



FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA

**Climate Change “Comes Knocking”.**  
**An Ecocritical Analysis of the Anthology *Empty House***

**O Cambio Climático Peta na Porta. Unha Análise Ecocrítica da Antoloxía *Empty House***  
**El Cambio Climático Llama a la Puerta. Un Análisis Ecocrítico de la Antología *Empty House***

Lucía Budiño Carril  
Titora: Manuela Palacios González  
Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesas  
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Asdo. Lucía Budiño Carril



FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA

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**Título:** Climate Change "Comes Knocking". An Ecocritical Analysis of the Anthology *Empty House*.

**Resumo:**

*Empty House* (Doire Press 2021) is a poetry and prose anthology, edited by Alice Kinsella and Nessa O'Mahony, in which writers from the English-speaking world, although mainly Ireland, elaborate on climate crisis topics such as natural disasters, biodiversity and eco-anxiety. This dissertation aims to study the connections between the human and the nonhuman, now affected by climate change, that these texts establish. *Empty House* presents a local endangered environment that triggers feelings of fear, hopelessness and indignation, but also admiration for nature and an explicit demand for its global conservation and the implementation of urgent socioeconomic changes. The various perspectives and literary genres the authors have adopted to introduce ecocritical topics will also be analysed according to current environmental literary criticism. Fundamental books such as Hubert Zapf's *Literature as Cultural Ecology* (2016), Matthew Griffiths' *The New Poetics of Climate Change* (2017) and Andrew J. Auge and Eugene O'Brien's *Contemporary Irish Poetry and the Climate Crisis* (2022) will be used for this purpose. Contemporary contributions to ecocriticism, notably Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence* (2011), Astrida Neimanis' *Bodies of Water* (2017) and Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino's *Affective Ecocriticism* (2018) will further the theoretical discussion of the topics introduced in *Empty House*.

Santiago de Compostela, 3 de novembro de 2022.

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## **Declaración de Orixinalidade do Traballo**

Eu, Lucía Budiño Carril, con DNI 20628038M, declaro que o presente Traballo de Fin de Grao é orixinal e que tódalas fontes empregadas foron citadas adecuadamente. Do contrario, son consciente das consecuencias que isto conleva dacordo co artigo 16 da *Normativa de avaliación do rendemento académico dos estudantes e de revisión de cualificacións*.

E, para que conste, asino esta declaración

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'LC' or 'LBC' with a stylized flourish.

Santiago de Compostela, 15 de xuño do 2023

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## 1. Introduction

This dissertation will provide an ecocritical analysis of *Empty House: Poetry and Prose on the Climate Crisis*, an anthology edited by Irish authors Alice Kinsella and Nessa O'Mahony. The anthology, published in 2021 by Doire Press, includes a diverse range of literary and non-literary texts that deal with the contemporary environmental crisis. *Empty House* focuses on climate change and its present and future effects on human and nonhuman beings. Anne Tannam, one of the authors present in the anthology, suggests that climate change “comes knocking” (in *Empty House* 91). Poray-Wybranowska (5), referencing the NASA webpage on climate change, provides a definition of it:

Climate change refers to a change in global climate patterns associated with increased levels of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) in the Earth's atmosphere. It is linked with sea level rise, increases in global temperatures, disruptions to normal seasonal cycles, changes in precipitation patterns, increased likelihood of droughts and temperature extremes (both extreme heat and extreme cold), and increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events such as hurricanes.

Haraway (45) traces the roots of climate change back to the late eighteenth century, the era of the Industrial Revolution and its ecologically disastrous engine –coal. It is also the era of Romanticism and the birth of environmental awareness in English-speaking writers such as William Wordsworth. It is only in recent decades that ecocriticism has developed into a deep and extensive field exploring several topics related to human relationships with nonhuman phenomena. These nonhuman phenomena refer to nonhuman beings, things and the environment as such. This dissertation, in providing a deep analysis of several texts in *Empty House*, explores three relevant ecocritical topics –environmental justice, ecofeminism and affect theories. These theories challenge modern Western frameworks that have placed nature as an exploitable resource at the service of human nations and corporations.

Literature is one of the most important assets for environmentalism, for it provides a space to explore and challenge anthropocentric, patriarchal and colonial worldviews. Griffiths (153) insists that these worldviews have provoked the environmental crisis. Haraway (98) and Nixon (14) consequently defend the interdisciplinarity of environmentalism and the cooperation of “artists, scientists [...] and activists” in physically and discursively acting against climate change (Haraway 98).

The first chapter of this dissertation will develop some ideas related to environmental justice that are present in *Empty House*. Since the consequences of climate change are worse in

communities outside of the Western world, they are often underestimated, which is what Nixon calls the “slow violence” of the environmental crisis. Environmental justice focuses on both global and local perspectives on climate change. The environmental and social state of things in postcolonial Ireland and non-Western countries such as Nigeria are explored in *Empty House*. For instance, some authors relate the loss of Irish Gaelic to the extinction of autochthonous nonhuman beings.

Alaimo has presented throughout her extensive work a proposal for acknowledging human and nonhuman trans-corporeality. This means that humans must understand that they are not separate from nature and therefore, not exceptional as anthropocentrism has been promoting (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 20). The second chapter of this dissertation will elaborate on this idea together with Neimanis’ theories on ‘bodies of water’ or water embodiment. This dissertation will claim that our bodies are not separate from our environment but instead interdependent on it. Affect theories, as those Bladow and Ladino have developed, challenge human exceptionalism as well. These will be explored in the third chapter of this dissertation with an analysis of eco-anxiety, ecophobia and solastalgia in *Empty House* among other affects. Bladow and Ladino (8) argue that “affect theory disrupts both discrete notions of embodied selfhood and static notions of environment”.

*Empty House* presents several types of literary texts such as poems, short fiction and short essays and sometimes these genres are even intertwined within a single text. This is the case in many texts such as Luka Bloom’s “Little Blue Vase” (in *Empty House* 154-157), where poetry and essay merge to report in a journalist-like manner the contradictory feelings that ecological catastrophes bring out. *Empty House* is also structurally divided into four sections, each with the name of a season. For instance, texts in the ‘Winter’ section tend to be more pessimistic than in the ‘Spring’ section, so a traditional allegory associating seasons with positive or negative connotations is reproduced. However, the texts in this anthology are as varied as their many authors, which allows for a more extensive and collaborative perspective on climate change. Therefore, this anthology will not only be read from an ecocritical perspective, but it is *per se* ecocritical and intended for environmental activism. Haraway (35) believes that we must “cultivate the capacity of response-ability”, that is, we humans must acknowledge our responsibility for the environmental crisis and act against it. *Empty House* makes a substantial attempt at doing that.

## 2. Environmental Justice

*Empty House* (Kinsella and O'Mahony) is the first literary anthology on climate change that Ireland has ever produced. Climate change has only recently become an issue of both public and ecocritical interest, even though the human impact on global warming began significantly in the mid-twentieth century (Nixon 12). Clark ("Some Climate Change Ironies" 139) has noted that ecocritics did not pay much attention to the climate crisis only a decade ago. Climate change and its acceleration in the past few years have been caused by our capitalist socio-economic model of society and its expansion through colonisation, imperialism and globalisation. Auge and O'Brien (10) state that this system's "ever-expanding cycles of production and consumption" have "colonised and commodified most of the planet". However, this climate crisis affects different peoples and areas of the world in various ways. While it has been largely caused by Western countries, the main and stronger effects are now seen in the global South and East, where their landscapes and natural resources have suffered massive changes and despoiling. For instance, gigantic landfills have been located there, which together with poor infrastructures have provoked rising toxicity in water and more destructive natural disasters (Nixon 16, 226, 274).

Environmental justice is a social movement that emerges within the communities that suffer environmental injustices which are generally invisibilised by the dominant and privileged groups in society (Murdock 9). Environmental injustices are produced and strengthened by the colonial and racist structures of global societies and Fiskio (15) highlights the importance of connecting slavery, "environmental racism" and "vulnerability to climate disasters and impacts". Fiskio (14-15) argues that our colonial history can allow us to understand better our responsibility for climate change and produce a "transformative framework" in theoretical criticism where we do not only rely on distributive justice but also on reparative justice. Distributive justice is defined as the "equitable sharing of benefits and burdens" of our economic system, while reparative justice concerns reparations to the communities that most suffer the consequences of our modern colonial world (Fiskio 13-14).

