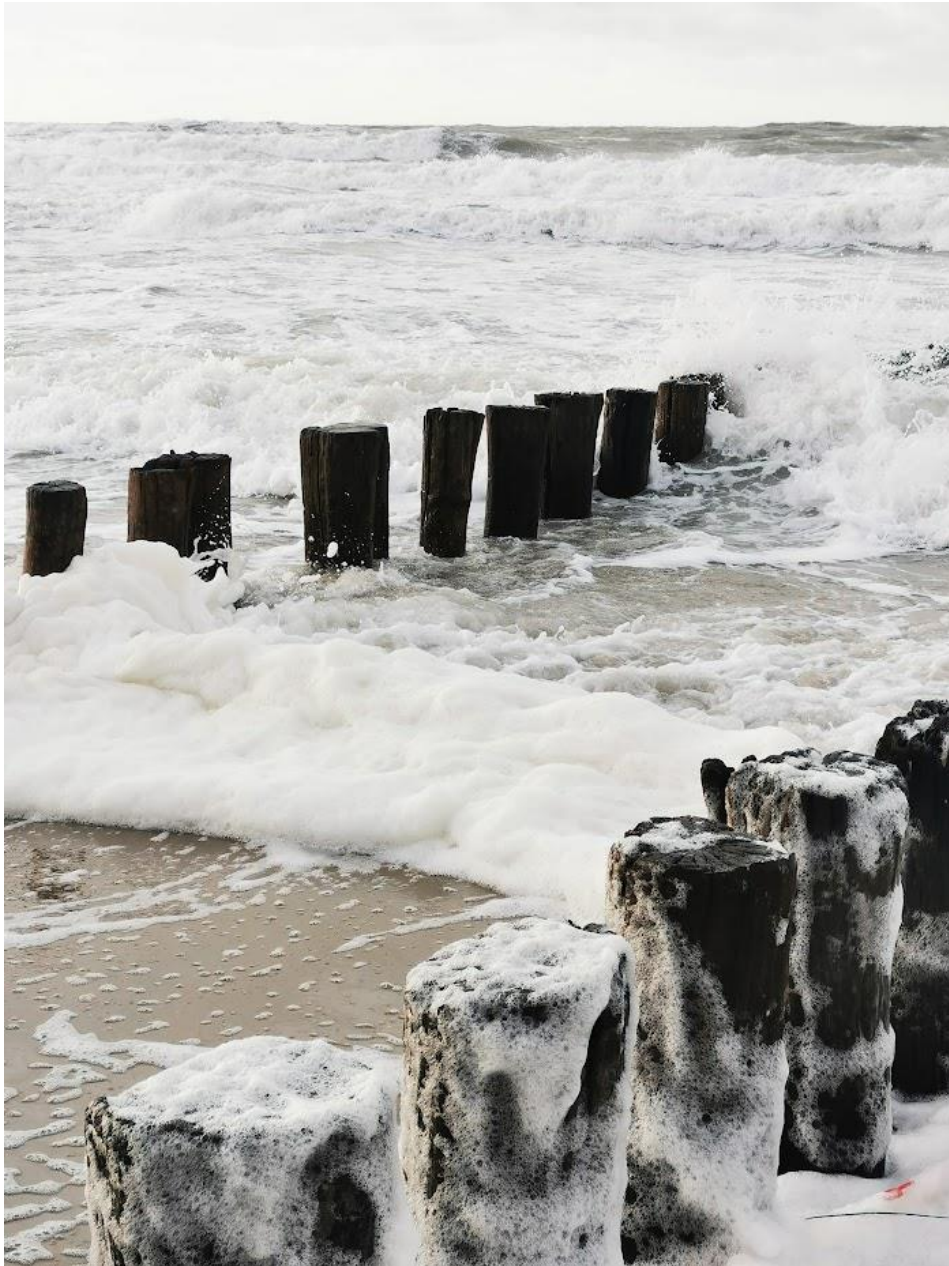


**‘Na ons de Zondvloed’:
Remediating Dutch Flood Memory in the Anthropocene**



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The photograph on the cover is my own, taken at the coast of Zeeland in January 2019.

Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this thesis are my own.

Abstract

Recent scholarship in the fields of ecocriticism and literary studies has increasingly focused on the challenges that arise in the narratological representation of climatological change. That scholarship has, amongst others, focused on the scalar complexities of climate change, in relation to the scale of personal, human life as commonly found in literary fiction. The emergence of climate fiction as a genre led to an increase in theoretical scholarship on climate fiction, often focusing on the scalar complexities of the Anthropocene.

The climate crisis has been presented not only as an ecological crisis, but also as a crisis of the imagination, as it challenges the capacities of human thinking, but also the capabilities of traditional fiction. Within the Netherlands, however, the climate crisis also becomes a crisis of cultural identity, as an important element of the Dutch cultural identity is its relationship to water and water management.

The aim of this thesis is twofold. First, it presents an overview of how water has become ingrained in Dutch cultural identity, as formalised in the cultural narrative ‘Nederland Waterland.’ Secondly, it argues that any contemporary work of Dutch climate fiction should be seen within the context of that cultural narrative, as contemporary fiction builds upon a centuries-old cultural narrative. As such, it analyses three contemporary works of climate fiction about floods in order to analyse how they remediate the cultural narrative of ‘Nederland Waterland.’ In its analysis, it builds upon a methodological framework around environmental memory, arguing that in its remediation of cultural memory, these novels navigate some of the scalar complexities as highlighted in ecocriticism.

Introduction

'De Klimaatbril'

Denkend aan Holland
zie ik breede rivieren
traag door oneindig
laagland gaan
[...]
en in alle gewesten
wordt de stem van het water
met zijn eeuwige rampen
gevreesd en gehoord.¹

Hendrik Marsman, *Herinnering aan Holland*

Thinking of Holland
I see wide-flowing rivers
slowly traversing
infinite plains
[...]
and in all the regions
the voice of water
with its endless disasters
is feared and obeyed.²

Hendrik Marsman, *Memory of Holland*

In an essay published in 2019 in the Dutch newspaper *Trouw*, author Jan Willem Anker writes: “Wie met een klimaatbril op de Nederlandse literatuur beschouwt, moet wel concluderen dat het gros van de Nederlandse romans volkomen irrelevant is.”³ (Whoever looks at Dutch literature from a climate perspective, can only conclude that the majority of Dutch novels are completely irrelevant.) At the time of writing, Anker had just released *Vichy*, a novel that has been hailed as a climate novel as its protagonist Elmar lives through an intense heatwave in France.⁴ However, Anker includes his own work when he concludes that

¹ Hendrik Marsman, “Herinnering aan Holland,” in *Verzamelde Gedichten* (Amsterdam: Atheneum-Polak & van Gennep, 1979).

² Hendrik Marsman, “Memory of Holland,” trans. Paul Vincent, David Reid Poetry Translation Prize, October, 2006, <http://www.subtexttranslations.com/drptp/hah/hah.html>.

³ Jan-Willem Anker, “Een boek schrijven over het klimaatprobleem, dat is nog niet zo makkelijk,” *Trouw*, January 27, 2019, <https://www.trouw.nl/duurzaamheid-natuur/een-boek-schrijven-over-het-klimaatprobleem-dat-is-nog-niet-zo-makkelijk~b7fc1353/>.

⁴ Jan-Willem Anker, *Vichy* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij De Arbeiderspers, 2017).

most of Dutch literature is irrelevant in the climate crisis, since the drought in *Vichy* only serves as a backdrop to Elmar's life. While he is in France, he is asked to reduce his shower-time as the drought eventually leads to wildfires. At the same time, Elmar hears news from back home, that the Netherlands is increasingly threatened by high water.

Yet none of these events dramatically influence Elmar's life—and thus, Anker concludes that *Vichy* is not successful in portraying the climate crisis. He writes that climate fiction should avoid the “spektakeldystopie”⁵ (spectacular dystopianism) associated with writing climate fiction, that is seen for example in apocalyptic films like *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), *Snowpiercer* (2013), or the more recent *Don't Look Up* (2021). Anker is far from the first to criticise such apocalyptic imaginations of climate change: literary critic Adam Trexler writes that such narratives, although they provide recognisable and captivating imagery to an abstract concept like climate change, simultaneously “reduce [it] to a unitary phenomenon.”⁶ The one-dimensional representation of climate change as a disastrous event that, in popular dystopian narratives, primarily affects families in the US, does not do justice to the complexities of climate change, nor to the unequal distribution of consequences of climate change. This superficial representation of climate change in popular dystopian stories is visualised by, for example, the settings chosen for such narratives. They are often set in meaningful locations: the Statue of Liberty in New York, for example, has become a “landmark” location in such dystopian narratives.⁷ Such landmark locations have thus become both meaningful and meaningless: their usage signals importance, but at the same time their usage already hints at much of the narrative. Many landmark locations in dystopian narratives are big cities in the West, and thus do not reflect that areas in the Global South are likely to be affected by climate change far before cities like London or New York will feel its consequences.⁸ Furthermore, the consistent use of landmark locations continuously strengthens the appearance of climate change as a unitary phenomenon, not doing justice to its multidimensional consequences or the way climate change dramatically alters life of mankind, as well as the life of all living creatures and ecosystems on the planet.

Regardless, following upon the dystopian turn in the 1980s, popular culture has been flooded with such dystopian narratives, inspired by right-wing politics and fundamentalism

⁵ Anker, “Een boek schrijven.”

⁶ Adam Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015): 26.

⁷ Paul Dobraszczyk, “Sunken Cities: Climate Change, Urban Futures and the Imagination of Submergence,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 41, no. 6 (2017): 869.

⁸ Dobraszczyk, “Sunken Cities,” 869.

that was prevalent in that time.⁹ As the following decades brought about a further increase in populism, the emergence of terrorism and the subsequent war on terror, and the climate crisis, dystopian narratives became commonplace in our contemporary cultural production.

Dystopian narratives have become the new standard to such an extent that its polar opposite, utopias, no longer emanate hope, but merely desire—whereas traditionally, utopian narratives were a place of hope.¹⁰ As audiences, we are thus more familiar with the grim sense of futurity proposed by dystopianism than with the hopeful sense of futurity found in utopianism. This causes its own problems as utopianism is also a method of imaging *and* achieving a better future.¹¹

When Anker concludes that writers of literary fiction should avoid *spektakeldystopie*, he is thus echoing arguments from literary studies, which reason that dystopian fiction does not do justice to the complexities of climate change. In fact, many prevalent discussions in ecocriticism and literary studies comment on the literary challenges of narrating the climate crisis. Some focus on how literary fiction seems unable or at least unsuited to narrate the temporal and spatial scales associated with climate change, given that these scales exceed the scale of human life as presented in literature.¹² Others argue that climatological representation in literature is lacking because the statistical improbability of climate change is not well suited to the realist dimension of literary fiction,¹³ or that the deeply scientific vocabulary used in climate change discourse is too far removed from the poetic language used in fiction.¹⁴ Such arguments draw attention to the future of the literature, questioning what use the traditional novel has in a time of planetary crisis. This is in sharp contrast to the increase in the production of climate fiction, often shortened to cli-fi, in the past decades. The emergence of cli-fi as genre has invited a new wave of literary scholarship, which often acknowledges the

⁹ Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini, "Introduction," in *Dark Horizons Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, ed. Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini (New York: Routledge, 2003): 2.

¹⁰ Ruth Levitas and Lucy Sargisson, "Utopia in Dark Times: Optimism/Pessimism and Utopia/Dystopia," in: *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, ed. Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini (New York: Routledge, 2003): 14.

¹¹ Ruth Levitas, "Back to the Future: Wells, Sociology, Utopia and Method," *The Sociological Review* 58, no. 4 (2010): 540.

¹² Timothy Clark. *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015).

¹³ Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2016): 26.

Climate change becomes visible in unlikely events. The floods in the Meuse delta in the summer of 2021, were caused mostly by heavy rainfall that is very unusual for the summer season, and every year, previous records of hottest days, most or least rainfall, and so forth are smashed. The improbability associated with climate change makes it hard for climate scientists to make exact predictions, but also makes their data hard to gauge and contextualise for the general public.

¹⁴ Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*, 77.

“pessimistic turn of literary (eco)criticism,”¹⁵ but simultaneously focuses on defining the genre, or on the capabilities of the climate change novel. Some argue that climate fiction, in its futuristic setting, can present climate change as an “event that went unnoticed in the recent past but whose effects permeate the present and future.”¹⁶ Such readings allow for a hopeful outlook of the future, where there is still time to make a change.

The observation that climate fiction is a rapidly growing genre is in sharp contrast to Anker’s essay, who argues that ‘most of Dutch literature’ becomes irrelevant from an ecocritical perspective. Here, too, he echoes some ongoing discussions about the state of Dutch climate fiction. Literary scholars Stef Craps and Lieven Ameel note in an article on climate fiction from the lowlands that in Dutch fiction “reflections on the future fate of coastal cities are few and far between.”¹⁷ This is in sharp contrast with reality, as the low-lying Netherlands, with a long coastline and multiple river deltas, is certainly threatened by the rising sea levels caused by anthropogenic climate change. It would therefore stand to reason that such reflections would be prevalent in Dutch fiction, given also that the relationship between the Netherlands and water, particularly floods, is well-documented in Dutch literature and art. An example is the poem by Hendrik Marsman at the beginning of the introduction. The poem’s opening line is amongst the most quoted lines from Dutch literature, highlighting how ingrained water is into Dutch culture. In fact, one can distinguish a cultural narrative built upon this very element, referred to by phrases such as *de strijd tegen het water* (the battle against water), *luctor et emergo* (I struggle and emerge),¹⁸ or *Nederland Waterland* (Netherlands Waterland).

Historical records about floods in the area now known as the Netherlands go back as early as 838 AD, and floods have remained prevalent throughout Dutch history. The Dutch flood history is intrinsically also about flood and water management, and the two have become inseparable. Historian Simon Schama writes that the floods of the Middle Ages had the same effect on Dutch culture as the Black Death in Italy, for example.¹⁹ Schama stresses

¹⁵ Stef Craps and Rick Crownshaw, “Introduction: The Rising Tide of Climate Change Fiction,” *Studies in the Novel* 50, no. 1 (2018): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sdn.2018.0000>.

¹⁶ Caren Irr, “Climate Fiction in English,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* (2017): 8, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17613/M6HR6N>.

¹⁷ Lieven Ameel and Stef Craps, “Flooded Cities in Low Countries Fiction: Referentiality and Indeterminate Allegory in Renate Dorrestein’s *Weerwater* and Roderik Six’s *Vloed*,” *Green Letters* 21, no. 1 (2020): 37. Similar observations are made by Astrid Bracke (2016) and Fiep van Bodegom (2017): whose articles will be discussed at a later point in this thesis.

¹⁸ The Latin phrase *luctor et emergo* is the motto of the Dutch province Zeeland. It is known in Dutch as *ik worstel en kom boven*, which has a watery connotation in its context.

¹⁹ Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (Berkeley: The Regents of the University of California, 1988): 37.

that during the formative period of the Netherlands as an independent country, the physical landscape was altered by the creation of *polders*. In the decades following the establishment of the Dutch republic, this became crucial in the formation of a national identity, which took self-legitimation from the way the Dutch land had been wrestled free both from the sea and from the Spaniards.²⁰ The significance attached to floods was further strengthened as floods were a communal experience; illustrated by the collective work that went into rescue, restoration and subsequent flood management. That collective nature is embodied, for example, in the Dutch waterboards: the oldest governmental body in Dutch history, originating in the Middle Ages. Water and floods gained additional significance in Dutch cultural identity through their cultural representation, which was shaped by recurring motifs.²¹ An example is the image of a baby in a cradle, lost in the waves, which originated from panels painted to depict the Saint-Elisabeth's Day Flood in 1421, but which are now a common image in visual representations of the flood.²² In the 2009 film *De Storm* (The Storm), a drama about the North Sea Flood of 1953, a baby is left in its cradle when his mother is rescued, and the film subsequently shows the mother searching for the baby and only finding an empty cradle.²³ The use of this trope in such a major film production shows how widespread the image of a baby in the cradle, lost in the flood has become.²⁴

When Anker writes that most Dutch literature can be disregarded if considered from an environmental perspective, he simultaneously disregards a large body of literature that perhaps does not engage with human-caused climate change as encountered in the Anthropocene, but that certainly engages with many of the themes prevalent in ecocritical discourse: writing about non-human actors and landscapes, for example.²⁵ In this thesis I contest the notion that there is little to no Dutch climate fiction, for two reasons. Firstly, there is a large and rapidly expanding body of literature that classifies as climate fiction in the Dutch literary sphere, and secondly, Anker's definition of climate fiction is inadequate within the Dutch context, as I will illustrate below.

Anker's article was written in 2019, and although that is at time of writing only three years ago, many novels have since been published that would fit his understanding of climate

²⁰ Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 34.

²¹ Lotte Jensen, "Floods as Shapers of Dutch Cultural Identity: Media, Theories and Practices," *Water History* 13, no. 2 (2021): 217-233. 222.

²² Jensen, "Floods as Shapers," 224.

²³ *De Storm*, Ben Sombogaart, (Universal Pictures, 2009): Netflix.

²⁴ The widespread use of this trope can easily be linked to its similarities with the story of Moses, left in a cradle on the Nile's shore.

²⁵ Anker, "Een boek schrijven."

fiction.²⁶ Although perhaps fifty years late, it seems that the Dutch literary scene is now catching up. Examples include work by Eva Meijer, philosopher and writer, whose scholarly work considers the political voice attributed to animals, and whose fictional work often deals with ecocritical themes such as animal rights and climate change. Her 2013 novel *Dagpauwoog* follows the artist Iris Dagpauwoog, who learns about veganism and animal rights through her neighbour and increasingly becomes involved in animal rights protests.²⁷ The novel follows her journey as she starts sceptical even of vegetarianism, but ends up in jail as a result of her protests. Although the relation between meat consumption and climate change remains on the surface, the novel is notable for its attempts to allot agency to the animals in the novel. Iris's dog Pol majorly influences her decision to move into a new house, and it is not until over a hundred pages into the novel that Pol is described as a dog explicitly. Animals have similar agency in Meijer's next novel, *Het Vogelhuis* (Bird Cottage),²⁸ and in her novel *De Nieuwe Rivier* (The New River)²⁹ it is not animals but an unnamed river in Latin America—that suddenly appears and continues to expand—which takes centre stage in the eco-thriller. Finally, in her latest novel *Zee Nu* (Sea Now)³⁰ Meijer tackles water on the Dutch front, as the sea starts flooding the Netherlands by one kilometre each day.

But aside from Meijer, many Dutch authors are increasingly engaging with climate change. The prolific Dutch author Adriaan van Dis recently published *KliFi: Woede in de Republiek Nederland* (CliFi: Rage in the Dutch Republic),³¹ which takes its title from the Dutch translation for cli-fi. *KliFi* is the first work in which van Dis engages with themes of climate change and the environment. Emy Koopman's *Het boek van alle angsten* (The book of all fears)³² follows teens trying to find meaning in a world where most biodiversity has been lost and faith rests with geoengineering to stop global warming. Poet Maartje Smits broaches the topic in her poetry collection *Hoe ik een bos begon in mijn badkamer* (How I started a forest in my bathroom),³³ and Dutch Poet Laureate Lieke Marsman's first novel *Het*

²⁶ Annephe van Uchelen, "Klimaatroman Steeds Populairder: 'Schrijvers voelen aankomen wat gebeuren gaat,'" *NOS*, August 15, 2021, <https://nos.nl/nieuwsuur/artikel/2393920-klimaatroman-steeds-populairder-schrijvers-voelen-aankomen-wat-gebeuren-gaat>.

²⁷ Eva Meijer, *Dagpauwoog* (Amsterdam: Cossee, 2013).

Dagpauwoog is the name of the protagonist, but in Dutch it is also the name for peacock butterflies.

²⁸ Eva Meijer, *Het Vogelhuis* (Amsterdam: Cossee, 2019).

Available in translation: Eva Meijer, *Bird Cottage*, trans Antoinette Fawcett (London: Pushkin Press, 2019).

²⁹ Eva Meijer, *De Nieuwe Rivier* (Amsterdam: Das Mag, 2020).

³⁰ Eva Meijer, *Zee Nu* (Amsterdam: Cossee, 2022).

³¹ Adriaan van Dis, *KliFi: Woede in de Republiek Nederland* (Amsterdam: Augustus, 2021).

³² Emy Koopmans, *Het Boek van Alle Angsten* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2020).

³³ Maartje Smits, *Hoe ik een bos begon in mijn badkamer* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij De Harmonie, 2017).

tegenovergestelde van een mens (The opposite of a person)³⁴ centres climate scientist Ida who attempts to deal with her estrangement from the world by joining a project that sets out to destroy a dam to restore nature to its original status. The novel is a combination of traditional narrative and essayistic fragments in which Ida philosophises on man's place in the world, and attempts to empathise with non-human actors, from cucumbers to dinner tables.

The discrepancy between the climate fiction that is being published and critical pieces like Anker's, commenting on the lack of climate fiction, is not unique in the Netherlands, as it happened around a decade earlier in the English literary field. In the introduction to his study on climate change novels, Adam Trexler writes that although he found quite a number of climate change novels in his research starting in 2008, journalistic responses did not notice the upcoming movement until 2012. The Dutch literary field is late to the trend, and so is the critical response. It fits perfectly with the apocryphal quote by Heinrich Heine: 'When the flood comes, I'll go to Holland, because there everything happens fifty years later.' However, writing in 2022, I cannot agree with Anker that there are few books in Dutch literature tackling the climate crisis, since Dutch climate fiction certainly is on the rise.

However, I also want to expand upon Anker's notion of climate fiction. I find that, within the Dutch context, climate fiction should include all works that engage with questions and themes of the environment, ecological change, nature, and non-human life. The work of Belgian poet Guido Gezelle, for example, whose poetry was largely about the environment, does not fall into Anker's understanding of climate fiction. However, particularly his poem about the Mandelbeke and the pollution of that river, engages with themes seen in climate fiction: such as anthropomorphism, pollution and the influence of man and technology on nature.³⁵ *De Mandelbeke* was written in 1848, but could just as easily have been published today. In the same line of arguing, this thesis considers any literature on floods and the Dutch watery landscape to be climate fiction: because when read in a contemporary cultural context, where sea levels are rising and floods are increasingly more likely to happen, all these narratives are inherently climate change narratives.

Therefore, this thesis operates on the understanding that any Dutch narrative about water should be seen as part of a larger cultural and historical narrative that engages with the Netherlands' flood history. Its focus lies with contemporary flood narratives that situate

³⁴ Lieke Marsman, *Het Tegenovergestelde van een Mens* (Amsterdam: Atlas Contact, 2021). Available in translation: Lieke Marsman, *The Opposite of a Person*, trans. Sophie Collins (London: Daunt Books Publishing, 2022).

³⁵ Guido Gezelle, "De Mandelbeke," in *Dichtwerken*, ed. Frank Baur (Amsterdam: Veen, 1949).

floods as a result of anthropogenic climate change, but from a cultural-historical perspective that takes into account the cultural narrative of ‘Nederland Waterland.’ In order to do so, it first illustrates what that cultural narrative entails and how it is presented in Dutch culture. From there, it moves on to argue that by building upon a centuries-old cultural narrative, contemporary flood narratives overcome some of the narratological challenges associated with writing climate fiction as signaled in literary studies. Its theoretical framework therefore comes from the environmental humanities, particularly from the fields of ecocriticism and cultural memory studies. Its methodology comes from the intersection of these two fields as it puts forward conceptualizations of ‘environmental memory’ to illustrate how memory might work to navigate some of the scalar discrepancies that arise in environmental literature.

The thesis continues upon emerging scholarship on environmental memory by analysing how Dutch flood memory operates within cli-fi narratives that centre flooding. It adds to existing scholarship through its focus on Dutch climate fiction, as most scholarship on climate fiction has focused on Anglophone literature, and on authors with much cultural capital. It considers three examples of contemporary Dutch flood narratives that engage with the existing cultural narrative of ‘Nederland Waterland’ and analyse to what extent these novels build upon flood memory to narrate the climate crisis.

