Narrating Loss in James Bradley's *Clade* (2015); or, Introducing Arrested Narrative in Climate Fiction

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Abstract

In James Bradley's futuristic novel of climate crises, *Clade* (2015), characters constructed to evoke empathy and readerly attachment, and whom we expect to be further developed narratologically, are prone to sudden, unexpected and unexplained disappearances. The development of cared-for characters is thus 'arrested' at the level of narration. For readers, this is disarming and disconcerting. However, we find purpose in such acts of narratorial breakage in cli-fi texts like *Clade*. In contemporary stories of climate crises, which project environmental destruction, the loss of habitats and species, and severe disruption to human and nonhuman lives, the arrestation of a character's development parallels a sense of environmental loss evoked at the level of storied content. Put another way, the sudden disappearance of character-story at the level of form imitates the sudden erasure of species, ecosystems and lived experience in the storyworld of *Clade*. We call such narratological innovation *arrested narrative*. In this essay we define and describe the appearance and function of arrested narrative in *Clade*, in some depth, as well as its emergence in two other novels of climate crises, Megan Hunter's *The End We Start From* (2017) and Diane Cook's *The New Wilderness* (2020). While investigations into narrative form in stories of the Anthropocene are not new, ecocritical literary scholarship remains largely focussed on story-level content. This examination of the way arrests in narrative discourse parallel environmental ruptures at the level of content, in selected cli-fi, is aimed at contributing to the emerging field of "econarratology" (James), concerned with the study of the workings of both form and content in ecofiction.

Keywords: Arrested narrative, climate fiction, econarratology, empathy, *Clade*.

Resumen

En la novela futurista de James Bradley sobre la crisis climática, *Clade* (2015), los personajes construidos para evocar la empatía y el apego del lector, personajes de los que esperamos un mayor desarrollo narratológico, son propensos a desapariciones repentinas, inesperadas e inexplicables. De este modo, el desarrollo de los personajes más queridos queda "suspendido" en el plano de la narración. Para los lectores, esto resulta inquietante y desconcertante. Sin embargo, en la ficción climática (cli-fi) como *Clade* encontramos un propósito en tales actos de suspensión narrativa. En los relatos contemporáneos de crisis climática, que proyectan la destrucción del medio ambiente, la

pérdida de hábitats y especies, y graves trastornos para las vidas humanas y no humanas, la suspensión en el desarrollo de un personaje es paralela a una sensación de pérdida medioambiental evocada a nivel del contenido del relato. Dicho de otro modo, la repentina desaparición del relato de un personaje en cuanto a la forma es una imitación del repentino exterminio de especies, ecosistemas y experiencias vividas en el mundo narrativo de *Clade.* A esta innovación narratológica la llamamos suspensión narrativa. En este ensayo definimos y describimos con cierta profundidad la aparición y función de la suspensión narrativa en *Clade*, así como su aparición en otras dos novelas sobre crisis climáticas, *The End We Start From* (2017), de Megan Hunter, y *The New Wilderness* (2020), de Diane Cook. Aunque las investigaciones sobre la forma narrativa en los cuentos del Antropoceno no son nuevas, los estudios literarios ecocríticos siguen centrándose en gran medida en el contenido a nivel del relato. Este examen del modo en que las suspensiones en el discurso narrativo son paralelas a las rupturas medioambientales con respecto al contenido, en una selección de cli-fi, pretende contribuir al campo emergente de la "eco-narratología" (James), que se ocupa del estudio del funcionamiento tanto de la forma como del contenido en las narraciones ecocríticas.