*Empty House* does not explicitly and thoroughly develop issues of environmental justice other than in Chiamaka Enyi-Amadi's poem "Smoke and Mirrors" (130-131), which focuses on postcolonial Nigeria. As Auge and O'Brien (4) suggest, Ireland's postcolonial condition as a now independent country from the United Kingdom allows writers to examine the effects that

the long-lasting colonisation had on their landscapes and culture, connecting the loss of fauna and flora with the loss of Irish Gaelic and native cultural practices. This is illustrated in poems such as Annemarie Ní Churreáin's "A Villager Mourns the Bay" (in *Empty House* 57). However, environmental justice concerning more than human beings, that is, the protection of nonhuman beings from the effects of human activity, is in this anthology a relevant issue both in local and global terms.

Environmental justice is growing in relevance in literary criticism. Lidström and Garrard (37) suggest a distinction between writing that portrays an idealistic image of nature and writing that is environmentally critical and considers current ecological problems. Lidström and Garrard (37) have named "ecophenomenological" writing what they consider to be "focusing on descriptions and appreciation of non-human nature with roots in Romantic and deep ecology traditions". Deep ecology has been defined by Clark (*The Cambridge Introduction* 2) as a theoretical critique of modern anthropocentrism, which is the belief that "it is only in relation to human beings that anything else has value" and it sometimes leads to an excessive idealisation of nature. For environmental justice critics, nature cannot always have a positive or idealised connotation, since many communities in the world are suffering the effects of the climate crisis in the most destructive ways (Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction* 87-88). It is only "environmental" writing, as Lidström and Garrard (37) suggest, that can consider nature "in relation to difficult and complex questions regarding human-environment relations" and by doing that, create a conflict with our modern nature-exploiting cosmovisions. Literature can become a space where conventional images of nature are challenged and new images of it are introduced together with a critical perspective on the social origins of the climate crisis. In this first chapter, local and global points of view will be presented together with an analysis of the underlying violence of the climate crisis against nature and humanity. In the last section, the necessary use of scientific data in literary works on climate change will be studied.

## 2.1. Local and Global

Climate change is a global issue, although its effects are known to vary from one country to another. In this section, the globally-oriented poems in *Empty House* "Mercury Rising" (71) and "Smoke and Mirrors" (130-131) will be compared to texts set in Ireland such as "A Villager Mourns the Bay" (57) and "Remedial Treatment, Second Session, Forty Years Later" (92-98).

“Mercury Rising” (in *Empty House* 71), by Moyra Donaldson, presents a list of names of nonhuman species that have recently gone extinct or will become extinct in this century. The poem has been displayed as a calligram that mimics the figure of a mercury thermometer, which highlights the idea of global warming menacing the lives of all kinds of nonhuman beings. The calligram also resembles an exclamation point and it draws readers’ attention to the dramatic extinction rate that the world is experiencing, which by the year 2100 will come to the point of “fifty percent of / every species / on earth extinct” (71).

Chiamaka Enyi-Amadi’s poem “Smoke and Mirrors” (130-131) is the aptest illustration of literary environmental justice in *Empty House* and can be considered an example of environmental poetry in Lidström and Garrard’s terms (37). Here, the poetic voice powerfully condemns the Western metropolis for the effects the despoliation of natural resources has on postcolonial nations such as Nigeria, one of the largest oil producers in the world – “What will it take to compel post-colonial capitalist empires to open / tight pockets, to loosen purse strings, to pour resources into indigenous / lands instead of sucking crude oil from swollen pipelines?” (in *Empty House* 130). This demand that Western countries share their wealth with the colonised constitutes an example of distributive justice, which, although encouraged by activists and academics, should combine other forms of environmental justice such as reparative justice (Fiskio 14, Murdock 12).

“Smoke and Mirrors” (in *Empty House* 130-131) is set in our modern postcolonial world and it acknowledges the contribution of black slaves and colonised communities to the Western economic system. Indigenous lives have been and are still at risk for the sake of Western companies’ businesses in Nigeria (“brown skin / sinking into the depths of the earth daily, risking death” 130), which mine the land not only searching for oil but also for precious stones (line 11) and coltan (lines 30-32). The exploitation of coltan, the mineral of modern technology, is repeated several times in the poem to highlight that Western commodities are invented and generated by means of neocolonial practices. Furthermore, the poetic voice warns that the continuous despoliation might “disturb dormant giants” (130), which can be read as a metaphor for human activity disrupting natural order and causing disasters. It could also be referencing precolonial beliefs in which people feared divine beings would punish them for neglecting nature.

As Auge and O'Brien (10) suggest, this global situation has come to a point where it is no longer sustainable, and "Smoke and Mirrors" (in *Empty House* 130-131) presents a similar idea by stating that humanity still has a "commitment to an age-old lie" by which endless consumerist lifestyle is presented as the preferable way of life. Fiskio (6) and Baldwin (7) have pointed out that there is a rising fear of loss of Western superiority over the world due to harsher and more radical measures against the climate crisis that would reduce the impact of industrial activity. These could decelerate the economies of the world because the capitalist economic system thrives on the exploitation, production and consumption of lands and goods. The poem suggests a similar idea: "Fear of recession clouds over / cries of climate crises, warnings of human extinction" (in *Empty House* 130).

"A Villager Mourns the Bay" by Annemarie Ní Churreáin (in *Empty House* 57) is another example of postcolonial and environmental poetry in terms of its denunciation of the loss of native culture and nature in Ireland caused by the English colonisation. Auge and O'Brien (4) argue that Irish literature is unique in its exhibition of strong relationships between sea, land and culture. An instance of this is Annemarie Ní Churreáin's work, which she connects with a wider Irish tradition "of writing the body as an extension of the landscape, and of honouring the deeprooted connection between Gaeilge and the environment" (in Palacios 238). Xie (4) asserts that interest in postcolonial perceptions of climate change is arising in ecocritical writing, since the most severe consequences of climate change are affecting postcolonial communities. *Empty House* contains many poems set in Ireland that concern specific Irish issues on nature-culture relationships, and Annemarie Ní Churreáin's "A Villager Mourns the Bay" (57) presents a striking parallelism between natural and cultural extinction. In the poem, an important question is raised: "How, now, to say the convolutions of a *tonn*?" (57). The poetic voice feels she has lost fluency in her native language to the point where she wonders how to describe the curve of sea waves in English, the colonisers' tongue that has become her own. It is therefore implied that the English language cannot reach the referential capabilities of Irish Gaelic, which presents much more vocabulary concerning natural phenomena. The poetic voice recalls "the sunken names of kings / who, vowel to the bone, defended the island / in *suaimhneas, solas, fiántas* [peace, light and wilderness]" (57). Ireland and its special connection with nature through language and legend have been threatened by the colonising English culture. The poetic voice's use of Irish Gaelic words mixed with English also reflects her hybrid identity. She finds herself "At the end of the language" (57), where she cannot truly think and perceive in the old Irish way, but neither can she mimic English behaviour. This

poem stresses the loss of balanced relationships between nature and culture, including the loss of “*suaimhneas, solas, fiántas*” (57) and a linguistic and cultural sense of belonging. As in Nigeria and many other colonised countries around the world, identity features are lost to a growing monolithic identity where the coloniser’s language, cosmovision and economic models are adopted by force.

“Remedial Treatment, Second Session, Forty Years Later” (in *Empty House* 92-98) is a short story by Lisa McInerney. The narrator, an Irish person, remembers a flash flood that she had experienced four decades before with her Asian girlfriend Amy. Apart from the suddenness of the catastrophe, the narrator implies that this event triggered the couple’s breakup. Their confronted cosmovisions came to their climax that day. While Amy was used to flash floods and migrating had toughened her, she criticised that her partner had grown soft and comfortable in the Western world. However, the narrator argued that Ireland’s colonisation had disrupted Irish people’s lifestyles as well – “The old church, the whatyoucallit, class divide (...) We were an emigrant nation too” (93-94). Ireland’s unique situation in Europe is highlighted by the references to their precolonial culture – “I told her about the banshee, our folklore of omens and warnings” (95).

In this short story, two different worldviews are competing over which parts of the world have suffered the most the consequences of capitalism, such as colonisation and climate change. The story implies that every community in the world has been affected by it and has experienced the effects differently. This comes to stress the contention of this section that the whole world is struggling with climate change and that Ireland is an example of how it is perceived locally.