As case studies, this thesis analyses three novels. The first is Koos Tiemersma’s *Ûnder Wetter*³⁶ a Frisian novel set in 2065, made up of the diary of Frisian poet and musician Sil Posset.³⁷ The rising sea levels mean that the parts of the Netherlands that lie below sea-level will be returned to the sea, including the province Fryslân. Instead, the coastal line will be used to build new power plants, harvesting the energy of tidal waves. The novel focuses on the evacuation of Fryslân, starting as soldiers arrive to keep peace during the evacuation, and ending three months later, as the dikes are blown up. Sil’s diary narrates how he and his friends, who together form the literary band FRL, attempt to voice their protests against the order of business and particularly the way the Frisian people are forced out of their homes.

The second novel is Adriaan van Dis’ *KliFi: Woede in de Republiek Nederland*, set in 2030. The Netherlands has become a republic led by a populist president, who refuses to acknowledge any damage when a storm causes flooding in a river delta. The novel consists of the pamphlet manuscript written by Jákob, a 84-year old widow whose home becomes the

³⁶ Koos Tiemersma, *Ûnder Wetter* (Leeuwarden: Friese Boekerij, 2009).

³⁷ Fryslân is one of twelve Dutch provinces, but with its own language and culture. It is the only Dutch province with its own language, and several measurements are in place to ensure the preservation of Frisian language and culture.

centre of rescue operations after the flood. Refugees find shelter in his house, and angered by their stories, Jákob starts documenting the events and the stories refugees share. His manuscript becomes a way to counteract the government, who continue to refuse any acknowledgement of the flood or its victims.

Finally, the third novel is by Eva Meijer, whose most recent novel *Zee Nu* (Sea Now, 2022) recounts how the Dutch coast line starts moving inland when the tides cease to exist.³⁸ The novel is narrated by a wide array of characters, such as a marine scientist, a young climate activist, and the Dutch prime minister. As the sea consistently moves inland, the novel narrates how the government is slow to evacuate, and how eventually, all Dutch citizens relocate to Germany.

These works have been selected because they are all written by Dutch authors and are firmly set in the Netherlands, and because they are, in short, about floods. Some other Dutch climate novels, like *Het tegenovergestelde van een mens* or *De nieuwe rivier* feature a flood, but are set in respectively the Swiss Alpes and South America—and are thus far removed from the localised Dutch setting that is central to my argument. These novels are thus selected because they are contemporary narratives, about floods in the Netherlands. I should add that *Ûnder Wetter* is, indeed, far less recent in comparison to the other case studies, but if the Dutch literary field is small, the Frisian field is miniscule in comparison, as much less novels are published in the Frisian sphere. Furthermore, I felt the addition of a Frisian novel important, because Frisian literature is rarely studied within scholarly discipline, and the use of the language continues to decline. The addition of a Frisian novel also highlights, as I will show in my analysis of the novel, that although Fryslân has its own cultural identity, the cultural narrative of ‘Nederland Waterland’ is ingrained in Dutch society to such an extent that it is also visible in Frisian literature.

The first chapter of this thesis provides an overview of the theoretical discussions within ecocriticism, from which this thesis emerges. It explains how the scalar complexities of the Anthropocene are highlighted by the climate crisis, and how these complexities challenge human thinking, and in turn, human writing. It moves to discuss ongoing debates about ecological representation in literary fiction, and ends with a short overview of scholarship around climate fiction. The second chapter aims to bring to light what the cultural narrative ‘Nederland Waterland’ entails exactly, as it is commonly referred to but definite studies on the topic are lacking. The chapter aims to answer what ‘Nederland Waterland’ entails, and

³⁸ Meijer, *Zee Nu*.
Phonetically, *Zee Nu* in Dutch sounds like *zenuw*, which means nerve.

secondly, where the narrative is found within cultural representation. The chapter ends with an overview of ‘Nederland Waterland’ as presented in contemporary Dutch climate fiction, bringing in the case studies of this thesis as well as other narratives to illustrate how these stories imagine the future of ‘Nederland Waterland.’ The third chapter moves to the close reading of the three novels, supported by a methodological framework around environmental memory. The chapter starts with a short introduction on ongoing scholarship at the intersection of cultural memory studies and ecocriticism, and applies that framework to the novels in a close reading, highlighting how the three novels foreground a sense of displacement. Finally, the conclusion will tie together all chapters and return to the relevance of this research by placing it within a global context.

Chapter 1

‘Zeeën van Tijd’: Narrative in the Anthropocene ³⁹

In Jan Willem Anker’s contemplation on Dutch climate fiction, he touches upon two important points when it comes to the literary and cultural representation of climate change. The first is that writers, musicians, artists, filmmakers and so forth have a “morele plicht” (moral duty) to take part in creating climate change awareness.⁴⁰ In no case however should such stories and artworks be related to popular dystopian stories (*spektakeldystopie*): as these would do little good in creating awareness.⁴¹ In just a few sentences, Anker touches upon some of the central arguments in ecocritical discourse on representing climate change in narrative, and climate fiction in particular: namely the challenges of representing climate change in narrative, and yet the urgency to do so nonetheless. This chapter will provide an overview of the current scholarly debates around this topic, based mostly in ecocriticism and literary theory. It starts by expanding upon the difficulties involved in thinking and writing about climate change, and continues to discuss the scholarship surrounding climate fiction as a genre. This theoretical framework serves to illustrate the necessity of considering climate fiction, and to show how this thesis expands upon existing scholarship.

Environmental Thinking and its Challenges

On February 1st 1953, the combination of a heavy north-western gale and spring tide caused a large flood in the Netherlands, Belgium, England and Scotland. The storm hit the Netherlands particularly hard, which led to the death of 1836 Dutch citizens and tens of thousands of animals. Because the flood occurred in the night between Saturday and Sunday, when radio communications were



This picture of a map made by the Dutch waterboards shows, in red, which parts of the Netherlands were flooded in 1953.

³⁹ The Dutch expression “zeeën van tijd” (oceans of time) is used to denote that one has more than enough time for something.

⁴⁰ Anker, “Een roman schrijven.”

⁴¹ Anker, “Een roman schrijven.”

halted, warning signals were communicated late and did not reach most people until it was too late. The damage was incredible, and to this day, the flood is incredibly significant in Dutch cultural memory. It is the most recent flood with such a high death toll, but the flood also was the direct cause for the establishment of the *Deltawerken* (Delta Works). To illustrate how thinking about climate change challenges our thinking and our writing, I want to briefly consider the *Nationaal Monument Watersnoodramp 1953* (National Monument for the North Sea Flood 1953), which was erected in 2003.⁴² The monument is situated in Ouwerkerk, Zeeland, and also houses the *Nationaal Watersnoodmuseum* (National Flood Museum).⁴³ The monument is situated at the site of the final reparations of initial dyke repairs after the flood, and it consists of three parts: a statue of a brick column and metal rods, the concrete caissons that were used to finalise initial dyke repairs in 1953, and the environment surrounding the monument. I will return to the monument and the way it commemorates the flood in the next chapter, but I want to focus here on the way the monument draws attention to the influences of anthropogenic climate change on one's surroundings. Through the inclusion of the monument's direct surroundings within the monument itself, it commemorates not only the flood but also the way the flood and subsequent measures (emergency responses, but also the *Deltawerken*) altered the landscape. The monument does not explicitly commemorate the way continued (anthropogenic) climatological change affects the landscape, but one can certainly read the monument as one that also commemorates climate change. It is important to note that the monument is situated in a rural area, not easily accessible by public transport, around two kilometres from the closest village and nearly eight from the closest city. Visitors are thus confronted with the landscape that is incorporated in the monument simply because the road leading up to the monument is a rural one.⁴⁴ Secondly, in the embedding of the *Nationaal Museum* within the monument, the monument also places importance on both the Dutch flood history and the future of the Netherlands. The final permanent display in the museum considers the "never-ending battle" against water in the Netherlands, but also engages with disastrous floods in other countries and the way rising sea levels will threaten countries around the world.⁴⁵ The museum, which is situated in the four concrete caissons that are part

⁴² Nationaal Monument Watersnoodramp 1953, Ouwerkerk, Zeeland.

⁴³ Nationaal Watersnoodmuseum, Ouwerkerk, Zeeland.

⁴⁴ This does not mean to imply that nature begins and ends with the borders of human civilization, but rather that the action of leaving densely populated areas in exchange first for the rural Zeeland, and second for the direct surroundings of the monument (true for most Dutch citizens making their way to the monument, except for those living in Zeeland): for most will invoke a sense of 'nature' that is less likely to appear in an urban setting.

⁴⁵ "The Battle is Never Ending," *Watersnoodmuseum*, <https://watersnoodmuseum.nl/en/knowledgecentre/the-battle-is-never-ending/>.

of the monument, thus already includes anthropogenic climate change, albeit from an educational perspective. In that sense, through the inclusion of a dynamic element in the monument (the landscape), as well as an educational element (teaching future generations), the monument is both retrospective and anticipatory: commemorating not only the past, but also the future.

It is precisely this interaction between past and future, mediated in the present, that lies at the heart of the Anthropocene, inviting a perspective that is at once retrospective and anticipatory.⁴⁶ The continuous moving back-and-forth between the two is not only characteristic for the Anthropocene, but is also central to our being, as Mark Currie argues in *About Time*:

The present is the object of a future memory, and we live it as such, in anticipation of the story we will tell later, envisaging the present as past. The present might be lived in anticipation of some future present from which it is narrated, but this may also entail the anticipation of events between the present present and the future present from which it is narrated which will also be part of that story.⁴⁷

Social media in particular invite such a future-oriented mode of living, but it is not only related to the life of the individual. The climate crisis constantly asks for such a perspective: the consequences of rising emissions, for example, may not be felt in the moment, but will certainly influence life in the coming decades. However, the challenge of this future-oriented thinking comes with the scale associated with the climate crisis and with living in the Anthropocene in general. Thinking about “the story we will tell later” invites thinking about the future, but is limited to the foreseeable future. The climate crisis asks for a perspective that incorporates a temporal scale which exceeds the human timeline by far—not to mention how the climate crisis is a global crisis, thus also happening on a larger spatial scale than one’s own living environment. The climate crisis is, as one would say in Dutch, a ‘*ver-van-mijn-bed-show*’ (far-from-my-bed-show), an expression used to illustrate that anything happening far away from one’s own home (or bed) is less interesting than things happening close to home.

⁴⁶ The Anthropocene has become a widely debated term, as the term itself is anthropocentric. Many alternatives have been offered, like Donna Haraway’s ‘Chutulucene,’ or Jason Moore’s ‘Capitalocene.’ I am aware of the debates surrounding the term, but have chosen to adhere to ‘Anthropocene’ in this thesis, as it is the only term that has become commonplace outside of the environmental humanities, and because the focus of this thesis does not lie with a theoretical discussion of the different terms for the current era.

⁴⁷ Mark Currie, *About Time* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2007): 6.

The Anthropocene's obsession with time, alternating between past and future, can also be traced to changing conceptualizations of history in modern times, as highlighted by the French historian Pierre Nora. Nora observes an "acceleration of history" that complicates a smooth transition from past to future, and foregrounds the difference between memory and history.⁴⁸ For Nora, memory is real, "life, borne by living societies founded in its name," and history is the constructed representation of the past, "always problematic and incomplete."⁴⁹ The acceleration of history, caused for example by the disappearance of peasant culture or the way mass media frame events, has led to the shift from *milieux-de-mémoire* (environments of memory) to *lieux-de-mémoire* (sites of memory). Nora signals this shift within the "French context of the wake of the mid-1970s economic crisis that swept France into a renewed awareness,"⁵⁰ brought about by the break between memory and history. *Lieux-de-mémoire*, which are not necessarily physical locations, are sites where memory is crystallised, and the primary location of memory in a modern society. The shift that Nora identifies is also caused by the way modern life has upheaved traditional boundaries between past, present and future.

The climate crisis further complicates the division between past and future. In the late nineteenth century, carbon dioxide emissions started rising, and already in the 1950s, alarming reports about the impact of emissions appeared.⁵¹ Currently, we are thus confronted with actions of previous generations, as well as their inability to act following the first reports about greenhouse gases and global warming. At the same time, emissions continue to rise, and although environmental awareness continuously increases, estimates for global warming are constantly recalculated as climate neutrality has not been achieved. In the words of sociologist Bruno Latour: "we have become the people who could have acted."⁵²

However, the consequences of anthropogenic climate change are not distributed equally across the globe. Western countries have played a far larger role in the climate crisis due to higher emission levels, but countries in the Global South are faced with the consequences first. The understanding that the climate crisis was brought about by the collective actions of multiple generations, as well as the understanding that the consequences are distributed unequally across the globe, invites questions of guilt and perpetration. Who is responsible for the climate crisis? Should all countries and communities be held to the same

⁴⁸ Pierre Nora. "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*," trans. Marc Roudebush, *Representations* no. 26 (1989): 7.

⁴⁹ Nora, "Between Memory and History," 8.

⁵⁰ Liedeke Plate, "Climate Change and the Metamorphosis of Memory: A Response to Stef Craps," *Parallax* 23 no. 4 (2017): 495, DOI: 10.1080/13534645.2017.1374519.

⁵¹ Geert Buelens, *Wat We Toen Al Wisten* (Amsterdam, Querido Facto, 2022).

⁵² Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017): 9.

standards in global environmental agreements, when not all have the same resources, nor the same share in emissions and pollution? Rob Nixon has introduced the term ‘slow violence’ to refer to the kind of violence that is found, amongst others, in the climate crisis: “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all.”⁵³ Slow violence provides a framework to understand how the effects of slow violence are spread out across time and space, and how the violence is not always linked to individual or identifiable perpetrators. Nixon illustrates, for example, how Kenya’s Green Belt Movement draws attention to environmental and gender injustice as they employ local women to plant trees. The violence the Green Belt Movement foregrounds is both global and local, with distinct local implications. Anthropogenic climate change influences soil erosion on the local scale, the effects of which are strengthened by the illicit deforestation at the hands of the Kenyan regime. The Green Belt Movement began as a way to commemorate women environmentalists, but grew to a large-scale protest of active reforestation.⁵⁴ As they worked to restore a forest that the regime considered to be private-owned, their actions “assumed a potency that reverberated beyond the fate of one particular forest,” until ultimately, the regime was forced to halt their refute against the women, and against the trees.⁵⁵ The Green Belt movement, in foregrounding soil erosion and deforestation, shows how different forms of violence accumulate, and affect human and non-human life.

Living in the Anthropocene thus calls for an awareness that transcends the scales of the individual *and* the collective, the temporal *and* the spatial. The textbook example is how many years it takes for plastic waste to decompose (a few centuries): drawing attention to the spatial scale. Similarly, it is increasingly clear how environmentalist practice in one nation may have disastrous consequences across the globe: the increase in consumption of meat and dairy alternatives in Western countries, for example, have led to increased deforestation in the Global South as soy harvest becomes more profitable. The human psyche is not skilled in thinking on these scales which transcend individual lives by far. There is a certain amount of cognitive dissonance involved in anything that does not impact our own lives—much like Elmar’s life in Jan Willem Anker’s *Vichy* is not impacted by the drought, our lives are not impacted when we throw away a plastic bottle. As Timothy Morton summarises: “Everything

⁵³ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011): 2.

⁵⁴ Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 128-137.

⁵⁵ Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 136.

is connected. This is *the ecological thought*.⁵⁶ Morton coined the term ‘hyperobject’ to refer to objects that are “hyper” in relation to humans, which are “massively distributed in space and time.”⁵⁷ Hyperobjects are viscous, illustrated by the way oil stuck to bodies after the BP oil spill in 2010 long after media coverage about the disaster ceased, and non-local: Morton uses quantum theory to show that any perceiving of the hyperobject only perceives a fraction of it.⁵⁸ They exist on timescales that are impossible to perceive by humans, but they are not infinite, merely a “very large finitude.”⁵⁹ Global warming is a hyperobject; as well as the oil spill, radioactive isotopes, or Styrofoam.

Finally, the climate crisis dramatically contrasts the individual and the collective, further challenging our ability to think (and act) environmentally. One individual throwing away a plastic bottle does not lead to anything, but the accumulation of all those bottles lead to plastic soup in the oceans, which affects all life on earth. It follows logically that much of environmental discourse has focussed on the power of the individual in making a change. In the Netherlands, Postbus 51 ran a campaign under the slogan “Een beter milieu begint bij jezelf” (A better environment starts with yourself): implying that individual actions like recycling waste or reducing shower-time would go a long way for the planetary condition.⁶⁰ A similar focus on the individual is found in the concept of the carbon footprint, particularly in the popular carbon footprint calculator. The calculator is based entirely on individual choices, such as the energy use of one’s household, travel habits or dietary preferences.⁶¹ What the calculator does not take into account is how systematic emissions, at the hands of corporations or governments, affect the climate crisis. Instead, the focus lies with the individual: the calculator urges you to make more environment-friendly choices, but one person alone cannot significantly influence national emissions levels.

The focus on the individual has been broadly criticised, particularly by those who place not individual actions, but the widespread consequences of the capitalist (neoliberalist)

⁵⁶ Timothy Morton, “Introduction: Critical Thinking,” in: *Ecological Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010): 1.

⁵⁷ Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minnesota: University Press, 2019): 1.

⁵⁸ Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 33; 40.

⁵⁹ Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 60.

⁶⁰ Postbus 51 was a governmental institution used for promotional campaigns, for example to call attention to environmentalism, to dissuade the use of cars on Sundays, to spread information about AIDS and so forth. Postbus 51 relied on flyers as well as radio and TV commercials, with a distinctive jingle and logo that marked them as governmental propaganda. Regardless, the use of Postbus 51 was often criticised in the opposition for promoting a certain agenda, and in 2012, Postbus 51 was nullified. Now, similar promotional campaigns are aired by the Dutch government.

⁶¹ “Carbon Calculator,” *Carbon Footprint*, accessed July 15, 2022. <https://www.carbonfootprint.com/calculator.aspx>

system at the heart of climate change.⁶² In a Dutch context, journalist Jaap Tielbeke has published on the link between major corporations and the climate crisis; particularly his aptly titled work *Een beter milieu begint niet bij jezelf* (A better environment does not start with yourself) shows that the Postbus 51 campaign had little effect, as the planet is even worse off than before.⁶³ Tielbeke shows that major corporations hold the biggest cards when it comes to radical change, and that the tools to change course lie not with individuals, but with large systematic solutions in the political and legal sphere. In that same vein, it is also crucial to illustrate how greenwashing has shaped public opinion. The carbon footprint calculator, for example, originated as a marketing campaign by BP: one of the world's biggest fossil fuel corporations.⁶⁴ Such skewed marketing is, perhaps unsurprisingly, not unique: already in the 1950s, major oil corporations worked to keep alarming reports about the growing use of fossil fuels under wraps. The idea behind “Een beter milieu begint bij jezelf” holds no merit: although the climate debate is centred on the power of the individual, true power lies not with changing one's habits but by making systematic changes—within the hyperobjects, if you will.

Environmental Writing and its Challenges

Anker's review of Dutch climate fiction calls attention to one of the major challenges of writing about climate change: dystopianism. Trexler signals that cli-fi is often based on dystopian apocalyptic scenarios, relying on immediate and urgent danger caused by climate change, such as superstorms, floods or extreme droughts. These narratives may be effective in that they provide recognisable and captivating imaginations to an abstract concept like climate change, but they simultaneously “reduce climate change to a unitary phenomenon.”⁶⁵ Furthermore, the dystopian turn of the 1980s has led to a dramatic increase in stories that “engage climate change, ecological devastation and other contemporary threats” to fuel escapism amongst readers.⁶⁶ Because such stories are anthropocentric, they promote an

⁶² Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (2014) is one of the influential works that shows how capitalism and the climate crisis have become intertwined and can no longer be regarded as separate. Klein argues that the only hope for the climate crisis lies in the abolition of the neoliberalist system.

⁶³ Jaap Tielbeke, *Een Beter Milieu Begint Niet bij Jezelf* (Amsterdam: Dag Mag, 2020).

⁶⁴ Mark Kaufman, “The Carbon Footprint Sham.” *Mashable*, July 27, 2021, <https://mashable.com/feature/carbon-footprint-pr-campaign-sham>.

⁶⁵ Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions*, 26.

⁶⁶ Pieter Vermeulen, “Future Readers: Narrating the Human in the Anthropocene,” *Textual Practice* 31, no. 5 (2017): 869, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2017.1323459>.

understanding of “human agency and responsibility,”⁶⁷ placing even further importance on the human in the Anthropocene—precisely what we should get out of. Dystopianism should thus be avoided within environmental narratives, because it does not represent the complexities of anthropogenic climate change, nor does it allow for a non-anthropocentric focus.

Much of the ecocritical debate on climate fiction focuses on the complexities of anthropogenic climate change, specifically about the scalar dimensions of climate change. Ecocritic Timothy Clark was one of the first to point out the discrepancy between the temporal (and spatial) scale of climate change and that of literature, especially literary realism.⁶⁸ Clark argues that these scales can hardly be represented in literature precisely because literary realism operates on different temporal and spatial scales.⁶⁹ To navigate this issue, Clark proposes scale framing: a way of reading that takes into account the differences when it comes to the space and time of literary realism and that of climatological change. Clark’s scale framing has three levels. The first scale considers the narrator and their immediate circle of friends and family, over a few years⁷⁰—rendering environmental problems unimportant, as they are unlikely to affect the narrator’s life dramatically. This is how Jan Willem Anker reads his own novel *Vichy*, because the drought nor the flood dramatically alter his protagonist’s life. The second scale then considers a historical period, a few decades, and is often assumed in literary criticism when placing a work in its direct context.⁷¹ Finally, the third scale considers the planetary timescale where scale effects become visible, but “human history and culture can take on unfamiliar shapes.”⁷² Central to Clark’s argument is the understanding that ecological change happens on spatial and temporal scales that are hard to imagine, inside and outside of fiction—and that we therefore should not aim to do so.

Clark’s claim is a rigid one, and one that holds very little optimism for the future of literature. He retracts some of his relatively radical dismissal of literature in his later work, *The Value of Ecocriticism*.⁷³ In this critical anthology, he expresses hope for poetry and genre fiction as literary spaces where ecological change can be represented.⁷⁴ His discussion on scalar literacy here reflects his earlier work, but with a more hopeful outlook. Clark relies on

⁶⁷ Vermeulen, “Future Readers,” 869.

⁶⁸ Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge*.

⁶⁹ Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, 73.

⁷⁰ Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, 99.

⁷¹ Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, 100.

⁷² Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, 101.

⁷³ Clark, *The Value of Ecocriticism* (Cambridge: University Press, 2019).

⁷⁴ Clark, *The Value of Ecocriticism*, 77.

readings by others as well as his own reading of work by Kim Stanley Robinson, and concludes that these works fail to meet the requirements of scalar literacy in one way or another. Regardless, as Clark writes: “each text, in its very different way, instantiates the new aesthetic and representational challenges being taken up at the current frontiers of ecocriticism.”⁷⁵ Perhaps we should not strive for one narrative successful on accounts of scalar literacy and anthropomorphism, but read a myriad of works that all highlight one or more elements of the environmental discussion.⁷⁶

Clark’s discussion of scalar literacy focuses primarily on literary realism, although narratives about climate change can also readily be found within other genres, primarily genre fiction.⁷⁷ His discussion of genre fiction however is framed by the sentiment that the literary value of such genres should be re-evaluated if we wish to validate genre fiction within ecocriticism. His views echo that of Amitav Ghosh, who writes that climate fiction is primarily found within the borders of science fiction, which is “not the kind that is taken seriously by serious literary journals.”⁷⁸ Ghosh’s discussion of the climate crisis in culture, history and politics discusses several challenges for the cultural representation of anthropogenic climate change: such as the deeply scientific language associated with climate change, which does not compare well to the poetic language of literature, or the way the improbability of climate change does not match up with literary realism.⁷⁹ Ghosh concludes his analysis by expressing hope that, as in previous crises, the climate crisis will pave way for new forms of imagination.⁸⁰ Regardless, although not all are equally optimistic about environmental literature, there is an underlying understanding that we need literature to narrate the climate crisis. As Rob Nixon writes: “writer-activists can help us apprehend threats imaginatively that remain imperceptible to the senses,”⁸¹ and in that sense bear witness to the ongoing complexities of the climate crisis.

⁷⁵ Clark, *The Value of Ecocriticism*, 56.

