detail. Readers learn that a collapse of some sort happened, that there are food shortages and wars, that the countryside is largely abandoned and forced population control is the norm. By never explaining what has happened, *The Carhullan Army* replicates some of the epistemological uncertainty characteristic of a time of climate crisis. Much as in *The Carhullan Army*, the temporal setting of *The Island at the End*

of the World is also never made explicit, but the epistemological uncertainty characterizing Hall's novel is largely absent here. Indeed, the title of the work itself provides a spatial and temporal cue that suggests that the novel is set either far away ('at the end of the world' as a spatial cue), or in a (distant) future in which the world as the novels' initial readers know it is about to end. Taylor's novel begins with a diary entry, written by the main character – the father – in the Biblical language typical of him. He writes of an unspecified enemy coming nearer the island where they live. Within the first ten lines, the reader is told that the father and his children have been living on the island 'since the Great Flood seven springtimes ago' and that unlike the rest of the world, they are 'UNCONTAMINATED' (Taylor 2009: 3, original emphasis). References to this Great Flood continue throughout the novel: Finn, one of the children, mentions the 'befor' world' (Taylor 2009: 8) in his own erratic writing, and the father thinks of his own parents, who must have drowned in the 'great wave that crashed down on us' (Taylor 2009: 16). While it is made apparent almost from the start what happened, when exactly the novel is set is not made explicit, although it can be roughly deduced. The world on the island bears similarities to the actual world of the early twenty-first century: the father owns a computer which is powered by means of solar panels, although he hides it from his children, and his secret library contains the Don DeLillo novels *White Noise* (1985) and *Underworld* (1997), amongst other works. The temporal setting of the novel can be approximated through a reference the father makes to the first flood he experienced as a five-year-old. The post-apocalyptic landscape he remembers echoes images of Hurricane Katrina, in 2005. If the father is in his late-thirties to mid-forties in the novel – he had a job for a few years, and his eldest daughter is a teenager – and he was born in 2000, the novel is set around the 2040s. This too is a date close to the initial readers' actual world. The sense of proximity to the first readers' actual world is moreover achieved through the novel's genre. As a story about a family stranded on an island, it echoes not only that of Noah's flood but also Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and the popular books and television series about the *Swiss Family Robinson*. In Taylor's novel, the narrative of exploration, in some form, underpins the narrative of environmental collapse, much as the pastoral narrative does in *The Carhullan Army*. Indeed, as I explore in the final chapter of this book, exploration and environmental collapse are closely connected,

the former not infrequently leading to the latter. In *The Island at the End of the World*, environmental collapse supposedly leads to exploration: to the search for – albeit only for a number of years – an idyllic place of escape. Yet towards the end of the novel, the environmental collapse narrative is turned upside-down. As I discuss in more detail below, the father's stories of the flood are false. He created the island he and his children live on himself, by flooding a large piece of land. Their mother, who he told them was dead, is still alive, having left him before he created the island. Although the Great Flood the father speaks of echoes historical and existing floods, and predictions of the future, it not being true in the world of the novel also destabilizes the narrative of environmental collapse *The Island at the End of the World* seems to be telling.

Textual cues are not the only way in which narratives transport readers into the future. In *Cloud Atlas*, the reader is also led to believe that Sonmi's and Zachry's narratives are set in the future because of the structure of the novel: the first two narratives are set in the past, the next two in the present and the final two in the future. Having read two sections set in the past, followed by two set more or less in the present – the 1970s and 2000s, respectively – the reader naturally expects to now read two narratives about the future, or at least is more likely to interpret the final two narratives as set in the future. This conclusion is supported by the textual cues in Sonmi's and Zachry's narratives that I explored above. The novel's representation of time, however, is also significant to how the reader interprets the consequences of social, environmental and political collapse in especially the temporally more distant narratives. Indeed, the structure of the novel has variously led critics to interpret the narrative either as hopeful or more pessimistic of the future. *Cloud Atlas*' structure has been described as 'Russian-doll like', as depicting a 'boomeranging arc' (Hicks 2010: par. 4), as resembling an ouroboros, the snake or dragon eating its own tail (Dimovitz 2015: 77; Ng 2015: 107) and, by the novel itself, as a 'sextet of overlapping soloists' (Mitchell 2004: 463).[11] Halfway through each story, it is suddenly interrupted and followed by the next. The sixth story is the exception to this: 'Sloosha's Crossin'' is told in full. Then, as Ian Baucom aptly puts it, having taken its reader into the distant future, the novel 'pivots back in time … to hunt for clues of what has made Zachry's long-Anthropocene ruinous present' (2015: 151). Following Zachry's full story, the second half of Sonmi's is provided, followed by the second half of Timothy Cavendish's story set in the

2000s, and so on until the final section, made up of the second half of the story that the novel started with, Adam Ewing's nineteenth-century travel journal. Most critics agree that the novel's cyclical structure is a way of going 'beyond' or offering an alternative to conventional linear conceptions of time. As Gerd Bayer suggests, '*Cloud Atlas* refuses to submit to the linearity of temporal developments' (2015: 345). A similar argument is made by Heather Hicks, who points out that the cyclicality of the narrative creates connections between the narratives that a linear narrative would perhaps not foreground. One of these connections is the setting of the chronologically first and final narratives: both Adam Ewing's travel journal and Zachry's oral narrative are set in the Pacific (Hicks 2010: par. 26), and Pacific cultures, Lynda Ng notes, frequently take a non-linear approach to temporality, as the novel does (2015: 119).

Interpretations of *Cloud Atlas* as cyclical depend on foregrounding the *syuzhet* rather than the novel's *fabula*. Only if readers interpret the novel as it is told, i.e. as it is constructed (*syuzhet*), is the narrative cyclical. If not, and the novel is read chronologically, it ends with Zachry's oral narrative, an ending that holds little to look forward to for the future of humanity. A reading focusing on the *syuzhet* makes the comments that Adam Ewing makes at the end of the novel prophetic of the future but also of the novel's previous sections, since this future is told before the final part of Ewing's diary is offered. In the final pages of his journal – and the novel – Ewing contemplates the fate of humankind: 'one fine day, a purely predatory race *shall* consume itself… Is this entropy written in our nature?' (Mitchell 2004: 528, original emphasis). This comment is prophetic: read chronologically, according to the *fabula*, the six narratives of *Cloud Atlas* indeed form a record of entropy, in which human civilization eventually runs down. Consequently, 'humanity is caught up in an entropic cyclicality that is fated to repeat itself' (Shaw 2015: 111). Like Adam Ewing's, the final story of the novel similarly touches on issues of predacity and greed. Zachry's tribe is visited by Meronym, a Prescient, a group of people who seem to have retained some knowledge of the world before it collapsed. When Zachry asks her what caused this collapse, she tells him that the 'Old'uns' 'tripped their own fall' with their 'hunger for more' (Mitchell 2004: 286) – much as the apocalyptic events in the five other narratives are caused by human hunger. Meronym's comment, consequently, reveals both the historical past, as well as the parts of the novel that the reader has yet to read. Her remark, particularly

given her status, also suggests a prophecy about the future after 'Sloosha's Crossin'', in which continuing human greed will cause ever more destruction. Nonetheless, some critics suggest that 'Sloosha's Crossin'' leaves room for humankind's survival. To Kristian Shaw, *Cloud Atlas*' structure suggests a revision of the future, producing 'an overriding framework which confronts the crises inherited from history, incorporated … as redirected hopes for the future' (2015: 111). Hicks similarly interprets the novel's *syuzhet* or structure as providing a way out of apocalypse: 'through its basic structure, *Cloud Atlas* invites us to consider how cyclical understandings of time might serve as a way out of apocalyptic events, since this is what the book itself enacts' (2010: par. 8).[12] The connection between cyclicality and hope is emphasized by Peter Childs and James Green, who note that '[i]f, during the first half of the text, humanity appears to be shackled to its apocalyptic destiny … the reversal of this forward momentum opens up an alternative perspective' (2011: 35). This 'alternative perspective', they suggest, means that 'the novel argues the case for ethical choices made by individuals and societies reasserting the potential for enlightened political agency' (Childs and Green 2011: 35). In other words, they propose that 'Sloosha's Crossin's' world of tribal warfare after 'the Fall' implies that Zachry and his tribe put the knowledge gained from Meronym to the betterment of humanity, making *Cloud Atlas* a narrative of progress along the lines of such narratives idealized by Ewing's mid-nineteenth-century contemporaries. Yet, none of these critics take into account that while *Cloud Atlas*' structure may suggest cyclicality, its chronology doesn't. In terms of its *fabula*, the novel is open-ended, leading to nothing but to the orison with Sonmi's confession, which Zachry's children hold in their hand at the end of the narrative. Even a cyclical view of the novel cannot obscure the record of crisis, entropy and human greed that the stories form. Furthermore, at the end of Zachry's section, which is, no matter how the novel is interpreted, set furthest in the distance, the odds of humanity surviving are bleak. A mysterious disease is sweeping a world ridden by tribal violence, and even though Zachry's children have survived long enough to tell his story to a group of other people, nothing suggests that there is in fact hope – except the novel's structure, which then returns to what is essentially the past, bringing home yet again how the societal, political and environmental collapse of Zachry's world came about. In terms of environmental collapse, *Cloud Atlas*, then, doesn't only suggest that

humanity will eventually essentially destroy itself – emphasizing the novel's theme of cannibalism and predacity – but also that, as Bayer proposes, 'the kind of apocalypse traditionally envisioned as an event to be encountered in the future is, in effect, already taking place' (2015: 345).[13]

In essence, *Cloud Atlas* sketches environmental collapse as both something enduring and recurring, in the past, present and future. Imagining the future in terms of the past is a tactic frequently employed in crisis discourse, as the resurfacing of apocalyptic narratives in various different settings demonstrates. This technique, which holds the middle between analepsis – flashback – and prolepsis – flashforward – is applied in similar ways in *The Carhullan Army* and *The Island at the End of the World*. Both novels describe floods: in *The Carhullan Army* the narrator notes the swelling rivers and increased flooding after the Civil Reorganisation, and in Taylor's novel the flood motivates much of the narrative. Indeed, the father styles himself as a contemporary Noah – he even calls the ship he and his children live on 'the ark'. Floods are a powerful image of climate crisis and, as Adam Trexler writes, 'the dominant literary strategy for locating climate change' (2015: 82). The strength of the flood image as part of the environmental collapse narrative is that it is both a recognizable image lodged in readers' cultural memory, as well as projected for the future by climatologists. Moreover, the kinds of scenes described by Sister in *The Carhullan Army* are rapidly becoming all too familiar to British readers in the early twenty-first century. Sister talks of how the river Eden, in Cumbria, has broken its banks in the rains and the cottages in the villages are window-deep in the river's current. Floods have become common in Sister's world: she mentions smelling 'the *familiar* smell of flooded homes', of wet mortar, fabric and silt (Hall 2007: loc. 102, emphasis mine). Indeed, in recent years, the river Eden has frequently flooded – by which the narrative blurs not only the temporal but also the spatial distance between the world of the text and that of the reader. As the readers' actual world is catching up to the textual world of especially *The Carhullan Army*, and to a lesser extent *The Island at the End of the World*, the future is becoming the present, and the lines between the projected crisis and the actual crisis we might be living are further blurred. Sketching a future that is an extension of the present and which corresponds to projections of the future consequently closes the gap between future and present. It also brings the large scale of environmental collapse to the medium scale of human

experiences and brings home the reality of environmental collapse much more than a novel that depicts a future that is less familiar and further away does. Yet whereas they use narratives and storytelling as a technique for depicting environmental collapse, all three novels also destabilize the role that narratives play in this respect.

The problem with narratives

While the ecocritical and environmental humanities' search for 'new narratives' sounds promising and necessary in a time of climate crisis, I'd argue that this much-repeated suggestion is more complex, and significantly more problematic, than scholars usually propose. The challenge goes beyond the challenge to devise narratives capable of representing the scale and complexity of environmental crisis. Rather, it lies in the nature of narratives themselves. Cognitive narratologists have long argued that stories help us make sense of the world. Since stories, as Herman puts it, 'furnish an optimal environment for making sense of what goes on by allowing circumstances and events to be dovetailed with the intentions, desires, and experiences of persons or, more broadly, intelligent agents' (2002: 73)[14] narratives are ideally suited for representing and coming to terms with environmental collapse. As Baucom argues, following Donna Haraway's work on companion species, relation is a vital element in our understanding of climate crisis. Fictional lives – characters – he suggests, embody these relations (2015: 154). Yet stories, and characters, can also – wilfully or by accident – distort reality or otherwise mislead the reader. Stories can be manipulated, altered and (partly) destroyed, which hardly makes them the kind of stable and uncomplicated entities the term 'new narratives of nature' suggests. In *Cloud Atlas*, *The Carhullan Army* and *The Island at the End of the World*, the dominant narrative of environmental collapse is explored especially through the novels' problematization of narratives. In various ways, all three novels give centrality to storytelling and narratives while challenging the function of narratives and the role they might play in imagining environmental collapse. To put it differently, the novels affirm the ecocritical and environmental humanities argument that climate crisis is a failure of the imagination (e.g. Garrard 2009: 709; Kerridge 1998: 4)

while destabilizing these arguments. Narratives, they suggest, are inherently unreliable, corruptible and unstable.

The most obvious way in which *Cloud Atlas* emphasizes narrativity is through the novel's combination of six different stories and six different genres.[15] The different genres in particular draw attention to the extent in which our experience of the world is narrated – and shaped by the form, or genre, that our narratives take. 'Half-Lives – The First Luisa Rey Mystery', the third section, is an apt example of the effect of genre on the depiction of environmental collapse. The story is set in the United States in 1975, a time when fear of nuclear disaster and war intersect with the burgeoning environmental movement. Luisa Rey is a young reporter investigating the construction of a new nuclear reactor by the Seaboard Corporation. When she discovers that the corporation building the plant is trying to cover up a report that deems the new reactor unsafe, her own life is threatened and some of the scientists contributing to the report are killed. This section of *Cloud Atlas* is written as a crime thriller, a genre whose aims and characteristics to some extent coincide with those of environmental discourse. One of the genre's features is that, as David Glover notes, 'the *scale* of the threat [in the crime thriller] may appear to be vast, its ramifications immeasurable and boundless' (2003: 138, original emphasis). Both nuclear crisis and environmental collapse are vast in scope, and their effects – particularly when it comes to environmental collapse – are unpredictable. Moreover, the crime thriller lends itself well to the kind of story told in 'Half-Lives' because, unlike the detective novel – which, according to Julian Symons, expresses conservative social attitudes – the crime thriller is 'often radical in the sense of questioning some aspect of law, justice or the way in which society is run' (Symons 1992: 163). Consequently, the genre creates a space in which governments, corporations and the status quo can be challenged, for instance, by the environmental activists who, on their campsite near the power plant, literally inhabit an outside position that allows them to critique those in power.

The role that narratives play in how we interpret the world is most explicitly addressed in *The Island at the End of the World*. The father in Taylor's novel allows his children to read only a book of fairy tales, the Bible and a collection of Shakespeare's works, depending on their age. These works literally shape how they perceive and interpret the world. Alice, the oldest daughter, has

had doubts about the sea surrounding their island actually being a sea for a while. Her doubts are founded in Shakespeare's works: 'in Shakespeare the sea's always moving. There are waves and tides and tempests and … in Shakespeare the sea has a special smell, it makes a special sound' (Taylor 2009: 142), whereas the body of water surrounding their island is calm and still, without the briny, salty smell of the sea. Her strictly religious father, conversely, interprets Alice's disobedience in terms of the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Bible. When Will, the father's nephew, unexpectedly arrives on the island, the father tries to keep his children from discovering the truth about the world: that there was no flood and that the children's mother is still alive. Alice, however, is curious: she is always 'wanting yearning needing to KNOW' (Taylor 2009: 54, original emphasis), much like Eve in the Bible. When Will and Alice fall in love, the father interprets this as a betrayal on the scale of the sin committed by Adam and Eve in Genesis. His subsequent description of discovering Alice and Will together merges his actual experience with a God-like focalization in which he borrows from the book of Genesis:

> At an easy pace I move forward. And they heard the voice of the Father walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Will and Alice hide themselves from the presence of the Father amongst the trees of the garden. And the Father called unto. But no, I keep silent, and walk on, until I reach the sunflowers … And the Father said to Alice, WHAT IS THIS THAT THOU HAST DONE?
>
> (Taylor 2009: 112; 113, original emphasis)

His God-like perspective and the religious lens through which he sees the world become a legitimization for the act the father subsequently commits. Much like God expelled Adam and Eve from paradise – and made them mortal – he kills Alice and Will.

Especially through the father's interpretation of the present in terms of the Bible, the novel addresses the danger of interpreting the future in terms of the past. By practising a kind of Biblical exegesis, and framing his daughter's relationship with Will in terms of Adam and Eve, he projects the essential failure of the Biblical narrative unto his own life, and that of his children. In her father's eyes, Alice commits Eve's sin, by having a sexual relationship with

Will and searching for more information – more knowledge – about the true reason for the flood. In other words, the father's attempts to create a paradise for himself and his children is founded on the failure of Biblical paradise. While we may, as Dipesh Chakrabarty puts it, 'normally envisage the future with the help of the same faculty that allows us to picture the past' (2009: 197), doing so is not without risk. In the novel, the position of narratives as reliable entities is even further destabilized when Will's arrival demonstrates that the entire world didn't flood. While this is the story that he had been telling his children, it turns out that the father flooded a large plot of land when his children were little, in the belief that this would save them from a wicked world. In *The Island at the End of the World*, then, narratives and storytelling play a role in both the establishment and destabilization of a potentially environmental collapse narrative. Moreover, it could even be argued that the destabilization of the collapse narrative in this novel foregrounds the extent to which climate discourse relies on narrativity in order to bring across a message of environmental crisis. Narratives, the novel suggests, might always be corrupted, or severely coloured. This shows for example in Daisy's interpretation of events. As the youngest of the children, she is also allowed to read only fairy tales and hence frames the world in terms of those stories. She interprets Alice's sin – and eventual murder by her father – not in terms of the Biblical fall, and thereby as an ending, but as just another passage in a fairy tale. Consequently, she comforts her father towards the end of the novel by telling him that 'Evry things go-ing to be all right. This is the bad part of the story but its go-ing to get better you no it is. Weare all go-ing to live haply/Everafter' (Taylor 2009: 215).

Libraries, as collections of narratives, feature explicitly in all three novels: the father's secret library in his cabin in *The Island at the End of the World*, the library Sonmi has access to after her escape from the diner in *Cloud Atlas*, and the library at Carhullan, the farm building to which the protagonist flees in *The Carhullan Army*. Indeed, by including six different stories and six different genres *Cloud Atlas* is itself a collection of stories that demonstrates the effect that, as I suggested above, the choice of genre has on depictions of the environment. In all three novels, narratives also fulfil another function: libraries in the works provide a link to the (pre-collapse) past, but also foreshadow (possible) events in both the initial reader's future and in the characters' future. In both *The Island at the End of the World* and Sonmi's narrative in *Cloud Atlas*, the books are of

the dystopian kind: Sonmi encounters books by Orwell and Huxley (Mitchell 2004: 220), while the father's library in Taylor's novel verges between survival manuals – the *US Army Survival Manual* – and the dystopian – Don DeLillo's *White Noise* – with the tongue-in-cheek addition of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (Taylor 2009: 45). The selection on the shelves of Carhullan's library is less obviously dystopian. In her first days at the farm, Sister reads Lawrence's *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (Hall 2007: loc. 1696) and later discovers books by Osgood, Fuller and Douhet (Hall 2007: loc. 2209). These four authors and their works point to the past, both prior to the novel's publication and the characters' past, the narrative's present and the future. *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*'s account of the First World War serves as a reminder of the wars of the past, and the introduction of global warfare. Richard Buckminster Fuller's use of the concept Spaceship Earth prefigures the initial readers' future, and sheds light on the textual world's past. In *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* (1968), Fuller proposes that earth is a spaceship with a finite amount of resources: resources that in *The Carhullan Army* have largely run out and that are decreasing in the early twenty-first century. The name Osgood might refer to the head of UNIT – the United Taskforce Intelligence – in the science fiction series *Doctor Who*. By including this name in a list of authors in the real world outside of the novel, *The Carhullan Army* blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction, in much a similar way in which the temporal distance and proximity to the reader's presence creates a blurring of the boundaries between the first readers' future and their present. Finally, the mention of Giulio Douhet prefigures Sister's future, and potentially also that of the readers. The group of women Sister joins at Carhullan have secluded themselves completely from society, yet are planning a revolt. This insurgence is described in the final pages of the novel. Little is made known about the Carhullan Army's actions at this point, but Sister's account gives some sense of what took place:

> I was a willing participant in the siege on Rith, and the occupation of Authority headquarters. I led the patrol that bombed the clinic and I gave armed support to attacks on three other targets, including the refinery and the railway station. I do not know how many men I have killed. We regretted the civilian casualties and civilian deaths that occurred in the first few weeks of the conflict.
>
> (Hall 2007: loc. 2741)

An Italian general, Douhet is best known for his belief that during war a quick victory can be won by an early air attack on the enemy's vital centres. The civilian population, he argued, must also be directly targeted. The mention of Douhet's name around three-quarters into the novel hence prefigures the attack on Rith: although it is not made clear whether the Carhullan Army has the means to attack the town from the air, their targeting of the Authority headquarters, clinic, refinery and railway station, as well as Sister's mention of civilian casualties, is a nod towards Douhet's theory. For the reader, the books at Carhullan consequently come to serve as connections between her own period and that of Sister – and provide a frightening image of the societal and environmental collapse that awaits.

While serving as a connection to the past, a foreshadowing of the future and an explanation for what has gone wrong, books also serve another purpose in the novels. In fact, the emphasis on narratives and books functions as a legitimation of novels and their significance in the world as well as affirming the environmental humanities project. Literary works, Derek Attridge argues, may offer consolation to readers, especially 'when the experience of the work enables the reader to reconceive his or her situation' (2004: 77). Attridge here echoes cognitive narratologists' argument that narratives help make sense of the world. Yet his suggestion may also be used as a rationale for exploring novels depicting climate crisis, as I do in this book. Most significantly, however, he aims to legitimize literary works. The three novels I explore in this chapter participate in this legitimation, and have a vested interest in it. Yet at the same time they challenge, even undermine, the importance and role of narratives by showing how narratives can be manipulated and by emphasizing the frequently distorting influence narratives can have on our perceptions of the world. Consequently, the loss of written narratives becomes a symbol, even a synecdoche, for the loss of Western civilization. Not only do the novels hereby legitimize their own position and significance as guardians of civilization, they also use the most definite end they can depict – the end of the very language and narratives novels are made of – as a powerful representation of environmental collapse and even the end of humanity.

In *Cloud Atlas*, *The Carhullan Army* and *The Island at the End of the World*, the loss of knowledge, written narratives and language go hand in hand with a (supposed) societal and cultural collapse. *The Carhullan Army* is structured as

a series of records, some complete, some partly destroyed, in which Sister talks about her life at Carhullan and, in sparse detail, the attack on Rith. The further the reader progresses in the novel, the less material becomes available. What exactly happened in Rith and how Sister has come to be – as we can assume – questioned about her activities remains unknown. She herself provides the reason for that: all official records were destroyed by the women of the Carhullan Army (Hall 2007: loc. 2747), and supposedly all other records are also incomplete. At the same time, Sister's story, fragmented as it is, is presented as significant. It is important, Carhullan's leader tells her, to 'tell them about us. Tell them everything about us, Sister. Make them understand what we did and who we were. Make them see' (Hall 2007: loc. 2738). The records and the story she tells are consequently a way in which she both reveals and obscures: with the destruction of all records, the census has been wiped as well and the woman who identifies herself as 'Sister' tells her supposed interrogator: 'You will not find out who I am. I have no status. No one does' (Hall 2007: loc. 2747). At the same time, her actions have weakened the regime, which may have led to more chaos and insecurity. The record of Sister's interrogation echoes a similar story in *Cloud Atlas*, that of Sonmi~451. After her arrest for activities that undermine the totalitarian regime in which she lives, a so-called archivist records her story. As in *The Carhullan Army*, the importance of the narrative and of recording is emphasized: 'Historians still unborn will appreciate your cooperation in the future, Sonmi~451. We archivists thank you in the present' (Mitchell 2004: 187). A similar impulse surfaces in *The Island at the End of the World* in which the father keeps a diary because, he writes, 'I knew I had to leave them [his children] some clue to their past, to the nature of the world beyond this island' (Taylor 2009: 31). Yet while in Taylor's novel the father's diary provides the only truth, since everything he tells his children is a lie, a surprising twist occurs at the end of Sonmi's (filmed) narrative. She tells the baffled archivist that everything that happened to her was part of a 'theatrical production' (Mitchell 2004: 363), scripted by those in charge, hence making her not a resistance fighter, but a knowing ploy of the regime. The story that the reader had taken for real for hundreds of pages is suddenly overturned and any belief in the transparency or reliability of narratives challenged.

The trouble of recording stories and knowledge is even further complicated when the medium most commonly used in Western culture – the written

word – is lost. This connection between written narratives and civilization is not unique to the three novels I discuss in this chapter. In his discussion of twenty-first-century dystopian fiction, Peter Boxall notes that at the heart of this fiction 'is the perception that the narrative mechanics which have allowed us to negotiate our being in the world, to inherit our pasts and to bequeath our accumulated wisdom to the future, have failed' (2013: 217). *Cloud Atlas* presents an explicit correlation between on the one hand the faith in the written words that underpin much of Western civilization and on the other hand population collapse. In Zachry's section, the final story of the novel, scientific and cultural knowledge, including of what came before, has largely been lost. Only a tribe known as the Prescients has retained some of the knowledge of the 'Ancients', but for illiterate tribesmen such as Zachry this is unavailable. What remains in 'Sloosha's Crossin'' is instead an oral narrative, characteristic of the way in which civilization has reverted to a pre-literature, pre-civilized state. Hicks recognizes that *Cloud Atlas*' use of letters, diaries and other types of narratives 'can be read to comment on the role the loss of the written word may play in global collapse' (2010: par. 44), but is unsure about why the dissolution of literacy matters, since in the novel 'the reading of the narratives – or even the viewing of the media – has little or no effect on the unfolding of events' (2010: par. 45). Indeed, within the world of the novel, the different types of texts or the forms that the stories take may perhaps not play much of a role. On the level of the novel as a whole, however, the loss of literacy is a way in which the novel legitimizes itself as an important form. To put it differently, the novel's progression into a time in which the written word has been largely lost, coincidentally also a time of massive societal collapse, positively correlates written narratives – especially literature – with the continued existence of civilization. However, the novel complicates this reading in several ways. Zachry's section, for instance, is the only of the six sections that is – as far as the reader knows – edited. Unlike in the five other stories, we don't get Zachry's unmediated story, even though it's a first-person narrative. Instead, his son is the one who tells the story to his children and tribesmen. The loss of written narratives as symbolizing the loss of civilization is moreover a very Western perspective that leaves out both non-Western civilization and the rich tradition of non-Western oral narratives. Such a neglect of oral narratives over written narratives is also apparent in criticism. Boxall, for instance, refers to Atwood's

Oryx and Crake and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* as two novels in which 'the exhaustion of narrative is the corollary to the death of the planet' (2013: 217), not acknowledging that in both oral narratives survive. Emphasizing written narratives as more valuable than oral narratives also belies the importance that narratology assigns to all narratives as important tools for sense making. In a culture dominated by the written word, oral narratives might function as resistance, or an alternative to a culture that is alien and even destructive. The turn to oral culture in the final section of *Cloud Atlas*, then, may also tie in with a critique of Western civilization that runs through especially Adam Ewing's journal that bookends the novel. In his descriptions of the Chatman Islands, Ewing is particularly perceptive about the destructive results of colonialism and of Western civilization. The loss of Western civilization in the most distant of *Cloud Atlas*' six stories, then, might not be such a bad thing.

The oral future that *Cloud Atlas* envisions, however, leaves little room for the novel as a genre. The novels discussed in this chapter hence employ other strategies to depict the end of humankind as corollary to the end of narratives. Paradoxically, in doing so they both attempt to legitimize the novel as an important vehicle for environmental collapse narratives while destabilizing it. Language entropy or erosion of the kind that takes place in both Sonmi's and Zachry's stories is an example of the end of narratives coinciding with societal and environmental collapse.[16] Nowhere in the novel is language so explicitly foregrounded as in 'An Orison of Sonmi~451' and 'Sloosha's Crossin''. In Sonmi's narrative, a commodification of language has taken place, in which brand names have become nouns: shoes are 'nikes', coffee is 'starbucks' and cars are 'fords'. Spelling has also simplified – 'slightly' has become 'slitely' for instance – a development that is exaggerated in Zachry's narrative. The final 'g' in words ending in '–ing' is routinely dropped, leading to, for instance, 'fishin'', 'clackin'' and 'boilin''. In much the same way, 'and' has become 'an' and 'finally' and 'family' have become 'fin'ly' and 'fam'ly', respectively. The simplification, or erosion, of language is extensive. The frequent use of parenthesis in words such as 'und'stand', ''mazement' and 'barb'ric' suggests an almost literal falling apart of the language, much more than a natural development inherent to languages. In this respect, *Cloud Atlas* uses a technique that Joshua Masters also identifies in McCarthy's *The Road* in which the end of language is employed as a means of imagining the end of the world (2012: 114). Through 'death of language',

Boxall suggests, *The Road* 'traces a vast sundering between word and world, between historical form and unnameable present, an unloving time without precedent and without succession' (2013: 218) – an argument that could very well be applied to *Cloud Atlas* and *The Island at the End of the World* too. In the latter novel, the idiosyncratic language of Daisy and Finn strengthens the idea that the reader – along with the majority of the characters – is led to believe: that what we are perceiving in the novel is the end of the world. Without written language, these novels suggest, we have little left to interpret the world with. Entropy is consequently employed in *Cloud Atlas* and *The Island at the End of the World* as a metafictional device that illustrates the confusion of environmental collapse, and the future that awaits. As such, it may well be the most powerful device that written narratives have at their disposal. Much more so than telling the reader about the effects of environmental collapse, *Cloud Atlas* and *The Island at the End of the World* foreground confusion and dissolution by breaking up language, the very thing that the textual world is made up of, and the only thing that gives the reader access to it.

