Essay

From Elegy to Climate Bildungsroman: Jenni Fagan's *The Sunlight Pilgrims*

NANDITA MAHAJAN

This essay is dedicated to writers of climate fiction.

We are currently living through a time when our entire species, along with all the other inhabitants of planet earth, are hurtling into an age of accelerating environmental degradation amid what some call the sixth mass extinction (Kolbert). As biodiversity flounders and the threat of even our own species' demise looms ominously on the horizon, little wonder that various neologisms—including "climate grief," "climate-change distress," and "solastalgia"—have arisen to denote psychological anguish caused by present or anticipated ecological losses (Newby; "Coping"; Albrecht). Given this profound sense of loss, it is perhaps unsurprising that ecocriticism—literary studies' environmental branch—is marked by a turn toward the elegiac, as scholars like David Huebert argue that the "environmentalist imperative to conserve" should be supplemented with acknowledgment of the need to mourn (68). Huebert's assertion that elegiac forms are valuable—for their capability to facilitate mourning and address eco-anxiety—reflects an idea that is gaining popularity. The importance of the elegiac is highlighted throughout the critical anthology *Mourning Nature*, and one of its editors states that the book itself is partly "an ecological elegy and eulogy" (Cunsolo xxi). As Ursula K. Heise explains, "melancholy can be considered an integral part of the environmentalist worldview" (35). This emphasis on the elegiac has acquired renewed force in the wake of a recent manifestation of the environmental crisis, the coronavirus pandemic,[1] as some literary conferences feature panels on the elegy's capacity to address mass death (Alexander and Campana).

Some scholars, however, indicate the limits of the elegy. While recognizing the "power of mourning and melancholy" (35), Heise argues for the need to complement elegiac representations of extinction with more recuperative modes. She offers comedy as an alternative, drawing from Joseph Meeker's observations regarding the

NANDITA MAHAJAN recently obtained her doctorate in English literature from the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, where she worked under the supervision of Suddhaseel Sen. Mahajan is a member of the editorial board of the academic journal *Adaptation* and a former Fulbright-Nehru Doctoral Researcher at Harvard University. Her publications include an essay in *Adaptation* in which she develops an ecocritical approach to artistic adaptations, and she is writing a monograph on the climate Bildungsroman.

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regenerative emphasis of comedy (Heise 50); however, as she herself notes, comic treatments of extinction are rare. Michael P. Branch similarly argues that humor is potentially valuable to the environmental movement, opining that the elegy—the "self-indulgent expression of grief"—has been "exhausted through overuse" (385). Others suggest that the elegy does not sufficiently offer a means of transforming grief into action: Alan E. Stewart, in his review of *Mourning Nature*, writes that given the collection's concern with transforming grief "adaptively to motivations to preserve and protect the environment," its contributors could perhaps have taken account of contemporary psychologists who indicate that paralysis may ensue from grief (84–85). This suggests that overwhelmingly elegiac narratives, even if impactful, may be unproductive: crippling grief may inhibit action. Implying a similar concern, Heise asks, "Is it possible to acknowledge the realities of large-scale species extinction and yet to move beyond mourning, melancholia, and nostalgia to a more affirmative vision of our biological future?" (13).

In this essay, I suggest that one particular genre, heretofore largely overlooked by ecocritics, may harness the more transformative capacities of climate grief. This is the coming-of-age story, the Bildungsroman, which typically features a protagonist—or *Bildungsheld*—who undergoes a transformational journey following loss or tragedy and eventually comes to terms with the world. As I show, several authors of climate fiction (cli-fi) invoke the Bildungsroman to envision a range of transformations following ecocatastrophe. Together, their novels constitute a subgenre of cli-fi that may be termed the "climate Bildungsroman"—a form of storytelling that narrativizes the process of moving beyond the shock and mourning that follows large-scale death or planetary devastation; of transforming these affective states into meaningful action; and, ultimately, of adapting to a changed world. As this suggests, climate-change adaptation is a crucial theme of these novels, which depict *Bildung*—formative development—as learning to live with massive losses while navigating a new geological reality. In what follows, I briefly sketch the contours of this subgenre before proceeding to an in-depth analysis of a novel that epitomizes its distinctive characteristics: Jenni Fagan's *The Sunlight Pilgrims* (2016). Through my analysis of Fagan's novel, I explore how climate Bildungsromane may both appropriate and subvert the traditional Bildungsroman, adapting it to an age of climate change.

The Bildungsroman's basic framework lends the genre a special relevance during times of crisis. Jo Lampert acknowledges this in her examination of the 9/11 Bildungsroman. Observing that a loss of innocence pervaded post-9/11 America, Lampert writes, "The cultural mood particularly suited the bildungsroman genre" (171–72): its protagonists, "provoked by crisis, find the maturity that comes only from suffering. The crises are usually a result of a catastrophe and take the characters on journeys of self-discovery" (172). According to Lampert, the losses of 9/11 triggered a maturational process on a national scale, which found expression in the Bildungsroman. But the era of climate change, characterized by immense ongoing losses on a *global* scale, is a time when humans as a species must shed their innocence, as societies worldwide gradually awaken into the knowledge that their lifestyles are disharmonious with the ecosphere. This revelation will force us all to transform in fundamental ways; therefore, the Bildungsroman's "key elements of loss, suffering, self-awareness, introspection, and growth" (Lampert 172) are all the more relevant in the context of climate change. Amitav Ghosh uses the word *recognition* to denote this awakening from naivete, for "recognition is famously a passage from ignorance to knowledge" (*Great Derangement* 4). Such a statement underscores the relevance of the Bildungsroman, the "novel of education," in the light of climate change: the Bildungsroman has been defined as the story of a protagonist in "a blissful state of ignorance," who "struggles with the hard realities of the world" before maturing (Wilhelm Dilthey qtd. in Hardin xiv).

Indeed, an exploration of cli-fi reveals that numerous authors, whether consciously or unconsciously, invoke the Bildungsroman to illustrate journeys from ignorance to knowledge to adaptation. Their *Bildungshelden*'s maturation is often

explicitly triggered by climate grief. For instance, Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior*, which has been read as Dellarobia's Bildungsroman (Mayer 217), represents the latter's *Bildung*—and her decision to become a climate scientist—as the result of her grief at the impending extinction of monarch butterflies. In other cases, personal losses that trigger *Bildungshelden*'s maturation arise from the violence or chaos that permeates the dystopian worlds of cli-fi: in Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, Lauren's family is killed and her neighborhood destroyed before Lauren eventually forms her own community. Losses may be connected with totalitarian regimes that ensue from the climate crisis. Emmi Itäranta's *Memory of Water* pivots on Noria's loss of her parents—her father's death and her separation from her mother—and Noria struggles with grief while blossoming into an adult. And Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* trilogy—which, as I argue elsewhere, may be read as cli-fi (Mahajan 246–47)—features a *Bildungsheld* who grapples with tremendous loss and death as she transforms an exploitative social order. As several of these examples illustrate, *Bildung* may acquire multiscalar proportions in cli-fi: in addition to an individual's maturation, these novels may depict the "maturation" of an entire society learning to navigate a devastated world. Losses feature prominently in numerous climate Bildungsromane. The child in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* grows up on a barren, corpse-laden earth and is eventually orphaned. Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* has been read as the Bildungsroman of Jimmy (Barzilai 88), for whom loss is a formative experience. Several others—Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book*, Doris Lessing's *Mara and Dann*, George Turner's *The Sea and Summer*, Saci Lloyd's *The Carbon Diaries 2015*, Christie Nieman's *As Stars Fall*, Omar El Akkad's *American War*, and Lydia Millet's *A Children's Bible*—feature *Bildungshelden* who grow up with massive losses. In various ways—literal, metaphoric, allegorical—these novels invoke the literary archetype of the journey: adaptation becomes framed as a coming-of-age journey triggered by climate grief.

