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## Zásady pro vypracování

Závěrečná diplomová práce se bude věnovat žánru populární literatury – sci-fi. V úvodu práce studentka s využitím relevantním odborných zdrojů tento žánr charakterizuje, případně definuje další pojmy, s nimiž bude pracovat (dystopia, environmental crisis, apod.). Dále představí zvolená díla, zasadí je do uvedeného literárního kontextu a jejich výběr zdůvodní. Jádrem práce pak bude analýza románu *The Water Knife* Paola Bacigalupiho a *Glimmer* Marjorie B. Kellogg(ové), zaměřené především na zobrazení tématu environmentální krize, změny klimatu a nedostatku zdrojů. Svá tvrzení bude ilustrovat ukázkami z primárních textů a z kritických zdrojů k nim. Obě díla z hlediska přístupu k environmentální krizi závěrem porovná a obecně shrme, k jakým cílům využívají žánr sci-fi.

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## **ANNOTATION**

This bachelor thesis explores environmental issues in contemporary sci-fi literature, focusing on *The Water Knife* by Paolo Bacigalupi and *Glimmer* by Marjorie B. Kellogg. The work depicts how these novels explore climate change, resource scarcity, survival strategies, and technology within a dystopian setting. It aims to illustrate the relationship between speculative fiction and real-world environmental collapse and exemplify how the two novels approach environmental themes.

## **KEYWORDS**

water, environmental collapse, climate change, survival, adaptation

## **NÁZEV**

Problémy životního prostředí v současné sci-fi

## **ANOTACE**

Tato bakalářská práce zkoumá problémy životního prostředí v současné sci-fi literatuře, se zaměřením na romány *Vodní nůž* (*The Water Knife*) od Paola Bacigalupiho a *Glimmer* od Marjorie B. Kelloggové. Práce se zabývá tím, jak tyto romány v dystopickém prostředí zobrazují změnu klimatu, nedostatek zdrojů, strategie přežití a technologie. Cílem je ukázat vzájemný vztah mezi spekulativní fikcí a reálným kolapsem životního prostředí a dále znázornit, jak se na problematiku životního prostředí dívají dva zvolené texty.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

voda, kolaps životního prostředí, změna klimatu, přežití, adaptace

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## INTRODUCTION

Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* and Marjorie B. Kellogg's *Glimmer* explore survival as a struggle not only against nature itself but also the systems that exploit its destruction. Environmental issues have become a defining crisis of the 21st century, one that genre fiction has been quick to portray, mostly through sci-fi, dystopian, and climate fiction.

This work is divided into five chapters and explores the three genres as narratives for the consequences of environmental collapse. The theoretical part contains three chapters and begins with a depiction of sci-fi, dystopia, climate fiction, and their engagement with environmental issues, providing a foundation for the analysis. The theory generally defines the three genres, clearly illustrating their tropes and genre conventions using *The Water Knife* and *Glimmer* as examples. Chapter four provides the general and situational context for the analysis by summarizing the main plot points and inspiration behind the two novels. The fifth chapter contains the analysis itself and is organized into five subchapters: resource scarcity and climate change, adaptation, plan for survival, morality, and technology. The analysis describes the novels' different approaches to the portrayal of climate change, highlighting the abundance of water in Bacigalupi's novel and its overabundance in Kellogg's novel. The possibilities and limitations of individualistic and collective approach to solving environmental crises, and the societal effort to mitigating and surviving it will be exemplified as well. Furthermore, the role of governmental power will be discussed through the themes of morality. Lastly, in connection to sci-fi as a genre that often narrates science and its implications, the depiction of technology will also be emphasized.

This bachelor thesis takes a comparative approach to analyzing the main aim, which is to exemplify how *The Water Knife* and *Glimmer* address environmental issues. However, it also describes how contemporary sci-fi engages with dystopia and climate fiction, exploring its tropes, while simultaneously illustrating how the genres call attention to environmental crisis in the real world, given the increasing urgency of resource depletion. The work intends to provide a closer look into the underlying themes associated with environmental issues – social, political, and moral challenges – and explore how societies should respond to climate change as well. Although the novels' environmental issues are rooted in speculative narratives, their impact is made out to be personal through relatable character voices and grim yet engaging narratives.

# 1. Science Fiction

To find a single comprehensive definition of science fiction proves difficult because it is a combination of different genres and subgenres. Over the years, it has gotten various explanations, for example a “realistic speculation about future events” by Robert Heinlein or “a genre based on an imagined alternative to the reader’s environment” by Darko Suvin.<sup>1</sup> However, according to David Seed’s *Science Fiction: A Very Short Introduction*, sci-fi should not even be categorized as a genre, but rather a “mode or field where different genres and subgenres intersect,” particularly because of its hybrid nature. Among other conventions, sci-fi has a speculative nature, which is reflected in the future it portrays. It can be seen as a creative exploration that alters elements of the real world.<sup>2</sup> Seed also argues that sci-fi generally covers five different narratives.<sup>3</sup>

Based on his first narrative categorization, the most expected element – when picking up a sci-fi novel – is a spaceship flying into space. Voyages serve as a means to create distance between us and the real world, depicting external and often ironic views on Earth, and showing a new inclination towards self-parody. In many cases, voyages offer an easy and effective way to reach new worlds and cultures.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, “otherness and difference” are frequently used to describe the alien. While in most cases, an alien represents strange beings from other places; generally, the idea of it has two other meanings – either reflecting social divisions or referring to the story’s overall style. Sci-fi often questions identity, encouraging readers to rethink their opinions, especially through encounters with the strange and unfamiliar.<sup>5</sup>

The third reoccurring narrative is technology, along with the relationship between a human and its creation, either demonstrating change, marking success, or conveying concerns about human replacement, as well as displaying Isaac Asimov’s “technophobia.”<sup>6</sup> David G. Wells, highlights other key symbols, such as the concern for scientific accuracy and skepticism towards the literary, as sci-fi works can create tension by being removed from reality and yet

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted in David Seed, *Science Fiction: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Seed, *Science Fiction*, 1–2.

<sup>3</sup> Seed, *Science Fiction*, 4–5.

<sup>4</sup> Seed, *Science Fiction*, 6–7.

<sup>5</sup> Seed, *Science Fiction*, 27–28.

<sup>6</sup> Seed, *Science Fiction*, 47.

grounded in actual scientific philosophies. Wells also suggests, without stating directly, that some narratives reflect a rather optimistic view, portraying science as the source of progress.<sup>7</sup>

According to Seed, dystopias and utopias are often written alongside sci-fi, making it his fourth narrative categorization. The word “utopia” first emerged in 1516 as Thomas More’s novel’s title and set a genre convention for future utopian works. It portrays a depiction of an ideal world. Though not to be mistaken for dystopia, which stands on the other end of the spectrum, describing a non-functioning utopia. In the 20th century, dystopia started to gradually replace utopia as a more common narrative.<sup>8</sup>

Lastly, Seed’s final categorization of sci-fi refers to fictions of time. Even though almost every sci-fi novel is closely tied to the future, it explores time in other ways as well, focusing on transformation, showing how the present can be altered by past events, and hopes or fears for the future.<sup>9</sup> In connection, Seed recognizes several subcategories of time’s different fictions; for instance – disasters – those can be caused either by ecological forces or external events, such as a planetary collision. Usually, humans have little control over these natural threats.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Seed argues that it is a typical nature of sci-fi to constantly try to redefine itself, as it finds its place in the book trade.<sup>11</sup>

In 1979, Darko Suvin came with a groundbreaking idea. He was one of the first to differentiate sci-fi by presenting it as a “literature of cognitive estrangement.” He gave estrangement an additional meaning, emphasizing that sci-fi is shaped by a “novum” – a term that changes an abstract idea into a real one, such as the novel’s setting or reader’s worldview. His theory underscores the importance of viewpoint and the relationship between reader’s understanding of reality and the alternative world.<sup>12</sup>

At the beginning of the 20th century, many writers tried intertwining fiction into science with the intention of spreading a more profound understanding of science. It is also the time when the label “science fiction” itself was first used. Although to say when exactly sci-fi emerged proves difficult. There are differentiating opinions by many historians, some argue that the very first sci-fi novel was *A True Story*, written in the 2nd century by Lucian of Samosata. Others claim that it started in Renaissance with St. Thomas More’s *Utopia*. However, most would agree that Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, written in 1818, is seen as the first true sci-fi

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<sup>7</sup> As quoted in Seed, *Science Fiction*, 50.

<sup>8</sup> Seed, *Science Fiction*, 73–74.

<sup>9</sup> Seed, *Science Fiction*, 97.

<sup>10</sup> Seed, *Science Fiction*, 113.

<sup>11</sup> Seed, *Science Fiction*, 117.

<sup>12</sup> As quoted in Seed, *Science Fiction*, 127–128.

novel.<sup>13</sup> P. L. Thomas' *A Case for SF and Speculative Fiction: An Introductory Consideration*, also considers *Frankenstein* to be the first work of sci-fi, particularly for its threat of science and cautionary elements.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, Brian Stableford, in *Science fiction before the genre* argues that it is actually an anti-sci-fi novel, primarily because of its cautionary elements, which further adheres to the idea that to present a single comprehensive definition of sci-fi or its origins is complicated.<sup>15</sup> Based on *Frankenstein*'s elements and genre conventions, Seed suggests that sci-fi is closely related to gothic and fantasy. Even though fantasy and sci-fi often overlap, fantasy deals more with impossibilities rather than scientific explanations.<sup>16</sup> In reference to Brian Aldiss, he says that fantasy essentially evolved alongside sci-fi in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, P. L. Thomas claims that sci-fi invites readers into a fictional world that is closely related to the real one, allowing them to see reality more clearly. It exposes real-life issues and readers are supposed to fear the consequences of such exposal. Although not unique to the genre, sci-fi not only combines realism, real or possibly real speculative narratives, and high tensions but also the questions of morality, who has the right to kill whom, or the power of government. The theme of science itself can either be the core subject or simply an inspiration. The work does not have to be inherently scientific in order to be considered as a sci-fi narrative.<sup>18</sup>

As Seed highlights, there is an ongoing debate about whether combining genres, subgenres, and tropes in contemporary sci-fi undermines its importance, as it leads to familiar themes losing their traditionality. Nonetheless, most experimental works draw on the shared "mega-text" that sci-fi has already developed.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Seed, *Science Fiction*, 1–3.

<sup>14</sup> P. L. Thomas, "A Case for SF and Speculative Fiction: An Introductory Consideration," in *Science Fiction and Speculative Fiction: Challenging Genres*, ed. P. L. Thomas (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2013), 23.

<sup>15</sup> Brian Stableford, "Science fiction before the genre," in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. Edward James, and Farah Mendlesohn (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 19.

<sup>16</sup> Seed, *Science Fiction*, 122.

<sup>17</sup> As quoted in Seed, *Science Fiction*, 122.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas, "A Case for SF," 18–20.

<sup>19</sup> Seed, *Science Fiction*, 130.