Palabras clave: Suspensión narrativa, ficción climática, eco-narratología, empatía, *Clade.*

Summer Leith is a key character we warm to and empathise with early in James Bradley's 2015 cli-fi novel *Clade*. The only child of Adam and Ellie, Summer suffers from asthma attacks as a child in a world becoming ever-more polluted and harder to breathe in. We get to know her as a teenager, growing up in a 2030s world of social upheaval and environmental rupture caused by climate crises. The anticipated development of her character is, however, suddenly halted. Just as we are developing a readerly attachment to her and *expecting* to learn more about Summer as a character—based on "textual cues" or "a textual blueprint" that we as readers draw on to make "provisional inferences" about a narrative's direction (Herman 150)— Summer dissipates. Her story, the development of her character, is arrested. She does return to the narrative, intermittently; however, she is given no back-story, we learn nothing about the intervening years of her life between fleeting appearances. Such unexpected arrestations also occur with the development of other well-rounded characters in *Clade*, a novel whose storyline stretches from the 2010s to near the end of the century. The effect of these arrests is disarming and disconcerting, especially given that, as Angelo Monaco argues, Bradley otherwise seeks to "arouse empathetic responses in readers" of *Clade* "by means of empathetic engagements in human vulnerability and ecological decay" (207).

We read purpose in the arrest of character development in this novel. It is a purpose, a formalistic attribute, that is particular to a number of novels of climate change, and we identify it as *arrested narrative* in climate fiction. In contemporary stories of climate crises, which project the loss of habitats, the extinction of species, the disruption and loss of human and nonhuman lives in the age of the Anthropocene, the sudden arrestation of characters' stories, as well as the irresolution of elision in a cared-for character's story, parallels and exacerbates the sense of environmental loss. Put simply, the sudden disappearance of character-story imitates the sudden erasure of species, landscape and lived experience in *Clade* in particular, but also in a number

of other cli-fi novels. Arrested narrative, then, is a narratological innovation that works formalistically *in climate fiction* to simulate and enhance a deep sense of loss and distress over human-caused, environmental disruption and destruction that is portrayed at the story-level in these novels. In other words, disruption or arrest operates here at "both the story and discourse levels" (Chatman 60). Arrested narrative purposefully impairs readerly predictability and expectation, and emulates a rupture of climate-disaster loss that species are likely to face, if action is not taken now by individuals, corporations, nations and others to impede global warming. This essay examines the workings of arrested narrative in *Clade,* in some depth, because such *formal* disruptions to character development that function as a mirror of environmental ruptures in the *content* of cli-fi narratives appears to be most prominent in this text. Later, we briefly describe further instances of arrested narrative in two other novels of climate crises, Diane Cook's *The New Wilderness* (2020) and Megan Hunter's *The End We Start From* (2017).

We use the term 'arrested' for the narratological phenomenon we describe here, as opposed to synonyms like broken, fragmented, disrupted or ruptured, because it best suits the kind of halted, though not necessarily completely severed, seizure of narratorial discourse that we find occurs in some novels of climate fiction. Narratologists offer little help in seeking to secure the best term. They have used a range of terminology to define various breaks, ruptures and arrestations in time, story and discourse, particularly in relation to modernist prose (see Albiero; Kavaloski; Keniston and Quinn; Müller-Funk; Nünning and Nünning; Stivale). Ansgar and Vera Nünning, in a study of what they refer to as "broken narratives" (37), point to a lack of definitional work on narrative arrest or rupture in narratology handbooks (37). They find no entries on "the term 'broken narrative(s)' nor on related concepts like 'discontinuity', 'fragmentation', 'incoherence' or 'rupture'" in leading textbooks (37). Rupture, which Wolfgang Müller-Funk defines as "any cessation of a narrative sequence, which contrary to narrative closure does not arise out of a story's inherent causal logic" (9), appears to be the term most commonly adopted to describe breaks in narrative time or story. However, in most usages, rupture signals complete collapse or irreparable severance. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) defines rupture in terms of a breach or break in a surface or substance, "The act of breaking or bursting […] of being broken or burst" ("Rupture"). Arrest, on the other hand, while defined in the *OED* as the "act of stopping anything in its course," can also be, "The act of standing still, […] halt, delay," as well as, "A sudden, sometimes temporary, cessation of function" ("Arrest"). While cataclysmic events that occur within the storyworlds of climate fictions can be described as ruptures, breaks at the level of narrative *discourse*, which involve sudden stoppage in some instances though mere delay or temporary cessation in others, might best be described as an arrest of narrative.