## 2.2. Slow Violence

In his 2011 book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon conceptualised the imperceptible violence hidden in the works of our modern socioeconomic system and the climate crisis that it has generated, giving it the name “slow violence”. He argues that violence is not always brutal and scandalous, but that it can precipitate untraceable changes that over time delete responsibilities and the possibility that the affected people are considered victims of systemic violence (Nixon 11). Environmental justice becomes then more challenging because the “delayed effects” of slow violence make it “difficult to secure effective

legal measures for prevention, restitution, and redress” (Nixon 9). In “Smoke and Mirrors” by Chiamaka Enyi-Amadi (in *Empty House* 130-131), the despoliation of Nigerian resources is overtly violent against Nigerian workers’ lives, but the poem cannot imagine the human and nonhuman implications this violence will have in the long term. Slow violence primarily refers to this kind of violence against indigenous lives and lands outside of the Western world. In the workings of climate change, its causes, processes and consequences are never easy to understand or foresee. In Anne Tannam’s poem “Comes Knocking” (in *Empty House* 91), climate change represents this slow violence – “the signs are easy to miss” and disregard because they are dispersed over time. In this poem, only a week passes from the first signs of the water level rising until land is finally submerged, which is a hyperbole of what is currently happening to our planet.

Nixon (8-10) analyses how modern media only have an interest in events of extreme violence, such as terrorist attacks or tsunamis, and help generate this modern spectacularisation of life where less visually violent events are dismissed. Raising awareness of slow violence such as climate change is an objective hard as ever to meet, and Nixon (8-15) wonders how “planetary consciousness” can be spread without sensationalist practices. As Baldwin (3) argues, climate change is a “hyperobject” of which only a fraction can be seen, such as increasing natural disasters. When we are considering climate change events in a human temporal line, it is impossible for us to grasp the real catastrophe that is slowly coming. In the case of sea-level rise, it will not probably be a serious problem for decades, but it is already affecting sea life.

Nixon (14-15) believes that the role of ‘writer-activists’ is that of imagining the unimaginable and presenting it via imaginative and scientific methods, as *Empty House* does in the previously analysed poems “Mercury Rising” (71), “Comes Knocking” (91) and many others. Zapf (12-19) suggests that literature not only reproduces cultural knowledge but is a site of exploration and transformation within the discourse system ready to provide a “more complex, self-reflexive, and ethically responsive concept of sustainability”. Similarly, Auge and O’Brien (10) argue that ecopoetry can generate the new concepts and frameworks needed for confronting climate change. Making the invisible visible through the creation of challenging images is one of the main goals of environmental writing (Lidström and Garrard 37).

Furthermore, Fiskio (11) also acknowledges the important role of activists protesting in public spaces and Nixon (17) argues that “indigenous resource rebellions” have “resulted largely from

a clash of temporal perspectives between the short-termers who arrive (...) to extract, despoil, and depart and the long-termers who must live inside the ecological aftermath". In Chiamaka Enyi-Amadi's "Smoke and Mirrors" (in *Empty House* 130-131), the risk indigenous lives suffer in oil extractions is denounced. In the poem, an explicit reference to a group of Nigerian activists is made – "If only these lines could grant the Ogoni Nine an extra eight lives" (130), since they were hanged for opposing oil extraction in Nigeria.

In the opening line of the essay "Art in the Climate of Change" (in *Empty House* 142-144), the author Ingrid Casey states that "the history of politics in Irish art is intrinsically linked to Ireland's breaking free of colonial and postcolonial shackles" (142). She describes in this short essay the relevant aspects of the history of the "urban art collective" (142) SUBSET, which captured the Irish public attention by getting involved in recent political events such as the referendums on abortion and homosexual marriage, which took place in 2018 and 2015 respectively. Because of that attention, they were asked to collaborate with Friends of the Irish Environment to spread awareness on environmental matters. The writer concludes that SUBSET asserted "Irish visual art's post-colonial, post-capitalist cultural power", since they achieved great success and "a real effect on [Irish] society" (in *Empty House* 144). As Zapf (18-19) and Nixon (14-15) have argued, this kind of activism, together with the ecocritical nature of *Empty House's* texts, can perform an indispensable role in raising awareness and challenging dominant liberal frameworks. Since these efforts are accessible to the public, they can be easily appreciated by anyone in their communities. Ingrid Casey further states that "art should be used to disrupt the known narrative" (in *Empty House* 143).

The afterword of the anthology *Empty House*, "About Friends of the Earth" (173-181) exemplifies that the collaboration between environmental activists and artists, or 'writer-activists' as Nixon (14) calls them, can be a powerful tool in the necessary challenge of modern frameworks to prevent the climate crisis from worsening. Here, even though individual acts are considered, the focus is placed on governmental measures against climate change. As Ingrid Casey points out in her essay "Art in the Climate of Change" (in *Empty House* 142-144), the mainstream discourse about Ireland idealises its natural landscapes, while in fact, the country ranks among "the worst offenders in all of Europe when it comes to plastic pollution" (144). In the afterword, Friends of the Earth stress that Ireland must act against climate change in many aspects, such as abandoning the generation of electricity via coal burning (in *Empty House* 178). Clark ("Some Climate Change Ironies" 141) affirms that "without more sustained

work on the nature of the state, ideology, modes of production etc.”, placing “the focus on the individual [...] reinforces the illusion that reality and power remain a matter of individuals pursuing their rights and opinions”.

### 2.3. Scientific Data

Any question related to climate change can be regarded from a multidisciplinary perspective. As this chapter has proved thus far and Clark (*The Cambridge Introduction* 8) expresses, “ecocriticism makes up the arena of an exciting and imponderable intersection of issues, [...] science, morality, politics and aesthetics”. In this section, the scientific data displayed in *Empty House* will be analysed as a characteristic feature of literature on climate change.

Clark (*The Cambridge Introduction* 10) states that environmental writing struggles “to inhabit the difficult area between scientific knowledge and immediate perception, between fact and value”. In *Empty House*, personal experiences of the environmental crisis are prioritised over empirical scientific knowledge. However, some texts use scientific data to present a new global reality that is often disregarded by the population and the governments. Since literary texts are often associated with imagination or even fantasy, the use of scientific data highlights that *Empty House* builds its literary texts on empirical facts. The previously analysed poem “Mercury Rising” (71) is the only text in *Empty House* that reports scientific data on their own, without invented details. “Mercury Rising” (71) includes a long list of nouns barely connected in a syntactically adequate sentence. These nouns refer to nonhuman species already extinct or in danger of extinction, a fact that science can prove and literary works have not invented. An example of this follows:

2010 vietnamese rhino  
 last female killed  
 and horn removed  
 christmas island  
 pipistrelles long  
 jaw tristamellas  
 yangtze dolphins

Many texts that include scientific data in *Empty House* make use, however, of the allowed creativity in literary texts. One of the texts that combine science and imagination is “Comes Knocking” (in *Empty House* 91), where the factual rising sea level is exaggerated to the point that all terrestrial life has been erased in a matter of a week. Abby Oliveira’s poem “Ghost Light” (in *Empty House* 165-166) presents scientific data as the background to her personal

portrayal of life in midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ever since COVID-19, it has become public knowledge that environmental degradation increases the chance of suffering pandemics. “Ghost Light” (165-166) focuses on the restored ecosystems in places such as Venice, where tourism had altered the city’s biodiversity. The poetic voice declares: “There’s fish and oblivious dolphins, / ducks swimming in Roman fountains” (165) and she laments that humans cannot enjoy a healthy environment because they must stay at home. However, the poetic voice acknowledges that we will keep deteriorating the environment as soon as lockdown is over and “the show goes on” (166).

Climate change literature has developed specific imagery to describe and present the environmental crisis and it has often derived from scientific knowledge. An example of this is the iceberg, which represents the slowness and future dreadful consequences of climate change. While it is a fact that icebergs are melting and forcing sea levels to rise, they also work as a metaphor for the superiority in size of what cannot be seen, of what is underwater. This image works dually in calling attention to the climate crisis, pointing out its unseen processes and consequences. Climate change is difficult to deal with “as a sustained and direct object of analysis” (Clark, “Some Climate Change Ironies” 145), or as Baldwin (3) called it, climate change is a hyperobject. Therefore, the use of imagery facilitates the apprehension of the environmental crisis. In Jan Carson’s “Mr Iceberg” (in *Empty House* 146-153), the iceberg does not only work under this double significance, but it includes a third level of meaning in which the iceberg has become idealised and admired as a spectacular natural phenomenon. In this story, the protagonist is detached from ecological consciousness, but he eventually comes to admire nature and understand the gravity of climate change. Seeing the icebergs has caused this feeling of urgency and danger, which are the same responses the text is meant to provoke in readers. Therefore, both physical and imaginary icebergs can trigger a change in the public’s perception of climate change.