But what is the nature of this journey? Through Fagan's novel, I explore what appears to be a prevalent characteristic of many climate Bildungsromane: their framing of the path from ecocatastrophe to adaptation by means of a partial rejection of modernity, and a move toward modes of thought, living, and narrative commonly considered premodern. At this point, however, some conceptual clarification is perhaps in order. The term *modern*, in the Western European context, generally denotes a set of sociocultural practices "[b]orn of certain profound upheavals of economic and social organization" (Baudrillard 63) that began around the sixteenth century (64), variations of which eventually emerged across the globe through the workings of empire. European modernity is associated with capitalism, scientific rationalism, industrialization, colonialism, and, more generally, a belief in relentless, forward-moving progress[2]—an ensemble widely acknowledged to be responsible for climate change.[3] This ensemble is also partly a gendered one, associated with "nature-destructive masculinities" (Hultman 240), for "the men who dominated and ran industrial modernization performed a hegemonic form of masculinity" (243)—a subject to which I return in a later section. Furthermore, modernity is viewed as secular: its emergence is said to signal "the defeat of religious traditionalism" (Morrison 294), whereas many nonindustrial societies considered "premodern" are described as "organized around religion, mythology, and tribal organization" (Kellner). While I follow many others in employing *modern* and *premodern* as convenient shorthand terms in this essay, it is worth noting that important debates surround these categories. Some scholars, for instance, argue that there are multiple modernities;[4] meanwhile, others problematize the modern/premodern binary.[5] As I illustrate in what follows, climate Bildungsromane complicate this binary in their own way, indicating and calling for its disruption in a time of climate change in particular.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of climate Bildungsromane's partial move toward "premodernity" is their embracing of myth and religion. Both the Bildungsroman and environmentalism have historically been imbricated with subjective forms of religion. On the one hand, the Bildungsroman's emergence has been connected with the Pietist

movement in Germany, particularly its emphasis on personal transformation: for this reason, it is often argued that *Bildung* connotes self-realization of a spiritual kind (Hardin ix). On the other hand, the modern environmental movement, since its inception in the 1960s, has been bound up with Western culture's "new religious turn"[6]—a turn described as "clearly inspired by premodern religiosity" (Heelas 109) and as partly a critique of modernity (105)—which emphasized personal experience, resulting in an increased popularity of Eastern spirituality and, to some extent, subjective forms of Christianity.[7] This movement's prioritization of subjectivity is akin to Pietism's focus on individual development—a focus the Bildungsroman has inherited. And interestingly, several environmental novels written in the 1960s and 1970s—the early literary offshoots of the environmental movement—were Bildungsromane, which drew from subjective belief systems to present the awakening of an ecocentric sensibility as a protagonist's *spiritual* evolution.[8] These novels were largely instances of New Wave science fiction (New Wave SF),[9] the mystical inclinations of which seem to have filtered down into contemporary climate Bildungsromane: from McCarthy's and Millet's biblical references and heavily fabular tone to Wright's mythical allusions to Itäranta's engagement with Buddhism, contemporary cli-fi continues to invoke premodern belief systems and narrative modes. New Wave SF may, therefore, be considered part of cli-fi's prehistory.

However, contemporary cli-fi also differs from New Wave SF in significant ways. While the latter was more inclined toward the fantastical or otherworldly, cli-fi is largely rooted in climate science and portrays worlds characterized by varying degrees of speculative realism. Amid this scientific rigor, the prominence of myth brings about a seemingly anachronistic blend of modern scientific rationality with ancient belief systems. Relatedly, while science may play a part in grieving protagonists' *Bildungen*, their transformation is often portrayed, paradoxically, as a spiritual awakening.[10] Hence, while Itäranta narrates Noria's discovery of scientific information regarding drinkable water in her parched world, this process is tied to Noria's spiritual self-cultivation—her mastery of the Zen Buddhist ritual of the tea ceremony. Butler's protagonist, Lauren, dreams of enabling humans to colonize other planets, yet these scientific endeavors are facilitated by the religion Lauren develops. And while Kingsolver narrates Dellarobia's "encounter with climate science" (Mayer 217), the novel repeatedly draws from religious symbolism to depict this awakening. These climate Bildungsromane's fusion of modern science with premodern belief systems embodies what Richard Kerridge calls the two "fiercely opposed" modes of thought the environmental crisis demands: it necessitates both "emergency technological measures" and "a shift of social and personal values in the direction of Deep Ecology, to give us a chance of stabilising the global ecosystem and living peaceful, fulfilled lives as we do so" (369). Kerridge prescribes various literary genres to address these contradictory demands (372–73); yet, like most ecocritics, he overlooks the Bildungsroman.[11]

My overview suggests that the climate Bildungsroman—a genre dually rooted in cli-fi's link with climate science and the Bildungsroman's emphasis on spiritual self-transformation—becomes a site where these "fiercely opposed" strands of thinking intertwine. It is through this seemingly paradoxical manifestation of the timeless archetype of the journey that these novels harness the transformative power of climate grief. *The Sunlight Pilgrims*, I argue, epitomizes this power. One of its most striking features is how its narration of individual grief and adaptation melts into an allegory of humankind on a devastated planet. Furthermore, this novel most extensively illustrates the seeming paradox through which many climate Bildungsromane grapple with grief: modern and premodern values anachronistically converge across several levels of Fagan's narrative. It is therefore to this novel that I turn in my exploration of how and why this enigmatic paradox haunts *Bildungshelden*'s journeys from climate devastation to adaptive transformation. This anomaly, I show, destabilizes the very idea of progress that is said to have come into being with the dawn of Western modernity.

The Sunlight Pilgrims

In Fagan's novel, melting Arctic ice desalinates the ocean, slowing the Gulf Stream and leading to freezing temperatures in several parts of the world as the earth slides into what some fear is an ice age. Although this frigid future may seem unlikely, it is based partly "on scientific research on what hypothetical climate shock might look like" (Hinde, "Something").[12] Relatedly, the novel is filled with fantastical-seeming phenomena that are actually scientifically sound, like Fagan's opening image of "three suns in the sky" (*Sunlight Pilgrims* 1)—an instance of parhelia.[13] Yet these fantastical-*seeming* elements are deftly interwoven with *genuinely* fantastical references: through the conversations of Fagan's eccentric characters, geological fact is interspersed with mythical Aztec deities, "sunlight pilgrims," biblical angels and giants, and fairy tales. The novel itself seems almost a fairy tale or fable about climate change: the science behind a cooling Gulf Stream and freak winter mingles with allusions to "old Mother Frost" (62) and "Narnia" (151) amid surreal-seeming descriptions of bewitching snowscapes. It is against the backdrop of this seemingly incongruent amalgamation that the novel narrates its characters' adaptation to ecocatastrophe.