<div align="center">*</div>

Environmental collapse as depicted in *Cloud Atlas*, *The Carhullan Army* and *The Island at the End of the World* takes various forms: floods are a recurrent feature, as are sociopolitical and economic instabilities. In *Cloud Atlas*, Sonmi talks about large parts of the world that have been poisoned so extensively that they have become inhabitable, and a large pandemic is killing off what remains of humanity in Zachry's narrative. By blurring the line between present and future and playing on the principle of minimal departure, the three novels employ realism to bring the large scale of environmental crisis down to the smaller scale of human understanding. I would argue that especially their reflexivity, their use of metafictional techniques such as language erosion and their challenge to the role of narratives make these novels most interesting, particularly from an ecocritical and environmental humanities perspective.

   Novels such as those explored in this chapter invite a more critical ecocritical approach that focuses on the possibilities and limitations of narratives. This approach shows that narratives may always be suspect, and are never transparent, but importantly also that our perceptions of the world, including environmental collapse and climate crisis, are never unfiltered or unbiased.

This need not be problematic, or lead to climate crisis denial, yet should be an inherent part of any form of cultural, especially literary, criticism. Being sensitive to the role that narratives and narrativity play foregrounds how *Cloud Atlas*, *The Carhullan Army*, *The Island at the End of the World* and other novels open up a space of uncertainty that echoes some of the uncertainty of climate crisis.[17] When the reader's attention is drawn to the instability, corruption or loss of narratives within a novel, she may also reflect on a similar instability when it comes to interpreting climate crisis discourses and predictions. Narrative instability hence becomes a metafictional device by which postmillennial British novels engage in the broader cultural awareness of climate crisis. For ecocritics and environmental humanities scholarship, it is vital to similarly be more critical towards their own methodologies. Such an attitude, this chapter demonstrates, can affirm what Attridge calls the singularity of literature, while acknowledging the limitations of (literary) texts. Environmental collapse, then, is also a challenge to cultural criticism to explore more fully the creative and critical capacities of the postmillennial novel.

Yet, climate crisis narratives are not only those in the foreground of the environmental imagination, those dealing with environmental collapse and, in the final chapter of this book, the melting poles. They are also those stories underlying these narratives, the ones that tell of older or more immediate relationships of identity that people have with the changing non-human natural environment. The narratives of pastoral and urban nature that I turn to next are narratives of climate crisis in their own right, part of and shaping the current environmental moment.

Pastoral

In BBC 2's long-running television programme *Escape to the Country* Brits tired of urban life look for a new home in the countryside. Key terms in this search are 'period features', such as 'low beams' and 'open fireplaces', 'community' and 'space'. At the same time, most of the show's potential homebuyers explicitly want a rural idyll within commuting distance from London. With its emphasis on the countryside as a better, more traditional and more communal place, the programme showcases the British countryside as a pastoral retreat, which city dwellers can escape to. It is precisely this tension between ideal and reality that is so poignant in a time of climate crisis, and which makes the pastoral narrative so apt. Although less explicitly concerned with climate crisis than, for example, the environmental collapse narrative discussed in the previous chapter, pastoral is no less a narrative of climate crisis. As I'll explore in this chapter, the twenty-first-century pastoral narrative is shaped by developments in and changes to the British countryside that run parallel to the growing awareness of environmental crisis in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. The result is a narrative that emphasizes both sides of our contemporary relationship with nature: the dream of ideal nature and living somehow close to it, while never being able to forget the unfeasibility of this dream. In the postmillennial pastoral narrative, this tension is captured in the traditional pastoral movement of retreat and return. Consequently, pastoral opens up the way for engagements with nature that are sensitive to precisely those kinds of issues characterizing contemporary representations of nature, from advertising to film, from literature to other forms of art.

Pastoral's ubiquity in depictions of nature has led it to be criticized by ecocritics and others concerned with representations of nature.[1] The escapism that characterizes the narrative seems out of place in a time of climate crisis,

and its traditional focus on the countryside might no longer suit a rapidly urbanizing Western world. In this chapter, I propose an approach that recognizes pastoral's contested history but is aware of the narrative's ongoing appeal to readers, authors and artists. I focus on pastoral as a means by which twenty-first-century British novels come to terms with contemporary climate crisis. The traditional pastoral movement of retreat and return is central in this respect. In its literal sense and traditional use, retreat is the escape to an idyllic landscape outside of the city and society, while return denotes the necessity for the city dweller – the traditional audience of pastoral and the one who retreats – to go back to the city and society. In a more figurative sense, return can also be that by which the (desire for) retreat is critiqued, for instance, when the narrator or characters of a text expose the artificiality of the retreat. In postmillennial British novels, the desire for (idealized) nature – retreat – goes hand in hand with an awareness of environmental, social and political realities – return – which challenges the idealization that makes popular uses of pastoral so problematic. While the novels I discuss in this chapter may not often explicitly discuss climate crisis, their exploration of retreat and return and the pastoral narrative in general pave the way for a depiction of the non-human natural world that is far from anachronistic.

Terry Gifford terms retreat and return 'the fundamental pastoral movement' (1999: 1). Indeed, the texts that first established pastoral do so by explicitly framing the idealization in terms of a necessary return, either literal or metaphorical. In Theocritus's *Idylls* (third century BC), for instance, the retreat takes the form of childhood memories in the countryside that the speaker tells to his urban, courtly audience, while two centuries later, the idealized countryside of Virgil's *Eclogues* is never far from political turmoil and the threat of eviction. In the English tradition, the pastoral line stretches via Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender* (1579) and the golden age of pastoral poetry in the Elizabethan age (Payne 2009: 420) to nature poetry of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Along the way, the pastoral narrative develops into 'a description and thence an idealisation of actual English country life and its social and economic relations' (Williams 1973: 26), embodied in, for instance, the country house poem.

Greg Garrard suggests that the Industrial Revolution sees the ultimate end of classical pastoral, when a new form emerges that distorts or mystifies

'social and environmental history, whilst at the same time providing a locus, legitimated by tradition, for the feelings of loss and alienation from nature to be produced by the Industrial Revolution' (2011: 44).[2] What is understood as 'pastoral' in popular discourse today is a direct consequence of this shift. No longer is the pastoral tied to the dimension of retreat or work, nor does it comment on contemporary political, social and economic circumstances. Instead, the pastoral has become synonymous with an idealization of nature that pays little attention to actual environmental circumstances. While an idealistic narrative no longer befits contemporary environmental circumstances – if it ever did at all – many critics of pastoral gloss over the other half of pastoral, the return. Yet, it is the return that holds the narrative's potential in uniting the contemporary contrasting impulse of a desire for (unspoilt) nature on the one hand and a deep-seated awareness of its loss due to environmental crisis, urbanization and other developments on the other. Both Garrard's and Dana Phillips's critique rests on a view of pastoral that emphasizes retreat, and neglects return. Consequently, in his analysis of the narrative Garrard argues that '[a]t the root of pastoral is the idea of nature as a stable, enduring counterpoint to the disruptive energy and change of human societies' (2011: 63). Phillips dismisses pastoral for expressing a view of nature that emphasizes stability rather than flux; for its use and abuse in service of class and race; and especially for its 'tendency to transmogrify and to splinter into different versions' (2003: 17). Pastoral, he concludes, is unsuitable to confronting environmental crisis since 'the context of this crisis is largely an urban one' (Phillips 2003: 146). Strikingly, Phillips here seems to be unaware of the urban origins of pastoral: Theocritus composed his *Idylls* for an urban audience, and the city and court are the audience in classical and English pastoral, from Virgil to the country house pastorals of Pope and Jonson. Philips may have found support for his argument that pastoral has taken too many different forms in Paul Alpers's discussion of the narrative and his suggestion that '[i]t sometimes seems as if there are as many versions of pastoral as there are critics who write about it' (1982: 437). Alpers also illustrates another reason why contemporary ecocritics might be wary of engaging with the pastoral when he writes that the narrative isn't about the landscape at all, but about the people in it – shepherds – while the ecocritical project is about decentring the human in favour of the natural (1982: 459).[3] Yet, it is precisely

pastoral's 'tendency to transmogrify' – to change and adapt – as Phillips puts it, that makes the narrative so useful in a contemporary context, as it both expresses desire for retreat as well as an awareness of historical, cultural, social, economic and environmental realities that make return necessary and inevitable.[4] Those critiquing pastoral, including Garrard and Phillips but also Ursula Heise and Timothy Morton,[5] instead argue that 'ancient tropes' such as pastoral may 'have the advantage of deep roots in our culture, but the liability of anachronism in the postmodern era' (Garrard 2011: 202), and should therefore be replaced by other, more suitable, narratives such as 'the human animal and the whole Earth' (Garrard 2011: 202).[6] This sentiment is supported by the silence on pastoral in influential works published in the early 2010s that barely or not at all mention the narrative, such as Timothy Clark's *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (2011) and *Ecocriticism on the Edge* (2015) as well as *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* (2014), edited by Garrard. A notable exception is *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Environment* (2014), edited by Louise Westling, which includes a chapter on pastoral by Gifford that emphasizes contemporary uses of pastoral.

Only a handful of critics have sought to explore pastoral in terms of contemporary circumstances and environmental crisis since the beginning of the twenty-first century.[7] While those critiquing pastoral tend to define the narrative as, in Leo Marx's words, an 'inchoate longing for a more "natural" environment' at work '[w]herever people turn away from the land' (1964: 5), those who explore the possibilities of pastoral tend to focus on what he terms 'the complex pastoral'. Complex pastoral is shaped by the disturbance of the pastoral idyll, either by an actual machine such as a train or an airplane or more figuratively by a reference to death (1964: 26). In his work on what he calls 'post-pastoral' Gifford similarly proposes an understanding of pastoral that relies on retreat and the inevitable return.[8] It is this understanding of Marx's complex pastoral that enables contemporary and more productive usages of pastoral. Post-pastoral refers to works that raise, and to a certain extent answer, six questions, ranging from 'Can awe in the face of natural phenomena, such as landscapes, lead to humility in our species?' to 'How should we address the ecofeminist insight that the exploitation of our planet emerges from the same mind-set as our exploitation of each other, the less powerful?' (Gifford 2014: 27).

Gifford's concept explicitly engages with the criticism of Garrard and Phillips. The post-pastoral does not seek an image of stable harmony between humans and nature, but rather 'a dynamic self-adjusting accommodation' to what the ecologist Daniel Botkin has termed 'discordant harmonies' (Gifford 2014: 28).[9] Developed originally in respect to the poetry of Ted Hughes, over the years Gifford has foregrounded the post-pastoral dimension in works from Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* to postcolonial women's poetry.[10] Yet, while Gifford's work on post-pastoral no doubt forms the most significant contribution to a contemporary reengagement with pastoral, I will not be using it in my readings of the novels in this chapter. The concept falls prey, as Gifford acknowledges, to what he terms the 'prefix-pastoral': the many forms of 'new' pastoral emerging over the past decades (2014: 29). While 'urban pastoral', 'radical pastoral' (Garrard 1996), 'narco-pastoral' (Goldberg 2016), 'postmodern pastoral', 'gay pastoral' and other pastorals point to a welcome resurgence of the narrative,[11] such terms run the risk of leading to splintering rather than emphasizing the kind of historical continuity that the reconceptualization of retreat and return in postmillennial British fictions demonstrates.

Although also an example of 'prefix-pastoral', Heather Sullivan's 'dark pastoral' is closest to my use of pastoral in this chapter. Rather than either embracing or rejecting it, she proposes a 'dark form' of the narrative that emphasizes that, problematic though it may be, the pastoral 'remains the dominant vision of nature in much of our modern techno-industrial culture' (2014: 86). Drawing on Morton's concept of 'dark ecology', Sullivan's dark pastoral shows how pastoral dichotomies are blurred or bridged by environmental crisis: 'The dark pastoral provides ecocriticism with specific representational frames that make sense of the Anthropocene's paradoxes by refusing to separate our green dreams from the material manifestations of the new toxic nature' (2016: 57). Dark pastoral surfaces in works as early as Goethe's *Hermann and Dorothea* (1797) and as recent as Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003). In the same special issue of *Green Letters* in which Sullivan's discussion of Goethe and Atwood appears,[12] Deborah Lilley provides an analysis of the pastoral in two contemporary British novels: Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army* (2007). While Lilley does not make explicit reference to retreat and return – which forms the core of my argument in this chapter – her premise is similar to mine. Pastoral, she argues, both idealizes

and scrutinizes and, through its critical edge, resists 'simple idealisations of nature, or simplifications of the complex human-natural worlds that their environments represent' (2016: 68).

While my understanding of the pastoral narrative in this chapter overlaps to some extent with Gifford's, Sullivan's and Lilley's work,[13] I have deliberately not chosen a new term for the pastoral narrative that emerges in postmillennial British fiction. Rather, I use the same term to refer to Virgil's *Eclogues* and to Graham Swift's 2011 novel *Wish You Were Here*. Not only does this provide a simplification of the many different terms often confusedly used in pastoral scholarship, it also emphasizes the narrative's historical continuity as well as its expansiveness and ability to adapt. Indeed, the term 'pastoral' fits as easily with the classics as it does with twenty-first-century British novels. The scale of contemporary environmental crisis may be unprecedented in human memory, but pastoral narratives have always been used to come to terms with troubling political, social or environmental times. As Guy Lee notes, Virgil's poem responds to political turmoil: 'The *Eclogues* spring from the troubled times that followed the murder of Julius Caesar in March 44BC, years when Italy was torn by civil war and the Mediterranean world split between contending Roman factions' (1984: 19). Precisely this tension between (idealized) nature and socio-economic and political circumstances makes the pastoral so suited to twenty-first-century realities.[14]

In what follows I explore three dimensions of the twenty-first-century pastoral narrative, as represented in Gerard Woodward's *August* (2001), Ross Raisin's *God's Own Country* (2008) and Graham Swift's *Wish You Were Here* (2011). My discussion will foreground the reconfiguration of the pastoral narrative in the twenty-first century as a response to developments running parallel to climate crisis. The chapter continues the concern with narrative form that I sketched in the introduction to this book, as well as the emphasis on narrativity and storytelling that is central to Chapter 1. The three dimensions I focus on in particular are the importance of time to the pastoral narrative, the contemporary British countryside as a site of aesthetics rather than production and, finally, what I call 'pastoral traces' as a way of bringing the pastoral return into the retreat and vice versa, particularly through the use of narrative technique.

Pastoral time

Particularly through its associations with the Garden of Eden and the Golden Age, (popular) pastoral is often associated with the past, with loss and nostalgia. What Williams calls an 'escalator movement' is characteristic of much pastoral discourse: the retreat of pastoral, and the dream of a better, unspoilt nature, is often located just over the historic horizon (1973: 9). The search for a lost 'Old England', he argues, is an inherent part of much British writing about nature and the countryside. This 'Old England' resurfaces in Oliver Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* (1770) as much as in Julian Barnes's 1998 novel *England, England*. But looking back to the past in both these works – and in others like them – is not merely a matter of falling prey to nostalgia or escapism. Rather, the pastoral retreat typically serves to critique the present or urban reality: in Goldsmith's poem the enclosure movement, in *England, England*, commodification. Time and temporal markers in a narrative consequently become instruments of critique every bit as much, if not more, than escape, as I will discuss in this section. The seeming absence of time also recurs in pastoral texts, especially in Renaissance poetry and drama. As Jay L. Halio suggests about Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (1603), timelessness is a 'convention of the pastoral' that contrasts the forest of Arden favourably to 'the time-consciousness of court and city life' (1962: 197). The pastoral of seventeenth-century carpe diem poems is similarly tied in with timelessness. In Marlowe's 'The Passionate Shepherd to His Love' (1599), for instance, the shepherd's attempt to convince his love to come live with him relies primarily on idyllic nature being outside of time and immune to change – a fact that Raleigh used to satirize the poem in his 'The Nymph's Reply' (1600).

Yet, in order for the pastoral narrative to provide a productive engagement with the non-human natural world, the pastoral escape or retreat has to be embedded in a critique of contemporary society, politics or environment. *August*, *God's Own Country* and *Wish You Were Here* all present a pastoral retreat that is temporally and often spatially remote. Flashbacks and temporal markers ensure that the pastoral narrative in these works provide a reflection on contemporary developments, especially those that affect the environment. As such, the pastoral narrative offers a space in which to explore the tension

between the idealization of nature on the one hand and environmental realities on the other, a tension that seems more pressing than ever in a time of climate crisis. Spatial and temporal distance are central to especially *August* and *Wish You Were Here*, and to a lesser extent *God's Own Country*. In *August* the spatial contrast is achieved through the juxtaposition of Wales – where the Joneses go on holiday – and London, where they live. Swift's *Wish You Were Here* holds a spatial cue in its title: the phrase 'wish you were here' denotes a pleasant, even idyllic, space reminiscent of vacations. The 'here' in the title refers to Dorset, from which the main character Jack sends a postcard to his future wife Ellie, as well as to the caravan park the couple runs on the Isle of Wight and even the airfield where Jack – without Ellie – travels to receive the body of his brother Tom. *God's Own Country* is most cynical about the possibilities of pastoral and most explicitly explores the contrast between an agricultural production landscape and an aesthetic landscape – it is also the one to hold the clearest spatial marker of the three works. While the phrase is used by 'towns', as the protagonist Sam calls them, 'god's own country' creates an idyllic picture of the countryside that is immediately destabilized and deconstructed in the novel. Although space is a significant part of pastoral, then, my focus here will be on its temporal dimension as the primary force shaping the pastoral narrative.[15] Consequently, this chapter forms a counterpart to Chapter 1 in which time is central to imaginations of environmental collapse. The novels explored in that chapter use temporal markers to create an eerie sense of proximity between the initial readers' world and environmental collapse, while the pastoral narrative draws on the past in order to critique the present. At the same time, as I discussed in relation to *The Carhullan Army*, the familiar pastoral landscape is often used to create a contrast with the landscape of environmental collapse, by which (loss of) the past becomes a marker of futurity.

Time is central to narration: narrative is, in H. Porter Abbott's words, 'the principal way in which our species organizes its understanding of time' (2008: 3). Certain events in a narrative gain importance when more attention is devoted to them – and when it takes the reader more time to read them. In order to make sense of events, we often relate them to something that came before – a potential cause – and something that happens afterwards: an effect. Time and what may be called temporal mapping hence help make sense of the world and events unfolding in it. Temporal cues also establish the context

of narratives and as such enable readers to place events and make sense of them: references to war as they appear in *Wish You Were Here*, for instance, have different connotations from similar references in *August* when the reader knows that the former novel is set in the early twenty-first century, and the latter at the time of the Cold War. In Swift's novel, especially, temporal cues abound: the narrative mentions 9/11, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and foot-and-mouth epidemics in Britain. 2001 is mentioned as the year for both the time when 'a couple of planes had flown into a couple of big towers' as well as when Tom watched 'cattle burning on the telly' (Swift 2011: 203). The intradiegetic narrative is set in November, a month that is furthermore significant because of the Remembrance Day commemorations Jack always attended with his father and brother, as well as being the month in which his brother Tom ran away from home to join the army.

Through duration in particular the past is emphasized in *Wish You Were Here*. The time period the novel spans, nearly thirty years, is much longer than the period of time in the intradiegetic narrative: a few hours. Moreover, time passes much faster in the flashbacks than it does in the narrative present. Analepsis – flashback – is central to the depiction of the pastoral landscape in *Wish You Were Here*: a landscape overlaid with memories of problematic family relations and agricultural decline. The novel is set on one day, during a few hours in November, when the protagonist, Jack Luxton, sits on his bed with a gun, contemplating suicide. Very little happens on the intradiegetic level of the novel: eventually Jack's wife Ellie, with whom he had a row, returns and he puts away the gun. Most of the narrative takes place on the metadiegetic level through various flashbacks: to Jack's childhood and the stories his mother used to tell, to his mother's death, his brother running away from home, his father's suicide and the blossoming relationship between Jack and the girl next door, Ellie. These personal narratives are interspersed with other flashbacks of the BSE and foot-and-mouth epidemics in Britain, and the decline of the family farm. After selling both their farms, Jack and Ellie take over a camping site on the Isle of Wight. He recalls not hearing from his brother Tom until a few weeks before the events in the intradiegetic narrative, when he receives a letter telling him that Tom has died in combat in Afghanistan. Some of the flashbacks are devoted to Jack travelling to the airbase to receive Tom's body

on his own after Ellie has refused to accompany him, and burying him next to his parents in the village he hasn't been back to in years. While most of the narrative can be captured within this framework of the intradiegetic narrative and Jack's memories told as flashbacks, in two instances the narrative steps out of this framework: once to describe the purchase and renovation of the farm by a London family, the Robinsons, and once to describe Tom's experiences in the army and his eventual death. Both of these narrative strands are tied in closely with perceptions of the landscape, as I explore in the sections on the British countryside and pastoral traces below.

David Herman notes that retrospective stories 'include (at least) two shifts of "deitic centers"', or reference points, levels or locations on which the narrative happens (2002: 224). In the case of *Wish You Were Here*, one deitic centre is the bedroom in the house on the Isle of Wight in which the intradiegetic narrative is set. Through the flashbacks, however, the novel presents a host of other deitic centres in different times, including the farm when Jack and Tom were children, the farm after Jack's father's death, the days of the repatriation and the burial of Tom's body. By combining all these different narrative strands and deitic centres, the novel achieves what Herman calls polychrony: 'a mode of narration that purposely resists linearity by multiplying ways in which narrated events can be ordered' (2002: 221). Indeed, Jack does not recall the events in chronological order: sometimes flashbacks occur within other flashbacks, and at other times earlier events are narrated after later events or, as in the case of Tom's leaving and their father's death, events are hinted at or recounted more than once. Such recalling and retelling is one way in which, as Herman suggests, characters come to terms with the (traumatic) past (2002: 220–221). In Swift's novel, though, more happens than just flashbacks from within Jack's narrative. The flashbacks that relate events on the metadiegetic level contribute to the ways in which the pastoral concept of retreat is framed in *Wish You Were Here*. By locating the pastoral retreat on the metadiegetic level of the flashbacks, a return to the intradiegetic level – out of the flashback – automatically also provides a pastoral return away from any possible idyll. The retreat, to put it differently, is framed continuously by return, and by the awareness of environmental realities.

Woodward's novel *August* is structured according to very explicit temporal cues: the title itself refers to the month in which the Joneses go on vacation,

and in which much of the novel is set, and the eight parts of the novel are titled according to the year in which they're set, starting in 1955 and ending in 1970. The interplay of pastoral and time is played out primarily through the novel's historic setting. Yet, the temporal settings of the novel also hold spatial importance, as for much of the novel the month of August is spent in Wales, which functions as the pastoral retreat. While the Joneses' Welsh vacations are central, particularly towards the end of the novel the family's London life – which is considerably less idyllic – begins to receive more emphasis and to take up more narrative space than the vacations. The pastoral retreat of *August* is located in two locations: the first being the landscapes of Britain and Ireland where the protagonist Aldous went on cycling holidays with his friend Lesley, and the second being the farm in Wales where Aldous and his family spend a month each summer, in a kind of echo of his earlier holidays with Lesley. The first location is most explicitly a lost location: their shared holidays come to an abrupt end because of the start of the Second World War and Aldous becoming a soldier. For him, this event provides a significant marker in how he thinks about time and past and present: looking back he realizes that 'the past ended with the outbreak of war. Everything since then was the present' (Woodward 2001: 19–20). Yet, the pastoral narrative in *August* consists of much more than a mere re-enactment of the old nostalgia for the pastoral idyll. Indeed, much of the pastoral retreat is achieved through a spatio-temporal conflation in which Wales is placed in a historically earlier time than the city to which the Joneses return.

In 1955, Aldous Jones cycles from London to Wales to find a camping site for his family. Looking for 'somewhere idyllic and isolated' (Woodward 2001: 24) he gets hit by a car on a country road and meets Hugh Evans, a local farmer. He later describes this event to his wife Colette as landing 'head first in paradise' (Woodward 2001: 14). For the Joneses, the farm in Llanygwynfa is indeed paradise, a retreat in both the spatial and temporal sense. Waiting for his wife and children to arrive after his 'discovery' of the farm, Aldous finds it hard to believe that the village can be reached by train from London at all: standing on the platform he cannot imagine that 'the rails below, dead straight in both directions, provided an unbroken line of bolted steel between Llanygwynfa and London Paddington' (Woodward 2001: 16). In Aldous's mind, this distance is not merely measured in kilometres and railway tracks,

but also in time. As a child and young man, he frequently visited Wales, until the Second World War interrupted his annual camping holiday.

Even before the novel has properly begun, the temporal distance so characteristic of popular pastoral is hinted at in an epigraph by R. S. Thomas: 'There is no present in Wales,/And no future;/There is only the past,/Brittle with relics'. This epigraph immediately sets the tone for Aldous's experience of Wales: it is a region that belongs to the past and is seemingly distinct from the rest of the world, at least for outsiders. Quite literally, it occurs to Aldous that '[a] much older geology shaped the landscape' (Woodward 2001: 288). In fact, he notes, he is not merely travelling in space but also through time: '[i]t hadn't occurred to Aldous before that in travelling to Wales he was travelling backwards through geological time. The country ages with each mile out of London. In Wales there were mountains that were formed right at the beginning of Earth's geological history – the oldest surfaces in the world' (Woodward 2001: 288–289). The transition between the present of London to the past of Wales begins even before arriving on their holiday destination. Cycling once again to Wales in the 1970s, Aldous crosses the Chilterns and thinks 'about the expanse of time when human beings had no place in the world' (Woodward 2001: 288) that seems more immediate here than back home in the city. In crossing the Chilterns, then, Aldous crosses into a temporal and spatial retreat and believes that, if only for a little while, he can keep the inevitable return to the city and the present at bay. Here, the novel utilizes what Caroline Edwards calls 'metachronous times'. British postmillennial fiction, she suggests, increasingly foregrounds 'temporal experience through disruptive, nonlinear, and non-contemporaneous narrative frameworks' (2012: 478). She finds examples of this trend especially in the fiction of Sam Taylor, but also in the novels of John Burnside and Jeanette Winterson that depict 'metachronous times': 'times in which multiple simultaneous pasts and futures are operative within the present' (Edwards 2012: 481). While at first sight *August* is considerably less experimental than Taylor's, Burnside's and Winterson's work, it too utilizes what could be called a form of 'metachronous times' through the spatio-temporal conflation occurring in Wales. Yet, where Edwards explores metachronous times in relation to the Arcadian revenge – when nature strikes back – time in the novels I discuss does not serve to point towards apocalypse, but rather functions as part of the pastoral movement

of retreat and return. In these works, the simultaneity of pasts and presents emphasizes the pastoral movement, especially when, as I explore in the final section of this chapter, they form pastoral traces.

Finally, in the third of the three novels discussed in this chapter – Ross Raisin's *God's Own Country* – time hardly plays a role. This work has the most contemporary setting and consists of very few flashbacks. Those that do occur are brief, and provide only necessary background to Sam Marsdyke's life, not a possibly idealized image of the countryside. Sam lives in a seemingly eternal present that only comes to an end when he's arrested for abducting a teenage girl. As I explore in the final section of this chapter on pastoral traces, using an unreliable narrator is one of the ways in which retreat into the pastoral idyll is prevented in the novel. Yet, *God's Own Country* holds up a mirror to the common idealized image of the countryside in other ways as well. Both idealization and the harsh reality of life in the countryside are depicted in the novel. Without much formal experimentation, the novel consequently offers both the retreat in terms of what the tourists think of the countryside and the return in what Sam Marsdyke experiences and describes as the son of a farmer. While most pronounced in *God's Own Country*, this juxtaposition is apparent in all three pastoral novels discussed in this chapter. They show that making the pastoral narrative productive in a time of climate crisis requires the return – for instance, in the form of awareness of agricultural and environmental change. This awareness is played out further through the contrast between the agricultural and the aesthetic landscape that is foregrounded not only in these fictional postmillennial works, but also in the physical British landscape in the early twenty-first century.

From farm to country house: The productive versus the aesthetic countryside

When the Joneses go on holiday to Wales for the last time, in 1970, they realize that the farm has lost its charm. What Aldous had described as paradise in 1955 has become a holiday destination, complete with a toilet block and designated sites for tents and caravans. For years, the Joneses had been the only holidaymakers on the Evans farm, which wasn't officially allowed to

host visitors. Ironically, the rural idyll that the Joneses sought and found in Llanygwynfa is destroyed by others looking for their own version of the rural idyll. Through its references to tourism, *August* illustrates a shift in the British countryside since the Second World War, when tourism increasingly became an important feature of the landscape. The shift from a landscape viewed predominantly as a production landscape to a landscape perceived in aesthetic terms is depicted in *August*, *God's Own Country* and *Wish You Were Here*. This shift can also be captured in terms of a change from traditional pastoral, which emphasizes a working landscape, to popular pastoral that presents the countryside as the embodiment of the rural idyll. Falling agricultural profits make a shift from predominantly agriculture to agriculture combined with tourism, or even only tourism, more appealing to farmers, and as such contribute to showing the countryside as popular pastoral rather than traditional pastoral. As research has shown, and the novels demonstrate, this is also a problematic development, leading to conflict and a greater gap between the human and non-human environments, rather than the 'escape to the country' many countryside tourists seek.[16] *August*, *God's Own Country* and *Wish You Were Here* work against the ideal and rather show retreat *and* return. The three novels moreover trace a chronology from a primarily agricultural landscape to one that combines agriculture and tourism in *August*, through to the agricultural recession in the 1990s, and mad cow disease and food and mouth disease in *Wish You Were Here*, to a critique of incomers and those with second homes in the countryside in *God's Own Country*.