Nixon (14-15) insists on the importance of apprehending “imperceptible threats [...] through the work of scientific and imaginative testimony”, where writer-activists “make the unapparent appear, making it accessible and tangible by humanizing drawn-out threats inaccessible to the immediate senses”. In “Comes Knocking” (in *Empty House* 91), this feeling of threat against all we know and all we are is portrayed, which allows the readership to imagine how the future will look like if action against climate change is not taken. Auge and O’Brien (9-10) highlight that the climate crisis not only stresses the “cultural nullity” of our worldviews, but it provokes

a needed change in them. Natural forces are driving us to change our ways so that both nature and human societies may survive. In order to understand the causes of the climate crisis, humanity must be aware that Western frameworks such as anthropocentrism displace nature to an object of human dominion and exploitation. Nixon (12) brings forward the concept of the ‘Anthropocene age’, that is, the current geological period marked by the human impact on the Earth’s natural cycles. He argues that it is the acceleration of time in the Anthropocene and especially in the last few decades (‘the Great Acceleration’), with its fast and extreme violence, that hinders the perception of slow violence (Nixon 12).

To conclude this chapter, *Empty House* presents various instances in which literary texts portray, imagine and warn of the climate crisis processes and effects. This is done from a postcolonial and anti-capitalist perspective, a radical point of view that is defended among many ecocritical theorists as the most effective solution against the social causes of climate change. In this chapter, the local and global dimensions of the climate crisis have been analysed with a focus on its hidden violence against human and nonhuman beings. The scientific data that many of the literary texts have provided strengthen the arguments of its authors, or as Nixon (14) has decided to call them, ‘writer-activists’ against climate change.

### 3. Human and Nonhuman Trans-corporeality

This chapter will focus on texts in *Empty House* (Kinsella and O'Mahony) where human and nonhuman relationships are represented or discussed. In Western worldviews, these relationships often suppose a hierarchy of power in which human reason is placed above human bodies, nonhuman beings and nonhuman things (see Plumwood; Alaimo). Emily Cullen's poem "Adam's Apple?" (in *Empty House* 107) condemns this hierarchy with the use of a significant term that can be referencing the title of Plumwood's acclaimed work *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*:

As a girl, I clashed  
with a cosmology  
that preached of  
mastery over  
the biosphere

Our modern Western frameworks, where nature has been politically categorised as an exploitable resource, have inevitably caused our current climate crisis (Griffiths 153). Human reason and culture have been placed in the centre of our Western cosmovision, resulting in an asymmetrical relationship between human and nonhuman phenomena. Emily Cullen's poem "Adam's Apple?" (in *Empty House* 107) refers to this as "the chasm / between humanity / and planet". This anthropocentric worldview has not only affected how humanity interferes with the environment causing a climate crisis but also the "construction of human identity as 'outside nature'", that is, detached from the body and materiality (Plumwood 2, 20).

The "rational dualism of Enlightenment philosophy" has long been criticised in ecocritical theory (Flannery 158), since it has placed culture and nature in a dichotomy similar to those of "mind/body, subject/object, rational/emotional" and "male/female" (Alaimo and Hekman 2). Plumwood (19-20) further develops this idea:

Nature, as the excluded and devalued contrast of reason, includes the emotions, the body, the passions, animality, the primitive or uncivilised, the non-human world, matter, physicality and sense experience, as well as the sphere of irrationality, of faith and of madness.

In this regard, O'Reilly (1) argues that "climate change is a set of human engagements with the environment" which "are not only conceptual but also material, sensory interactions with substances around us". While Gaard (296) criticises the excessive focus paid in ecocriticism to the "practice of the mind and the intellect" to detriment of materiality, Alaimo (*Bodily Natures* 3) recognises that environmental justice movements have helped set materiality as a relevant topic in recent ecocritical discussions of which she is a major contributor. Consequently, a

radical change in our anthropocentric cosmovision is needed to “confront the full implications of climate change” (Griffiths 175).

This chapter will be organised into three sections: the first one will analyse in which ways human and nonhuman relationships are asymmetrical. The second section will explore the topic of trans-corporeality, which has been widely developed by Stacy Alaimo in *Bodily Natures*. The third section will present a discussion on human corporeality with special attention to water embodiment according to Astrida Neimanis’ proposal in *Bodies of Water*.

### 3.1. Nature’s Agency

Nonhuman phenomena and their representation in literature are major topics in ecocriticism, for the display of power relationships between culture and nature can either be reinforced or become an object of criticism in literary texts. In this sense, O’Reilly (2) declares that the environment has usually been “depicted as blank, a stage, or passively receiving input from more agentic subjects, usually humans”. The idea of humanity as the protagonist and actor of all stories and Western history is, according to Gaard (315), a “methodological fallacy”. Gaard (315) believes that “the a priori assumption of an autonomous thinking subject, an ‘I’ that is separate and discontinuous from the rest of ecomateriality” is a misjudgement.

In Siobhán Campbell’s poem “River-Talk” (in *Empty House* 135), the poetic voice passively observes the flow and activity of a river that is surrounding her. She acknowledges the agency of nature – the river is a subject performing actions:

*Hello* says the slow but steady flow.  
*Hello* I say, wary now,  
 knowing how it fills the fields,  
 leaves a layered skim of grey silt,  
 carries salmon to their home runs,  
 shucks stones through their sprig-spawn,  
 makes bends where it will  
 though farmers dredge its banks.

Concerning the question of nature’s agency, Alaimo (*Bodily Natures* 2) affirms that even though “the environment [...] is too often imagined as inert, empty space or as a resource for human use”, nature has “its own needs, claims, and actions”. These actions impact all beings, things and phenomena in the environment since nature “interacts with and changes the other elements in the mix, including the human” (Alaimo and Hekman 4-5, 7). The division between humans and nature has placed reason and action as exceptional characteristics of humanity while in its representation, nature has only been left with a passive and invalidated role.

Plumwood (5) believes that reconsidering this categorisation does not only involve acknowledging nature's "agency and intentionality", but also returning materiality and corporeality to the human. Neimanis and Walker (564) similarly state that "once enmeshed in a world of more-than-human, transcorporeal transits, it is impossible to maintain a human exceptionalism on the grounds of agency". Siobhán Campbell's poem "River-Talk" (in *Empty House* 135) presents this state of being and observing nature as a way of realising its power and agency, thus changing our anthropocentric perspective. Aġin (346) insists that "those narrative capabilities" such as the river's ("River-Talk" in *Empty House* 135) "are not something that we humans grant to the nonhuman matter but are already inherent in all living beings and nonliving things". Therefore, while the line "*Hello* says the slow but steady flow" (in *Empty House* 135) confers anthropomorphised characteristics to the river, the rest of the actions ("leaves", "carries", "shucks", etc.) are natural and not exclusively human.

The poetic voice stresses the contrast between her immobility and the river's change and flow (in *Empty House* 135):

And all is movement here  
and all is season  
and all is turning –  
except me,  
as I would fall down if I did.

Ecofeminist criticism has long examined Western dichotomies as "gendered concepts" used to characterise women and racialised people as "more bodily and hence 'closer' to a debased nature" (Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground* 13, 145). Therefore, agency, subjectivity and mind have been assigned to humans and especially white male humans, while their opposites have been used not only to diminish nonhuman phenomena but other human beings (Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground* 13). Neimanis (13) adds that "a lack of acknowledgement of feminist contributions to these issues transmutes into a lack of attention to intra-human difference". In the previously quoted fragment from "River-Talk" (in *Empty House* 135), the human poetic voice's passivity contrasts with nature's agency. Because of the references to traditionally regarded female traits, we will consider the poetic voice to be a woman. Therefore, the expected feminine passive role is apparently satisfied. However, this passivity can be read as a form of rejecting human or even male intervention in nature, therefore embracing a position of observation. Ralph (473) argues for "coexistence as opposed to mono-existence and absolute forms of power; and receptivity, passivity, nonconfrontation, and declination" as "positive,

feminist, forms of passivity”. Reclaiming passivity as a positive feature can become a powerful tool to change the dynamics of nature’s exploitation and pollution.

In Siobhán Campbell’s poem “River-Talk” (in *Empty House* 135), human and nonhuman elements or anatomies are intersected:

When I step in to the tar-black flow  
under the fur beam of pussy willow  
my legs fill with surfacing blood.  
Each pore fights the river cold.  
Bones stiffen, locking my limbs.  
Feet on stones feel for ridges and ribs.

Two possible wordplays can be extracted from this fragment – while “pussy willow” denotes a tree, it may as well connote a vagina, and the stone’s “ribs” can also refer to the poetic voice’s ribcage. The sexual connotations are heightened by references to the poetic voice’s “legs fill[ed] with surfacing blood”, which in relation to the wordplay in “pussy willow” could mean that the bleeding is her menstruation. Furthermore, imagery of water throughout the poem has traditionally been interpreted as a symbol of fertility in literary works. Therefore, there is a clear intersection or “trans-corporeality” (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*) between the poetic voice’s body and the river’s body. In this regard, Alaimo (*Bodily Natures* 2) asserts that “emphasizing the material interconnections of human corporeality with the more-than-human world” will “allow[s] us to forge ethical and political positions that can contend with numerous late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century realities in which ‘human’ and ‘environment’ can by no means be considered as separate”. Acknowledging and representing trans-corporeality becomes then an exercise of deconstructing the much-discussed division between human and nature since the “sense of being immersed within incalculable, interconnected material agencies” can “erode even our most sophisticated modes of understanding” (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 17).