⁷⁶ Clark writes that anthropomorphism is often a way to work around scalar literacy, because it allows for the narrative to incorporate the non-human, thus more easily moving away from a human perspective. At the same time, such writing risks “obliterating the singularity of very different modes of life and communication.” Clark, *The Value of Ecocriticism*, 81.

⁷⁷ The formal boundaries of literary fiction of course do not apply when it comes to poetry, and Clark is optimistic in his discussion of ecopoetry. Regardless, since this thesis focuses on prose narratives primarily, there is no space to dive into the specifics of poetry within environmental writing.

⁷⁸ Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*, 7.

I do not necessarily agree with Ghosh’s assessment that genre fiction is not taken seriously by literary journals, and certainly not with the dismissal of genre fiction because it is not taken seriously by serious journals. This thesis shows that there is already a large body of work that considers climate fiction, including genre fiction, and at the same time adds to the existing scholarship.

⁷⁹ Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*, 26.

⁸⁰ Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*, 84.

⁸¹ Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 15.

Climate Fiction

The call for different ways of imagining (and narrating) the climate crisis is echoed throughout ecocriticism, urged forward by the general consensus that environmental writing has its challenges. Pieter Vermeulen writes that the complexities of the Anthropocene call for diverse narratives, but also that Anthropocene literature already warps the conventions of the novel to fit an epoch that asks for different ways of thinking.⁸² Lieke Marsman's *Het tegenovergestelde van een mens* is a fitting example: the novel is embedded with scientific facts, delivered in footnotes, as well as essayistic paragraphs about critical thinkers, including passages on the object-oriented-ontology by Timothy Morton, whose 'hyperobjects' I have considered above.⁸³ In an essay on the form of 'the climate novel', literary critic Fiep van Bodegom suggests that there is an urgency to spread scientific data that no longer fits within the formal shape of fiction.⁸⁴ Trexler too signals that the climate crisis calls for a recalibration of the novel, precisely because it involves different and new agents than one is accustomed to in the traditional novel, but also "economic processes, the incremental emissions of every grocery run, chemical and meteorological variations, the life cycle of phytoplankton, and any number of systems not typically incorporated into the novel."⁸⁵ Trexler is also more optimistic about the future of the novel than some, as he argues that incorporating elements that have become associated with climate change (weather, cars, futurity) incorporates the climate crisis into narrative without the necessity to do so explicitly.⁸⁶ Within the Dutch context, for example, farmer protests and the nitrogen crisis have become synonymous with the climate crisis, and any inclusion of these elements in literature thus calls attention to the environmental dimension, even if the novel itself is not occupied with the climate crisis.⁸⁷

When Anker writes that the majority of Dutch literature is irrelevant from a climatological perspective, he claims that (at the time of writing) there was not a whole lot of Dutch literature about anthropogenic climate change. When Astrid Bracke writes about the (seeming) lack of Dutch climate fiction, she attributes this partly to the lack of pastoral

⁸² Pieter Vermeulen, *Literature and the Anthropocene* (New York: Routledge, 2020): 63.

⁸³ Marsman, *Het tegenovergestelde van een mens*, 130.

⁸⁴ Fiep van Bodegom. "Wat is een klimaatroman?" in *The Dutch Review of Books*, no. 4 (2017).

⁸⁵ Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions*, 77.

⁸⁶ Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions*, 15.

⁸⁷ At the time of writing this thesis, there are ongoing farmer protests throughout the country, as farmers occupy highways and supermarkets. The emission of nitrogen gasses, particularly within certain chemical compounds, is too high in the Netherlands and does not comply with European regulations, made to protect nature reserves. Because most nitrogen emissions in the Netherlands originate from agricultural practice, most measures to cut nitrogen emissions affect those areas. This has led to widespread protests from farmers, who do not agree with the measurements and often are mistrustful about the data that has led to these conclusions.

Romantic literature in the Netherlands, a prevalent literary tradition in many other Northern-European countries. Bracke suggests that unlike British and German pastoral literary traditions, in the Netherlands, the idea of Dutch landscape as *maakbaar* (manufacturable) had been firmly established. This thus left little space for the idea of “nature as something separate from humans,” which formed the foundation for the Romantic literature that ecocritics also often consider.⁸⁸ Bracke finds that the lack of Dutch climate fiction she too identifies, is in part caused by the lack of a Romantic literary tradition, as well as the cultural understanding of the landscape as *maakbaar*, which continues into the era of the climate crisis.⁸⁹

However—although I do not dispute the absence of a Romantic tradition in Dutch literature—I find that the focus on *maakbaarheid* (manufacturability) throughout Dutch culture in literature and visual art shows a focus on climate and the relationship between humankind and nature long before we started to gauge the lasting impact humankind has had on the planet. Precisely because the Dutch people have been reshaping landscape and influencing the climate for centuries, which is so strongly embedded in Dutch culture, any narrative of the *maakbaarheid* of landscape *is* a climate narrative. Fundamentally, from landscape paintings by Dutch masters like Ruisdael to flood stories, these narratives are all texts about the impact of mankind on its environments and the different human *and* non-human agencies involved in shaping the planet—or, at the very least, the Netherlands.



Jacob van Ruisdael, *The Watermill*, oil on canvas, 1660.

Especially when these texts are read today, where matters of weather, floods and landscape have become intangible from the climate crisis, they become narratives about the climate. In an analysis of environmental texts from Northern Europe, Katie Ritson writes that:

⁸⁸ Astrid Bracke, “Braving the North or Conquering the Sea: A Comparative Approach to British, German and Dutch fiction on climate,” (paper presented at the EASLCE Conference, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium, 2016), https://astridbracke.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/astridbracke_braving-the-north-or-conquering-the-sea.pdf, 3.

⁸⁹ Bracke, “Braving the North,” 8.

Bracke notes that although there is not as much of a Romanticist literary tradition in the Netherlands, there is a strong tradition of pastoral painting with much international renown. However, as Bracke explains, these paintings are already based on an understanding of landscape as *maakbaar*, and often feature elements representing the *maakbaarheid* of landscape, such as dykes, watermills and man-made canals.

While not explicitly environmentalist texts or novels about climate change, both novels use their lowlands setting to move between the past and future of the environment, engaging with the questions of time, human agency, and environmental change that are so central to understandings of the Anthropocene.⁹⁰

Ritson argues that through embedding elements and sites commonly associated with the climate crisis, such texts engage with the climate crisis regardless—and especially so from a contemporary perspective. My discussion of the novels in this thesis is thus founded on the understanding that they are situated in a tradition of climate fiction, and as I will show in subsequent chapters, that this proves to be a way to navigate some of the challenges of environmental writing. This understanding primarily applies to Dutch literary history, which I find is full of climate fiction, as the novels that form the case studies of this thesis very explicitly position themselves within the anthropogenic climate crisis. The question that remains, however, is how to understand a centuries-old premise of *maakbaarheid* from an Anthropocene perspective—and how Dutch climate fiction relates to ongoing discourse on the different facets of representing the climate crisis in literature.

So far, this chapter has provided an overview of the challenges associated with environmental thinking and environmental writing, and illustrated how the climate crisis calls for new ways of imagining the world, and our relationship to the non-human life on this planet. The challenges revolve around temporality and scale, around representation of and agency for the non-human life on this planet, and around multi-dimensional representation that allows for all the complexities associated with a global crisis. Although there is plenty of work on the challenges of climate fiction, what echoes across all theoretical work is nevertheless an understanding that literature can and should play a role in the cultural representation of the climate crisis.

⁹⁰ Katie Ritson, *The Shifting Sands of the North Sea Lowlands: Literary and Historical Imaginaries* (New York: Routledge, 2019): 115.

Chapter 2

‘Nederland Waterland’: a Cultural Narrative

In order to understand how Dutch flood memory is remediated in contemporary flood narratives, it is important to first understand what meaning floods and water hold in Dutch culture. This section will provide an overview of what is meant by ‘Nederland Waterland,’ as well as the reasoning behind this term. In short, when referring to ‘Nederland Waterland,’ I refer to the way water and floods have shaped the Netherlands, literally and culturally, and the cultural narrative that emerged as a result. Throughout scholarship, but also in Dutch public education, different terms have been used in this context: most commonly ‘de strijd tegen het water’ (the battle against water) and ‘Nederland Waterland.’ In choosing to use ‘Nederland Waterland,’ I follow the term used in the Canon of the Netherlands, a publicly accessible source that highlights the main themes and events in Dutch history.⁹¹ Their description of the narrative ‘Nederland Waterland’ refers to the geographical makeup of the Netherlands and the risks and benefits of living in a delta.⁹²

The Netherlands is situated partly below sea level and forms the delta of multiple major rivers. Flood risks thus come both from the coastline and the rivers, and because much of the population is centred in the Rhine-Meuse-Scheldt delta, the stakes are high. Without dykes, a large area of the Netherlands (roughly up until Utrecht) would be flooded with regular tides. At the same time, the Netherlands has a history of creating *polders*, which started in the Middle Ages and continues to this day.⁹³ Polders are bodies of land, previously part of watery environments such as lakes or oceans, turned into land by building dykes around the area and draining the land. The most prominent Dutch example is Flevoland, the youngest Dutch province consisting entirely of polders; in total, almost 5% of the Dutch landscape is made up of polders.⁹⁴ The Dutch landscape is thus characterised by dykes and polders, used both to protect the low-lying land from flooding, but also to increase arable

⁹¹ The *Canon van Nederland*, under management of the Dutch Openluchtmuseum (Open Air Museum): establishes seven main narratives in Dutch history, of which ‘Nederland Waterland’ is the first. Previously, this theme was referred to as ‘Lage landen bij de zee’ (Lowlands by the sea). The Canon is also used as a guideline for primary and higher education in the Netherlands, and is thus a valuable source to gauge what is considered important in Dutch collective memory. Within the canon, the North Sea Flood of ’53 is included in ‘Nederland Waterland,’ but also the Rotterdam harbour, the Beemster polder, and the dolmens (to illustrate the transition from hunters to farmers).

⁹² “Hoofdlijnen,” *Canon van Nederland*, last modified in 2020,

<https://www.canonvannederland.nl/nl/page/141570/hoofdlijnen#leven-in-een-kwetsbare-delta>

⁹³ “Hoe Werd in Nederland van Water Land Gemaakt?” *NPO Kennis*, accessed July 18, 2022, <https://npokennis.nl/longread/7612/hoe-werd-in-nederland-van-water-land-gemaakt>.

⁹⁴ “400 Duizend Inwoners IJsselmeerpolders,” *Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek*, accessed July 18, 2022, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2018/12/400-duizend-inwoners-ijsselmeerpolders>.

areas. In more than one way, water has therefore strongly influenced the geographical makeup of the Netherlands, both by natural and man-made forces. In turn, this led to a cultural narrative of ‘de strijd tegen het water,’ referring to the constant battle to survive despite watery odds. The following paragraphs will serve to illustrate first what this narrative entails, and subsequently, how it has been represented in Dutch culture. In my analysis, I have chosen to adhere to ‘Nederland Waterland’ in referral to the cultural narrative, rather than the commonly used ‘de strijd tegen het water,’ for three reasons.

Firstly, as seen in innovative and sustainable living solutions like floating neighbourhoods, water has provided plenty of opportunities for the Netherlands: in terms of arable land and export opportunities, for example. Historian Petra van Dam has coined the term ‘amphibious culture’ to show how, in the past, water and water management shaped the country: by building elevations for villages and dykes, but also in the way water was used to evacuate and send supplies to flooded areas.⁹⁵ Van Dam also notes that from the nineteenth century onwards, amphibious culture paved the way to technological solutions for water management, such as the Deltawerken, and that the Netherlands’ major cities were extended into low-lying areas, rather than building primarily on elevated land.⁹⁶ Van Dam ends her argument by stating that “learning to ‘live with the water’, rather than fighting against it, may be the most relevant and urgent message for today’s decision-makers based on the historical study of former amphibious cultures,” echoing a shift in narrative.⁹⁷ Water thus has brought many opportunities to the Netherlands, and the pride felt in innovative water management techniques is an important part of the cultural narrative that emerged as a result. The richness brought about by living in such a watery environment, as well as the source of national pride that living below sea level has become, is not represented when referring to ‘de strijd tegen het water’, which merely positions water as threat and enemy of the Dutch people.

Secondly, I find that ‘de strijd tegen het water’ is unproductive in the Anthropocene, the epoch defined by man’s impact on earth and simultaneously decentring mankind’s place on the planet. The military connotation of ‘de strijd tegen het water’, which has been the dominant narrative for most centuries (as I will show in subsequent paragraphs): presupposes that water exists only in servitude to humanity. This is visible too in the English description of polders: the *reclamation* of land from the sea: as if the sea was ours to begin with. Working

⁹⁵ Petra van Dam, “An Amphibious Culture: Coping with Floods in the Netherlands,” in *Local Places, Global Processes: Histories of Environmental Change in Britain and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2017): 78-93.

⁹⁶ Van Dam, “Amphibious Culture,” 89.

⁹⁷ Van Dam, “Amphibious Culture,” 90.

from a background in the environmental humanities, I cannot operate on this vocabulary, as it removes any agency of non-human life on our planet. This anthropocentric attitude towards our environment is precisely what I try to avoid, both within this thesis and in general practice, operating on a background in ecocritical theory. Any dialogue that considers the non-human life on this planet only from an anthropocentric perspective is unproductive in the era of the climate crisis. Therefore, I find that this is precisely the reason we have arrived at this point in time.

Finally, as a Dutch citizen, I also signal a shift in the national narrative, that is increasingly moving away from the anthropocentric and military vocabulary and towards a narrative that is more eco-friendly: visible for example in strategies from leading Dutch water management institutes.⁹⁸ This is echoed in a largescale rapport on Dutch national identity, published in 2019: “waar tot kort onze heroïsche strijd tegen het water de identiteit vormde, is nu een herijking aan de orde.”⁹⁹ (Where our heroic battle against water used to shape our identity, it is now time for recalibration.) Similarly, the updated description for ‘Nederland Waterland’ in the *Canon van Nederland*, that now includes: “En voor de bijzondere flora en fauna in het waterrijke ecosysteem krijgen we steeds meer oog.”¹⁰⁰ (And we have a growing appreciation for the extraordinary flora and fauna in the water-rich ecosystem.) This description hints at an understanding of the Netherlands as shaped by water, not only in a challenging way (in terms of flood risks): but also of the richness brought by the water. In this thesis, in which ‘Nederland Waterland’ forms a central focus, I will illustrate that the meaning of that narrative is shifting, as highlighted also by the novels I bring forward in the following chapters. Operating thus on the understanding that water has not only been a threat but also an opportunity for the Dutch, and operating on the premise that anthropocentrism is something to

⁹⁸ One of the strategies proposed by Deltares, an independent research institute that focuses on water and water management, is ‘Meebewegen’ (Moving with): also understood as ‘living with water’. ‘Meebewegen entails ceasing to build or sustain human living in areas that are at risk of flooding, or that adapt to sustainable living practices, such as floating houses.

“Meebewegen,” *Deltares*, last modified March 30, 2020, <https://publicwiki.deltares.nl/display/KWI/Meebewegen>.

Another example would be Rijkswaterstaat’s project ‘Ruimte voor de rivier’ (Space for the river), which means that rivers are given space to (over)flow in some areas to reduce flood risks in densely populated areas.

“Ruimte voor de Rivieren,” *Rijkswaterstaat*, accessed July 19, 2022.

<https://www.rijkswaterstaat.nl/water/waterbeheer/bescherming-tegen-het-water/maatregelen-om-overstromingen-te-voorkomen/ruimte-voor-de-rivieren>.

⁹⁹ Jeanet Kullberg, Jurjen Iedema and Anniek Schlette. “Het Nederlandse Landschap en Nederlandse Identiteit,” in *Denkend aan Nederland: Sociaal en Cultureel Rapport 2019I*, ed. Joep de Hart, Pepijn van Houwelingen and Maroejska Versantvoort (Den Haag: Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, 2019): 22.

¹⁰⁰ “Hoofddlijnen,” *Canon van Nederland*.

be left behind, I use ‘Nederland Waterland’ in this thesis to refer to all elements of the cultural narrative that unites the Dutch and their environment.

The Imagined Community

The theoretical framework for scholarly discussion of national identities, and thus the theoretical framework for this chapter, comes largely from the concept ‘Imagined community’ as first put forward by Benedict Anderson.¹⁰¹ Anderson’s ‘imagined community’ refers to the impossibility of all members of one community knowing one another, yet they are connected through their community; resulting in a community that is not imaginary, but imagined. The imagined community was made possible by the coming-together of capitalism and the printing press, which allowed for the mass production and distribution of images that constituted the sense of “comradeship” that turns nation-states into communities.¹⁰² Print culture allowed for more continuity amongst regions, as language evolution was slowed down and print media was spread across people with different idioms and dialects. The recurring images spread in print communication became crucial in the cultivation of an imagined community, as Anderson argues. His work is based on early-modern communities, but in recent decennia, mass media has of course gained a similar influence to print culture and thus played a role in the further formation of imagined communities—and globalisation and the way mass media spread beyond borders of nation-states means that the imagined community is also defined transnationally.

Of particular interest for this thesis is the way natural disasters influence the development of the imagined community. Here, too, mass media play a fundamental role, as the framing of natural disasters in news media is able of to take disasters out of a national context, turning them into global events. In that context, media “are *performatively enacting* them, *constituting* them on the public stage, and visualising and narrating them in ways that demand recognition and response.”¹⁰³ The immediate representation and the narrative formed to communicate these disasters influences the continued perception of disasters, and as Jensen argues, it is “through the repetition of images, tropes and narrative schemes that disasters become fixed entities in a region’s or nation’s history.”¹⁰⁴ Historian Michael Kempe shows

¹⁰¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. (London: Verso, 2006).

¹⁰² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 15.

¹⁰³ Simon Cottle. “Mediated Disasters in the Global Age: On the Ritualization of Catastrophe,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Cultural Sociology*. (Oxford: University Press, 2012): 260.

¹⁰⁴ Jensen, “Floods as Shapers,” 221.

the influence water, which “comes from everywhere” and is “omnipresent,”¹⁰⁵ has played in Northern German communities. Northern Germany too finds itself in marshland, wedged between a major river (the Elbe) and the sea. Kempe illustrates that within Northern Germany, the repetition of floods throughout the centuries and the impact they have had, has led to a “coastal culture of disaster.”¹⁰⁶ Kempe illustrates how commemorative speeches, literature, arts and photography have together formed a narrative that became fundamental in Northern Germany, but which in turn, influenced the national identity. The narrative about floods ultimately instrumentalised the national discourse about different forms of disasters, such as a cholera outbreak in Hamburg or the bombing in the Second World War.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, Kempe writes, contemporary discourse adds to the ongoing narrative, listing an example of writers who wonder how Northern Germany should cope with future floods, as flood risks increase under anthropogenic climate change. Kempe concludes that such questions continue and give new meaning to its cultural narrative.

Kempe’s analysis starts with the sixteenth century, and ends in the twenty-first. His analysis shows how such cultural narratives are based upon centuries of development, and how influential such narratives are in creating the imagined community. Natural disasters have a large influence on identity formation, and Kempe has shown that flood narratives even permeate discourse on non-natural disasters. Given that Germany is a far larger country than the Netherlands, it is worth considering how floods have influenced Dutch identity formation, and how Dutch history formed the cultural narrative identified as ‘Nederland Waterland.’

Moral Geography

In 1964, the Dutch author Godfried Bomans published a somewhat ironic essay on Dutch identity, taking a stab at the Dutch people as characterised by their individualism, irony, and perseverance (to a fault).¹⁰⁸ Although Bomans subverts his own essay when he writes that the Dutch cannot gauge their own character (“Hij maakt deel uit van het probleem, dat hij behandelen moet” (he is part of the problem that he must handle)) his essay holds some interesting observations, particularly on the Dutch and their relationship to water, which Bomans considers to be indispensable.¹⁰⁹ He identifies three elements that together make up

¹⁰⁵ Michael Kempe, “‘Mind the Next Flood!’ Memories of Natural Disasters in Northern Germany from the Sixteenth Century to the Present,” *The Medieval History Journal* 10, no. 1&2 (2007): 333.

¹⁰⁶ Kempe, “Mind the Next Flood!,” 228.

¹⁰⁷ Kempe, “Mind the Next Flood!,” 251-253.

¹⁰⁸ Godfried Bomans, “Wat is een Nederlander,” 1964, collection *Literatuurmuseum*, B 00706 Bomans, G.

¹⁰⁹ Bomans, “Nederlander,” 20.

the identity of a people: a country's landscape, climate and religion, and notes that the three mutually influence each other.¹¹⁰ The major rivers Rhine and Meuse in the Netherlands, for example, provide an almost clean demarcation line in certain linguistic matters, but strikingly also in the religious matters: the area 'below the rivers' is predominantly Catholic, whereas the area 'above the rivers' is predominantly Protestant;¹¹¹ or, in Bomans' words, the line divides between the dreary people of the North and the jolly people in the South.¹¹²

Bomans does not comment on the influence of the rivers on religion or character, other than marking them as a division¹¹³—but he considers the sea to be essential to Dutch character:

Als je een foto zou maken van de zee en je zou vergeten die te ontwikkelen, dan zou je een Nederlander krijgen. Ik heb dat ooit wel eens gedaan en het kwam uit. Men moet zich de ontwikkeling van onze nationale trekken aldus voorstellen: telkens knabbelden wij een stukje van het water af en zodra we dat veroverd hadden legden we er een dijkje omheen.

(If you were to take a photograph of the sea and you forgot to develop it, you would get a Dutchman. I have done that once and it came true. One should imagine the development of our national traits as follows: we constantly nibbled a piece off the water and once we conquered that, we put a dyke around it.)¹¹⁴

Bomans' notion that the Dutch people equal an undeveloped photograph of the sea is based on two notions: first, that the Dutch are formed and shaped by the sea, and second, that the sea forms their natural enemy, as the sea continuously threatens their continued existence.¹¹⁵ As such, Bomans positions the Dutch as opposite to the sea, but simultaneously created by it: hence the undeveloped photograph, putting forth the notion that the Dutch were formed in, and exist within, the negative of the sea. Simultaneously, as Bomans describes, Dutch

¹¹⁰ Bomans, "Nederlander," 30.

¹¹¹ In Dutch, *onder/boven de rivieren* (below/above the rivers) is a common expression.

¹¹² Bomans, "Nederlander," 30.

¹¹³ Oddly enough, in his reflection on the influence of water on the Dutch character, Bomans considers only the sea. The influence of rivers is only considered in his reflection on the Dutch *polderlandschap* (polder landscape): but here his analysis focuses on the polders and not on the way water runs throughout the Netherlands. A possible explanation might be that the most disastrous floods in Dutch history were caused by the sea rather than the rivers.

¹¹⁴ Bomans, "Nederlander," 21.

In my translation, I've chosen to translate "het kwam uit" as "it came true," but it can also be used to mean "it came out," referring to the successful development of the photograph.

¹¹⁵ Bomans, "Nederlander," 20.

individualism and perseverance is formed by the way the Dutch continuously ‘nibbled pieces of land’ away from the sea and thus feel ‘king over their own piece of polder.’¹¹⁶

Bomans thus concludes that the Dutch personality (individualist and stubborn) is shaped by their surroundings. Bomans’ ironic essay echoes what historian Simon Schama describes in his book on Dutch culture in the seventeenth century.¹¹⁷ In his book, Schama bases himself on Maurice Halbwachs’s understanding of collective memory,¹¹⁸ and uses “moral geography” to illustrate how the Dutch landscape and the distribution of religion and morals influence each other. He directly links impoldering to religion and the Dutch landscape, referring to the Dutch “moral geography” to illustrate how religion and landscape become interlinked.¹¹⁹ He writes that the concept of *beproeving* (ordeal): or the trial by faith, is embedded in Dutch identity through the constant threat of floods and the simultaneous ‘reclamation’ of land from the sea. Particularly the era between 1550 and 1650, during which the Netherlands became an independent nation, the physical landscape of the Netherlands was dramatically altered by creating polders. The cultural significance of the establishment of the Dutch Republic was thus echoed in its physical appearance: the Dutch did not only gain sovereignty over the Spanish, but also over its water. Schama writes that the formative period of the Netherlands, both physical and political, became intrinsically linked in subsequent historical narratives: in true Calvinist rhetoric, “the land was not merely reclaimed but redeemed, and in the process both were morally transformed. So the act of separating dry land from wet was laden with scriptural significance.”¹²⁰ The justification for the cultural identity that was built upon this understanding was threefold: historical—in that much of the Dutch lands were once under water, moral—following upon the hard work needed to create polders, and scriptural—the continued survival below sea-level was partly made possible by God’s good grace.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Bomans, “Nederlander,” 21.

