

Of Bees and Women: Femininity and Climate Change in Mireille Juchau's *The World Without Us*

Judith Rahn, University Düsseldorf, Germany

Abstract

This article investigates notions of femininity in light of contemporary debates around anthropogenic climate change in literature. Climate change fiction (cli-fi) specifically considers life in the Anthropocene and the consequence of changing climatological realities for human and nonhuman actors in ecosystems. Seemingly straight-forward dichotomies between human and nonhuman, wild and domesticated, useful and harmful subjectivities are being contested, and literary texts increasingly pick up on and reflect the instabilities of previously undisputed dualisms. Mireille Juchau's novel *The World Without Us* (2015) explores the intertwined relationships between climate, the animal world, and human subjectivity as it slowly uncovers the multifaceted narration around the Müller family's grief at the loss of their child. As the family's life is repeatedly underscored with symbolism of bees, the narration draws parallels between human life and the lives of bees. The text's elaborate play with multiperspectivity is reminiscent of insect eyes' compound nature and undulates between fragmentation and complexity. This article explores how Juchau's novel offers new ways of exploring femininity within notions of grief and suffering on the one hand and the effects of anthropogenic climate change on the other.

You could think of the weather [...] as a gateway between the earth
and the sky.

—Michelle Juchau, *The World Without Us*

The first time that we open a hive there comes over us an emotion
akin to that we might feel at profaning some unknown object,
charged perhaps with dreadful surprise, as a tomb.

—Maurice Maeterlinck, *The Life of the Bee*

Introduction

With the rise in global sealevels, increasingly frequent reports of catastrophic natural disasters, and a worrying account of the current climatic conditions by the 2021 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the realities of anthropogenic climate change are becoming progressively palpable (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). Questions of sustainability, water scarcity, and efforts to preserve a diverse environment for future generations emerge as more pressing now than ever before. It is, thus, little surprising that both literary fiction and critical scholarship have considered approaches to analyse and imagine presents and futures where the irrevocably changing climatic conditions and their effects on human and nonhuman life are tangible. Especially Australian fiction and Australian academic research have embraced questions of anthropogenic climate change. “Climate has [...] been a characteristically Australian literary preoccupation,” since at least the mid-twentieth century, attests Andrew Milner (2020). This characteristic “preoccupation” can in part be seen in correlation with Australia’s geographic, climatic, and economic conditions. With a population clustered around the coastal peripheries and a large, climatically challenging, and expanding dry landmass at its centre, Australia’s peoples are challenged by the threatening effects of rising sea levels, forest fires, and floods. The realities of the extent to which world climate impacts local regions is particularly visible in the devastating decline of biodiversity due to expansions of human habitation, disproportionate land clearing, and the aggressive sourcing of natural resources: “Species loss in Australia since 1788 has been apocalyptic, and Australia continues to have one of the highest extinction rates in the world,” remarks Helen Tiffin in 2020 and warns against new plans of industrial expansion (62). For example, one of Australia’s most well-known natural structures of unparalleled species diversity, the Great Barrier Reef, is under imminent threat from human industrial expansion.

Deborah Jordan accentuates that the “consciousness of planetary change is reflected in recent cautionary climate change narratives”, which ask for a re-examination of the role the “environmental imagination [plays] in Australian literature” (Jordan 5). In this vein, this article sets out

to investigate this new “environmental imagination” that is becoming an increasingly visible presence in contemporary Australian fiction and to examine how the lives of nonhumans and humans intersect. The points of intersection thus rethink the status of the individual as entwined with the human and nonhuman actors that surround it. By using climate-change fiction (cli-fi) as a genre of ever-growing popularity and influence as a stepping-stone, this article addresses and explores if and how far the genre in general and Mireille Juchau's novel *The World Without Us* (2015) in particular can contribute to finding solutions to pressing contemporary climatic questions. In as much as the Great Barrier Reef has become an emblem of the human impact on oceanic ecosystems, dying bee populations have become synonymous with the effects of excessive human farming, climate-related wildfires, and pesticides on life on land (Hogendoorn et al. 1). As a species dependent on nutrition from insect-pollinated plants, the reduction in the survival rate of pollinators is a tangible threat to the survival of humanity on this planet. Therefore, the significance of bees as an exceptionally social, sensitive, and endangered species inhabits a narrow yet highly significant narrative niche in literature.