## 2. Dystopia

According to M. Keith Booker in *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism*, Thomas More's *Utopia* – which gave a name to the genre – includes themes of science to portray a perfect society. It affirms science and dystopia fiction's close relation, despite More's idea of science being vastly different.<sup>20</sup>

Overall, dystopian novels are fascinating particularly because of their ability to develop a defamiliarizing point of view and object to the traditional idea of what the future will look like. Such works conform to Suvin's idea of "cognitive estrangement," the depicted future is written best when not too overtly realistic. Even though dystopia can draw and be inspired by real-life events and people, it ought not to state their names directly. For example, George Orwell's *1984* indirectly comments on totalitarian figures through the notion of a "big brother."<sup>21</sup> Many of the contemporary dystopias are tentative and pessimistic in nature.<sup>22</sup> Although it was only in postmodernism that dystopian literature began to embrace the idea that fearing utopian ideals might have a constructive role. This suggests that the cautionary elements in fiction are intended to help prevent a dystopian future from becoming a reality.<sup>23</sup> Traditionally, utopias and dystopias presented a choice between a world that was either fundamentally good or evil, as Booker quotes Samuel R. Delany's statement. However, modern sci-fi has developed beyond this notion.<sup>24</sup> For example, Gary Saul Morson explains the difference as utopias narrating "an escape from history" and dystopias "an escape to history."<sup>25</sup> Similarly to David Seed, who argues that while utopias naturally create their own new world, dystopias deconstruct an existing reality, most commonly through the eyes of an outcast.<sup>26</sup>

In *The Rain Feels New*, Eric C. Otto comparably describes dystopia as a "generic sibling of utopian fiction," one that reflects on what already happened, conceptualizes future, and establishes a link between current developments and their inevitable demise. Additionally, to define dystopia, he draws on Suvin's idea of a "novum." By linking the "novum," past, and present, dystopia functions as "the dark side of hope," where the real world is transformed into an alien one. He says that the purpose of this genre is to challenge the reader's passivity. Otto draws on Paolo Bacigalupi's ecotopian writing style, recounting that his most powerful writing

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<sup>20</sup> M. Keith Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994), 5.

<sup>21</sup> Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse*, 150–153.

<sup>22</sup> Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse*, 161.

<sup>23</sup> Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse*, 141.

<sup>24</sup> As quoted in Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse*, 145–146.

<sup>25</sup> As quoted in Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse*, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Seed, *Science Fiction*, 88.

tool is shaped by bringing the latest environmental issues to light and revealing their possible impact on society. Bacigalupi wants readers to realize that his portrayed future is not one to be strived for.<sup>27</sup> According to Dale Knickerbocker, as quoted by Otto, dystopia can also serve as a warning, urging real society to attempt to reverse the potential outcome.<sup>28</sup> The strategy for social change is another of Bacigalupi's tools. It is comparable to that of Jean-Pierre Dupuy, who says that dystopian disasters should be approached in a particular way. Firstly, it requires recognizing the inevitability of the situation; secondly, immersing ourselves in the past of the fictional world and reflecting on it; thirdly, taking action by accepting the predestined doom and acknowledging that nothing can be done to avoid the fictional disaster; and lastly, by accepting this, only then can we find the motivation to act and alter the inevitable reality.<sup>29</sup> The last tool mentioned by Otto is used in three of Bacigalupi's works: *The People of Sand and Slag*, *Pop Squad*, and *Pump Six*. In comparison to the first two, this method is surprisingly hopeful. Usually, after experiencing something traumatic, Bacigalupi's characters develop a new worldview and the power to act on this newfound perspective. Similarly, the reader is meant to begin laying the foundations for a similar transformation, particularly in relation to ecotopia.<sup>30</sup> Although most ecotopias employ this rather formulaic transformation, as the majority of characters are not only outcasts but also individuals who stand apart from the rest, longing for a better world. This quality often pits them against the establishment.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, Adeline Johns-Putra in her *Climate Change and the Contemporary Novel* says that "science is not overtly utopian," because it does not always conform to what is considered ethically right. Although she argues that science does not directly embrace utopian ideas, it is influenced by them. Additionally, science does not claim ethical responsibility, instead, others assign it. This role falls to authors who use scientific ideas in climate fiction. According to Johns-Putra, sci-fi has been exploring the utopian potential of science as a theme since the 19th century. Nevertheless, this doesn't mean that sci-fi has always been utopian, many dystopian works link scientific progress to psychological and cultural alienation.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Eric C. Otto, "The Rain Feels New," in *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction*, ed. Gerry Canavan, and Kim Stanley Robinson (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2014), 180–182.

<sup>28</sup> As quoted in Otto, "The Rain Feels New," 182.

<sup>29</sup> As quoted in Otto, "The Rain Feels New," 182–183.

<sup>30</sup> Otto, "The Rain Feels New," 183–184.

<sup>31</sup> Otto, "The Rain Feels New," 188.

<sup>32</sup> Adeline Johns-Putra, *Climate Change and the Contemporary Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 142–143.

Generally, as defined by Eric C. Otto, ecotopia and dystopia are judged by their impact on the reader, exploring alternatives. It shifts how we think and plays a key role in creating changes in our behavior so that the dystopian future can be prevented from materializing.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Otto, "The Rain Feels New," 184.

### 3. Climate Fiction

In *Climate Change Fictions: Representations of Global Warming in American Literature*, Antonia Mehnert claims that climate fiction portrays the altered world as a “climateculture hybrid” and generally, plays a pivotal role in understanding climate change altogether.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, similarly to David Seed’s categorization of sci-fi, she claims that most published climate fictions conform to a hybrid nature. The conventions that co-occur with climate fiction within a text come from either genre or speculative fiction.<sup>35</sup> According to Adeline Johns-Putra, those genres often have to do with the future, thus sci-fi and dystopia are often written as one with climate fiction.

Anyhow, some authors, who employ climate change narratives, are known and marketed as straightly sci-fi writers. It happens because they use the idea of a “novum,” which is closely tied to sci-fi. However, based on Adam Trexler’s and Johns-Putra’s theory, sci-fi is “build on and defined by a sense of shared identity,” which explains why some authors whose focus is on writing a certain narrative, may not always be categorized as such.<sup>36</sup> Evidently, to classify climate fiction in terms of sci-fi is confining, as it is rather good at “blurring the boundaries between science fiction and other genres.”

On the other hand, the connection between dystopia and climate fiction can be presented more comprehensibly, as most climate works rely on its imagery – a fictional world that is inferior to the real one. Though climate fiction depicts worlds that are in danger of environmental crisis, rather than those predetermined to cease. Furthermore, climate fiction’s endings are mostly written in an ambiguous way, remaining open. As a result, such works can be interpreted as “critical dystopias,” because of their resistance for closure. It results in the readers gaining a sense of hope that the world will not cease to exist, if action gets taken. It highlights the use of “utopian impulse within the work,” instead of humanity or nature coming to an end, climate fiction evokes a sense of responsibility and new ways of thinking about environmental crisis.<sup>37</sup>

Mehnert further defines climate fiction in terms of “reimagining time,” claiming that it is essential to comprehend the difference between “short-term thinking and decision making” and the “resulting long-term environmental consequences.” This means that climate and

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<sup>34</sup> Antonia Mehnert, *Climate Change Fictions: Representations of Global Warming in American Literature* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 10.

<sup>35</sup> Mehnert, *Climate Change Fictions*, 40–41.

<sup>36</sup> As quoted in Mehnert, *Climate Change Fictions*, 40–41.

<sup>37</sup> Mehnert, *Climate Change Fictions*, 41–43.

dystopian novels tend to warn readers of possible consequences of inaction; however, it proves difficult to react to an abstract phenomenon that does not have an immediate effect, but is rather a future prospect.

Nonetheless, fiction has a power that other forms of writing do not. It can convert and explain the abstract future through a fictional character's eyes.<sup>38</sup> According to Jennifer Rose White, as Mehnert quotes, literature makes environmental issues more intelligible and impactful. It also connects the past, present, and future so that the intangible idea of possible doom becomes urgent, thus destroying the gap between short and long-term consequences and reimagining our perception of time.<sup>39</sup> As a consequence, climate fiction does not utilize the "end time visions" but alternatively, focuses on a climate transformation.<sup>40</sup> In addition, Mehnert calls attention to the importance of literature beyond its aestheticism and as Sylvia Mayer suggests, fiction changes perception and forms identity, because it not only describes but also directly effects our understanding of reality.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, Mehnert generally defines that climate fiction is a literature describing anthropogenic climate change; denoting culture, politics, and functioning as another means of communicating climate change. While it can serve as a deliberate way to illustrate the future, standardly, it is a reflection of human behavior and presents only one version of reality. Additionally, it employs the "objective truth" of science and makes the reader contemplate what is believable and what is not. Climate change is principal particularly because it offers insight into the uncertainty of future climate.<sup>42</sup>

In *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*, Adam Trexler says that the word "Anthropocene," used also by Mehnert as a near synonym to climate fiction, is used to talk about the Earth's history from the year 2000. The need for a new name arose primarily because of human destruction towards their environment.<sup>43</sup> Though according to Trexler, climate fiction emerged earlier, but it was recognized as a literary movement only around the year 2010, when more novels started to cover the topic. Despite that, to recognize when exactly the first climate novel was written proves confusing because most works were fused with either sci-fi or dystopia, and thus accepted as such, like *The Sands of Mars* written

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<sup>38</sup> Mehnert, *Climate Change Fictions*, 93.

<sup>39</sup> As quoted in Mehnert, *Climate Change Fictions*, 102–103.

<sup>40</sup> Mehnert, *Climate Change Fictions*, 10.

<sup>41</sup> As quoted in Mehnert, *Climate Change Fictions*, 3.

<sup>42</sup> Mehnert, *Climate Change Fictions*, 4–8.

<sup>43</sup> Adam Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 1.

by Arthur C. Clarke in 1951 and *Dune* by Frank Herbert published in 1965. The earliest climate fiction focused mostly on terraforming. Themes of global warming, toxic waste, and deforestation became the topics of discussion later. At first, the themes were a part of the novel's plot to imagine scenarios in which the world would get saved; it was only later that novelists started to explore the harsh consequences of climate change. Similarly to Mehnert, Trexler finds that climate fiction gets often grouped together with genre fiction, which he says is probably due to its history. He argues that climate fiction did not enter the literary world as a singular convention, but neither is it related to a specific group of authors. The topic of climate change is broad.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, writing climate fiction alongside genre fiction is not a bad thing, as each genre can offer a fresh insight into environmental issues due to the use of different narrative techniques. For instance, sci-fi explores future outcomes and human reflection of important incidents. Yet with climate fiction, it challenges its notions, even though "climate novels must change the parameters of storytelling" so that the genre's tropes are not changed, and it does not become unrecognizable.<sup>45</sup>

Trexler also says that climate novels are "a privileged form to explore what it means to live in the Anthropocene moment," comparable to Mehnert's claim that the novels help the society familiarize themselves with environmental issues on a more personal level.<sup>46</sup>

Adeline Johns-Putra in *Climate Change and the Contemporary Novel*, further describes the common setting of such novels by making parallels between climate and dystopian novels. She says that most of the earlier novels were written in future apocalyptic, postapocalyptic, or dystopian worlds, depending on the severity of the situation. In spite of that, the more recent and common approach is creating a setting that is recognizable and comparable to our world, in which the change has not happened yet with characters that are living on the brink of political, ethical, financial, and most importantly, climate collapse.<sup>47</sup>

In *Ecocollapse Fiction and Cultures of Human Extinction*, Sarah E. McFarland offers a different point of view to climate fiction. She subtly criticizes the genre's conventions because of its apparent refusal to portray human extinction. She speculates that one day, the human species may go extinct, yet the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic setting of climate fiction rarely

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<sup>44</sup> Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions*, 7–11.

<sup>45</sup> Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions*, 13–14.

<sup>46</sup> Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions*, 27.