We wish to distinguish our work on arrests in narrative discourse in ecofiction from examinations of temporality in storying climate crisis more broadly. Much work has been done on the latter, that is, on the challenges of narrating the immense temporalities of environmental time. It was Barbara Adam, in *Timescapes of*

Modernity (1998), who proposed a "proper engagement with temporality" and the imagining of new "timescapes" to deal with impending environmental crises (228). Ecocritic Rob Nixon has drawn attention to the "representational challenges and imaginative dilemmas" posed by the "slow violence" of environmental destruction, "whereby violence is decoupled from its original causes by the workings of time" (11). More recently, rhetorician Debra Hawhee has urged new approaches to "how time gets told" in an age of climate crises (8): "We humans must get better at imagining a deep future, a medium term, and a very near term, to keep them all open and link them together, and to do so at the same time, in the now" (Hawhee 26). Literary scholar Sarah Dimick, in a study of "disordered environmental time," argues that environmental time is a mode of temporality that is phenomenological, "it proceeds according to phenological coordinates such as the air's temperature, the particular scent of foliage, the tenor and intensity of insect noise, and a host of other sensory data" (706). Dimick argues for more "interplay between literature" and these new environmental temporalities in the age of climate change (715). These studies point to the need for reinterpretations of time in a physical world disrupted by climate crisis and in literary texts seeking to articulate the "environmental arrhythmias" of climate change (Dimick 715). However, our focus in this study is on arrhythmias in the *narration* of climate fiction, such that this might reflect or articulate climate upheaval as represented in a fictional story. It is Dimick's questions about disordered time and *form*—"How do shifts in seasonality reverberate within literature and the human imaginary? Is it possible that our production of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases impacts narrative form?"—that we seek to address in this study (702).

While investigations into narrative form in stories of the Anthropocene are not new (see Caracciolo; James; James and Morel; Lehtimäki; Morgan), ecocritical literary scholarship has focussed largely on the social and political content that arises from the storyworld action of climate fiction. However, for Marco Caracciolo, the examination of narrative form "is crucial to bridging the divide between literary representation and social and political issues" (28), particularly with regard to stories about the ecological crisis. He argues:

> If we want to fully rise to the challenge of the Anthropocene, we need to think about it as a formal problem, where the word 'formal' denotes the cognitive and affective schemata required to envisage a phenomenon that is fundamentally multifaceted and complex, and whereby the human subject seems to loop, epistemically and morally, into nonhuman realities that Western culture has taught us to consider external to ourselves. (28)

For Caracciolo, "a more playful approach to form might be able to address [the] limitations of storytelling and meet the demand for 'new stories'" of the Anthropocene that many critics and activists claim are urgently needed (28). Arrested narrative in cli-fi represents, to invoke Caracciolo, a "departure from conventional stories and schemata via experimentation with form" that has not yet been examined in Anthropocene writing (29). In broader terms, we view our work as contributing to

what Erin James calls "econarratology" (xv), a relatively "novel project" that seeks to pair "ecocriticism's interest in the relationship between literature and the physical environment with narratology's focus on the literary structures and devices by which writers compose narratives" and by which readers process them (4, xv). James argues that "ecocritics rarely, if ever, evoke narratological ideas or vocabulary in their readings of primary texts, as they tend to remain more interested in realist content than form or narrative structure" (3). This examination of the way arrests in narrative discourse parallel environmental ruptures at the level of content offers a possible corrective to the rarity of studies of *both* form *and* content in ecofiction novels.

Clade is a novel of climate crisis set across the course of the twenty-first century.[1] Its examination of polar ice-melts, rising sea levels, species collapse, storms, floods, drought, fire, disease, as well as climate-induced social unrest, riots and refugee movements, ranges all over the globe, though it is principally set in eastern Australia. The story begins with Adam Leith, as a young climatologist, stepping out into the cold of an Antarctic day to conduct research. It's around 2022 and "the planet [is] on a collision course with disaster" (18), with flatlands of the world under flood and tropical forests on fire. Across the next nine chapters there are switches in narrative voice and character perspective, and leaps forward in time, as we follow the stories of Adam and Ellie, their daughter Summer (for a while), Summer's son Noah (more extensively), as well as others connected to their friends and families. Bradley's cli-fi, set in the near future, thus "engages with the challenges of time, place, and human agency that climate change presents" (Khalaf 60). While it deals with plagues, climate disasters, social and political turmoil, mass extinctions and other likely consequences for the planet, if action is not taken urgently to reduce global warming, "*Clade* remains largely focused on the personal, and on the strength and vulnerability of the human heart" (Baillieu).