¹¹⁷ Schama’s book refers to the seventeenth century as the ‘Golden Age,’ a term that is commonly used in Dutch culture and history, but which also has been criticised due to the way it does not reflect that the prosperity in the seventeenth century was caused partly by the Dutch share in the transatlantic slave trade, and the exploitation and violence that came with the Dutch East India Company. When referring to the seventeenth century, I choose to refrain from using the ‘Golden Age’ for that reason.

¹¹⁸ Halbwachs’ introduced the concept ‘collective memory,’ posing that memory exists not only in the individual form, but also in the collective, dependent on groups and societies. Halbwachs argued that individual memory is strongly influenced by collective memory. The concept of ‘collective memory’ paved the way for cultural memory.

¹¹⁹ Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 24.

¹²⁰ Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 34-5.

¹²¹ Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 35.

As an example of the way watery ordeals defined Dutch identity, Schama brings up the example of the drowning cell, a seventeenth-century punishment in which a prisoner was placed in a cell that gradually filled up with water, and in order to survive they had to pump the water out continuously.¹²² Not many historical records survive on the drowning cell, but seemingly the punishment was halted after one prisoner chose to drown rather than pump out the water—implying that the cell was not used for extensive periods of time. Schama writes that “the frightening experience inflicted, *in extremis*, on the ‘patient’ was designed to be an intensive rehearsal of the primal Dutch experience: the struggle to survive rising waters.”¹²³ The notion of flood as punishment went further than prison cells, as floods were continuously repositioned as deluges in sermons. A series of floods in the eighteenth century, for example, were reframed as punishments by priests, who preached that the floods were the result of homosexuality, thus creating the image that water was “purifying.”¹²⁴

The Dutch ‘moral geography’ in which religion and floods become intertwined is also represented in literature, as historian Lotte Jensen shows. In research on the six hundred years of cultural representation following the Saint-Elisabeth’s Day flood of 1421,¹²⁵ Jensen shows that local historical narratives from the seventeenth century often portrayed the flood as punishment for the ongoing siege of Dordrecht.¹²⁶ The siege of Dordrecht was a dispute between Jacoba van Beieren and her uncle Jan van Beieren, who both felt that they inherited the city. Their dispute resulted in a siege, and unrest remained for years after the siege. Depending on which side authors chose, historians at the time often depicted either Jacoba or Jan to be in the wrong, and attributed the flood to their faults. The history by Pieter Langendijk, for example, published in 1745, posed the flood as the punishment for the actions of Jan van Beieren in the siege, whereas other authors writing in the same timeframe said the same for Jacoba.¹²⁷ Later research showed that the dykes broke at least partly as a result of overdue dyke maintenance during the siege and following dispute, meaning that it can partly be attributed to the parties in the siege. However, regardless of what side historians chose in the dispute, the important thing is that all cast the flood of 1421 as punishment for their

¹²² Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 22-3.

¹²³ Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 24.

¹²⁴ Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 601.

¹²⁵ The Saint-Elisabeth’s Day flood of 1421 is in fact one of three Saint Elisabeth floods in the fifteenth century, named after her since the floods happened on or close to her name day. The flood of 1421 was by far the most disastrous of the three, and is thus most commonly referred to as the Saint-Elisabeth’s Day flood.

¹²⁶ Lotte Jensen, “‘De Zee, die Brult van Toorn’. De Verbeelding van de Sint-Elisabethsvloed in de Literatuur,” in *De Groote en Vreeselike Vloed: De Sint-Elisabethsvloed 1421-2021* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2021): 108-116.

¹²⁷ Jensen, “De Verbeelding,” 111-116

opponents. At the same time, the trope of a baby lost to the waves but recovered features prominently in such narratives – as Lotte Jensen has shown, this trope originated in narratives about the Saint-Elisabeth’s Day flood. The flood was thus not only used as retribution for sins, but was also employed to show God’s good will.

Bring in the Dutch

Narratives about the Saint-Elisabeth’s Day flood are not only about pointing fingers, or about babies lost at sea. The 1841 poem *St. Elizabeths Nacht* (St. Elisabeth’s Night) by Reijer Hendrik van Someren,¹²⁸ is an epic retelling of the flood, centring on a noble couple who are torn apart when the husband is asked to fight for Jan van Beieren. In the culmination of the three-part poem, the husband manages to return to his beloved, but when he tries to keep his family safe, he places the baby in the cradle, which is swept away by the sea. Miraculously, the parents are saved by the priest, and reunited with their baby later.¹²⁹ The epic ends by commending the Dutch water management:

’t Is, Neêrland, ’t is uw taak om zeeën te gebieden! / Ja, zeeën te gebiën, en vijanden
verslaan, / Ziedaar, wat Nederland sinds eeuwen kon bestaan! / De Godheid nam dit land
in haar bijzondere hoede, / En ’t keerde zee en vloed en ’t breidelde hun woede;¹³⁰

(It is, Netherlands, it is your quest to command the seas! /Yes, to command the seas, and
to defeat enemies. / Behold, that the Netherlands has existed for centuries! / The deity took
this country under her special heed, / and it [the Netherlands] turned sea and flow and it
curbed their fury;)

Van Someren ends his epic poem not by reflecting upon the family, now reunited, or on the way divine intervention is visible in the flood, but also in the reconnection with the lost child. Instead, the poem concludes with a glorification of Dutch water management: God may have taken the Netherlands under its guard, but it was the Dutch that turned sea and flow, who ‘curbed’ the sea’s fury.

¹²⁸ Reijer Hendrik Van Someren, *De St. Elizabeths Nacht, ao 1421: Dichtstuk in Drie Zangen* (Utrecht: L.E. Bosch en Zoon, Boekdrukkers-Uitgevers, 1841): 47.

¹²⁹ Jensen, “De verbeelding,” 118-120.

¹³⁰ Van Someren, *De St. Elizabeth’s Nacht*, 47.

Note that in Dutch, *vloed* both means “flood” and “flow,” meaning that it can also be translated to mean “it turned sea and flow and curbed their fury.” I would argue that in the original, both meanings are implied, as the action of turning sea and flow would also decrease flood risks.

The pride felt in the continuous *strijd tegen het water* is also visible, for example, in the poem placed at the Eastern Scheldt Storm Surge Barrier, the most ingenious of the thirteen Deltawerken. The poem reads: “hier gaan over het tij / de wind, de maan en wij.”¹³¹ (Here the tide is ruled by / the wind, the moon, and us.) The poem represents the idea deeply rooted in Dutch consciousness



Ed Leeftang, "Hier gaan over het tij / de wind, de maan en wij," inscription carving, Oosterscheldekering.

that landscape is *maakbaar*: a notion strengthened by the perceived difference between nature and culture, as well as the Dutch landscape as characterised by dykes and polders.¹³² The ultimate example of *maakbaarheid* today are the Deltawerken, a series of thirteen defensive structures, established after the 1953 flood. When the Tour de France in 2015 led past the Deltawerken, Rijkswaterstaat, the Dutch Ministry for Infrastructure and Water Management, put up a promotional campaign advertising the Deltawerken and the Dutch expertise in watermanagement.¹³³ Rijkswaterstaat claims that knowledge on water management is an important Dutch export product, and claims that the slogan “Bring in the Dutch” has become



Advertorial on the Oosterscheldekering, *Mwah Tekstuele Verwenners*.

a well-known proverb in global discourse on water management.¹³⁴ Based on this, they put up promotional slogans for the second leg of the Tour, which led past some of the Deltawerken. These posters had exclamations like “Water you thinking? Bring in the Dutch,” “Don’t fight the water, manage it” and “Water cycles through our veins.”¹³⁵ It may be hard to quantify the claims

¹³¹ Ed Leeftang, *Hier gaan over het tij de wind de maan en wij*, inscription carving, Oosterschelde, viewed January 18, 2019.

¹³² In the 2019 rapport *Denkend aan Nederland*, the argument is made that the *maakbaarheid* of Dutch landscape extends beyond watermanagement, visible for example in the *ruilverkaveling* (land consolidation) that became commonplace after the Second World War, where farmland was exchanged between farmers to increase efficiency of farming.

Jeanet Kullberg, Jurjen Iedema and Anniek Schlette. “Het Nederlandse Landschap en Nederlandse Identiteit,” in *Denkend aan Nederland: Sociaal en Cultureel Rapport 2019I*, ed. Joep de Hart, Pepijn van Houwelingen and Maroejska Versantvoort (Den Haag: Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, 2019): 12.

¹³³ “Rijkswaterstaat—Bring in the Dutch!” *Mwah Tekstuele Verwenners*, July 15, 2015, https://www.mwah.nl/water-you-thinkingbring-in-the-dutch/rijkswaterstaat_bitd/

¹³⁴ “Delta Works,” *Rijkswaterstaat*, accessed March 18, 2022, <https://www.rijkswaterstaat.nl/en/water/water-safety/delta-works>.

¹³⁵ “Rijkswaterstaat,” *Mwah Tekstuele Verwenners*.

made by Rijkswaterstaat, but that does not mean that the dual attitude towards floods and flood management has not become internationally known. The Netherlands and their relationship to water is, for example, also found in Anglophone climate fiction. Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140*, in which much of the world as we know it has been flooded as result of rising sea levels, features New Amsterdam: a floating township "directed by Holland's government to wander the Earth helping intertidal peoples in whatever way possible."¹³⁶ In the most recent work by Neal Stephenson, *Termination Shock*, a fictional Dutch queen holds an important role in international geoengineering efforts to cool down the Earth for she is, after all, the ruler of one of the nations most endangered by climate change.¹³⁷ In the short story "The Netherlands Lives with Water" by the American author Jim Shepard, the protagonist fittingly notes that "it had always been the Dutch assumption that we would resolve the problems facing us from a position of strength,"¹³⁸ remarking on the optimism that goes hand in hand with ingenious water management.

The importance of water for Dutch cultural identity also shows in a large scale study on this topic, carried out in 2019.¹³⁹ In determining what is considered to be 'typically' Dutch, as well as what elements of Dutch culture create a sense of belonging amongst citizens, fourteen dimensions are identified. The third dimension, which is ordered by perceived importance, is water management, ranking only after symbols (first) and traditions and habits (second).¹⁴⁰ In a closer examination on the role of different landscapes in the shaping of Dutch cultural identity, seven out of ten landscapes identified are associated with water and water management, such as the Wadden Sea, the polders, or the rivers.¹⁴¹ 82.3% of participating citizens finds the Dutch polder landscape to be typically Dutch, for example.¹⁴² The researchers conclude that water management plays a bigger role amongst the elderly than amongst young people,¹⁴³ but they also conclude that water and water management play an

¹³⁶ Kim Stanley Robinson, *New York 2140* (London: Orbit, 2018): 223.

¹³⁷ Neal Stephenson, *Termination Shock* (New York: William Morrow, 2021).

¹³⁸ Jim Shepard, "The Netherlands Lives with Water," in *You Think That's Bad* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011): 59.

¹³⁹ Joep de Hart, Pepijn van Houwelingen and Maroesjka Versantvoort. *Denkend aan Nederland: Sociaal en Cultureel Rapport 2019* (Den Haag: Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, 2019).

¹⁴⁰ Maroesjka Versantvoort, Sjoerd Beugelsdijk, Sander Muns and Juliette de Wit. "Verschillen en Overeenkomsten tussen Sociale Groepen," in *Denkend aan Nederland: Sociaal en Cultureel Rapport 2019*, ed. Joep de Hart, Pepijn van Houwelingen and Maroesjka Versantvoort (Den Haag: Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, 2019): 7-12.

¹⁴¹ Kullbert et al, "Het Nederlandse Landschap," 26.

¹⁴² Kullbert et al, "Het Nederlandse Landschap," 26.

¹⁴³ Versantvoort et al, "Verschillen en Overeenkomsten," 8.

important role in cultivating Dutch cultural identity, and that this is threatened by anthropogenic climate change.¹⁴⁴

At the same time, as the global sea level rises and flood risks increase yet simultaneously long periods of droughts in the summer threaten the groundwater basins,¹⁴⁵ one might expect widespread concern amongst Dutch citizens. A 2020 rapport on the awareness of water and associated risks however showed that the majority does not feel overly concerned about flood risks in the Netherlands.¹⁴⁶ Although most participants feel the risk posed by rising sea levels,¹⁴⁷ they also underestimate the flood risks and are unaware of what measurements provide protection.¹⁴⁸ However, the researchers suggest that the faith in the Dutch government and their capability to take measures in a timely manner,¹⁴⁹ might be why participants are not particularly worried about the risks.¹⁵⁰

The cultural narrative of ‘Nederland Waterland’ highlights a number of elements that have become representative for the Anthropocene and the global climate change discussion. The optimism and faith in the Deltawerken, for example, directly link back to ongoing discussions about geoengineering and particularly geoengineering optimism. Many have criticised geoengineering optimism because it does not acknowledge the reality of the climate crisis, and instead finds refuge in the idea that humankind will find a solution. As three sustainability scientists argued in a Dutch newspaper: geoengineering optimism mistakenly gives the idea that we can halt or even revert climate change, and that we therefore do not need to change everyday practice.¹⁵¹ Secondly, geoengineering allows mankind to increase its influence on the planet and the global climate, and we cannot always predict the impact actions will have on ecosystems.¹⁵² The continued optimism that comes from faith in geoengineering in the Netherlands is thus part of a larger discussion, about the influence of geoengineering and placing all our eggs in one basket, so to say.

¹⁴⁴ Kullbert et al, “Het Nederlandse Landschap,” 26.

¹⁴⁵ Marcel aan de Brugh, “Pech voor de Aardappel: Nederland Moet Natter,” *NRC* February 28, 2022, <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2022/02/28/pech-voor-de-aardappel-nederland-moet-natter-a4095088>.

¹⁴⁶ Lisanne van Thiel and Philine Mol, “Waterbewustzijn van de Nederlandse bevolking: Hoogwaterbeschermingsprogramma,” *Kantar* (2020): 4.

¹⁴⁷ Van Thiel and Mol, “Waterbewustzijn,” 6.

¹⁴⁸ Van Thiel and Mol, “Waterbewustzijn,” 8-15.

¹⁴⁹ Van Thiel and Mol, “Waterbewustzijn,” 15.

¹⁵⁰ Van Thiel and Mol, “Waterbewustzijn,” 4.

¹⁵¹ Frank Biermann, Aarti Gupta and Jeroen Oomen, “Nederland Mag Nooit Inzetten op Geo-engineering,” *NRC*, January 17, 2022, <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2022/01/17/nederland-mag-nooit-inzetten-op-geoengineering-a4079981>.

¹⁵² Naomi Klein, “Geoengineering: Testing the Waters,” in *On Fire: The Burning Case for a New Green Deal* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019): 102-6.

Literary History

In the previous sections, I have attempted to sketch what the narrative ‘Nederland Waterland’ entails, and how it combines flood history and water management with commemoration, narrative tropes and national pride. In the subsequent paragraphs, I will show where this narrative can be found—adding to the examples used for illustration in the previous paragraphs—focussing first on fictional narratives and finally on Dutch cultural memory. This short discussion of Dutch literature that engages with ‘Nederland Waterland’ also serves to illustrate how Dutch literature about landscape and the environment has always inherently been about climate—and therefore, that Dutch climate fiction existed long before the twenty-first century rolled around.

A recurring image in Dutch flood narratives is the trope of a baby’s cradle lost in the flood. That trope originated in narratives about the Saint-Elisabeth’s Day Flood, but continued to become commonplace in Dutch flood narratives—and within other contexts, too. The painting on the right, by a British painter, is assumed to have been inspired by news accounts about a local flood, as explained by the museum’s caption to the painting.



John Everett Millais, *A Flood*, oil on canvas, 1870, Manchester Art Gallery.

However, “Millais’ painting falls into a tradition more persistent and ancient”¹⁵³: that of the cat and the cradle, as first appeared on painted wooden panels, originating from the end of the fifteenth century, that pictured the Saint-Elisabeth’s Day Flood of 1421 on one side, and the life of Saint Elisabeth on the other.¹⁵⁴ Lotte Jensen has shown that although there is no historical basis for this story, it became widely associated with the Saint-Elisabeth’s Day Flood following the panels, and has appeared in countless representations of the 1421 flood and other floods since.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Julian Treuheurz, “The Cat and the Cradle,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 46 (1983): 240-242, <https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.2307/751127>.

¹⁵⁴ *De Sint-Elisabethsvloed, Meester van de Heilige Elisabeth-Panelen*, ca. 1490-1495, oil on panel, 127.5 x 110.5 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/collectie/SK-A-3147-B>

¹⁵⁵ Hanneke van Asperen, Marianne Eekhout and Lotte Jensen, “De Sint-Elisabethsvloed in Woord en Beeld. Een Inleiding,” in *De Grootte en Vreeselijke Vloed: De Sint-Elisabethsvloed 1421-2021*, ed. Hanneke van Asperen, Marianne Eekhout and Lotte Jensen (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2021): 11-26.

The baby-in-the-cradle trope is not the only widespread narrative surrounding Dutch floods. The statue in the image on the left is found in Harlingen and shows the figure Hansje Brinker, who allegedly saw a tiny tear in the dyke as he biked past, and kept the gap closed



Grada Rueb, *De Held van Haarlem*, stone statue 1950, Spaarndam.

with his finger for hours until help came, so that the hole wouldn't grow bigger. The myth of Hansje Brinker originated from a children's book by an American author, and the story holds little historical credibility.¹⁵⁶ It is particularly famous in American contexts,¹⁵⁷ and the statue was placed by the local tourism agency, who came looking for the origin of the myth.

In theory, the myth of Hansje Brinker is far from typically Dutch, as most Dutch flood narratives refrain from solely heroic narratives, and instead often focus on the victims of the flood.¹⁵⁸ The baby in the cradle is an exception, but in most common interpretations of that trope, the miracle rescue is attributed to higher powers or to sheer luck, never to a single heroic figure. The myth of Hansje, although not of Dutch origin, has nevertheless found its way into some corners of Dutch culture. It appeared in the recent Covid-19 crisis, for example, as a metaphor, and the trope commonly appears in children's literature. The continued use of tropes like the baby's cradle, or Hansje Brinker, show how embedded flood narratives have become in Dutch culture, and how their influence stretches far beyond environmental narratives.

Children's literature, where Hansje Brinker is commonly represented, is precisely where we find many narratives about floods and the Dutch relationship to water. Growing up in the Netherlands, I remember that there are plenty of children's books and picture books in Dutch libraries about floods, ranging from anthropomorphic narratives, found for example in

¹⁵⁶ Lotte Jensen, "De Strijd Tegen het Water in Woord en Beeld: Verbindingen Tussen Heden en Verleden," in *Welke Verhalen Vertellen We? Narratieve Strategieën Rondom Waterbeheer en Zeespiegelstijging*, ed. Lotte Jensen and Adriaan Duiveman (Nijmegen: Radboud Universiteit, 2020): 6-13.

¹⁵⁷ Lizzy Diercks and Hannah Vernooij, "De held in de Nederlandse geschiedenis," *Leidschrift/Helden Des Vaderlands* 22: Heldenverering In Nederland Door De Eeuwen Heen (2007): 113-118. <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/72818>

¹⁵⁸ Theo Meder, "De Sage van Hans Brinker," in: *Wereldgeschiedenis van Nederland*, ed. Lex Heerma van Voss (Amsterdam: Ambo|Anthos, 2018): p. 421-425.

the iconic picture book series *Kikker* (Frog),¹⁵⁹ or historical novels about floods.¹⁶⁰ There are plenty of children's novels about the 1953 North Sea Flood¹⁶¹—which is striking, because representation of the 1953 flood remained scarce in literature in the decades following the flood.¹⁶² A 2015 article on floods in 20th century Dutch children's literature, for example, was based on 89 books: 72 of which were published after 1950, of which 33 referred directly to the North Sea Flood.¹⁶³ One of the most popular children's books about the '53 flood is Jan Terlouw's *Oosterschelde Windkracht 10* (Eastern Scheldt, Wind Force 10).¹⁶⁴ The first part of the novel is a retelling of the events of the North Sea Flood, from the perspective of Anne, a young woman living with her family on a farm in Zeeland. In the second part of the novel, some twenty years later, we see how Anne's sons each represent one side of the debate surrounding the Eastern Scheldt and the proposed dam. The novel follows how protests from environmentalists and fishermen led to the installation of the storm surge barrier, rather than a complete dam. The novel thus simultaneously falls into the tradition of flood writing that focuses on victims of the flood, as Anne loses her brother and grandmother, but also links the flood to the installation of the Deltawerken afterwards. The novel is important because it combines many of the elements involved in 'Nederland Waterland' as a cultural narrative—which in turn, are elements commonly seen in Anthropocene discourse at large. On the one hand, the novel deals with the emotional trauma of the '53 flood and the way water breaks through the everyday life of Anne and her family. In the second part, the novel also deals with the juxtaposition of human safety and environmentally friendly choices. Anne's husband is in favour of closing of the Oosterschelde, his argument deeply rooted in the trauma of the flood. Their sons, however, take the ecological side: closing the Oosterschelde would have disastrous consequences for the local fishing trade and for the ecology of the Oosterschelde. As both parties make their case, the family travels around

¹⁵⁹ Max Velthuijs, *Kikker is een Held* (Amsterdam: Leopold, 1995).

The *Kikker* series are some of the most influential and popular picture books from Dutch origin, which are aimed at children under six. Although the series is not explicitly set in the Netherlands, the use of water and floods for narrative purposes shows how widespread the cultural narrative is, visible already in books aimed at children who cannot yet read.

¹⁶⁰ See, for example: *Het Woeste Water*, by Arna van Deelen (Apeldoorn, De Banier, 2018) about a flood in the fifteenth century.

¹⁶¹ See, for example: Lydia Rood, *De Stem van het Water* (Den Haag, Pixel Perfect Publications, 2015); Jan van Reenen, *Het Water Komt* (Apeldoorn, De Banier, 2016); Hans Petermeijer, *De Nacht dat het Water Kwam* (Tilburg, Zwijzen, 1999); G. ten Haage Blank, *Stormvloed* (Nijkerk, eigen beheer, 1953).

¹⁶² Inge Duine, "De Watersnoodramp: Fictie, Non-Fictie en Cultureel Geheugen," in: *Vooys*, 28.1 (2010): 33.

¹⁶³ Erik Mostert, "Children's Books as a Historical Source: Flooding in 20th Century Dutch Children's Books," *Water History* 7, no. 3 (2015): 362.

¹⁶⁴ Jan Terlouw, *Oosterschelde Windkracht 10*. (Rotterdam: Lemniscat, 2019): 39th ed, first ed. 1976.

Since the literary market of the Netherlands is incredibly small, a 39th edition of any novel means that it can be considered to be a commercial success.

Zeeland, visiting *lieux-de-mémoire*: such as the site where Anne's brother was found after the flood, but also the wildlife surrounding the Oosterschelde. The memory of the flood is thus used to show the different sides to the debate around the Oosterschelde, placing equal emphasis on the national trauma of the flood as well as the environmentalist approach to its aftermath.