Juchau's novel accentuates the precarious status of both humans and bees, as both are dependent on the survival of specialist ecosystems that provide habitats, nutrition, and ensure the survival of both species. Beate Neumeier observes that “[p]lants and particularly animals play a decisive role in the shaping of the Australian national imaginary” (Neumeier 6), so the close proximity at which bee- and human narratives intersect is not surprising. Yet, the text foregrounds the human species' evident incapacity to preserve the biodiversity that we are so dependent on. Through mapping the links between human and animal life, this novel emphasises the significant new and diverse ways in which literary texts can imagine inter-species relations. It furthermore considers the potency of ecosystems, which are portrayed as amounting to more than the sum of their parts. Thus, the novel's visualisation of Australian landscapes, wildlife, and human inhabitants creates a continuous effort to imagine all life on earth as interconnected and interdependent.

Australia and Climate Change Literature

While narratives of the imminent and destructive dangers of unpredictable nonhuman natural forces have been written and read since at least the beginnings of the modern novel in e.g., Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876) etc. (Taylor *The Sky of Our Manufacture: The London Fog in British Fiction from Dickens to Woolf*; Taylor “Where Is Victorian

Ecocriticism?"), narratives of (anthropogenic) climate change and a vividly agentic nature have often been pushed to the margins of 'serious' literature and marketed as science fiction (sci-fi), horror, or fantasy (Ghosh; Craps and Crownshaw). Gerry Canavan, in his investigation of the relationship between ecology and science fiction, even calls the terms 'science' and 'fiction' an "oxymoronic combination" (Canavan ix). This sentiment may easily be transferred to the combination of 'ecology' and 'fiction' and thus implicitly questions the 'scientific value' of fictional imaginations of climatological potentialities. Amitav Ghosh famously calls this misalignment of literary reception and climatic realities the "great derangement" of our time, an age which "so congratulates itself on its self-awareness" (Ghosh 11). Humanist notions of 'self-awareness' and human singularity have dominated Western cultural and scientific thought for the longest time and have remained practically uncontested since the age of the Enlightenment. However, with the rise of new modes of inquiry into the nature and make-up of the world, cultures, and traditions, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries provide a whole new toolkit for reading, understanding, and interpreting fictional and non-fictional worlds. Theories of affect (e.g.: Massumi 2002, 2015; Sedgwick 2003), posthumanism (e.g.: Barad 2003; Braidotti 2013, 2019; Braidotti and Hlavajova 2018; Herbrechter 2013; Nayar 2014; Rosendahl Thomsen and Wamberg 2020) and actor-networks (e.g.: Latour 1993, 2005), for example, all allow for the rise of new literary and critical perspectives. Especially as postcolonial studies are growing as a field, voices from former colonial and/or marginalised backgrounds become visible and audible, the perspectival literary and critical horizon has expanded. It incorporates a focus on Western and non-Western, human and nonhuman perspectives and thus allows for the inclusion of a broad spectrum of experiences. At the same time, this multitude of (new) perspectives questions the status quo of established hierarchical dichotomies such as nature-culture, barbaric-civilised, human-nonhuman, and instead accentuates how all subjectivities are interlinked through complex mesh-like connections (Morton). Rather than supporting linear hierarchies, these multiplicities question the prevalence of existing humanist values and sustain the necessity of multiperspectival and multidirectional narratives. As Ghosh describes the magnitude of the "derangement," he particularly stresses the difficulties of establishing narratives of anthropogenic climate change as 'serious' literary endeavours, even though they imagine possible, even probable global climatic scenarios. However, since he proclaimed that "[p]robability and the modern novel are in fact twins, born at about the same time, among the same people" (Ghosh 16), notions of anthropogenic climate change have begun to emerge in greater numbers and to greater recognition in the literary world. Transcending the absolutes of the boundaries between

'scientific fact' and 'fictional text' to create contemporary and future scenarios, these texts bring to the fore the fragility of our planet.