It is important to note that “feminism has long struggled with the historically tenacious entanglements of ‘woman’ and ‘nature’” (Alaimo *Undomesticated Ground* 2). This association engenders topics such as those of “Mother earth, earth mothers, natural women, wild women, fertile fields, barren grounds, virgin lands, raped earths [...]”, an association which traditionally “thrusts woman outside the domain of human subjectivity, rationality, and agency” (Alaimo *Undomesticated Ground* 2). However, Alaimo and Hekman (12) insist that the purpose of ecofeminism and especially “material feminism” is to redefine and revalue nature as “an active,

signifying force; an agent in its own terms” instead of considering it “the repository of sexism, racism, and homophobia”.

Alaimo (*Undomesticated Ground* 9) further states:

The fact that women’s bodies, experiences, and labor have long been denigrated for their supposed proximity to a degraded natural world creates the potential for feminist epistemological positioning and discursive reworkings that challenge the constitution of both “woman” and “nature.”

Alice Kinsella, one of *Empty House*’s editors, explains that “reject[ing] the female body and its biological possibilities” is not as much a feminist act as accepting and embracing the qualities that make it special and out of a male-constructed norm (in Palacios 232). Kinsella states: “When I write about my body, it is because I am trying to love it. [...] My animal body is divine” (in Palacios 233). Mary O’Donnell, one of the authors present in *Empty House*, also discusses her work in Palacios (239) and touches on women and nature relationships:

Nature calls to women, embraces them, supports them, ‘understands’ exactly why they (meaning me, or a speaker) often live close to, or within, subversion. Nature subverts everything artificial, everything arrhythmic, everything antihuman and alienating. It functions in terms of cycles, sequences, patterning, deeply embedded in humans and, on a particular level, within female humans.

Furthermore, the challenge to the Western division between culture and nature, mind and body, subject and object, is necessary in order to “encourage an environmentalist ethos” (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 15) that can help solve our climate crisis. Alaimo and Hekman (9) suggest that “thinking through the co-constitutive materiality of human corporeality and nonhuman natures” can transform “environmentalism itself”.

### 3.2. Trans-corporeality

This section will further elaborate on Alaimo’s notion of trans-corporeality, and it will be accompanied by the analysis of two poems in *Empty House* that present trans-corporeality as their main topic.

Alaimo (*Bodily Natures* 20) insists that trans-corporeality means not only acknowledging that the environment and humanity are interdependent “but that humans are the very stuff of the material, emergent world”. In “Trans-corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature”, Alaimo (238) similarly argues that we must “inhabit” trans-corporeality and she defines it as “the time-space where human corporeality, in all its material fleshiness, is inseparable from ‘nature’ or ‘environment’”. Alaimo (*Bodily Natures* 9-10) criticises the lack of interest in materialism towards the environment and its ecosystems since many materialist analyses focus

on human corporeality. Alaimo (*Bodily Natures* 2) affirms that important ethical consequences derive from the recognition of trans-corporeality. Human interconnectivity with the nonhuman world foregrounds the need to “relinquish mastery” over the environment because we are inescapably part of it (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 2, 17).

“Eating” by Seanín Hughes (in *Empty House* 70) describes a procedure for preparing the food we eat in order to survive. Eating can be considered a trans-corporeal act since we incorporate nonhuman beings into our system by digesting them. The poem insists on the idea that eating has become an aesthetic activity where “all [is] in the presentation” (70), which requires food to look appetising rather than nourishing. We can extract from the following references that a fish is being prepared for cooking – it is “still blue when sliced” and the cook is “descaling, stripping, removing / the eyes” (in *Empty House* 70).

In this regard, Alaimo (*Bodily Natures* 13) claims that “we are transformed by the food we consume”, even though “food disappears into the human body, which remains solidly bounded”. Alaimo (*Bodily Natures* 13) further argues that “the gastronomical relations between earth and stomach exhibit a digestible example of trans-corporeal transit”. In the context of our current environmental crisis, Oppermann (446) refers to “our immersed existence” as being “epitomized in contaminated fish consumption, plastic pollution, and radioactive waste in the oceans”. This contemporary situation is referred to in Geraldine Mitchell’s poem “Wool for Weaving” (in *Empty House* 99) – “seas over- / flowed with plastic”.

Neimanis and Walker (562-563) introduce in their essay on weather embodiment several fragments of literary texts, such as the following:

[T]he weather burrows into me. I incorporate the direction of the wind, the slow simmer of the sun.  
[...] Water pollution, rising water temperatures, weather events, droughts. These things are not unrelated. The weather also incorporates me.

Neimanis and Walker (562-563) claim that our polluted oceans are not a separate reality from ours. As Seanín Hughes’s poem “Eating” (in *Empty House* 70) described, the nonhuman beings that live in the ocean end up on our plates. We incorporate fish and the polluted environment they lived in. Neimanis (5) asserts likewise that “our bodies are also of air, rock, earth – even plastic at a growing rate”. Alaimo (*Bodily Natures* 15) adds:

Although trans-corporeality as the transit between body and environment is exceedingly local, tracing a toxic substance from production to consumption often reveals global networks of social injustice, lax regulations, and environmental degradation.

In literary texts, the ability to represent trans-corporeality is intensified through the use of imagery that allows the expression of such intersected realities. In Geraldine Mitchell's poem "Wool for Weaving" (in *Empty House* 99), a striking ironic comment is made: "fish choked on the finger bones of / children", since the opposite is the common situation. This literary figure intersects human activities such as eating fish and the polluted oceans where fish live and choke on waste humans have generated. Therefore, trans-corporeality is a cyclic phenomenon where all environmental constituents influence each other's existence.

### 3.3. "Bodies of Water"

This chapter has argued that human phenomena should not be understood as exceptional and separate from nonhuman phenomena or what is generally perceived as 'the environment'. Neimanis and Walker (565) insist that no body – "a human body, a gust of wind, striations of rock" is "an autonomous entity, unaffected by (and ineffectual in) its environment". For this reason, climate change cannot be evaded, since "our bodies are both the products and the vehicles of its iteration" (Neimanis and Walker 570). Therefore, acknowledging our trans-corporeality can reduce the impression that the climate crisis is a "hyperobject" in Baldwin's (3) terms. Neimanis (1) proposes then a review of human embodiment by meaningfully describing our bodies as "bodies of water", which further connects us to an environment that is suffering several water crises. Bedford (198) affirms:

There are many facets of environmental devastation demanding the urgent attention of writers and activists alike but water—its scarcity, its pollution, its privatization, and battles for control of it are some of the primary contemporary concerns.

This section will examine the poems in *Empty House* "Comes Knocking" (91) by Anne Tannam and "Untitled" (167) by Saoi O'Connor following Neimanis' theoretical proposal in *Bodies of Water*. Neimanis (1) introduces her main idea as follows:

Blood, bile, intracellular fluid; a small ocean swallowed, a wild wetland in our gut; rivulets forsaken making their way from our insides to out, from watery womb to watery world: *we are bodies of water*. As such, we are not on the one hand *embodied* (with all of the cultural and metaphysical investments of this concept) while on the other hand primarily *comprising water* (with all of the attendant biological, chemical, and ecological implications). We are both of these things, inextricably and at once – made mostly of wet matter, but also aswim in the discursive flocculations of embodiment as an idea.

Oppermann (444) explains that "blue humanities" are developing discussions on the ocean and our perceptions of it, which are determined by its discursive representations and "the sea's biogeophysical existence embodying the materiality of its meanings". In Saoi O'Connor's

poem “Untitled” (in *Empty House* 167), we can find imagery intimately related to our Western constructions and knowledge of the ocean. For instance, in the lines “sea spray sirens calling me into the waves” and “I am so sure, that the ocean is the mother of justice” (167). Helmreich (29) traces this kind of imagery:

Seeing the sea as a feminine force and flux has a storied history in the crosscurrents of Judeo-Christian thought, Enlightenment philosophy, and natural scientific epistemology. The ocean has been motherly amnion, fluid matrix, seductive siren, and unruly tide, with these castings opposing such putatively heteromascuine principles as monogenetic procreative power, ordering rationality, self-securing independence, and dominion over the biophysical world.