Oosterschelde, Windkracht 10 incorporates all the themes that Mostert identifies as common in Dutch children's literature about floods, namely: nature, technology, governance, individuals and religion. These elements are, of course, not unique to Dutch children's literature, although the importance of these elements (and of flood narratives in general) in children's literature illustrates what is being taught to future generations—and therefore, what is considered important in Dutch cultural memory. Regardless, many of these themes appear outside of children's literature. The discussion of Bomans' essay on Dutch character at the beginning of this chapter, for example, already highlighted the importance of religion and individualism. These elements are echoed, for example, in the 1933 novel *De Waterman* (The Waterman) by Arthur van Schendel,¹⁶⁵ which centres on the life of Maarten Rossaert. Maarten is considered an outcast in his community, but is also known for his uncanny understanding of water,¹⁶⁶ for which he is nicknamed 'de Waterman.' Living in the middle of the Rhine-Meuse-Scheldt delta, Maarten's life is shaped by water and the moments the rivers overflow. As a child, Maarten is berated by his parents for playing in the water, but he comes to fear the water when he witnesses a murder, where the body is thrown into the water, and second, when his mother and sister drown in a flood. Maarten, who has been out helping for most of the flood, is told by the pastor that the deaths of his family are punishment for his sins.¹⁶⁷ As an adult, Maarten remains an outcast, not fully adhering to the Calvinist morals he grew up with, and especially when he falls in love with a Catholic woman. Water and religion become intertwined in *De Waterman*, or, as Katie Ritson puts it: "The lowlands are permeated and sodden not just with water but with the Word, and the Bible is a source of guidance in life in Dutch society: the landscape is made and unmade with the symbolism of a jealous God who judges and punishes."¹⁶⁸

De Waterman is an example of how religion and water were intertwined, especially in the centuries before widespread secularization in the Netherlands. It illustrates the way floods

¹⁶⁵ Arthur van Schendel, *De Waterman*, digital ed, (Rotterdam: Nijgh & Van Didtmar, 1933). *DBNL*, https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/sche034wate01_01/colofon.php

¹⁶⁶ Van Schendel, *De Waterman*, 54.

¹⁶⁷ Van Schendel, *De Waterman*, 34.

¹⁶⁸ Ritson, *Shifting Sands*, 40.

were often framed as punishments in sermons, but at the same time, it critiques the rigid religious attitude that was common in that era. Maarten, who is already considered an outcast early in his life in his protestant family, finds a home with his aunt, who is happy to take him in and continues to provide a loving home for him throughout adulthood. When Maarten is criticised by the pastor for taking off his clothes in order to tend to the dykes, his aunt does not respond, but skips her weekly visit to church.¹⁶⁹ *De Waterman* thus shows a change in perspective on the religious use of floods, by making readers empathise with Maarten, whose uncanny abilities save many lives in floods throughout the novel. At the same time, Maarten is not presented as a heroic figure: rather as a solitary figure, whose only interest lies in the water. Maarten marries the Catholic girl, and they have a son, but when the child drowns while afloat, his wife refuses to continue living on the water. Maarten cannot separate from it, so the two break up and Maarten continues to sail the rivers.

Literary representation of historical floods increased in the twenty-first century, coinciding with the fifty-year anniversary of the 1953 flood. Although the 1953 flood remained underrepresented outside of children's literature in the decades following the flood,¹⁷⁰ the new century brought new narratives. The novel *1953: De Storm (1953: The Storm)* is a dramatic retelling of the flood,¹⁷¹ which was also adapted into a major film.¹⁷² Although the influence of the church steadily decreased over the twentieth and twenty-first century, religion features prominently in most of these narratives – likely at least partly because some of the regions susceptible to flooding, such as Zeeland, are part of the Bible Belt.¹⁷³ As Rick Launspach puts it in *1953: De Storm*: “Wat een morbide ironie dat op de rustdag van de Heer juist het vrome Zeeland aan zijn lot werd overgelaten.” (What morbid irony that on the Lord's Day of rest, it was the pious Zeeland that was left to its own devices.)¹⁷⁴ We find further reflections on religion and water in later literature about the North Sea Flood: for example in *Het ruisen van de zee (The swishing of the sea)*.¹⁷⁵ The novel is set in 2003 and centres on Anton, a teacher stuck in the past. He lost his father in the 1953 flood, and grew up in a strictly religious household, scarred by the loss of his father. Even after his mother's death, Anton's life is determined by the loss of his father and his religious

¹⁶⁹ Van Schendel, *De Waterman*, 56-7.

¹⁷⁰ Duine, “De Watersnoodramp,” 32.

¹⁷¹ Rik Launspach, *1953: De Storm* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2009).

¹⁷² Sombogaart, *De Storm*.

¹⁷³ The Bible Belt is used to refer to the regions in the Netherlands with the highest concentration of orthodox protestants.

¹⁷⁴ Launspach, *1953: De Storm*, 210.

¹⁷⁵ Catharina IJzelenberg, *Het ruisen van de zee* (Amsterdam: Ambo|Anthos, 2017).

upbringing. As he grows close to one of his students, he is increasingly plagued by memories of his parents, and the narrative is constantly interrupted with flashbacks. His religious background and his memories of the flood both obstruct his life, until he learns to deal with his trauma. When the student asks him to assist in taking care of her and the child, he holds up the pretence that the child is his to the orthodox protestant village community, leaving behind his upbringing. The novel shows how religion and water remain intertwined after the flood, but also the long lasting effects of the trauma caused by the '53 flood. It stands apart from many other North Sea Flood narratives because it is not set in 1953, but rather shows how the flood has become embedded in national memory and the gaps left behind by the flood.

This is far from a complete overview of water and floods in Dutch literature, as there are countless examples. It serves, however, to illustrate how water has become almost synonymous with certain elements of Dutch culture: primarily religion and ideas of *maakbaarheid*, related to the optimism and confidence that comes from constant water management and maritime engineering. To understand the narrative of 'Nederland Waterland,' as well as gauge how the meaning of that narrative changes in the Anthropocene, it is crucial to understand how water has gained a cultural meaning—how the Dutch have become the equivalent of an undeveloped photograph of the sea. Furthermore, particularly children's literature illustrates how the cultural meaning of water and floods are communicated to future generations, and in doing so, what remains in Dutch cultural memory.

Commemoration

Finally, to round off this analysis, I want to move away from fictionalised history and consider the large number of monuments and other commemorative practices for floods that can be found throughout the Netherlands, as monuments are important locators for cultural memory. Monuments are an example of what historian Pierre Nora has identified as *lieux-de-mémoire*: sites of memory that are material, symbolic and functional.¹⁷⁶ These sites are not necessarily physical, but can refer to any location, object or concept that holds meaning in collective memory. Nora writes that *lieux-de-mémoire* are “boundary stones of another age,”¹⁷⁷ and that their importance lies in the way modern society now relies primarily on history to give shape to its past, rather than ‘living’ memory. *Lieux-de-mémoire* are sites of meaning, created by the urge to remember, but are simultaneously susceptible to different

¹⁷⁶ Nora, “Between Memory and History,” 19.

¹⁷⁷ Nora, “Between Memory and History,” 12.

significations: “capable of metamorphosis.”¹⁷⁸ Most importantly is that these sites of memory are important in the building and cultivation of national identities. Monuments are obvious sites of memory, important in signalling what memory is considered important within societal context, but the flood anniversaries that I discuss below are likewise sites of memory, important aids in discovering what is considered important and meaningful in Dutch society.

The twenty-first century meant an increase in flood memorials in the Netherlands. This was partly visible for the 1953 flood, with the fiftieth anniversary of the flood, but there was also renewed attention in the public sphere for other floods. The 600th anniversary of the Saint-Elisabeth’s Day flood in 2021 was marked by a large exhibition in the museum of Dordrecht, for which the wooden panels mentioned earlier were borrowed from the Rijksmuseum. The centenary of the last Zuiderzeevloed (Zuiderzee flood)¹⁷⁹ led to a flood-themed exhibition in the Zuiderzeemuseum, combining the commemoration of the 1916 flood with information about present day water management.¹⁸⁰ The highlight of the exhibition was the flooded street, built to recreate the experience of walking around a recently flooded village—stench included. In similar fashion, the Noordelijk Scheepvaartmuseum (Northern Maritime Museum) in Groningen commemorated the 300-year anniversary of the Kerstvloed (Christmas Flood),¹⁸¹ which affected the north of the Netherlands, with an exhibition that focused on the flood, the engineer who led dyke repair following the flood, and the traces the flood left in the local landscape. And, all anniversaries aside, in 2011 a bike-route was launched in Gelderland, leading past archaeological traces of villages that were lost to floods throughout the centuries,¹⁸² which shows also a renewed interest in floods outside of their anniversaries.

¹⁷⁸ Nora, “Between Memory and History,” 23.

¹⁷⁹ The Zuiderzee is a former body of water, that was divided in two by the Afsluitdijk (Barrier Dam) in 1932. The Afsluitdijk forms a road between Fryslân and North-Holland, and turned the water south of the dam into a sweet water lake now known as the IJsselmeer. The water north of the dam is now considered to be part of the Waddensea. The Afsluitdijk was a direct response to the last Zuiderzee flood, in 1916. Following the construction of the Afsluitdijk, large areas of land were reclaimed from the water and turned into polders, creating the new province Flevoland.

¹⁸⁰ “Zuiderzeemuseum in Teken van Herdenking Watersnood,” *Historiek*, accessed June 28, 2022, <https://historiek.net/zuiderzeemuseum-in-teken-van-herdenking-watersnood-1916/55865/>.

¹⁸¹ “Kerstvloed 1717,” *Historiek*, accessed June 28, 2022, <https://historiek.net/kerstvloed-1717-tragedie-heldenmoed/72407/>.

¹⁸² “Verdronken Dorpen West,” *Regio Arnhem*, accessed June 28, 2022, https://www.visitarnhem.com/routes/3924400678/verdronken-dorpenwest?ins_rd=d3d3LnZlcmRyb25rZW5kb3JwZW4ubmw%3D.



Nationaal Monument Watersnoodramp 1953, Ouwerkerk.

In particular, I want to return to the *Nationaal Monument Watersnoodramp 1953* (National Monument for the North Sea Flood 1953),¹⁸³ which was presented on the fiftieth anniversary of the '53 flood. The monument is situated in Ouwerkerk, Zeeland, and also houses the *National Watersnoodmuseum* (National Flood Museum).¹⁸⁴

In the location of the monument, at the site where initial dyke reparations in 1953 were finalised, the duality that is central to 'Nederland Waterland' echoes: it is as much a monument for the lives lost in the flood, as it is for what came after: the creation of the Deltawerken. This system of thirteen defensive structures has since been internationally recognised as an industrial "gem,"¹⁸⁵ and its creation is as much a part of the monument as the casualties of the flood. As said before, the monument consists of three parts: the statue, the concrete caissons and the environment. Respectively, the monument thus commemorates the victims of the flood, the immediate responses to and the long-term consequences of the flood, and finally the way the flood and those solutions forever altered the landscape. The monument thus perfectly illustrates the different elements of 'Nederland Waterland' that I have described so far. However, it is also an important example of flood memory in the Netherlands because it is strikingly different from most other monuments for the North Sea Flood. Many localised monuments in Zeeland emphasize the individual: memorials are often plaques with the names of victims, and statues often portray hands holding back waves or mothers carrying babies away from the water. The national monument is in that sense surprisingly different, as it makes no mention of the individual lives that were lost in the flood, but rather commemorates the absences left behind: represented particularly in the caption on the statue, which was chosen by inhabitants of Zeeland and reads *Het water, de storm, de stilte* (the water, the storm, the silence).¹⁸⁶ At the same time, the monument commemorates the way the landscape was changed both due to the flood and the subsequent establishment of the Deltawerken, by including the natural landscape surrounding the environment in the monument. There is little information provided on this, and it remains unclear to what extent nature is part of the monument, as there are no

¹⁸³ Nationaal Monument Watersnoodramp, Ouwerkerk.

¹⁸⁴ Nationaal Watersnoodmuseum, Ouwerkerk.

¹⁸⁵ "Gems of Rijkswaterstaat", *Rijkswaterstaat*, accessed March 20, 2022, <https://www.rijkswaterstaat.nl/en/about-us/gems-of-rijkswaterstaat>.

¹⁸⁶ *Het water, de storm, de stilte*, inscription carving, Ouwerkerk. Viewed January 18, 2019.

borders given to what is considered to be monumental and what is not.¹⁸⁷ However, in the choice for including the monument's immediate surroundings in the monument, it commemorates not only the way water and then engineering altered the landscape, but also the way the land is continuously altered under the sway of the sea—the way water holds agency over land. Nora writes that *lieux-de-mémoire* are capable of 'metamorphosis', that their meaning and significance depends on the society around them.¹⁸⁸ From that perspective, I can only argue that the monument simultaneously commemorates the way anthropogenic climate change alters the Dutch landscape, and in turn, life in the Netherlands. The inclusion of the direct environment of the monument within the monument, as well as the way the museum includes future perspectives, hints at the dynamic memory articulated within the monument. It may not be explicitly expressed within the monument, but in the Anthropocene, I find that the monument for the '53 flood is as much as monument to the way water has and always will hold its sway over life in the Netherlands. Furthermore, in its commemoration of the influence water has over land, like in the new Rijkswaterstaat strategies, we find the first hints of an ecological shift in the narrative of 'Nederland Waterland.' It acknowledges that the Dutch people have always malleablised their landscape, but also that the sea still holds sway.

Flood Fiction

So far, I have sketched an overview of 'Nederland Waterland' in terms of its content and the location of the cultural narrative, illustrating how for example secularization has altered the contents of 'Nederland Waterland.' The narrative is deeply rooted in Dutch history, as well as the physical landscape, and combines elements of pride, national trauma and self-legitimation. The dual nature is also reflected in the poem "Herinnering aan Holland" by Hendrik Marsman, with which I started this thesis. The poem's first line is amongst the most cited lines from Dutch literature, but the last line, which comments on the disasters brought forth by water, are far less famous. Here, too, one finds that behind a story of self-legitimation and national pride also lies a history filled with loss. It is precisely that loss that serves as a constant reminder that ultimately, water holds final say over land.

The question that arises then, is how this narrative holds up in the Anthropocene, as rising sea levels and an increase in weather extremities influence flood risks. For that reason, the remainder of this chapter turns to consider contemporary Dutch climate fiction about

¹⁸⁷ *Nationaal Watersnoodmonument*, Ouwekerk.

¹⁸⁸ Nora, "Between History and Memory," 23.

flooded futures to see how writers imagine the future of the Netherlands, and in turn, how they imagine the future of Dutch cultural identity. The three flood narratives under consideration in this thesis all easily fall into the traditional conventions of the climate fiction genre, as they are firmly situated within the debate of anthropogenic climate change. Although Koos Tiemersma's *Ûnder Wetter* was published in 2009, and is in that sense set apart from Adriaan van Dis' *KliFi: Woede in de Republiek* and Eva Meijer's *Zee Nu*, respectively published in 2021 and 2022, all three novels position the flood as direct consequence of anthropogenic climate change. Of course, from a literary perspective, these novels were not published far apart, but within the discourse of climate change, a lot has changed in the eleven years between the publication of *Ûnder Wetter* and *KliFi*.¹⁸⁹ Particularly within the Netherlands, climate change has gained traction in public debate, as only in recent years the Dutch government has started to seriously consider the climate crisis in policy making.¹⁹⁰

The first characteristic that contemporary Dutch flood narratives thus add to the narrative of 'Nederland Waterland' is that they imagine a futuristic Netherlands where anthropogenic climate change has caused a flood that, despite ingenious water management, wreaks havoc on the country. The slight exception to this is to this is *Ûnder Wetter*, where the flood is ultimately invited in, as a committee has concluded that the only way the Netherlands can continue to survive is by giving up all areas that lie below sea level—but here too, anthropogenic climate change has trumped the Dutch water management. From the very first lines of the novel, however, it becomes clear that this cannot have been an easy decision, as water is essential to Dutch history and culture:

It fersûpen sit ús yn de genen en gjin dokter krijt it derút. Spitich dat wy it mar net begripe wolle, mar – ferjou i tús - wy binne de snoadsten net.¹⁹¹

(Drowning is in our genes, and no doctor can get it out. It's a shame that we will not understand it, but—forgive us—we are not the brightest.)

¹⁸⁹ Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*, for example, the documentary that majorly influenced public discussion of climate change, was released in 2006, and the agreed-upon limit of 1.5°C global temperature increase was first suggested in the Copenhagen summit of 2009, which ultimately failed.

¹⁹⁰ In 2021, the Dutch government established a new ministerial seat for climate change, showing for the first time that the climate crisis will have a central place in policy-making.

¹⁹¹ Tiemersma, *Ûnder Wetter*, 9.

This is how Sil starts his diary, on the day that Polish soldiers move into his city, Ljouert, to keep the peace. Immediately, Sil positions the Frisian people, and by extent, the Dutch, within the Dutch history of flooding: no matter what anyone might say or do, the Dutch (and the Frisian) do not change.

The foreword to *Ûnder Wetter*, written in 2140, makes clear that the decision to return the low-lying areas to the sea were part of Climate Accords. This, along with the sentiment that ‘it fersûpen us yn de genen sit’ immediately highlights the dilemma the Netherlands faces, and thus by extent, its cultural identity as put forward in ‘Nederland Waterland’: the country, known for its continued survival below sea-level, is now ultimately trumped by the way anthropogenic climate change and rising sea levels endanger human life in the Dutch delta. The same irony is presented in *Zee Nu*: the first few days, when ebb ceases to exist and the sea slowly moves towards the edge of human civilization, there is little worry except amongst scientists. Media and politicians alike are not worried: “Gelukkig weten we in Nederland hoe we met water om moeten gaan,”¹⁹² (Thankfully, we in the Netherlands know how to handle water,) the news reporter comments cheerfully. When worry arises as the sea starts flooding over dykes, the prime minister decides that a speech from the king should help to keep peace: “Over standvastigheid. En de geschiedenis, dat we het water vaker overwonnen hebben.”¹⁹³ (About perseverance. And our history, that we have overcome the water before.) All faith in Dutch water management aside, by the end of the novel, the Netherlands has ceased to exist and the entire population is relocated to refugee shelters in Germany. *Zee Nu* and *Ûnder Wetter* both portray a future where it is not the water itself, but the consequences of human behaviour, that prove to be fatal to centuries of life below sea-level, but also to ‘Nederland Waterland.’ As I will show in the next chapter, these novels also imagine a future where Dutch cultural identity is threatened: *Zee Nu* questions the continued use of the Dutch language now that the country has disappeared under water, and a central theme in *Ûnder Wetter* is how the Frisian identity will be preserved if the Frisian population is scattered in Eastern Europe. Both novels thus illustrate first how the Dutch identity is built upon the continued survival despite its watery odds—and subsequently, how the rising water threatens not only the landscape and daily life in the Netherlands, but also erodes a cultural identity built on living with water.

One finds a different approach in Adriaan van Dis’ *KliFi*, where the central dilemma is not that the Dutch find their demise in rising sea levels, but rather that Dutch leadership

¹⁹² Meijer, *Zee Nu*, 15.

¹⁹³ Meijer, *Zee Nu*, 44.

continually fails to acknowledge that anthropogenic climate change is causing trouble: in this case, a hurricane that causes a flood. The Dutch president continues to deny that the storm has had any disastrous consequences, and in his speech on the matter, he only refers to the way the Dutch have survived worse:

Alles is onder controle. Water stijgt, water daalt. [...] Wij beschermen onze grootse beschaving. Wij zullen puinruimen. Ons gewortelde volk kan tegen een stootje. Wat stijgt zal ook weer dalen. Wij zullen herwinnen. Wij zullen herbouwen. Alles is onder controle.¹⁹⁴

(All is under control. Water rises, water falls. [...] We protect our grand civilization. We will clear the rubble. Our rooted people can take a beating. What rises will fall again. We shall recover. We shall rebuild. All is under control.)

In a traditional populist manner, the president reminds the people that this time is no different from what they have seen before. Water rises, water falls, but the Dutch remain. What the president continuously ignores, however, is firstly that this flood has caused deaths and put many people out of a home, and secondly, that anthropogenic climate change will continue to disrupt daily life. Instead, the president poses climate change as “klimaathysterie” (climate hysteria),¹⁹⁵ and as propaganda spread by “de linkse klik” (the leftist clique),¹⁹⁶ and as nothing more than a good opportunity: “Wat hebben jullie tegen mooi weer? Amsterdam wordt Bordeaux. Koop een korte broek.”¹⁹⁷ (What have you got against nice weather? Amsterdam will become Bordeaux. Buy some shorts.)

The president’s comments in *KliFi* echo that of the prime minister in Eva Meijer’s *Zee Nu*:

Zelf had hij niets met de koude seizoenen en zag hij de voordelen van een mediterraan klimaat, voor het toerisme en de groenteteelt en ook voor hemzelf, maar hij paste ervoor dat in het openbaar te zeggen, voor je het wist kreeg je problemen.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Van Dis, *KliFi*, 63.

¹⁹⁵ Van Dis, *KliFi*, 40.

¹⁹⁶ Van Dis, *KliFi*, 63.

¹⁹⁷ Van Dis, *KliFi*, 27.

¹⁹⁸ Meijer, *Zee Nu*, 75.

(He himself didn't care for the cold seasons, and he saw the advantages of a Mediterranean climate, for tourism and for the vegetable harvest and for himself too, but he knew better than stating that in public, before you knew it you had trouble.)

Such comments are ultimately also part of the 'Nederland Waterland' narrative in the Anthropocene, as they mimic comments made by Dutch politicians. The unnamed prime minister in *Zee Nu* strongly resembles the Netherlands current prime minister, Mark Rutte. When the prime minister in *Zee Nu* is first introduced, he is characterised by the major events of his political career: some of which include a racism scandal within the tax authorities, and the MH17 crash.¹⁹⁹ The MH17 airplane crashed in 2014, with 196 Dutch citizens amongst the victims, marking it one of the biggest national traumas in recent years, and the tax scandal is a blatant reference to the *Toeslagenaffaire* (tax benefit scandal), where institutional racism within the tax authorities led to the wrongful accusations of fraud for thousands of families. Both of these events happened under Mark Rutte's term, who, like the unnamed prime minister, was elected for his fourth term in 2021. The association is strengthened by the fact that Rutte has made similar comments about climate change: in 2019, he commented that "we moeten nog wel lekker kunnen blijven barbecueën."²⁰⁰ (We must still be able to enjoy a barbecue.) Similarly, the unnamed populist president in *KliFi* bears strong resemblance to both Rutte and particularly the prominent populist politician Thierry Baudet, as the president's speeches closely resemble Baudet's, including a similar tendency to use Latin phrases. Resemblance to Rutte comes for instance from the following statement: "Ik zie ons volk als een prachtige porseleinen schaal,"²⁰¹ (I see our people as a beautiful porcelain bowl) resembling Rutte's letter to the Dutch public where he compared the Dutch people to a breakable and brittle vase.²⁰²

The way fictional politicians in Dutch climate fiction position climate change as something positive is thus not all too far removed from reality. However, this is not the only way climate change and its consequences are framed in a positive way. Other flood narratives, all imaging a future where the Netherlands is ultimately (partly) flooded, imagine ways to turn an underwater country into an opportunity for revenue. The new coastline in *Ûnder Wetter*,

¹⁹⁹ Meijer, *Zee Nu*, 17.

²⁰⁰ Hans van Soest, "Niet Doorslaan met Klimaat, We Moeten Wel Lekker Kunnen Blijven Barbecueën," *Algemeen Dagblad*, 24 April 2019, <https://www.ad.nl/politiek/rutte-niet-doorslaan-met-klimaat-we-moeten-lekker-kunnen-blijven-barbecueen~aa20bc7a/>.

²⁰¹ Van Dis, *KliFi*, 165.

²⁰² Mark Rutte, "Beste Nederlanders," *Algemeen Dagblad*, December 17, 2018, <https://www.ad.nl/politiek/weerschrijft-rutte-open-brief-aan-alle-nederlanders-we-moeten-ons-land-beschermen~a12f5e26/>.

for example, will be used to build power plants harnessing power from the tide. After most of the Netherlands has flooded and the Dutch population has fled to Germany, one of the protagonists in *Zee Nu* comments:

Ik denk dat ze over een paar jaar excursies gaan organiseren, zei Wilg. Met cruiseschepen. En dat mensen dan in gebouwen gaan duiken. Dan kunnen ze het Rijksmuseum ook weer in ere herstellen.²⁰³

(I think that in a few years' time, they will start organising excursions, Wilg said. With cruise ships. And that people will dive into buildings. Then they can also re-instate the Rijksmuseum.)