Dan Bloom is credited with abbreviating the term climate change fiction in 2007 thus coining the term 'cli-fi', in reference to the term 'sci-fi' for science fiction. The abbreviated term thus "bridges the gap between academia and popular culture to construct a blended language" (Baysal 234). Situated at the intersection of ecological science and literary imagination, the term aptly symbolises the inherent bipartite nature of the concept, which always (and not always successfully) tries to unite two very different worlds. While research into climate change is trying to find practical solutions and long-term forecasts, the literary imagination creates scenarios that illuminate the state of the current climatic crisis. However, since climate change is a global, interconnected, and overarching phenomenon, the term indicates the need for trans- and interdisciplinary approaches to both literary fiction and academic research. In 2016, Amitav Ghosh criticised the lack of literary texts that explicitly imagine and foreground the effects of anthropogenic climate change. Now, the body of work connected to the effects of human-made climatic changes is growing continuously and has in recent years expanded to include more and more works by authors that foreground narratives from perspectives that are not primarily situated in the Global North. These include for example: Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993), Chang-Rae Lee's *On Such a Full Sea* (2014), Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* (2010) and *Lagoon* (2015) and Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* (2021).

Especially the body of work produced by Australian authors is ever-growing and is slowly developing into an established genre. In the Australian literary imagination, the effects of anthropogenic climate change have been a predominant topos since the end of the last millennium and include works like: *The Sea and Summer* by George Turner (1987), *A Rainforest in Time* by Jean Vormair (1988), *Carpentaria* By Alexis Wright (2006), *Salt* by Gabrielle Lord (1990), *Sea as Mirror* by Tess Williams (1990), *No Tomorrow* by Philip Machanick (2008), *And the Waters Prevailed* by John Litchen (2010), *The Swan Book* by Alexis Wright (2013) and recently James Bradley's *Ghost Species* (2020). Considering the impact and visibility of Australian climate change issues and cli-fi of Australian origin, it is somewhat surprising that only a very limited number of academic publications have engaged with the specifics of the Australian climate change novel. While current criticism on the subject is still sparse, a few elemental works have tried to map Australian fiction in their engagement with anthropogenic climate change. The most comprehensive is Deborah Jordan's overview in *Climate Change Narratives in Australian Fiction*, in which she analyses and inspects both

Adult- and Young Adult narratives and foregrounds how extreme weather is written in fiction. Her text aims to identify specifically Australian climate fiction novels and lays the foundation for future analytical texts on Australian cli-fi. However, like Ghosh, Jordan underscores that an issue as pressing as the current climatic future needs more literary renderings. Recently, Andrew Milner's article has contributed to the analysis of Australian climate change literature with "Australian Climate Fiction", in which he criticises Jordan's assessment that there is a distinct lack of cli-fi novels in Australia. He argues that the "small scale of Australian publishing when compared to the major centres of cli-fi publishing in Britain, France, Germany, and the United States" is the cause behind this seeming disparity and that, considering the size of the literary market, "Australia has actually been remarkably productive of climate fictions" (Milner n.p.). Beate Neumeier and Helen Tiffins's volume on *Ecocritical Concerns and the Australian Continent* considers the topic from a humanities point of view, although it does not apply a purely literary perspective. There has been some research on scientific and literary comparisons regarding climate change fiction in Australia (Mills, Olive and Clark; Morgan) and some work regarding ecological changes in law and the natural sciences (Rogers), but with a growing literary corpus the need for more diverse scholarship is essential. The great irony of anthropogenic climate change lies, of course, in the fact that since the industrial revolution, it has habitually been the Global North that caused the effects of global warming, while it is often in the Global South where its negative effects impact the most (Edenhofer et al. 2). Considering the vulnerability of Australia's geographical location and the precarious future of its biodiversity in the light of current anthropogenic climatic changes, the circumstances seem to demand a specifically Australian climate change fiction. As more Australian narrative texts engage with the human and nonhuman side of anthropogenic climate change and increase the repertoire of narrated biological and non-biological actors, so will academic interest and the number of academic publications on the subject.