The production landscape is rarely referred to in *August*. The three weeks during the family's first summer in Wales are spent 'in almost pure contentment in the hills or on the beach', while '[t]he processes of the farm went on about them, an impenetrable mystery. Animals were moved from field to field for no obvious reason' (Woodward 2001: 35). Although their vacation depends on the farm, the family is not interested in the details of farm life. To put it differently, they frame the farm in terms of popular pastoral, as an idealization detached from reality. For much of the novel, Llanygwynfa remains the paradise that Aldous thought it to be in 1955. The rural retreat in *August*, though, can only exist if the realities of agriculture are obscured and replaced instead by images of rolling hills, quaint pubs and cute animals, meant for petting, not slaughter. The idyll is created on a narrative level solely by focalizing through the family –

the narrative voice, on the other hand, critiques the supposed retreat. In *August*, then, the reader's faith in the story is destabilized much like the novels explored in the previous chapter did. In the context of the pastoral narrative, it serves to embed and critique the pastoral retreat by forcing awareness of the realities on the reader if not on the characters. Aldous's 'paradise', for instance, is described by the narrator as 'a thorny strip … of marshy fields, small tenant farms, clumps of Douglas firs, abandoned aerodromes, toppled cromlechs and disused sheds of black tin' (Woodward 2001: 1). Further inland, the landscape is interspersed with 'a single-track railway [that] cuts a dead straight path across the land, accompanied by a small bundle of telephone wires mounted on crooked poles' (Woodward 2001: 1). This subtle challenge of the idyll becomes a full-blown critique when the farm on which the Joneses stay is described from the perspective of the owner. Hugh Evans is clearly not living the idyllic life that the family associate the farm with. Rather, while Aldous lands 'head first in paradise', Evans is hoping to finally buy the freehold of his tenancy (Woodward 2001: 4). The narrator subsequently presents the annual holiday as a clash between the Joneses' expectations and the Evanses' attempts to make a living. For instance, in 1969, Aldous laments the changes about to take place at the farm, as they will ruin his pastoral retreat: 'The Evanses were on the brink (as they always were) of successfully purchasing the freehold of their farm. Barry [Evans] was engaged in a perpetual struggle with the National Park authorities to convert the upper fields of the farm into a proper camp site, with toilet facilities, shops, playgrounds' (Woodward 2001: 225). Alun Howkins's overview of the British countryside in the twentieth century demonstrates why the Evanses would be so eager to build a campsite: as early as 1955, when *August* starts, a survey revealed that many farms in Wales 'were unable to generate sufficient agricultural income to justify their continued existence as farms' (2003: 145) and farmers began to explore additional means of generating income.

In the second half of the twentieth century, and especially since the beginning of the agricultural recession in the mid-1990s, the British countryside turned into landscape no longer solely associated with agricultural production.[17] It has become 'a product in its own right; advertised, transacted, consumed' (Rye 2011: 263), appreciated for its recreational and aesthetic values rather than its agricultural importance (Vepsäläinen and Pitkänen 2010: 195).

The number of people working in agriculture has consequently declined, while that in tourism has increased. Although the foot-and-mouth epidemic of 2001 was largely seen as an agricultural crisis, in terms of its effect it was much more a crisis in rural tourism. In 2001, rural tourism in Britain was worth £12 billion per year, while livestock farming was worth about £4 billion a year. The losses to the tourism industry were consequently far greater than those to the agricultural industry: in March 2001 the English Tourist Council estimated that 'the tourist trade was losing £250 million a week while farming was losing only £60 million' (Howkins 2003: 232). The tension between ideal and reality inherent to pastoral is further complicated by crises such as BSE after which the countryside in the popular imagination lost even more of its production dimension and became increasingly a tourist landscape.

In *Wish You Were Here*, the shift from a rural economy relying primarily on agriculture to one relying more and more on tourism is reflected in two ways: by Jack Luxton exchanging his ancestral farm in Devon for a caravan park on the Isle of Wight, and by the Robinson family buying the Luxton farm and turning it into their second home. Jack and Ellie's move to the Isle of Wight may not be a literal example of the way in which many farms have begun to rely on tourism rather than agriculture, but Jack in particular keeps making the connection between his previous life on a working farm and his current life as the owner of a caravan park. More than once he thinks of the caravans in terms of cows: he is 'tending a herd of caravans' (Swift 2011: 26), sees them as 'a form of livestock' and decides that '[a] cow was only one notch up, perhaps, in thinking power, from a caravan' (Swift 2011: 343). Jack's family had been farming their land in Devon for generations: as he recalls his mother saying, the first farmhouse on Jebb Hill was built by a Luxton in 1614 (Swift 2011: 29). The agricultural recession of the 1990s, however, spells the end for generations of Luxtons farming on the hill. Following a BSE infection on their farm, after which the family's sixty-five cows are culled, Jack's father Michael commits suicide in 1994.[18] The toll of BSE, the local policeman remarks, was not only animal: '[f]ollowing the cattle disease, there had been this gradual, much smaller yet even more dismaying epidemic' of farmers killing themselves (Swift 2011: 240). The foot-and-mouth epidemic of 2001 had similarly traumatic effects on both animals and humans: as Ian Convery et al. suggest, 'the events of 2001 transcended the loss of the material … and became also the loss of the

conceptual (the loss of meanings associated with this *lifespace*)' (2005: 107, original emphasis). Jack's father experiences a similar conceptual loss after the BSE outbreak on his farm which leads him with no other alternative, he believes, to kill himself.

By the time of their father's death, Jack's brother Tom has run away from home to join the army and their mother has been dead for years. Jack's future wife, and neighbour, Ellie points out the opportunities to Jack: they can sell Jebb Farm to Londoners who will pay good money for a house in the country. Jack's wonder at this thought centres on his initial inability to see the landscape as anything but an agricultural, working landscape: 'it was a farm and he'd never thought of the farmhouse as a separable entity, as anything other than the living quarters of a working farm' (Swift 2011: 287). The sale of Jebb Farm to the Robinsons, who turn it into a country house, does not merely illustrate late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century developments in the British countryside, but also the development of the pastoral narrative. As Williams points out, the focus of pastoral shifted in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century from agriculture to the country house (1973: 26). Rather than describing the working landscape, pastoral came to be used to describe the aesthetic landscape, for instance, in poems such as Ben Jonson's 'To Penshurst' (1616). At the same time, the pastoral movement of retreat and return was severed. What's left is an emphasis on retreat only – as is the case in *Wish You Were Here* and the Robinson's views of their new second home. For them, it's 'their own away-from-it-all place in the country' (Swift 2011: 284) and 'their own little bit of England' (Swift 2011: 285). Particularly striking is how agricultural crises don't affect affluent urbanites' perception of the countryside as retreat. When foot-and-mouth disease strikes after they've bought the house, Toby Robinson emphasizes just how much Jebb Farmhouse is a retreat that seems wholly disconnected from the rest of the world. He tells his wife Clare that the epidemic 'isn't their problem and it would blow over. In any case they didn't have to *be* there, that was the beauty … of its being their second place' (Swift 2011: 318, original emphasis). Yet, for Clare, the epidemic will not 'blow over' – a wry reminder of the smoke of the pyres on which culled animals were burned – but might contaminate their retreat: she didn't like 'this thing happening so plainly and upsettingly close to their new property' (Swift 2011: 319). While for Clare, retreat is never wholly possible, as I explore in

the next section, Toby holds on to the image of the rural idyll and even sees the opportunities that agricultural epidemics provide people like them. As Jack learns when he sells the farm, Toby Robinson feels that 'this BSE business could only mean there might be some real bargains around' (Swift 2011: 313). This was certainly the case in the late 1990s and early twenty-first century, but the influx of urbanites into the British countryside is much older than that. Howkins suggests that as early as the 1930s, large number of city dwellers were buying second homes in the countryside: 'the town was coming back to the countryside' (2003: 2). From the 1960s onwards especially, the arrival of townies or 'towns', as the protagonist of *God's Own Country* calls them, increasingly led to conflict. Ironically, while urbanites often moved to the countryside looking for a sense of community, it was precisely this community that many people living in the countryside felt was threatened by incomers (Howkins 2003: 179). In Wales, opposition to incomers was especially virulent: in the 1980s and early 1990s second homes were burned in Wales and locks of holiday cottages super-glued (Howkins 2003: 179). Protests such as those in Wales are characteristic of an epidemic market in which 'second home owners compete for the same housing stock as the permanent rural population' (Rye 2011: 265). Unlike endemic markets – such as in Scandinavian countries – where second home ownership is not seen as problematic, in the British countryside it leads to, and often exacerbates, inequalities. Moreover, as Johan Fredrik Rye notes, in an epidemic second home market where the 'second home population do not have thick, robust and long-lasting social relations to the permanent population of the rural communities, the second home phenomenon has the potential to destroy the qualities for both the visiting and the host populations' (2011: 265). The conflicts surrounding second homes illustrate the tension at the heart of pastoral, in which the experience of the retreat is shaped solely by those seeking it, without being willing to see the countryside for anything else.

Precisely such a development is sketched in *God's Own Country*, set on the Yorkshire Moors. While incomers are buying up farms, '[y]oung folk hadn't brass enough to buy houses here anymore, so they were sloping off, and all that left was the old-timers… This house hadn't left our family for near four generations, you know. As if the city folk gave a stuff for that. They were rubbing their hands waiting for the old-timers to clog it' (Raisin 2008: 31). While in all three novels characters are aware of the changing countryside,

Sam Marsdyke is most aggressive towards the influx of 'ramblers' and 'towns'. Partly this has to do with Sam's role as narrator, and the way in which the narrative's exclusive focalization through him prevents full immersion in the rural idyll, as I explore in the next section on pastoral traces. Unlike in *August*, where the contrast between the narrative voice and the characters' focalization ensures a complete picture of the countryside as seen by locals and by tourists, in *God's Own Country* only Sam's perspective is offered and the exclusive focalization leaves no room for the experiences of others. Hence, we only get the tourists' opinions through Sam's eyes, leading to a picture of the tourist experience that relies heavily on stereotypes of the countryside – stereotypes that Sam himself finds offensive. He is annoyed, for instance, by the way in which ramblers are too 'respect-minded': 'they wouldn't dare even look on myself for fear of crapping up Nature's balance. The laws of the countryside. And me, I was real, living, farting Nature to their brain of things, part of the scenery same as a tree or a tractor' (Raisin 2008: 1). Howkins suggests that the sense of entitlement that Sam believes many of the ramblers feel is an effect of laws and regulations that opened up the countryside to tourism: after the 1949 Access to the Countryside Act was passed, 'the demand for a bit of the country, for a day out or longer holiday, has been … a central fact of urban life' (2003: 193). To the tourists and incomers, Sam imagines, the country is like 'a Sunday garden … wellingtons and four-by-fours and glishy magazines of horse arses jumping over a fence' (Raisin 2008: 10). The result is a countryside that is becoming increasingly empty of permanent residents: as Sam notes, the houses are largely empty throughout the year, as the owners only come down during summer or Christmas holidays (Raisin 2008: 57). With many local business owners no longer willing or able to continue, the few pubs and stores near Sam's farm are taken over by non-local companies that aim to cater to the incomers, rather than the local population. As Sam reads an advert for a new pub, it becomes clear that what the towns are looking for in the countryside is not the countryside per se, but the aesthetics of the countryside, the rural idyll that popular conceptions of pastoral enshrine: '*Coming soon – comfort and class in the perfect countryside setting, with traditional ales and a comprehensive wine list*' (Raisin 2008: 42, original emphasis). People like his new neighbours, Sam decides, are 'loopy' for farmhouses, though not for the actual life but the 'postcard view out of the bedroom window' (Raisin 2008: 9). What they don't

see is the reality of the countryside: the struggles of farmers like Sam's father, waiting on subsidies to come through, and the hard and often dirty work on the farm.

While *August*, *God's Own Country* and *Wish You Were Here* draw on the rural retreat and emphasize the extent to which outsiders' experience of the countryside relies wholly on retreat without return, all three novels achieve a sense of return nonetheless. By doing so, these postmillennial fictions demonstrate that popular pastoral, and a separation between retreat and return, is unfeasible and impossible at a time of climate crisis – if it was ever feasible at all. At the same time, they hereby demonstrate the usefulness of pastoral as a narrative for contemporary environmental circumstances: by drawing on both the retreat and return, the narrative taps into dominant, idealizing, perceptions of the countryside, while offering a corrective more in line with contemporary realities. Another way in which the novels achieve this is through the use of pastoral traces, the third dimension of the postmillennial pastoral narrative I explore in this chapter.

Pastoral traces

The Joneses' experience of the Welsh countryside relies largely on the traditional pastoral contrast between city and country, in their case London and Wales. In the most obvious sense, this dichotomy is implied in their vacation – a modern-day pastoral retreat away from ever-expanding London. The characters, particularly Aldous, even think in terms of the pastoral contrast: 'Aldous had come to believe that Llanygwynfa and Fernlight Avenue [their London home] were balanced around a common fulcrum, and that any change in the one might cause a similar change in the other. It was as though they were geographical twins, separated at birth, but still linked by a common geological ancestry' (Woodward 2001: 63). The connection between Wales and London is exemplified by several incidents that change both the Joneses and the farm: shortly after the family buy their first car, the Evanses build milking parlours, demonstrating how 'this unfolding of technology in [the family's] lives would cause a similar disruption in Llanygwynfa' (Woodward 2001: 65). Colette reasons the other way around and anticipates a change in London

because of the milking parlours at the farm: 'she imagined that something equally disruptive would happen at Fernlight Avenue, some old process, a way of doing things, would be changed beyond recognition' (Woodward 2001: 65). Indeed, while the Joneses are on holiday, they are notified that Colette's mother, who had been living with them, has died. This event brings death to the countryside, and illustrates the *et in arcadia ego* motif so central to what Marx terms the 'complex pastoral'.

The Joneses' focalized experience of pastoral relies heavily on the contrast between country and city, favouring the view of the country as idealized retreat. The novel achieves a more fruitful take on the pastoral dichotomy through its use of what I call traces, in which London and Wales are subtly interconnected. Pastoral traces are elements belonging to the retreat appearing in the city or society, and vice versa. In this respect, the term extends the *et in arcadia ego* motif in which death disturbs the retreat, as well as Marx's machine in the garden motif. Marx argues that the return to a less-than-ideal reality is inevitable, or, as he puts it, the machine – literally or figuratively – always enters the garden. Pastoral traces, however, also bring the country or retreat to the city. They illustrate the inextricability and interdependence of retreat and return, in line with contemporary circumstances in which the boundaries between retreat and return, the city and the country have become fluid. A similar blurring takes place in *Wish You Were Here* and *God's Own Country*: quite literally through the cattle diseases in the former novel, and the protagonist's mental illness in the latter.

In *August*, the first of these interconnections between London and Wales follows the burning down of the family tent in 1963. Rather than going back to London, the Evanses invite the Joneses to stay in one of the barns for the rest of their holiday. Soon, the barn – a quintessential symbol of the countryside – is filled with the family's possessions: 'The family had set about the domestication of the barn [and] [w]ithin a few days they'd established a living space that was a rough echo of their house in London' (Woodward 2001: 50). Of course, all forms of camping, no matter how primitive, are always a way of domesticating and culturing the countryside. This example, however, explicitly brings London to Wales: through the traces of their Fernlight Avenue house, the Joneses establish a pastoral contrast themselves. It is not the absence of London, but its presence – a trace – which creates the dichotomy.

The establishing of dualities by means of traces also works the other way around, as slowly the family's home in London is filled with references to Wales. A quite literal example in this respect are Aldous's paintings of Wales that he hangs all over the house: the picture of Moelfre near the television, and pictures of a waterfall and clouds (Woodward 2001: 236–237). He even uses one of his Welsh paintings to board up the broken door, which subsequently gives them a view not of suburban London but the Welsh hills: 'a view through trees of distant Welsh hills, the painting facing into the house, brown stippled hardboard facing the street' (Woodward 2001: 271). As Colette's addiction to bicycle glue progresses, camping life on the farm also invades their house in other ways as she reproduces 'the cuisine of the fields in the kitchen at Fernlight Avenue' (Woodward 2001: 204). Most extreme in this respect is an episode from 1968 in which Colette, high on bicycle glue and sleeping pills, hallucinates a farm in the living room:

> she noticed animals, tiny little ones, moving slowly across the carpet. A flock of sheep, hardly bigger than white mice, and some kitten-sized cows were scattered about the floor, doing exactly what real sheep and cows do – very little. Some sheep were nibbling at the fibres of the carpet, one of the cows was licking its hind parts with its bird-like tongue, another was, with a raised tail, letting slip from its body a little fall of manure.
>
> (Woodward 2001: 166)

Whereas in *August* pastoral traces are employed through a series of events that bring the city to the countryside and vice versa, in *Wish You Were Here* and *God's Own Country* pastoral traces form a much more extensive – and inherent – part of the novels' narratological structure. To an extent, *Wish You Were Here* is framed by war, and further bloodshed enters the idyll through BSE, foot-and-mouth and Michael Luxton's suicide. In *God's Own Country* narrative voice and focalization are the embodiment of *et in arcadia ego*, and through Sam's confused narration – and mental illness – the pastoral idyll is never wholly achieved. Instead, it is continually informed by the artificiality of retreat, and the necessity of return.

As I explored in the previous section, *Wish You Were Here* consists largely of flashbacks, told within a larger framework of Jack sitting on his bed on the Isle of Wight, holding a gun and contemplating suicide. In that respect,

the entire pastoral narrative of his farming life is not only framed by a shift in time, reaffirming the relation between the pastoral and the past, but also in terms of possible death. In other words, to the extent that the pastoral retreat in *Wish You Were Here* even exists, it is framed by (the thought of) death through which return enters the retreat. This framing is enforced by the novel's epigraph which as a paratext or extradiegetic device introduces one of the novel's central themes: the challenge to or destruction of the retreat. The epigraph to *Wish You Were Here* takes the final lines from William Blake's 'A Little Boy Lost': 'Are these things done on Albion's shore?'. The poem tells of a small boy who confesses to not being able to love anyone else more than he loves himself. An enraged priest subsequently punishes the child:

> They stripped him to his little shirt,
> And bound him in an iron chain,
> And burned him in a holy place
> Where many had been burned before;
> The weeping parents wept in vain.
> Are such thing done on Albion's shore?

<div align="right">(Blake 1794: ll. 15–20)</div>

Like many of the poems in *Songs of Experience* (1794), 'A Little Boy Lost' deals with the hypocrisy of religion and the state, the failure of parents to protect their children and the corruption or loss of children. At first sight this context does not fit the context of *Wish You Were Here*: except in Jack's memories, there are no children in the novel, nor does religion play any considerable role. At most, the little boy lost could be Tom, Jack's younger brother, who runs away from home in his late teens and years later dies in Afghanistan. Much like the boy in Blake's poem, he too is sacrificed for a supposedly higher cause. The boy's inability to love someone more than himself in the poem may relate to Ellie's inability to overcome her jealousy of Tom and go to the repatriation ceremony and burial with Jack. Her refusal to join him causes a deep rift between the two and on the day of Jack's return leads to him contemplating suicide. Yet, the clearest connection between Blake's poem and Swift's novel is provided by the final line of the poem, the only line used in the epigraph.

Major Richards, the army representative who comes to talk to Jack and Ellie after Tom's death, reflects on his job of bringing bad news to families all over Britain. Such scenes of loss, he thinks, 'were proliferating and increasingly pockmarking the land' (Swift 2011: 96). Though not an exact repetition of Blake's poem, Major Richards's observation echoes and in a way answers the question posed at the end of the poem. Scenes of loss are indeed happening ever more frequently on Albion's shore. Moreover, although most people may not realize it on a day-to-day basis, the country is at war: 'This was peacetime in the middle of England. But there was a war on terror' (Swift 2011: 149). The narrator's explicit reference to 'the middle of England' – the heart of Englishness – echoes Blake's use of 'Albion' as the mythical name for England. While the scenes of loss that Major Richards has in mind are army casualties, his words are also applicable to the devastation caused by BSE and foot-and-mouth disease. Even more literally than the loss of soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq, the mass culling and burning of cattle in the 1990s and 2001–2002 echo the scenes of punishment in 'A Little Boy Lost'. 'Are these things done on Albion's shore?', then, can be read both in relation to war and cattle disease. Both war and cattle disease frame the pastoral retreat in the novel, and remind the reader of the inevitability of pastoral return. Interestingly, the link between war and cattle disease is also made by Tom. Neither Jack and Ellie nor Tom experience the foot-and-mouth epidemic at first hand: by that time, Jack and Ellie have sold the farm and moved to the Isle of Wight and, like Tom, see footage of the burning pyres of cattle on TV. Tom soon realizes that it is a 'useful' image to remember, especially whenever he, in Iraq and Afghanistan, 'saw a belch of black smoke, after the explosion, rise up above the flat rooftops, over the palm trees' (Swift 2011: 197). The image turns out to be even more useful when Tom tries to get the image of the first casualty he sees, Willis, out of his mind: 'He'd got the picture of Willis out of his head by remembering that cow. Strange, it was just a cow on the telly. But then *they*, B company, were just pictures on the telly for most people back home' (Swift 2011: 199, original emphasis). The footage of cattle becomes his go-to image whenever Tom tries to get the things he sees – wounded, dying or dead people – out of his head. When he dies himself, his last thoughts are of cattle as well, though not of the cow disease, but rather of lying in Barton Field as a child, hearing a sound he hasn't heard for years: 'It was the unmistakable, steady "tchch … tchch …

tchch" of browsing cattle, the slow, soft rip of cows' mouths tearing up grass. It was the most soothing sound in the world' (Swift 2011: 209). At his moment of death, the pastoral retreat enters the horrors of war – a reversal of the usual pastoral trace of return entering the retreat.

Tom's death provides a quite literal *et in arcadia ego* for the Robinsons, especially Clare Robinson. The letter announcing it is initially delivered to Jebb farm. Although Clare immediately sends the letter on to the Isle of Wight, she feels uneasy about the news it might bear. Her forebodings are confirmed when, a few days later, she reads a short report in the local newspaper about Tom Luxton's death. Toby's had an affair for years. Clare's knowledge of this affair is another way in which the less-than-idyllic world enters the retreat, exemplifying the *et in arcadia ego* motif in the novel. At Jebb, Clare tries to forget that 'her marriage was really a rather flimsy, unlovely affair', especially now that she's been given 'the bribe of this handsomely refurbished farmhouse in its splendid setting' (Swift 2011: 309). Yet, even though she believes that Jebb has 'a healing effect' on her and the family as a whole, she can never wholly forget about the affair, or about Tom's death. Another thing that disturbs her and keeps her from wholly immersing herself in the pastoral retreat of Jebb is the old oak near the farmhouse. She has the feeling that there's something sinister about it. Although she never finds out, the tree is the clearest and most permanent symbol of death entering the idyll, as it is against this tree that Michael Luxton shot himself. The mysterious hole in its trunk is where the bullet exited Michael's head.

While a disturbance of the aesthetic landscape, death is an inherent part of the farming landscape. In *God's Own Country* Sam notes a dead rabbit on the moors (Raisin 2008: 4), recounts the dangers that young puppies face from bigger animals or birds of prey (Raisin 2008: 6) and assists in the birth of a dead lamb (Raisin 2008: 114). In winter, the sheep on the farm run the risk of dying from pneumonia, especially if they aren't taken in on time (Raisin 2008: 123). Sam himself participates in the rural *et in arcadia ego* as well when he kills a chicken belonging to one of his neighbours. He knows that the fox stalking the farms will be blamed for this – a fox that he explicitly identifies with: 'Real vermin, you and me, skulking around in the dark, eh?' (Raisin 2008: 21). The connection between the countryside and war that is created in *Wish You Were Here* through Tom Luxton is also made in *God's Own Country*. On the moors, Sam sees the military installation at Fylingdales in the distance.

He thinks it being there is ridiculous: 'What did they think – there was going to be a war? The Battle of the Farmers and the Off-comed-ones' (Raisin 2008: 177). His comments on Fylingdales emphasize the pastoral trace of return in the retreat of the countryside, yet he also tries to negate this by making the possibility of actual war in the countryside sound ridiculous. Installations such as Fylingdales quite literally bring war to the countryside – and, as such, also introduce return into the retreat. As Rachel Woodward notes, '[r]ural areas provide the location and backdrop to most [military] training' (Woodward 2000: 646). The invasion of return into the retreat, through warfare or otherwise, shows the countryside as 'certainly not the rural idyll of community and nature in harmony' (Woodward 2000: 648).

Yet, the most significant means by which return enters the rural retreat in *God's Own Country* is through Sam himself, a mentally unstable and potentially unreliable narrator. Expelled from school for supposedly assaulting a girl, he now spends his time on his father's farm. From the beginning, Sam is presented as troubled, cynical and quick to believe that others think poorly of him. His attempt to befriend the new neighbours – incomers recently moved into a former farmhouse – fails when he forgets to check the mushrooms he picks for them for maggots. Nonetheless, he ends up befriending the neighbours' teenage daughter Jo, and when she wants to run away from home, he goes with her. As the story of their journey across the moors continues, however, it becomes increasingly uncertain whether Jo really wants to go along with Sam. For the reader it is difficult to gauge what and how much happens against Jo's will: the novel is exclusively narrated through Sam, who does not seem to have the ability to imagine Jo's feelings, either because he cannot, or because he doesn't want to. After Jo has tried to run away from him, Sam catches up with her and ties her up – for her own good, he says. To the reader, Sam's interpretation of this event is clear evidence that he is mentally unstable. It makes the entire narrative and his account of the events that came before suspect. Their journey ends in Whitby, where Sam hides himself and Jo with the idea that they will be able to catch a ship to America. Even then he seems unaware of what is really happening and instead remarks on the pleasant location – a damp cave – and the 'postcard' view it offers (Raisin 2008: 181). The final, brief, part of the novel is set four years later, when Sam is about to be released from prison, having served a sentence for holding Jo against her will.

Sam is a typical unreliable narrator – even though the reader may not understand the extent to which he is unreliable until at least halfway through the novel. Indeed, for a long time, the reader may be temped to give Sam the benefit of the doubt: his description of the supposed assault that has him expelled from school, for instance, might make the reader believe that it was not so much assault, but at least initially desired by the girl. The novel's exclusive narration through Sam also affects the pastoral dimension. Specifically, I want to argue, Sam's unreliable narration provides a return to the pastoral retreat created by the incomers' and ramblers' experience of the landscape. Unreliable narration in *God's Own Country*, then, functions as a pastoral trace on the narratological level, exemplifying the inevitable return from the retreat that can never be avoided. In coining the concept of the unreliable narrator Wayne Booth proposed that a narrator is reliable 'when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author's norms), *unreliable* when he does not' (1961: 158–159, original emphasis). Some critics of Booth's concept have argued that his suggestion that unreliable narration is a product of a clash between narration and the implied author relies on the belief that the author has the same beliefs as the reader. As Ansgar Nünning argues, '[a] pederast would not find anything wrong with Nabokov's *Lolita*' (1999: 61). Yet, while Nünning suggests that attributing unreliability depends on text reception, he also argues that certain textual markers signal unreliability, which makes his theory problematic, as Greta Olson argues (2003: 97). Olson instead suggests a distinction between fallible narrators and untrustworthy narrators. In the former case, 'external circumstances appear to cause the narrator's misperceptions rather than inherent characteristics' (2003: 102); in the case of the latter, '[t]he inconsistencies these narrators demonstrate appear to be caused by ingrained behavioral traits or some current self-interest' (2003: 102).[19]

Sam is an example of what Olson terms 'an untrustworthy narrator': he seems to suffer from some sort of mental illness that makes him unable to interpret signs and, importantly, makes him seemingly insensitive to the feelings of others. He is simply incapable of interpreting or understanding situations as they are. At the same time, the reader can never be certain of this as the novel provides little to no distance between the experiencing-I and the narrating-I. No evidence is provided that the account of running away with Jo

is related at a much later time than the actual act of running away took place, which would allow Sam to reflect on his actions and potentially reinterpret them. This also means that we get no evidence of whether Sam is really mentally confused and unaware of the ethical implications of his actions, or whether he is deliberately malicious, and hides it in the narrative. If the latter is the case, although nothing in the narrative points towards this, the story of the months leading up to Sam's eventual arrest could function as a way for him to retrospectively make his actions seem better. Either way, the reader is left having to reinterpret the narrative when it becomes obvious that Sam is an unreliable narrator. The process of coming to terms with unreliable narration in *God's Own Country* hence functions as a pastoral movement in its own right. In the passages where Sam draws on stereotypical idealized images of the countryside when he imagines the incomers' and ramblers' perceptions, a retreat is suggested. When the reader becomes aware of Sam's unreliability, any retreat becomes impossible. In other words, by forcing the reader to question everything Sam says – including his descriptions of the landscape – the reader is prevented from being wholly immersed in the novel, as well as any pastoral retreat it might offer.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

In using the pastoral narrative, the three postmillennial novels explored in this chapter go back to the traditional movement of retreat and return and thereby present a pastoral much more in line with, and applicable to, contemporary environmental circumstances. The pastoral as presented in these novels nowhere relies solely on problematic idealization, and instead combines the image of the rural or pastoral retreat that dominates so many contemporary discourses of nature with an all-pervasive awareness of environmental realities, including the state of the countryside in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. That the necessity of return cannot be avoided shows especially in the narratives' use of pastoral traces in which return consistently invades the retreat, and the other way around. In addition to the literal, physical landscapes depicted in *August*, *Wish You Were Here* and *God's Own Country*, the pastoral narrative in these novels also functions as a kind of middle landscape in itself. In *The Machine in the Garden*, Marx suggests that the pastoral landscape is a

landscape in between the city and the wilderness. In order to be truly pastoral a space has to be neither too wild not too civilized, safe from the possible dangers of nature, as well as the corruption of the city. In a contemporary setting, in which awareness of nature is necessarily shaped by climate crisis, the pastoral narrative also functions as a middle space in between problematic idealization and despair. Indeed, the concept of the pastoral middle space offers a particularly productive way of thinking through contemporary climate crisis, as does the concept of pastoral traces. Widespread cultural awareness of contemporary environmental circumstances functions as a trace on our perceptions of nature that can never be untainted by crisis. At the same time, problematic though it may be, the idea of the pastoral retreat frequently underlies popular discourses of climate crisis. Depictions of the loss of species and environments are so poignant because underlying them is the belief in an ideal, spatially and temporally remote place of 'pure' nature. Seen through the lens of pastoral, environmental rhetoric is also indebted to Williams's pastoral escalator, in which the pastoral retreat is located ever further into the past. Consequently the destruction of the retreat and the loss of the idyll are popularly located with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, or the Agricultural Revolution, or even the Cognitive Revolution between 70,000 and 30,000 years ago.