That instinct is not wrong, when considering other examples of Dutch climate fiction. The exhibition *Koele Wateren*, held in the Museum of Gouda, thematically centred around the portrayal of water as friend or enemy in the past four centuries, also exhibited an animated video entitled *Gouda Atlantis*. The video imagines life in Gouda in 2200, as Gouda is situated in the lowest area of the Netherlands and thus very susceptible to floods. The video starts with a history lesson explaining “het onwaarschijnlijke succesverhaal”²⁰⁴ (the unlikely success story) that is ‘Nederland Waterland,’ and continues to imagine an alternative future for the Netherlands, where the Dutch coastline is moved further inland. However, Gouda does not disappear: but it becomes an underwater city and thus remains a tourist hotspot.

Ondanks de waarschuwingen van het waterschap bleef Gouda verder bouwen. Gouda werd een stad waar al het belastinggeld moest worden besteed aan de strijd tegen het water. Na een lange periode van ontkenning heeft de stad Gouda van de nood een deugd gemaakt. Gouda werd de wegzinkende stad, het Venetië van de Lage Landen.²⁰⁵

(Despite warnings from the water board, Gouda continued to expand. Gouda became a city where all taxes were used for the battle against water. After a long period of denial, the city

²⁰³ Meijer, *Zee Nu*, 221.

²⁰⁴ Museum Gouda, “Gouda Atlantis,” *Youtube*, April 11, 2021, 0.00-0.07. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lxyl13gSAGo>.

²⁰⁵ Gouda Atlantis, *Youtube*, 5.48-6.05.

of Gouda made made a virtue of necessity. Gouda became the sinking city, the Venice of the Lowlands.)

Gouda Atlantis, too, considers the future of the Netherlands untenable in its current state, but imagines that the Netherlands' pragmatic attitude will turn the water into a source of economic profit, through tourism. The short story "Proximale Falanx" by Jan van Aken imagines a future where rising sea levels proved too much for the dykes, resulting in a country that is largely underwater. The water has divided the Dutch into two groups: those living in flooded areas, and those who have moved to higher land and remember little of the country before the flood. The narrator is a tour guide, who takes tourists on a trip through Amsterdam and shows them how life has changed. We find a similar focus on tourism for example in Christiaan Weijts' *Furore*. The novel combines a timeline in 1904 and one in 2054, and although the focus of the novel does not lie with the flood or the future of the Netherlands itself, here too we find a country that has been partly returned to the sea, under threat of further flooding. The novel's protagonist in 2054 is a virtual reality researcher, who works on VR-tourist projects. His specialty lies with art history, but he allows us glimpses in the future of tourism in the Netherlands, particularly when he comments: "Recreatie was het aspirientje voor de fantoompijnen van een geamputeerd land."²⁰⁶ (Recreation was the aspirin for the phantom pain of an amputated country.) He summarises the view of the Netherlands that is being articulated by contemporary Dutch climate fiction: a future where the low-lying Dutch land is (partly) reclaimed by the sea, but also a future where Dutch ingenuity now means making money with water-logged tourism. All together, these contemporary stories about floods as result of anthropogenic climate change in the Netherlands picture a future where the Netherlands, after a long history of managing, is ultimately flooded. The results differ: based on these stories, the Netherlands will either find a way to turn their new situation into a profitable situation, or Dutch culture will wash away with the flood.

²⁰⁶ Christiaan Weijts, *Furore* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij De Arbeidspers, 2020): 84.

Chapter 3

‘Als het Water Komt’: Anticipating the future²⁰⁷

In *Anthropocene Fictions*, Adam Trexler observes that because of the cultural iconography of floods, they have become “the dominant strategy” to locate climate change.²⁰⁸ Floods have become an archive filled with meaning, and are so well-represented in cultural and literary history across the planet, that even cultures unfamiliar with floods from their own experience have come across flood narratives. In an introduction to a special issue on floods in ecocritical narratives, Bracke and Ritson write: “in our current moment of environmental crisis, floods are often invoked to stand in synecdochally for the breakdown of our known ecologies.”²⁰⁹ This is in part because floods happen for a myriad of reasons: heavy rainfall, tsunamis, heavy rainfall following periods of extreme drought, storms, and so forth. Versions of the great deluge myth, for example, can be found in different religions and mythologies, and floods are now also commonly presented in the climate change debate.²¹⁰ Precisely because floods incorporate such an extensive literary history, having become “archaic images,” the use of floods within climate fiction “affects the temporality of the genre.”²¹¹ Within the Dutch context, floods hold additional cultural significance, as they form the basis of the cultural narrative ‘Nederland Waterland,’ as shown in the previous chapter.

The previous chapter has also shown a first look at how the novels situate themselves within the narrative of ‘Nederland Waterland,’ and how that narrative might change in the future if contemporary Dutch climate fiction is somewhere in the ballpark of what the future will hold. This chapter will continue to discuss how the novels situate themselves in Dutch cultural memory, by employing a methodological framework originating from the intersection of ecocriticism and cultural memory studies: anticipatory memory. As such, this chapter will first introduce the framework, and then continue with a close reading of the novels to illustrate how they employ Dutch flood memory, and what they draw attention to in doing so.

²⁰⁷ “Als het water komt” translates to “When the water comes,” although “als” can also mean “if.”

²⁰⁸ Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions*, 82.

²⁰⁹ Atrid Bracke and Katie Ritson, “Introduction,” in *Green Letters: Waters Rising* 24, no. 1 (2020), 1.

²¹⁰ Within the Dutch context, traditionally a predominantly Christian country, Noah’s ark comes to mind as an example of the deluge story. Similarly, versions of the deluge appear in Greek, Hindu, Mesopotamian and Chinese mythology, to name a few.

²¹¹ Irr, “Climate Fiction in English,” 7.

Anticipatory Memory

The first chapter already discussed how the constant back-and-forth between past and future, as mediated in the present, further complicates the human capacity to understand and think with the temporal scale on which climatological change happens. Regardless, that mode of thinking, which mediates future representation of the past in the present moment, has become characteristic for our current day and age, but also echoes recent calls for cultural memory studies to become more future-oriented.²¹² Craps observes a shift in memory studies, following upon the three phases identified by Astrid Erll: the first focussing on the emergence of the field in the early twentieth century, the second having begun roughly with Pierre Nora's conceptualization of *lieux-de-mémoire* and focussing on the role of the nation-state, and the third being the phase focussing on global, transnational and transcultural memory practices.²¹³ Craps adds to Erll's observations by identifying a fourth phase, emerging as the result of "growing consciousness of the Anthropocene" and focussing on the scalar possibilities of memory, while simultaneously moving away from the "persistent humanism that can be seen to prevent it from adequately addressing the vast spatiotemporal magnitudes of the Anthropocene."²¹⁴ The scholarship emerging in this fourth phase focuses on the intersection of environment and memory studies, resulting in concepts like 'environmental memory' and 'anticipatory memory.' These concepts work to reconcile the spatial and temporal dimensions of ecological change, but also hold space to engage with memories of past societies, on how they dealt with impactful ecological change.

One of the scholars working on founding a framework for environmental memory is Lawrence Buell, who describes environmental memory as "the intimation of human life and history as unfolding within the context of human embeddedness," which can occur on the human timescale as well as move into deep time.²¹⁵ Buell splits up environmental memory into four categories, based on the spatial and temporal scale on which they operate: the biogeological, the personal, the collective and the national.

Biogeological memory works on the planetary scale, imagining the interdependence of human life and the planet, closely resembling the third scale of Timothy Clark's scale reading,

²¹² Stef Craps, "Climate Change and the Art of Anticipatory Memory," *Parallax* 23, no. 4 (2017): 486, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2017.1374518>.

²¹³ Astrid Erll, "Travelling Memory," *Parallax* 17, no. 4 (2011): 4-18, <https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1080/13534645.2011.605570>.

²¹⁴ Stef Craps et al, "Memory Studies and the Anthropocene: A Roundtable," *Memory Studies* 11, no. 4 (2018): 500, <https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1177/1750698017731068>.

²¹⁵ Lawrence Buell, "Uses and Abuses of Environmental Memory," in *Contesting Environmental Imaginaries: nature and Counternature in a Time of Global Change*, ed. Stephen Hartman (Leiden: Brill, 2017): 96.

as explained in the first chapter. Biogeological memory places human life on the planetary scale, and Buell acknowledges that this scale is hard to transform into lived experience, which leads to the second frame, the personal.²¹⁶ Here, human lived experience is connected to localised memory, as human memory is stronger when linked to specific locations. Thirdly, the collective frame centres on communal narratives, and the national frame focuses on the imagined communities established by collective memory practices, strengthened for example through *lieux-de-mémoire*. Buell stresses that these categories in his framework seek “to make a preliminary case for the importance of ‘environmental memory’,” which is why I will continue to discuss other conceptualizations of similar concepts.

A special issue of *Textual Practice* focuses on planetary memory to navigate the scalar complexities of the Anthropocene. The introduction defines planetary memory as follows:

By registering the literary inscription of individual and collective memories of climate change experience alongside the growing archive of vanishing landscapes and species that characterise the emerging planetary conditions of the Anthropocene, the notion of planetary memory enables us to join macro-, meso- and microscopic perspectives.²¹⁷

Planetary memory, they argue, reshapes the foundations of memory studies, as planetary memory is not only found within traditional *lieux-de-mémoire*, but includes non-human elements, and therefore focuses also on the memory of a time before (and possibly after) human civilization.²¹⁸ In the afterword to the same special issue, Claire Colebrook concludes that twenty-first century literature already “has oriented itself beyond the individual of early novels, beyond the family, social whole or decades of nineteenth-century fiction, and beyond the centuries of the epic tradition,”²¹⁹ but that planetary memory provides a possibility to move beyond the confinements of a humanist understanding of the Anthropocene, that to this date “is still all too human.”²²⁰

Yet another conceptualization of environmental memory comes from Richard Crownshaw, who coins ‘speculative memory’ to step away from other “future-oriented” concepts which focus on remembrance, and moves towards a concept that foregrounds

²¹⁶ Buell, “Uses and Abuses,” 101.

²¹⁷ Lucy Bond, Ben De Bruyn & Jessica Rapson, “Planetary Memory in Contemporary American Fiction,” *Textual Practice* 31, no. 5 (2017): 859, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2017.1323458>.

²¹⁸ Bond et al, “Planetary Memory,” 859-860.

²¹⁹ Claire Colebrook, “The Time of Planetary Memory,” *Textual Practice* 31, no. 5 (2017): 1017, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2017.1323495>.

²²⁰ Colebrook, “The Time of Planetary Memory,” 1023.

mediation.²²¹ “The fiction of speculative memory demonstrates the mediations of what is actually remembered from the future as well as the mediated vantage points of retrospection.”²²² Through speculative memory, attention is drawn to the mediation of both the way future memory presents the past, but also to the way different systematic and ideological discourses mediate memory. Crownshaw argues that speculative memory is able to narrate the slow violence articulated by Rob Nixon, as “the environment itself is lent a catastrophic agency,”²²³ and particularly foregrounds the complexities of displacement as caused by anthropogenic climate change. The use of speculative memory within literature, Crownshaw argues, foregrounds the mediation of future memory, but also draws attention to the capacity of literature to narrate such complexities.

Crownshaw’s approach is similar to that of Craps, who uses ‘anticipatory memory’ to refer to the narratological technique where protagonists in futuristic narratives try to make sense of the present by looking back in time, into a past that is at least partially shared with the reader, drawing upon the reader’s memory.²²⁴ As such, the reader’s lived experience and memory is brought into a fictional history, and thus a fictional future. Craps signals this technique to be common in climate fiction, and adds that it is often found in mediated form, such as in journals. Such narratives mobilise memory “in the hope of averting the catastrophe being remembered, which at the time of reading or viewing has not yet (fully) happened.”²²⁵ Like Crownshaw, Craps places emphasis on the use of mourning in such narratives: “the prescient grieving going on in fictional future histories of climate change clearly ties in with such efforts to reclaim mourning as a potent political practice.”²²⁶ Anticipatory memory is thus brought in to imagine the future consequences of present actions, drawing upon the past to mediate such events, as well as making them affective.

What Craps’ use of anticipatory memory is lacking, however, is an inclusion of non-human forms of memory, which is what Liedeke Plate also signals in a critical response to his article.²²⁷ Instead, Plate proposes a way of thinking where climate change is seen as “the material, embodied memory of past decisions and mistakes.”²²⁸ Cultural and ecological changes caused by climate change are not merely in the future, but are already part of our

²²¹ Richard Crownshaw, “Speculative Memory, The Planetary and Genre Fiction,” *Textual Practice* 31, no. 5 (2017): 890, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2017.1323484>.

²²² Crownshaw, “Speculative Memory,” 890.

²²³ Crownshaw, “Speculative Memory,” 891.

²²⁴ Craps, “Climate Change,” 479.

²²⁵ Craps, “Climate Change,” 488.

²²⁶ Craps, “Climate Change,” 489.

²²⁷ Plate, “Climate Change,” 493.

²²⁸ Plate, “Climate Change,” 494.

reality. Plate returns to Pierre Nora's conceptualization of *lieux-de-mémoire* and suggests a reconsideration of *milieux-de-mémoire*. Plate argues that although at the time Nora's shift from *milieux* to *lieux* made sense, the Anthropocene calls for a recalibration of memory on the planetary scale. Plate's *milieux-de-mémoire* thus occur on a "planetary/global, climatological/ecological and anticipatory" scale, and are different from Nora's *milieux* in that they are non-anthropocentric, that the "human and the geological commingle."²²⁹ The memory environment that Plate proposes is one that holds space for geological memory and human memory, that draws attention to the entanglement of the human and the non-human, but without the humanist focus that remains prevalent in memory studies.

Finally, in his contribution to the special issue of *Textual Practice* on environmental memory, Pieter Vermeulen transforms the concept of environmental memory to the narratological representation in literature, by introducing the 'future reader.' The future or posthumous reader is a "narrative-enabling device" uniquely situated to provide an image of the future, as well as a call to action.²³⁰ The role of the future reader is to caution contemporary readers, for whom "there still is supposed to be a chance."²³¹ Vermeulen writes that the future reader does not attempt to provide a solution to the issues narrated, but merely shows the progression of time and writes a cautionary tale. Vermeulen too identifies that environmental memory in fiction often occurs through figures capable of making such observations, like a geologist.²³² Unlike Craps however, Vermeulen writes that the future reader oscillates between two modes: "that of a future historian and that of a future geologist—the former competently *interpreting* humanity's current failures, the latter typically dispassionately *reading* the record of its passing."²³³

In the subsequent paragraphs, I will look at the way environmental memory appears in *Ûnder Wetter*, *Zee Nu* and *KliFi*, drawing upon the different frameworks set out above but following the terminology set out by Craps and Plate, as well as Vermeulen. The analysis will focus on the way memory is mediated within these novels, and what discourses are foregrounded by the use of anticipatory memory.

²²⁹ Plate, "Climate Change," 495.

²³⁰ Vermeulen, "Future Readers," 872.

²³¹ Vermeulen, "Future Readers," 872.

²³² Vermeulen, "Future Readers," 874.

²³³ Vermeulen, "Future Readers," 874.

At the end of his analysis of the climate change in literature, Ghosh writes:

[if] the most intransigent way the Anthropocene resists literary fiction lies ultimately in its resistance to language itself, then it would seem to follow that new, hybrid forms will emerge and the act of reading itself will change once again, as it has many times before.²³⁴

One of the ways that such hybrid forms might develop within climate fiction is anticipatory memory, as both Craps and Crownshaw, in the frameworks provided above, stress the mediated dimension of anticipatory memory. Craps highlights that anticipatory memory comes in the shape of a narrator situated for retrospection, such as an archivist or a geologist.²³⁵ In *KliFi*, we find librarian Jákob, whose manuscript makes up most of the book. The novel is introduced however with a prologue from the nameless narrator, who will write about events yet to come:

Om deze roman te kunnen schrijven is mij door de uitgever een aantal documenten ter hand gesteld met het verzoek een waarheidsgetrouw beeld te geven van gebeurtenissen die nog zullen plaatsvinden. De beschreven personen hebben—voor zover nog in leven en voor zover zij nog geboren moeten worden—ingestemd met de verandering van hun namen en woorden en samen met de auteur een sprong in de tijd gemaakt.²³⁶

(In order to write this novel, the publisher has provided me with a number of documents, requesting that I would present a true account of events yet to come. The people described have—insofar they are still alive and insofar they will be born—agreed with the changes to their names and words, and made a jump in time together with the author.)

The prologue highlights two significant elements. Firstly, it complicates the temporal setting of the novel, as the narrator situates the events of the plot ahead of current time. By stressing that the events of the future are represented as accurately as possible, the novel presents itself as a prediction rather than fiction—as future history. This is what literature, specifically speculative fiction, can do: “narrate things that are not certain—that are not even true, but that

²³⁴ Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*, 84.

²³⁵ Craps, “Climate Change,” 489.

²³⁶ Van Dis, *KliFi*, 7.

are still credible or plausible—in ways that articulate different spheres of knowledge.”²³⁷ The narrator returns to this positioning of *KliFi* in the epilogue, when he writes: “Misschien kunnen we het noodlot samen nog een knietje geven, al trappelen de presidenten wel in de coulissen.”²³⁸ (Perhaps we can cut off fate at the knees together, although the presidents are eagerly waiting in the wings.) The narrator thus not only writes future history, but actively encourages readers to change the future—echoing the activist agenda Craps finds to be characteristic for such narratives.²³⁹

In addition to the call to action, the prologue also foregrounds the mediated dimension of the future history presented here. The narrator, in his admission of the changing of names, acknowledges the mediated and altered narrative that is based on documents provided by the publisher—which readers understand to be the manuscript that Jákob sends to his publisher at the end of the story. The mediated dimension of the novel, however, is further complicated within Jákob’s typescript, influenced by two narrating voices. Jákob is a librarian who has now taken up the pen, as he feels the need to articulate his opinions. The second voice is Poema: Jákob’s inner voice of self-doubt and censorship. Poema (Dutch for puma) is described like an animal: signified once by pawprints, introduced as “het monster met de denkbeeldige viltstift en schaar.”²⁴⁰ (The monster with the imaginary felt tip pen and scissors.) Poema cuts paragraphs, blacks out fragments, reproaches him when he feels proud of his work and encourages him when he feels like giving up. His censorship is clearly presented on the page:

Mag ik ██████ Of zal ik <<<<<< Of zullen we ~~doorstrepen~~? Poema popelde.²⁴¹

(Can I ██████ Or should I <<<<<< Or should we ~~strike through~~? Poema was itching.)

Poema is primarily present in the beginning of the typescript, as Jákob is figuring out how to articulate his reason for writing and how to start his process, and at the end, as Jákob is preparing the manuscript to send to his publisher. Poema’s agency is visible, for example, in choosing the title. Jákob has doubts about his title, before deciding on *KliFi*, and his doubts are strengthened by Poema’s critique on *KlimaatFictie* (ClimateFiction) as title. When he

²³⁷ Vermeulen, “Future Readers,” 875-6.

²³⁸ Van Dis, *KliFi*, 205.

²³⁹ Craps, “Climate Change,” 487.

²⁴⁰ Van Dis, *KliFi*, 20.

²⁴¹ Van Dis, *KliFi*, 29.

The typography is exactly the same in the novel.

writes *KliFi* down instead, Poema approves: “Jákob had het nog maar net opgetikt of hij voelde een 🐾 op zijn schouder: *Titel akkoord.*”²⁴² (Jákob had only just written it down when he felt a 🐾 on his shoulder: *Title approved.*) Here, Poema’s agency in altering the manuscript is made visible: on the page, but also in the fact that ultimately, the novel is titled *KliFi*.

However, Poema is not always equally successful in convincing Jákob. At the beginning of the manuscript, written entirely in the third voice, for example, the two disagree about how the flood should be presented:

Rustig, we komen hier samen uit. Mijn voorstel: ontsmet je woorden als een wond, hou het klein, maak van de ramp een incident.

‘En al die doden dan, en die honderden daklozen?’

Overdrijf niet.

‘Het halve land stond onderwater.’

*Nu is het weer droog. Niemand zal je geloven.*²⁴³

(Calm down, we will figure this out together. My proposal: disinfect your words like a wound, keep it simple, turn the disaster into an incident.

And what about all those who died, and the hundreds who lost their home?’

Don’t exaggerate.

‘Half the country was flooded.’

Now it’s dry again. Nobody will believe you.)

The alterations Poema (in italics) suggests are reminiscent of the way the populist president represents the flood: as an exaggeration, nothing more than an incident. Strikingly enough, Jákob refrains from describing the flood as a disaster, although he does not refer to it as an incident either. Instead, he lets facts speak for themselves: the warning messages about the storm beforehand, the way the river flooded, and particularly the stories told by those seeking refuge on his land. Similarly, at the end of the manuscript, Poema rears his head again and suggests optimistic changes to the ending. After some of the refugees, along with Jákob’s close friend and neighbour Boer Kees (Farmer Kees) are shot down at a protest that quickly

²⁴² Van Dis, *KliFi*, 21.

²⁴³ Van Dis, *KliFi*, 13.

turns violent, Jákob provides a different version of events than presented on the news. He focuses on the peaceful protest, juxtaposing how they were quickly framed as violent by police and media alike. Poema suggests, again resembling what the president might suggest, that Jákob should alter his description of the protest, so that Boer Kees remains hopeful after being shot, and that one of the refugees holds her smile after she is hit in the face. Neither character is mentioned again by Jákob, and his initial description stays in place. Regardless, the suggestions made by Poema and the way that Jákob (partially) accepts some, as well as Poema's materialised agency in altering the narrative, foreground how the narrative is mediated: both by Jákob and Poema, and then again, by the narrator.

One might suggest that the narrator appears as Poema in the story, but close reading renders this reading unlikely. Readers are first formally introduced to Jákob in the third chapter, which contains his life story. The narrative voice clearly changes in this chapter, as Jákob is introduced with his first and last name, and Jákob's characterisation in this chapter is observational: "Hemmelbahn stond zich er lang op voor een susser te zijn, een bruggenbouwer."²⁴⁴ (Hemmelbahn had long identified himself as an appeaser, a builder of bridges.) The narrator lays out Jákob's life history, from how he and his family left Hungary at ten years old, to the house he bought with his late wife to escape the buzz of the city. The chapter is alternated with passages from Jákob's hand, where he combines quotations from the president (in red capital letters, per Poema's suggestion) and his own opinion on politics. The narrator's passages are descriptive, hinting at patterns in Jákob's life, whereas Jákob's passages rely on indirect characterisation. There is thus a clear difference between Jákob, Poema and the narrator. All three influence the narrative, but particularly Poema's influence is materialised on the page. Vermeulen's distinction between the geologist and the historian as narrative voices in future histories is helpful here to understand the role Jákob and Poema play within *KliFi*. Vermeulen writes that the future reader alternates between a geologist and a historian, where the former simply records the events of future history, and the latter contextualises and interprets these events.²⁴⁵ In Vermeulen's reading, both modes appear within one narrative voice, but in *KliFi*, Jákob is the geologist, and Poema and the narrator both function as historians. This reading is further strengthened by Jákob's characterisation as someone who is uninvolved in politics, unmotivated to take action: "Jákob vond zichzelf geen denker, laat staan een dissident, daar was hij te klein voor, te meegaand van aard."²⁴⁶ (Jákob

²⁴⁴ Van Dis, *KliFi*, 33.

²⁴⁵ Vermeulen, "Future Readers," 874-6.

²⁴⁶ Van Dis, *KliFi*, 15.

didn't think of himself as a critic, let alone a dissident, he was too small for that, too accommodating.) What follows from this is the conclusion that three narrative voices are at play in *KliFi*, two of which (Poema and the narrator) alter the narrative alter the narrative and present a mediated future history.

As Crownshaw concludes, such mediations foreground the “socio-economic, political and ideological discourses” at play in the novel.²⁴⁷ In *KliFi*, the mediation particularly foregrounds the political discourse, which is presented as the cause for the turn of events as presented in the future history of the novel. Jákob's narrative clearly shows how the future history presented in the novel leads to the Dutch republic, and the subsequent consequences. His narrative simultaneously builds upon the cultural memory of the contemporary reader, for example in this passage:

Jákob en Agnes waren vóór de Grote Verandering verhuisd, toen het land nog luid van stemmen was en nuance schiftte tot haat. Het vertrouwen in de overheid was gering. Regels waren er om te overtreden. Half overwonnen virussen of niet, feesten zou je en je geilheid vieren.²⁴⁸

(Jákob and Agnes had moved before the Major Change, when the country was still loud with voices and nuance made way for hatred. Faith in the government was minimal. Rules were made to be broken. Partially surmounted viruses or not, all would party and celebrate their horniness.)