Making Home of a Changing Earth

In Fagan's initial chapters, Dylan MacRae, a refugee from London, migrates to a caravan in a Scottish caravan park in the village of Clachan Fells. Wracked by grief over the death of his mother and grandmother, Vivienne and Gunn, and the loss of their home, an art-house cinema called Babylon—one of the many houses that has been seized by the bank following the twin ecological and economic collapses—Dylan intends to scatter the women's ashes in their homeland before departing for warmer climes. But he decides to stay, for he falls in love with his surroundings and with Constance Fairbairn, who lives next door with her transgender daughter, Stella Fairbairn—a boy beginning to embrace her true identity as a girl even as her body, to her horror, enters into male puberty. As the three of them become a family unit of sorts, the grief-stricken Dylan works on learning to survive in a caravan in the freezing, mountainous wilderness while Stella grapples with a new gender identity.

While the novel is often described as Stella's coming-of-age story (Logan; Martinez), what has been overlooked is that it additionally narrates the maturation of the much older Dylan, who lacks worldly experience. In what follows, I show that Fagan's novel—the third-person narrative of which oscillates between Dylan's and Stella's perspectives—is, in fact, a double Bildungsroman, which parallels its two primary characters' maturational arcs. The subject of climate grief and adaptation is addressed most explicitly through Dylan, whose *Bildung*, I argue, involves coping with the demise of urban modernity while making home of a spatiotemporal liminality comprising elements of both modern and premodern environments. I examine how Dylan's geographic movement from modern toward premodern correlates with Stella's transition from male toward female, for Stella overcomes the loss of her prior life while finding home in a liminal male-female identity; and, in this regard, the novel symbolically incorporates the gendered undertones of the modern/premodern binary in its depiction of climate-change adaptation. The novel and its *Bildungshelden*, I ultimately explain, transcend elegiac views of extinction through this liminal balance of modern and premodern; masculine and feminine; scientific rationality and more ancient forms of thought, living, and narrative.

Finding Home in a Liminal Environment: Dylan MacRae

Dylan's characterization as a mourning-refugee figure epitomizes the key role of loss in the Bildungsroman: it is through Dylan that Fagan's novel most explicitly addresses its theme of grappling with grief and adapting to it, and of losing homes and making new ones—a process I elucidate in this section by means of Yi-Fu Tuan's concept of "topophilia," "the affective bond between people and place or setting" (4). Topophilia plays a crucial part in climate grief: as Jonica Newby explains, climate change is often personally experienced as grief

for the loss of one's "heart places," which carry one's sense of identity (19). This loss may be only indirectly linked to climate change: it is the economic collapse following climate breakdown that leads to Dylan's loss of Babylon. Fagan's nostalgia-laced opening chapters narrate Dylan's melancholic departure from the place, which holds "memories from his childhood in each and every nook" (*Sunlight Pilgrims* 9). Furthermore, his topophilic bond with his home is shown to be entwined with his relationship with the others who shared it. He thinks sorrowfully, "For the first time in over sixty years there will not be a MacRae in ownership" at the cinema (11). Dylan continues to mourn Babylon, Vivienne, and Gunn for most of the novel, the mundane details of their lives "[n]othing much, yet everything" to him (176). This is consonant with Newby's description of climate grief as focused on specific loss rather than on nebulous catastrophe (19): Dylan's loss of home represents an intensely personal experience of global ecocollapse. And while it is not climate change that kills his family, his reckoning with their deaths sets the stage for a broader engagement with extinction—a theme to which I return in a later section.

Since "the link between home and family is so strong that the terms are almost interchangeable" (Mallett 62), Dylan's tripartite grief for Babylon, Vivienne, and Gunn may be broadly understood as the refugee's grief for the loss of home. Indeed, refugee narratives are ubiquitously associated with the elegiac. In Fagan's novel, however, the loss of home is also the beginning of growing up, for although Dylan is an adult, he has lived a sheltered life: "Sometimes he has no idea how he made it to thirty-eight"; "pretty much all the things people are supposed to have done by his age have passed him by" (*Sunlight Pilgrims* 13). Thus, the loss of his parent figures and expulsion from his childhood home signal an entry into adulthood, fusing the refugee's defining loss—the source of the novel's elegiac leanings—with his coming-of-age journey. Through the figure of the mourning refugee, then, elegy and Bildungsroman are amalgamated to narrate a journey from grief to transformation. And significantly, this climate refugee's adaptive maturation involves overcoming grief for his lost home and world while forging new topophilic ties. This theme of forming new topophilic bonds is made explicit at one point when Dylan, newly arrived in Clachan Fells and battling grief while climbing a mountain, begins to puzzle over "[b]uildings and people—the relationship between them"—his grief for Babylon and its cinema hall unexpectedly giving way to admiration for the forest. "There is something to love in this," he realizes: "some people love buildings, and he did—he burrowed in his projection booth—but this!" (84). Over the course of the novel, Dylan overcomes his nostalgia for the building he once called home while falling in love with a Clachan Fells whose climate is gradually transforming. Strange though it may seem, then, apart from being a cautionary tale, the novel often appears to be a celebration of the apocalypse's grandeur: as one reviewer notes, in Fagan's novel, "the deadlier the earth becomes, the more it dazzles" (Garavelli). Dylan's awe of the winter landscape is continually suggested, signaling his growing bond with Clachan Fells and a changing earth.

If grieving a lost home is inextricable from mourning the family with which it was shared, then making a place home involves forging ties with a new community: Dylan's growing bond with Clachan Fells corresponds with a strengthening attachment to Constance and Stella, so much so that they are often conflated with land and weather, such as when Dylan imagines Stella is the wind and Constance is the fire being fanned by her (Fagan, *Sunlight Pilgrims* 128), or when Constance wears a wolf costume (e.g., 129), which even Stella dons at one point (157). Constance is ubiquitously associated with winter (e.g., 33), and Dylan's desire for her is often interweaved with his admiration for the winter landscape: for example, "He kisses her neck and it is cold and she smells like snow" (227). Such descriptions entwine his attachment with his new community with his ties to a wintry Clachan Fells. But his growing topophilic bond is signified, above all, through a perpetual foregrounding of the process of homemaking: Dylan painstakingly converts his caravan into a

livable space, eventually getting Constance to install a heating system to protect him from the cold (215–16). This emphasizes how, in an environmentally devastated world, converting spaces into homes becomes synonymous with making them shelters against hostile nature. Shelter building is repeatedly associated with climate-change adaptation: Constance, a survivalist, stockpiles supplies and fortifies the caravans against the bitter weather; and several other spaces—the Clachan Fells community hall (98) and IKEA store (282)—become makeshift shelters as the entire town struggles to shield itself from the oncoming winter. And so the climate refugee's *Bildung* consists partly in learning the skills involved in homemaking and shelter building.

Thus, although the novel is a refugee narrative and topophilic elegy for a lost home in a changing world, it is also a Bildungsroman that depicts the refugee's maturation as he overcomes grief for his lost home while making home of a changing environment—a process encompassing the many dimensions of home, so that ties are forged with a dwelling (the caravan), its surroundings (Clachan Fells), and a community (Constance and Stella).[14] Significantly, this process accompanies a dissolving of topophilic attachments to a prior home and world, represented specifically as a dissolving of ties to urban modernity. When Dylan, newly arrived in Clachan Fells, struggles to navigate frosty wilderness, he is conscious that as a city dweller he does not belong here: he imagines the sleet is telling him to go back to London and "get back in a burrow—where ineptitudes like [him] belong" (87). Eventually, however, he ceases to think of himself as an imposter in the land: he feels it is "not like he's a trespasser" but "[l]ike something in him comes from this rock, these mountains, this landscape, something older than time and generational—all those links to people who survived this place and thrived" (209). Here, learning to belong to a future ravaged by climate change is represented, paradoxically, as going back to premodern times, when one's ancestors survived elemental nature. As Dylan's identity as a citizen of modernity gives way to this older identity, he specifies that he no longer misses London (208). He eventually thinks of Babylon as "a cold building that had made up their family home forever": "it feels like a million years ago already" (299).