Mireille Juchau's *The World Without Us* (2015)

One of the intriguing characteristics of climate change fiction is the almost limitless pool of potential literary voices. Mireille Juchau's intimately poetic novel *The World Without Us*, published in 2015, depicts the intertwined fates of a family with the Australian ecosystem surrounding them. At the centre of the novel is the family of Stefan and Evangeline Müller, whose youngest daughter Pip has tragically passed away. She leaves behind a family in dissolution, captured by grief and in need of recalibration after the dreadful events. There remain two sisters, Tess and Meg, their grief-stricken mother and their father, consumed by his beekeeping hobby and

his ambitions to write a book on the art of beekeeping. As the novel explores the narratives of the publicly and excessively grieving mother, a daughter who no longer speaks, and a daughter who tries to act as an interpreter for her sister and negotiator between her parents, it uncannily parallels different individual approaches to loss. While each family member grieves in their own unique ways, the novel opens with the shockingly practical approach to beekeeping: The father/Stefan carefully extracts the queen bee from each hive, killing it and later replacing it with a new queen to enhance the productivity of the hive and ensure a consistent income.

Today he'll kill the old queens. After squashing them with his boot he'll leave their crushed corpses beneath each hive so the bees can smell she's dead. *Queens produce pheromones which exert a great power over the surrounding bees. If they begin to perform poorly they should be replaced.* (*The World* 14)¹

Evangeline's grief finds form in her escape into the realm of art and spirituality, while Stefan's distanced stupefaction culminates in helpless horror at the unfolding of yet another tragedy.

Stefan, picturing everyone gone, [...] his thoughts hovered on Pip, his youngest, his little house bee. Pip, who'd looked most like his mother, Gretchen. He'd not been able to bury one, because the other was so ill. Both had died in the same month, in different hemispheres. Acute lymphoblastic leukaemia [sic]. Stroke. (*The World* 18-19)

The overarching perspective of the family story across continents and generations is aptly imagined in this devastating scenario of two deaths on either side of the world, uncannily joined through fate. The alienating otherness of both mother and daughter having died within a short window of time is repeatedly evoked in Stefan's consideration of his family in terms of a beehive. At the same time it is through Stefan's work with the bees, that the novel continuously connects human family ties to the world of the nonhuman. As Val Plumwood phrases it: "[t]he construction of nonhumans as 'Others' involves both distorted ways of seeing sameness, continuity or commonality with the colonized 'Other'" (Plumwood 53). Thus, the characters' manifold perspectives and their individual perception, interpretation, and reaction to Pip's passing—the driving force of the novel—evokes ways of "seeing sameness" in difference.

The novel received a fair amount of attention upon its publication and was, without exception, well-received by critics. It was awarded the Victorian Premier's Literary Award in 2016 and was shortlisted for numerous other awards, including the 2016 Stella Prize and the NSW Premier's Literary Awards in the same year (Juchau "About - Mireille

¹ Hereafter abbreviated *The World*.

Juchau" n.p.). Surprisingly then, the novel has to date not received similar amounts of attention in academic scholarship but has been mentioned in publications about family life (Arnold-de Simine and Leal), in connection with an overview of Australian literature and World Ecologies (Egerer), as well as in a volume about fiction and activism in the age of climate change (Rogers). The author's homepage announces, however, that the novel is scheduled to be adapted for television and it is more than likely that this will spark renewed interest in its interwoven array of subjectivities that so cleverly imagine the world in times of changing ecological and climatic conditions.

Stef Craps and Rick Crownshaw rightly acknowledge a general pessimistic bias against the novel as a form to fully imagine and process the enormous entity that is our planet's climate as well as our human role in it. He sees "concerns about pessimistic assessments, in recent literary criticism, of the novel's ability to meet the representational challenges posed by the pressing planetary problem of climate change" (Craps and Crownshaw 1). However, as Adam Trexler argues, it is the cultural texts of a time that "show complex networks of ideas" and mark the important aspects of contemporary life (Trexler 5). In that respect, the novel form is suitable, like no other form, to evoke and imagine the fears, hopes, possibilities, and lost changes that occupy contemporary literary, political, and climate change debates. In this spirit Juchau's narrative invokes Australian farm-life between small-town troubles and personal tragedy.