Works of fiction that engage with climate crises tell certain kinds of truths about a lack of concerted human action on averting or minimizing planetary collapse, but they can also work towards "imagining possible strategies to move us forward" (Wright 102). Laura Wright argues that for readers of cli-fi, truths are realized via an "ability to empathise with fictional characters who are grappling with the potential devastation that our species has caused to our planet. And, in many ways, this engagement with the empathetic imagination can be a more effective intellectual and emotional driver than many of the scientific narratives that exist about climate change" (102). Thus, for Wright, "Fiction that engages with climate change […] can help us negotiate the space between dystopia and reality. It can, perhaps, help us intervene in a tragedy of our own making" (114).

One of the ways in which Bradley tells stories of an ailing, vulnerable planet and its human and nonhuman species is through the metaphor of illness. Many human

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[1] James Bradley, an Australian novelist and literary critic, describes his own novel *Clade* as "geological fiction" (qtd. in Baum), but it is also internationally-lauded "cli-fi" (Bloom). Indeed, Dan Bloom, who coined the term cli-fi, names Bradley's *Clade* as one of a few books "from the cli-fi genre" that he thinks people will "still be reading in 100 years" (qtd. in Flyn).

characters in the novel suffer from disease or from a physical or mental ailment. These include infertility, Alzheimer's, cancer, depression, malaria and cholera. However, nonhuman species suffer too, bees from "Accelerated colony collapse disorder," due to the overuse of insecticides (148), bird species from global warming and loss of habitat. There is also—prophetically, for a book published in 2015—a virus that emerges in China, "Acute Viral Respiratory Syndrome" (195), which attacks the human respiratory system, enforces isolation and mask-wearing, and spreads rapidly, lethally, around the globe. But illness in *Clade* is not just metaphor for an injured planet; people and nonhumans are made sick by a polluted, poisoned, overheated and malnourished environment. Bradley's novel might thus be described as "ecosickness fiction," an emergent literary mode that seeks to "posit the interdependence of earth and soma through affect" (Houser 2-3). For Heather Houser, such literature "shows the conceptual and material dissolutions of the body-environment boundary through sickness and thus alters environmental perception and politics. Uniting earth and soma through the sickness trope, albeit a trope with a material reality, ecosickness narratives involve readers ethically in our collective bodily and environmental futures" (3). Borrowing partly from Houser's idea of a link between ecosickness narratives and readerly affect, Angelo Monaco argues that *Clade* engages with disease and human vulnerability to evoke empathy in readers, who are thereby imbricated in "an ethics of care" for the planet (206). However, as stated above, these ties of empathy or "personal involvement" with particular characters (Louwerse and Kuiken 169), after having been carefully established, are then strategically severed in *Clade*.

Suzanne Keen defines empathy as "a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect [that] can be provoked [...] by reading" (208). She cites "character identification" as the "most commonly nominated feature of narrative fiction to be associated with empathy" (216). Further, while the "speech, thoughts, and feelings of characters [...] are very often supposed by narrative theorists to enhance character identification, [...] relatively externalized and brief statements about a character's experiences and mental state may be sufficient to invoke empathy in a reader" (Keen 218-19). Interestingly, initial readerly identification with and empathy for the character of Summer, in *Clade*, may be enhanced not by one or the other of the above-cited factors but by a combination of both. That is to say, in two early chapters in *Clade* we receive only "externalized and brief statements" about Summer before we gain more direct insight into her "speech, thoughts, and feelings" in a succeeding chapter.