Dylan's departure from urban cityscapes in favor of premodern wilderness subverts the traditional Bildungsroman's implication in modern doctrines of progress. Classical Bildungsromane usually portray protagonists who leave the country "to make [their] way independently in the city (in the English novels, usually London)," their education facilitated by "urban life" (Buckley 17). Fagan's novel reverses this: it is London that Dylan leaves for an education in the countryside. It is worth noting, however, that this is not a simplistic return to a preindustrial past, but a partial one: Dylan moves to a liminal space, closer to premodern wilderness, even as modernity, represented by the technologies Constance employs to heat his caravan, partly shelters him from it. This liminality is symbolized in unexpected ways, Dylan's shift from modern toward premodern reinforced by occasional imagery of the domestic in the outdoors. Having left Babylon, for instance, he notices "a roundabout where a dining table has been set up with place mats and flowers" (Fagan, *Sunlight Pilgrims* 20). Soon afterward, he witnesses a sleepwalking Constance vacuuming the road (28). Such odd moments, plentiful in the novel, complicate the binary of inside and outside: the self-contained modern home ceases to exist. Hence, Dylan forges topophilic bonds with a spatiotemporal liminality, inhabiting a space between inside and outside, in a caravan park on the outskirts of Clachan Fells—between society and wild, "modern" and "premodern."

This is significant precisely because Stella's coming-of-age journey similarly involves inhabiting a liminal identity: described as having "two spirits" (3, 50), Stella is, in some sense, both male and female.

Finding Home in a Liminal Identity: Stella Fairbairn

Like Dylan's journey toward "premodernity," Stella's transition toward female subverts the conventional Bildungsroman, which typically narrates a process "of masculine self-formation" (Esty 24).

Furthermore, the novel subtly parallels the journeys of its two *Bildungshelden*. Stella's transformation is also framed in terms of loss: indeed, Constance, although supportive of this change, is "in mourning" for her son (Fagan, *Sunlight Pilgrims* 212). Stella's transition entails the demise of an identity and, tragically, the loss of her former life: her prior friends and even her father reject her, and oncoming puberty makes her feel like a boy is "[taking] over her body" (203). However, she eventually finds self-acceptance: "She doesn't care any more what anyone thinks" (249); "This is her. So what if they don't get it?" (250). Therefore, Stella's maturation, like Dylan's, involves grappling with all-encompassing loss before finding home in a liminal identity. There is a certain resonance between their *Bildungen*, the novel hinting at the kinship between their transformations by revealing that they are related by blood (241). It is to the deeper implications of this kinship that I now turn—the possible symbolic significance of pairing Dylan's modern-premodern journey with Stella's masculine-feminine one.

As I have indicated, "modernity" and "premodernity" are partly gendered categories. Scholars of gender and environment show how capitalist modernity relies on the performance of hegemonic, "industrial masculinities" that seek mastery over both women and nature (Hultman 243–45)—a process predicated on the constructed "naturalization of femininity" and "feminization of nature" (MacGregor, "Gender" 4)—culminating in colonialism's hypermasculine, violent conquest of the earth and the often-feminized cultures that lived in harmony with it.[15] This is partly why the term *Manthropocene* has been proposed as an alternative to the more universalizing *Anthropocene*: to acknowledge that "socially sanctioned expressions of masculinities" are at "the very heart of the global social and ecological problems we face" (Pulé 11; see also Pulé and Hultman; Di Chiro; Raworth). It follows that a critique of these destructive practices—of Western modernity itself—must occur in tandem with a critique of hypermasculinity.

It is significant, then, that Dylan's adaptive, partial departure from modernity is paralleled with Stella's partial departure from masculinity. While Dylan makes home of a changing environment in a literal sense, Stella's transition arguably holds a subtler, more metaphoric significance for climate-change adaptation. Importantly, her embracing of the feminine is connected with environmentalist leanings: she intends to start a political party with the dual aims of making "every human" a "caretaker of the planet" and of ending "the war against women" (Fagan, *Sunlight Pilgrims* 130), suggesting that adaptation necessitates shunning the hypermasculine dominance of both women and nature, and embracing the more caring roles conventionally associated with femininity. Indeed, Stella is depicted as a compassionate person who "even feels empathy for stones" (169). Meanwhile, the evils of violent masculinities are continually indicated: Stella is brutally beaten by transphobic boys (59), Constance's father bullied her mother (232), and Dylan suspects that Gunn was raped by her brother (246). Stella's partial movement toward femininity, then, may be read as a rejection of hypermasculine violence—after all, her former name, Cael, is the name of a mythical warrior. Thus, by paralleling its primary characters' *Bildungen*, the novel constructs climate-change adaptation as a dual, partial movement from modern toward premodern and masculine toward feminine, and as a balance between the two opposing sets of categories.

Interestingly, this balance mirrors the narrative's own fusion of modern science with premodern myth and folklore—broadly, the "rational" with the "nonrational." Notably, these are also culturally constructed as gendered categories: while masculinity has been associated with scientific rationality, femininity has historically been aligned with nonrationality, intuition, emotion, and forms of knowledge considered premodern.[16] Indeed, several of Fagan's works reflect these dualisms by portraying women as naturally linked with premodernity, the earth, and nonrationality, while lamenting the violence against this group of entities by modern patriarchal institutions. Fagan's *Hex*, for example, condemns the horrific witch trials of early modern Europe, when women were persecuted

partly because of their knowledge of natural healing.[17] Not unproblematically, however, this magical-realist novella represents women as *actually* being witches. *Hex* associates women with both witchcraft and the earth: women's ability to create life is represented as magical (24–25), and the earth is described as a witch because "she" makes life, too (63).[18] Such a celebration of ecofeminine power is perhaps a double-edged sword: while it calls for the liberation of women and the earth, it unquestioningly reinforces the association of women with nature, premodernity, and nonrationality. Many scholars reject these "essentialist" ecofeminisms, expressing "unease with the activist celebration of women's natural eco-superiority" (MacGregor, "Gender" 10; see also Biehl; Agarwal; Plumwood; Sandilands).

To *some* extent, *The Sunlight Pilgrims* espouses a similar brand of ecofeminism. It continually invokes the earth-mother-goddess Coatlicue (further discussed in the next section),[19] and arguably reflects stereotypical dualisms by aligning masculinity with rationality and science, on the one hand, and femininity with nonrationality and intuition, on the other. Several of Fagan's feminine characters (Vivienne, Gunn, and Stella) are portrayed as superstitious, psychic, and clairvoyant (e.g., 231, 283–85). Meanwhile, the female character arguably most associated with "masculine" qualities, the resourceful survivalist Constance—a "tomboy" (262), muscular and short-haired (159)—is a skilled mechanic and encyclopedic reserve of scientific knowledge. On one level, this reinforces stereotypical associations of "masculinity" with modernity and rationality, and of "femininity" with premodernity and nonrationality; on another, however, the novel's portrayal of both Stella and Constance usefully challenges gender stereotypes, blurring the masculine/feminine binary. The novel, then, establishes gendered dualisms partly with the purpose of problematizing them. Moreover, its implication that Stella's masculine-feminine liminality is a form of climate-change adaptation corresponds with the argument that transgenderism may help "[address] environmental problems, including shifting away from" entrenched "systems and status quos" (Seymour 265). As Ruby Corado and Lauren Wood note, "If the climate movement cannot embrace people who embody courageous transition, how can we call for a transformation of society?" (qtd. in Seymour 265). Through Stella's transition, with its symbolic implications, Fagan's novel similarly suggests that transgender individuals' willingness to defy conventions and binaries—to find home in liminality—is potentially useful for climate-change adaptation.