As the nonhuman "Others" in this novel, bees hold a distinct place in the narrative. Not only are various (female) family members addressed as "house bee" (*The World* 18-19), "worker bee" (*The World* 14) or the "virgin queen" (*The World* 180-81) respectively, but a central aspect of the text focuses on Evangeline Müller's childhood and youth at a hippie commune called 'The Hive.' Notions of femininity in Juchau's text are very closely linked to notions of the nonhuman, of otherness and marginality. Evangeline's past as a daughter and member of the commune makes her a creature between worlds. Firmly rooted in the world of humans, she is simultaneously also a member of a hive, of a matriarchal society where the survival of the community exceeds the life of the individual. As an in-between subject (one is almost tempted to call Evangeline a bee-ing), she seamlessly interlinks the two realms. The text is evocative of the resemblance between Evangeline and the queen bee of a hive, when her middle-daughter, Meg, takes the parallels between her father's apiary and her mother's commune literally and asks: "Were you a worker bee up there, Mum? Or a queen?" and the mother wearily replies that "It wasn't like that" (*The World* 14). Indeed, as a mother figure, or rather, *the* mother figure in the novel, she is depicted as the centre of the family unit, "everyone busy around her, while she sits at the heart of the hive" (*The*

World 181). Her central position is, however, also a precarious one, and she suffers physical abuse and the grief of her child's passing. While in the beginning this trauma is only hinted at, "their mother [was] blinking fast, a tic that appeared when they spoke of The Hive" (*The World* 14), the novel later reveals that Evangeline, pregnant with her first child and desperate to end the relationship with then-boyfriend Pete is brutally abducted and physically assaulted by both Pete and his friend. Pete "was homeless, shambolic, a drifter making do" (*The World* 172). In the aftermath, Evangeline is irrevocably drawn to Stefan, the surfing, bee-loving German who is fascinated by a human community modelled after a bee colony. Eventually, a fire destroys the physical evidence of the commune, leaving Evangeline with a past she cannot fully transcend. The utopian matriarchal ideals at the base of The Hive reveal themselves to be not more untainted and idyllic than any other (human) society.

Apart from Evangeline's implicit and explicit symbolic relationship with the hive-world, all her daughters are in close connection with the nonhuman world around them. While Meg feels distress at the sight of a kangaroo trapped in the toxic waste fields left behind by the local fracking industry (*The World* 73), her silent sister Tess, upon encountering a swarm of bees in the wild remarks "are these wild bees or have they swarmed from someone's apiary? You can't say if they've come from man or nature" (*The World* 162). Immediately transcending the dualistic logic of 'domesticated' and 'wild', 'colonised,' and 'coloniser', Tess's assessment that a wild bee is no different from a bee in an apiary also illuminates the innate fallibilities of Cartesian dualisms. Dualistic categorisation reaches its limits as concepts transcend binary boundaries and connect opposing ideas rather than dividing them. The bee's status as both wild and domesticated exhibits the otherness of the species and calls for non-binary ways of thinking. The novel even presents the materiality of the bee as inhabiting a realm somewhere between individual and collective being, between living and inanimate object:

As her eyes adjust Tess sees what's hanging from the ceiling and jutting like lichen in thick, creamy layers. They protrude from the walls and fan from the corners. They garland the roof beams. Great waxy chandeliers lit with yellow bees. A massive natural hive. (*The World* 162)

The bees, alternatively described as "lichen", "creamy layers", as "garland[ing]" and "chandeliers", seem to oscillate between different states of existence. While being profitable property, subject to extensive and selective breeding (*The World* 130), they also exist exclusively on their own terms. If anthropogenic ecological destruction of the bee's natural habitat does not come to an end, the bee colonies will diffuse, migrate, or go extinct. It is not in human hands to extract profitable goods from the bees' proximity but rather to discern their importance for human

survival. Their ability to foreground the ironic discord between domesticated animals and ecologically vital pollinators leaves their status as conceptually diffused. The toolkit of the Western tradition does not suffice to fully narrate, comprehend, or imagine the bee.