In the second chapter, for instance, we gain brief insights into Summer's childhood development, chiefly through the externalised perspective of her parents, Adam and Ellie. While extreme heat and power cuts—external environmental threats—pervade the family's domestic routine, Summer is raced to hospital with a severe attack of asthma. After action is taken to "open up her airways" at the hospital (34), the family arrives home to find "the air thick with the stink of rotting food" (35). The effects of global warming, literally as all-pervasive as air, cannot be averted, cannot be kept beyond either vulnerable human bodies or domestic living spaces. In

the third chapter, Summer, now a young teenager, is still narrated through an adult-as-focaliser, Maddie, Ellie's stepmother. When Ellie and Summer come to visit Maddie at her beach house, the older woman detects an abiding "core of sadness and restlessness in Summer" she has never been able to source (45). This hints at the elusive nature of Summer's character for the reader, too. Her inscrutability is accentuated by particular incidents in this chapter. As the two women watch from the beach, Summer steps out into the sea for a swim, "drops into a low, clean dive and disappears" (48). When they get back to the house, "Summer disappears to her room" (49). Later, Maddie wonders "whether there are things Ellie is not telling her about Summer" (60). There is a paradox at work here: how might we be drawn towards identifying with or empathising with Summer if she remains so elusive, so withdrawn from narratorial focus? Indeed, at this point in the text, we as readers engage in what Keen refers to as "gap-filling [...] by which a reader supplements given character traits with a fuller psychologically resonant portrait" (217). Here, Keen references Wolfgang Iser's theories on the imaginative process of reading. Iser argues that it is only by imaginatively "filling in the gaps left by the text itself" that reading becomes active and creative, and thereby engaging and pleasurable (285, 280). For Max Louwerse and Don Kuiken such imaginative 'filling-in'—a reader's "projection of possibilities for understanding narrative events [... and] for comprehending character development"—serves to enhance personal involvement in a narrative and empathy with a character (170).

Clade's fourth chapter, as with the previous chapters, has a heterodiegetic narrator, but now Summer herself is the focaliser. We get to experience her thoughts and feelings, which further accentuates our readerly interest in her as a key character. With student friends, Summer spends most of her time in bars, wandering the streets of Sydney, popping pills, and breaking into empty apartments at night, simply for the thrill of invading and sometimes trashing other people's homes. She is thus represented as a troubled young adult, restless, reckless, somewhat unsure of herself and her future. She is an engaging character. At the end of the chapter, Summer is standing on a balcony looking towards "the glow of the fires" at the edge of the city. She "closes her eyes, breathes in the smoky air" (92). Will her growing scepticism towards her friends turn her away from mischief? What will become of her? The liminal space of the balcony, Summer's halfway state of wakefulness, and the inhalation of only half-breathable air, all suggest a shift, a possible transition or orchestrated turning point in Summer's story. To this point in the novel, across three of the first four chapters, Bradley has invested much in the development of Summer's character, left us curious and wanting to know more as readers.

However, when we next meet Summer, ten or more years have suddenly passed and we learn very little more about her (105). She is living in the English countryside and has a son, Noah. But Summer is closed off from us. We learn nothing more about her character through the rest of the novel, what she studied, what work she may have done, how or why she came to be in England, what her state of mind is, how she came to have a son. Somewhat disconcertingly, development of her character

has been arrested at the level of narration. Of course, this could be seen as a writerly error on Bradley's part in the way he has constructed his narrative. But we read this arrest in character development as strategic, especially given that Summer's narrative arrestation is not exceptional. For there are other characters in *Clade*, human and nonhuman, who are either excised from the narrative altogether (such as Maddie, and bees) or who are reinserted or revived only very briefly and without recourse to where they have been or what they have been doing in an interim time period (such as Ellie and Amir). Again, there is purpose in the arrested narratives of these characters. Just as Summer's story is discursively disrupted, which functions to parallel climatic rupture in the storyworld of *Clade*, so too are other characters' stories arrested in parallel to environmental loss.