Stella's transgender identity, then, is part of the novel's more general blurring of binaries and defiance of conventions. Entwining its *Bildungshelden*'s trajectories with each other—and with its own narrative—it constructs climate-change adaptation as a *partial* transition from one set of related categories toward its polar opposite: a multilayered, liminal fusion of modern with premodern, rationality with nonrationality, scientific realism with myth, and masculinity with femininity. Furthermore, as I have explained, this anachronistic embracing of broadly "premodern" values additionally defies the conventional Bildungsroman's association with modernity and the forward march of progress. Ghosh notes that "the most powerful of [modernity's] tropes" is its notion of relentless progress—"that which envisages time as an irresistible, irreversible forward movement" (*Great Derangement* 93)—yet Fagan's novel turns *back* the clock, in some respects. Almost as if to emphasize this, it infuses its characters' *Bildungen* with strange imagery of temporal rewinding: Stella observes that with the planet's entry into an era of climate change, "[w]e've kind of gone back in time" (Fagan, *Sunlight Pilgrims* 294). In what follows, I explore how the novel's anachronisms both facilitate its larger theme of cyclical change and enable its transcension of elegiac views of extinction. For, while the first aspect of the novel's depiction of adaptation entails *surviving* a transitional time, the second, conversely, entails embracing mortality or transience itself.

The Transience of Home

Sarah E. McFarland laments cli-fi's propensity to depict "happy endings" in the form of human

survivors: she argues that stories should acknowledge the possibility of human extinction (2). Fagan's novel certainly satisfies this criterion: not only does it conclude by suggesting its primary characters' deaths, it continually grapples with species mortality, Dylan's grief for Vivienne and Gunn eventually melting into anticipatory grief for the demise of humankind as a whole. Amid plummeting temperatures, "thousands of people are dying" as a result of the planetary-scale "collapse of intricate weather systems that are vital to survival" (Fagan, *Sunlight Pilgrims* 272). It becomes clear that "adapting," in this context, entails more than simply sheltering oneself; it involves making peace with likely death. Dylan and Stella grow obsessed with mortality: Dylan frantically wonders where exactly Gunn and Vivienne went after they died (9, 82), while reports of frozen corpses prompt Stella—who now identifies as "goth"—to consider how she will face death (150–51). Their reckoning with mortality is expressed as a struggle with the fact of transience. Upon losing Babylon, Dylan realizes, "It's all borrowed: bricks; bodies; breathing—it's all on loan! . . . Eighty years and people trying to get permanent bits of stone before they go, as if permanence were a real thing" (9–10). This parallels the body with the home, positioning the body itself as a home of sorts and construing the permanence of both these entities as illusory. Like Babylon, which gets repossessed by the bank—and the once-thriving city of Babylon, which crumbled into ruin—the body is "on loan" (10), to be eventually repossessed, in some sense, by the earth. Hence, all shelters—homes, bodies, and earth—are temporary. Thus, the novel is not simply about dissolving attachments to former homes and identities while making new ones; it also demonstrates that all attachments are formed—all shelters built—only to be destroyed. This is reinforced in the end, when Constance, Dylan, and Stella take shelter from a deadly snowstorm in Alistair's home. What follows is ambiguous: as Dylan wonders whether they will make it to spring, Fagan's final lines hint that they are freezing to death (310).

This interlinkage of body, home, and earth facilitates a trans-scalar contemplation of mortality:[20] all strategies of sheltering the body locally are dependent on the planetary home, which is also a "body," in some sense. This indicates the *interconnected* transience of all homes and bodies—a ubiquitous theme in the novel.[21] On the micro level, transience is manifested through pervasive evocations of mutating landscapes: as Stella observes, winter is coming so fast that icicles "are appearing almost as she looks at them" (71). Transience is often embraced: Barnacle loves the sky because it is always changing (265), and Dylan grows to love a transforming landscape. On the macro level, transience manifests itself as fluctuations over massive spatiotemporal scales. Dylan, Stella, and Constance discuss the formation of heavenly bodies (e.g., 305–06), and when an Arctic iceberg arrives on their shores, they consider transitions over deep time—geological history—marveling at how fifteen-million-year-old ice caps are melting (293–94). These discussions locate the characters' lives amid the larger story of their species' life and death, and this larger story is contextualized amid planetary flux (the formation and melting of ice caps), and those geological changes are situated among celestial transformations (that of the earth, sun, and moon), invoking transience across dizzying proportions as Fagan's characters attempt to make sense of their lives vis-à-vis these massive, interlinked forces.

This philosophy of trans-scalar transience evokes a certain worldview connected with scientific modernization. Drawing from Hannah Arendt, Tyler Austin Harper explains that "to be modern" is to relinquish the "idea of permanence": "to see ourselves as existing among an interconnected series of finitudes, stacked like nesting eggs—we are mortal human beings, trapped on a slowly dying planet warmed by a slowly dying sun" in a "universe that itself may ultimately implode" (9). As I have shown, Fagan's characters grapple with these interconnected finitudes—an endlessly transitioning cosmos wherein their species' rise and fall is insignificant. Their grief exemplifies what Harper terms "environmental nihilism": the anguish that arises from awareness of humankind's finitude and "radical spatiotemporal insignificance" (8). Indeed, this

definition recalls what Stella humorously describes as "existential goth-angst" upon considering humankind's place in geohistory (Fagan, *Sunlight Pilgrims* 294). Environmental nihilism, explains Harper, is a "modern form of despair" that arose following a series of scientific discoveries "beginning around the turn of the nineteenth century," including "the deep, prehuman history of the earth, the expansive size of the universe, [and] biological evolution" (8).

But while environmental nihilism is rooted in modern scientific progress, Fagan's novel, ironically, addresses the condition by merging scientific realism with older systems of thought: her characters' *Bildungen* bear a spiritual aspect, their angst expressed partly through Coatlicue, the Aztec mother-goddess of death, fertility, and the earth. Dylan bears a tattoo of Coatlicue (Fagan, *Sunlight Pilgrims* 39), Stella is wildly intrigued by her, and both characters frequently interweave her into their ponderations of mortality. While this may appear unrelated to climate change, the Coatlicue myth, I suggest, is perhaps deeply connected with the idea of human insignificance: it may locate humankind amid earthly fluctuations over deep time. Coatlicue symbolizes "the earth as both creator and destroyer": her figure merges markers of fertility and death, decomposition and regeneration ("Coatlicue"). In the context of mass extinction, she may be viewed as a metaphor for planetary fluctuations of life and death—the ebb and flow of biodiversity over deep time. For while the great extinction events of the past were characterized by abrupt reductions in biodiversity, they were always followed by a period of renewal wherein life diversified, the overall effect being that biodiversity fluctuates over deep time. Indeed, extinction events often create empty ecological niches for evolving species to occupy, so "although they are destructive in the short term," they "may make evolution more prolific in the long term" (Lehman and Miikkulainen). In this light, Coatlicue's unification of destructive and creative forces becomes eerily fitting during the sixth mass extinction. As an entry in the National Geographic Resource Library evocatively asks, "[W]hat new life would rise up to fill the niche that we currently occupy?" ("Extinction"). In the context of climate change, Coatlicue becomes a reminder that humankind is a humble, ephemeral feature in a timeless cycle of earthly metabolism. Several features of Fagan's narrative indicate this cyclical aspect of geohistory, such as Stella's likening of climate change to going "back in time" (*Sunlight Pilgrims* 294). Coatlicue additionally evokes cosmic spatiotemporalities—as Dylan explains, she is said to have birthed the heavenly bodies (268)—hence signaling humankind's radical insignificance amid a vast tangle of timescales. Ironically, then, it is partly through this mythical figure that the novel expresses a worldview that, as Harper shows, arose because of scientific modernization.