<sup>47</sup> Johns-Putra, *Climate Change and the Contemporary Novel*, 38.

entertains that scenario, instead focusing on happy endings and characters who have the ability and means to survive environmental collapse.<sup>48</sup>

Nonetheless, similarly to other critics, McFarland claims that ecological disasters have been written alongside sci-fi approximately since the 20th century, following fears of nuclear apocalypse.<sup>49</sup> At this time, we are fascinated by them because of their ability to explore both the “voyeuristic” thrill of destruction and the adventure of starting anew, like Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, as Claire P. Curtis argues. Moreover, according to Lisa Garforth, the apocalyptic scenario is used to depict thriving communities as they rise from the ruins of modern life. Climate fiction can push the idea that a community based on equality, living in a remote area, not controlled by the government and industrialization is an ideal that all society should be striving toward. Although, as Slavoj Žižek puts it, “such utopian projects do not eliminate evil,” but merely transform it into a “mythic threat” against which society unites.

According to McFarland, as a “human-caused” and “natural” phenomenon, most climate fiction works blend the two imaginary scenarios, depicting a disaster either caused by humans, or one that has roots in nature, such as asteroids, volcanos, or sandstorms and superstorms.<sup>50</sup> Climate fiction explores different narratives that have not only the entertainment value but also the power to acquaint the general public with those themes.

It is in climate fiction’s nature to cover real-life scenarios on a level that is as close to the human experience as possible. Therefore, as Adam Trexler states, climate fiction is not trying to imagine a world that is climatically affected, but rather one that imitates reality and realizes the real threat of uncontrolled climate change. As a consequence, some authors responded to climate fiction’s purpose by drawing attention to an “immediate, local disaster,” thus creating a sense of urgency. Trexler believes that novels set in real places, where a particular threat of floods, storms, or droughts looms; are more likely to be relatable to the reader. It causes readers to “immediately experience climate change as a threat to their centers of value” and makes it more personal.<sup>51</sup>

Firstly, each such work employs an apocalyptic narrative suitable to its setting. However, Trexler claims that in order for a book to be considered as climate fiction, it needs to also involve social, political, atmospheric, and overall effects of climate change. For example, a novel called *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, while describing a world altered by drought,

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<sup>48</sup> Sarah E. McFarland, *Ecocollapse Fiction and Cultures of Human Extinction*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 2.

<sup>49</sup> McFarland, *Ecocollapse Fictions*, 6.

<sup>50</sup> As quoted in McFarland, *Ecocollapse Fictions*, 6–7.

<sup>51</sup> Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions*, 75–76.

fails to address the previously mentioned plot points. *The Road*'s main theme is different than that of environmental issues. On the other hand, Trexler considers the *Carbon Diaries* by Saci Lloyd to be climate fiction, as the novel directly and successfully depicts the aftermath of a warmer climate. It is set in London during a heatwave and the citizens have to ration water. There are several other works that change Britain into a tropical climate. However, Trexler thinks that it proves to be an exhausting effort to make readers care about a warmer climate, as in reality, humans are used to living in them. Therefore, in order to create a deep relationship between the reader and the novel, it needs to employ a bigger disaster. In the case of the Lloyd's *Carbon Diaries*, floods come. Other examples of novels that explore severe scenarios of desertification, droughts, and the scarcity of water as the main theme are *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler or *The Drowned World* by J. G. Ballard.

Secondly, when novels about droughts fail to deliver a "narrative punch," there are those about superstorms. Such works usually contain hurricanes, cyclones, or rainstorms as the main plot points. However, these novels can blur the line of climate fiction, as in place of focusing on superstorms with predictable frequency and their effect, they focus on procuring the one "perfect storm," specific for its singular occurrence. Trexler argues that climate fiction should try to defy this impulse for one and done superstorms, and instead focus on reoccurring instances. For example, a novel about regular storms is *Exodus* by Julie Bertagna.

Nevertheless, the most common strategy in climate fiction over the last 40 years has been the depiction of floods. This is largely due to the scientists' predictions about the melting of polar ice caps in the Arctic and Antarctic, and Greenland. Such disasters could lead to rising sea levels, particularly affecting cities like New York and Washington, as both are situated close to sea level. Moreover, the flood narratives are common because they draw on a literary tradition dating back thousands of years – the flood myths appeared in many early civilizations and are often linked to historical events. Novels describing it not only try to answer when the societal collapse will happen in real time, but also make climate change more culturally familiar. These narratives are good for focusing climate fiction on a local place, J. G. Ballard's *The Flood*, written in 1962, influenced early flood narratives.

Lastly, the landscapes of the Arctic and Antarctic lead to several climate works as well. This phenomenon started to spread in the 21st century, when media were covered in images from the polar part of the world. According to Trexler, the expected warming of the Earth's glaciers has become a symbol of climate change. Novels such as *Ice Age* by Brian Freemantle

and *In Cold Pursuit* by Sarah Andrews are set in Antarctica. Additionally, Allan Folsom's *The Day after Tomorrow* tells the tale of characters who travel to the polar landscapes.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions*, 79–84.

## 4. Summary and Literary Context: *The Water Knife* and *Glimmer*

Motto:

“When the water runs out blood will flow.”

Published in 2015 and written by Paolo Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife* is set in the near future in the Southwestern United States, mostly Phoenix, where a climate change has resulted in water scarcity, droughts, and sandstorm. As a consequence, the states are in a war over water reservoirs. Thus, the world is depicted in a catastrophic state full of violence and tragedy with no easy solution in sight.

The story is told from the point of view of three different characters – the first point of view is that of Angel Valasquez, a water knife or assassin, who destroys water supplies for political gain, not asking any questions, only doing the government of Nevada’s bidding. When he travels from Nevada to Arizona, he meets the two other narrators – a journalist, Lucy Monroe and Maria Villarosa, a refugee from Texas. These characters’ journeys are distinct; however, the discovery of legal documents, which could disrupt the power balance, changes the game.

Despite the novel being told in three separate point of views, neither of the characters is a hero, most are portrayed as animals, living only for their own benefit. As a result, the novel offers a more realistic perspective and narrative plot points. Additionally, the novel is politically oriented and discusses the role that the government has in people’s everyday lives, as the world is on the brink of war, but the government is willing to do anything for its own gain, seeing its citizens only as pawns in a game. In place of sustaining the limited and quickly disappearing water supply, Catherine Case uses it as a bargaining chip and leverage. Explaining these motifs is essential not only for understanding the themes of morality and the development of society in a world that drastically changed, but also for depicting the impacts of climate change.

In the novel’s acknowledgements, Bacigalupi states that while *The Water Knife* is a work of fiction, real-life environmental crisis inspired the work, affirming climate fiction’s purpose, writing that:

The roots of this devastated future drew sustenance from the dedicated research and reporting of a number of science and environmental journalists whom I have known and followed over the years. If we want to know what our future will look like, it’s worth following the people who report the details and trends that are rapidly defining our world.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Paolo Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife* (London: Orbit, 2015), 451.

The setting of the novel, i.e. the states and cities close to the Colorado river, is important. This area is factually prone to droughts; in an interview, Bacigalupi admits that he drew on the traditional context of Southwestern environmental literature by taking on the issue of water scarcity and making it ten times worse. He uses the southwest as a cautionary tale by incorporating those themes.<sup>54</sup> Similarly to dystopian and climate fiction, where authors often exaggerate reality to encourage reader reflection.

In *The Rain Feels New*, Eric C. Otto says that Bacigalupi uses utopia to make readers rethink the world's environmental degradation, their thinking, and ethics. However, his fictional worlds are not utopian but dystopian, as the definition is unlike. So while his world itself doesn't represent a perfect society, it contains an element of the so called "utopian impulse towards hope" – suggesting that readers are a glimmer of hope or a possible path to redemption.<sup>55</sup> According to a literary scholar, Lyman Tower Sargent, who explains that albeit the fictional world is dystopian, Bacigalupi writes in a utopian way where the future can be avoided if the reader takes action.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the novel explores one of climate fiction's subcategories, severe droughts, as defined by Adam Trexler.

Published in 2021 and written by Marjorie B. Kellogg, *Glimmer* is set in a reimagined New York in the year 2110. In this version of New York, heavy flooding has caused most of the people to live either on boats or on the rooftops of skyscrapers. These extreme conditions can be attributed to the melting of Earth's glaciers, and the frequent occurrence of type five and even six tornadoes, the latter being yet unknown in the real world.

Glimmer, a young woman who lost her memory, is the narrator of the story. Due to her memory loss, her narration sounds naïve and innocent at times, which offers a fresh perspective on the futuristic fictional world, albeit it can feel out of place in a world shaped by tragedy. She finds herself a part of a sustainable society, Unca Joe, which lives in one of Manhattan's skyscrapers. However, the rivaling gangs are starting to attack their hiding place, the weather is getting worse, and pandemics rage. Glimmer must decide what to believe in and whether a damaged population has any chance of surviving.

The plot is mainly motivated by morality, the will to live, and reshaping the world into a place worth living in. Although the story contains violent parts and there appears to be no immediate solution to climate change, the overall tone remains surprisingly hopeful. In contrast

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<sup>54</sup> Edward M. Eveld, "In 'The Water Knife,' extreme drought creates a dystopian America," *The Kansas City Star*, June 26, 2015.

<sup>55</sup> Otto, "The Rain Feels New," 180–181.

<sup>56</sup> As quoted in Otto, "The Rain Feels New," 181.

to *The Water Knife*, *Glimmer*'s main character seems to be a heroic figure who despite losing herself is kind and generous.

Even though *Glimmer* is clearly categorized as climate fiction, Adam Trexler, in *Anthropocene Fictions*, claims that defining the scope of cli-fi is complicated due to the complexity and controversy surrounding the topic of environmental crisis.<sup>57</sup> Kellogg explains her stance on categorization in an interview for *Writer's Digest*, drawing on Trexler's claim, she says that defining the scope proves difficult due to society's general unfamiliarity with climate issues, which can result in climate fiction being classified as sci-fi. Moreover, she compares her work to that of Kim Stanley Robinson, J. G. Ballard, and Frank Herbert's *Dune*. In fact claiming that her *Glimmer* is a climate fiction novel with themes similar to *Dune*, as both of the novels take weather and make it the main character. Kellogg also states that "every science fiction author hopes to write with total conviction about events that haven't happened yet," affirming the genre's purpose.<sup>58</sup>

In parallel to Adam Trexler's claims about climate fiction, *Glimmer* draws on the traditional flood narrative and employ the scientists' worries about the earth's glaciers melting and thus flooding New York. The novel transforms the hypothesis into a reality. Furthermore, in an interview for *Artists and Climate Change*, Kellogg hopes that readers can identify with her writing and start to be more mindful of their environment so that they don't end up like her characters.<sup>59</sup>

*The Water Knife* and *Glimmer* were chosen for the analysis because of their dissimilar portrayal of water as a theme in climate fiction based on Adam Trexler's categorization. As a result, the analysis illustrates how diverse and hybrid climate change is altogether and that there is not only one direction a crisis can go in. Additionally, in connection to Eric C. Otto's depiction of Bacigalupi's writing, the analysis puts these ideas into practice, showing Bacigalupi's writing tools and comparing them with that of Kellogg's.

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<sup>57</sup> Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions*, 29–30.

<sup>58</sup> Robert Lee Brewer, "Marjorie B. Kellogg: On Climate Fiction as Its Own Genre," *Writer's Digest*, October 10, 2021.

<sup>59</sup> Amy Brady, "An Interview with Writer Marjorie B. Kellogg," *Artists and Climate Change*, November 4, 2021.

## 5. Analysis: *The Water Knife* and *Glimmer*

### 5.1 Resource Scarcity and Climate Change

Both Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* and Marjorie B. Kellogg's *Glimmer* take water and make it the main theme.