For instance, the vanishing of various bird species occurs alongside the demise of Maddie's three-year-old son Declan, who succumbs to cancer (54f, 67, 69). Both events are remembered by Maddie in a similar fashion. She ponders the disappearance of kookaburras, cuckoos and cockatoos—emblematic Australian birds—but is "not sure when they began to disappear" (55). Likewise, she "is not sure when she began to withdraw," after realising that hospital-bound Declan was beyond recovery (67). The extinction of bird species, in particular, weighs heavily on Maddie. She remembers "their crazed laughter and screeching clamour echoing through the trees like a memory of the primordial forest" (54). The novel alludes here to the ancient lineage of birds, which are direct descendants of dinosaurs (Jaggard; Padian and Chiappe). The rupture of this lineage, with "great waves of birds falling from the skies" (Bradley 55), indexes the catastrophe of climate destruction: Species that have survived on Earth since primordial times are fading into oblivion. Maddie's memory of the "laughter" and "screeching clamour" of birds highlights their sonority. With their loss the planet falls silent. After the death of Declan, the remaining part of the chapter is strikingly filled with other silences. There is the silence in Maddie's relationship with her husband, Tom, that leads to their divorce (72), the quiet of the house on the morning of Tom's funeral (70), the quiet of the beach where his ashes are scattered (73). The chapter closes with Maddie remembering Tom's sadness at the disappearance of birds: "They're dying, you know," he once remarked. "They're a ghost species" (74, 75). Pondering the memory of these words, Maddie silently watches a lone, black currawong take flight outside her window. Maddie's story is arrested after this chapter; she is not mentioned again. Hence, her quietening and the arrest of her narrative occurs alongside the silencing and gradual disappearance of birds, thereby drawing attention to a ghostly hush associated with climate-induced extinction.

Bees, which also "existed alongside the dinosaurs" (177), face a fate similar to bird species in *Clade*. Readers are introduced to bees via Ellie, who, now separated from Adam, lives in a remote rural region. On a walk one day through a forested area she stumbles across a bee hive, and meets the bees' keeper, Amir, who becomes her friend. Previously a doctor from Bangladesh, Amir is one of "hundreds of millions" of people displaced by rising sea levels: "Bangladesh is gone, as is much of Burma and

coastal India" (167). He has escaped to Australia, where he now lives as an "illegal" and tends to bees (167). "I think they know me," Amir tells Ellie. "They know things, bees. They become used to you [...]. It is not so unreasonable to think they might have memories" (150). Ellie observes that the "glistening architecture of the wings" endows the bees with a "curiously archaic quality" (146). Like Amir, Ellie wonders whether bees have a concept of time, considering "they have existed for so long, their colonies shifting and changing and evolving as the world [has] altered around them" (177). Ellie further ponders what bees might be able to comprehend "of the past, of the future, of the deep well of their history" (177).

What is emphasised here is not only the bees' longevity as a species but also their affinity with humans. Bradley thus draws attention to potential synergies, knowledges and even kinships across a human/nonhuman divide, across species equally vulnerable to the effects of climate crises. Ursula Heise argues that in seeking to tell better stories about extinction we need to "frame our perception and relation to endangered nonhumans" within *human* stories (5):

> [However] much individual environmentalists may be motivated by a selfless devotion to the well-being of nonhuman species, however much individual conservation scientists may be driven by an eagerness to expand our knowledge and understanding of the species with whom we co-inhabit the planet, their engagements with these species gain sociocultural traction to the extent that they become part of the stories that human communities tell about themselves: stories about their origins, their development, their identity, and their future horizons. (5)

Indeed, stories of the survival of humans and bees are inextricably linked in *Clade*. As Ellie's relationship with Amir deepens, she wonders about becoming "attached to a man whose life is so parlous, who might disappear at any moment" (183). This reflects the precarity of bees in the narrative: their colonies are collapsing but the reasons for this collapse remain a mystery or remain untraceable to a singular cause (148). Since "there appears to be no pattern to the process," the future of both the bees and Amir remains uncertain (166). At the end of the chapter, after a sustained absence, Amir makes an unexpected return, gifting Ellie a piece of honeycomb, suggesting that both he and the bees are not about to disappear. However, bees are declared extinct in the following chapter; Amir is mentioned only once more, briefly (285). Hence, our readerly and empathetic investment in the lives of both Amir and the bees is arrested; once again, the impediment of character development at the level of narrative discourse in *Clade* parallels the climatic disruption to human and nonhuman lives at the level of story.

