

Aquatic Futures: Literary Imaginings of Climate-Changed Waters

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In parallel to an increasing awareness of the present climate crisis as a crisis of water, the first two decades of the twenty-first century have seen a growing number of literary portrayals of water in climate-changed fictional worlds. In my research, I investigate such imaginings in Anglophone literary works. Positing that literary imaginings can affect readers' emotions and attitudes, I explore the aesthetic and thematic features that create such potential. Particularly interesting from a combined thematic, aesthetic, and affective perspective are texts balancing on the borderline between fiction and poetry as such texts are especially apt for an exploration of how thematic focus and formal lyrical and narrative features interact in forming literary imaginings. The project responds to the following research questions:

- How is water presented in selected narrative works thematising human-induced climate change and relying on lyrical features?
- How do thematic foci and aesthetic strategies express features of the Anthropocene?
- To what extent do the texts have a potential to affect readers' emotions and ethical attitudes?

The project focuses on texts from 2000 and onwards, such as Emmi Itäranta's novel *Memory of Water* (2014), which describes a future world in which cities have turned into underwater sites of abandoned structures while fresh-water scarcity defines life in the novel's future world; Marina Vitaglione's *Solastalgia* (2017), a combination of lyrical storytelling and poetic photographs, in which the city of Venice is slowly sinking into the Adriatic Sea; and Charlotte McConaghy's novel *Migrations* (2020), describing the protagonist's encounters with the last Arctic terns on their final migration from north to south.

Methodologically, I combine standard close-reading techniques with econarratology, climate lyricism, affective ecocriticism, and hermeneutic narrative ethics. The analysis involves a procedure of three steps: firstly, close reading of econarratological and climate lyricist features, secondly, analysis through theories of affective ecocriticism of how textual features invite readers to imaginatively experience fictive environments and emotions, and thirdly, analysis through hermeneutic narrative ethics of how the texts suggest ethical possibilities. The conjoining of these methods forms an innovative approach enabling analysis of how narrative features, lyrical expression, and thematic foci combine in creating affective affordances and ethical possibility in the texts.

The project intervenes in established as well as emerging fields. By bringing together affective ecocriticism, hermeneutic narrative ethics, and blue ecocriticism, it contributes to knowledge of affective and ethical affordances of literary portrayals of water. It addresses a research gap between studies of poetry and explorations of a broader range of realist and speculative fiction portraying climate change, climate disaster, and dystopian future worlds. It partakes in advancing the emerging fields of affective ecocriticism and hermeneutic narrative ethics by employing and developing their theories and ideas in relation to selected works from a time period particularly relevant for ecocritical explorations related to the Anthropocene. In general, it expands our knowledge of literature's potential to partake in shaping readers' environmental consciousness and, by extension, its significance in a world facing large-scale changes of the Earth system.