But what is most striking about the novel's engagement with environmental nihilism is its characters' refusal to succumb to it: as I have explained, they derive pleasure from transitioning landscapes, embracing what Harper calls "the ontological precarity of nature" (8). If environmental nihilism arises from the "threat to human meaning" posed by the possibility of extinction (Harper 11), these characters exhibit an uncanny ability to derive their lives' meaning from portents of their species' doom. At one point, when they stand together admiring a gorgeous coast blanketed in snow and ice with a massive iceberg out on the sea, Constance observes:

> Sometimes you get a minute where it all seems worth it: all the stress, the struggling, life, death. . . . You see something like this and it all becomes sharper—oh yeah, you remember, this is it, this is it!
> —It's what? [Dylan] says.
> —It! she laughs.
>
> (Fagan, *Sunlight Pilgrims* 207–08)

Constance's statement suggests that human existence may be meaningful despite—even because of—human awareness of mortality. And notably, it is the pleasure she derives from her topophilic bond with her transforming homeland, and her attachment to her community, that enables her to find meaning. These lines make explicit a central suggestion of the novel: that it is topophilia that is the antidote to environmental nihilism, and that humans, in the face of their species' cosmic

insignificance, derive solace from local attachments to places and people—from homemaking and shelter building—even while acknowledging the finitude of all forms and scales of shelter.

Significantly, this view of the human condition is also represented through mythical elements, particularly Fagan's invented myths surrounding light. Light, in the novel, symbolizes many things—most notably, life, shelter, and community. The novel abounds in imagery involving light, and Fagan herself has specified that she intended to explore the ways that humans interact with light (Evans). The novel represents light as something humans yearn for, a theme articulated through the mythical tale of the sunlight pilgrims—a community of monks who were said to have lived on an island near Clachan Fells, almost all of whom went mad and killed themselves. Only one survived, and he was found "sitting in lotus, drinking light": "He said it keeps humans right" (Fagan, *Sunlight Pilgrims* 145). Dylan and Stella feel a connection with the mythical monks, and the novel hints that both *Bildungshelden* are descended from the lone survivor (284). Toward the novel's end, when the snowstorm plunges the region into darkness, Stella merges the Coatlicue myth with the sunlight pilgrims' story to develop a creation myth of sorts. Equating Coatlicue's deathly river with winter's "total darkness," Stella speculates that human bodies are made of matter that came from the sun: "Our cells crave light because that is what we started as, it's what we are. All humans are sunlight pilgrims" (306). To avoid succumbing to environmental nihilism, then, humans need light and all it symbolizes—life, home, and community. Stella's statement both constructs topophilia as a human need and indicates that the novel's title is a reference to humankind as a whole: that is, if all humans are sunlight pilgrims, *The Sunlight Pilgrims* is not only the story of Dylan and Stella—the monks' descendants—but an allegorical tale of their species. As the novel's initially mournful tone melts into the telling of Dylan's and Stella's *Bildungen*, it becomes more than simply an elegy for humankind. Even while decentralizing the human, it celebrates the rise and fall of the species, the "sunlight pilgrims" who continue to "drink light" during their darkest hour and who, in the face of their cosmic insignificance, derive meaning from topophilic bonds.

Hence, the novel holds on to hope and meaning even while suggesting its characters'—and humankind's—final end. It is the transformative power of the Bildungsroman that enables this representation; yet, through Fagan's allegorical myth, the novel of individual formation also depicts a far larger-scale maturation. The novel twins the *Bildungen* of *two* individuals, its eponymous sunlight pilgrims, before further suggesting that "all humans are sunlight pilgrims" (306), rendering *humankind* its protagonist and performing a scalar leap from double Bildungsroman to collective Bildungsroman. Doubtless, such a representation may be deemed problematic, for it universalizes two *Bildungshelden*'s experience of climate change, overlooking how differences or inequalities—say, differences in ethnicity or geographic location—alleviate or exacerbate climate precarity. However, Fagan highlights climate inequality in other ways, continually emphasizing how her fictional poverty-ridden caravan-park community is particularly vulnerable to weather extremes (e.g., 105–06). Hence, the novel may be viewed through what Debra J. Rosenthal terms an "'ecopoverty' critical lens" (269), even though its universalizing allegory somewhat dilutes this engagement with particularities. Dipesh Chakrabarty aptly notes the difficulty of uniting these two strands: "How do we relate to a universal history of life," he ponders, "while retaining what is of obvious value in our postcolonial suspicion of the universal? The crisis of climate change calls for thinking simultaneously on both registers" (*Climate* 42). At least in part, Fagan's novel engages with "both registers": it acknowledges the heightened precarity of the poor even while employing allegory to construct precarity and transience—and the need to forge topophilic bonds despite these realities—as aspects of the human condition in general. While allegory may problematically gloss over differences among humans, its scale-bridging techniques can uniquely narrativize humankind as a whole—a species subject to the laws of evolution and extinction.

But strangely, the novel's largely scientific allusions to humankind's history frame the latter partly as a spiritual journey—a "pilgrimage." While Fagan's characters continually recount scientific facts—the novel articulating, through Constance, the value of scientific knowledge for survivalism—they grapple with trans-scalar transience by filtering natural history through a mythical lens. Indeed, their conversations during the snowstorm constitute an interesting case in point. Constance's stated scientific facts—the fact that our 4.5-billion-year-old planet houses the nearly 200,000-year-old *Homo sapiens*, which needs sunlight to survive and grow food (Fagan, *Sunlight Pilgrims* 305)—are interwoven with Stella's invented myth: the notion that the earth broke away from the sun and a race of light-drinking "sunlight pilgrims" emerged (305–06). This amalgamation of science and myth—and more generally, of modern and premodern—haunts Fagan's narrative on several levels, amplifying the climate Bildungsroman's singular paradox.

It is to the paradox itself that I now turn. While this anomaly variously surfaces across the corpus of climate Bildungsromane, its specific manifestation in Fagan's narrativization of humankind on a transitioning planet is particularly telling. This is because Fagan's novel—with its trans-scalar cyclicalities and reversals of time—continually emphasizes one particular feature of this paradox: its temporal aspect. The climate Bildungsroman is profoundly paradoxical in a temporal sense, not only because modernity and premodernity are anachronistically juxtaposed, but because modern and premodern narrative forms (realism and myth) evoke fundamentally different temporalities. This is why Yuriko Furuhata writes that the tendency of some scholars and filmmakers to draw from myth to imagine climate change brings about a "spatial and temporal paradox": "a curious folding of mythical time within the geological time of Earth" (69). My overview and close reading suggest that this paradox is far more widespread in narratives of climate change than Furuhata indicates, and it is in climate Bildungsromane—rooted in both scientific realism and myth—that the paradox is most strongly articulated. But what accounts for such an expression of climate change?