In seeking to identify and describe the particularities of arrested narrative in cli-fi, we pause here to acknowledge that characters disappear from all kinds of stories, sometimes for inexplicable reasons. In contemporary fiction, George R.R. Martin's fantasy series, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which began with *A Game of Thrones* (1996) and was adapted into a hit TV series of the same name, became famous for suddenly "killing off beloved characters" (Selcke). For one critic, the shock of sudden character-death in Martin's work engineers a readerly distancing from text and story:

"Fans learned quickly not to get too attached to characters, because Martin doesn't hesitate to kill off characters who feel like vital protagonists in a split second" (Roberts). Martin himself argues his strategy works to heighten suspense, because if you kill off a beloved character, as Tolkien did with Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings*, "the suspense of everything that follows is a thousand times greater. Because now anybody could die. And, of course, that's had a profound effect on my own willingness to kill characters at the drop of a hat" (qtd. in Schaub). For Robert Dale Parker, too, shows like *Game of Thrones*, wherein any character can die at any moment, work to "tighten the screw of suspense" and keep viewers watching: "The vulnerability of the characters makes viewers want to find out which characters will survive" (Parker 79).

However, arrested narrative in cli-fi—what we are seeking to describe as an unanticipated suspension or disruption of character development in novels of climate crises—is not a plot device aimed at generating suspense. Rather, it is a narratological strategy, a discursive device, that works formalistically to simulate and enhance a deeper sense of distress, invoked at the level of story, over human-caused, environmental disruption and destruction. We have identified this device in James Bradley's *Clade* but it can also be found in a number of other cli-fi novels, including Diane Cook's *The New Wilderness* (2020) and Megan Hunter's *The End We Start From* (2017).

Bea, the protagonist of *The New Wilderness*, joins a group of volunteers in the last remaining patch of natural wilderness—somewhere in North America—in order to escape from an overpopulated, polluted city and save her sick daughter, Agnes. The volunteers are part of a government study to determine whether humans can co-exist with nature at all. Initially, the action is focalised through Bea as we follow her and others on a challenging journey through the wilderness. Bea notes how her daughter observes her intently (65), provokes her (89), mimics her behaviour (8), and at other times acts like a wild animal (7f, 112): We empathise with Bea and her care for her daughter. However, when Bea receives news that her own mother has passed away in the city, she suddenly runs off, leaving her daughter and her partner behind (135). Her story comes to an abrupt halt. In the next section of the novel, a year later, Agnes wakes up by herself, and becomes the focaliser from here on in (139). She has adjusted to the absence of her mother and whenever she is asked about Bea, Agnes replies that her mother is dead (147). When Bea makes an unexpected return, her daughter becomes detached and distant (237f). The reader learns nothing about what really motivated Bea to leave her child; there is no extensive backstory about what Bea did during her absence, apart from brief mentions about what is going on in the city (251-53). After Bea's departure and the shift in focalisation to Agnes, readerly empathy shifts too. We begin to see the world through the eyes of a child who has grown up in the wilderness. After her mother reappears, Agnes starts to withdraw from her. This estrangement of daughter from mother is imitative of the distance Bea created to her daughter in deciding to return to the city. Bea's arrested narrative in *The New Wilderness* can be read, in turn, as mirroring the abrupt loss of home and

familial surroundings caused by the contaminated, environmentally destroyed world that is storied in the novel.

