

Flooded Futures: the Anthropocene in 21st-Century British Fiction

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In its most recent report, the IPCC predicts more frequent and more severe flooding for most areas around the world due to climate crisis. In Britain, anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions will lead to an increased flood risk of more than 20%, in some predictions even 90%. Floods are not only literal but also figurative symbols of climate change. The image of the flood captures the overwhelming psychological effect of climate crisis and the fear of sudden rather than gradual environmental collapse when the moment of no return has been passed.

My project is the first to define twenty-first-century flood fictions as a major response to anthropogenic climate change. The aim of the project is to enhance our understanding of life in the Anthropocene by examining a set of under-explored novels that I term ‘flood fictions.’

In this project, I define flood fictions as novels that, firstly, depict climate crisis through floods. These are major destabilising events, leading to and coinciding with the largescale collapse of societal, political and economic structures. Secondly, flood fictions internalise the effect of climate crisis on cultures and societies through narrative fragmentation and language erosion. Such breaking apart of narrative and language reflects the novels’ concern with the role that narratives and knowledge play in the Anthropocene.

The project’s first objective is to define the genre of flood fiction and place it in a wider social and cultural context (including flooding in Britain and beyond, and the prevalence of the flood as environmental image, such as in the 2016 documentary *Before the Flood*). Floods constitute a major vein of the British imagination of climate change in fiction. The increased threat of floods in Britain combined with an older tradition of nineteenth- and twentieth-century flood novels, make flood fictions a particularly interesting genre to study in a British context. The project’s second objective is to use novels such as Maggie Gee’s *The Flood* (2004), Sarah Hall’s *The Carhullan Army* (2007), Antonia Honeywell’s *The Ship* (2015), Megan Hunter’s *The End We Start From* (2017) and Clare Morrall’s *When the Floods Came* (2015) as a lens through which to explore climate crisis.

Unlike much contemporary scholarship, this project takes an approach that is not largely normative and does not discount conventional narrative as a whole. In line with emerging research on ecocriticism and narratology (econarratology), my project focuses on the way in which narratives shape the discourses that surround climate crisis, and are affected by it in turn, as demonstrated in the work of Erin James, Pieter Vermeulen and others. My project confronts the crisis of the imagination by