In 2110's version of New York, depicted in *Glimmer*, water is abundant, but its overabundance is just as destructive as scarcity. The high water levels result from a series of events beginning with global warming. Although the text does not explicitly state how it came about, it could be the result of advanced technology, the failure to effectively address environmental concerns, or over-reliance on non-renewable sources. Drawing on the novel's literary context, Kellogg tried to mirror real-life impact, which implies that the local factories had released greenhouse emissions from burning fossil fuels, and thus also contributed to global warming. Paralleling real-world fears about the long-term effect of climate inaction:

I scowled at the looming sky. "Smells like rain."  
"A thousand toxins drifting from the sky..." he sang softly.  
"Rain's cleaner now, with the factories mostly shut down."<sup>60</sup>

The conversation offers a deeper insight into potential causes of global warming; however, it also symbolizes the paradox of environmental recovery through devastation, highlighting the aftermath of ecological collapse. The environment finally has a chance to heal, but it comes at the cost of societal collapse and displacement.

While the cause of global warming may not be glaringly obvious and has to be deduced based on clues, the results are. Not only had the glaciers in Greenland melted but also superstorms started to rage. Combined, it caused the sea levels to rise and subsequently, New York flooded. The Downtown area was completely destroyed, Hurricane Misha brought a surge that never fully disappeared, and most of the population had already fled a long time ago. Although there are a few remainers, some never knowing a world without the disaster, indicating that the world has been in a disastrous state for some time. In the past, each citizen had a choice to either stay or move out of New York; nonetheless, the area is now so destroyed that it is impossible to get out. The conditions are harsh, and most children have to suffer for their parent's decision. *Glimmer*'s friend, Rubion, is an example, as his parents were among the few diehards who decided that they had a better chance of survival by staying.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Marjorie B. Kellogg, *Glimmer* (New York: Daw Books, 2021), 1.

<sup>61</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 17–18.

The rest of the world seems to be completely gone. It poses the question of whether New York has any chance of surviving, even with all its efforts to become sustainable. There is nothing the characters can do about the worsening weather, it might be inevitable that they will end up exactly as Venice did, completely drowned:

I rowed for a bit, thinking about boats, how many shapes and sizes they came in, how they made travel faster and easier in our watery world. “I got a buddy says we should remake Manhattan like Venice, where everybody gets around by gondola.”

Breakers snorted. “Make that past tense. Venice is under water. Long abandoned.”<sup>62</sup>

Although at first, the conditions were not so dire, it was only later that the weather pushed the remainers to live on top of high buildings. They are able to travel on foot when there is no tide, but with the raging hurricanes and tsunamis, the water level is constantly rising, making boats indispensable. Similarly to *The Water Knife*, there is no longer an easy way out and the few civilians are stuck living in disaster. While both novels’ setting is inspired by real-life places, the stories serve as an extension and not a direct replica, following M. Keith Booker’s definition of dystopia.

The world Bacigalupi’s novel depicts is in stark contrast to the one of *Glimmer* – water is an elusive and highly coveted resource. In place of superstorms that cause flooding, *The Water Knife* includes sandstorms and droughts that are slowly causing water to evaporate, not accumulate. This scarcity transforms rain into a near-mythical entity, referred to as: “Godwater. Water that fell of its own volition, right out of the sky.”<sup>63</sup> Rain is no longer a part of the predictable cycle but an extraordinary event. On the other hand, *Glimmer*’s rain embodies the lingering consequences of human failure.

Furthermore, the situation in *The Water Knife* is so bleak and dire that stepping outside requires the characters to wear “REI filter masks and grit goggles” to protect themselves from the harsh weather, as unprotected skin could be blasted raw.<sup>64</sup> These extreme conditions are aggravated by the relentless heat, with temperatures reaching “one hundred twenty degrees in the shade” – nearly 50 degrees Celsius.<sup>65</sup> The unbearable heat symbolizes the physical manifestation of the environmental collapse.

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<sup>62</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 221.

<sup>63</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 23–24.

<sup>64</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 31.

<sup>65</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 97.

However, most of the fictional meteorologists conclude that the situation will eventually end. They seem to take the severe situation quite lightly and humorously, counting all the storms and hoping to set and break records. Moreover, using the word “drought,” implying that the heat “could end; it was a passing event, not the status quo.”<sup>66</sup> But as Lucy’s character wonders, “maybe they were destined for a single continuous storm – a permanent blight of dust and wildfire smoke and drought, and the only records broken would be for days where anyone could even see the sun –”<sup>67</sup> Her fears are justifiable and highly probable, it proves unlikely that the situation will get better, specifically considering the political situation in the novel. The specialists’ refusal to acknowledge the situation as severe underscores the general societal stagnation. However, by combing these themes, it could be argued that Bacigalupi’s novel depicts an extreme situation, as described by Trexler. The author does so in order to make the reader care not only about *The Water Knife* as a piece of literature but also its realizable climate situation. Bacigalupi successfully fulfills the genre’s purpose by making the climate themes personal, as Rick Riordan’s Goodreads review states that:

The plot is great, the characters relatable, but what will really haunt you is how well the author builds this near-future world. It reads less like a fantasy and more like an augury of what will happen to us – and the prediction is not pretty.<sup>68</sup>

Moreover, while in *Glimmer*, there is an overabundance of water, the situation is remarkably similar to that in *The Water Knife*, as the water in its natural state is not drinkable. It must undergo filtration and purification, a process reliant on electricity. However, when a superstorm strikes, electricity is inevitably cut off, triggering a series of resource scarcities. Even in a world seemingly abundant in water, the infrastructure required to make it usable is fragile. On the other hand, though *Glimmer* has not figured out an effective way of sustaining water long-term, it manages to effortlessly sustain other resources because the community’s strategies for resource management go beyond water. For instance, “picking” is vital for survival. This means that every night, a group of selected pickers goes outside and scavenges for any useful resources, from food and medicine to technology.<sup>69</sup> Other chores, such as gardening, cooking, security, or technology management, are fairly distributed among individual den members. They rely on an innovative solution to produce food, showing their ability to adapt and be resourceful:

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<sup>66</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 30.

<sup>67</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 31.

<sup>68</sup> Rick Riordan, “Adult science fiction,” review of *The Water Knife*, by Paolo Bacigalupi, *Goodreads*, July 24, 2015.

<sup>69</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 1–4.

Unca Joes produced most of our fresh food in a series of wrap-around terraces rising floor by floor around the central tower of the skylight well ... sounds like a lot of growing space, but it was just as crowded as our living areas. No inch went unused. A sheltered corner was stuffed with compost bins. Solar panels and stubby windmills were fastened wherever there was opportunity.<sup>70</sup>

The structure has several floors; the fifth floor is for barn animals, the sixth floor stores fruit-bearing shrubs, and the seventh floor holds hoop houses for vegetable gardens.<sup>71</sup> Traditional agriculture is no longer feasible, so efficiency and creativity have become essential for sustaining life. However, it also suggests that humans can only go so far in mitigating crises because the renewable sources are too dependent on the weather. Solar panels depend on consistent sunlight, and windmills require stable wind conditions – both of which are dictated by weather patterns, and in these conditions, the patterns are unpredictable. While effective, the sources are fragile, thus any disruption means failure.

After facing the consequences of yet another superstorm that disrupted the roof-gardening system, the need to procure a long-term sustainable society becomes urgent, showing the determination to survive:

Picking was vital, but the gardens were our most valuable asset. Like most pickers, I knew this but still tended to take for granted the steady stream of edibles to the Mess. But the shock of coming face to face with the wreckage left on Six by Storm Joseph made me reconsider the vulnerability of our food supply.<sup>72</sup>

The aftermath causes Glimmer and her community to confront the limitations of their resource management strategies. The novel is aware of the world's fragility and the overall vulnerability of renewable resources. Therefore, the community's need for change and ensuring long-term survival becomes a central topic of discussion.

*Glimmer* emphasizes the importance of collective resource management through activities such as picking and gardening – the community shares its resources. In contrast, *The Water Knife* depicts a system driven by individual greed and survival. For example, at the beginning of the novel – one of the characters, Maria, figures out a way to make money. The water pump is dependent on aquifers; when the water level gets low, the price goes up to stop people from buying and thus to prevent the source from running out. Once the aquifer fills,

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<sup>70</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 189.

<sup>71</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 189.

<sup>72</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 189.

water is cheap again. By deducting clues and overhearing conversations, Maria is able to work out when exactly the price of water goes down:

Once she got the water into the center of town and sidled up beside the Taiyang construction work – people wanted a cool cup of water there. And they had money ... and she would be there waiting for them. Offering them relief from the heat.<sup>73</sup>

Her actions not only depict a representation of survival strategy under extreme conditions but also the greedy nature of individuals, for whom self-interest is more important than the collective good. However, her behavior can also be interpreted as a parallel to *Glimmer*, i.e. as a manifestation of human creativity and the ability to survive in any conditions by any means.

Altogether, these examples document the distinct nature of the two novels, where water acts as the driving force of the plot and mediator between characters and plot points. Water represents both power and lifeline. In *Glimmer*, the community is trying to find a collective solution to the scarcity of drinkable water through shared effort, whereas *The Water Knife* is focused on competition and survival of the fittest. Ultimately, these contrasting portrayals of water serve as a stark commentary on humanity's divergent responses to environmental collapse.

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<sup>73</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 57.

## 5.2 Adaptation

The primary difference between the two novels lies in how the societies respond to crisis. In *The Water Knife*, the society is distrustful, and survival depends on ruthless competition; while *Glimmer* portrays a world rooted in community cooperation and hope for the future. Both societies are the direct products of their environment, finding own ways of coping with the situation.

*Glimmer*'s narrator, who has lost her memory, provides a unique perspective on the environmental collapse, focusing on the personal impact of the catastrophe. The disoriented perception she has of herself mirrors that of a world constantly reshaped by catastrophe. As she has no past to compare it to, Glimmer experiences the disaster along with the reader, making the collapse feel more personal and urgent. She must come to terms with both her fragmented identity and the changed world, but struggles to adapt: "Rubio could endlessly explain how change was inevitable and necessary, but he hadn't convinced me to welcome it."<sup>74</sup> Each superstorm forces change, whether Glimmer is ready for it or not, pushing her toward adaptation. Though ultimately, her struggle is not about resisting change, but about the difficulty of adapting to it.

While Glimmer grapples with personal adaptation, the den members also exhibit a response to the harsh circumstances. For example, after each storm, they unite to make repairs, emphasizing that individuality can no longer prevail. The groups working on the repairs make sure that there is no waste, "the tape itself was as precious as the heavy sheeting ... no waste to be tolerated."<sup>75</sup> This depicts the community's adaptation, showcasing that it resulted in collectivism and resourcefulness. Their careful preparation for each superstorm also highlights their adaptation to the environmental crisis. Overall, the community efforts underscore the den's ability to adapt and illustrate the fundamental role of collectivism in ensuring survival. Sustainable food production, obtaining supplies, and inventory management became a vital part of everyday life. In comparison to *The Water Knife*, the society in *Glimmer* adapts through those careful practical steps that ensure their long-term survival in a way the other society fails to achieve. *The Water Knife*'s rejection of the new reality and refusal to adapt exacerbates suffering, leading to disfunction and widespread violence, illustrating that "some people had to bleed so other people could drink. Simple as that."<sup>76</sup> Additionally, the lack of community efforts in Bacigalupi's novel leads to the breakdown of societal norms, while in contrast, Kellogg's

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<sup>74</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 190.

<sup>75</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 190.