In contrast to the female protagonists who in one way or another, all have a deep, intuitive, and affectionate connection to the natural world in general and bees in particular, the male characters in Juchau's novel seem to have in ambition what they lack in intuition. While local teacher Jim is chronically allergic to bees (*The World* 211), Stefan is an apiarist, having inherited the knowledge and scientific interest in bees from his German grandfather, who kept bees on his balcony in Berlin during and after the war (*The World* 18-19). Stefan's approach to beekeeping, however, is imagined in polar opposition of his wife and daughters' intuitive way. Keeping his "personal bible", Maurice Maeterlinck's influential *The Life of the Bee* (1901), as a steady companion, his ambition includes studying and writing his own scientific contribution and establishing himself academically as an apiarist (*The World* 22). When first arriving in Australia, Stefan is driven less by ambition, and economic interest and aimlessly searches for opportunities for self-realisation. This utopian dream he sees almost fulfilled when he hears about The Hive.

Fifteen years since he'd left Germany and floated into Bidgalong with a backpack and a copy of Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Life of the Bee*. This had become his personal bible and so, after a dope-hazed, partying spring in Thailand, he headed for the lands to find what that Belgian writer had so loved in the bees: *passion for work, perseverance, devotion to the future*. After a week of surfing, he'd trekked up to the commune because he'd heard it was modelled on bee communities. (*The World* 17)

With only *The Life of the Bee* as a companion, Stefan strongly feels the rightness of the connection between conferring logics of bee societies to human societies; he engages with the commune to find that while structures, nomenclature, and set-up of The Hive try to resemble a beehive, the inhabitants are very much human (*The World* 66). Finally, the novel poses the question of if and to what extent the imitation of bee life in the human world can be a feasible alternative to contemporary social, economic and climatological problems, if it does not also entail a radical rethinking and reimagination of human relationships with the nonhuman world.

Bees, Femininity and Anthropogenic Climate Change

Bees are curiously present and absent in literary fiction. More and more fictional literary texts are published that explore the idea of bees, and the corpus of bee-related fiction grows almost exponentially with their physical disappearance. Despite a growing number of literary texts implicitly and explicitly addressing bees as central actors and significant

subjectivities (e.g., Laline Paull's *The Bees*, Maja Lunde's *The History of Bees*, Eileen Garvin's *The Music of Bees*, Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*), theoretical and critical texts analysing the relationship between bee and human subjectivities are few. Imagining insect life and the intricacies of life in a beehive are often literarily connected to narratives of climate change and femininity. Laline Paull's *The Bees*, for example, explores the life and structure of the population in one beehive, including its social, political, and hierarchical structures from the perspective of bees. As notoriously difficult focalisers, bees inhabit the narrative territory between the mysticism of the unknowable, the power of matriarchal societies, and the material representatives of the abstract terrors of climate change. The bee-society is thought of as a mirror and counter-image of human society, depicting social, political, and ecological structures that seem superior to patriarchal human societies. Visualising how other (nonhuman) societies depend on the stability of the climate, while human societies depend on the survival of the bees, these insects have come to represent an alternative, perhaps even superior, social model.

Interlacing issues of climate change with notions of feminism is a significant aspect of debates about global environmental futures. Feminism as a consistent staple in the history of environmental concerns contributed to coining Ecofeminism in the late 1970s and tries to provide a platform for critical thought at the intersection of feminism and climate activism (Byrne 169). It highlights what Carolyn Merchant appropriately calls the “the contradiction between production and reproduction” (Merchant 193) and what she sees women’s attempt to overturn the offences and depletion of resources within local ecosystems. She even diagnoses “assum[ed] or act[ed] connections between women and nature” (Merchant 193). Similarly, Sangita Patil argues that “women and ecology [...] seem to be intertwined” (Patil 3) so that the conjunction of ecological and feminist issues seems a logical—global—consequence. While I remain hesitant to argue for a logical unavailability and socio-biological necessity that links women, activism, and ecologies, I concur with Nicholas F. Stump’s statement that “ecofeminism posits that the same hegemonic patriarchal capitalist forces driving global ecological destruction are also responsible for subordination along lines of gender, race, class, indigenous status, [and] the Global South-North divide” (Stump 4).