As a middle space between idealization and despair, the pastoral narrative straddles our conflicting emotions and perceptions of nature. It also embodies the variety of nature experiences that may exist at the same time: for the same person, nature might offer seemingly untainted enjoyment of a space relatively devoid of human influence while it is under threat. Rather than a narrative that is outdated and problematic, then, the pastoral narrative embodies the tensions that are central to the twenty-first century and a time of climate crisis. Far from being outdated or in need of replacement, the pastoral narrative lends itself well to the twenty-first century and to the human desire for nature, albeit a desire tempered by knowledge of crisis.

3

Urban

In Richard Jefferies's 1848 novel *After London*, London has been flooded and a noxious, poisonous marsh sprung up in its place. London and other cities face similar fates in more contemporary imaginations of disaster and climate crisis: in *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), the Statue of Liberty in New York rises from the frozen landscape, father and son pass by a deserted network of roads on the edge of a city in *The Road* (2009) and a tidal surge threatens London in *Flood* (2007). The iconic features of cities such as New York, London and San Francisco are especially suitable for bringing home the severity, and perhaps immediacy, of a disaster. Disaster, they suggest, will destroy even familiar landmarks. Yet, cities are not only a particularly popular setting for climate change stories,[1] they are spaces of climate crisis themselves, as I'll explore in this chapter. In 2014, 54 per cent of the world's population lived in cities, and the United Nations predict that by 2050 that figure will have risen to 66 per cent (2014: 1). At the same time, urban environments are key sites in which global climate change is played out. The majority of anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions are produced through urban activities, while cities themselves are often the most vulnerable to effects of climate crisis such as flooding.[2] Urban environments are increasingly positioned as important environmental sites in sociological and political scholarship (cf. Loftus 2012: xxii). Part of rethinking the role that cities play in our understanding of the non-human natural environment, as well as how we come to terms with climate crisis, lies in the stories we tell about cities.

In this chapter, I read the narrative of urban nature as a key, though often overlooked, narrative of climate crisis. Not only is climate crisis increasingly played out in cities, many urban trends – such as urban gardening, farmers' markets and the existence of green 'wild spaces' – are a direct response to an

environmental awareness fuelled in large parts by climate crisis. The three novels I discuss in this chapter reflect and engage in a reshaping and retelling of urban natures that is also happening in cities themselves. The popularity of the city in British realist literature since 2000 includes the multicultural novels of Zadie Smith and Stephen Kelman, as well as Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), Philip Hensher's *The Northern Clemency* (2008), Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005), Jon McGregor's *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things* (2003) and *Even the Dogs* (2011) and John Lancaster's *Capital* (2012). This increase of urban novels runs parallel to new ways of thinking about the city developed in the field of urban studies since the 1970s. Though the focus of urban studies has long been on the social and political dimensions of urban life, a number of scholars explicitly foreground the non-human natural aspects of cities. An early and influential scholar in this respect is Anne Spirn, whose *The Granite Garden* (1965) argues for the inclusion and utilization of natural processes in urban planning. The city, she proposes, 'is a granite garden, composed of many smaller gardens, set in a garden world. Parts of the granite garden are cultivated intensively, but the greater part is unrecognized and neglected' (1984: 4). More radically, Spirn does not see the city as an artificial or unnatural space. Rather, she suggests, 'cities do not obliterate nature, they transform it, producing a characteristically urban natural environment' (1985: 42). In a British context, the landscape architects Nan Fairbrother and Ian McHarg have published works that emphasize the importance of including nature in cities.[3] The British movement to protect nature in towns goes back at last forty years (Goode 2014: 285) and Britain has a relatively long tradition of interest in urban nature starting in the mid-nineteenth century (Goode 2014: 286). The Victorian age similarly saw the beginnings of urban nature writing. Richard Jefferies and W. H. Hudson form the precursors to Richard Mabey's *The Unofficial Countryside* (1973), Paul Farley's and Michael Symmons Roberts's *Edgelands* (2011) and Esther Woolfson's *Field Notes from a Hidden City* (2013). Parallel to this new vogue of urban nature writing, urban political ecologists have continued the work of Spirn and others. These scholars recognize the existence of a specific *urban* nature and ecology, separate from – and thereby certainly not lesser than – traditional natures and ecologies (Keil 2003: 726).[4]

This chapter traces the appearance of the narrative of twenty-first-century urban nature in three postmillennial British novels set in cities: *The Translation*

of the Bones (Francesca Kay 2011), *NW* (Zadie Smith 2012) and *Clay* (Melissa Harrison 2013). Much scholarship on the city in literature focuses on how the development of urban environments can be read in tandem with the development of literary environments.[5] In this chapter, however, I focus not on the city as a catalyst for new forms of writing, but on the city as a site in which the twenty-first-century novel comes to terms with changing environmental conditions. Moreover the chapter presents a corrective, or contrast, to the argument that the contemporary city 'seems to be increasingly unmoored from its spatial specificity, from the city as a fixed point of collective reference, memory, and identity' (Soja 2000: 150). Postmillennial British novels are increasingly sensitive to the actual, material city and fictions such as the ones I explore are firmly grounded in the material city through, for instance, the frequent use of spatial cues or markers and the use of food narratives as a way of connecting to nature.

The environmental justice movement, which intersects with especially American ecocriticism, has since the 1970s paid particular attention to urban environments. It is especially concerned with highlighting and addressing the relationship between environmental hazards – and hazardous environments – on the one hand, and race and class, on the other.[6] While such approaches generally succeed in the important task of foregrounding the ways in which human and natural concerns intersect in urban environments, environmental justice is also problematic as a lens through which to study urban nature. Through its critique of the connections between race, class and environmental degradation, environmental justice focuses largely, if not solely, on disadvantaged communities, hereby creating a one-sided critique of nature in urban environments. Consequently, little room is given to the (positive) possibilities urban nature offers.[7] Ecocritical engagements with urban nature as a positive and productive space are few and far between. Implicitly or explicitly, many ecocritical discussions are predicated on the idea that urban nature is somehow 'less than' non-urban, more traditional natural landscapes. Lawrence Buell, for example, mentions urban spaces in the same breath as 'other severely altered, damaged landscapes' (2005: 88), and argues that in contrast to the holisticism advocated by many environmentalists and ecocritics, urban nature allows only for 'short takes and small grains at micro-level … ventured against the background of enclosure' (2005: 88). Similarly,

and more explicitly, Lee Rozelle concludes that 'the terms *urban* and *ecology*, when placed together, seem a most dangerous oxymoron; to make such easy semantic fusions, however intriguing the academic result, leaves the door open for the referent – voiceless nature – to become critically restricted' (2002: 109, original emphasis). Attempts to truly see urban nature for what it is, rather than as representing 'absence' (Tallmadge 2004: 111), or fearing that it may become 'critically restricted' as Rozelle argues, have been slow to develop. The recent expansion of the field through material ecocriticism and other philosophical or cultural approaches would invite more explicit attention to the influence of urban nature on conceptions of nature. The exploration of non-traditional landscapes in material ecocriticism focuses on nuclear landscapes (Glotfelty 2014), degraded environments and pollution (Iovino 2016), dirt (Phillips and Sullivan 2012; Sullivan 2012), corporality (Iovino 2014) – often in association with toxicity (Alaimo 2010) – and, as Dana Phillips has put it, 'knowing where your shit goes' (2014), though not cities. While these approaches no doubt expand the field beyond the concept of ideal nature, not engaging explicitly with the positive possibilities offered by urban environments keeps the dichotomy between nature and the city largely intact. Indeed, material ecocriticism's limited engagement with the city is especially poignant given that urban environments demonstrate the intra-action of nature and society, to use Karen Barad's concept of 'relata-within-phenomena' emerging through intra-rather than inter-action (2003: 815).

One of the most sustained efforts to develop an ecocriticism more attuned to urban environments has been made by Michael Bennett, who argues for a 'social ecocriticism' focusing on 'how the social, political, and economic decisions made by humans effect [*sic*] our interaction with the environment' (2001: 33). Yet, Bennett's social ecocriticism has been picked up by few ecocritics, most likely because it intersects with, and even appears to have been absorbed by, the environmental justice movement. More recently, Ashton Nichols has proposed 'urbanatural roosting' as a way of existing in the world that recognizes that nature and cities are not as distinct as is traditionally believed. Urbanature, Nichols argues, 'insists that human beings are not *out of* nature when they stand in the streets of Manhattan any more than they are *in* nature when they stand above the tree-line in Montana' (2011: xiii, original emphasis). The argument he makes is the reverse of the one usually made by

critics – that humankind has become so pervasive that 'real' nature has ceased to exist[8] – but it is no less intriguing: 'Crucial to *urbanature* is the idea that human beings are never cut off from wild nature by human culture… Nothing I can do can take me out of nature. There is nowhere for me to go. I am a natural being from the moment I am born (biologically) until the moment I die (organically)' (2011: xv, original emphasis). Yet, urbanature's expansiveness may also negatively impact the concept's usefulness. While focusing on urban nature, as I do in this chapter, suggests a dichotomy between urban and non-urban nature that is unfeasible, arguing that urbanature includes 'the biggest of all pictures … as well as the smallest of all small pictures' (Nichols 2011: xv) – in other words, everything – may obscure the distinctive qualities of urban nature. Urban nature and non-urban nature are in many ways different – just as they are in many ways similar and interconnected. Postmillennial British fiction engages with these differences and similarities and presents a variety of narratives in which urban spaces function as sites of changing twenty-first-century human–nature relations as a result of, and developing in parallel with, climate crisis.[9] In the rest of this chapter, I will first discuss the different varieties of urban nature suggested by the novels, relate experiences of nature to socio-economic circumstances and, developing from that, explore food as a way in which especially well-off urbanites attempt to forge a connection to nature.

Varieties of urban nature

Perhaps more than any of the other narratives of climate crisis discussed in this book, the narrative of urban nature bumps up against definitions of 'nature'. In this chapter, I frequently use the term 'nature' to refer to landscapes that traditionally were not seen as such, and may still not be. I write about urban wastelands as wildernesses, about an abandoned garden as an example of nature, and about food providing a connection to the natural world. Yet, it is not my aim to provide an overarching definition of what nature is in a time of climate crisis.[10] Rather, I want to argue that nature is defined and potentially redefined by those who use the term. Seeing nature and perceiving it as more than a textual construct does not rely on clear-cut definitions. The potential of

the term, and in any story that we tell about our engagements with the non-human natural environment, lies precisely in it remaining undefined. Hence, especially in this chapter, I am interested in *experiences* rather than *definitions*, in exploring what characters and narrators in postmillennial novels perceive as nature. The nature that surfaces from these works is often much less glamorous, and much more immediate, than traditionally understood.

In being concerned with the city as a site of climate crisis and particularly as a site of a distinct kind of nature, my focus in this chapter is on space and how the novels work to depict urban spaces on a narratological level. Spatial cues provide the reader access to the storyworld of the narrative and, importantly, make urban nature visible to readers perhaps used to seeing only non-urban landscapes as natural. In *Clay* (re)connecting with urban nature happens primarily through descriptions of a local park:

> a strip of land between the noisy high road and the flats. The council had laid tarmac paths across it here and there, but narrow tracks of beaten earth – what the planners called 'desire paths' – had been made by feet and better reflected where people wanted to go: from the estate to the bus stop, for instance, and from the benches to the pedestrian crossing.
>
> <div align="right">(Harrison 2013: 14)</div>

The title of Zadie Smith's novel *NW* is a spatial cue in itself and points at the area in which the novel is set: north-west London. In *The Translation of the Bones*, spatial cues are almost specific enough to be directions: Stella and Rufus travel to Dorset via the 'M3, the A303, past Andover, through Sherborne' (Kay 2011: 22) and the church in which many of the novel's important events take place is 'on the corner of Riverside Crescent' (Kay 2011: 22). The location of the church is fictional: though it is never made explicit, the novel is most likely set in London, yet there is no street called Riverside Crescent in the city.[11]

Spatial markers participate in the reconfiguration of urban environments in a time of climate crisis by foregrounding urban nature, creating meaningful connections and reflecting a sense of belonging to uniquely urban natural spaces. I will approach the significance of space to twenty-first-century British urban novels through the narrative distinction between topological and projective locations. A topological location is a location that is described according to its geometric properties, like on a map.[12] Projective locations, on

the other hand, 'vary in value and interpretation depending on how they are viewed' (Frawley 1992: 262). David Herman uses the example of a cube and a tree to clarify the difference: 'What counts as the *inside* of a cube is invariant and thus a topological location; but what counts as *in front of* a tree is a projective location, varying with one's angle of vision' (2002: 280, original emphasis). William Frawley emphasizes the significance of perspective in projective locations and suggests that these locations 'involve *a frame of reference*' (1992: 263, original emphasis). Frawley's definition leaves the way open for an extension of topological and projective locations through the concept of space and place more familiar to ecocritics. Spaces become places through (emotional) attachment, knowledge and memories, as happens in *NW*.[13] The directions that make up chapter 9 of *NW* are an example of topological locations:

Turn left on Yates Lane	40 feet
Head **southwest** toward **Edgware Rd**	315 feet
Turn **right** at **A5/Edgware Rd**	1.6 miles
Continue to follow A5	
Turn left at **A4003/Willesden Ln**	0.7 mile
Turn **left** at **Bartlett Avenue**	0.1 mile
Destination will be on the left	
Bartlett Avenue, London NW6, UK	

(Smith 2012: 33, original emphasis)

The chapter that follows provides a projective perspective of the same route:

From A to B redux:

Sweet stink of the hookah, couscous, kebab, exhaust fumes of a bus deadlock. 98, 16, 32, standing room only – quicker to walk! Escapees from St Mary's, Paddington: expectant father smoking, old lady wheeling herself in a wheelchair smoking, die-hard holding urine sack, blood sack, smoking…. Casino! …. TV screen in the TV shop. TV cable, computer cable, audiovisual cables, I give you good price, good price. Leaflets, call abroad 4 less, learn English, eyebrow wax, Falun Gong, have you accepted Jesus as your personal plan? … Here is the school where they stabbed the headmaster. Here is the Islamic Center of England opposite the Queen's Arms.

(Smith 2012: 34)

Here, the topological location has become a projective location, particularly when projective locations are understood as functioning as places, rather than spaces. Extending the narratological concepts of topological and projective locations through the ecocritical concepts of space and place – and vice versa – adds the dimension of the topological, or map-like, to space. At the same time, this extension highlights the extent to which a place is not just a space to which someone feels a sense of belonging, but especially a space that is overlaid with meaning – whether societal, cultural or personal. As I discuss in Chapter 4 on polar narratives, the seemingly empty polar landscapes are projective landscapes because nationalistic discourses are projected unto them. Moreover, the hostile environments of the Artic and Antarctic show that a sense of place need not always be positive but can also rely on negative sense of belonging. Of course, projective locations needn't always necessarily also be places: as Herman's example of the tree implies, being in front of a tree, from whatever perspective, does not necessarily mean attachment to the tree, or even knowledge of it. Yet, in many novels, including the ones discussed in this chapter, the shift from topological to projective location is a shift from space to place. When his father leaves, TC, the young boy in *Clay*, no longer feels at ease at home. He begins to explore the urban natural areas around the block of flats where he lives:

> In the weeks without his father those few nondescript city acres – the park by the Plestor Estate, the common and the few godforsaken corners of scrub between the estate and the high road – had become overlaid with the landmarks of all his solitary imaginings, until every tree and fence post and path and thicket was charged with an almost mystical significance.
>
> (Harrison 2013: 8)

The topological location – 'those few nondescript city acres' – has become a projective location, as space has become place and the area has become 'charged with an almost mythical significance'. Achieving a sense of place, and turning a topological location into a projective location, this example illustrates, is essential to becoming aware of urban nature. It is also, by extension, central to becoming attuned to the kinds of nature that do not fit many traditional ideas – a project that gains in urgency as climate crisis worsens.

For TC, much of the park's mythical significance lies with the wilderness he discovers there. Crawling through the bushes of the park he finds tracks of what he is sure is 'something lonely and wild', which he decides must be a wolf (Harrison 2013: 39). That a wild animal such as a wolf would roam the London estate, he tells his friend Jozef, isn't all that unusual: '[t]here are panthers out there, all sorts. People see them all the time. A man got bit by a big cat in Luton, taking his bins out, I saw it' (Harrison 2013: 103). TC's story of the panther in Luton echoes the widely publicized case of the Sydenham Panther that attacked a man in 2005 (Barkham 2005). Indeed, reports of big cat sightings have over the past decade-and-a-half risen from a few dozen a year to thousands. George Monbiot, who has written extensively about this phenomenon, suggests that the chances of actually encountering one of these animals are small. Human perceptions are moreover distorted by darkness and the human brain is unable to adequately tell an animal's size, particularly at a distance. Yet, at the same time, Monbiot argues, big cat sightings also tap into deeper sentiments and are comparable to the many UFO sightings during the Cold War space race between the United States and the Soviet Union (Monbiot 2013). Sightings of wild animals and the desire for the wild are not unique to *Clay*. Other postmillennial British novels such as Evie Wyld's *All the Birds Singing* (2013) and Sarah Hall's *The Wolf Border* (2015) also feature actual or imagined wild animals in Britain. Perhaps, Monbiot suggests, big cats activate an ancient evolutionary template in our minds which is stimulated especially by the disappearance of these creatures from our environments (Monbiot 2013: 58; 60). In twenty-first-century novels, I'd argue, the desire for and appearance of the wild is yet another way in which contemporary fictions renegotiate contemporary climate crisis.

TC eventually discovers that the paw prints he found were not those of a wolf, but of a large dog. The experience doesn't diminish his desire for the wild, however, and he finds an even wilder space in an abandoned garden a few streets away from the park. It is 'a forgotten half-acre, fenced off, overgrown and utterly abandoned' (Harrison 2013: 145). Overlooked by town planners and neglected by its owners, the garden has gone wild: 'kingcups marked the boggy place where once there was a pond; there were three stunted rhododendrons amid the brambles; and almost lost among the lime and sycamore saplings were two rusty sequoias and a larch, nearly 120 foot high, survivors of the garden's Victorian

apogee' (Harrison 2013: 145). TC's sense of wonder and joy at finding the garden echoes a similar experience described by the poets Farley and Symmons Roberts. In their 2011 book *Edgelands*, they set out to chart and describe what they call 'England's true wilderness' – not the manicured wilderness of craggy hills, but instead the 'feral' wilderness of the spaces in between, of the edgelands between country and city, and of inner city wastegrounds and forgotten lots. An urban wasteland, they suggest, takes you by surprise. Entering it often carries a sense of suspense or trespassing that manicured nature trails up mountains or through the countryside do not offer (Farley and Symmons Robert 2011: 137). Both the narrator of *Clay* as well as Farley and Symmons Roberts emphasize the emptiness and non-human qualities of urban wastelands. TC nonetheless immediately sets about making the garden his own: 'It was a lost world, and it belonged to him…. He decided to find out every single thing that lived there, so he could take care of it all' (Harrison 2013: 145–146). His desire to get to know and take care of every part of the garden and even become part of it himself illustrates what William Cronon has described as the wilderness paradox shaping many conceptions of wilderness. Wilderness, Cronon argues, is explicitly where we are not: 'wilderness embodies a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural. If we allow ourselves to believe that nature, to be true, must also be wild, then our very presence in nature represents its fall. The place where we are is the place where nature is not' (1991: 80–81).[14] Although TC may not realize it, his sheer presence compromises the very wildness he loves so much. Indeed, he ends up literally compromising the garden and his own access to it. When TC decides to show the garden to Jozef – a Polish man who'd become his friend – he loses the garden forever: Jozef is arrested on suspicions of child abuse and TC is forced to move in with his father, away from the city and his hidden garden.

Wilderness is both the embodiment of the sublime, as well as a sacred space in which the boundaries between human and non-human, natural and supernatural have always been more fluid than elsewhere. It is, as Leo Mellor suggests, a term thick with layered meanings, yet also a way to imagine a landscape as a '*tabula rasa* for the imagination, thronged with natural forces and ripe with possibilities' (2014: 111). The wild depends on the peculiar combination of being a space loaded with meanings yet necessarily empty because in order to be true wilderness it can never be wholly captured or

imagined. As such, the wilderness paradox is an especially apt way of thinking through human–nature relations, especially in a time of climate crisis that is caused by a desire for, and destruction of, the wild, the loss of which is subsequently lamented in environmental campaigns. The urban wilderness Father Diamond visits in *The Translation of the Bones* is a good example of a space that is both physically empty as well as full of meanings, especially – Father Diamond being a Catholic priest – religious meanings. The central event that the novel leads up to is the murder of a young boy in a London church. After being interviewed about this by the police once again, Father Diamond gets out of his car at the edge of an estate. The landscape he encounters is a typical urban or post-industrial wasteland, smelling of marsh water and compost. The allegorical significance of this space soon becomes clear: 'In this abandoned place he cried out loud. Why? he asked… Father Diamond tramped across the marshy waste ground and heard nothing. No voice came in answer to his questions. But at least he'd voiced them; and the wind blew sea-whispers to him and at the end of this long day he would be tired enough to sleep' (Kay 2011: 160). The murder and Father Diamond's subsequent walk take place at the end of Lent, the period in the religious calendar that references Christ's temptation and forty days of fasting in a desert wilderness. The wilderness is also a place of literal and spiritual hunger, as in the story of the Israelites fleeing Egypt. Father Diamond's experience in the urban wasteland takes the form more of spiritual hunger than satanic temptation: the death of the boy shakes his faith at a time when it is already fragile. For Father Diamond, an inner-city priest, the urban wasteland becomes a contemporary version of the Biblical wasteland – a wilderness or desert that is not only bare of landscape features generally seen as meaningful, but also empty of answers and void of spiritual support.

Contemporary urban natural spaces, then, can take many different forms: from the small and nearby of a park, to the vaster and perhaps more alienating spaces of the post-industrial wasteland Father Diamond wanders. In both cases, older conceptions of nature – as a wild space, for instance, or a space untouched by humans – are reconfigured and reshaped to fit in with a twenty-first-century urban context. While these examples draw on familiar language, other examples of urban nature elude it. An example of this is a small wood that Linda, one of the characters in *Clay*, encounters by the side of a busy road. Not only is she surprised to find it, it is so different

from the kinds of environments that she typically sees as nature that she cannot quite grasp it. Getting out of her car on one of her many business trips she discovers a small forest that is quite a bit more substantial than the windbreak she had expected: 'it began to seem as if she was in another world. The trees had closed around her, and for a moment she felt that the wood could well go on forever' (Harrison 2013: 89). She imagines that once the bluebells in the wood are in bloom, 'this tiny, forgotten corner of woodland would be a paradise' (Harrison 2013: 90). Its unlikely location confuses her: it is not in a place that she would associate with nature, nor does it seem to have any other real purpose. She wonders about it: 'What was the point of it? It didn't look as though people were cutting it for timber, and it was too close to the motorway for paintballing. She wondered if it had a name, and who it belonged to' (Harrison 2013: 89). The forest is literally wild: seemingly without an economic purpose, without a name, and without an owner. Whereas in a rural environment Linda would most likely classify it as 'countryside' or indeed 'wild', here, at the side of a busy road, she finds it difficult to name, or even place it amongst the ideas she has about nature.

Marion Shoard – who first coined the term 'edgelands' – suggests that one of the reasons why these spaces are not seen as valuable or natural is because they don't fit existing ideas about what counts as nature. Edgelands 'certainly do not conform to people's idea of the picturesque by presenting a chocolate-box image, suitably composed and textural. On the contrary, they seem desolate, forsaken and unconnected even to their own elements let alone to our preferred version of human life' (Shoard 2002: 3). This might be just the reason why Linda – a person generally not very interested in nature at all – finds it hard to place the wood she encounters. Knowing only 'official nature', and most probably not at first hand, an edgeland space does not fit into her framework of ideas about what is nature and what isn't. Instead, the forest is an example of Mabey's 'unofficial countryside' that in its indeterminate state at the side of a road provides 'a story of co-existence, of how it is possible for the natural world to live alongside man, even amongst his grimiest eyesores' (2010: 21).[15] Indeed, for a brief period, Linda's encounter with the wood leads to a rekindling of her interest in nature that had lain buried since her youth.

Urban nature at the intersection of socio-economic processes

In *Clay*, Linda's socio-economic status is suggested to be one of the reasons why she does not recognize urban nature as valuable, or even as nature at all. Postmillennial novels like *The Translation of the Bones*, *NW* and *Clay* emphasize that urban environments are made up of different dimensions: social and natural, political and economic, as well as cultural and discursive. Much of *Clay* is set in and around a small, unnamed park, built in the 1960s as part of the Plestor estate, while *NW* takes a bigger area – the London postal code NW – as its setting. In both cases, the characters feel an intense attachment to these spaces: as the narrator of *NW* relates, one of the novels' main characters, Leah, 'is faithful in her allegiance to this two-mile square of the city as other people are to their families, or their countries' (Smith 2012: 5). Not only do these spaces consequently function as emotional geographies, both the park and NW are presented as being at the intersection of socio-economic, cultural and natural processes. Kilburn, in north-west London, is a particularly apt example of the way in which socio-economic processes shape an area. Developed in the 1880s to provide '[w]ell-appointed country living for those tired of the city', over a century later it now offers '[d]isappointed city living for those tired of their countries' (Smith 2012: 42).

While environmental justice movements have been particularly concerned with race and socio-economic status on the one hand, and degraded environments on the other, urban scholars explore the interplay of socio-economic status and environment in relation to all environments. Power, Erik Swyngedouw suggests, plays a decisive role in experiences of the city, and becomes particularly visible in struggles of class, gender and ethnicity. These processes 'produce socio-environmental processes that are both enabling, for powerful individuals and groups, and disabling, for marginalized individuals and groups. They precisely produce positions of empowerment and disempowerment' (Swyngedouw 2006: 115). Sophia's daughter Linda grew up in the house that Sophia still lives in and that borders the park. Well-off and able to afford a house in a desired part of the city, she tries to forget about the estate she grew up on all together: 'the Plestor was yet another part of the city she tried to blank out, like the awful high road, the tower blocks and the terraced row of squats near the station' (Harrison 2013: 46). This view

extends to not only the park but to her views of nature altogether: to Linda, nature is mostly a hassle, an inconvenience that needs to be kept in check and controlled. When she does briefly take an interest in nature, this interest disappears after she discovers that TC – who has become a friend of Daisy – has been 'taken' by Jozef to the urban wasteland. Not only does Linda hereby draw a hasty and completely wrong conclusion about the friendship between TC and Jozef, the experience itself also reaffirms her beliefs of urban nature as dangerous. Consequently, she gets rid of the tools she had bought to do some gardening herself, and rehires the gardener. Like Linda, TC's mother Kelly also pays little attention to nature. The reason behind this is crucial to an understanding of experiences of urban nature: whereas Linda is well-off and hires a gardener to deal with the nature she finds so inconvenient, Kelly cannot afford to be concerned with nature. The kind of concerns that Linda has when it comes to her garden and urban nature in general are a luxury to Kelly, who can barely keep her head above water financially and has trouble raising and understanding her son. To put it differently, whereas Linda is privileged enough to enjoy the nature that she finds worthwhile and derides those urban natural spaces she associates with danger, Kelly's financial problems and socio-economic status prevent her from doing so. In the novel, this very real difference in experiences of nature is illustrated by creating a literal, physical barrier between Kelly and the earth: she lives 'four floors and forty-two feet up in the night sky' (Harrison 2013: 55).

Different social perspectives also bring with them different associations and connotations of natural and built spaces. In Smith's novel *NW*, Felix is a young man from a poorer background determined to make something of his life. Travelling through the city on the tube, he looks at a map of the London tube network and realizes that it does not 'express his reality. The centre was not "Oxford Circus" but the bright lights of Kilburn High Road. "Wimbledon" was the countryside, "Pimlico" pure science fiction. He put his right index finger over Pimlico's blue bar. It was nowhere. Who lived there? Who even passed through it?' (Smith 2012: 143). For Felix, who's been outside of the city only a handful of times, NW is the centre, and everything else – including the 'official' centre of Oxford Circus and the 'countryside' of Wimbledon – is marginal and unimportant. For Natalie, a lawyer in the same novel who has worked hard to escape her upbringing on the Caldwell estate, nature

also has a socio-economic dimension: for her, those spaces that in the novel are associated with urban nature are significant primarily – if not, only – in terms of social status. When she and her husband buy their first home, what matters to Natalie is not that the garden is tiny, but rather that it is far away enough from the estate (Smith 2012: 221). Similarly, the one space in *NW* that is something of an urban natural oasis – a typical country church on a small plot of land – is important to Natalie only because joining this church will enable her children to get into a good school. The lengthy description of the church – as well as the long trek that Leah, Natalie and her children undertake to get there – stands out for the suggestions it makes about the role of nature in the city:

> A little country church, a medieval country church, stranded on this half-acre, in the middle of a roundabout. Out of time, out of place. A force field of serenity surrounds it. A cherry tree at the east window. A low encircling brick wall that marks the ancient boundary, no more a defence than a ring of daisies. The family vaults have their doors kicked in. Many brightly tagged gravestones. Leah and Nat and the children pass through the lychgate and pause under the bell tower. Blue clockface brilliant in the sun. It is eleven thirty in the morning, in another century, another England.
>
> (Smith 2012: 60)

The little church, on an island in the middle of a roundabout, appears to exist in a spatial and temporal bubble in the city – not only is it surrounded by 'a forcefield of serenity' that cancels the chaos of the city, it is reminiscent of 'another century, another England'. On the one hand, this scene implies the significance and benefits of nature, even its ever-lastingness. Inside the church is a statue of a black Madonna, given voice by the narrator as the spirit of both the city and the countryside that preceded it. Older than church and city, the Madonna comes to embody '[u]nruly England of the real life, the animal life!' (Smith 2012: 64). Yet, while emphasizing the perpetuity of nature in the city reflects the way in which, as urban political ecologists suggest, cultural, natural, social, economic and political processes all play a role in shaping the environment, presenting nature as spatially and temporally removed from the city is also problematic. In a novel in which nature is defined in several different ways – as associated with food, for instance – the description of the

church stands out as especially anachronistic in its depiction of nature as that which is separate from the city, even separate from humans.