<sup>76</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 443.

work shows the opposite. Ultimately, the novel's core theme is the people and their adaptation, a Goodreads review highlights this as well: "This story is about the people that are growing up in this terrible age, and how they are taking this collapsing way of life and remaking it."<sup>77</sup>

*The Water Knife*'s character, Angel, is one of the only individuals allowed to cross the state borders because of Catherine's authority. It exemplifies the privileged side of the rich and adheres to societal breakdown. At the beginning of the collapse, *The Water Knife*'s characters tried to flee to Vegas, but "the State Independence and Sovereignty Act had put up walls they couldn't cross. Every single state realizing it was in trouble if it kept letting people flood in."<sup>78</sup> Other than the privileged, most are trapped within the borders. Consequently, the citizens refuse to adapt to the new reality and still cling to an outdated sense of normalcy. This refusal to acknowledge change mirrors the mindset of Maria's deceased father, who insisted that the situation is only temporary, as Maria thinks, "living according to an ancient map of the world that no longer existed."<sup>79</sup> Despite the clear collapse, he insists on clinging to the past, much like the society at large. His inaction reflects the society's refusal to adapt, escalating their suffering as they continue to face an environment they cannot control or escape from. The fragmentation of society is fueled by the rejection of change because it forces the individuals to become more isolated and distrustful of each other.

The novel also highlights the tension between the society's psychological resistance to change and practical adaptation. The only instance of adaptation is by safeguarding what the individual considers theirs; for example, Lucy herself counts the gallons of water in her urn every morning.<sup>80</sup> Unconsciously, it has become a part of her routine. The reluctance to relinquish control over the coveted resource mirrors the broader rejection of adaptation to the new reality. While it shows that the society is not universally stagnant, it also emphasizes their violent tendencies. Most attempts to adapt are fragmented, underscoring the inadequacy of individualism to deal with crisis on such a large scale. On the other hand, Nevada's Lake Mead, known as "the lifeline of Las Vegas,"<sup>81</sup> is one of the few remaining sources of water, other than the Colorado River. The use of the word "lifeline," can either symbolize hope or serve as an ironic comment on the fragility of resources, emphasizing the states' inadequacy. Moreover, the lake is heavily guarded by Catherine's militia, not only from civilians but also so that other areas, like Arizona, do not steal Nevada's water reservoirs. When Angel is on his way to

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<sup>77</sup> Bonnie McDaniel, [review of *Glimmer*, by Marjorie B. Kellogg], *Goodreads*, November 10, 2021.

<sup>78</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 48–49.

<sup>79</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 49.

<sup>80</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 24.

<sup>81</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 100.

Phoenix, he notices that in order to prevent water from evaporating, due to the unbearable heat, Southern Nevada Water Authority or SNWA came with yet another megaproject:

A portion of the lake was covered with a half-finished gossamer structure, a carbon fiber roof that would eventually enclose the entire lake. SNWA's latest megaproject, trying to reduce evaporation.<sup>82</sup>

While these projects aim to address the crisis, they reveal the society's limited efforts, highlighting that the situation in Nevada is not superior to that of Phoenix. The "half-finished structure" symbolizes the need to protect their resources and an isolated approach to solving the problem, while practical, it does little to address the deeper collapse. This defensive stance, whether of the physical or psychological nature, fails to embrace the collective adaptation necessary for survival, as *Glimmer* emphasizes.

Simultaneously, the situation in Phoenix leads to a large division between societal structures – the poor and the rich. While the poor have to fight for survival, the rich live in luxury within the "Taiyang Arcology," an environmentally-oriented style of architecture and a place where they are shielded from the devastation below. The contrast emphasizes the stark divide and societal collapse, portraying both the physical and psychological distance. As long as the rich cling to their privileges, the possibility of meaningful change remains unrealizable. The society's behavior is stagnant, refusing to see further than the past. Moreover, the systematic inequality takes a psychological toll on Maria – to survive, she is forced into prostitution and her descent illustrates the moral decay and survival instincts that take hold when adaptation becomes synonymous with dehumanization. Furthermore, the streets are littered with dead bodies and sickness, "blood rivers and dust intermingled on the boulevard ... a pair of corpses,"<sup>83</sup> thus it is no surprise that most turned to violence. The environment did not give them any other chance.

The Taiyang Arcology is run and still being built by the Chinese. If the construction workers agree "to sweat a 12/12 shift,"<sup>84</sup> they will get lunch and a salary. The Chinese are smart and innovative in composting and recycling.<sup>85</sup> However, based on Lucy's narration, it is evident that the Arcology is detested, considering the societal gap it creates:

And the even stronger glares of the construction lightning of the rising Taiyang Arcology, the half-alive monster looming over all things Phoenix.

The Taiyang's struts gleamed like ghostly bones in the haze of flying dust.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 100.

<sup>83</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 33.

<sup>84</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 42.

<sup>85</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 42–43.

<sup>86</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 32.

Her use of the word “monster” reflects her disdain for the Arcology and “half-alive” serves as a chilling contrast to the streets full of corpses below, emphasizing the dehumanization of this unequal society. The Taiyang is a symbol of the divide; evidently, the Chinese exploited a dire situation, raising critical moral questions. The Arcology comes across as derogatory, as if laughing at the poor and thus fueling the pervasive violence. The rich, shielded by the Arcology, see no need to adapt as their lifestyle remains unchanged, reinforcing the stagnant behavior and individualism. In comparison, *Glimmer* presents a more balanced power structure where the harsh environment forces everyone to contribute equally to survival, no longer having the space to operate based on power structures – no one is exempt from struggle, which fosters a sense of familiarity and shared responsibility, even with a leader in charge.

Unlike in *The Water Knife*, where weather is hindered by ignorance, the meteorologists in *Glimmer* are actively working to mitigate the situation. Regardless of technology, most of *Glimmer*’s civilians learned to rely on natural cues and instincts: “My internal weather radar had been beeping away and I didn’t listen,”<sup>87</sup> this further demonstrates their ability to adapt. Although the storm’s unpredictability underscores the constant threat, “a slow patter of rain. Already? The forecast had been way off this time, or I should’ve paid more attention to the updates.”<sup>88</sup> Despite the individuals’ knowledge and preparedness, the characters’ only option is to hope that this storm won’t be the one that wipes them out, the ongoing threat is never fully in their hands.

Furthermore, other than Glimmer’s den, called Unca Joe, there are others. Each one has a different name (Macy, Ladysmith, Chelsea, etc.) and focus; for instance, there is one only occupied by women, who have been mistreated, mostly raped. It shows that even in a world that is not defined by violence, unlike the lawless collapse in *The Water Knife*, danger lurks. Initially, the dens are not particularly friendly, only trading supplies; however, as storms intensify and enemy gangs grow bolder, necessity forces them to work together. Albeit begrudgingly, they realize that survival hinders on joining forces, making reluctant cooperation no longer sufficient. Compared to Bacigalupi’s novel, the characters in *Glimmer* know that the only way to ensure long-term survival is by working together towards a common goal. The society understands that in order to adapt, they need to put aside their own feelings and wants, agreeing that “we’re not getting out of here anytime soon, so we’re going to need rules about how we should operate as a society.”<sup>89</sup> In the end, they do succeed, demonstrating the power of

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<sup>87</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 147.

<sup>88</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 147.

<sup>89</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 185.

unity in the face of overwhelming adversity. This contrasts with Bacigalupi's characters, who fail to achieve the same objective, instead choosing their own survival over unity. For example, two of the main narrators – Lucy and Angel – form a romantic relationship which gets sacrificed for survival: “‘You aren't going to shoot me.’ ‘I will if you don't listen,’ Angel growled.”<sup>90</sup> Emotional connections become liabilities, the world demands the sacrifice of any emotional bonds and survival instinct inevitably overrides all personal attachments. The novel's overemphasis on individuality reflect the societal collapse and undermine collective survival.

In comparison to *Glimmer*, it seems as though the society in *The Water Knife* did not adapt at all. The characters act like terrified lone animals, let loose for the first time in their lives, with no real plan for survival. Their individuality appears insufficient as no one can survive alone for long. *Glimmer*'s motto, “in unity is survival,”<sup>91</sup> proves far more useful, because the characters understand that survival requires collaboration. Moreover, majority of *The Water Knife*'s characters still believe that the world will magically return to the way it was before the climate catastrophe. Lucy's character exemplifies that type of individual, because “she thinks the world is supposed to be one way, but it's not. It's already changed. And she can't see it, 'cause she only sees how it used to be. Before. When things were old.”<sup>92</sup> This belief weakens her ability to adapt, making her ill-equipped to survive. Her mindset is comparable to that of Maria's father, who also held onto the past instead of adjusting to the new world, highlighting the deep societal stagnation that prevents any meaningful change.

Maria, once holding onto her morals, becomes increasingly hardened. In order to survive, the environment forces her to discard any trace of humanity. She starts as a clever but also kind young woman; however, losing her father and friend and becoming a prostitute, makes her shred it. She ends up being as harsh as the environment. Maria's transformation illustrates that in a collapsing society, adaptation is not a choice but a necessity for survival, making her the only narrator who understands that the world is never going back to the way it was before. Unlike Lucy, who clings to the past, Maria accepts that it has permanently changed, resulting in adaptation. Although her form of survival is still purely individualistic, Maria does not make strategic choices. Rather than adapting in a way that ensures long-term survival, she only reacts to suffering and abandons everything but survival itself. Maria thus realizes her own power by accepting the environment's terms:

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<sup>90</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 444.

<sup>91</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 17.

<sup>92</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 448.

“Why?” Maria stared at the woman, trying to understand what made all these people see the world the way they did. “Because I’m not going back to Phoenix. Maybe you think those papers mean something, but that place ain’t never getting better, and I ain’t going back.”<sup>93</sup>

This stagnant mindset doomed Maria’s father as well; therefore, Maria thinks that unless Lucy accepts the situation for what it is, she can never truly adapt. The violent behavior of the society could be explained similarly – resisting the reality of their world, the people lash out in desperation, clinging to old structures by force rather than adaptation. Whereas in *Glimmer*, society has already accepted the new reality, only hoping it will get better so that they can survive. They changed their strategy, while in *The Water Knife*, the people are stuck in the past, with no other way for adaptation than turning into violent and defiant creatures. The lawlessness becomes a form of adaptation, as if by forcefully protecting their beliefs of the old societal structures, it will somehow preserve the world as it is.

Maria’s transformation illustrates that survival requires adaptation, yet her world fails to accept the new reality fully. *The Water Knife* ultimately portrays a society clinging to old structures and thus unable to evolve, while *Glimmer* demonstrates that strategic adaptation, though imperfect, is the key to survival. Ultimately, both novels emphasize the critical role of adaptation in climate fiction, showcasing how societies either thrive or falter.

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<sup>93</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 447.

### 5.3 Plan for Survival

In *The Water Knife*, survival depends on controlling resources, violence, and individualism; while in *Glimmer*, it is built on long-term adaptation and collectivism. Each society takes a contrasting approach to securing its future or not securing it at all.

A central plot point of *Glimmer* is the search for a long-term survival. With the dens now in agreement to merge, the main objective is finding a suitable hideout. Rubio and a small group are tasked with locating a space large enough to house the new society and sustain all resources. However, Manhattan is cut off from the rest of the world, as most of it is either underwater or destroyed, and “the Mainland” no longer accepts refugees. The refugee camps are full and the damage severe, not accepting people “inland,” even with identification papers.<sup>94</sup> As Daniel, Glimmer’s love interest, remarks, “there’s less inland to share.”<sup>95</sup> This demonstrates a different example of scarcity, with the characters trapped in Manhattan, the new location needs to be within the city. Moreover, as Glimmer wisely notes, “I stored away another major requirement for a good den home: lots of flat rooftops or terraces for livestock and garden space. Rubio’d better be keeping that in mind.”<sup>96</sup> With the Mainland deliberately cutting off their supply of provisions, the people of New York are left to survive on their own. They must adapt by relying on their own resources, it proves vital to focus on further improving their own means of production, underscoring the need for a location with enough space for self-production.<sup>97</sup>

With the den leaders being strategic planners and sharing the same determination to survive and protect its people, they agree on the necessity of a concrete plan, concluding that strength is in numbers and a short-term plan is better than no plan at all:

“But we still need a plan.” He spread his palms. “Just ... something.”