In both “Comes Knocking” (in *Empty House* 91) and “Untitled” (167) the involved female humans express different kinds of trans-corporeality with nonhuman phenomena, connecting women and nature, not from a traditional but from an ecofeminist perspective, as Alaimo and Plumwood have been suggesting. In “Comes Knocking” (in *Empty House* 91), the poetic voice refers to a woman that “dreams herself / into the body of a sea lion”. This oniric image transcends the symbolic nature of zoomorphism since it can be read as an extreme form of ecofeminist trans-corporeality. The choice of words also matters – “body” and “sea” are connected to the human. This can be interpreted in Neimanis’ sense of ‘bodies of water’, that is, that human and nonhuman phenomena are constituted and connected by water. Neimanis (21) further adds that “since we human and more-than-human animators of life are all bodies of water, we give material form, shape, and meaning” to water.

The previous lines in *Empty House*’s “Comes Knocking” (91) can be connected with the following in “Untitled” (167): “my backbone is a stalactite / [...] I am the product of / that steady drip drip drip”. Here, the human poetic voice acknowledges that her body is not purely human, for she is embodying a nonhuman phenomenon. Stalactites and “that steady drip drip drip” (in *Empty House* 167) are intimately related to water as well. In a previous line in the poem, the poetic voice similarly asserts: “[the waves] taught me how to love being fluid”. In this regard, Neimanis (27) clarifies that bodies of water “are not only humans and other animals, plants, funghi, protocists, but also geological and meteorological bodies such as oceans, rivers, aquifers, subterranean streams, clouds, storms, swamps, and soils – all dripping or tidal or damp”. Finally, “experiences of our aqueous becomings are *more-than*-human embodiment. They interrupt a comfortable human sense of a bodily self, while also amplifying our very human vulnerabilities” and challenging Western anthropocentrism (Neimanis 2, 50).

In Anne Tannam's "Comes Knocking" (in *Empty House* 91), an example of a more-than-human embodiment can be found – "the metallic taste of blood / in her mouth when she rises, ravenous / teeth aching, jaw stiff". In this sense, Oppermann (445-446) argues that "our oceanic origins play an important role in living and experiencing the sea, especially through our blood [...] and in the saline tears of our eyes". The chemical composition of these watery phenomena is essentially nonhuman. That "metallic taste of blood" (in *Empty House* 91) is due to the presence of iron in it, which highlights the idea that nonhuman bodies are part of our human bodies. As Neimanis (3) stressed, "we are literally implicated in other animal, vegetable, and planetary bodies that materially course through us, replenish us, and draw upon our own bodies as their wells. [...] This is a different kind of 'hydrological cycle.'"

In conclusion, recent ecofeminist contributions have stressed the relevance of apprehending human corporeality as trans-corporeality, thus understanding human bodies as an inseparable part of the environment. Likewise, the nonhuman is also part of the human body. In this regard, Neimanis' theory of bodies of water uses water as one of the human body's most relevant constituents, for it is a nonhuman phenomenon indispensable for our existence which has simultaneously penetrated our contemporary discourses on nature. Water has been perceived as feminine and women have often been associated with nature in a Western cosmovision that has treated both women and nature as inferior and exploitable. Acknowledging our trans-corporeality, especially embodying water, reconnects us to a degraded environment and provokes a necessary discussion on the devalued status of nature in our Western framework. This question becomes crucial in the context of our environmental crisis.

#### 4. Affective Responses to Climate Change

Climate change representations in literature often entail strong affective responses. As a phenomenon that threatens our hopes for a better future for human and nonhuman beings, the environmental crisis is faced with worry, anxiety and even fear for many people. However, climate change has not yet been strongly addressed from a political and governmental perspective, since it is also paradoxically perceived as a minor problem compared with other social interests.

Affective responses towards the environmental crisis are only recently being examined from an ecocritical perspective in what have been known as ‘affect theories’ (Bladow and Ladino 4, 8) or “the ‘affective turn’ in cultural studies” (Houser 16). In fact, Panu (9) narrowed this growing interest in studying “the emotions, feelings, affect, and moods related to ecological issues” down to the last two decades. Anderson (5) explains that the word ‘affect’ can designate “a heterogeneous range of phenomena that are taken to be part of life”. For instance, “depression”, “euphoria”, “shame or hate”, “hope or panic”, “love”, and “societal moods such as anxiety or fear” (Anderson 5). Anderson (6) further declares:

Affects are constantly infusing embodied practices, resonating with discourses, coalescing around images, becoming part of institutions, animating political violences, catalysing political communities, and being known and intervened in, amongst much else.

On her part, Houser (3) defines ‘affect’ as “body-based feelings that arise in response to elicitors as varied as interpersonal and institutional relations, aesthetic experience, ideas, sensations, and material conditions in one’s environment”. Similarly to the previous chapter’s ideas on trans-corporeality, Bladow and Ladino (8) state that “affect theory disrupts both discrete notions of embodied selfhood and static notions of environment”. Thus, exploring the affects that surround environmental issues may strengthen a new framework that abandons human exceptionalism and recentres nature back from its displaced position. Likewise, Houser (2-3) believes in the “interdependence of earth and soma through affect” since affect “is transmissible and shows one’s vulnerability to the outside world” and it “brings to light the connections between self and other that trouble the conviction that humans are autonomous, inviolable beings” (Houser 15-16). Bladow and Ladino (3) argue that “bodies, human and nonhuman, are perhaps the most salient sites at which affect and ecocriticism come together”. Contributors in Bladow and Ladino (3) explore affective responses to the environmental crisis such as “despair, resignation, climate grief, and solastalgia” together with “disappointment and anxiety” (Bladow and Ladino 11).

However, affective responses to the climate crisis are not similar in all parts of the world. There is a clear distinction between Western and non-Western perspectives on climate change since Western countries develop scientific reports on events that are mainly affecting non-Western countries, such as heavy floods and storms. According to Poray-Wybranowska (11), many non-Western people do not even acknowledge the existence of such a climate crisis, therefore they are unable to react to it as a Western person does. While non-Western people may suffer ecological trauma, affective responses like ‘eco-anxiety’ and ‘ecophobia’ are essentially Western phenomena (Merola 41). Both eco-anxiety and ecophobia, which will be analysed in the first section of this chapter, arise in a context in which the future effects of climate change are predictable and acknowledged by the general public.

Western awareness of climate change has generated a wide range of representations of what our future as humanity might look like. The climate crisis is often associated in literature and in cinema with humanity’s doom and a future apocalypse that will erase all forms of life on Earth. Haraway (4, 56) is concerned with this apocalyptic and defeatist imagery since it portrays climate change as an irresolvable problem of the future. As will be presented in the second section of this chapter, Haraway (91) believes that the environmental crisis must be perceived as a problem of the present time that is challenging us to reconsider our relationships with other living beings and with nature itself. A pessimistic, apocalyptic attitude towards climate change cannot allow us to reflect on our cosmovisions and on possible ways of action (Haraway 4) against the consequences of decades of “turbo-capitalism’s assaults” on natural resources (Nixon 42). Thus, literature plays an important role in eliciting the emotions necessary for acting against the environmental crisis.

#### **4.1. Eco-anxiety, Ecophobia and Ecological Trauma**

*Empty House* (Kinsella and O’Mahony) offers a collection of texts in which a variety of emotions towards climate change are presented. The poetic voices and the narrators express their fear and worry in a rapidly changing world where nonhuman beings become extinct and humans suffer ecological trauma as a result of deadly floods. The texts also elicit strong emotions in the readers, such as commotion, anger and anxiety about what is currently happening on Earth. The intention of these texts is precisely to provoke affective responses to

what is being described. In order to spread awareness of the urgency of the environmental crisis, emotions in *Empty House* are considered to play a crucial role.

Bladow and Ladino (2) explain that the media are contributing to the newest affective responses to natural catastrophes in the public. Since mainly visual and deadly catastrophes are presented in the news, it seems that a “psychic numbing” or “compassion fatigue” is affecting the public (Bladow and Ladino 2), whereby people become used to witnessing catastrophes. Furthermore, responses such as “anxiety, fear, sorrow” are now accompanied by “Anthropocene disorders” like “climate grief” (Bladow and Ladino 2). In Luka Bloom’s essay “Little Blue Vase” in *Empty House* (154-157) the mediatic 2019-2020 Australian bushfires are depicted from an affective perspective. The worldwide spectacularisation of this natural catastrophe intensified the general public’s reactions to the environmental crisis. In Nixon’s terms (8-10), only massive and deadly events such as this one interest the media and can elicit an affective response from the public. Luka Bloom (in *Empty House* 155) reflects on the impact the Australian bushfires had on him and on his perception of the environmental crisis:

This feels like a significant moment on our Earth.  
 There is so much noise, so much anger.  
 We are so preoccupied with our differences: political, regional, tribal, religious, gender...  
 And yet, in the end, our collective NEEDS on Earth are so very simple and clear.  
 Air. Water. Shelter. Food.  
 Hello?