"This Is All Sort of Time-Travel!": Temporality, Change, and the Transformation of Literary Genre

Several scholars argue that authors of twenty-first-century cli-fi have introduced "innovations" to the novel form to portray climate change.[22] These "innovations" include the intermingling of disparate genres: highbrow, realist "literary novels bleed into science fiction" (Trexler 14), imagining futuristic worlds ravaged by climate change.[23] What has been overlooked, however, is that the rise of such a novel was predicted in 1975 by the early science fiction theorist Robert Scholes, during a time when the New Wave SF movement—which, as I have explained, may be considered cli-fi's prehistory—was emphasizing formal experimentation and beginning to destabilize generic boundaries. Attempting to understand the growing seriousness being accorded to science-fictional techniques, Scholes proposed a model to make sense of how literary forms evolve and grow dominant. While fiction undoubtedly develops in conjunction with myriad sociocultural forces, Scholes's specific model, I argue, has relevance to the climate Bildungsroman's distinctive paradox.

Fiction, argued Scholes, develops in accordance with changing cultural perceptions of time. Cultures without "a concept of historical time" are dominated by forms such as myths—which typically treat the time between worldly creation and destruction as either unchanging or cyclical—and fairy tales, which evoke an "ideal time" or atemporality (12, 13). But when cultures, because of technical developments, begin to have histories—experiencing irreversible, forward-moving, linear change—mythical and ideal time are considered relics of a premodern past (13), while other forms assume predominance: the novel "may be said to have developed and reached its greatest achievements precisely by learning to regard the present as history" (14). But out of this consciousness of history as involving forward-moving, often radical change, something else happened: writers began to project realism into the future, and science-

fictional extrapolation was born. Observing that futuristic fiction "has been gathering strength for about a century and is currently coming into dominance" (17)—and noting that some heretofore "realistic" writers were already adopting science-fictional techniques and conjuring up futuristic settings—Scholes predicted that this trend would increase over time, as a result of environmental damage among other things. Because "the rate of change in the present human situation has accelerated dramatically" (16), more literary novels would grow extrapolative, imagining futures to warn humans of the consequences of current actions: "The structuralist imagination must help us to live in the future so that we can indeed continue to live in the future. And this task . . . will work its changes in the system of literature. New forms will arise, must arise, if man is to continue" (16–17).

This prophecy was remarkably prescient, and many of the ostensible "innovations" of twenty-first-century cli-fi may be viewed as the culmination of the nascent interbreeding between realism and science fiction during Scholes's time. Yet even Scholes apparently did not foresee how New Wave SF's substantial engagement with myth and folklore would also be carried forward, so that as the new novel he was calling for gradually evolved, its largely rational extrapolations—worlds "strongly influenced by modern science" (Scholes 102)—would be tinged with premodern genres and belief systems: a paradox especially evident in climate Bildungsromane. And perhaps a novel like Fagan's, with its clashing temporalities and trans-scalarities, provides some indication as to why.

If fiction changes with changing cultural conceptions of time—the cyclical time-consciousness of myth giving way to the novel with the development of a linear historical sense—then surely something complex and unprecedented must have happened to fiction around the turn of the twenty-first century, when climate change became a source of widespread public anxiety (Chakrabarty, *Climate* 24–25) and the term *Anthropocene* was popularized to denote the geological epoch of planetary-scale human impact (Crutzen). Beyond merely signaling an acceleration of the linear "rate of change in the present human situation" (Scholes 16), these developments sparked a paradigm shift in conceptions of history. As Chakrabarty explains, we humans are now forced to recognize the extent to which "the limited timescales" of our recorded histories are inextricable from "the inhumanly vast timescales of deep history" (*Climate* 4). Climate grief has awakened a profoundly trans-scalar imagination: modernity's orderly, linear progression is colliding with unthinkably immense spatiotemporal forces, which are overwhelmingly fluctuational and erratic, and which threaten to disrupt modern progress altogether. And with this paradigm shift in conceptions of history, it appears that our fictions have changed once more. The climate Bildungsroman in particular emerges as a site where fabricated futures—projections partly reflecting an acceleration of linear time-consciousness—become infused, conversely, with the timelessness of fairy tale and the cyclicality of myth. A novel like Fagan's interlaces realism with myth and fairy tale to play with time,[24] portraying humankind's journey into the future as, simultaneously, a journey *backward* in time and a journey across dizzyingly massive cyclical temporalities—which, conversely, appear almost static and timeless against humankind's relatively minuscule modern historical progression. As Chakrabarty writes, the historical consciousness provoked by the Anthropocene concept stretches "the very idea of historical understanding" (*Climate* 42). A similar sense of spatiotemporal disorientation is suggested by Stella's exclamation when her small coastal hometown is suddenly invaded by a colossal, ten-million-year-old Arctic iceberg: "This is all sort of time-travel!" (Fagan, *Sunlight Pilgrims* 294).

It appears that there is something about contextualizing human lives amid massive, nonlinear changes that prompts storytellers to insert premodern mythical temporalities into their otherwise realistic speculations.[25] Some climate Bildungsromane rework myths to explicitly contemplate historical change, depicting the adaptation birthed from grief as learning or developing a philosophy of change.[26] Fagan's *Bildungshelden*, for example, adapt the Coatlicue myth, grappling with environmental

nihilism through radical acceptance of what I have called "trans-scalar transience." While this usefully foregrounds the emotional aspect of adaptation, other climate Bildungsromane's visions are more activist: beyond accepting the inevitability of change, they invoke myths or religious traditions to call for recuperative social change. Butler's grieving *Bildungsheld* invents a religion that teaches that "God is change": "We shape God" to "adapt and endure" (27).[27] Similarly, Itäranta's protagonist converts the Buddhist tenets of impermanence and nonattachment into a call to break away from a stagnant order: "Only what changes can remain" (3). Itäranta's novel, like Fagan's, is informed by cyclicality: there is "no beginning and no end," only flux (5). And in Kingsolver's novel, Dellarobia's maturation is indicated through the symbol of metamorphosis (with its spiritual connotations). These authors invoke the Bildungsroman, the novel of self-formation, to foreground transformation itself, indicating the value of adaptability in a world where radically different rates, scales, and kinds of change are colliding. What climate grief births in these novels is a transformed historical consciousness.

Undoubtedly, several aspects of Fagan's novel could be theorized further than I have in this essay. I have, however, focused on how the novel epitomizes an oft-overlooked subgenre of cli-fi—the climate Bildungsroman—which answers ecocritics' calls for a template that transcends climate grief. I have explored this subgenre's tendency to address climate grief through a seemingly paradoxical juxtaposition of "modern" and "premodern" values, genres, and conceptions of history. This elucidation is by no means exhaustive: the merits and limits of such a representation might be further explored in subsequent studies. Moreover, the novels featuring this paradox may perhaps be considered a subcategory within the subgenre of the climate Bildungsroman, the larger body of which possibly encompasses diverse expressions of adaptation, and my outlined corpus may be extended to include novels from more geographic locations and historical periods. Yet the paradox I have illustrated is an important one: these novels' partial embracing of the premodern—and premodern imaginings of historical change—subverts the conventional Bildungsroman's implication in modern narratives of progress. Franco Moretti reads the Bildungsroman "as the 'symbolic form' of modernity" (5), and, drawing from Moretti, Melanie Hacke writes that the *Bildungsheld*'s typical movement from country to city allegorizes Western civilization's coming-of-age journey from agricultural societies to industrial modernity (117). But climate Bildungsromane like Fagan's complicate this view of progress: yoking together Kerridge's "fiercely opposed" aspects of adaptation, they speculatively allegorize humankind's "maturation" in a time of climate crisis.