“We do,” she conceded. “At least a short-term one.”

“Yes.” Rousseau’s bunched shoulders relaxed a fraction. “So that we live long enough to make good on the long-term one.”<sup>98</sup>

Together, they combine their resources, and with Rubio’s help, relocate to the Yankee Stadium. The stadium’s size, complete with office buildings, restaurants, private boxes and other spaces that can be utilized, offers the perfect self-sustaining environment. Its isolated location, surrounded only by open water, transforms it into “an island fortress,” providing

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<sup>94</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 228.

<sup>95</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 231.

<sup>96</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 211.

<sup>97</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 307–308.

<sup>98</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 313.

protection from both the weather and enemy gangs.<sup>99</sup> With this revelation, *Glimmer* establishes a clear and practical plan for survival, embracing the collective approach, unlike *The Water Knife*. As defined by Lisa Garforth, Kellogg's novel also embraces the societal ideal, exploring a society that lives a primitive life with no official government.

After the dens relocate to the Yankee Stadium, Glimmer feels optimistic for the first time in her life, "watching them, I felt the future-possible stretch out before us like a road. A highway, even, paved and marked."<sup>100</sup> It emphasizes the novel's optimistic approach to environmental issues, and the hope that action can be taken before it is too late. However, the overall question of the world's survival still looms, as it remains uncertain whether the people even stand a chance when the weather is getting worse. While the stadium is resilient and high enough to withstand severe flooding and superstorms, there is no certainty that New York will not face the same fate as Venice, despite there being people monitoring the weather's behavior, as Glimmer notes:

At Unca Joe, we had a numbers guy working on a system to predict how long it would be before we'd picked the whole island clean, and our living dried up. Taking things as I did pretty much day by day, I was glad someone had an eye out for our future.<sup>101</sup>

This further demonstrates the communal effort to adapt and survive, even though there is no guarantee of survival. The worsening weather remains an ever-present threat. However, the characters persist in their efforts, highlighting their unwavering commitment to adapting and finding hope, no matter the unpredictable future. This uncertainty aligns with Antonia Mehnert's categorization of climate fiction as a "critical dystopia," refusing clear closure to the depicted climate crisis and remaining open-ended. At the same time, the novel highlights the genre's general definition, a form of media that makes environmental issues more accessible and imaginable to the reader. Although *The Water Knife* complicates this conversation by portraying a deterministic view of humanity's fight for resources.

Similarly, both novels refuse to depict a guaranteed future. Although in *Glimmer*, humanity could only disappear as a consequence of the worsening weather; *The Water Knife* suggests that infighting may cause their downfall before the weather even has a chance to worsen. *The Water Knife* does not solely rely on climate change but also the gradual systematic

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<sup>99</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 316–318.

<sup>100</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 488.

<sup>101</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 92.

degradation caused by human greed. One passage describes the aftermath of a city after Nevada cuts off its water:

“But it takes time for people to get a grip on how screwed they are.

...

“But sewage treatment isn’t working anymore, since they got no water going through the system. So then disease starts to be a problem.

...

“But the homeowners hang on, at least a while longer. But even they break eventually. First just a few, then more – and then it’s this.” He gestured out at the river of refugees filling the highway. “A whole city getting the fuck out.”<sup>102</sup>

The Nevada government’s inhumanity is evident. While the quote simply depicts the aftermath of a tragedy, it could also serve as a prediction of the future. It is only a matter of time before all the water everywhere evaporates, either as a natural depletion, or sabotage. The authorities treat its people as an inconvenience, the novel directly shows the government’s cruelty by taking away the water right, forcing civilians out of homes, and going so far as to shoot them at any sign of disobedience. Specifically, Nevada does not hesitate to kill, willing to cross any lines in order to maintain its idea of control:

Up on the embankments, refugees had set up their tents. People intent on attempting a midnight run across the river, right into the teeth of the people Angel had recruited to stop them.

It was a nightly ritual. Texans and Mexicans and Zoners would rush the river. Some of them would get through. Most of them wouldn’t.<sup>103</sup>

Arizona has no way of sustaining the refugees any longer and Nevada will not let them in as there are not enough resources for the locals to live on, let alone newcomers. It creates a paradox, because the government’s actions ensure mass displacement while they simultaneously refuse to offer any solution other than violent force. In a similar way, charities set up relief tents along the border, not to help the people whose homes were taken, but to take good PR photos.<sup>104</sup> The government is only for show, it does not care about its people, further emphasizing that the demise of humanity seems inevitable. The society will massacre each other sooner than the weather worsens; their fate was sealed long before the last drop of water even disappeared. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, if the meteorologists and other experts continue portraying the situation as a record-breaking phenomenon, the civilians will not take action. Although Lucy’s dead friend, Jamie, seemingly realized that:

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<sup>102</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 427.

<sup>103</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 100.

<sup>104</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 101.

If I could my finger on the moment we genuinely fucked ourselves, it was the moment we decided that data was something you could use words like believe or disbelieve around.<sup>105</sup>

It seems that for smart people like Jamie, there is no space to thrive, because his arrogance toward the stagnant society is what gets him killed. On other hand, not to completely disregard *The Water Knife*'s attempts at formulating a plan for survival, there are two viewpoints showing that their survival does not depend on innovation, like in *Glimmer*, but control over resources. Firstly, the Taiyang Arcology with its advanced technology presents the perfect solution to survival. They have adapted and figured out a different type of lifestyle suitable to the environmental situation. Although because of not being inherently American, the locals are vary and envious, preferring to get replaced by the Arcology's culture rather than join forces. The Taiyang's objective can hardly be described because of their portrayal as a "looming monster" and mysterious, narrated only from the perspective of those who perceive them as such. To the struggling civilians, the Taiyang are not only foreign outsiders but also an elite class that has the means to help with the crises, but refuses to unless the individual is rich. The characters realize how dire their situation is, but instead of seeking change, they resign themselves to future failure:

"But someone ... someone will adapt. They'll make some kind of new culture that knows how to --"

"Be smart?"

"Or how to make a Clearsac for your entire body."

"I think that's called the Taiyang."

"There you go," Angel said. "People adapting and surviving."<sup>106</sup>

This quote illustrates the society's continuous refusal to adapt. It reinforces the idea that this generation is not going to be the one to do so, supporting all the previous arguments of their stagnant behavior. Angel and Lucy further claim that in the future, this period will be either referred to as the "Dry Time" or nothing at all, because this is the "Decline of the Americans."<sup>107</sup> There is no plan for survival, not only for lack of urgency but also because they have already given up. While the Taiyang represents a possible model for adaptation, the outsiders remain trapped. Secondly, the reason for all the narrators of *The Water Knife* coming together is the discovery of a long lost legal documents that give the city rights to another water source. Simply, the novel states that a Native American tribe, called the Pima, "made a deal with

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<sup>105</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 36.

<sup>106</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 422.

<sup>107</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 421.

Phoenix to shift all their tribal water rights over to the city.”<sup>108</sup> This means that Phoenix owns more of the Colorado River than initially thought, so other cities taking water from the river have no legal right. The papers offer hope for Phoenix, because they could utilize the river to better suit their needs and then “make Phoenix and Arizona the arbiters of their own fate instead of a place of loss and collapse.”<sup>109</sup> It completely changes the game, on one side, Phoenix’s resources got bigger and thus their chance of survival; however, it also puts them in danger. The other cities will not stand for even more water being forcefully taken away from them. By ensuring its own survival, Arizona would doom the other states, escalating violence and individualism rather than cooperation. Specifically with Angel’s orders being to bring the documents into enemy territory, Catherine’s hands. Similarly to *Glimmer*, the novel’s ending is open, thus it remains ambiguous whether the papers get into the hands of someone who could make a change, proving unclear to conclude if Phoenix turns into a speck of dust or not.

The characters also speculate about an “open war over water”<sup>110</sup> as if they are not already in the midst of one. The massacre at the state borders and deliberate destruction of resources indicate that war has already begun. It highlights the rejection to see the world as it is and even though they claim that “we saw what was coming and didn’t do anything about it,”<sup>111</sup> they still refuse to act, instead willing offering their identity to be replaced by the Taiyang Arcology. The Arcology proved that there is a solution to the crisis, though only for a select few. It seems that if the world doesn’t go back to the way it was before, the characters will refuse to be a part of any structure. In contrast, *Glimmer* highlights that scientists “knew what was coming” and thus tried to prepare by planting resources on top of their office roofs, even if the solution was small in scale.<sup>112</sup> Kellogg’s characters acknowledge the crises, while Bacigalupi’s cling to a past that no longer exists. It confirms *The Water Knife*’s general inability to solve the crisis.

Furthermore, as described by Eric C. Otto in *The Rain Feels New*, Bacigalupi evidently employed the first two tools for writing ecotopia, when creating *The Water Knife*. He uses the society’s behavior as a warning, showcasing that this is not a desirable future. The author also writes a gripping narrative, which immerses the readers into its plot and thus makes them realize the inevitability of the situation. Unfortunately, the painted scenario provides no hope for the

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<sup>108</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 282.

<sup>109</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 439.

<sup>110</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 284.

<sup>111</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 421.

<sup>112</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 192.

characters or society as a whole, instead portraying them as stagnant, refusing to undergo the necessary change towards transformation.

The society in *Glimmer* is more comparable to the Taiyang Arcology, because of their forward-thinking. Even though in contrast to the Arcology, whose structure is based on exclusivity and advanced technology, the dens' collective survival strategies can seem primitive; both societies strategically present their ability to adapt and maintain a plan for survival. If the weather does not get so bad that all humanity ceases to exist, future archeologists will look back on these societies with admiration, recognizing them as those who adapted while others perished. The damaged population of the Arizona state was doomed by its own mindset sooner than the weather even had a chance to escalate.

## 5.4 Morality

Sci-fi novels often discuss the role of government in people's lives, as P. L. Thomas defines. While in *Glimmer*, there is no formal government, *The Water Knife* directly explores this theme and thus poses many moral dilemmas.

In Bacigalupi's novel, survival depends on control – whoever owns the water supply controls the state. That person is Catherine Case, known as “the Queen of the Colorado.”<sup>113</sup> The novel introduces her through Angel, as the first chapter depicts him executing one of her ruthless orders – destroying an area's water supply, simply because “Catherine Case had decided they didn't deserve their water anymore.”<sup>114</sup> This decision and alias illustrate the dual cruelty of her character, the ruthlessness required to maintain order and control but also the god-like reputation that she has gained. However, she scarcely appears directly on page and by being portrayed mostly through Angel's eyes, it is hard to see her as anything other than a one-dimensional evil character, lacking complexity beyond her own gain.