In this fragment, he criticises that many social issues are prioritised over the urgent environmental crisis, but “Little Blue Vase” (in *Empty House* 154-157) generally focuses on the anger or ‘eco-anger’ (Panu 10) and anxiety that climate change provokes in the rest of the world. This contrasts with the author’s personal experience, as he decides to highlight his love for nature (in *Empty House* 156):

And so at the end of 2019, I am raging.  
 Not with anger; there is enough of that to go round.  
 Raging with a powerful yet innocent love.  
 Love of every river that wants to run with clean water.

Admiring, loving and respecting nature are generally presented in *Empty House* as the preferred affective responses in the current climate crisis context. However, they are compatible with other ‘ugly feelings’ in Ngai’s terms, such as worry, fear and anxiety. These are often analysed in ecocriticism as ‘eco-anxiety’ and ‘ecophobia’. Eco-anxiety has been defined as “any anxiety [...] related to the ecological crisis” (Panu 3), which “causes difficult feelings of uncertainty, unpredictability, and uncontrollability, all of which are classic ingredients in anxiety” (Panu 2).

Merola (33) opts for a different terminology by discussing an “Anthropocene malady” that she calls “Anthropocene anxiety”. As Merola (33) states, anxiety is “a temporally doubled affect of nervousness and unease that infects both present and future”. Houser (204) similarly declares that “anxiety bends toward the future”. We feel anxiety about future events when indicators of future problems are already present. In the case of climate change, feeling anxiety refers to acknowledging that our present environmental conditions will lead us to a worsening future context.

In Arnold Thomas Fanning’s essay “How I Feel About Walking” (in *Empty House* 35-43), anxiety in the context of our environmental crisis is viewed from a different perspective. The author explains that feeling anxious about anything can be overcome by regaining contact with nature: “Walking lessens the grip anxiety has on me, step by step, [...] even as I absorb the nature around me, feel the healthy function of my body, and so walk on, less burdened, less afflicted, more bountiful” (43). In this text, anxiety is not perceived as something the environment provokes but instead, as an emotion that nature is able to appease. On the other hand, in Tanya Farrelly’s short story “Storms” (in *Empty House* 62-68), eco-anxiety torments the protagonist by inducing nightmares of ecological disasters that affect her town. The past experiences of ecological trauma can be the cause of this since a storm had recently hit her father’s house (62). Later, we discover that the house has been destroyed by a flood right after her nightmares (64). This story highlights the psychological effects of ecological trauma by representing the increasing eco-anxiety many people feel nowadays.

Eco-anxiety can not only appear in the context of catastrophic events such as floods or storms but also in events of what can be considered the ‘slow violence’ (in Nixon’s terms) of climate change, such as an unseasonal lack of rain in Ireland. In Jean Tuomey’s story “Will it Rain Tomorrow?” (in *Empty House* 83-84), the characters worry about the unseasonal weather they are experiencing. The lack of rain in Ireland, where it is very frequent, triggers eco-anxiety in the people that participate in this story. This is a form of ‘slow violence’ (Nixon) in the workings of climate change since it is not as visible to the public and to the media as other catastrophic events. In Brian Kirk’s poem “Houses” (in *Empty House* 100), an example of capitalist ‘slow violence’ (Nixon) against nature is presented. The poetic voice reflects on the consequences of spoiling land to build houses in Ireland. The effects are already manifest in the present time and the poetic voice considers that they will worsen in the future. In the context of a housing crisis in Ireland, this poem connects both the environmental crisis and the capitalist

crisis that human and nonhuman beings face nowadays on Irish soil. Eco-anxiety is here manifested through the poetic voice's belief that the construction of more houses will not solve the crisis but will in fact hasten it to the point that "no jobs [are] left to do, no places [are] left to go" (in *Empty House* 100) because everything and everyone will be extinct.

Panu (2, 4) insists however that eco-anxiety may play a role in acting against the environmental crisis. Panu (2) states that the majority of "forms of eco-anxiety are non-pathological" and that it "often manifests in 'practical anxiety', leading to problem-solving attitudes". Eco-anxiety is frequently associated with other emotions such as "grief, solastalgia, guilt, shame, despair, and anger" (Panu 10). For instance, 'solastalgia' or 'environmental melancholia' (Panu 7, 10) can be defined as a state of nostalgia for a healthy environment mixed with discomfort about the environmental crisis. *Empty House* presents an example of solastalgia in Mary O'Donnell's poem "A Husband's Lament for the Massacre of the Birds" (82). In this poem, feelings of "loss", "rage" and "sorrow" (82) are caused by the disproportionate hunting of birds. The husband of whom the poetic voice speaks is devastated by the loss of so many species of birds, but he still genuinely hopes that the situation will get better in the future. Grief is then an important affective response as well in this poem. In this regard, Haraway (39) claims that "grief is a path to understanding entangled shared living and dying", that is, that "human beings must grieve" the losses of the environmental crisis in order to acknowledge and act on them.

Another relevant and frequent affective response that the environmental crisis elicits is fear. This fear amounts to fear of losing our homes and even our lives in a natural catastrophe and fear of losing the biodiversity on Earth. Furthermore, Estok (130) argues that it is "agency outside of ourselves" that we perceive "as threats", that is, we fear nature's agency will surpass humans' agency. Estok (130-131) states then that:

It is precisely these nonhuman agentic forces that determine so very much of our environmental ethics: [...] the felt or imagined material threats, the felt or imagined challenges to our existence [...], the felt dangers of material agencies beyond us simply do not fit into any friendly epistemological familial mesh we may design.

This fear is labelled by Estok (130) as 'ecophobia', which "turns nature into a fearsome object in need of our control" (Estok 135). Deyo (195) similarly argues that "received anthropocentric ideas concerning human beings' status, position, role, and agency vis-à-vis the nonhuman world" makes our culture 'ecophobic' and at the same time repressive of "our animality". Estok (134) suggests that we must challenge human "beliefs in its own agency, autonomy, and, of

course, superiority” over the animal world and the environment, since they lay the foundation of our ecophobic culture.

Ecophobia often triggers apocalyptic representations of climate change in which humanity will be irrevocably damaged by nature’s destructive forces. Our ecophobic culture reinforces the idea that if we do not dominate nature, it will dominate us. Then, there is no place for balance between human and nonhuman phenomena and hope for human survival can only rely on our power and control over nature. Climate crisis apocalyptic narratives often evoke this ideology unless they imply that humanity is suffering a deserved punishment, which is similar to Judeo-Christian constructions of the apocalypse. In this respect, Poray-Wybranowska (45) insists that natural catastrophes must not be treated in literature as “symbols or allegories” but as “dramatizations of real historical events or of events that occur regularly in a given region”. Interpreting natural catastrophes as literary devices denies “the material realities of poverty, vulnerability, systemic oppression, and environmental destruction that communities in postcolonial regions face regularly” (Poray-Wybranowska 45). Houser (202) further states that “apocalypticism and protest are compatible then only to the extent that this rhetorical mode remains just that, rhetorical, and that catastrophe is avoidable rather than a foregone conclusion”. Haraway (4) also indicates the faults of apocalyptic thought:

We think we know enough to reach the conclusion that life on earth that includes human people in any tolerable way really is over, that the apocalypse really is nigh. That attitude makes a great deal of sense in the midst of the earth’s sixth great extinction event. [...] There is a fine line between acknowledging the extent and seriousness of the troubles and succumbing to abstract futurism and its affects of sublime despair and its politics of sublime indifference.

For Haraway (56), narratives of apocalypse imply defeatism since they ultimately consider that struggling against climate change is pointless. Of course, this is not beneficial for environmental thought and action. In *Empty House*, there are several texts that introduce apocalyptic references that criticise defeatism instead of bringing it forth. Examples of this are Michael J. Whelan’s poem “The Migration of Winter” (in *Empty House* 113) and Eleanor Hooker’s poem “An Optimist Tips and Turns” (116-117). In Whelan’s poem, Dublin is flooded and people are starving in what “could be [the year] 2098” (113). This futuristic poem does not dwell on the relentless nature of the environmental crisis but instead on the passivity of humanity: “asking why nobody listened” (113). Apocalypticism works here as a warning of what might happen in the future, not as a revelation of what will definitely happen. Hooker’s poem also uses apocalyptic imagery and terminology by inventing “the *Great Thirst*” (116). Even in the aftermath of ecological catastrophe, people in this poem stay optimistic and

“determined to recover dignity from despair, / we resolve to keep a promise to our grandchildren” (116). Therefore, hope for a better future is maintained and not believed to be over after the ecological catastrophe had happened.