Yet, while the novels overall emphasize a positive reconceptualization of nature, they too include instances in which urban natural spaces are potentially dangerous. Indeed, in *Clay*, the issue of the possible danger that lurks in inner-city parks and commons is central to the narrative. On the one hand, that precisely *Clay* explores this is remarkable: of the three novels discussed in this chapter, Harrison's novel is the most explicit about urban nature, and at first sight, also the one that most explicitly celebrates it. Characters such as Sophia, an elderly lady who has lived next to the park for over forty years, are fiercely loyal and attached to it. On the level of the *fabula*, or story, the novel traces a year in and around the park which in one way or another plays a role in the characters' lives: Sophia's, TC's, Jozef's, but also Linda's, who is glad to have moved away from it, and Daisy's, Linda's daughter, who frequently visits her grandmother. On this level, the story ends with the loss of the kind of urban nature Sophia celebrates: Jozef is arrested when TC shows him the secret garden, an event that for Linda confirms that urban nature is dangerous. While it ends in loss, the *fabula* nonetheless paints a largely positive image of urban nature. At the same time, if approached in terms of its structure or *syuzhet*, all of the novel's urban spaces are framed by the possible danger these spaces form to children. The novel is not structured exactly chronologically: it begins with the event that follows Jozef's arrest, when TC is questioned by social services. As such, the novel is circular, since the final pages of the novel depict what follows this conversation, namely that TC is driven to his new home, far away from the park, by his father. On a structural level, *Clay* frames urban nature in terms of danger – even though Jozef did TC no harm and is not charged. The novel's *syuzhet*, then, illustrates a contemporary culture in which many children are no longer free to roam and in which urban nature is often associated with danger. A study from the late 1980s characterizes this culture. Many respondents explicitly mention the importance of open and natural urban spaces to children and lament the disappearance of such open spaces and the time that their children spend indoors watching television. An important factor in not letting children play outdoors, though, is the supposed danger of urban nature, resulting in them having 'so much less freedom to roam' (Burgess, Harrison and Limb 1988: 465). In *Clay* playing outside in the

park with minimal supervision gives Daisy one of the best times she's ever had (Harrison 2013: 130), since she's rarely allowed to leave the garden or 'explore' nature unsupervised. TC, on the other hand, just a year older than Daisy, spends most of his time outdoors, exploring the park and its undergrowth. His adventures are cut short when he is forced to move. *Clay*, then, aptly shows how what counts as nature depends on what a person – a character – perceives as such: for TJ it is the park, and for Linda, albeit briefly, the wood by the side of the road. How we define nature, novels such as *Clay* and *NW* suggest, depends on a host of other factors as well, ranging from socio-economic status, to ideas about danger and safety. In the final section of this chapter I explore another permutation of twenty-first-century (urban) nature: the natural connotations attributed to 'real' food.

Real food and (re-)connecting to nature in the city

The past decades have seen increased demand for 'real' – often local and/ or organic – food, of the kind Natalie and Frank serve in *NW*: spinach that is 'farm to table' and a salad of 'heirloom' tomatoes (Smith 2012: 76). Food ties us to our environment – both human and non-human – in the most common yet most intimate ways. It also illustrates our conceptions of nature: our associations of certain products as 'pure', 'real' and healthy are direct echoes of connotations we attribute to nature. Moreover, particularly in urban environments, food and food narratives serve to define and redefine human–nature relations. While food is largely produced in non-urban environments, certain food practices are associated especially with the city – particularly the kind of food that popular and marketing discourse calls 'real' food. Indeed, the rise of 'alternative food practices'[16] is frequently related to urbanization: 'urbanization yields more farmers markets and increases demand for local produce in line with a variety of economic and political agendas and consumer beliefs and desires. This may be especially pronounced in cities with well-educated residents who have high incomes' (Jarosz 2008: 242). Urban food narratives in *The Translation of the Bones*, *NW* and *Clay* have two dimensions: firstly, they point to food as a marker of socio-economic status and secondly, they suggest that food creates a connection to nature. On a deeper level, these

two dimensions are closely connected: socio-economic status is tied to the consumption of food – turning socio-economic elites into food elites – that either enables or precludes ties to nature. In *The Translation of the Bones*, mother and daughter Fidelma and Mary-Margaret are poor, generally eat fatty and salty foods and are never referred to in relation to nature. Stella, on the other hand, is well-off, cooks elaborate dishes for her husband's dinner parties and is frequently associated with nature, especially with flowers. This connection between socio-economic status and food is hardly new. Yet, while in contemporary discourses the affluent are generally positively associated with food, and food itself is seen as a status symbol, disadvantaged and poorer people were in the past typically negatively associated with food. Both the people and any sensuous pleasure derived from food were seen as gross, as food scholars such as Jennifer L. Fleissner propose. This view of food goes back to Plato's hierarchy of the senses where taste, 'weighed down by its associations with gross sensuality and "selfish interest"' was put last (Fleissner 2008: 28). The appreciation of food as other than purely aesthetic has consequently long been connected with lower socio-economic status,[17] a sentiment that is echoed in *The Translation of the Bones*. Yet, the positive association between good or 'real' food and the positive connotations of nature is in the contemporary urban nature narrative reserved for those people who are better educated and more affluent.

At first sight, *The Translation of the Bones* relies heavily on, and even replicates, the traditional division between the country and the city, with the city as a place of little nature. The descriptions of the country even echo the countryside of old, depopulated and a playground for absentee landlords. Yet, through its depiction of the characters' relationship with food, the narrative radically redefines urban relations to nature. A particularly good example is the sense of wonder that one of the main characters, Stella, experiences when preparing mussels for a dinner party:

> Such beautiful things, she thought, these mussels. Their sleek shells gleaming in the water, pearl-tinged at the hinges, a darkness that was full of colour – green and grey and bronze. It was their ordinariness that put them beyond remark. As with many other things – the iridescent feathers on a drake's neck in the winter, so startling a green; the buds of a magnolia; the high polish of a newly released conker – the mussels were too familiar to be a real

cause of wonder. We look out for the rare and exotic. The magnificence of a peacock's tail, the flash of diamonds in a seam of coal. And yet what could be more exotic than a cock pheasant in a field of frozen turnips on a winter morning, his ruby markings and his emerald-green head?

(Kay 2011: 72)

The mussels, Stella thinks, are 'too familiar to be a real cause of wonder', because we tend to 'look out for the rare and exotic'. This seems to be particularly the case in urban environments, where much nature is left unseen and unremarked on because it does not fit the dominant image of spectacular, non-urban, nature. Yet, in all of their ordinariness, these mussels provide Stella with a sensuous experience of the non-human natural. Her aesthetic appreciation of the mussels emphasizes the connection she has to both food and nature, creating the possibility of an embodied relationship with the non-human natural. Rachel Slocum refers to the potential that alternative food practices hold in this respect as enabling 'embodied ecologies': 'situated, corporeal ways of connecting' (2007: 523). In an urban narrative such as *The Translation of the Bodies* food provides precisely such situated and corporeal ways of relating to nature that are generally not associated with urban living.

Alternative food practices and related networks such as farmers' markets are associated with environmental, social and economic benefits, and as such play a significant role in shaping human–nature relations in the city. 'Real' food is often even felt to provide ties to the land and the non-human natural that urbanization is believed to have destroyed. Hence, as Lewis Holloway and Moya Kneafsey argue:

the association of FM [farmers' markets] with the rural and the local may be read as a search for localized identity, an attempt to fix identity or build a sense of community within a context of perceived threats to local identities and communities in the face of the power of multi-nationals associated with, for example, food retailing and new and diffuse forms of risk, such as genetically modified crops.

(2000: 295)

Strikingly, the meanings attributed to alternative food practices echo many of the concerns and aims of the bioregionalist movement, which generally rejects urban life in favour of small-scale communities. Alternative food practices,

then, provide a way of rooting to the non-human natural that does not depend on 'staying put' (Sanders 1993) or living in the countryside, and are in that respect particularly valuable in re-shaping human–nature relationships in urban environments. At the same time, the dinner scene that follows Stella's preparation of the mussels foregrounds the problematic dimension of reconnecting to nature through food. While Stella praises the mussels for their 'ordinariness', they are hardly ordinary for many people that fall outside of Stella's social class, like Fidelma and Mary-Margaret. In many ways, these characters function as foils of each other. Stella seemingly leads an ideal and privileged life with her husband and three children, alternating between their London and Dorset homes. Fidelma left Ireland after becoming pregnant with a man who was married to another woman. She ended up supporting herself and her young daughter by prostituting herself in England, before shutting herself in her flat, vowing never to leave. She is morbidly obese and relies completely on Mary-Margaret, her thirty-two-year-old daughter who has a learning disability. While Stella is continually associated with flowers, Mary-Margaret and Fidelma are associated with confusion and darkness, especially in Fidelma's dreams. The contrast between these characters is emphasized by the foods they eat. Mary-Margaret buys their food at a poorly stocked corner shop, and she and her mother live off 'soft things, sweet things – white bread, chocolate sponge' (Kay 2011: 195). They are not able to buy 'real' food, and with their desire for soft, sweet and fatty things, enjoy food generally looked down on by those belonging to the food elite. The food they prefer, however, nonetheless holds similar importance to them as the 'real' foods do to the other characters, and creates a similar relationship of identity. When buying food for herself and her mother, Mary-Margaret likes to splurge every now and then on Irish Cream, which reminds her of her own, and her mother's, Irish heritage. The beverage itself is every bit as important to her as the connotations that the package promotes: 'She was drawn to things that reminded her of her heritage, with green fields on the labels and words on them like cream. Cream was a word that tasted of itself, she thought, and filled the mouth exactly like the real thing' (Kay 2011: 100). Food and particularly comfort foods play a special role in the formation of identity – or attempts to hold on to an identity that has been lost, as in the case of Fidelma and Mary-Margaret. Julie Locher et al. argue that people rely on food 'to define who we are as both individuals

and as groups, and both the media and advertisers of consumer goods use this social function of food for their own benefit' (2005: 275). The green fields on the Irish cream label are a prime example of such a relationship of identity suggested by food. Comfort food especially is also associated with physical comfort, much more so than healthier food, and convenience, two further elements that define the relationship Fidelma and Mary-Margaret have with food. In the context of British imperialism, Fidelma's and Mary-Margaret's limited access to healthy food moreover echoes food shortages and famines caused and exacerbated by predatory British politics in Ireland up to the early twentieth century. The importance of socio-economic status to who has access to certain types of 'real' foods hence gives British food narratives an added, troubling dimension.

Socio-economic position, then, functions as a marker of a positive or negative relationship to food and nature, both in postmillennial British fiction and in the world outside of the text. Conversely, food itself may reveal socio-economic status. The absence of 'proper' food in *Clay*, for instance, is yet another example that TC's mother is unable to take care of him and is struggling with unemployment and addiction. For Natalie in *NW*, food is a way of distinguishing herself from the estate she came from. As a trainee barrister she realizes that the dinners she is required to attend with her colleagues play an important function: they show that she has become an important person and that she is no longer 'an accidental guest at the table – as she has always understood herself to be – but a host, with other hosts, continuing a tradition' (Smith 2012: 190). Food subsequently becomes a mark of privilege to Natalie and she aims to mimic this at her own home. At a dinner party she serves her friends farm to table spinach, heirloom tomato salad, green beans with shaved almonds, lemon tart and 'extremely good coffee' (Smith 2012: 77). People who have not achieved similar status and happiness eat other kinds of food and are ridiculed for it, like Natalie's ex-boyfriend Rodney whom Leah spots in Sainsbury's buying 'a meat pie and two cans of ginger beer and a bottle of that hot sauce that you put on everything' (Smith 2012: 187).

Food is not only a socio-economic marker, but also gendered. In both *NW* and *The Translation of the Bones*, the preparation of food is completely in the hands of women. Natalie obsesses over a picnic and ends up cooking 'everything from scratch' and bringing 'a hamper with real crockery and glasses'

(Smith 2012: 225). Likewise, the dinners Stella's husband Rufus organizes as part of his work as an MP may be no big deal for him – 'Spag bol. No need for your best bib and tuckers' (Kay 2011: 71) – but Stella goes to considerable trouble and work. During the dinner, Stella is essentially left to herself: no one asks for her opinion on any of the (political) topics discussed and 'she was left to produce dinner and consider the assorted guests' (Kay 2011: 74). While cooking for others is often seen as feminine, 'offering food as love' (Lupton 1996: 108–109), masculinity is associated with eating food that others have prepared. Since thinking about food and preparing it is a largely female affair in *NW* and *The Translation of the Bones*, the novels suggest that the connection to the non-human natural that food offers is distinctly female as well. This, of course, replicates problematic associations of women being more natural – and also, traditionally, less rational or valuable – than men, tying issues of gender in with food and nature in yet another way. As *The Translation of the Bones* illustrates, food is also tied to religion, as in the case of Father Diamond. Set in the final weeks of Lent, the novel describes the priest's Lenten diet of 'black coffee, unbuttered toast, pieces of fish' (Kay 2011: 88). The spiritual hunger he feels leading up to Easter – and Felix's murder – is echoed by his physical hunger. He also misses the spiritual connection he usually experiences: 'This year he experienced only hunger. Hunger of the acid, nauseous kind and a sort of tiredness; sensations as flat and as discreditable as a habitual drunkard's headache' (Kay 2011: 88). In this part of the novel, *The Translation of the Bones* shows how contemporary food practices are rewritings of older food traditions such as that of fasting in some form or another during Lent. Yet, for Father Diamond, food does not provide access to nature, nor does the religious dimension it is part of have a natural counterpart, as was the case in his experiences in the urban wasteland. Rather, food in this case identifies his state of mind, and the crisis of faith he experiences. When he cannot remember what he had for dinner yesterday or the day before, this is not so much a denial of a connection to the natural world, but a disconnection to the material world as a whole that forms the background to 'his one acute and conscious feeling: a helpless ache for Stella' (Kay 2011: 171) after her son has been killed.

Finally, although alternative food practices may provide affluent urbanites such as Stella with a sense of connection to their regional context – and as such foster bioregionalism – it often remains unclear what exactly this connection

entails, since ideas about 'real' food are largely based on assumptions of health and environmental benefits only. As *The Translation of the Bones* shows, alternative food practices hold complex meanings that have little to do with the health and environmental benefits frequently associated with them. Although ideas about the benefits of alternative food practices are common, eating local, adopting a bioregional lifestyle and other elements of alternative food practices are not necessarily good or beneficial to people and planet.[18] The small-scale farmers that are supposedly supported by alternative food practices are particularly vulnerable, since they often rely heavily on unpaid family labour and lack the resources to juggle demands of processing, marketing and transport to farmers' markets (Jarosz 2008: 241). Given the distances that many of these farmers have to travel to bring their products to a farmers' market in town, the question can be asked to what extent the local community is really supported.[19] Indeed, pleas to 'buy British' and eat local have not led to a more sustainable British countryside, as the picture that is painted of the countryside in *The Translation of the Bones* illustrates. Since Stella's husband Rufus is an MP for a county in Dorset, they own a house in a small rural village, which they only visit, however, during weekends. Stella feels uncomfortable about this – 'fraudulent' even: 'For the generations who had lived there it had represented permanence, a place of work, a settled place in life… Now there was nowhere in the village where a person could earn a living except as a cleaner or an odd-job man. Or, of course, as an MP' (Kay 2011: 29). Even the local produce – in the form of the apple juice in Stella's fridge – is not marketed towards those actually living locally, but to those like Stella and Rufus, tourists and visitors. Urban food narratives, then, may also emphasize a disconnection from methods of food production, and a lack of true knowledge of the earth it came from. *NW* references the eruption of the Icelandic volcano Eyjafjallajökull in May 2010, causing one of the characters to remark that there's '[n]o fruit and veg in the shops … Makes sense if you think about it. Of course, it's an island we're on here' (Smith 2012: 42). Only when the volcano's ash cloud prevents transport by air, do people suddenly realize that their broccoli comes from Kenya (Smith 2012: 44). Critics have also suggested that alternative food practices lead to the further commodification of nature. This is not only the case for the kinds of foods Natalie buys – organic ketchup, 'real' coffee (Smith 2012: 221) – but especially for the food available to disadvantaged families like Fidelma and

Mary-Margaret's, who experience the other side of the commodification of food and live in a food desert. Supermarkets, whether expensive or the poorly stocked cornershop where Mary-Margret shops, become spaces of reification which, as Allison Carruth (2009) argues, downplay environmental and social histories.[20] In twenty-first-century urban narratives, then, food functions as a nexus point of environment, economics and politics, as well as identity, gender, race and class.[21] In a biting satire on the availability of 'real' food, the narrator of *NW* comments on one of the characters' complaints that croissants will never be as good as in France by noting: 'This is because they are made in the back of a sweet shop, off Willesden Lane. *Real* croissants may be purchased from the organic market, on a Sunday, in the playground on Leah's old school' (Smith 2012: 18, emphasis mine). Real food is available to those who have the resources to pay for it: those primarily well-educated and affluent consumers who shop at organic and farmers' markets.[22]

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

Postmillennial British novels depict an ongoing engagement with cities as sites of a particular kind of urban nature that is especially poignant in a time of climate crisis. Much like the pastoral narrative explored in the previous chapter, the narrative of urban nature runs parallel to other climate crisis narratives such as those of environmental collapse (Chapter 1) and polar environments (Chapter 4). While climate crisis forces us to take a global view, the narrative of urban nature draws attention to the immediate natural spaces surrounding many of us. Seeing urban nature as nature, leads to a more varied and less rarefied idea about which spaces count as natural. Such an awareness may not only lead to empowerment and even activism, but also counter the often debilitating effect of the environmental destruction of more typical natural landscapes, such as glaciers. Indeed, sociological research shows that so-called unofficial green areas – such as greenery by the side of the road – are more valued by urbanites than 'official green areas', such as parks and gardens (Burgess, Harrison and Limb 1988: 460). Subjects in these studies treasure urban nature particularly for enhancing positive qualities of urban life: for the 'variety of opportunities and physical settings; sociability and cultural diversity' (Burgess, Harrison and Limb 1988: 471). To put it differently, urban green areas are valued precisely for being urban nature, not as signs

of the absence of 'real' nature. Urban natural spaces may even have the same restorative potential that many environmentalists and ecocritics attribute to non-urban environments (Karmanov and Hamel 2008: 122). For ecocriticism, the narrative of urban nature requires an extension of much of its traditional, and contemporary, corpus as well as its methodologies that is slowly underway (Bracke 2013). Recent ecocritical analyses of non-traditional landscapes have yet to lead to a sustained engagement with the positive possibilities that urban natural environment presents.

The Translation of the Bones, *Clay* and *NW* hence participate in a reconfiguration of nature narratives that is acutely aware of the significance of the man-made in natural spaces, without lamenting its presence. What emerges in twenty-first-century fiction is a narrative of urban nature that is both old and new, both enchanted with nature and aware of its loss, a narrative which reflects the problems and complexity of nature in cities, particularly concerning those who have access to it. Most importantly, it is a narrative that is acutely attuned to contemporary environmental circumstances, and depicts the full breadth and variety of postmillennial experiences of nature.

4

Polar

A 2010 television commercial begins with an image of the Arctic that has become all too familiar: melting ice, large chunks of glacier crashing into the sea, a forlorn-looking polar bear. The commercial continues by following the polar bear as it swims to a woodland area supposedly thousands of kilometres away from its natural habitat. He briefly shelters underneath an overpass, then follows train tracks, momentarily distracted by a colourful butterfly. He watches the brightly lit skyline of a large metropolitan area, encounters urban wildlife – a raccoon – and eventually ends up on a suburban street where a professionally dressed man is about to get into his car. The polar bear rears up on its hind legs to hug the perplexed man. While the two embrace, the voice-over steps in to introduce the audience to the Nissan LEAF, a 100 per cent electric car: 'Innovation for the planet' (Nissan 2010).

The commercial works on many levels: it neatly greenwashes what is essentially a polluting industry, anthropomorphizes an animal that is generally shy of humans – and often deadly when it is not – and taps into familiar images of polar landscapes. Of course, polar bears are no strangers to advertising. Coca-Cola, for instance, has been using polar bears in their ads since 1922. According to the maker of a 1997 commercial, the company uses polar bears because they are 'innocent, fun and [reflect] the best attributes we like to call "human" … The bears are cute, mischievous, playful and filled with fun' (Ryan 2012: par. 10). In the twenty-first century, polar bears are more than just innocent or fun. They have become the poster boys of the drama of climate change in which, as Sara Wheeler puts it, the Arctic is the lead player (2009: 4). Especially in advertising and environmental campaigns, the bears are a 'visual cliché' (Emmerson 2011: 151). 'Their fate', Charles Emmerson writes, 'is an emotive issue, used by some to raise awareness about the consequences

of climate change and by others to imply that global warming is a matter of aesthetics' (2011: 151). In commercials such as that for the Nissan LEAF, polar bears add a sense of environmental awareness that may be positively interpreted by the viewer, but that is fundamentally misleading.

The melting poles are one of the most dominant images of climate crisis in the twenty-first century: while the poles are often seen as the last wildernesses of the world, they also function as symbolic canaries in the mine of climate change: 'The role of climate change canaries is … to render global warming visible, to provide a sequence of what Kevin DeLuca has called "image events": easily recognised iconic scenes, such as crumbling icecaps or dried-up riverbeds, which stand for wider issues' (Hamblyn 2009: 231). Or, in the words of Robert Harriss, 'the Arctic of the early 21st century is a living laboratory for experiencing unprecedented, large-scale changes in land, ocean, ecosystem, and atmospheric environments' (2012: 4). The Arctic is 'nature's front line' (Emmerson 2011: 167). Indeed, of all the environments around the world, the Arctic is most severely affected – and it has been the focal point of crisis for decades. It was, Wheeler notes, 'the front line of the Cold War, with both sides pouring money into long-range nuclear bomber installations' (2009: 6). There's something about the Arctic, she concludes, that 'attracts millennial anxiety' (2009: 6). While often overshadowed by reports of the melting of the sea ice in the Arctic, Antarctica is also affected by climate crisis. Although the warming affecting the Arctic does not have the same severe consequences for Antarctica, the region became an early and powerful symbol of global climate crisis with the discovery of the ozone hole in 1985. At the same time, the Antarctic Treaty, ratified in 1961 and extended since, means that Antarctica's environment is better protected than that of the Arctic. Its distance and remoteness mean that Antarctica wasn't sighted until the eighteenth century, although stories about it had circulated for centuries. Most importantly, Antarctica has, unlike the Arctic, never been permanently populated.[1] Though different environments in some ways, the Arctic and Antarctica consequently hold some of the same meanings both historically and in the twenty-first century, and I discuss them as such. Both the North and South Pole have always held the appeal of the final frontier, emptiness and wilderness – to which the past decades have added the image of the poles as indicators of and most direct witnesses to climate crisis.

As I show in this chapter, throughout history the Arctic and Antarctic have functioned as nexus points in the British imagination where ideas of empire, identity and nature come together with climate crisis discourse and environmentalism. Through their engagement with polar space and the depiction of human nature in this space, the postmillennial novels I discuss in this chapter position polar landscapes as the symbolic and literal embodiments of climate crisis. Their engagement with the poles is rooted in a typically British tradition of polar narratives that continues to shape twenty-first-century experiences and narratives of the poles. In the next section, I briefly sketch this tradition, especially as it is reflected in the literary imagination. The majority of the chapter focuses on experiences of the polar landscape, through a discussion of space in the second section and exploration and environmentalism in the third. Polar narratives, such as Jeremy Page's *The Collector of Lost Things* (2013), Rebecca Hunt's *Everland* (2014) and Ian McGuire's *The North Water* (2016), are characterized by a refusal to see landscapes as places of positive belonging, and rather hold on to a familiar perception of these environments as hostile, alien and unknowable. In this concern with space, the chapter continues the discussion on space and place, topological and projective locations from the previous chapter. Polar spaces are historically and in the twenty-first century also typically presented as spaces of conquest and loss, making imperialist nostalgia central to experiences of the North and South Pole.

Imagining the poles

A video accompanying Ludovico Einaudi's 'Elegy for the Arctic' (2016) shows him playing his composition on a pontoon, just large enough for him and a black Steinway piano. In the background, a glacier is melting. Right before Einaudi begins to play, a loud crashing noise is heard as more cracks appear in the ice. All through the composition, the sound of the waves and the water suggest the sound of melting ice. In a kind of pathetic fallacy, large pieces of ice splash into the sea halfway through Einaudi's performance. Einaudi briefly looks up, but continues to play. Filmed in front of the Wahlenbergbreen glacier near Svalbard (Norway), 'Elegy for the Arctic' was composed and performed in 2016 by Einaudi for the Greenpeace campaign 'Save the Arctic' that aims to

make the Arctic a natural sanctuary. Nine years earlier, the British artist Katie Paterson created her own Arctic elegy by installing a microphone in Vatnajökull (Iceland) (Paterson 2007). Using a special telephone number, visitors to a gallery could phone in and listen to the glacier. They heard a slow dripping and crackling sound that becomes particularly eerie when the listener realizes they are hearing, as one journalist anthropomorphized it, the glacier's 'death throes' (Kennedy 2007: par. 1). In a similar fashion, the organization Cape Farewell, founded in 2001, combines art and environmentalism by taking artists and scientists to the Arctic. These expeditions have become famous through Ian McEwan's novel *Solar* (2010), in which the highly sceptical protagonist joins one of these – much like McEwan did himself.

Not since the Victorian period have the poles spoken so much to the cultural imagination.[2] In the mid-nineteenth century, the Arctic – and the vogue for polar narratives – even inspired Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens to write their play *The Frozen Deep* (1856). The direct inspiration for the amateur production was a report about the lost Franklin expedition. John Franklin had left to traverse the north-west passage with two ships in 1845 – and nothing was heard from them again. The loss of the ships and crew was a huge blow to British polar exploration. Almost worse than the loss of the ships and the men, however, were reports that emerged in 1854 that signs of cannibalism had been reported by Inuit who found the corpses of some of the crew. The British public was shocked. Collins and Dickens used *The Frozen Deep* to portray a heroic picture of British polar exploration and to slander the Inuit. Exploration, the play suggested, was a noble, Christian endeavour, of which a barbaric practice such as cannibalism wasn't part.[3] The currency of the Arctic in the Victorian imagination also shows in Dickens's 1854 novel *Hard Times*, in which one character pulling her chair away from the warmth of the fire inspires another to say, 'Don't go to the North Pole, ma'am!' (1988: 139). The novel's villain, James Harthouse, is described as not so much 'designedly bad', but rather 'indifferent and purposeless' (1988: 139). The narrator concludes this observation with a reference all too familiar to a Victorian audience familiar with the treacherous nature of icebergs – which had crushed the ships of many British polar explorers, or had set them adrift. Harthouse's indifference is likened to icebergs: 'It is the drifting icebergs setting with any current anywhere, that wreck the ships' (1988: 207). Even before the nineteenth century, writing about the Arctic and

Antarctica was popular – at least since, Sarah Moss suggests, 'the expansion of English print culture in the eighteenth century and probably long before that' (2006: 24). For Celtic monks in the seventh and eighth centuries, the Arctic was the ultimate place for retreat and reflection: both a Land of the Blessed and the home of the antichrist (Lopez 2014: 17; Officer and Page 2012: 23). In John Donne's 1613 poem 'Eclogue' the test of true passion is whether it can melt the ice of the North Pole: whether 'the passage of the west or east would thaw' (1613: l. 115). Until the late Renaissance, the search for a passage across the North Pole that the speaker of Donne's poem refers to contributed to the idea of the Arctic as a mysterious place: '[f]or the European mind, the North continued to be, mythologically, the place from where dangerous people and noisy gods swept south and, at the same time equally mythologically, a kind of promised land, a place where fortunes were to be made and national destinies resolved' (Officer and Page 2012: 28). Antarctica was long held to be even more mysterious and its first sightings were particularly exciting to explorers, scientists and artists. Cook's sightings of Antarctica in the 1770s influenced Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' (1798). Once the cursed ship in the poem sails southwards, the crew faces an icy landscape: 'And ice, mast-high, came floating by,/As green as emerald. … The ice was here, the ice was there,/The ice was all around:/It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,/Like noises in a swound!' (2012: ll. 53–54; 59–62). Polar journeys provided a particularly rich language and imagery to the Romantics. In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) Robert Walton describes the sublime experience of being 'surrounded by mountains of ice which admit of no escape and threaten every moment to crush my vessel' (1994: 205), a situation that he finds both pleasurable and threatening.

The Franklin disaster in the mid-nineteenth century spelled the end of the British glory age of polar explorations. Yet, enthusiasm for the poles – both in terms of journeys as well as the cultural imagination – was revived in the early twentieth century with the race for the South Pole. Robert Falcon Scott's failed attempt to be the first to reach the South Pole – the Norwegian Roald Amundsen beat him to it – created a new vogue of polar narratives. Scott explicitly shaped the cultural afterlife of his fatal expedition. He left behind a diary, published in 1913, as well as other papers describing his journey. When his grave was discovered in 1912, a 'message to the public' was retrieved.