Here, one finds anticipatory memory at work, as the narrative reflects back on the Covid-19 pandemic, which we can assume to be prevalent in the memory of any reader.²⁴⁹ Particularly the emphasis on the way faith in the Dutch government decreased during and after the pandemic resonates with Dutch citizens, as the acting cabinet during most of the pandemic fell in the beginning of 2022. The novel thus not only draws upon the memory of global events, but also on localised memory that continues beyond an understanding of ‘Nederland Waterland’ that has been discussed in the previous chapter. This phrase becomes particularly important however, because what follows after the “Grote Verandering” is the rise of a

²⁴⁷ Crownshaw, “Speculative Memory,” 890.

²⁴⁸ Van Dis, *KliFi*, 37.

²⁴⁹ Since *KliFi* was published in 2021, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, the ‘partially overwon viruses’ seems an obvious reference to that pandemic.

populist politician who ultimately transforms the Netherlands into a republic.²⁵⁰ In the description that follows, the president's words closely resemble an interview with the Dutch populist politician Thierry Baudet, thus further drawing upon the memory of Dutch readership. Anticipatory memory, as seen both in the mediation and the use of Dutch cultural memory, is thus used to foreground a political discourse—an element to which I will return in a few paragraphs.

The mediated dimension of anticipatory memory is primarily foregrounded in *KliFi* through the material presentation on the page: in the way Poema's alterations are at times made visible with censored words. In similar fashion, Jákob (per Poema's suggestion) adds in fragments from the president's speeches, always in red capital letters. When news spreads that the storm and subsequent flood might have been more impactful than initially communicated, Jákob sums up the observations made by journalists on victims and damages. He ends his paragraph by including the presidential remarks on the matter: "**LATEN WE DANKBAAR ZIJN VOOR DE MENSEN DIE ONS LEREN POSITIEF TE BLIJVEN.**"²⁵¹ (LET'S BE THANKFUL FOR THE PEOPLE WHO TEACH US HOW TO STAY POSITIVE.) Jákob himself, in his role of geologist, does not directly comment on the matter, but through the juxtaposition about facts about the flood (the coast seems to be unreachable and body bag shares increased in value) with the presidential commentary (which, in populist fashion, answers no questions at all) readers are encouraged to draw their own conclusions: that with leadership like the president's, there is no attention to the victims of the flood, nor will any critical questions be answered. At times, Jákob draws upon his father's stories about growing up in Hungary. He does not explicitly point at the resemblances in Hungarian history and the Dutch republic, staying in the role of geologist, but readers can find the resemblances.

Within the novel, anticipatory memory is mediated, both in Jákob's manuscript but also materially on the page. As a result, the novel as a whole becomes a cautionary tale. What *KliFi* cautions for, is both the result of anthropogenic climate change (as materialised in the novel's title) and the underlying political discourse. One of the ways this is mediated is through Poema, whose suggestions often fall in line with the contemporary *zeitgeist* as articulated by the populist president. More importantly, however, are the stories told by the refugees on Jákob's land, which are central to Jákob's manuscript. The refugees are all former inhabitants of De Kuil (The Pit): an unmarked village, not appearing on any maps, on low-lying ground and thus completely flooded. In its essence, the setting of the story is typically

²⁵⁰ Van Dis, *KliFi*, 37.

²⁵¹ Van Dis, *KliFi*, 131.

Dutch. Jákob's house is situated on a *terp*, which are commonly found in Dutch coastal regions and floodplains. The refugees, from a low-lying village known as De Kuil (The Pit), find themselves forced to relocate to higher ground as their village is flooded, but Jákob's *terp* remains dry. Seemingly, what has changed in the Dutch republic is a different allocation of space. Currently, most of the Dutch population is centred in the Rhine-Meuse-Scheldt delta, as well as the Dutch capital, the political capital, the Rotterdam harbour and its main airport. In *KliFi*, however, it seems that the low-lying land is now inhabited by people who are marginalised within Dutch society. The refugees are voiceless, as their hometown is unregistered on any maps, and their existence is unregistered in any system, as Jákob is tasked with their documentation. Jákob, who records far more than their name and civil status, goes against presidential decrees by documenting their stories and thus providing them with a voice. This is presented, for example, by Kano: "Kano was haar níeuwe naam, de oude had ze in het water verloren."²⁵² (Kano was her *new* name, she had lost her old name in the water.) The refugees presenting themselves at Jákob's desk are aware that Jákob provides them with an opportunity to make their stories heard: and as such, they request that Jákob uses their new names, that he writes down the details they consider important. However, as the narrative progresses, the refugees find that making their voices heard in Jákob's manuscript is not enough: they want to take action. "Wij passen niet in jouw saaitaal, ouwe inktpot. Ik wil niet geeuwen maar schreeuwen."²⁵³ (We don't fit into your boring language, old inktpot. I don't want to yawn, I want to yell.) As such, Jákob's friends leave the *terp* to protest the republican government, and are shot down. At the end of the novel, Jákob's neighbour Kees becomes disabled as a result of his injuries, and Kano has lost her teeth after being shot. Their protest comes too late, but is recorded by Jákob, as well as the skewed official report on the protest. The refugees might have gone unseen by the government before the flood, and they are shot down after the flood, but regardless, their stories and the official responses are recorded in Jákob's manuscript. The displaced people from De Kuil provide a stark contrast to the responses by the president, who generally refuses to acknowledge the disaster in any shape or form. Instead, his responses are casual and careless, and he only acknowledges the water as something that the Dutch have continuously conquered, and thus will continue to do. Again, the flood highlights an underlying problematic. Jákob's manuscript starts as he is asked to document the refugees coming in, because they live in an unmarked village and most are not registered in any database. For all governmental purposes, the refugees do not exist—one can

²⁵² Van Dis, *KliFi*, 83.

²⁵³ Van Dis, *KliFi*, 172.

speculate how presidential response would have differed if the flood affected upper class citizens. Again, the flood highlights not only the consequences of anthropogenic climate change, but also what other discourses the flood presupposes.

Jákob's manuscript is an accusation, his way of protest—but it also the struggle of a librarian who is searching for a way to impact the turn of events. His entire library is filled with books about water: poetry, but also many scientific and historical books. Throughout the narrative, Jákob returns to the collection of “waterboeken”²⁵⁴ (waterbooks) when he feels upset: when he misses his wife, he starts to reorder their collection. When one of the refugees asks him what use his books have, Jákob reads her a fragment of Hendrik Marsman's *Herinnering aan Holland*, a well-known poem (which also appears in the introduction to this thesis), but she is not interested. Jákob has to remind himself that he is “a man of letters,”²⁵⁵ reminding himself why he finds literature important. As the narrative progresses, however, the use of books is increasingly questioned. When Kees and some of the refugees organise a protest, Jákob refuses to take part. When one of the refugees states that she has a right to a living, to be more than a refugee, Jákob nods: “Precies dát wil ik in mijn boek vertellen, in jullie woorden.”²⁵⁶ (Exactly that is what I want to say with my book, in your words.) But the refugees want action, not words, and Jákob realises that Kees is becoming the hero to their new friends. When Kano starts talking to him, accidentally (presumably) rhyming her words, Jákob hisses that he doesn't want to hear any rhyme²⁵⁷—signifying that Jákob too, is losing his faith in the power of the written word. The protest ends in disaster, as Kees, Kano and the others are shot at, and Jákob continues to write fervently. His self-doubt returns, and so does Poema, but ultimately Jákob finishes his book and sends it to his publisher, along with all his notes and his phone. He takes suicide pills and spends the last hour of his life reading poetry and talking to the birds in his garden. Jákob has realised that literature has power, after all—reflected also in the epilogue to his diary, as the narrator expresses hope that together, fate can be turned around. That hope is foregrounded in the novel's mediation. The alterations made by Poema, as well as the prologue and epilogue as written by the narrator, foreground how the narrative has been mediated before being presented to its readership. In that mediation, what is foregrounded is indeed an understanding that it is not too late, that fate can be turned around. By making explicit how the future history presented in *KliFi*—which builds

²⁵⁴ Van Dis, *KliFi*, 147.

²⁵⁵ Van Dis, *KliFi*, 116.

²⁵⁶ Van Dis, *KliFi*, 172.

²⁵⁷ Van Dis, *KliFi*, 172.

upon ‘Nederland Waterland,’ as well as on a shared cultural memory in its referral to the pandemic or contemporary Dutch politics—the novel highlights how contemporary events accumulate to the future as presented in the novel. However, through its mediated presentation of that future history, the novel foregrounds that it is not too late to change the course of events.

Ûnder Wetter

Koos Tiemersma’s *Ûnder Wetter* focuses on the consequences of anthropogenic climate change for the province of Fryslân specifically. Fryslân is partly set aside from the Netherlands in its cultural identity, as it shares the national identity of the Dutch as set out in Chapter 2, but has an additional sense of identity brought about by the use of the Frisian language, as well as Frisian traditions and culture. Fryslân is a coastal province, and thus has been heavily influenced by historical floods. It is also a province rich with lakes and rivers. Fryslân is therefore particularly known for the *Elfstedentocht* (Eleven Cities Tour), a long-distance skating tour on natural ice, in one stretch moving through eleven cities. The last Elfstedentocht was held in 1997, as global warming has affected winter temperatures, and long periods of temperatures below zero are necessary to facilitate the tour. In summer, Frisian lakes attract tourists looking for water sports, such as sailing. Without writing a separate chapter on Frisian cultural identity, it suffices here to say that it echoes Dutch cultural identity, but simultaneously has its own cultural identity, drawing upon its own language and traditions, as well as its landscape.

The Fryslân found in *Ûnder Wetter*, however, is losing all that. In 2065, the Dutch lowlands must partly be returned to the sea, as sea-levels continue to rise. The novel presents Sil’s diary, the novel’s protagonist, started three months before the dykes are demolished and ending on the morning after the flood. The diary is introduced with a prologue, written seventy-five years after the flood, as commemoration and to foster the Frisian community living in Lithuania. The prologue is written by a Lithuanian professor, and appears in the book both in Lithuanian and in Frisian, firmly situating the novel in the future. At the same time, this prologue too foregrounds both the mediated dimension of the novel, and positions Sil as unreliable narrator:

Noch yn datselde jier waard yn de neilittenskip fan de Fryske dichter/skriuwer Sil Posset in bewurke ferzy fan in deiboek oantroffen. Nettsjinsteande it feit dat de betrouberens fan

beskate passaaazjes betwivele wurdt jout dit deiboek in goed byld fan wat yn dy tiid foarfoel.²⁵⁸

(In that same year, an edited version of a diary was found in the possessions of Frisian poet/writer Sil Posset. Notwithstanding the fact that there is some doubt surrounding the reliability of these passage, this diary provides a good overview of what happened in that era.)

Unlike *KliFi*, the editorial process does not materialise on the page, and there are thus no other hints to the medialisation of Sil's diary other than the prologue. The prologue, however, also complicates the future memory positioned within the diary text. The major plot elements, such as the flooding of the low-lying areas and the way the Frisian community was forced to relocate, are reaffirmed in the prologue—but many other elements, such as the assassination that takes place halfway through the novel, are not. It is therefore up to the reader to decide what elements of the narrative are considered believable, and which are not.

In the epilogue, dated to 2077 and narrated by Sil, the reader finds some clues. The manuscript provided within the novel was edited by Sil himself: he edited, expanded upon, and sought a Lithuanian translator for his work so that “de jingen dy't my dierber binne de kâns te jaan te lêzen wat ik meimakke.”²⁵⁹ (My loved ones got the chance to read what I went through.) Unlike *KliFi*, there is no direct activist agenda behind the epilogue; Sil's voice here is primarily that of the geologist, recording history as it happens. Throughout the diary, as well as the prologue, however, we find the historian speaking: the prologue ends by expressing hope that the novel will do justice to an important period in European history, as well as promote understanding between different communities.

Within his diary, Sil takes both the role of historian and geologist. Early on in the narrative, for example, Sil illustrates how his friend finds reasons for current events in history:

Nim no de demokrasy, sei se dan. Wy hiene altyd de mûle fol oer minskerjochten in Sina, mar fan it wichtichste rjocht dat wy hiene makken hieltyd minder minsken gebrûk. De stimlokalen bleaune leech, gjinien woe him noch ynspanne foar de mienskip en dan krijst

²⁵⁸ Tiemersma, *Ûnder Wetter*, 7.

²⁵⁹ Tiemersma, *Ûnder Wetter*, 239.

de lieding dy'tst fertsjinnest. Religieuze partijen dy't de kâns namen, wat roppers en razers en dêr gie de boel.²⁶⁰

(Consider democracy, she said. We had the mouth full about civil rights in China, but our most important right was used less and less. Voting booths remained empty, nobody wanted to put effort into the community, and then you get the leadership you deserve. Religious parties taking their chance, bold voices, and now we're in big trouble.)

Keeping in mind that *Ûnder Wetter* was published in 2009, the focus on civil rights in China can be attributed to concerns about rights that arose in 2008, as China hosted the Olympic Games. Here then too, we find anticipatory memory at work: discussions about civil rights in China are linked to decreasing participation during elections, and the way that has influenced the events as presented in the novel.

Anticipatory memory is also used to describe how anthropogenic climate change has ultimately led to the demise of Fryslân. When the university where Sil studies closes, the speech given to announce the closing focuses on the way the new coastline would make way for power plants. Delta2 is the name for the plan, that includes the flood, returning land to the sea, but also increased profit potential as opportunities for salt mines increase and power plants will be built. The video about Delta2 shown at Sil's university uses captivating imagery of the Wadden Sea to show the ingenuity of such a power plant; but a bitter Sil, taking the voice of the historian, comments on how the role of climate change is completely neglected. Although Sil is unhappy about the upcoming changes, the official narrative about the course of events in the Netherlands is one of pride. The video Sil describes does not focus on the upcoming loss, the way the Netherlands has to give way to the water, or how thousands of people are losing their homes. Instead, the video, like any communication regarding Delta2, focuses on the ingenuity of making the worst out of the situation, on the pride associated with building new power plants. That position is embodied by Folkert Wigge, the head of the company mining the coastal line for salt and closely connected to Delta2. For that reason, Folkert is also the target for FRL's assassination attempt, their final and desperate move to protest the future. Folkert becomes the embodiment of the pride associated with 'Nederland Waterland,' and Sil and his friends have become the other half of the narrative, focussing on loss. Sil also comments on how the communication surrounding Delta2 refrains from making

²⁶⁰ Tiemersma, *Ûnder Wetter*, 16.

any mention of increasing droughts, global warming and increased storms.²⁶¹ Sil thus both presents a more realistic outlook on Delta2, but simultaneously also relies on anticipatory memory, as all these consequences of anthropogenic climate change are visible already in the early 2000s, and certainly recognisable for readers in 2022. Sil continues to describe elements that leave the reader's memory and are situated in the anticipatory memory the novel proposes: such as new negotiations between China and Europe about the distribution of energy and water, or how the Dutch dunes were flooded. Again, we find anticipatory memory at work, as elements embedded in the reader's memory are combined and correlated to events presented in the future history of the narrative. Sil clearly alternates between the voice of the historian and the geologist—much like in *KliFi*, the prologue as well as the form of the novel foreground the mediated nature of the future memory presented in these novels.

Again, the mediated dimension of *Ûnder Wetter* calls attention to the consequences of anthropogenic climate change as presented in the novel, as well as the underlying political discourse. The prologue immediately illustrates how the Frisian community has disbanded and is spread across small groups in different countries, struggling to keep their culture alive. The publication of Sil's diary, in that sense, is also a political decision, a means to keep the Frisian language in circulation. The focus on the Frisian community in this novel, and particularly the way they become displaced as a result of Delta2, calls to mind the “temporalities of place” described by Rob Nixon in his work on slow violence.²⁶² In the first chapter, I referred to Rob Nixon's work on slow violence, and how the climate crisis primarily affects the poor, thus highlighting systemic inequalities between different communities. The Frisian people, of course, do not hold the same position in Dutch context as many marginalised communities hold in the global field, but their language and culture is a minority within the Netherlands. Nixon's temporalities of place refer to the understanding that “place is a temporal attainment that must be constantly renegotiated in the face of changes that arrive from without and within,” foregrounding the physical displacement caused, in one way or another, by the climate crisis. Although the novel makes mention of the fact that a large area of low-lying land is returned to the sea, which likely includes land other than Fryslân, its focus lies clearly with the displacement of the Frisian. The Frisian people are set aside from the rest of the Netherlands by their language and culture, the rural location, bordering the Wadden Sea, and far removed geographically from the Randstad, which forms the cultural, governmental and economic centre of the Netherlands. The novel illustrates that

²⁶¹ Tiemersma, *Ûnder Wetter*, 36.

²⁶² Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 18.

for the Dutch, there is no question of place; but the Frisian people are forced to leave their homes.

As Sil watches a promotional film on one of the new salt mines, he concludes: “Stadichoan wurde wy ôfknypt. Eutanasy, sis mar,”²⁶³ (Slowly, we are being cut off. Call it euthanasia) articulating how the displacement of the Frisian community eventually leads to relocation entirely. Throughout the novel, we read how more and more citizens bail on the sinking ship that Fryslân has become. Sil’s fellow students, for example, have taken up international internships, but Sil does not dare to leave his city, even as it becomes increasingly clear that his university will soon close down:

Jij en je roots, konstearre se. Soms vind ik je een beetje aandoenlijk. Echt. Steek je energie in je eigen toekomst, de wereld ligt voor je open. Het Instituut hier heeft z’n langste tijd gehad, ze krijgen heus geen dispensatie. Dat heeft ook weinig zin als iedereen weg is, vind je niet? De jaren zijn weken geworden, of is dat je ontgaan?²⁶⁴

(You and your roots, she concludes. Sometimes I find you a little pathetic. Really. You should invest your energy in your own future, the world is your oyster. The Institute here has had its day, they certainly won’t get dispensation. That makes little sense when everyone is gone, don’t you think? The years have become weeks, or has that eluded you?)

The stark difference in attitude between Sil’s fellow students and himself is articulated by the fact that, although they study in Fryslân, they communicate in Dutch. The novel rarely includes Dutch conversation, unless it is by those involved in the displacement: such as the students, quick to leave Fryslân, and the soldiers who increasingly force the Frisian people out of their homes. Similarly, all news about impending measurements, such as travel restrictions, is brought in Dutch.²⁶⁵ The Frisian people are negligible, from the governmental perspective. In fact, rather than providing any support in conserving Frisian culture, the Dutch government is actively working against the Frisian, in refusing to acknowledge their position. This is of

²⁶³ Tiemersma, *Ûnder Wetter*, 37.

²⁶⁴ Tiemersma, *Ûnder Wetter*, 35.

²⁶⁵ In 2014, a new law was implemented that ensures the continued use of the Frisian language, and also states that within Fryslân, both Dutch and Frisian are considered official languages, meaning that any official governmental procedure can be held in Frisian. This only amounts for anything within Frisian borders; the Dutch governmental website, for example, is available in Dutch, English, Papiamentu, Papiamentu and Dutch sign language—but not in Frisian.

course only amplified as the Frisian land is evacuated, and the people of Fryslân find themselves spread out across the Netherlands and Eastern Europe.

One of the turning points in *Ûnder Wetter* is set about halfway through the novel. Sil and his bandmates from the literary group FRL find that poetry and music no longer suffice to voice their discontent about political proceedings, particularly in Fryslân. Throughout the novel, military presence in Fryslân increases, and increasingly, freedom is taken away from the Frisian people. Leaving the province now requires a visa, and a curfew has been put in place. Up until this moment, Sil has taken very little action. The members of FRL have decided that they want radical action, and signalling that the capital promised by salt mines is the main reason Frisians are continuously losing their freedom, the band's singer comes up with the idea to assassinate one of the key figures in the salt mine business. Sil, who continuously goes along with anything and is afraid to speak up, sticks to the plan and does not speak his mind. However, as he walks through one of the desolated parks in Leeuwarden, he questions his place in the world:

Wolken tûmelen oer my hinne en ik wie de iennichste dy't it seach. Is dat wat my fan belang makket? Dat ik fêstlis, it publik bin by de foarstelling dy't it lot ús foarset? Iik soe fuort. Ynienen stie ik each yn each mei in rikelfoks. In koart stuit seagen wy elkoar oan yn in moeting dêr't wy beide net op rekkene hiene. Yn de eagen lies ik dat ik dêr net hearde, it wie sÿn territoarium. Dêr't minsken belies jouwe, sei er, nimme wy it oer. [...] Hy sjachele mei in ûnferskillich sypkjende sturt de strewellen yn, foar him hie 'k ôfdien. Lykwols, ik wit wat hy nèt wit. Want sa is it: alles wat net swimme kin sil fersûpe, útsein wy. Wy dy't dit alles yn gong setten, mei de fûgels spylje wy fan ruten, wat oerblieuwt komt om.²⁶⁶

(Clouds tumbled over me, and I was the only one who saw it. Is that what makes me important? That I record it, that I am the audience to the show fate shows us?

I intended to leave. Suddenly, I am face to face with a fox. We consider each other for a short moment, a meeting neither of us counted on. In his eyes I saw that I didn't belong there, it was his territory. Where people give up, he said, we take over. [...] He trudged into the bushes with a tail floating with indifference, to him, I had been written off. Yet, I know what he doesn't know. Because it is like this: everything that cannot swim shall

²⁶⁶ Tiemersma, *Ûnder wetter*, 89-90.

drown, except for us. We, who have put everything in motion, we can flee with the birds, what remains will die.)

This passage comes at a key moment in the novel, and provides a turning point, as this is the moment Sil takes action. Although he is part of FRL, with their mission to voice their discontent about political procedures and ensure the continuation of Frisian language and culture in some shape or form, Sil has remained a passive voice. His only act is his diary, in which he records how Fryslân is evacuated by the military and forced to find a new home. Up until this point, he has been the geologist: recording events, but not interpreting them. He wonders about his own role as writer, wondering if his value lies in the way he records moments that go unnoticed by others. As he turns to leave, he encounters the fox. The encounter foregrounds human agency in the climate crisis. Initially, it is Sil who is displaced—the park, once a location that signified *maakbaarheid*, is now the territory of the fox. It highlights the demise of Fryslân, as its capital city is thus increasingly the space of non-human life, rather than human life. However, the passage also foregrounds how ultimately the human agency in the climate crisis, as Sil realises that he knows more than the fox does: namely that the flood will come, brought about by human action, and that all animal life will be displaced. Mankind, having brought about the flood, can flee with the birds, but all life that cannot swim will drown. The novel focuses on the displacement of the Frisian people, set apart from the rest of the Dutch population as they struggle to keep alive the identity of a minor group, a language that has faced a decrease in users throughout the decades. Here, Sil realises that although he has focussed on the way the Frisian people are displaced, he has some responsibility in the matter regardless, as the flood is the direct result of anthropogenic climate change and human efforts to manage the environment. Climate change thus becomes “the material, embodied memory of past decisions and mistakes.”²⁶⁷ The passage articulates the question of human perpetration in the Anthropocene, and complicates an easy reading of this novel where the Frisian are victims of perpetration by the Dutch government.

Under Wetter holds little focus for the consequences of non-human life in most of the narrative, and there is little attention to the way the flood affects other life forms. However, this passage gains significance because it appears at a turning moment. Following the encounter with the fox, Sil becomes a historian rather than a geologist. From here on, Sil takes action: he speaks up against his friends, goes after the girl he likes and is ultimately the one to

²⁶⁷ Plate, “Climate Change,” 494.

complete their assassination, when his friend is unable to do so. Ultimately, Sil keeps his diary and starts to edit it when he is living in Lithuania, as we read in the epilogue. In that sense, he has tried to take action: in making sure that the story of Fryslân does not disappear. The epilogue indicates that he is working on a Lithuanian translation, and that he dictates the book to his children: ensuring that his cautionary tale is read by future generations. In its focus on the displacement of the Frisian people as result of the flood, which might have been brought about deliberately but is the direct result of anthropogenic climate change regardless, *Ûnder Wetter* too foregrounds the political discourse highlighted by the climate crisis.