In this vein, *The World Without Us* imagines a world where demarcations of subordination are overly visible. Ecofeminist perspectives rely on feminist activism to illustrate and counteract the inadequacies of patriarchal hierarchies which encourage monodirectional logics of binary opposites. The novel imagines this when the middle

daughter, Meg, observes a political protest against the local fracking industry. "This was peaceful protest – so quiet you could do it in your sleep. By refusing to move they'd halted the fracking, sometimes for a whole day" (*The World* 73). Having joined the protests earlier to have "something to do, in that year after Pip" (*The World* 73), the narration ironically distances both Evangeline and Meg from the scene by remarking: "Their mother said, you girls have helped, you've kept their energy up! So they couldn't bring themselves to tell her, *Those boys are vegan* – and that they'd frisbeed the eggs right on to the road" (*The World* 73). Megan's shame upon disposing of her mother's cooking brings to mind the distinct patriarchal gender roles that the Müller family has established, in stark contrast to the bee's matriarchic society. Meg's mild disinterest in environmental concerns acts as a criticism of socio-political activism as a fashionable, yet inconsequential, pastime. The conjunction of feminism and climate activism creates a counter-narrative that tries to oppose established norms of Western traditions. "The marginalization of women and the destruction of biodiversity go hand in hand. Loss of diversity is the price paid in the patriarchal model of progress which pushes inexorably towards monocultures, uniformity and homogeneity" (Mies and Shiva 164). As a powerful tool to foreground systemic hierarchical subordination, Ecofeminism emphasises the urgency to counter established (Western) cultural and scientific norms and advocate for more interconnected, diverse, and de-hierarchised modes of thinking. By counterposing ecofeminist action in the novel, Juchau illustrates the deep roots of hierarchical dualistic thinking in contemporary society, while circumventing easy logics of active vs. passive through highlighting the parallels between human and nonhuman actors. Instead of translating the women's aims into feminist activism, Mireille Juchau chooses to parallel issues of climate change and the loss of biodiversity with the lives of the Müller family. Bees in distress, hives that vanish, and the diminution of the family's livelihood stress the precarity of insect life. Just as much as the Müller family is in dissolution after the loss of their daughter, the nonhuman world is in danger of dissolution on a planetary scale (*The World* 162).

Conclusion

Mireille Juchau's novel *The World Without Us* challenges the limits of human perception and distinctly places logics of intuitive connectedness with the world in the feminine realm while leaving male human and nonhuman actors outside this intimate cycle of knowledge and understanding. Struggling to make sense of natural phenomena, and undeterredly attempting to penetrate the interconnectedness of human

and nonhuman forces through anthropocentric logics of West-centric scientific discovery, Juchau's narrative does not place hopes of survival in the hands of its male protagonists. Through highlighting the fallibility of traditional Western notions of hierarchical dichotomies, the narrative explores responses to global climatic change and gives insights into the lives of an unlikely, intriguing set of protagonists.

The increasingly palpable effects of anthropogenic climate change on vital parts of ecosystems on land and in the oceans have become symbolic for larger, more abstract events in a changing climate. The recognisable (narrated and visual) images of distressed bees, diminished ecosystems, and struggling oceanic life make the imminent dangers of climatic change more comprehensible. Exploring the interconnectedness of the world of the bees, the human world, and the environment, *The World Without Us* draws parallels between human and nonhuman subjectivities and becomes a multifaceted kaleidoscope that promotes the importance of multiperspectival approaches—in literature and beyond.