Addressing the world at large, Scott wrote: 'Had we lived, I should have had a tale to tell of the hardihood, endurance, and courage of my companions which would have stirred the heart of every Englishman. These rough notes and our dead bodies must tell the tale' (2008: 422). In the years leading up to the First World War, such sentiments fuelled a climate already rife with heroism, masculinity and nationalism. Over the following decades, Scott's quest for the South Pole was referenced in many artistic works, from Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) to A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926). In Woolf's novel Mr Ramsay frames his intellectual pursuits in terms of a bleak and harsh polar journey that he struggles through. He is said to have qualities 'that in a desolate expedition across the icy solitudes of the Polar region would have made him the leader' (Woolf 2000: 40). The heroism that Woolf gently mocks in *To the Lighthouse* resurfaced in children's literature. Polar stories became popular for children because of the adventure, but they also passed on shared values and codes that were seen as typically English. The moralism and nationalism that early twentieth-century polar narratives were steeped in inspired authors such as A. A. Milne to satirize Arctic and Antarctic exploration.[4] In a 1926 story, neither Winnie-the-Pooh nor Christopher Robin are quite clear what the North Pole is: '"It's just a thing you discover," said Christopher Robin carelessly, not being quite sure himself' (Milne 1992: 101). Quite in line with confusion about the exact place of the North Pole, Pooh and his friends are confused about what this pole exactly looks like. When along the way Pooh picks up a stick – a pole – he becomes the North Pole's discoverer. True to form, a message is attached to the pole – perhaps a play on the message Amundsen left behind for Scott on the South Pole – saying: 'NorTH PoLE/DISCovERED By/PooH/PooH FouND IT' (Milne 2002: 116). The expedition that Christopher Robin, Pooh and their friends go on is, of course, deliberately ridiculous.[5]

J. M. Barrie drew a deliberate link between his creation Peter Pan and the Scott expedition when, in a 1922 lecture, he described Scott and his men as emerging 'out of the white immensities *always young*' (Moss 2006: 200, my emphasis) – just as Peter Pan and his Lost Boys never grow old. Peter Pan's announcement that 'to die will be an awfully big adventure' is read by Moss as an echo of Titus Oates's suicide during the expedition. Oates's act, and especially his famous last words, 'I may be some time', were summed up by

Scott as 'the act of a brave man and an English gentleman' (Moss 2006: 220). 'It is easy', Moss suggests, 'to see Scott's men as Peter Pan's Lost Boys, escaping to a simple world where boys make all the rules' (2006: 220).[6] The lost boys of Scott's expedition gain especial poignancy with the loss of millions of young men in the First World War shortly after his journey. Indeed, the dimension that the First World War adds to early twentieth-century polar exploration resurfaces in the journey Ernest Shackleton undertook across Antarctica in 1914–1915. Despite harsh and treacherous circumstances, he managed to rescue his men, only for them to be sent to the front upon their return to Britain (Moss 2009: 23). By the early twentieth century, polar exploration had lost much of the glory that it held before. As Moss suggests, Shackleton's expedition in 1914–1915 was the last of the 'Age of Heroism' (2006: 23). Short of fame or nationalistic heroism, none of the explorers or nations involved expected to find any benefits in 'bagging' a pole. Instead it had become 'an exercise in public relations that seemed to have little to do with the starvation and frostbite on the ground' (Moss 2006: 19).

The spirit of early twentieth-century Antarctic expeditions was rekindled in 2012 and 2015 with the centenaries of the Scott and Shackleton expeditions. The commemoration of these events led to the publication of numerous works of fiction and non-fiction, the organization of museum exhibits and even a recreation of Shackleton's earlier journey to the pole by his descendants. In the cultural imagination, the centenaries came to be tied in with the significance of the poles as places where climate crisis is becoming rapidly very visible. As sites of climate crisis, the Arctic and Antarctic tend to attract fictional scientists. In *Anthropocene Fictions*, Trexler remarks on the popularity of polar fictions that take scientists as their main characters. Novels such as Brian Freemantle's *Ice Age* (2002), Jean McNeil's *Ice Lovers* (2003) and Sarah Andrews's *In Cold Pursuit* (2007) all 'use mysterious deaths [in the scientific community] to create an inquiry into the motives connected to global warming' (Trexler 2015: 80). Climate crisis adds an additional layer to the already thick and complex narrative of polar exploration. As such polar narratives become spaces of past, present and future, reminiscent of a glory age of British polar exploration, and pointing not only to a changed position of Britain in the world, but also to a time in which the poles have become of unsurpassed significance.

Narratives of exploration: Nation and nature

For the Victorians, their explorations of the north were part of the same tradition as the journeys that established the British Empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Spufford 1996: 164). Their polar pursuits hence functioned as a consolidation of an empire stretching back several centuries. Postmillennial British polar novels are involved in a similar return to an earlier age by explicitly setting novels in the glory days of British polar expeditions in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. To put it differently, like Victorian polar narratives, contemporary polar novels participate in a reconfiguration of the past through the lens of the present, and the present through the lens of the past. While for the Victorians framing their own journeys in terms of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century discovery was also a matter of legitimizing the expansion of the British Empire, the nationalistic dimension is problematized rather than legitimized in contemporary novels. As explicitly addressed in *Everland*, exploring in the name of the British flag has become distasteful and suspect, and expeditions now take place supposedly solely under the banner of science. Of course, the notion of a post-imperial age is undermined by international disputes over who owns which parts of the Arctic and Antarctic and the numerous national research stations in both regions.[7]

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, nationalism has once again become an important topic in British politics and culture. The move towards post-nationalism and hybridity that Dominic Head predicted in the early 2000s (Head 2002: 118) seems to have been replaced by increased nationalism, insularity and an emphasis on cultural difference. Terrorist attacks in the United States and Europe, economic crisis, migration and the rise of right-wing parties across Europe have contributed to a sense of nationalism in many European countries. In Britain, the situation is further complicated by the ongoing debate on Britain's role in the world since the Second World War. On the one hand, this has led to the so-called special relationship with the United States and support for its military actions. On the other, as demonstrated by the June 2016 referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union, British nationalism is leading to far-reaching insularity.[8] Polar narratives provide a productive space in which these kinds of ideas and tensions of nationhood and identity are played out. In early twenty-first-century novels,

conceptions of identity dovetail with, and spill over into, concerns about the climate crisis so visible at the poles. Especially in *The Collector of Lost Things* and *The North Water*, nationalistic discourse is explicitly placed next and in contrast to the environmental destruction that exploration brings, thereby questioning the role past and present imperialism play in environmental degradation. Historical fiction is a particularly apt genre to explore such issues of identity and perhaps unsurprisingly the genre has flourished over the past decades. The rise of historical fiction, Suzanne Keen remarks, coincides with 'a booming heritage industry's focus on a positive, marketable past capable of inspiring patriotism and attracting tourists' (2006: 169). Novels such as *The Collector of Lost Things*, *Everland* and *The North Water* can be said to reveal 'a form of literary nationalism that cuts across serious and popular genres to interrogate the uses of the past in a postimperial age' (Keen 2006: 176). The past, these works suggest, is not only something to be celebrated, but should be questioned and used as a lens through which to explore the present. The environmental dimension of historical novels, however, has been largely absent from literary scholarship to date. Instead, many critics have analysed historical novels primarily against the background of postmodern conceptions of history. Novels such as John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton* (1987) and A. S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990) are explicitly concerned with blurring the lines between fact and fiction, history and novels. As Dana Shiller argues, 'these historical novels take a revisionist approach to the past, borrowing from postmodern historiography to explore how present circumstances shape historical narrative, and yet they are also indebted to earlier cultural attitudes toward history' (1997: par. 5). Shiller terms these kinds of novels 'neo-Victorian fiction', a concept that overlaps to a large extent with Linda Hutcheon's term 'historiographic metafiction'. Historiographic metafictions are, she proposes, 'both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages' (1988: 5). The works' awareness of history and fiction as human constructs results in a 'rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past' (1988: 5), for instance through the discovery of unknown documents or by foregrounding previously neglected gender or race perspectives. In the early twenty-first century, Peter Boxall argues, novels such as Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) continue to respond to the historiographic metafictions of the late twentieth

century (2013: 40). Twenty-first-century works do not 'fold history into fiction' but instead open up 'a difficult gap between fiction and history' (2013: 67). Although I would certainly term the three novels that I am concerned with in this chapter revisionist, I would neither call them 'neo-Victorian' or 'historical metafiction', nor class them as examples of the kinds of novels that Boxall identifies. None of the three polar novels explicitly engages with blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, for instance, nor are they 'intensely self-reflexive', to use Hutcheon's phrase. If anything, *The Collector of Lost Things*, *Everland* and *The North Water* take postmodern debates about history and historical fiction as a given. Without being explicit about it, they employ the past to hold up a mirror to the present, and at the same time have a revisionist attitude towards the historical period with which they are concerned. In this sense, my argument in this chapter develops in opposition to Trexler's in his brief discussion of polar novels. Many of these fictions, he proposes, 'struggle to connect to wider implications of climate change around the world, as well as the causes that might still be addressed' (2015: 82). The problem that these novels face, he argues, 'seems to be embedded in the literary history of Anglo-American polar explorations, which paints the landscape as a vast, empty wasteland fit for adventure' (2015: 82). Yet, as I show in this section, it is precisely this historical background and the perceptions of the polar landscape it propagates that foreground the contemporary significance of and issues in the Arctic and Antarctic. The characters of *The Collector of Lost Things*, *Everland* and *The North Water* are not just, as Baucom puts it, 'summarizing types of a particular moment or historical situation' (2015: 154)[9] – they use the past to critique the present.

The Collector of Lost Things, *Everland* and *The North Water* reframe nineteenth-century ideas about human–nature relationships. Quite literally, *The Collector of Lost Things* even revises environmental history by bringing back to life the Great Auk, a species that has been extinct since 1844, a year before the novel is set (BirdLife International 2012). In most cases, though, environmental revision means foregrounding the parallels between eighteenth and nineteenth-century exploration and contemporary environmentalism, as I discuss below. Although over the past years eco-historicist approaches have become more common,[10] historical fiction has frequently been seen as antithetical to the ecocritical project. Some ecocritics fear that focusing on

historical texts leads to an avoidance of contemporary environmental crisis or, as Clark argues, find them wholly unsuitable in reflecting the environmental crisis currently unfolding.[11] Yet, as my discussion demonstrates, historical fictions can be made productive in a time of climate crisis. Indeed, past experiences and traditions may allow us to imagine – and create – the future. As Kate Soper suggests, reflecting on past experiences can 'stimulate desire for a future that will be at once less environmentally destructive' (2011: 24). I'd argue that especially through their historical context, polar narratives hold up a mirror to contemporary environmentalism and provide a deeper understanding of the role that the poles play in twenty-first-century climate crisis discourse. As such, historical setting is not antithetical to contemporary climate crisis, but rather foregrounds the practices that have led to today's crisis.

Given my emphasis on the polar landscape as a canvas for historical and contemporary human–nature relations, my focus will be on space in this chapter. At the poles, time loses its meaning, making space a much more important dimension: 'The meaning of time … diminishes the farther north one goes, until it is virtually irrelevant: because the meridians (longitude circles) converge at the Pole, so do the time zones' (Officer and Page 2012: 3). A similar observation is made by the narrator of *Everland*: 'The natural metabolism of time was suspended in Antarctica' (Hunt 2014: 82). At the same time, the historical setting of many contemporary polar fictions makes time an important element as well. Indeed, considerations of time explicitly inform my discussion of the novels in the next section in which I focus on the parallels between past and present that these works create. Nonetheless, my main emphasis, especially in this section, is on space: space made the Arctic and Antarctica so attractive for explorers who saw in the white, seemingly perfect landscape a perfect *tabula rasa*. Closer to Britain, populated and with a slightly milder climate, the Arctic more frequently serves as a canvas for imperialist dreams: basically a frozen desert, unpopulated and remote and inaccessible for centuries, the Antarctic carries far fewer of these projections. Through its emphasis on space, this chapter forms a counterpart to Chapter 3, in which I make space central to my discussion of the narrative of urban nature. In that chapter, I explore the concept of space in terms of topological locations and projective locations. Topological locations are described according to their

geometric properties, and are invariable – David Herman uses the example of inside a box being the same no matter how you look at it (2002: 280). 'In front of the box', however, depends on your perspective. Hence, the perspective shapes the value and interpretation of a projective location. As William Frawley suggests, projective locations 'rely on a framework *projected by the viewer*' (1992: 262, original emphasis). In my discussion of urban space, I extended the narratological concepts of topological and projective locations through the concepts of space and place familiar to ecocritics. A projective location, I argue in Chapter 3, may function as a place as it has become familiar and has accrued and is shaped by value and meaning. In the urban landscape, a sense of positive belonging is significant in connecting characters to urban nature. In *Clay*, for instance, TJ's intimate knowledge of the park makes him feel a sense of positive belonging that he doesn't experience at home. The core of my discussion of polar spaces, however, is that polar narratives deliberately negate such a sense of belonging. From both a narratological and an ecocritical standpoint, the dynamic played out in polar narratives is counterintuitive. Although value – a marker of projective locations – is assigned to the landscape, this is typically a negative value, rather than the positive values generally associated with place. The sense of belonging and connection inherent to the concept of place is consequently denied. Place, British polar narratives such as those depicted in the novels suggest, may be a negative experience, and fictional characters and historical explorers describe a sense of negative belonging. While they have intimately come to know the polar environment and have immersed themselves in it, these acts hold none of the positive connotations attributed to place-attachment by ecocritics and environmental thinkers. From a narratological standpoint, the polar narrative demonstrates that the meanings and values central to projective locations need not emerge in direct relation to a location – as Herman's example of in front of a tree suggests – but may be a consequence of preconceived notions about a landscape such as ideas about nationalism, gender and nature.

The British polar narrative depicts the landscape as harsh and alien because this legitimizes the project of exploration as well as that of environmentalism, both of which are framed as a struggle, though with different adversaries. The refusal to become more familiar with the polar landscape surfaces in Victorian and earlier British explorations as much as it does in postmillennial novels.

Interestingly, the perception and experience of polar landscapes as harsh, deadly and nearly insurmountable is a particularly British narrative. The British were, as Frances Spufford suggests, 'uniquely unprepared' (1996: 5) for polar exploration – even though, or because, they frequently carried immense amounts of materials with them.[12] Being so uniquely unprepared reinforced an already existing idea about polar landscapes as empty, senseless, cruel and hostile – and made the explorers look even more heroic and masculine.

In *The Collector of Lost Things*, *Everland* and *The North Water* the weather functions as a powerful symbol for the inhospitality of polar circumstances. Both *The Collector of Lost Things* (Page) and *The North Water* (McGuire) are set in the nineteenth century. McGuire's novel tells the story of a young doctor, Patrick Sumner, who joins a whaling expedition. Aboard the ship he is faced with the cruelty of the hunt and his fellow crew members. Indeed a parallel is suggested between the brutality of the first mate and the decimation of the whaling population. In *The Collector of Lost Things*, Eliot Saxby, a young naturalist, joins a ship full of hunters determined to kill as many Arctic animals as possible. During the journey, he too – like Sumner in *The North Water* – is faced with cruel practices and a violent crew. He also experiences a personal crisis when he thinks he recognizes the only woman on board as his former lover. In both novels fog is a dominant weather feature symbolizing the alienating circumstances in the Arctic. The whaling ship *The Volunteer*, on which *The North Water* is set, sails through 'fog and sleet and bitter wind, days without ease or let-up, when the sea and sky melt together into a damp weft of roiling and impermeable greyness' (McGuire 2016: 49). The characters aboard the ship in *The Collector of Lost Things* have a similar experience: '[t]he further north we sailed, the thicker the weather became. Fogs descended, as if the top of the world was hidden in clouds and vapours. Through the mist, curtains of stinging rain swept across the sea, drenching the decks in a matter of seconds' (Page 2013: 61). The alienation of the polar landscape is compounded by mirages common to the poles. In *Everland* in 1913, '[t]he landscape was hallucinating itself … Each iceberg was roofed by a phantom image which rose and slurred into immense hourglass forms' (Hunt 2014: 87). Another recurring element in the novels is the first sighting of ice, typically preceded by an experienced captain pointing out the smell of ice to the novice explorers. The emotionally unstable narrator of *The Collector of Lost Things*

interprets the ice – and the Arctic as a whole – time and again as not only a hostile place, but a frightening place. When first seeing the polar ice he describes it as 'a sudden unexpected whiteness as hard and flat as quartz. It was the ice sheet, that stretched out for a thousand miles beyond, but which looked from this angle as thin as paper… The worlds of ocean and ice were meeting in a frontier of rage, as if the Earth has torn in two along a line' (Page 2013: 108). The Arctic, he decides, is 'a place, if there ever was a place, where you could disappear' (Page 2013: 108). To the main character of *The North Water*, the ice is similarly weird, albeit less frightening. He too, though, draws heavily on language reminiscent of the sublime, at which the description of the endless and somewhat frightening ice sheet in *The Collector of Lost Things* also points. The first iceberg in *The North Water* is 'immense, chimneyed, wing-gouged, sliding eastwards like an albinistic butte unmoored from the desert floor. The berg is moving at a brisk walking pace and as it moves, its nearest edge grinds against the floe and spits up house-sized rafts of ice, like swarf from the jaws of a lathe' (McGuire 2016: 197). This description is typical of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century imaginations of the polar landscape, which drew heavily on the sublime. Spufford describes the significance of the sublime to polar exploration by referring to a photograph of the Barne glacier taken during the Scott expedition. The glacier, he suggests, 'is already sublime, sublime in and of itself. Like a perpetual flood, upreared and then frozen into place, the glacier asserts a huge, swallowing indifference to the efforts of travellers' (Spufford 1996: 37). The sublime, of course, is not only characterized by grandeur and fear, but also by being a spectacle: something perceived by someone, without that person coming to harm. The sublime, in other words, does not require engagement – it is indifferent to humans, and functions largely as a projection for the human imagination. As such, the concept's centrality to polar narratives ties in with my argument about polar spaces never becoming places of positive belonging. A landscape can only be sublime if a true sense of belonging, or place, is not established.

Both *The North Water* and *The Collector of Lost Things* are informed by the sublime in their descriptions of Victorian journeys to the North Pole. In *Everland*, however, the sublime response to the landscape turns into disgust. Hunt's novel has the most contemporary setting of the three novels – and it is the only one of the three to be set on Antarctica, rather than in the Arctic. It

goes back and forth between a 1913 narrative and one set in 2012. In 1913 three British men set out to explore a part of Antarctica that they name Everland. From the beginning the expedition seems ill-fated. Napps, Millett-Bass and Dinners don't get along very well and they face increasingly bad weather. Napps and Millett-Bass eventually make the decision to leave the injured Dinners behind in his tent. At the end of the narrative, however, it is Dinners who is found, more dead than alive, and the other two who don't survive. In many ways the expedition at least initially fits the mould of the traditional polar narrative: the explorers are sponsored by over eighty British companies keen to associate their business with polar exploration, the men are explicitly concerned with proving their masculinity and a sense of nationalism pervades the discovery of a previously uncharted part of the Antarctic. As the captain of the ship that brings Napps, Millett-Bass and Dinners to Everland tells them: 'We're here to advance science for the British flag by exploring uncharted territory across the Antarctic continent' (Hunt 2014: 13). The landscape they encounter, however, has none of the sublime characteristics that Victorian polar narratives popularized. Once the men approach Everland, they see an island that is neither awe-inspiring nor beautiful. The narrator's description deliberately diminishes any grandness that Everland possesses:

> Everland appeared as a black-and-white-striped molehill in the distance, its profile dominated by the squat peak of its volcano. Snow banks had lined the island's dark terrain with thick vertical bands which ran down from the higher slopes to the beaches. A glacier lay across the volcano's shoulder like a crumpled stole, and filled the waters ringing the shore with splintered ice.
>
> (Hunt 2014: 16)

Once they've arrived, at least one member of the group – Millett-Bass – becomes convinced that Everland is not only unappealing, but deliberately evil. Everland, he says, 'is bad luck' (Hunt 2014: 67). As circumstances worsen, he becomes even more convinced of this: 'He had wild theories about the island having malign powers. He could sense some sort of evilness, he said' (Hunt 2014: 219). Millett-Bass's belief is, of course, a projection. Landscapes are indifferent to humans. Yet, his claim, as deluded as it may seem, is also an inherent part of the polar narrative that *Everland* presents. By emphasizing the struggle between humans and the landscape, in which the landscape becomes

an almost human adversary, the idea of Antarctica as a hostile space can persist. As long as the landscape is not seen for what it is – an indifferent space – connection cannot happen and only negative place belonging ensues, not the positive kind. It is, of course, precisely the absence of positive belonging that environmental thinkers often suggest leads to environmental destruction.

In the 2012 narrative as well, Everland is hardly sublime. The narrator provides a rather factual description, positioning the island as a topological location:

> Everland's interior was mostly impassable slate-like terrain that sloped up into the seven-hundred-foot-high peak of Antarctica's smallest volcano, which was live, but had no record of ever erupting. The island had two colonies, an Adélie penguin colony in a bay at the southern end, and a fur seal colony at the northern cove where the *Joseph Evelyn* was preserved in situ by the Antarctic Heritage Trust as a site of cultural importance.
>
> (Hunt 2014: 10)

To Brix, one of the three scientists involved in the expedition commemorating the 1913 journey, Everland is not a topological location. She is disappointed when she first sees it. The novel suggests that her disappointment is the consequence of the island not confirming to the images of sublime Antarctica that she is familiar with: 'It had none of the remote splendour she'd expected. Instead the Antarctic presented her with a rubble moonscape that had all the charm of a builders' yard' (Hunt 2014: 21). Everland focalized through Brix is 'silent and life-less, and brutally unimpressive. More than bleak, it was ugly' (Hunt 2014: 21). Brix's descriptions describe a projective location, coloured by the meanings and value she brings to bear on it. It is also a location that never becomes a place of positive belonging. Indeed, as far as Brix experiences any sense of belonging it is of the decisively negative kind. Brix's values keep her from establishing a positive relationship of place, which ends up informing her entire stay in Everland. She jeopardizes the expedition by getting lost and is generally believed to be unsuited to the project as a whole. Incidentally, the most experienced explorer of the group, Decker, sees the landscape quite differently. Indeed, the passages focalized through him do not emphasize alienation, hostility, or ugliness, but rather commonplace-ness. The fact that he is the exception reinforces the typical connotation of polar landscapes as

projective locations that rarely become positive places. While polar narratives tend to negate the landscape from becoming a positive place, Decker's repeated visits to Antarctica have nonetheless made it so: 'Unlike Brix, to whom everything about Antarctica was exotic and strange, it was all familiar to him. Everything was commonplace in its own habitat, and after twenty years of Antarctic research, penguins and glaciers were no more astounding for him to witness than cows or trees' (Hunt 2014: 156). Once the landscape has become a (common)place, the novel suggests, the sublime layer of the landscape falls away, as does the kind of hostility that Brix experienced. At that point, the landscape can be seen for what it really is, rather than as a canvas for ideas about nature, nationhood and struggle. Decker is the only one amongst the characters in *Everland* who feels a positive sense of belonging to the landscape. For him, the landscape has become a projective location and a place in a more traditional sense: not a result of preconceptions, but rather a consequence of values and meanings originating from the landscape itself.

Eventually, the 2012 expedition nearly goes wrong when Brix goes missing and the team is trapped on the island due to bad weather conditions. While the parallels between the two storylines abound, as I also discuss in the next section, all three explorers in 2012 make it home alive. In both narratives, though, as in *The North Water* and *The Collector of Lost Things*, the polar environment is depicted as a harsh and frequently downright alienating place. Polar environments are no doubt tough on anyone not used to them. Yet, unlike the British, Nordic explorers were much better equipped to deal with polar circumstances. They learned from the Inuit, for whom the landscape was most likely familiar and not alienating. Rather than taking ponies or pulling sledges themselves, for example, Nordic explorers used dogs, built snow houses and wore fur clothing. For the British this was not a matter of simply not knowing what equipment would be most useful – it was a matter of nationalist pride *not* to follow the ways of the indigenous population. Responses to the 'loss' of the South Pole, when the Norwegian explorer Amundsen reached it before Scott, are telling in this respect. The British blamed Amundsen for 'poor sportsmanship' and argued that no 'gentleman explorer' would act as he did (Officer and Page 2012: 155). If Scott had used dogs – as Amundsen did – rather than crew members to pull the sledges he would probably have survived. But for Scott this was not a practicality, but rather the right – British – way of

conducting an exploration. For him, 'no journey made with dogs can approach the fine conception' of men facing the struggle of their own (qtd on Officer and Page 2012: 155). Using crew members rather than dogs would be a 'conquest more nobly and splendidly won' (qtd on Officer and Page 2012: 155). Engaging with the landscape, then, is an expression of nationalist and imperialist politics, and the environment itself becomes a canvas for these politics. Nordic engagement with the poles was, of course, shaped by politics and nationalism as well. In his book *Northern Mists* – described by Emmerson as an example of 'national self-aggrandisement' (2011: 21) – the Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen emphasizes his country's accomplishments (Emmerson 2011: 21). Yet, whereas for the British nationalism and politics turned the poles into an alien and inhospitable landscape, Norwegians in particular translated their nationalism into positive perceptions of the poles. Rather than a hostile, harsh environment, inimical to human life, for many Nordic travellers the Arctic and Antarctica were a spiritual home. Nansen explicitly did not experience the Arctic as depicted by many British polar narratives:

> Now we are in the very midst of what the prophets would have us dread so much. The ice is pressing and packing round us with a noise like thunder. It is piling itself up into long walls, and heaps high enough to reach a good way up the Fram's [his ship] rigging; in fact, it is trying its very utmost to grind the Fram into powder. But here we sit quite tranquil, not even going up to look at all the hurly-burly, but just chatting and laughing, as usual.
>
> (qtd on Moss 2006: 71)

In British narratives, both historical and contemporary, being beset by ice is generally interpreted negatively. In *The Collector of Lost Things*, Saxby describes the Arctic as nightmarish and deceiving: 'It's a wilderness that can encircle you, remove your perception, and dull your mind' (Page 2013: 269). Scott likewise described days on Antarctica when 'a sense of oppression is inevitable' (2008: 324), and in his journals characterized the South Pole as 'an awful place and terrible enough for us to have laboured to it without the reward of priority' (2008: 376) – suggesting an ambivalence reminiscent of the sublime, in which 'awful' is both awe-inspiring and horrible.

In *The Collector of Lost Things*, *Everland* and *The North Water*, then, the characters come to experience the danger of the polar landscape, in which travel

takes days and weeks longer than anticipated, in which snow blocks the eyes, and in which optical illusions make it very difficult to tell distances. Although the novels are largely set in the past, the landscapes in these novels should not only be seen as symbolic for the present environmental crisis, but may also help us think about the future. Like the polar landscapes, the landscapes of the future are likely to be unlike those we are used to: warmer and wetter in some places, colder and snowier in others, and drier in yet other areas of the world. The world will increasingly become a world in which, as Moss writes about the poles, '[i]n practical ways as much as in the imagination … none of the usual rules apply' (2006: 1). In a twenty-first-century setting, then, the Arctic and Antarctica become a canvas for discourses of climate crisis, both present and future. From spaces in which nationalism and masculinity could be tested, the poles have come to not only symbolize a rapidly changing world but have come to be at the frontline of climate crisis. In quite a different way than has been the case over the past few centuries, the Arctic and Antarctica now even threaten 'to harm *us*, for the icebergs and glaciers that were once thought of as stagnant are now considered to be living entities of their own, with a metabolism of their own, and could break off into oceans and irreparably flood major cities' (McGavin 2013: 59, original emphasis). This changing dynamic – from exploration to environmentalism to threat – is reflected in the novels especially through the implicit and explicit parallels they draw between exploration in the past and environmentalism and climate crisis in the present.

Narratives of extinction: Discovery and environmentalism

The historical context of polar narratives, especially in those novels in which the past is placed next to contemporary settings, foregrounds connections that would otherwise remain invisible or oblique. In *The Collector of Lost Things*, *Everland* and *The North Water*, this juxtaposition is explored especially in the ways in which contemporary environmentalism echoes some of the issues surrounding historical exploration and collecting. The concept of imperialist nostalgia – the longing for that which one has destroyed – plays a significant role in all three novels. Indeed, I'd argue that this feeling is so central to exploration and environmentalism that it is one of the elements that demonstrates how

the two are marks on a continuum, rather than opposites. This continuum stretches from the earliest Western engagements and explorations of the Arctic and Antarctica to contemporary environmentalism and awareness of climate crisis at the poles. While exploration and environmentalism do often have opposing aims – killing versus protecting, for instance – both point to a similar relation between humans and their non-human environment as especially the extinction narrative in *The Collector of Lost Things* demonstrates. In order to highlight this continuum, the three novels create parallels between past and present: sometimes very explicit – as in *Everland* – and sometimes much more subtle.