She is also the mastermind behind the SNWA, and her sole focus is to protect it from losing its water supply. Her efforts may protect some, but they come at a great cost to others. She uses violent means to outsmart her rivals, such as the employment of “water knives” who enforce her will. Moreover, she was never genuinely interested in finding a solution to the environmental crisis, any attempts at cooperation were only pretend. According to Angel, while there used to be a time when authorities pretended that sustainability was possible, the leaders have long since dropped their pretenses:

He trailed off, remembering early days, when he'd stood bodyguard behind Catherine Case as she went into meetings: bald bureaucrat guys, city water managers, Bureau of Reclamation, Department of the Interior. All of them talking acre-feet and reclamation guidelines and cooperation, wastewater efficiency, recycling, water banking, evaporation reduction and river covers, tamarisk and cottonwood and willow elimination. All of them trying to rearrange deck chairs on a big old *Titanic*. All of them playing the game by the rules, believing there was a way for everyone to get by, pretending they could cooperate and share their way out of the situation if they just got real clever about the problem.<sup>115</sup>

Evidently, their efforts were never grounded in genuine hope, the authorities were only “playing the game by the rules” and “pretending.” Much like the PR charities set up by the border, both depicting empty gestures and superficial actions to maintain control. The

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<sup>113</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 10.

<sup>114</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 10.

<sup>115</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 14.

negotiations were self-serving, and clearly futile. Angel's recollection also uses ironic words, such as – “bald guys” and “real clever,” with the “Titanic” metaphor symbolizing inevitable failure. As a result, Catherine then sought to change the game completely. However, whether she has the right to decide who lives and who dies, who gets to drink water and who is left to thirst, remains an open moral dilemma.

While it may seem unjustifiable for an individual to make such precious and crucial decisions, her actions reflect the desperate choices forced upon leaders in a world where survival is uncertain. This raises the paradox of control, undermining its concept, because it is not true control if it requires violence to enforce. Catherine's efforts to ensure Nevada's survival at the expense of others comes at a profound moral cost, although her ruthlessness has achieved a form of order, if ethically questionable. It stands in stark contrast to the chaos in Phoenix, the Arizona's city exemplifies the consequences of political weakness – corruption holds more power than any formal government. Ironically, Nevada remains one of the few Southwestern states still standing, precisely because of Catherine's aggressive and unlawful pursuit of water rights. Despite her limited page count, Catherine's presence dominates Angel as the constructor of her will, and the destroyed land. Whether she realizes it or not, Catherine is partly responsible for the severity of the situation; by purposefully stealing and destroying water supplies, she may have ensured Nevada's survival, but only for now. Her behavior is not the long-term solution, merely a delay of the inevitable collapse. One day, there will be no water left for her to hoard, resulting in her state facing the same fate as those she already forfeited.

In striking contrast to Catherine, *Glimmer* introduces Cline Rousseau, a strong leader, who maintains control through hope rather than fear. Rousseau is in charge of Glimmer's den, the Unca Joe, because of his efforts, the hideout is “said to be one of the good dens: well-organized, less infighting, better food and medical care, fewer casualties and less attrition.”<sup>116</sup> This is largely due to his leadership style and community organizing background. Unlike Catherine, the people following Rousseau genuinely believe in his ability to protect them. He offers the den faith, keeping “an article of faith: the situation would improve, even return to some version of business as usual.”<sup>117</sup> Despite some den members, like Rubio, calling him naïve, “Rousseau just can't face the music.”<sup>118</sup> For others, like Glimmer, his faith provides a way to cope and keep sane in a damaged world. Yet, his leadership raises its own moral questions – he knows that there is no climate fix in sight, no savior coming, but refuses to let

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<sup>116</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 17.

<sup>117</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 44.

<sup>118</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 18.

his people lose hope. Even though Rousseau's care for his people and sustainability makes him a better leader than Catherine, it also means he is a morally complex figure, rather than a heroic one. He refuses to adjust his vision, lying to the entire den. It simultaneously makes his leadership philosophy dangerous, because as a result of the lies, he might end up failing his people, as Catherine did hers:

“Wouldn't Rousseau be in favor of that idea?” I ventured. “It speaks well for the dens.”

She shook her head, calmer, even resigned. “Not if it makes his people lose hope in a better future. A future elsewhere. Hope's what will get us through, he always says. And I understand that. I guess. It's just that ...”<sup>119</sup>

Rousseau, like Catherine, refuses to change his objective, despite the chance that it would make his people's survival more probable. Even though in most scenarios, he puts his people above himself, making him a strong leader – there is a point at which Rousseau draws a line. Evidently, it proves difficult to define what makes a good leader figure, especially in a situation that has not yet been encountered in the real world.

Furthermore, in *Glimmer*, when times get hard, the leaders of different dens meet to collaborate. Whereas in *The Water Knife*, the leaders are scattered, prioritizing themselves over the masses; *Glimmer* seems to understand the moral need to sustain resources, instead of stealing them for a short-term gain:

One question everyone's asking is why the Adders, with no food or necessities production of their own, would think that burning out a den that produces well is a good strategy for long-term survival. It's killing the goose, y'know? They'd be better off encouraging production, especially if they intend to steal it.<sup>120</sup>

This conversation occurs after the “Adders,” a violent group with no morals, start to attack and ransack the dens. The Adders' objective is unclear, because they kill everyone in the den and then burn it to the ground before moving on. Even Glimmer doesn't understand their goal: ““Why can't Adders grow their own food?” I asked. ‘Everyone else does,’” another character explains that “they're takers, not makers.”<sup>121</sup> The Adders' behavior could stem from greed or being let loose in a world with no formal authority. Nevertheless, their approach mirrors that of Bacigalupi's novel – mindless violence and constant destruction of resources. Unlike *The Water Knife*, where the leaders are the ones destroying, *Glimmer* has leaders willing

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<sup>119</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 194.

<sup>120</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 302.

<sup>121</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 201.

to protect its people and put a stop to the group's tactics. The leadership in Bacigalupi's novel fails its citizens by putting greed above long-term sustainability.

Although comparably, in both novels, the characters of Glimmer and Angel depend on stealing valuable supplies based on orders. While their actions seem similar, because they simply execute the wishes of their leader to ensure their own survival, Glimmer's motif is fundamentally different. She is not stealing or "picking" from anyone of value or for personal gain, but in order to keep a community alive, fed, and clothed. All the picks are evenly divided with strict rules in place, only stealing what is necessary:

You see, by my den's rules, a picker could claim one object from each night's take, so long as there was more than one and it wasn't a firearm. But this pack was full. Had to be lots of stuff in there. What if I wanted more than one? Yes, that would be grabby. A betrayal of share and share alike. "In Unity is Survival," went the den motto. You heard it all the time. If one person starts putting their own needs first, then everyone's going to want to.<sup>122</sup>

It shows the collective effort it takes to sustain a den, emphasizing ethical principles and the community-based approach. Although her monologue demonstrates a greedy tendency, she does not stray, unlike Angel. His actions are helping no one other than Catherine to stay in power, his behavior is not about the greater good, but personal survival and comfort.

Overall, Catherine's personal "water knives" serve as the executors of her will, similarly to soldiers in a smaller unit, answering exclusively to her. In exchange for loyalty and brutality, they are allowed to live in luxury – getting food, shelter, safety, and most importantly, a steady water supply. Though their actions are immoral, they reflect the desperation of people whose fundamental necessities are taken away, willing to kill for any semblance of stability:

"It's Carver City," Angel said, stifling his own feelings of frustration. "It's about time for them to dry up."

"About time?" Toomie asked.

"They had their water cut a little while back."

"You mean Las Vegas cut their water," Lucy amended. "You cut their water."<sup>123</sup>

After an environmental collapse, survival becomes the law, anything else, like morality, comes secondary. Angel himself feels no remorse for his loyalty to Catherine. He views his behavior as justifiable, because it is what keeps him alive. Furthermore, he nonchalantly declares, "guess that makes me the Devil,"<sup>124</sup> after destroying Carver City's water supply. It

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<sup>122</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 13.

<sup>123</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 427.

<sup>124</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 22.

further exemplifies him as emotionally detached and mocking towards the helpless. Countless refugees and civilians suffer because of his actions. However, it proves difficult to entirely condemn him when every single character is doing their best to survive in a hostile environment. The water knives, Angel included, simply found their way of coping and surviving.

Similarly to the social segregation seen in the Taiyang Arcology, it is immoral to make evident distinctions between people based on wealthiness. The rich were presented with an opportunity to lead a somewhat normal life, and seized it. The characters' violent behavior suggests that any one of them would have taken the same path, had they a chance. Even though *Glimmer* also includes a rich neighborhood, the people there are not exempt from suffering through the storms or lacking resources. Other than not having to live in deteriorating buildings and getting more electricity, they do not get to enjoy much luxury. This revelation makes the contrast between the Chinese and locals in *The Water Knife* even striker.

*Glimmer* and *The Water Knife* present two distinctly different leaders, each with their own objectives. The contrasting leadership styles depict that there is not one way to lead people, especially when neither society was prepared for a catastrophe. Leadership is not black and white; morality depends on perspective. The political and environmental situation in each novel is vastly different, leading to a warranted response. Ultimately, both Rousseau and Catherine might genuinely believe that what they are doing is just right for their people and land.

## 5.5 Technology

From the point of view of environmental issues, the situation in *Glimmer* is more severe than the one in *The Water Knife*. As a consequence, technological advancement is limited, forcing people to find alternative ways to survive.

Furthermore, *Glimmer*'s instable electricity and gradual degradation of essential machines make technological reliance increasingly difficult. Every superstorm causes power cuts, although it is rarely stable overall. However, because of the dens' ability to adapt, they have found alternatives, showcasing extreme self-sufficiency despite the conditions. Unca Joe does not need technology to survive. It shows that the path to sustainability is not reliant on high-tech solutions, contradicting real-life. On the other hand, in *The Water Knife*, technology remains in use, as water damage is more likely to shut down electricity than sand. The novel incorporates sci-fi elements by exploring the alien in advanced machines and employing scientific philosophies. *The Water Knife* displays science optimistically, standing in contrast with the novel's bleak tone. It shows innovative ways to enhance sustainability by repurposing waste and recycling water.

Nonetheless, these systems work only within the Taiyang Arcology, describing a utopia and standing in contrast to the rest of the world. The Arcology depicts several valuable philosophies. For instance, they built latrines to improve public health while also collecting sewage for composting, turning waste into nutrients for plants.<sup>125</sup> Although they take water purification a step further with Clearsacs, devices that transform polluted water into drinkable water. The Chinese excel at repurposing liquid to stock up on resources, as Maria observes, "they were smart. Never wasted anything."<sup>126</sup> The outsiders compare the Taiyang's steady water supply to magic, exemplifying its scarcity and mythical nature, "magic, he'd said. Big science. Who cared what the difference was? The Chinese knew how to make big things happen."<sup>127</sup> Maria also gains further insight into their resource efficiency, when she visits a client's apartment in Taiyang:

He ran water down the drain and tossed his eggshells down with it. He noticed her following his movements.

"It's not getting wasted," he explained. "It all gets recycled. It goes down to methane digesters, then passes through carp ponds and snail beds. Some of it gets reverse-osmosis-filtered and comes back up through the pipes, and some of it goes into the vertical farm on the south face."<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 114–115.

<sup>126</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 115.

<sup>127</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 42.

<sup>128</sup> Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*, 216.

It creates a stark paradox, while the Arcology people have access to technological luxuries, those outside fight over scraps. The Arcology appears to be a clear answer to the crises, making its survival and gradual replacement of the Americans seem inevitable. By employing local workers and providing them stability, the Chinese are already staking their claim on the land of Phoenix.