Megan Hunter's *The End We Start From*, set in a futuristic, flood-devastated England, also contains a case of arrested narrative. The protagonist and her partner, R, are forced to leave their home in London due to flooding, just after the mother gives birth to their first child, Z (6). The family of three, along with R's parents, make a getaway from the disastrously flooded south of the country towards higher ground, towards R's childhood home in the north (10). But the journey is fraught with other dangers: climate disasters have led to the collapse of political structures and outbreaks of civil unrest (37f). About a third of the way into the novel, R suddenly disappears—his narrative is arrested—and he remains absent till the very end. This disappearance is foreshadowed by R's frequent absences: he is away on a hiking trip when Z is born; he increasingly leaves his partner alone with the new-born child on the precarious journey north. He returns from a shopping trip to announce that his mother, G, has died, though the cause of her death remains unmentioned (14). Later, R embarks on a quest to forage for food with his father but returns alone to report that his father has been killed in a violent altercation (38). R rushes his partner and baby out of the house in which they are staying and into their car, saying they need to flee immediately from imminent danger. For a while, they live in their car until Z gets sick and the mother convinces R to shelter in an overcrowded refugee camp, one of many that have been set up in response to flooding and civil disorder. After the move to the camp, R vanishes, without explanation, leaving mother and infant to fend for themselves in a shelter, surrounded by strangers (43). Hunter's novel then develops as a story of human resilience in the face of climate-induced crises. Both mother and child establish new networks of sociability in order to survive. They join with other refugees in escaping to an island to avoid food shortages and violent unrest (55f). Just before the end of the novel, with both flooding and civil strife abating, mother and child return to their apartment in London. R unexpectedly reappears (118). While Z takes his first steps through the flood-ravaged apartment, signifying a new beginning—the titular end the protagonists start from—R's sudden reappearance implies the restauration of some kind of familial stability.

But R's very return to the narrative, his unanticipated survival, which is just as abrupt and surprising as his earlier disappearance, serves to illustrate a key characteristic of *arrested* narrative in cli-fi—as opposed to narrative *rupture*—as we have sought to define it. Character development is arrested in so far as it is halted, detained, held up, but *not necessarily erased* from the narrative. The disappearance of an important or cared-for character from a cli-fi novel may well mean that that character has died or will not figure again in the plot, but any such character might just as easily return to the story. Unpredictability, instability, indeterminacy, all in relation to a character's possible development: this is the sense of what arrested narrative produces in a reader in particular cli-fi. And these qualities, formalistically constructed, echo the unpredictable, volatile nature of the environment, of untimely climate catastrophe in the age of the Anthropocene. As Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak

Taylor put it, "[The] Anthropocene is unfinished, a tale without an ending" (10). Writing and reading climate fiction is ultimately about writing and reading into the unknown, the unknowable; it is about "the acceptance of inconsistency, the belief in complexity, the attention to contradiction" (Menely and Taylor 13).

Narratologists Ansgar and Vera Nünning, in a 2016-published investigation of domains and features of "aesthetic ruptures in literature" and "discontinuities in serial story-telling," point to stories of "modernism, the avantgarde, and migration" as particularly interspersed with breaks and disruptions in acts of narration (46). They then assert that:

> In addition to the fields in which there has been research on the phenomenon of broken narratives, there are, however, a number of other domains in which broken narratives have recently featured quite prominently, without as yet seeming to have caught the attention of scholars working in the respective fields. In an age of ongoing crises, it is probably no coincidence that broken narratives seem to have proliferated in a number of new contexts. (46-47)

We argue that one of the "new contexts" in which breaks or arrests in the act of narration feature quite prominently, and which has not yet caught the attention of scholars, is Anthropocene climate fiction. The arrestation of character development, as we have sought to describe it in climate fiction like *Clade*, *The New Wilderness* and *The End We Start From*, is an innovation at the level of narrative form. The sense of loss, of unexpected disruption to empathetic investment in a character's development, which works at the level of narrative discourse (i.e., regarding *how* the story is told), parallels the sense of loss that is experienced by characters within the storyworld of the novel (as well as by readers) at climate devastation, environmental destruction and the sudden loss of species, habitats, ecosystems, and human and nonhuman lives. In addition, we specifically identify this 'break' as an *arrest* rather than a *rupture* in the act of narration, given that in the cli-fi we have examined there is no finality or closure around any character's disappearance; the character's story is held in abatement, he/she/it/they may well return but might not. This narrative move both imitates and invokes the unpredictable, indeterminant nature of climatic futures in the age of the Anthropocene.

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