In *Everland*, the story of a 1913 expedition is told side-by-side with exploration of the same terrain in 2012. At the beginning of the novel, these two storylines are neatly alternated: the first chapter is set in 1913, the second in 2012, the third in 1913 and so on. As circumstances in 1913 and 2012 worsen, however, this neat pattern becomes more erratic, through which the novel's form reflects how things are falling apart in both stories. At times, the two storylines spill over into each other: chapter 6, for instance, describes the tent of the expedition members in 1913, and chapter 7 begins with a reference to the tent in the 2012 journey. In similar fashion, chapter 25 describes a blizzard in 1913, and is wedged in between two 2012 chapters which are also set during a blizzard. In these instances, *Everland* reflects the kind of conflated temporal constructions that Brian Richardson identifies in postmodern novels. In such texts, 'different temporal zones fail to remain distinct, and slide or spill into one another. As the story segments run into each other, so do their respective temporalities' (Richardson 2002: 50–51). This technique foregrounds the connections between different temporal zones, which in the case of *Everland* results in a link between exploration and environmentalism, between past and present engagements with the Antarctic landscape. Connections between the two stories are not only made on the level of the overarching novel, but also are noted by the characters. In 2012 the past literally comes to the surface when Decker, Brix and Jess find a pineapple tin left behind by the men in 1913 (Hunt 2014: 56). They also come across the expedition flag with the motto *tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis* – times change and we change with them. Brix even literally comes face-to-face with the past when she finds Napps's body in

a cave, preserved by the ice and embedded in the ice-lined wall – a direct echo of the discovery of John Torrington's body, exhumed 140 years after he died during the Franklin expedition. Parallels of a different kind can be discerned in *The Collector of Lost Things* and *The North Water*, even though these don't consist of a double narrative like *Everland* does and are wholly set in the past. Rather, connections between past and present are made through descriptions of exploration that depict and foreshadow extinction and environmental crisis.

Page's *The Collector of Lost Things* and McGuire's *The North Water* are both narratives of exploration. They are also narratives of extinction – the first sentence of Page's novel even is '[p]erhaps I would be too late to save them [the Great Auks]' (Page 2013: 1). Saxby is on the search for the Great Auk, a bird that has been extinct since 1844, a year before the novel is set. A group of collectors has bet on whether the bird really is extinct and are paying Saxby to find out. He soon comes to abhor life aboard the ship: the crew's aim is to hunt and kill as many animals as possible, as ruthlessly as possible. Even though Saxby believes himself to be a good guy amongst all the brutality – and readers may be tempted to think so as well – the novel complicates this. The ship's captain challenges Saxby one night by telling him that his job as a collector is no different from his as a hunter:

> You, sir, are a collector. You are paid by the very same museums that have demanded this wretched bird for their display cabinets. In my world this bird is a lousy meal of greasy meat. It is your world that has placed a price upon its head. I suggest you take note of that, and your responsibility within it.
>
> (Page 2013: 160–161)[13]

When against the odds Saxby finds a tiny colony of Great Auks, these are immediately killed by the crew. One bird escapes and Saxby hides her aboard the ship. In the discovery of half a dozen Great Auks, environmentalism, hunting and extinction come together. Saxby sees this discovery as a new opportunity for the species, as an almost magical reversal of extinction (Page 2013: 152). To the captain, though, their rarity and incalculable value justifies killing the birds. When Saxby tells him that he is making an extinction, the captain retorts that he is making money and the birds are drowned by the crew (Page 2013: 159). Eventually Saxby, the Great Auk and her egg disembark on

the Scottish island of Barra, where he aims to foster a new colony of the birds. A similar case of reversed extinction – in which an extinct species is discovered to have survived – takes place in *Everland*. The 1913 expedition spot a group of fur seals, believed to have been extinct for years. Napps and Millet-Bass argue about whether or not to kill them. To Napps, 'the idea of hammering out the last few surviving fur seals on earth seemed like an act of unspeakable evil', but Millet-Bass pragmatically suggests that 'you also couldn't inflict damage on something which had already been destroyed' (Page 2013: 98). While they do kill the seals in the end, a small pocket of the population survives, and the scientists in 2012 observe that numbers have revived.

Exploration, hunting and extinction are also tied together in *The North Water*, set largely aboard a whaling ship. Sumner has joined in the belief that it will provide him with a place to lie low, having been discharged from the British army in India after a scandal. He looks forward to catching up on his classics and making some sketches of Arctic flora and fauna, but instead is plunged headfirst into the brutality of the hunt. Like in *The Collector of Lost Things* the ship's crew doesn't only hunt whales, but also other animals. Though whales and seals are immediately taken apart, polar bears are carefully skinned in order to be mounted. A live polar bear might be worth even more than a dead one, as the characters in *The North Water* discuss: one of the crew knows someone at a zoo who will pay twenty pounds for a polar bear cub. In McGuire's novel the contemporary connotation of polar bears I discussed at the beginning of the chapter is foreshadowed. In the nineteenth century the bears were similarly symbols of the Arctic and human relationships with the landscape. Indeed, the symbolic meaning of the animals goes back centuries. Barry Lopez writes that for Europeans the polar bear was 'a symbol of the implacable indifference of an inhospitable landscape' (2014: 113), and that hunting them became the 'sort of amusement' people expected on an Arctic journey (2014: 111). Until the Russians banned the hunting of the bears in the mid-1950s, around 1,300 polar bears were killed annually (Lopez 2014: 80). As embodiments of the Arctic, exploration and crisis, polar bears also show the changing sensibilities regarding hunting and extinction. Originally a ghostly presence, they became a nuisance to explorers and finally a symbol of environmental crisis (Lopez 2014: 113). The polar bear has, as Lopez puts it, become 'a vaguely noble creature, wandering in a desolate landscape, saddled

with melancholy thoughts' (2014: 113), as depicted in the Nissan commercial and in numerous environmental campaigns.

Just how closely related exploration and environmentalism can be is shown in *The Collector of Lost Things* when Saxby ceases to be an explorer and collector and becomes an environmentalist. Of the three novels I discuss in this chapter, this novel best illustrates the shifting sensibilities towards exploration and hunting that Lopez remarks on in relation to the polar bear. As the novel progresses, Saxby becomes increasingly convinced of the harm he and others are doing to the Arctic and comes to see it as a place of extinction. Every creature in the Arctic is 'fit for murder', he concludes, and '[s]laughter was everywhere' (Page 2013: 171). It is through Saxby's growing environmentalism that the novel establishes a parallel between the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries. Up until the nineteenth century, whalers, sealers and pastime hunters like the ones on Saxby's ship perceived the Arctic Ocean as seemingly inexhaustible. Yet, by the 1820s, the overfishing of whales had become a problem and after the high point of British Arctic whaling in 1823, the industry began to unravel. Set in 1845, the crew in *The Collector of Lost Things* aren't too concerned yet about the finitude of Arctic species. Saxby, the budding environmentalist, however, realizes that 'the Arctic Ocean was a larder with apparently infinite resources, yet it was clear the Arctic was not infinitely replenished' (Page 2013: 308). Similar environmental knowledge is expressed in *The North Water*. Initially the ship's captain does not believe that whales are slowly being hunted to extinction. Instead he holds on to the popular notion that the whales had travelled further north and that beyond the ice there was an ice-free Arctic Ocean where they swam (McGuire 2016: 103). The ship's owner, however, has come to the conclusion that the whaling business is no longer profitable: 'We *killed* them all … It was tremendous while it lasted and magnificently profitable too. We had twenty-five fucking good years' (McGuire 2016: 33, original emphasis). In both novels, then, a parallel between the past and the present is created through an awakening sense of environmentalism, or at least extinction, felt by some of the characters. At the same time, reading the novels with hindsight makes these predictions of extinction prophetic and turns the historical narrative into a foreshadowing of the extensive environmental crisis we currently experience.

Reading with hindsight also reveals how historical setting can serve as a mirror to contemporary practices of extinction. Overfishing, for example, is a nineteenth-century problem as much as it is a twenty-first-century problem. *The Collector of Lost Things* is most explicit in holding up this mirror. Once he's rescued the only remaining Great Auk and has settled on Barra, Saxby reflects on his initial discovery of the bird. The scene of reversed extinction when he discovered the Auks and the renewed extinction when almost all of the birds were killed changed his outlook on life – and humankind. Looking back on it he realizes that 'this scene, of man's destruction, of his heartlessness, would inevitably be repeated time and time again, across the decades and centuries with all the world's creatures. Man will murder whales and seals in their thousands, he will pluck the birds from their rocks and shoot them from the sky' (Page 2013: 369). The contemporary reader can only agree with Saxby's conclusions knowing that hundreds of thousands of species have gone extinct since the mid-nineteenth century.

Yet, parallels between the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries and between exploration and environmentalism go beyond prophecy or recognizing connections between extinctions. In both historical novels and contemporary circumstances, and in both exploration and environmentalism, the value attributed to a species lies in its rarity. In that sense, Saxby's collecting, and later environmentalism, is indeed much closer to the captain's hunting than the former feels comfortable with. Even collectors such as Saxby would at times kill animals so that they could be displayed. Collecting and exploration are, as much as environmentalism, concerned with the post-mortem quality of a species, a concern with what has been lost, or is about to be lost. This concern with loss and value is shared by exploration and environmentalism. A degree of imperialist nostalgia is at the heart of both – and of historical and contemporary polar narratives. Renato Rosaldo uses the concept of imperialist nostalgia to describe the specific type of nostalgia in which people mourn the thing they have destroyed, be it the innocence of a colonized people or nature (1989: *passim*). Many contemporary conceptions of nature are framed by loss: the loss of the rainforest, the loss of the polar ice, the loss of natural darkness and the loss of the polar bear floating away on an ice shoal. Paradoxically, this 'post-mortem quality' of nature may be exactly what appeals to many people (Soper 1995: 195–196). In the case of the Great Auk, it being alive or extinct

matters to Saxby's employers because they have made a bet on it. For Saxby, himself, the value of the bird is not just monetary, but lies in the fact that it would present man with 'a reminder of what he has done' (Page 2013: 91) – it has become a symbol of environmental destruction. The crew of the whaling ship in *The North Water* similarly feels a kind of imperialist nostalgia when it comes to the whales, even though for them this is largely inspired by the profit they're missing out on. In *The Collector of Lost Things* Saxby even feels a kind of proto-imperialist nostalgia when he realizes that before the whaling ships reach them, 'these magnificent creatures [are] oblivious of our presence' (Page 2013: 201).

The animals' obliviousness, their innocence and unspoiledness, as it were, is a significant part of imperialist nostalgia, but also of historical and contemporary conceptions of the wild. Saxby's proto-imperialist nostalgia echoes William Cronon's wilderness paradox, which I also discuss in the previous chapter. 'The place where we are', Cronon suggests, 'is the place where nature is not' (1995: 81). This paradox is central to engagements with the poles and polar narratives rely on it in order to make the polar landscape seem inhospitable and polar explorers heroic. As such, polar exploration is a continual search for the wild – only to lose it once it is reached. Similarly, environmentalism is faced with trying to find a balance between preserving the wild, and at the same time interfering with it in attempts to preserve it. The concern for the wild is hence another way in which environmentalism echoes practices of exploration. Richard Davis emphasizes the parallels between exploration and environmentalism when he traces the development of exploration narratives in the twentieth century. Before the First World War, he suggests, exploration narratives were 'characterized by a desire to dominate the wilderness, to assert the unquestioned supremacy of the human will over undomesticated nature' (Davis 1981: 85). In the course of the twentieth century, this idea shifts from the desire to find 'a relatively simple enjoyment of the natural world' in the mid-twentieth century, to a belief more familiar to contemporary engagements with nature in which 'the explorer seeks out unspoiled regions for what he can learn from them' (Davis 1981: 85). Yet, environmental concern may easily spill over into tourism – as the fact that nearly half a million ecotourists visited Antarctica in 2015–2016 demonstrates (International Association for Antarctic Tour Operators 2016: n.p.). Travelling

to Antarctica, or other remote regions, even in the name of environmentalism, becomes an extension of the explorers' search for the wild.[14] Not even the experienced researcher Decker in *Everland* is immune to this. He compares Everland to another tourist destination, the Franz Josef glacier in New Zealand and proposes that: 'The Franz Josef glacier was somewhere between a celebrity and a zoo exhibit, with its own merchandise of printed mugs and tea towels, postcards and calendars. It was tame and pimped, unlike the glacier on Everland, which Decker classified as wild, and therefore much more authentic' (Hunt 2014: 226). The question, of course, is when polar spaces like Everland will cease to be 'wild' and 'authentic', and when Decker's ideas about these areas have become just another example of imperialist nostalgia.

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The juxtaposition of the empty, wild landscape of the poles and their destruction by humans is precisely how postmillennial fictions like *The Collector of Lost Things*, *Everland* and *The North Water* – though set in the past – capture contemporary human relationships with nature, vacillating between a desire for the wild, a desire to possess the wild and, subsequently, a mourning for the wild that no longer is. Symbolically as well as literally, the Arctic and Antarctic are nodes in which past and present environmental circumstances, nation and exploration, environmentalism and climate crisis come together. Polar narratives do not only depict historical or contemporary polar settings, but also play on the fear of the world becoming as extreme and unpredictable as the poles have long been to most Westerners. As well as being some of the most poignant contemporary symbols for climate crisis, the physical realities of the Arctic and Antarctica open up an imaginative space to think through the changes wrought by climate crisis. The Arctic in particular functions as a kind of synecdoche for the human condition in a time of climate crisis, as Graham Huggan suggests: 'the uncertain future of the Arctic holds equally uncertain clues about mankind's future on the planet' (2016: 79). For narratives and literature, the challenge lies in identifying not only the Arctic and Antarctic as symbols of climate crisis, but also in describing human engagements with these environments, both as typical for human–nature relations in general, as well as unique to these regions.

While my discussion of the role of narratives in Chapter 1 demonstrates the extent to which depictions of climate crisis are always narrated and are

far from transparent, this chapter foregrounds the discourses that we bring to bear on environments. The Arctic and Antarctica are unique as spaces that are – historically and today – thick with projections and discourses about nature, nationalism and identity, and are at the same time at the frontline of the largest challenges facing humanity. For ecocriticism, polar narratives emphasize the need for the field to engage with 'white' as well as the 'green' spaces it has traditionally focused on – a development that is slowly getting underway.[15] Historical fictions may be especially productive as they emphasize how historical spaces and settings may hold up a mirror to contemporary circumstances and beliefs. On many levels, then, polar landscapes and the narratives surrounding them are the quintessential climate crisis spaces. Perhaps even more than the environmental collapse, pastoral and urban narratives, polar narratives quite literally embody the awareness of climate crisis that haunts contemporary ideas about nature.

Conclusion

The brochure for a thirty-two-day cruise through the Arctic promises its guests 'unprecedented adventures and unsurpassed luxury … in the footsteps of intrepid explorers' (Crystal Cruises 2016: n.p.). The ship will sail through 'unparalleled landscapes of grand glaciers, stunning fjords, and rare wildlife sightings as you learn the Arctic culture and its fascinating people' (Crystal Cruises 2016: n.p.). Priced at just under 22,000 dollars per person, the 2016 cruise through the north-west passage was quickly sold out. On the website of Crystal Cruises, passengers can also buy the right 'gear' for their cruise: not bathing suits, tropical hats or evening wear – although black tie is suggested for some on-board dinners – but lightweight hoodies, waterproof pants and thermal socks. The website selling the gear features images of the polar explorers Roald Amundsen and Henry Stanley supposedly endorsing the 'full package' and 'the *bear* essentials' (Ship to Shore 2016a: n.p., emphasis mine). But even when passengers don't buy the full package consisting of everything from long underwear to snow boots and neck gaiters, they probably have little to worry about. Temperatures in the Arctic in summer are, the company promises its guests, 'not as cold as might be expected' and 'temperatures can be pleasant and sunny' (Ship to Shore 2016b: n.p.).

The north-west passage cruise and the advertising around it are thick with ideas about nature, both past and present. By deliberately framing its journey in terms of exploration, and nature as an adventure, the company ties its advertising in with the idea of polar exploration as a noble and glorious act. Yet, the references to and pictures of polar adventurers also offer a kind of legitimization for the cruise. A twenty-first-century cruise to a region in crisis, the brochure suggests, is not problematic or suspect but rather an act as celebrated and unchallenged as Victorian journeys to the Arctic were. At the same time, of course, the background of exploration adds a frisson of

potential danger to the luxury cruise that may appeal to tourists who want more than sip cocktails on deckchairs by the pool. What is not addressed in the brochure is the reason why the north-west passage has become navigable for a 68,000-ton luxury cruise ship. Global warming has melted the Arctic sea ice to such an extent that the passage, thought to be unnavigable by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century explorers, has now become passable. The burning of fossil fuels – for instance, by global shipping – has played a considerable role in global warming, which is particularly wry considering the large footprint of cruise vacations (Pearson 2016: par. 5). The comment that temperatures 'can be pleasant and sunny' in the Arctic is even more cynical than the cruise itself. 2016, the year in which the cruise was first offered, once again showed record high temperatures in the Arctic. While the temperatures may feel pleasant to the ship's passengers, for the Arctic they are a disaster. The 22,000 dollars passengers pay give them a luxurious front seat for the unfolding of climate crisis – from the comfort of their own state-of-the-art cabin. Moreover, the wealth of the people that the cruise attracts stands in stark contrast with that of the people living in the Arctic. As exploration, tourism and climate crisis eroded traditional hunting grounds and destroyed traditional social structures, much of the remaining population of the Arctic struggles with poverty, addiction and poor health.[1] As such, even the prize of a place aboard the ship functions as a metaphor of global climate crisis in which the poor are disproportionally affected by the actions of the rich. In her book *The Magnetic North*, Wheeler describes going on an Arctic cruise as well. In 2008, she and her son joined an international group of tourists aboard a Russian icebreaker to travel across the Arctic Ocean. When the tourists spot their first polar bear, Wheeler is struck by the wry irony of the cruise: 'we were absorbed in the wonders of the natural world having burned up hydrocarbons by the tonne to reach them. Knitting at the guillotine? Or fiddling while Rome burned? Either way, this particular ship of fools illustrated the environmental conundrum of our times' (2009: 279).

Crystal Cruises' journey through the north-west passage and Wheeler's cruise are examples of extinction or 'last chance' tourism in which people visit a destination because it is under threat. Another example is the Great Barrier Reef. In a 2015 survey, 69 per cent of visitors to the reef said that seeing it before it was gone was one of their most important reasons to visit (Piggott-McKellar and McNamara 2016: 11). At the end of the cruise, Wheeler's son expresses a similar

sentiment: 'he was sad to think he might not be able to repeat the journey with his own son, if the ice really does melt' (2009: 299). Both the Arctic and the Great Barrier Reef are on a list published by *Time* in 2014 of '10 amazing places to visit before they vanish', which includes Venice, the Maldives and the Alps – all (future) victims of climate crisis (Gibson 2014). Though last chance tourism is not new or unique to the twenty-first century (Piggot-McKellar and McNamara 2016: 3), lists such as that provided by *Time* and vacations to the Great Barrier Reef and the Arctic are particularly apt examples of contemporary human–nature relations. Indeed, few things better illustrate the complexity of people's engagement with the natural world in a time of climate crisis. The fact that so many people give 'to see the reef before it's gone' as a reason for visiting the Great Barrier Reef shows the extent to which cultural awareness of climate crisis has even influenced decisions about where to go on holiday. Yet, the example of the Great Barrier Reef and the Arctic cruises also show the dark irony at the heart of climate crisis. Visiting a destination because it is about to be lost to climate crisis is a way of contributing to that same crisis. Indeed, the tourist who in an article in *The Guardian* said that he came to the Great Barrier Reef because he'd heard that 'tourism is killing it' (Mathiesen 2016: par. 9) is engaging in an act of imperialist nostalgia he's probably not aware of himself. Last chance tourism consequently functions as a kind of feedback loop: tourism exacerbates climate crisis, which in turn increases the appeal of certain regions for some people.

Approaching climate crisis through the narratives that surround it shows the influence it has on the twenty-first-century imagination and the role that art plays in depicting this crisis. The central argument of this book is that postmillennial British fictions reflect widespread cultural awareness of climate crisis, but also participate in the renegotiation of the stories we tell about it by suggesting modifications of older narratives and offering new ones. The novels I discuss especially emphasize the role that storytelling plays as a sense-making strategy. Such narrative framing goes beyond literature. When people describe the countryside as a place to 'get away from it all' they frame it in terms of the pastoral narrative, while Crystal Cruises' decision to frame their cruise to the north-west passage in terms of polar exploration is a deliberate appeal to the polar narrative I discuss in Chapter 4. Foregrounding the role that narratives play in depicting and communicating climate crisis, as I do throughout this book, also contributes to increased awareness about how narratives might

be employed to manipulate readers or, in the terms of television advertising, viewers. The Nissan LEAF commercial I describe in Chapter 4 draws on the narrative of polar nature to present an essentially polluting industry in terms of environmentalism, with the polar bear as its poster child. Similar greenwashing happens in the British Gas commercial that I mention in the introduction and which uses a penguin – wrapped up warm in a hat and scarf – to promote insulation. In suggesting that the penguin is looking for, as the commercial puts it, 'a warm home', the viewer might initially feel that she is doing something good for the environment by insulating her house. At a deeper level, however, the commercial is deeply cynical: it uses the narrative of polar nature and wider climate crisis discourse to cover up the fact that the burning of fossil fuels contributes to climate crisis. The penguin, of course, is not looking for a warm home – its habitat is threatened because continued demand for fuel is making its home too warm. Twenty-first-century novels provide a particularly valuable context in which to explore the role that climate crisis plays in the contemporary cultural consciousness. They present a sense of immediacy and familiarity that makes readers recognize the climate crisis discourses depicted and that ties in with other narratives and cultural artefacts in the reader's immediate environment, like films and commercials. As such, postmillennial novels are a valuable context in which to explore how climate crisis is being imagined now, and which stories are developing around it.

In a time of increasing and extensive climate crisis, it is the threatened quality of nature, a kind of econostalgia, that has become one of the defining characteristics of contemporary human–nature relations. Polar bears floating away on an ice shoal, monkeys losing their habitat and other animals common to environmental campaigns all address this sense of 'about to be gone'. While these campaigns aim to inspire a sense of guilt or compassion, they also contribute to a wider cultural image of nature as about to be lost. Econostalgia and extinction tourism hence fit in with the narratives of environmental collapse and polar natures that I discuss in Chapters 1 and 4 – yet at the same time are premised on the loss of an idealized nature such as that which the postmillennial pastoral narrative (Chapter 2) challenges. While climate crisis is predominantly about loss, awareness of climate crisis also leads to the emergence of new ways of thinking about nature. A particularly good example of that is urban nature (Chapter 3), a topic which has received

increasing attention over the past decades. But even the pastoral narrative, the most traditional of the ones I explore in this book, is being reinvigorated. The narratives that shape how we imagine, interpret and make sense of climate crisis in the twenty-first century, then, aren't only narratives of loss. In fact, they are explicitly also about change and a productive rather than merely mournful response to nature, suggesting novel means by which to engage with the non-human natural world other than defeatism in the face of climate crisis.

Chapter 1, on the narrative of environmental collapse, discusses climate crisis head-on. The narrative of environmental collapse, while infused by crisis, destruction and loss, also provides a counterpoint to the traditional narrative of apocalypse frequently used for environmental and climate crises. The apocalyptic narrative often results in defeatism or denial. That of environmental collapse, on the other hand, shows characters living with crisis – even if the future is bleak or, as can be argued about *Cloud Atlas*, the end of humanity is near. As such, the narrative of environmental collapse illustrates Greg Garrard's suggestion that 'the real moral and political challenges of ecology may lie in accepting that the world is *not* about to end, that human beings are likely to survive even if Western-style civilisation does not. Only if we imagine that the planet *has* a future, after all, are we likely to take responsibility for it' (Garrard 2011: 116, original emphasis). Using the principle of minimal departure as a means of playing with temporal distance, the narrative of environmental collapse brings home crisis to a far greater extent than less realist and more futuristic apocalyptic narratives have hitherto done. The novels explored in the first chapter also introduce a sensitivity to, or even a scepticism of, narratives and the act of storytelling that runs through the book.

Chapter 2 shows a shift from the pastoral narrative as predominantly associated with the problematic idealization of nature, to a narrative that provides a space in which to come to terms with the changing functions of the countryside. This reconceptualization of the pastoral narrative has taken place over the past decades at the same time as climate crisis has become increasingly important in the cultural imagination. While climate crisis might not be always explicitly addressed in the pastoral narrative, then, it provides ways of engaging with climate crisis nonetheless by providing a middle ground between an all-too-frequent desire for idealized nature on the one hand, and knowledge of climate crisis on the other. Particularly through the use of

pastoral traces, in which the city (return) appears in the countryside (retreat) and vice versa, novels such as *August* and *Wish You Were Here* illustrate how the pastoral narrative becomes more suitable to postmillennial environmental circumstances. In *Wish You Were Here*, for instance, the pastoral retreat that the Robinsons seek in the countryside is repeatedly interrupted by BSE, death and an extramarital affair. As such, the pastoral narrative in the novel makes explicit the impossibility of retreat without return, much as idealization of nature in the twenty-first century should acknowledge climate crisis. At the same time, the pastoral narrative foregrounds that other developments are also at work in the twenty-first century that are affecting the non-human natural environment, and that may be largely separate from climate crisis. The change from a predominantly productive landscape to a landscape that is perceived much more in aesthetic terms, for instance, has changed relationships of identity between people and the land in much the same way as is also happening due to climate crisis.

The destabilization of dualities suggested by the pastoral narrative is continued in the narrative of urban nature (Chapter 3). Of the four narratives explored in this book, that of urban nature provides the most explicit contrast to the discourses of loss and destruction typically associated with climate crisis. Although cities are uniquely susceptible to climate crisis and play a role in causing it, they also form the background against which new, typically urban natures come into being, such as the wasteground in *The Translation of the Bones*. Regeneration and gentrification have led to an increase of urban green areas in many cities, while developments such as the alternative food movement bring nature to the cities through farmers' markets, organic food and 'real' food. As the narrative of urban nature shows, cities consequently provide an engagement with nature especially also for those who do not have access to, or are far away from, sites more traditionally associated with nature. Particularly in cities, then, a broader cultural awareness of climate crisis may lead to new engagement with the nonhuman natural world.

From the more localized environments of pastoral and urban natures, the final chapter of the book returns to the larger scale of climate crisis as it is played out in two very particular environments: the Arctic and Antarctic. The narrative of polar nature encapsulates many facets of twenty-first-century human–nature relations, as the example of the north-west passage cruise

shows. Postmillennial novels such as those I explore in Chapter 4 tend to situate the polar narrative in historical contexts – not to avoid contemporary realities but rather to highlight the parallels between past and present concerns with polar regions. Moreover, historical fictions emphasize how the twenty-first-century polar narrative is historically embedded and provide a revision of the past as well as a distance that sheds light on the present. The historical events the novels depict shed light on the problematic nature of many of our contemporary engagements with the Arctic and Antarctica, whether through tourism, advertising or environmentalism. Both past and present interactions with polar spaces, I suggest in Chapter 4, are fuelled by similar discourses about nature, such as that of increased value once a species or landscape becomes threatened, or the appeal of a species or landscape that is about to be lost.

At the intersections of ecocriticism and narratology

In its concern with narratives of climate crisis, this book provides an extension of the two approaches I draw on most: ecocriticism and narratology. In the preceding chapters, I engage with a set of novels that has been largely ignored by ecocritics. My readings of these works demonstrate the value of the ecocritical study of twenty-first-century British fiction, particularly in terms of analysing climate crisis in a contemporary cultural context. Throughout the book, I make concepts that have been deemed problematic by ecocritics productive – such as the pastoral (Chapter 2), urban nature (Chapter 3) and the historical novel (Chapter 4). Both pastoral and the historical novel, I show, are utilized in postmillennial novels by framing idealization (pastoral) and the past (historical novels) in terms of contemporary climate crisis. Rather than leading to problematic escapism, then, the pastoral narrative and the genre of historical fiction comment on twenty-first-century environmental circumstances. Moreover, I suggest in Chapter 2 that the pastoral narrative itself functions as a middle space between idealization and despair that aptly captures contemporary perceptions of nature. My discussion of the narrative of urban nature shows that the postmillennial narrative of urban nature is aware of climate crisis and loss, but also enchanted with the positive possibilities provided by urban nature. In extending ecocriticism, I also problematize issues

popular in ecocriticism, such as the use of the Anthropocene as a cultural concept (introduction) and ecocriticism's faith in the cultural imaginary (Chapter 1). Although 'Anthropocene' is frequently used by ecocritics and environmental humanities scholars, I don't use it in this book as I believe it to be as yet too imprecise to be a useful term for literary analysis. As I argue in the introduction, more fleshing out of 'Anthropocene' as a cultural concept rather than a concept taken from geology is required. Finally, the novels I discuss in Chapter 1 complicate the use of narratives in a time of climate crisis, foregrounding how stories and storytelling can be misleading or suspect. By doing so, these novels provide a commentary on ecocriticism's faith in the role that narratives might play and the suggestion underlying much ecocritical scholarship that finding the 'right' narratives might counteract climate crisis (cf. Clark 2015: 19–20). Finally, the book provides a significant extension of ecocriticism through its use of narratological concepts. While traditionally concerned more with the construction of actual, physical landscapes, ecocriticism as I apply it throughout this book is also invested in the textual or narratological construction of nature. The genre of a novel, the temporal and spatial cues the narrative provides and the focalization it presents are examples of how the narratological dimension shapes the environment that the reader becomes immersed in through the act of reading. This is true for novels, such as *August* in which a contrast is created between the narrator's description of the landscape and the characters' focalization, as it is for other narratives. A narrative feature such as characterization may contribute to greenwashing, as in the British Gas commercial I describe above in which the use of a penguin suggests environmentalism and covers up the company's implication in burning fossil fuels and other activities that contribute to climate crisis.