Zee Nu

The third case study in this thesis, Eva Meijer's *Zee Nu*, takes a radically different approach. Whereas both *KliFi* and *Ûnder Wetter* appear largely in the shape of documentation, obviously mediated accounts of future histories, *Zee Nu* is set in the near future and does not have the same focus on the mediation of future memory. *Zee Nu* is narrated by an alternating cast of characters: the unnamed prime minister, the Dutch minister of Defence Sonja, an oceanographic scholar named Steen, a young environmental activist named Arie and a young girl, Wilg. The prime minister narrates the political side of events; how the government is debating the framing of the flood, and the decision process behind the evacuation. Steen is one of the first to signal that, unlike the government's messages, they might have a disaster on their hands, and attempts to find out if anything similar has ever happened. Arie starts the environmental activist group *Zee Nu*, to call attention to the way anthropogenic climate change causes displacement around the globe—now acutely visible in the Netherlands as the sea continues to move inland. Wilg, finally, is introduced as an unhappy teenage girl, writing poetry about the sea and whose mother disappears.

Unlike *KliFi* and *Ûnder Wetter*, *Zee Nu* does not have a prologue with an articulated narrator calling attention to the mediated dimension of the novel, alerting readers to the way the narrative has been changed. The novel is narrated by an omniscient narrator, often drawing heavily on the focalisation of the characters mentioned above. The narrator, however, also draws attention to the way the flood affects non-human elements. Its approach is not always anthropocentric, as becomes clear from the very first sentence: “Het duurde even voor de mensen begrepen wat er aan de hand was.”²⁶⁸ (It took some time before the people realised

²⁶⁸ Meijer, *Zee Nu*, 7.

what was happening.) Here, the narrator already hints at the fact that others realised what was happening before humans did—a suspicion proven true when a few pages later, all foxes leave the dunes, and again later, all rabbits, and then all grebes: “De futen vertrokken in paren naar het oosten, geen mens merkte het op.”²⁶⁹ (The grebes left in pairs for the east, no human noticed.)²⁷⁰ The narrator, however, does not let the animal’s migration go unnoticed, hinting at an understanding that the narrator is not (entirely) human. Additionally, the narrative is a record of the birds’ migration, ultimately making it known to the readership of the novel. Here, the narrator thus functions as the geologist, as both human and non-human responses to the flood are recorded. In similar fashion, the narrator focuses on the displacement of buildings and objects caused by the flood: recording how, for example, major buildings in The Hague go down in the flood, or a list of all things lost in the centre of Utrecht, including items like stuffed animals, an unsent letter and a piano, but also immaterial things: xenophobia, a longing for snow, mourning.²⁷¹ The sea is here presented as an archive of human and non-human life. Instead of presenting the water as a force wiping out Dutch society, it becomes a *milieu-de-mémoire*: the water becomes embodied memory of Dutch life, as seen in the long list of items from Utrecht, which goes on for more than a page. The flood, at the same time, is also the memory of choices and mistakes that have led to this moment.

The mediated dimension of *Zee Nu*, highlighted by the narrator, is further foregrounded in the way the narrative is interrupted with different kinds of texts. The novel includes texts sent by Murat, to what one can distinguish to be a family member, as Murat updates his family about the events and his whereabouts. The conversation is one-sided, as readers only read Murat’s messages. Materially, the texts are hardly set aside from the main narrative, distinguishable only by a slight difference in spacing. Other textual intermezzo’s appear in the shape of dollar store advertisements that become increasingly worrisome. The first advertisement is for life jackets, which escalates to full emergency kits, and as the country is mostly flooded, special bags to carry pets that have been put down. The advertisements, without any other material appearance on the page, illustrate the digression of Dutch society: the final advertisement is for body bags, delivered anywhere at least two kilometres away from the sea.²⁷² The influence of the flood is particularly articulated by the

²⁶⁹ Meijer, *Zee Nu*, 36.

²⁷⁰ The common translation of “geen mens” would be “nobody,” as it is a common phrase in Dutch. However, given the context of this citation within the analysis, I have chosen to translate it literally, as the specificity of noting that ‘no human noticed’ is important.

²⁷¹ Meijer, *Zee Nu*, 125-127.

²⁷² Meijer, *Zee Nu*, 149.

fact that the first advertisements are for items that will keep people alive—later advertisements advertise items to preserve the deceased.

The most common of textual intermezzo's, however, are the poems Wilg writes, all of which are about the sea. All poems imagine a different role for the sea; her first poem, for example, is titled "*De zee als hoeder van gedachten*"²⁷³ (The sea as guardian of thoughts.) The poems are continuously printed in italics and thus are set aside from the rest of the narrative. Here, readers are alerted to the mediated dimension of *Zee Nu*. Unlike *KliFi* and *Ûnder Wetter*, there is no narrator who calls attention to the editorial process behind the presented narrative—yet the mediated dimension is foregrounded through the way the different character arcs are broken up with poetic intermezzo's, often thematically corresponding with the course of events. Wilg's poetry, which she posts on her website, is also the direct cause for Arie and Wilg to bond together. Wilg first meets Arie at a protest in Amsterdam, where the two find each other in their agreement that the protest is not enough, and also too late. Later, in Germany, they meet again: Arie is now aware of Wilg's poetry, as she had been looking for poetry to articulate her feelings, and Wilg comes looking for Arie as her mother has disappeared. The poems thus also directly influence the course of events—and bring back a non-anthropomorphic focus as all poems centre around the sea.

In its combination of different perspectives, *Zee Nu* becomes a collage that shows the consequences of the flood, mostly on Dutch society and Dutch citizens, but also has some focus on the non-human. It is hard to distinguish between the geologist and the historian in *Zee Nu*, because the novel does not have the same narrative voice recording future history found in *KliFi* and *Ûnder Wetter*—but at the same time, *Zee Nu* is less anthropocentric. *Zee Nu* clearly poses the sea as an agent, capable of influencing and outliving human life. When Steen comments on her diving experience she remarks that the underwater world is different from her own living environment, friendlier, but also highlighting "hoe beperkt het mensenleven is,"²⁷⁴ (how limited human life is) and inviting one to imagine different life forms. The sea is presented as having agency, particularly over human life. However, in its constant return to the sea, through Wilg's poetry, through the narrator, and even in short instances in the characters' dialogue and thoughts, the sea is presented as the main moving force, within *Zee Nu*. Its characters remain flat characters, and particularly the politicians are presented satirically. The one force steadily moving forward the plot, not only literally but also narratologically, is the sea.

²⁷³ Meijer, *Zee Nu*, 15-6.

²⁷⁴ Meijer, *Zee Nu*, 154.

Zee Nu presents a future of the Netherlands where ultimately, the Dutch society makes way for the water. Its future history is mediated not by a narrator taking the voice of a geologist or a historian, but rather in a collage of text fragments that centre around the sea. Its mediation, much like *KliFi* or *Ûnder Wetter*, serves to foreground the underlying discourses, about anthropogenic climate change and politics. This is, for example, illustrated in its engagement with contemporary Dutch culture. Through the close resemblance between the novel's unnamed prime minister and the current Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte, the novel engages with readers' memory. Especially in the first third of the novel, the novel also continuously engages with 'Nederland Waterland,' as politicians and journalists stress that the Netherlands is capable of dealing with a flood. The novel thus draws upon readers' memory to portray a future of the Netherlands that is not so far removed from what the readers' life; but then, of course, this is disrupted as the sea floods most of the country. The novel, as discussed, clearly places the flood as result of anthropogenic climate change, although it also highlights the group of people who believe that it is all a conspiracy. That group, named the "blijvers" (the ones who stay), are led by Grote Willem (Big Willem), who argues that scientifically, flow is always followed by ebb and therefore, the news about the sea continuously moving inland cannot be true.²⁷⁵ "Het bleek een complot in een reeks complotten, allemaal bedoeld om de mensen onder de duim te houden. Willem zei wat de blijvers dachten en de blijvers deden wat Willem zei." (It all turned out to be a conspiracy within a series of conspiracies, all meant to keep people under control. Willem said what the ones who stayed thought, and the ones who stayed did what Willem said.) Here, too, anticipatory memory is at work: Grote Willem, who becomes the face of a large group of people who deem all news about the sea fake. To contemporary readers, the comparison to the Dutch Willem Engel is obvious. In the Covid-19 pandemic, Willem Engel became the face of the organization Viruswaanzin, who protested government measures against the virus and spread the idea that the pandemic was used to restrict rights. The discussions that arise in *Zee Nu* as the news breaks about the flood thus closely resemble the political climate of the Netherlands during the Covid-19 pandemic. The novel moves into future memory as the sea moves past each dyke, as scientists are unable to explain the movements of the sea, and the Netherlands is slowly flooded. The novel highlights the inability of the Dutch system to deal with the flood, despite an age-old cultural narrative that illustrates how the Dutch are able to live below sea-level. That irony is highlighted when all characters slowly start to understand

²⁷⁵ Meijer, *Zee Nu*, 62.

the gravity of the situation, and politicians wonder about standard procedures. “We hebben toch wel een noodplan. We leven al tig jaar onder zeeniveau.”²⁷⁶ (We must have emergency procedures. We’ve been living under sea level for so long.) The answer to that question is silence; there are no procedures. In their pride, the Netherlands seemingly has forgotten the risk the water poses.

Ultimately, the consequence of flying too close to the sun is, in *Zee Nu*, the complete disappearance of the Netherlands. Strikingly, Belgium is not bothered by the flood; honing down the idea that the flood is brought about by Dutch pride and stubbornness, since logically, water does not adhere to the borders of nation-states. All of the Netherlands, however, is flooded, and the Dutch population finds refuge in other countries in the European Union. This almost seems like a somewhat happy ending, but it is not. For one, almost all protagonists in the novel drown. The prime minister goes to take a look at the sea when it is halfway across the country, walks into the water and drowns. The scholar, Steen, and Arie and Wilg group together after they arrive in Germany and rent a boat to go back into their now underwater country to find friends and family. When the boat gets stuck, Steen dives down to investigate the problem and never resurfaces, and at the very end of the novel, a wave strikes the boat and one can assume that Arie and Wilg drown, too. The only one to seemingly survive the flood is the minister of Defence, who takes over after the prime minister disappears and is last seen as the Dutch refugees arrive in Germany.

The novel hints not only at the disappearance of its protagonists, but also of Dutch culture entirely. Halfway through the novel, the narrative is interrupted by the poem “*De zee als bibliotheek*,”²⁷⁷ (The sea as library) which imagines the sea as archive. The second paragraph starts by stating that “Niemand bekommerde zich er op dat moment nog om dat de taal verloren zou gaan.”²⁷⁸ (In that moment, nobody was still worrying about the fact that the language would disappear.) The narrator continues to describe that the Dutch were never too loving about their language. The passage concludes: “Als je geluk hebt word je een verhaal.”²⁷⁹ (If you’re lucky, you become a story.) Here, we find the geologist’s voice, because Arie, Wilg and so forth have become a story, and are therefore not forgotten. The novel, regardless of what might happen to Dutch language and heritage, is a record of the Netherlands, its language and its habits—and of its downfall. Here, we find the foregrounding

²⁷⁶ Meijer, *Zee Nu*, 78.

²⁷⁷ Meijer, *Zee Nu*, 134.

²⁷⁸ Meijer, *Zee Nu*, 134.

²⁷⁹ Meijer, *Zee Nu*, 135.

of displacement, as the novel's protagonists drown and the Dutch population is relocated in different European states. The narrator, in various instances, also highlights how the animals have become displaced: how the birds living around the North Sea remained nervous for years,²⁸⁰ and how some of the tropical fish and corals, as well as the jellyfish adapt to their enlarged living space: "Na de eerste pleinvrees maakte iets jubelends zich van ze meester."²⁸¹ (After the first instance of agoraphobia, they became overjoyed.) The novel thus articulates how the flood, caused by anthropogenic climate change but its effects strengthened by political discourse, leads to the displacement of the Dutch population: its humans and its animals.

The future history presented in *Zee Nu* is one where water reclaims the Dutch lands, but also one where the response of the Dutch people is almost lethargic. The first half of the novel pays attention to the sceptical 'blijvers,' or to the ones willingly drowning themselves. The second half of the novel, however, focuses on how the Dutch have become displaced, how most willingly adapt to their new surroundings. The ones who return to whatever anchors them in their underwater home, Steen, Arie and Wilg, ultimately drown. Whereas the beginning of the novel is filled with references to 'Nederland Waterland,' filled with stubborn confidence, this is all washed away. The future history presented in *Zee Nu* thus presents a future where the water ultimately will come; and take everything with it.

Displacement

The use of anticipatory memory, foregrounded by its mediated appearance within the three novels, highlights a focus on displacement, of human and at times, non-human life. The question that arises then, is what the use is of this thematic focus on displacement. The novels all, through their use of anticipatory memory and particularly the way they build upon 'Nederland Waterland' to imagine their future versions of the Netherlands, present an understanding of the imagined Dutch community, with Anderson's words. By incorporating elements typical to Dutch culture—in their engagement with 'Nederland Waterland,' Dutch history, but also in the use of recognisable locations and well-known citations—characters become part of the same imagined community as Dutch readers are. This, I find, is where an affective response lies, where readers empathise with Kano, Arie, Sil and so forth, as they lose their home and their community. Anticipatory memory becomes more than a way to

²⁸⁰ Meijer, *Zee Nu*, 199.

²⁸¹ Meijer, *Zee Nu*, 127.

incorporate a planetary temporal scale in literary fiction, as it also directly brings readers into the novel: through their shared cultural memory, and their shared cultural identity.

Craps writes that future history narratives “aim to ward off the imagined catastrophe by sensitising readers to the enormity of the losses they or later generations will face if the current state of affairs continues [...] and by inviting them to consider how they could prevent the apocalyptic outcome.”²⁸² This is exactly what *KliFi* hints at: although Jákob starts doubting the role literature can play, he finishes his manuscript and hands it in, returning to poetry in his last hours. The narrator then concludes the novel in the epilogue, wishing that he would have been able to give Jákob a better ending—strengthening the understanding that the events as presented in the novel are real. At the same time, *KliFi* as a whole expresses a hope that there is still room for change, that the catastrophe presented can still be averted. This is foregrounded by the mediated appearance of anticipatory memory: the way narrators call readers to action or the alternation between the geologists and the historians voice. The use of anticipatory memory foregrounds the mediated nature of these narratives, visible in the editorial process of the narrative or in the way the narrative becomes a collage of different texts. The mediated dimension of the novels ensures that readers become aware that the narrative present a future history: one based on readers’ memory, escalating into a future dystopian scenario.

Through the use of anticipatory memory, these novels build a future history that strongly engages with the cultural memory of readers. *Zee Nu* and *KliFi* both call attention to the Covid-19 pandemic, as both novels were written and published during the pandemic. Especially in *Zee Nu*, the pandemic is considered as one of the crises occurring in the reign of the prime minister, much like the climate crisis. From an ecocritical perspective, the comparison is striking, because the Covid-19 pandemic showed that radical systematic change, executed at national and global scales, was possible. The comparison to the pandemic, in novels where the disaster has already happened and water is rising, hints at an understanding that radical change was possible during the pandemic. The question that remains, however, is when the same measurements will be implemented to save the planet.

All three novels thus present a recording of future memory, situated in Dutch cultural memory but presenting a future where the narrative of ‘Nederland Waterland’ ultimately ends with a flood. They all clearly situate themselves within the climate crisis, and pose anthropogenic climate change as cause for the plot events within the narrative. They can thus

²⁸² Craps, “Climate Change,” 487.

be classified as cli-fi on any account. In Trexler's summary of ecocritical discourse, he concludes that cli-fi should engage with the climate crisis as its already happening, rather than imagining a distant future. As the climate crisis is already affecting life in all sorts of ways—think for example of the floods in the Meuse delta in 2021, or the new Dutch ministerial seat for climate change established in 2022—literature should incorporate the changing realities of human culture.²⁸³ In their engagement with anticipatory memory, these novels present a future that could have happened, that is already happening, but ultimately rely on readers to change the outcome. The mediation in these narrative foregrounds the environmental and political discourse underlying the flood, and in that sense, almost provide readers with a handlebar on how to change the outcome.

²⁸³ Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions*, 26.

Conclusion

The expression ‘Na ons de zondvloed,’ (After us, the deluge) is used for someone leaving chaos behind them as they leave, seemingly uncaring because it is not their concern anymore. It has become particularly fitting in the climate crisis, brought about partly by the accumulation of actions by people who seemingly do not care what consequences their actions have for the future. This is highlighted in the Anthropocene, taking its name from an understanding that past actions of humanity will leave an inefaceable imprint on the future. However, the emergence of climate fiction as genre also illustrates that many do care about the future they leave behind—or about the flood that will ultimately come.

This is the future that is presented by *Under Wetter*, *KliFi* and *Zee Nu*: a future where the question is not whether a major flood will come, but when it will come. At first sight, the future histories presented in these novels is bleak, as all three in their own way highlight how the floods will lead to major displacement. Furthermore, they build upon the cultural narrative of ‘Nederland Waterland,’ to illustrate how the flood threatens to erode the Dutch cultural identity built upon its relationship to water. The characters of *Zee Nu* disappear into the water, and the rest of their fellow countrymen are scattered across Europe, seemingly uncaring if Dutch language and culture disappear, as long as they can enjoy the mountains or a warmer climate. In a letter, Arie’s love interest writes:

Er was eens een land aan de kust. De mensen leefden met de zee zoals mensen op sommige plekken ter wereld met grote roofdieren leefden: in de wetenschap dat zij niet de baas zijn, dat hun lot onlosmakelijk verbonden is met dat van de anderen, dat ze krijgen en geven en soms nemen.²⁸⁴

(Once upon a time, there was a country by the coast. The people lived with the sea like people in some places in the world live with big predators: with the knowledge that they are not the boss, that their fate is inseparable from others’, that they receive and give and sometimes take.)

Her observation is partly contrasted with the events of the novel, as people refuse to believe the flood is real, as politicians disregard scientists because the Netherlands has continued to

²⁸⁴ Meijer, *Zee Nu*, 230.

survive below sea level for so long. The cultural narrative of ‘Nederland Waterland,’ as I have shown in the second chapter, for a large part relies on the pride that comes with survival against watery odds. That narrative, although in recent years shifting to a more environmentally-friendly representation of water, does not rely on an understanding that the Dutch are not in charge. It relies, instead, on an understanding that the Dutch are at least partly in charge: as the poem on the Oosterscheldekering signifies, the tides are ruled by the moon, the wind and the Dutch. However, as the sea continues to move inland in *Zee Nu*, that cultural identity is forgotten, caught up by the water. Although Wilg sees some future for the Netherlands, particularly in underwater tourism, Dutch society has disappeared by the end of the novel. Almost mockingly, Dutch culture, language and identity has disappeared as the water has washed over the land—moral geography indeed.

Although *Under Wetter* focuses on the Frisian identity specifically, there seems to be little hope for the Frisian people either. The prologue of the novel explains that it was published in an attempt to keep Frisian culture alive, for the three hundred Frisian people living in Lithuania. There is thus some hope for its continued survival, but it also highlights how the Frisian people have become displaced all over Eastern Europe, disbanded and distraught. The same, of course, is true for the inhabitants of De Kuil in *KliFi*, who have all lost their homes and are only met with opposition and resistance when seeking refuge. When Jákob attempts to console one of the refugees with Dutch poetry about water, she refuses, and Jákob comments: “Verdomme, [...] dat is ook voor jou geschreven.”²⁸⁵ (Damn it, this was written for you too.) The conclusion is clear: these stories are not written for the refugees, because they are not protected from the flood, nor are they entitled to the same emergency care as other citizens, in the Dutch republic. The stories about ‘Nederland Waterland,’ therefore, are not their stories. The cultural identity built upon ‘Nederland Waterland,’ it seems, will not survive the next flood.

At the start of this thesis, I highlighted how climate fiction should avoid spektakeldystopie, as it does not do justice to the climate crisis. These novels, although they are not traditional apocalyptic narratives, present a bleak vision of the future. At first sight, that might come across as dystopian, thus falling into the pitfall of spektakeldystopie. These novels, however, allow for hope, as materialised in their use of anticipatory memory. As shown in the previous chapter, these novels employ anticipatory memory precisely to write a cautionary tale, to warn readers about the outcome of the current path. That is where hope

²⁸⁵ Van Dis, *KliFi*, 117.

lies: because these are future histories, based on contemporary events but with time and space left to change the outcome. If readers feel distraught by the way the Dutch dismiss the loss of their language following the flood, or the way the populist regime ignores the marginalised communities displaced by the flood, there is a solution. All three novels foreground their underlying political discourse, and clearly present the floods as the result of anthropogenic climate change. Here, we find thus almost a manual to prevent the floods as seen in these contemporary flood narratives.

At the start of this thesis, I illustrated how the scalar complexities of the climate crisis challenge life in the Anthropocene, and specifically, its literary representation. In the third chapter, I brought forward anticipatory memory as a way to bridge the temporal scalar discrepancy between literary fiction and the climate crisis. I argued that contemporary flood fiction should be placed within its cultural narrative ‘Nederland Waterland,’ which I expanded upon in the second chapter. I have illustrated that the three novels that form the case studies of this thesis build upon that cultural narrative in their use of anticipatory memory, ultimately highlighting questions of identity and futurity in the Anthropocene. The question that remains, then, is to what extent these novels successfully navigate the complexities of environmental representation. Although, as explained in the first chapter, the climate crisis challenges the temporal and spatial scale of literary fiction, my analysis focuses on a wide temporal scale, but a very localised scale. I have illustrated that the novels, in relying upon a cultural narrative that has influenced Dutch identity for centuries, bring in a far wider temporal scale than one might expect at first sight. What they do not do, however, is broach the spatial scale in any form: these novels are firmly situated in the Netherlands, as well as in Dutch context. This is, however, precisely what enables a temporal scale that moves beyond that of the life of the protagonists in the novels. Their localised setting, embodied in an engagement with the cultural narrative of ‘Nederland Waterland,’ is precisely what allows for a hopeful and affective reading of the future histories as presented in these novels. Their use of anticipatory memory furthermore ensures that these novels become cautionary tales, warning readers of the future if things are left as is. One might think that these narratives mean little outside of the Dutch literary sphere, as they have not (yet) been translated, and are so reliant on a localised setting. I want to contest that notion, on two grounds. Firstly, the climate crisis is an acute crisis, and one that, although not equally, affects all life on earth. From that perspective, I would argue that we need as many stories as possible, about all local communities, all forms of life. Literature, after all, is one of the spaces where change can be brought about. Secondly, although these novels are extremely localised, the larger questions raised in contemporary

Dutch flood fiction, as well as in the cultural narrative ‘Nederland Waterland,’ are not unique to the Netherlands. The Dutch national pride brought forth by their focus on water management echoes questions about geoengineering optimism in the Anthropocene, as well as human management of nature. Furthermore, the questions raised about identity and displacement within these novels, are prevalent in any discussion about consequences of the climate crisis in the Global South, and many coastal countries are threatened by rising sea levels and increased flood risks. From a global perspective, the Netherlands becomes a microcosm of many of the questions and concerns closely affiliated with life in the Anthropocene. These novels provide an intimate look at the Dutch perspective, illustrating how the Dutch national identity is threatened by the ever-rising sea-levels.

With this thesis, I hope to have contributed to ongoing scholarly discourses about climate fiction, about the role of water, landscape and the climate in Dutch culture, and specifically about the representation of the climate crisis within Dutch literature. The existing discussion on climate fiction in the Dutch literary sphere has primarily focused on highlighting that it does not exist, or at least, not in the volume one might expect. I hope that with this thesis, I have shown that the cultural narrative ‘Nederland Waterland’ has always intrinsically been about the climate, about the relationship between nature and culture, about human life in a non-human environment. Contemporary flood narratives remediate that cultural narrative to show how it is, in its current shape, threatened by anthropogenic climate change. These novels highlight how ‘Nederland Waterland’ starts to shift in the Anthropocene, and in doing so, become part of a shift in Dutch cultural identity, illustrated by the way ‘de strijd tegen het water’ is increasingly becoming a story about living with water.

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