These novels reflect a prevalent, evocative imagining of climate change. So strong is the tendency to address climate losses through such a paradox that even Newby, a science reporter, evokes this framework throughout her nonfiction book *Beyond Climate Grief*. While exploring climate science and psychology, she imagines herself a mythical hero garnering wisdom on "an epic odyssey into climate emotions" (3), explicitly alluding to fairy tales and fantasies (6 and others), and naming climate change "The Beast, like the monster out of any epic fantasy" (64). As I have noted, imaginings of this kind have grown ubiquitous: the specter of a grieving hero (or refugee, or "pilgrim") burdened by loss while undertaking a scientific-yet-spiritual journey into the unknown appears to have emerged as a pervasive trope surrounding climate change. This trope's implication that grief may enable adaptation reinforces Newby's theory regarding the evolutionary role of emotions (4). This also suggests that literature—with its unique power to address the emotions—may play an adaptive role. After all, it has been argued that even literary depictions of loss help readers learn and transform (Tedeschi and Calhoun 3); and fittingly, the term *Bildungsroman* was originally meant to connote not only the protagonist's *Bildung* but also the reader's (Martini 18). This implies that climate Bildungsromane may facilitate their readers' adaptation in response to climate grief. This seemingly radical notion—that stories may facilitate the survival of the human species—is but a resurfacing

of an age-old argument for the moral value of art. In this light, the climate Bildungsroman's emergence may itself be viewed as part of an adaptive transformation within the system of literature.

Notes

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1. For the connection between COVID-19 and climate change, see Beyer et al.

2. "Modernity has always been associated with progress" (Wagner 28).

3. For the role of capitalist modernity in climate change, see Moore.

4. E.g., Eisenstadt. For an opposing viewpoint, see Schmidt.

5. E.g., Davis; Chakrabarty, *Habitations*, esp. xx; Ramgotra; Porsanger; Germond-Duret; Katz. Conversely, for an argument against collapsing the modern/premodern binary, see Rigby 179.

6. Earth First!, deep ecology, and ecofeminism began as new religious movements (Erb 3).

7. For more on the new religious turn, and how it draws from a variety of religious traditions from around the world, see Partridge.

8. E.g., Ursula Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea* (heavily inspired by Taoism) and Frank Herbert's *Dune* (a messiah's coming-of-age story) intertwine environmentalism with protagonists' spiritual *Bildungen*. A recent manifestation of this trend is James Cameron's film *Avatar*, which has been read as a product of the new religious turn (Erb 3), and which depicts Jake's spiritual *Bildung* as a developing ecocentric awareness.

9. The New Wave SF movement emerged alongside the modern environmental movement, and several New Wave SF novelists engaged with environmental issues. For more on New Wave SF, see Harris-Fain.

10. Indeed, psychological studies describe the transformation following grief as a partly spiritual awakening (Taylor 382; Tedeschi and Calhoun 38). Bereaved individuals often embrace belief systems (Tedeschi and Calhoun ix).

11. For two exceptions, see Feder; Hacke.

12. Indeed, recent evidence suggests that the Gulf Stream is now slowing drastically because of melting polar ice: see Boers; Ditlevsen and Ditlevsen. Since the Gulf Stream normally regulates temperature, these studies have sparked concern that there will be "freezing temperatures" in "the northern hemisphere" (Mitchell). Scientists have long warned of this possibility, and this is why various climate-change novels envision cold worlds (Andersen 5). For Fagan's explanation of the science behind *The Sunlight Pilgrims*, see Armitstead.

13. Hinde describes Fagan's novel as "irrealist" in that it foregrounds the fantastical-seeming effects of climate change ("Something").

14. "[H]ome is a multidimensional concept": "the physical dwelling" is "simply one aspect of home" (Mallett 68).

15. For colonialism's gendered dimensions, see Sinha; Gahman. For colonialism's implication in climate change, see Ghosh, *Nutmeg's Curse*.

16. The "masculinization" of modern science, and the presumed incompatibility "between women and scientific rationality," are constructions that "[continue] to have enormous salience" (Seager 38). See also Lloyd.

17. For the link between witch-hunting and capitalist-colonialist modernity, see Ghosh, *Nutmeg's Curse* 37–38, 252–55. For a gender-attuned discussion of witch-hunting, see Merchant 127–48.

18. Witches are ubiquitous in Fagan's other works as well, such as *There's a Witch in the Word Machine* and *The Dead Queen of Bohemia*.

19. Originally a new religious movement, ecofeminism routinely embraced earth-mother-goddess figures (Erb 13). While many rightly lament this "intellectually-fluffy goddess worship" (Thompson and MacGregor 48), Fagan's particular incorporation of Coatlicue in *The Sunlight Pilgrims*, as I show in this essay, is profoundly apt.

20. Trans-scalar thinking bridges scales from local to planetary: see Horton.

21. Fagan wrote *The Sunlight Pilgrims* after suffering several close bereavements, and she wished her novel to convey that "our interaction with [the planet] is very short" (qtd. in Hinde, "Jenni Fagan").

22. For an overview of this scholarship, see Johns-Putra, *Climate Change* 38–39.

23. Much contemporary cli-fi employs "the strategies of one of the primary genres of futuristic imagining: science fiction" (Johns-Putra, "Ecocriticism" 749).

24. In this respect, Fagan's novel exemplifies what Koenig-Woodyard, writing on David Mitchell's *The Bone Clocks*, terms an "Anthropocene Bildungsroman": a genre that integrates the ten-thousand-year Anthropocenic timescale with an individual's formation (149–50). Koenig-Woodyard highlights how Mitchell synthesizes realism and fantasy in engaging with disparate timescales.

25. Indeed, Ramgotra notes, firstly, that with the onset of modernity, linear notions of time replaced cyclical ones (265), and, secondly, that "this ancient/modern binary" is now "reaching its end," for the Anthropocene births "[n]ew notions of time" (277).

26. Grief is said to spark a heightened awareness of change or impermanence (Wada and Park 664).

27. Butler's novel is a relatively early and remarkably prescient example of the new temporal awareness I illustrate: this novel was published nearly a decade before the Anthropocene concept was popularized.

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Abstract: Climate-change discourse is suffused with a profound sense of loss, amid accelerating ecological degradation. While some ecocritics consider the elegy an apt means of narrativizing these losses, others call for genres capable of moving beyond mourning. I argue that the Bildungsroman—which typically depicts a protagonist who undergoes a transformational journey following crisis and eventually comes to terms with the world—may narrativize the process of moving beyond climate grief and adapting to a changed world. I indicate a corpus of novels that may be termed "climate Bildungsromane," which envision various transformations following climate grief. Through an analysis of one significant example, Jenni Fagan's *The Sunlight Pilgrims*, I explore climate Bildungsromane's tendency to narrate the journey from ecocatastrophe to adaptation through a fusion of modern scientific rationality with forms of belief and storytelling commonly considered premodern. I contemplate how and why this seeming paradox surfaces across cultural imaginings of journeys beyond climate grief.