In turn, the book also provides an extension of narratology's limited engagement with issues of space and environment. Narratives are not only events set in time, but particularly also in space. How this space is described might determine the tone of the story and is tied in with other narratological concepts such as perspective and characterization. A character's relationship with her environment and the environment itself often considerably influences the story. In *God's Own Country* (Chapter 2), the Yorkshire Moors provide the main character Sam with a space to roam after having being expelled from school. Significantly, the landscape also provides the means for him to run away

with Jo and to hide from the authorities, while his descriptions of the natural world and his conversations with sheep and foxes contribute to the reader's image of him as mentally disturbed. Space, then, functions as background but especially also as an agent in narratives. This is not only the case in the novels I explored in this book, or only in novels set in a rural environment, or only in postmillennial or contemporary novels. In an ecocritical reading of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1818), Robert Kern remarks on the ideological filters, particularly those of the picturesque, through which characters and by extension the reader view the landscape. Consequently, the grounds of Mr Darcy's home Pemberley become a positive reflection of the man himself, precisely because they confirm to the picturesque ideal (Kern 2000: 14–16). Beyond literature, space frequently functions as an agential force in environmental advertising, but also in film. In the introduction to this book I describe *The Revenant* as a classic tale of men struggling with and in the non-human natural world. The wintery landscape of nineteenth-century North America is of particular significance to this film, not the least because of the many sweeping landscape shots included in it. Moreover, it is the landscape that causes much of the struggle the main character experiences. Although a film considerably less concerned with the environment than *The Revenant*, space and nature are key elements to the development of the story of Quentin Tarantino's *The Hateful Eight* (2015) as well. The remote location of the cabin provides a convenient setting for murder, yet it is the resulting snowstorm which prevents the murderers from leaving and that leads to the escalation of the situation in a way that would otherwise not have happened. As a narratological concept, then, space is of vital importance to stories, and readings such as those in this book contribute to the much-needed extension of the field that is currently underway.

In its concern with narratives of climate crisis, ecocriticism and narratology, this book is an example of the relatively new field of econarratology. One of the ways in which I explored the intersections between ecocriticism and narratology is by making time and space central to my discussion of the novels in this book. Not only are time and space key narratological concepts, they are also central to twenty-first-century literature (Boxall 2013: 5; 7) and to climate crisis. Emphasizing these two elements foregrounds how we navigate the present in light of the past and the future, as well as how we relate to natural

spaces and the different meanings these may hold. Time and space are inherent to depictions of nature: whether in associating the pastoral retreat with the past as in *Wish You Were Here* (Chapter 2), or in creating a sense of futurity in the narrative of environmental collapse, as in *The Carhullan Army* (Chapter 1). Space is significant in the narrative of urban nature (Chapter 3) as well. It provides the kind of belonging that ecocritics typically associate with the non-urban natural environment, which TJ experiences in *Clay*. Tying ecocritical ideas of space and place in with the narratological concepts of topological and projective locations in Chapter 4 demonstrates how projective locations are used to deliberately negate a sense of belonging in the polar landscapes depicted in *The Collector of Lost Things* and *The North Water*.

Looking ahead

As climate crisis develops and most likely worsens, the narratives that surround it will also develop. Some might disappear, while others will emerge. The cultural dominance of the four narratives in the broader contemporary culture suggests a continuation of these narratives in the future. At the same time, as I explore throughout the book, narratives are fluid and flexible, and their potential lies in the way in which they adapt to different circumstances. The narratives of environmental collapse, pastoral, urban nature, and polar are consequently also bound to transform. The narrative of environmental collapse will no doubt continue to be dominant in imaginations of climate crisis, particularly once the kind of collapses sketched in postmillennial novels of the 2000s and 2010s start to occur. As the effects of climate crisis become more visible, the narrative of environmental collapse will also bring forth distinct regional narratives. While the novels I explore in this book themselves are already examples of regional narratives – focusing explicitly on a British setting and the narratives that emerge from it – such regional diversity is bound to increase. In a British context, for instance, the climate crisis flood narrative is becoming increasingly popular in postmillennial literature, while in other areas around the world the drought narrative will become more central.

In the pastoral narrative, the movement of the pastoral escalator identified by Raymond Williams will mean that in the future, the present is likely to become

the past to which the narrative will return (1973: 9). In other words, whereas, for example, 1960s Wales functions as the pastoral retreat the characters look back at in *August*, in the future the 2010s might fulfil this function. At the same time, the development of climate crisis will also necessitate a continuing framing of the idealization inherent to the pastoral retreat. Indeed, once the consequences of climate crisis become more visible these effects – rather than traces of city life (*August*), mental illness (*God's Own Country*) and death (*Wish You Were Here*) – will increasingly start to function as pastoral traces. This will particularly be the case if the predictions of the IPCC about rural areas become true. Its 2014 report notes that '[m]ajor future rural impacts are expected in the near term and beyond through impacts on water availability and supply, food security, and agricultural incomes, including shifts in production areas of food and non-food crops across the world' (2014: 19). In the future, an increasingly urbanized population will seek more new ways of engaging with nature, whether through food, gentrification or architectural projects such as the Highline in New York and the proposed Garden Bridge across the Thames in London. Yet, the inequality in terms of who gets to experience urban nature in this sense and who doesn't is likely to increase as well. Climate crisis will mean that the poor and disadvantaged – like Fidelma and Mary-Margaret in *The Translation of the Bones* – remain poor. As the IPCC suggests, 'climate change impacts are projected to slow down economic growth, make poverty reduction more difficult, further erode food security, and prolong existing and create new poverty traps, the latter particularly in urban areas and emerging hotspots of hunger' (2014: 20). This will be particularly the case in urban areas since these are the places where, the IPCC report notes, '[m]any global risks of climate change are concentrated' (2014: 18).

With the Arctic ice reaching a record low in 2016, the poles will remain a significant part of climate crisis discourse. The narrative of polar nature will, however, also change. As global warming increases, the Arctic in particular will change from being a canary in the mine, as I discuss in Chapter 4, to being a record of missed opportunities. In other words, while in the early twenty-first century the Arctic and Antarctica are symbols of climate crisis because they are at the forefront of this crisis, in the coming years the disappearance of the Arctic's ice will embody the failure to act on climate crisis. Polar narratives are consequently set to become more elegiac, but at the same time also more

infused with the danger that the warming of the poles poses to sea levels and the regulation of the earth's temperature.

This book and the four narratives I focus on also provide a response, even a corrective, to the techno-optimism that shapes many contemporary imaginations of the future and of climate crisis. In the film *Interstellar* planet earth is doomed, yet at the last minute a new planet is discovered on which humans can live with the help of technology. This is the idea behind the dream of colonizing Mars, and the excitement in the press when a planet believed to be similar to earth was discovered in August 2016 – an event described by one astronomer as being 'like finding prime real estate in our neighborhood' (Chang 2016: par. 11). The hope for a new planet just like ours obscures the realities of climate crisis and is consequently highly problematic. Techno-optimism makes the kind of literary fiction that I discuss in this book especially valuable. In the lifetime of contemporary readers, another planet earth will not be reached, and climate crisis is making life on the planet we inhabit increasingly difficult. The ways through which narratives of climate crisis confront the challenge of coming to terms with the crisis at hand is therefore likely to be more useful than the dream of starting anew elsewhere in the universe.

The four narratives that are central to this book are not merely means of imagining contemporary climate crisis, but are also a record of shifting ideas about nature. Each of the four narratives reflects changes in how we perceive nature: whether in the mourning of a lost nature in environmental collapse narratives and the changing countryside central to the pastoral narrative, to the centrality of urban nature to contemporary experience and the ideas projected on the polar landscape. In the years and decades to come, narratives of climate crisis will even more become a record of changing environments and the stories we tell about them. Increasingly, novels such as those I explore in this book and other works of art will ask questions about the imaginative function of nature – particularly once climate crisis has made it wholly impossible to hold on to the traditional ideas of nature that still influence much of our thought today. While questions about nature's imaginative appeal may be answered anthropocentrically – we need nature to enjoy it, or to define ourselves against – other answers may surface as climate crisis continues. Narratives, for instance, in literary fiction, play a key role in offering answers to such questions and in providing examples of productively engaging with climate

crisis. They help us find the right balance between realism and possibility, between despair and looking away. In the future as much as today, narratives will provide the imaginative space in which to think through climate crisis. As I show in this book, narratives reflect contemporary ideas and conversations, and, importantly, play a role in shaping and creating new imaginations as well. How this shaping and reshaping continues, and the role that the imaginative capacities of novels and other artworks play, will remain vital to our response to climate crisis, now and in the future.

Notes

Introduction

1   See Bate (2000: 95–98) for a discussion of 'Darkness' in relation to the eruption of Tambora.

2   See Beer (1989).

3   Even though the French mathematician John-Baptiste Joseph Fourier first suggested man-made – anthropogenic – climate change in 1824, its scientific study didn't receive much attention until after the Second World War. Changes in the climate were instead attributed to changes in solar energy, the amount of volcanic dust in the atmosphere or variations in the elevations of continents (Plass, Fleming and Schmidt 2010: 58). In the 1950s the Canadian physicist Gilbert Plass challenged these ideas and suggested that scientists had to re-evaluate the role of carbon dioxide in climate change. The theory that carbon dioxide might influence the climate was first proposed by John Tydall in 1861, yet had not been much discussed until Plass's research nearly a century later.

4   Painter and Gavin discovered an increase of climate scepticism in the period between November 2009 and February 2010, and between November 2010 and February 2011. They suggest that the increase in the first of these two periods can be related to 'Climategate' in late 2009 and the discovery of errors in the 2007 IPCC report. In the latter period, no such events took place and Painter and Gavin attribute the increase of sceptical voices to the predominance of climate scepticism in two newspapers, *The Express* and *The Telegraph* (2016: 447).

5   Of course, it is difficult to connect individual events to climate change. Nonetheless, the likeliness of floods becoming more common in Britain as climate crisis worsens would invite a link between floods and climate change in newspaper reporting.

6   Rosemary Randall suggests that the splitting that happens in cognitive dissonance protects people 'from the need to truly face and mourn the losses associated with climate change' (Randall 2009: 118).

7   In an article for *The Guardian*, Alison Flood cites several authors, including Philip Pullman and Sadie Jones, on the difficulties of writing about climate crisis (2010).

8   As Ursula Kluwick puts it, 'climate change discourse permeates our culture'
    (2014: 505).

9   Increasingly, research is done on the effects of climate crisis films and
    documentaries on people's awareness and their willingness to act. See, for
    instance, Lauren Griffin and Ann Christiano, 'Why "Sharknado 4" matters:
    Do climate disaster movies hurt the climate cause?' (2016). Mike Hulme cites
    research that showed that amongst viewers of *The Day After Tomorrow* 'any
    increase in concern about climate change induced by the film appeared short
    lived, with most viewers treating the film purely as entertainment' (2009: 213).

10 Similarly, *Time* turned their cover's characteristic red border green in honour of
    Earth Day 2008 and in 2007, 2008 and 2009 compiled an annual list of 'Heroes of
    the Environment'.

11 As Adiseshiah and Hildyard note, 'research in the field of twenty-first century
    fiction is already rich, diverse and abundant, but is as yet largely unreported
    and unrepresented in academic discussion' (2013: 4). In addition to their edited
    collection *Twenty-First Century Fiction: What Happens Now* (2013) and Peter
    Boxall's *Twenty-First-Century Fiction* (2013), another example of scholarship on
    postmillennial fiction is *Twenty-First-Century British Fiction* (2015), edited by
    Bianca Leggett and Tony Venezia.

12 According to Boxall, twenty-first-century literature is characterized by three
    preoccupations: shifted temporalities; the real and new kinds of realism; and
    embodiment (2013: 9–11).

13 A similar point is made by Trexler when he suggests that '[t]he imaginative
    capacities of the novel have made it a vital site for the articulation of the
    Anthropocene' (2015: 23). In the same vein, Peter Boxall notes that the novel
    produces 'new perspectival forms with which to picture the world' (2013: 7).

14 See, for instance, Hoving (2010).

15 Visit Britain's Great Britain Tourism. Survey shows that the seaside is the most
    popular holiday destination for domestic travel, followed by the countryside (n.d.).

16 Markkhu Lehtimäki makes a similar point when he suggests that 'the
    narratological mainstream still tends to foreground fictional minds and
    imaginary storyworlds' (2013: 119) and that 'ecocriticism is too often
    preoccupied with the domain of nature to linger on the specific affordances that
    fictional narratives provide when it comes to imagining and situating oneself
    within suprahuman ecologies' (2013: 120).

17 Herman's own work is a good example of a narratological discussion more
    sensitive to space and environment. See especially *Story Logic* (2002).

18 See, for instance, Lehtimäki (2013) and James and Morel, forthcoming.

19 In 'Problems in ecocriticism and the novel' Head argues that the novel is ill-suited to ecocriticism because of the genre's focus on personal development, personal time and personal growth (1998: 65).

20 See, for instance, Scott (2012), Kostkowska (2013), Brazeau and Gladwin (2014), McCarthy (2015) and Sultzbach (2016).

21 The work of Deborah Lilley on contemporary pastoral forms a notable exception to the ecocritical neglect of twenty-first-century British fiction (Lilley 2016). See also my proposal for an ecocriticism more inclusive of contemporary fiction (Bracke 2010) and my discussion of the challenges of the contemporary British novel to ecocriticism (Bracke 2014b).

22 See, for instance, the special issue of the *Oxford Literary Review* (34.2 [2012]), edited by Timothy Clark on deconstruction in the Anthropocene, Adam Trexler's *Anthropocene Fictions*, Timothy Clark's *Ecocriticism on the Edge* as well as numerous conferences and special issues on the topic.

23 The media statement issued by the working group on the Anthropocene sketches the process that now follows before the concept can indeed become part of the geological timescale: once a specific date and site that demonstrate the beginning of the Anthropocene has been determined, a proposal would be put to

> our immediate parent body, the Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy (SQS), on defining a formal Anthropocene unit. If the SQS recommends this by supermajority vote, the proposal will go on to its parent body, the International Commission on Stratigraphy (ICS) to be voted on, with any vote in favour still needing to be ratified by the Executive Committee of the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS). (Anthropocene Working Group 2016: n.p.)

24 In early 2017, Owen Gaffney and Will Steffen proposed the 'Anthropocene Equation' in which human-induced change has become dominant in influencing the earth's processes (see Gaffney and Steffen 2017).

25 In deciding on the term 'climate crisis', I also decide against using 'climate change'. While I use the latter phrase occasionally, it is not the key concept of this book, as the title demonstrates. Indeed, there's much to be said for using climate crisis at this particular juncture in history, rather than the much more benign-sounding 'climate change'. Anabela Carvalho notes how the US administration replaced 'global warming' by 'climate change', as the former was seen as too alarmist (2005: 7). Of course, 'global warming' is also inaccurate, as it does not

account for all the extreme weather that climate crisis causes, including heavier snowfall in some parts of the world.

26 Focusing on space and time in this manner foregrounds the narratological dimension of the novels, provides a link between ecocriticism and narratology and exemplifies the centrality of space and time to twenty-first-century fiction in general (Boxall 2013: 5, 7).

Chapter 1

1 For an extensive discussion of climate fiction, see Adam Trexler 2015. For an econarratological reading of Kingsolver's *Flight Behaviour* and Rich's *Odds Against Tomorrow*, see my 'Worldmaking environmental crisis: climate fiction, econarratology and genre' (forthcoming).

2 See Lorenzo DiTamasso 2014 on the apocalyptic narrative in popular culture.

3 *Cloud Atlas* in particular has been read as an apocalyptic narrative (cf. Bayer 2015; Hicks 2010; Ng 2015).

4 For a discussion on the difficulties on narrating a world without people, see Garrard (2012).

5 A similar argument is made by Astrida Neimanis, Cecila Åsberg and Johan Hedrén in their discussion of possible directions of the environmental humanities (2015: 73).

6 As alternatives to conventional narratives, scholars have suggested the database (Heise 2016: *passim*) or techniques of modernist cut-up and collage (Kerridge 2014: 373).

7 A case in point is Clark's argument that 'the main artistic implication of trying to represent the Anthropocene must be a deep suspicion of any traditionally realist aesthetic' (2014: 81).

8 This calculation depends on when the great-grandfather was born and the length of a generation. If Sister's great-grandfather was twenty years old in the middle of the Second World War, 1943, and he had a child at age thirty, Sister's grandfather was born in 1953. If he too had a child at age thirty, Sister's father was born in 1983, and she – provided she was born when her father was thirty years old – born in 2013. An alternative would be to pick the longer period for a generation, of thirty-five years. Starting with the premise that great-grandfather was twenty in 1943, Sister's grandfather would have been born in 1958, her father in 1993 and she in 2028. In *The Carhullan Army*, Sister seems to be a young woman of

childbearing age, who has work experience and has been with her boyfriend for several years. If she is thirty years old, the temporal setting of the novel would be 2043 at the earliest (if generations are twenty years long) and 2058 the latest (if a generation is thirty-five years long). Generation lengths are suggested by the International Society of Genetic Genealogy.

9   These calculations take Sister's age during the walk with her father around age ten.

10 Carhullan comes to represent, according to Lilley, 'an awareness of the realities of the cultural and ecological landscapes of the present moment, coupled with the possibility that things could be otherwise' (2016: 67–68).

11 Robert Frobisher describes the musical piece he is composing as a 'sextet for overlapping soloists', a term that aptly describes the novel's structure.

12 Hicks bases part of her argument on the work of Mircea Elide and asks the rhetorical question, '[i]f a linear conception of time is contributing to humanity's apocalyptic tendencies, why not revert to the cyclical understanding of time that structured human consciousness for millennia?' (2010: par. 4).

13 His reading of the novel echoes observations by Ulrich Beck, on risk society (1986: *passim*), and Frederick Buell's argument that apocalypse has become 'a way of life', rather than something to be anticipated in the future (2003: *passim*).

14 Earlier, Jerome Bruner argued that 'we organize our experience and memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative – stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on' (1991: 4).

15 The six different genres are a diary (Adam Ewing), letters ('Letters from Zedelghem'), crime novel (Luisa Rey), memoir (Timothy Cavendish), a filmed interrogation (Sonmi~451) and an oral narrative ('Sloosha's Crossin'').

16 Incidentally, Scott Dimovitz suggests that language 'is ideological power, and throughout *Cloud Atlas* characters are haunted by the fear of losing voice' (2015: 74).

17 Narrative instability is also created in other postmillennial novels in which knowledge and narratives are lost, for instance, Clare Morrall's *When the Floods Came* (2016), and narrative manipulation is central to Antonia Honeywell's *The Ship* (2015).

Chapter 2

1   Dana Phillips's *The Truth of Ecology* (2003) is one of the most extensive critiques of pastoral. See also the chapter on pastoral in Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* (2011).

2   The end of pastoral is also proposed by John Barrell and John Bull who suggest the end of the separation between country and city in the nineteenth century was also the end of pastoral: 'The separation of life in the town and in the country that the Pastoral demands is now almost devoid of any meaning. It is difficult to pretend that the English countryside is now anything more than an extension of the town' (1974: 432).

3   As Alpers writes, 'it is the representative anecdote of shepherds' lives that makes certain landscapes pastoral' and that 'we may say that landscapes are pastoral when they are conceived as fit habitations for shepherds or their equivalents' (1982: 459).

4   A similar argument on the adaptability of pastoral underlies the collection *New Versions of Pastoral*, in which David James and Philip Tew note that 'Arcadian and bucolic traditions are either misunderstood or misrepresented as simply a contraction into conservative nostalgia…. Nevertheless in origin and in practice the dynamics of pastoral texts are far more adaptable, capable as they are of fluid and complicated ideological negotiations' (2009: 13).

5   See Heise (2008) and Morton (2010).

6   It should be noted, though, that in his chapter on pastoral in *Ecocriticism* Garrard begins his discussion by suggesting that pastoral 'must and will remain a key concern for ecocritics' (2011: 37).

7   A small resurgence of pastoral's popularity amongst ecocritics has taken place in Early Modern and Renaissance studies. See, for instance, Todd Borlik (2011) and Ken Hiltner (2011).

8   Gifford emphasizes that post-pastoral is not a chronological term, but can refer to literature of any time period (2014: 26).

9   See Botkin (1992).

10   See Gifford (2013) and Gifford (2014).

11   In *Pastoral* Gifford provides a 'prefix-pastoral' list of his own that includes Freudian pastoral, the pastoral of childhood, revolutionary pastoralisms, proletarian pastoral and urban pastoral (1999: 4).

12   Indeed, the entire issue is devoted to pastoral.

13   Other examples of twenty-first-century ecocritical engagements with pastoral are Scott Hess's work on pastoral and advertising (2004) and a roundtable on pastoral held at the 2011 ASLE conference in Bloomington, subsequently published in the *Journal of Ecocriticism* (Lioi 2011).

14   Gifford echoes this in his discussion of retreat and return by identifying 'the essential paradox of pastoral: that a retreat to a place apparently without the

anxieties of the town, or the court, or the present, actually delivers insights into the culture from which it originates. Pastoral authors are inescapably of their own culture and its preoccupations. Thus the pastoral construct always reveals the preoccupations and tensions of its time' (1999: 83).

15 In the urban chapter, which forms a counterpart to the present chapter, space is explored in more detail as central to the construction of the urban landscape.

16 See, for instance, Johan Fredrik Rye (2011); Maja Farstad and Johan Fredrick Rye (2013).

17 Interestingly, Gifford reads roughly the same period as demonstrating not the shift from a production landscape to a post-production or aesthetic landscape, but in terms of a shift from 'countryside' to 'environment', influenced by the rise of the British environmental movement (2016: *passim*).

18 The novel explicitly states that Michael committed suicide in the night of Remembrance Sunday 1994 and that before this time the culling of their cows due to mad cow disease (BSE) had taken place. However, the massive outbreak of BSE which is usually remembered did not take place until March 1996. Nonetheless, the disease had been identified before – for the first time in 1984 – and localized outbreaks occurred before the one in 1996, including presumably the one on the Luxton's farm before 1994 (see Howkins 2003: 218).

19 Per Krogh Hansen has also created his own distinction of various types of unreliable narrator (2007), as has Monika Fludernik (1999).

Chapter 3

1 Trexler notes that 'the vast majority of climate change novels are set in urban centers', the reason for this being that '[c]ities are, by definition, extraordinarily dense networks of affective bonds between people and place' (2015: 76).

2 See also Aidan While and Mark Whitehead (2013).

3 See Fairbrother (1970) and McHarg (1969).

4 For more work on urban environments and urban political ecology, see also Heynen, Kaika and Swyngedouw (2006); Cook and Swyngedouw (2012).

5 See Richard Lehan 1998 in which he argues that the rise of the city is inseparable from the development of the novel. Likewise Stuti Khanna has suggested that the city and modernism and postmodernism are 'not merely causal but fundamentally and mutually constitutive, in that one shapes the other, so that the city becomes a material register that articulates as well as

dictates the assumptions, ideologies and visions that underpin Modernism and Postmodernism' (2013: 2).

6 For a thorough introduction to environmental justice, see Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans and Rachel Stein (eds) (2002).

7 In their introduction to *In the Nature of Cities*, Heynen, Kaika and Swyngedouw criticize the environmental justice movement for not being political, or in fact, organized enough to lead to substantial change (2006: 9). Similarly, Cook and Swyngedouw argue that environmental justice is too localized and as such 'inadequate for understanding the production and contestation of environmental injustice' (2012: 1967).

8 An argument made popular especially in Bill McKibben (1989).

9 My readings in the following pages rely on an extension of ecocriticism through urban studies that I discussed at length elsewhere (Bracke 2013, 2014a). I have argued that '[e]xtending ecocriticism through urban studies results in a fundamental shift: whereas much ecocriticism and environmentalism remain premised on the image of an ideal nature – even if that has become unattainable – urban studies allows for a full and unprejudiced engagement with urban and humanized nature by focusing on the possibilities and engagements these spaces offer' (Bracke 2014a: par. 6).

10 The classic definition of nature remains Kate Soper's three-part definition from her 1995 *What Is Nature* in which she distinguishes between nature as a metaphysical concept, 'through which humanity thinks its difference'; as a realist concept, to refer to the 'causal powers that are constantly operative within the physical world'; and as a lay or surface concept by which nature is used 'in reference to ordinarily observable features of the world' (1995: 156). Amongst ecocritics and environmental humanities scholars, Timothy Morton's *Ecology without Nature* is one of the most comprehensive challenges to the concept of nature as it is frequently used.

11 While Urszula Terentowicz-Fotyga argues that the setting of Smith's *The Autograph Man* – the fictional suburb Mountjoy – demonstrates how in contemporary novels 'the city of places gives way to the "city of signs"' (2009: 307), the fictional location of a novel is not relevant for my purposes, as a storyworld need not have a real world referent in order to be accessible to readers, nor for it to possibly create greater environmental understanding.

12 As William Frawley puts it in his discussion of topological and projective locations, 'Topology is the study of the geometric properties of objects that are invariant under change of the object' (1992: 254).

13 For an extensive discussion of place and place-attachment, see Thayer (2003).

14 The wilderness paradox similarly plays a role in polar narratives, as I discuss in Chapter 4.

15 Mabey defines the unofficial countryside as 'habitats which have grown out of human need' (2010: 20) to which 'the labels "urban" and "rural" by which we normally find our bearings in a landscape, just do not apply' (2010: 20).

16 Defined by Rachel Slocum as advocating 'more ecologically sound and socially just farming methods, food marketing and distribution and healthier food options' (2007: 522).

17 See, for instance, Georg Simmel (1910), John Kasson (1990) and Visser (1991), in which she writes that '[w]e should note the constant likening of rude people to animals, and remember that a universal purpose of good behaviour is to demonstrate how *un*like beasts we mannerly people are' (1991: 63, original emphasis).

18 Similarly, Estok suggests that '[t]he simple assertion that bioregional is a good thing … is not quite so simple' (2012: 682), an argument echoed by Jarosz: 'The assumption that local, alternative food systems are necessarily beneficial and sustainable for all who participate in them simply because they are "local" or "organic" is inaccurate' (2008: 241).

19 As one small-scale organic farmer interviewed by Lucy Jarosz argues, 'in growing your food in a small rural area, are you really supporting your local, rural economy when you take your food into the nearest big city? … Wouldn't it be so much more direct if you focused on feeding the people right near you?' (qtd on Jarosz 2008: 240).

20 The term 'reification', Carruth notes, is used by her to signify the process in capitalist economies by which complex social (and I would add ecological) relationships are reduced to the circulation and marketing of commodities (2009: n 12 615).

21 Susie O'Brien notes that 'alternative food practices occupy sites of race and class privilege' (2011: 232). Slocum has proposed the term 'whiteness' to describe the intersections of food, politics and the 'inequalities of wealth that serve both to enable different food economies and to separate people by their ability to consume' (2007: 520).

22 Alternative food practices are a particularly middle class phenomenon. See Jarosz (2008: 240–241), Slocum (2007: 522) and Weatherall, Tregear and Allinson (2003: 242).

Chapter 4

1   As Charles Officer and Jake Page note, 'About a million people live in the Arctic, more than half of them in Siberia' (2012: 8).

2   For extensive discussions of the role of the Arctic and Antarctica in the cultural, particularly British and American, imagination, see Frances Spufford (1996) and Sarah Moss (2006).

3   Another hugely popular example of polar entertainment around this time was the Arctic diorama constructed at Vauxhall in 1852. In a further linking of literature and polar exploration, Tennyson wrote the epigraph on Franklin's cenotaph in Westminster Abbey.

4   In 'The Hunting of the Snark' (1876), Lewis Carroll mocks the boxes of food and equipment left behind at Resolution Bay with the words: 'forty two boxes, all carefully packed,/With his name painted clearly on each: But, since he omitted to mention the fact,/They were left behind on the beach' (1876: ll. 25–28).

5   Other examples of Scott's cultural legacy in the decades after the expedition are the children's book *Tarka the Otter* (1927), which in its attention to natural history was influenced by the expedition's attention to the same, and the 1948 film – coming on the heels of another war – *Scott of the Antarctic* (Spufford 1996: 4).

6   References to the link between exploration of the Antarctic and *Peter Pan* resurface in *Everland*. On their way to Everland, one of the explorers in the novel's 2012 storyline calls it 'Ever-ever land' (Hunt 2014: 21) – a pun on 'Neverland' in the *Peter Pan* stories. The same character notes that 'Everland does have a history of Lost Boys, though, if you think about it' (Hunt 2014: 21).

7   As Huggan notes, 'the recent scramble for mineral resources in the region, which shows every sign of intensifying as fast as the sea ice is weakening, also suggests the continuation of a protracted era of colonialism' (2016: 71). As many as seven countries have claimed a part of the Antarctic.

8   As movements for increased devolution in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland and the 2014 Scottish independence referendum suggest, this type of insular nationalism is perhaps more English than British.

9   As Baucom notes, he draws here on Georg Lukács's remarks on historical novels (2015: 154).

10 See, for example, Gillian D'Arcy Wood on eco-historicism in early modern literature (2008: 1–7).

11 See his chapter 'Emergent Unreadability' in *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, especially pp. 52–54 and 63.

12   Rather, the difficulties faced by and failure of many British polar expeditions
     lie in a lack of cultural relativity combined with a perception of the landscape.
     Unlike the Norwegians, for instance, who were considerably more successful
     in their explorations, the British largely refused to learn from the Inuit when
     it came to organizing their expeditions. Barry Lopez points out that the 'few
     technical advances the British brought to arctic exploration in the nineteenth
     century – India-rubber ground cloths, folding canvas boats, portable, alcohol-
     burning stoves – were all but inconsequential when compared with their failure
     to understand the advantages of fur clothing, snow houses, and fresh meat over
     naval uniforms, fabric tents, and tinned food' (2014: 360).
13   Indeed, as the IUCN Red List entry on the Great Auk notes, collecting became
     'the proximate cause of their extinction' as they became scarcer (BirdLife
     International [2012]).
14   I further explore such 'extinction tourism' in the conclusion of this book.
15   For recent examples of ecocritical discussions of polar landscapes, see, for
     instance, Huggan (2016) and McGavin (2013). The collection *Arctic Discourses*,
     edited by Anka Ryall, Johan Schimanski and Henning Howlid Wærp (2010) also
     includes essays that implicitly or explicitly take an ecocritical perspective.

Conclusion

1   Emmerson notes that for many Arctic communities 'climate change is a death
    warrant', yet for some others 'the prospect of an ice-free Arctic offers the
    opportunity for shipping routes, economic development and Arctic prosperity'
    (2011: 171).

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Index

Note: Locators followed by n denote note number.