Overall, electricity is consistently available in *The Water Knife*. The characters use cars, tablets, computers, cell phones, and advanced weapons. In contrast, *Glimmer* depicts phones as mythical, Glimmer herself saying, “sounded like magic.” Cell phones rarely function thus only few people carry them. The only reliable form of communication is through a landline, although even those are scarce due to reoccurring superstorms continuously destroying the power source.<sup>129</sup> Even though the dens generate their own power, using solar panels, the sun hardly comes out, making that source of power limited as well. Despite all this, Glimmer points out that Rousseau’s assistant, Song-yi, uses a tablet, which she refers to as “an ancient device she was allowed to recharge every night, no matter what the power situation was.”<sup>130</sup> Moreover, when power is on, Glimmer herself uses a computer, signaling that while technology is rare, it has not disappeared entirely.

Though it was not their choice to be without technology, the characters in *Glimmer* demonstrate that people can go without it, even in an apocalyptic setting. This suggest that maybe, those in the real world also can. On the other hand, the Taiyang Arcology in *The Water Knife* brings innovative solutions to environmental crises, reinforcing the genre’s purpose to bring awareness to real-life climate change and potential answers.

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<sup>129</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 240–241.

<sup>130</sup> Kellogg, *Glimmer*, 298.

## CONCLUSION

This work has analyzed *The Water Knife* by Paolo Bacigalupi and *Glimmer* by Marjorie B. Kellogg in terms of environmental issues, and the genre conventions of science, dystopia, and climate fiction. It has also depicted how both novels present different approaches to solving climate change, as well as the themes of adaptation, survival, morality, and technology.

The analysis detailed the novels' engagement with environmental issues, concluding that *Glimmer* mirrors a traditional flood narrative, depicting New York after Greenland's icebergs melted and thus realizing scientists fears. Similarly, *The Water Knife* materialized a drought narrative in the Southwestern part of the United States, which is already struggling with this crises. Both novels clearly exemplified the theoretical research by drawing on real-life scenarios and therefore, calling attention to climate change.

The two portrayals of adaptation and survival differ significantly. Even though both novels depict water as the main theme, *The Water Knife* presents a world where survival is dictated by access to resources, technological superiority, power struggles, and individualism. Based on the analysis of utopian and dystopian ideals, the Taiyang Arcology embodies a utopian solution, yet remains an inaccessible privilege for most. Outside of it, adaptation means ruthless competition and governmental exploitation of the scarce resource. Furthermore, the society's stagnant behavior makes them unfit for survival and adaptation, underscoring the failure of such approach in the face of environmental collapse. In contrast, Kellogg's novel, *Glimmer*, offered an alternative model, demonstrating that survival is possible through communal efforts and cooperation. The characters came up with innovative solutions to food production, making the novel an advocacy for self-sufficiency. Furthermore, the analysis proved that both novels effectively affirm the genres' purpose; while *Glimmer* can serve as the framework for survival, *The Water Knife's* scenario serves as a warning.

The novels also provided answers and deeper insight into the political and ethical challenges. Foremost, they showed that morality is not a clear concept, but rather something shaped by the pressure of survival. Comparably, the discussion on technology revealed that while *The Water Knife* offers solutions to the crises, they are mostly inaccessible to the general public, drawing on the themes of inequality and morality. *Glimmer* once more provided a counterpoint, showing that sustainability is possible without advanced machines, so long as the individuals stick together. Kellogg's novel demonstrates that addressing climate change requires not only technological innovation but also a shift in societal values towards cooperation and sustainable living.

By analyzing *The Water Knife* and *Glimmer*, this thesis contributes to the broader conversation about climate fiction and its role in contemporary literature. Together, these findings prove that both novels successfully explore tropes common for science, dystopia, and climate fiction. While both of them effectively address the horrifying consequences of environmental collapse and human inaction, Marjorie B. Kellogg's *Glimmer* describes a more compelling argument for how societies should approach climate change in the real world.

## RESUMÉ

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na analýzu problémů životního prostředí v současné sci-fi literatuře, a to konkrétně v románech *Vodní nůž* (*The Water Knife*) od Paola Bacigalupiho a *Glimmer* od Marjorie B. Kelloggové. *Vodní nůž* byl vydán v roce 2015 a *Glimmer* v roce 2021. Cílem práce je prozkoumat, jak tyto romány zobrazují téma životního prostředí, kolapsu a jak se postavy s touto situací vyrovnávají.

K vypracování práce byla použita komparativní metoda. Tato metoda detailně porovnává vybrané pasáže z obou románů na základě teoretického rámce. Jednotlivá porovnání zajistila efektivní přístup k analýze literárních prostředků a způsobů, jakými autoři vykreslují danou situaci.

Teoretický rámec práce je rozdělen na tři kapitoly. V první kapitole je definováno sci-fi jako žánr společně s historií, a to převážně pomocí terminologie od Davida Seeda. Jeho terminologii tvrdí, že má tento žánr velice hybridní povahu, a tak je těžké ho jednoduše charakterizovat. Další kapitola je zaměřena na popis literárního žánru dystopie ve spojitosti se sci-fi a literaturou zaměřenou na životní prostředí. A právě tomuto žánru, neboli klimatické fikci se věnuje třetí kapitola. Popisuje tematické prostředky, které se v této žánrové literatuře často objevují. Nakonec, pro přiblížení společných témat teoretické a praktické části, je v kapitole představeno téma vody, jako častý prvek objevující se právě v klimatické literatuře. Tato teorie je založena převážně na výzkumu Adama Trexlera. Hlavní téma, které lze z prvních tří kapitol vyvodit, je snaha fiktivní literatury o bližší přiblížení a poukázání na problémy životního prostředí v našem světě. Dále si tato práce pokládá za cíl v teorii zobrazit společná témata tří žánrových literatur, a to dystopie, klimatické fikce a sci-fi neboli vědecko-fantastické literatuře.

Následující čtvrtá kapitola stručně popisuje děj jednotlivých románů a poté je uvádí do literárního kontextu v závislosti na výše zmíněných žánrech. Román *Glimmer* se odehrává v New Yorku v roce 2110 a popisuje svět, ve kterém došlo k rapidnímu globálnímu oteplení, což vyústilo v roztání ledovců a následné zaplavení Manhattanu. Zatímco román *Vodní nůž* se také odehrává v Severní Americe, na rozdíl od *Glimmer* popisuje situaci ve městě Phoenix, kde je nedostatek vody a nepřetržitě svítí slunce.

Kapitola číslo pět se již zaměřuje na samotnou analýzu. V první podkapitole této kapitoly se objevuje obecný popis situace v obou románech vzhledem k životnímu prostředí. Dále se soustředí na analýzu nedostatku zdrojů, zejména vody. Ve *Vodním noži* je voda klíčovým prvkem, který utváří každodenní život, ale také politickou a ekonomickou situaci.

Postavy se potýkají s konflikty a násilím jako důsledek tohoto nedostatku. Naopak pro *Glimmer* je téma nedostatku zdrojů zpracováno v širším kontextu. Závěrem této podkapitoly je rozdíl mezi přístupy ke změně klimatu a nedostatku zdrojů, zatímco *Glimmer* k tématu přistupuje jako k příčinně ekologické obnovy a nutnosti hledání alternativních řešení, tak ve *Vodním noži* je nedostatek zdrojů přímo spojen s chováním a dalšími zájmy postav.

Druhá podkapitola se zabývá adaptací postav na nehostinné podmínky. V *Glimmer* je adaptace zpracována spíše jako pozitivní změna, kde postavy nacházejí nové způsoby, jak obnovit zničený svět. Na druhou stranu, Bacigalupiho postavy odmítají čelit změnám, což vede k jejich psychickému zničení. I přesto, že odlišně, tak oba romány efektivně ukazují, jak silně mohou změny životního prostředí formovat lidské chování a hodnoty. Je tak ukázán silný rozdíl mezi optimistickým a pesimistickým způsobem chování, což je dílčím závěrem této podkapitoly.

Ve třetí podkapitole je kladen důraz na plán pro dlouhodobé přežití. V *Glimmer* se postavy soustředí na kolektivní způsob přežití, který je založený na vzájemné pomoci a důvěře. Společnost ve *Vodním noži* nevytváří žádný jednoznačný plán, nýbrž bude spíše jednou nahrazena arkologií, spojení architektury a ekologie, Taiyang, a to právě kvůli své nečinnosti a odmítnutí adaptace. I když právě tato analýza ukazuje, jak jednotlivci a komunity volí různé cesty k přežití v extrémních podmínkách.

Čtvrtá podkapitola se naopak zaměřuje na morální témata, kterým postavy musí čelit. Bacigalupi popisuje, jak je těžké zachovat morální hodnoty ve světě, který je definován násilím a nerovností. Dále také popisuje nedbalost vůdčích rolí, které se namísto ochrany svého lidu soustředí na zachování vlastní moci. Kelloggová v porovnání zobrazuje svět, ve kterém mají postavy možnost jednat v rámci vyššího dobra a vůdci nezneužívají své pozice. Závěrem jsou postavy *Vodního nože* nuceny jednat podle pragmatických, až nemorálních rozhodnutí, aby zajistily své přežití. Naopak *Glimmer* dává důraz na vysoké morální hodnoty, etiku kolektivního přežití a obnovy zdrojů. Morální témata, kterým postavy čelí v obou románech, vedou čtenáře k zamyšlení nad tím, jak by se v podobné situaci zachovali oni sami. Ukazují, že v krizových podmínkách není všechno jen černé a bílé, a že se morálně rozhodnout může být mnohem složitější, než se na první pohled zdá. Žánrová literatura obecně přináší vícevrstvý pohled na otázky etiky v závislosti na přežití.

V poslední podkapitole analýzy je vyobrazeno rozdílné využití různých technologií. V *Glimmer* se společnost vrátila do primitivního způsobu života, kdy jeho kvalita nebyla založena na výkonu elektřiny a dalších zařízení. Naopak *Vodní nůž*, na rozdíl od doposud

ponurého tónu, nabízí několik inovativních řešení v potlačování krize životního prostředí. Představuje tak naději pro recyklaci a obnovu zdrojů, i když je jejich využívání omezeno na arkologii Taiyang. Technologie hraje klíčovou roli v obou románech, zatímco Kelloggová se jí snaží nahradit soběstačnými snahami, tak Bacigalupi zobrazuje svět, který by bez technologických zařízení již dávno pohasl.

Hlavním zjištěním práce je, jak oba romány vykreslují problémy životního prostředí jako klíčové faktory, které značně formují osudy jednotlivců. Tyto problémy ovlivňují jak fyzický, tak i psychický stav jednotlivce. A zatímco Bacigalupi ve *Vodním noži* ukazuje, jak se postavy pokoušejí zastávat starý způsob života, ale zároveň přežít ve světě, kde je voda nedostatkovým zbožím, tak Kelloggová skrz *Glimmer* zkoumá spíše širší témata obnovy zdrojů a schopnosti člověka se přizpůsobit zmíněným podmínkám. Tento román také klade důraz na kolektivní snahu, a tak ukazuje, jak by se lidé měli zachovat v případě, že nastane podobná situace. *Vodní nůž* slouží spíše jako varování, které ukazuje, co může nastat, pokud lidé odmítnou adaptaci a obrátí se na nehostinnost.

V závislosti na problémech, kterým čelí celá planeta, je tato práce aktuální, jelikož právě na ně upozorňuje. Také ukazuje, jak se literatura může stát nástrojem pro reflektování a zobrazení současných problémů životního prostředí. Analýza poskytuje cenné poznatky a její zjištění naznačují, že tento žánr má potenciál nejen varovat před hrozbami, ale také inspirovat k hledání řešení. A to právě proto, že literatura má tu jedinečnou schopnost zosobnit různá témata prostřednictvím poutavých příběhů a sympatických postav.

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During the preparation of this thesis, I used ChatGPT 4 in order to summarize source materials and enhance readability. After using this tool, I reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the thesis.