Works Cited

- Arnold-de Simone, Silke and Joanne Leal. *Picturing the Family: Media, Narrative, Memory*. Routledge, 2020.
- Barad, Karen. "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2003, pp. 801-31.
- Baysal, Kübra, editor. *Apocalyptic Visions in the Anthropocene and the Rise of Climate Fiction*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. Polity, 2013.
- . *Posthuman Knowledge*. Polity, 2019.
- Braidotti, Rosi and Maria Hlavajova, editors. *Posthuman Glossary*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.
- Byrne, Deirdre. "The Vocation of Healing: The Poetry of Malika Ndlovu." *Literature and Ecofeminism: Intersectional and International Voices*, edited by Douglas A. Vakoch and Sam Mickey, Routledge, 2018, pp. 169-84.
- Canavan, Gerry. "Preface." *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction*, edited by Gerry Canavan and Kim Stanley Robinson, Wesleyan UP, 2014, pp. ix-xii.
- Craps, Stef and Rick Crownshaw. "Introduction: The Rising Tide of Climate Change Fiction." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2018, pp. 1-8.
- Edenhofer, Ottmar et al. "Introduction." *Climate Change, Justice and Sustainability: Linking Climate and Development Policy*, edited by Ottmar Edenhofer et al., Springer, 2012, pp. 1-6.
- Egerer, Claudia. "Anglophone World Literatures and World Ecologies (Environmental Humanities)." *Handbook of Anglophone World Literatures*, edited by Stefan Helgesson et al., De Gruyter, 2020, pp. 119-32.
- Ghosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. The U of Chicago P, 2016.
- Herbrechter, Stefan. *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.
- Hogendoorn, Katja et al. "Conservation Management of the Green Carpenter Beexylocopa Aerata (Hymenoptera: Apidae) through Provision of Artificial Nesting Substrate." *Austral Entomology*, vol. 60, no. 1, 2020, pp. 82-88.
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. "Climate Change Widespread, Rapid, and Intensifying – IPCC." *IPCC*, 28 November 2021. <<https://www.ipcc.ch/2021/08/09/ar6-wg1-20210809-pr/>>

- Jordan, Deborah. *Climate Change Narratives in Australian Fiction*. Lambert Academic Publishing, 2014.
- Juchau, Mireille. "About - Mireille Juchau." *Mireille Juchau*, 29 November 2021. <<http://www.mireillejuchau.com/about/>>
- . *The World without Us*. Bloomsbury, 2015.
- Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford UP, 2005.
- . *We Have Never Been Modern*. Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993.
- Maeterlinck, Maurice. *The Life of the Bee*. Translated by Alfred Sutro, Dover, 2006.
- Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Duke UP, 2002.
- . *Politics of Affect*. Polity, 2015.
- Merchant, Carolyn. *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*. Routledge, 2005.
- Mies, Maria and Vandana Shiva. *Ecofeminism*. Zed Books, 2014.
- Mills, Catriona et al. "Sinking and Floating on a Shoreless Sea: Co-Reading "The Fool and His Inheritance"." *Paradoxa: Studies in World Literary Genres*, vol. 31, 2019, pp. 271-92.
- Milner, Andrew. "Australian Climate Fiction." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, 2020.
- Morgan, Ruth A. "Imagining a Greenhouse Future: Scientific and Literary Depictions of Climate Change in 1980s Australia." *Australian Humanities Review*, vol. 57, 2014, pp. 43-60.
- Morton, Timothy. *The Ecological Thought*. Harvard UP, 2010.
- Nayar, Pramod K. *Posthumanism*. Polity, 2014. *Polity Themes in 20th and 21st Century Literature*.
- Neumeier, Beate and Helen Tiffin. *Ecocritical Concerns and the Australian Continent*. Lexington Books, 2020.
- Patil, Sangita. *Ecofeminism and the Indian Novel*. Routledge, 2020.
- Plumwood, Val. "Decolonizing Relationships with Nature." *Decolonizing Nature: Strategies for Conservation in a Post-Colonial Era*, edited by William M. Adams and Martin Mulligan, Earthscan, 2003, pp. 51-78.
- Rogers, Nicole. *Law, Fiction and Activism in a Time of Climate Change*. Routledge, 2020.
- Rosendahl Thomsen, Mads and Jacob Wamberg, editors. *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Posthumanism*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2020.

- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Duke UP, 2003.
- Stump, Nicholas F. *Remaking Appalachia: Ecosocialism, Ecofeminism, and Law*. West Virginia UP, 2021.
- Taylor, Jesse Oak. *The Sky of Our Manufacture: The London Fog in British Fiction from Dickens to Woolf*. U of Virginia P, 2016.
- . "Where Is Victorian Ecocriticism?" *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 43, no. 4, 2015, pp. 877-94.
- Tiffin, Helen. "Australian Conservation Policies and the Owls of Lord Howe Island." *Ecocritical Concerns and the Australian Continent*, edited by Beate Neumeier and Helen Tiffin, Lexington Books, 2020, pp. 59-74.
- Trexler, Adam. *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*. U of Virginia P, 2015.