#### 4.2. Cultivating an Ethic of Care for the Nonhuman through Literature

This chapter has so far introduced several instances in which literary texts in *Empty House* present affective responses towards the environmental crisis while also aiming to stimulate them in the readership. Eco-anxiety can influence us in taking action and preparing other people for the urgency of climate change. Worry and fear highlight the danger we find ourselves in and the extreme vulnerability that future generations will have to face. Our connection with other nonhuman beings and phenomena is felt with grief at their loss. Bladow and Ladino (3) similarly state that “both climate and social justice activists require altruistic emotions as a foundation for action” and ethical responses. Haraway’s (1) first words in her essay *Staying with the Trouble* stress the relevance of being connected with the present time and with other human and nonhuman beings on Earth:

We—all of us on Terra—live in disturbing times, mixed-up times, troubling and turbid times. The task is to become capable, with each other in all of our bumptious kinds, of response. [...] The task is to make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present. Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places. In urgent times, many of us are tempted to address trouble in terms of making an imagined future safe, of stopping something from happening that looms in the future, of clearing away the present and the past in order to make futures for coming generations. Staying with the trouble does not require such a relationship to times called the future. In fact, staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings.

Haraway (35) insists that our Anthropocene times are “times of multispecies”, that is, that we must acknowledge the “right relations of the world” (Haraway 91) by which human and nonhuman phenomena are essentially trans-corporeal and not separate from each other (see Alaimo). Deyo (197) similarly argues that the “recognition of the lives of animals in conjunction with our own animality is indispensable to the creation of ecological sensibilities and ethical orientations that are adequate to the demands of the Anthropocene”. In order to do that, Haraway (35) proposes that we “cultivate the capacity of response-ability”. In other words, we must take accountability for the damage that our anthropocentric worldviews and actions have done to ourselves and the Earth. This must be followed by a change in these cosmovisions and actions and their respective consequences. It is especially relevant to do so

now because in Haraway's (35) words, we are living extraordinary times of "refusing to be present" and deal with the multiple social and environmental contemporary crisis around the world.

Literature plays an important part in this task since it "engage[s] affective registers not conventionally appropriate to scientific forms" (Merola 26) and it provides "a controlled and unthreatening site of engagement" to challenge the climate crisis (Poray-Wybranowska 11). Poray-Wybranowska (11) further argues that the "popular perception [of climate change] must first be addressed at the level of imagination" in order for the public to comprehend the "challenges affected populations are facing" (Poray-Wybranowska 12). Literature also offers a space for reconsidering human and nonhuman relationships (Poray-Wybranowska 12) in an engaging manner for the readership which allows them to focus on their affective responses. In this regard, Houser (15) declares that by "experimenting with the affects of body and earth", literature "teaches a lesson that environmentalists and social scientists are exploring with particular fervor: that particular tropes, metaphors, and narrative patterns carry an affective charge that can activate environmental care when empirical studies alone cannot". The affective responses that literature elicits are important for "ethical and political adjustments" (Houser 15) to happen, since "emotion can carry us from the micro-scale of the individual to the macro-scale of institutions, nations, and the planet" (Houser 223).

As was introduced in the first chapter of this dissertation, Nixon (14-15) claims that 'writer-activists' can "make the unapparent appear, making it accessible" to the readership both through imaginative and scientific means. Several texts in *Empty House* combine these means, as in Michael Viney's "Nature Undone and the End of Love" (49-51). The essay (50) introduces real scientific predictions in midst of a reflection on action against the climate crisis:

Some extreme weather events could let me pessimistically imagine, however darkly, a worst-case scenario for Ireland a good few decades after I'm safely dead. Hurricanes will have left the west coast a place where no one wants to live, at least in winter: the Wild Atlantic Way gone berserk. The forests have blown flat, the midlands are the flooded wetlands they were shaped for, the coastal cities are swamped by storm surges, if not drowned.

However, Viney (in *Empty House* 50) points out that "scaring people and governments into action" might not be as helpful as "loving nature and learning more about it". Even though narratives of defeatism should be discarded, Bladow and Ladino (11) believe that "we might recuperate 'bad feelings' for environmentalist purposes in our new geologic epoch". Affective responses to climate change are definitely shaping how we act on this crisis and they are valid

as long as they do not lead to passivity. Viney's (in *Empty House* 51) essay ends with an indication of this idea: "The recent news about the planet's loss of insects is, indeed, a worst-case scenario. In Ireland, at least, the response has been not fear, or resignation, but people planting more flowers for the bees".

These reactions stay in line with Haraway's (3) avowal for "cultivating multispecies justice" since "we become-with each other or not at all" (Haraway 4) or as she insists throughout the whole essay, our task is "making—and recognising—kin" (Haraway 102). Haraway (31) "want[s] to stay with the trouble" and face the environmental crisis through "generative joy, terror, and collective thinking". Human cooperative action and "a strong sense of community" are also a priority for Hiskes (16) so that "the rights of present and future generations of citizens to a safe environment can be protected and furthered". Hiskes (3) highlights that "environmentalism [...] invokes a special relationship between present and future generations by linking their interests within an intricate web of responsibility and dependence". Hiskes is presenting "a human rights argument for environmental entitlement to clean air, water, and soil" (2). Therefore, we must reflect on both 'multispecies justice' (Haraway) and on 'intergenerational environmental justice' (Hiskes). *Empty House* does that in texts such as "On Being Two in the Anthropocene" (158) by Victoria Kennefick. This poem introduces the uncertainty of motherhood in times of our alarming environmental crisis, connecting both 'multispecies' (Haraway) and 'intergenerational' (Hiskes) environmental justice. It also presents several references to a changing eco-centric cosmovision, such as trans-corporeal notions in "I am a sea and you are a bird" or "I parrot", together with respect for the environment: "it is the bugs' house, we must not squash them" (in *Empty House* 158). This is being taught to a future generation as means to cultivate a healthy relationship between human and nonhuman phenomena. The poetic voice ends by lamenting the anxiety and fear that the climate crisis provokes in her, for she is worried about the future of her child and the Earth (158):

I imitate lark sounds. It is not enough.  
The nests are empty.  
I get sad when hedgerows are ripped out  
like insulation from a rotting house.  
I get sad as earth becomes sea. I get sad  
that in showing you this sinking world  
I am teaching you how to say goodbye to it.

In this poem, motherhood is a vehicle for changing our anthropocentric cosmovision and incorporating an affective and trans-corporeal ethic of care for nonhuman phenomena. Parenting, and especially motherhood, is one instance in which humans can feel the connection

of their own bodies with everyone else's. Neimanis (16) highlights that human interdependence with other bodies can be felt "not only through entanglements of gestation, childbirth, and lactation, but also through networks of care, and material and affective patternings of bodies, subjects, communities, and worlds". Bedford (200) similarly argues:

The practices of caring and nurturing that are part of women's lives not only make them attune to the abuse of the environment as part of their concern for the survival of those they care for, but that the inculcation of caring means that women are likely to extend an ethic of care to nonhuman others as well. [...] the potential for mothering and caring as an experience that, rather than domesticating can be radicalizing, and can itself become an activist practice and intervention.

To conclude, this chapter has analysed several instances in which *Empty House* presents affect as a relevant topic in climate change discussions and imagery. The environmental crisis can only be faced in a scenario where human beings take care of other human and nonhuman beings, that is, in a context where 'intergenerational' (Hiskes) and 'multispecies' (Haraway) justice are priorities for our communities. Affect is therefore essential for this task, for it disturbs our individualism and anthropocentrism. Affective responses such as eco-anxiety, solastalgia or grief act as indicators of the urgency of the climate crisis. Most importantly, they emphasise that a revolution in the ways we think and act must begin now. In Houser's (223) words, "emotion can carry us from the micro-scale of the individual to the macro-scale of institutions, nations, and the planet".

## 5. Conclusions

This dissertation has presented three essential and contemporary ecocritical topics, namely environmental justice, ecofeminism and affect theories, that are considered to be represented in the anthology *Empty House* (Kinsella and O'Mahony). The texts analysed explore themes that range from an environmental, through a corporal, up to an emotional sphere. Environment, human and nonhuman bodies and affect are interconnected and condition each other. Ecofeminist and materialist theories such as those proposed by Alaimo highlight the transcorporeality of human and nonhuman phenomena, and together with affect theories, they resist human exceptionalism and anthropocentrism. Then, climate change does not only threaten us and nonhuman phenomena physically, but it also poses a challenge to our nature-exploiting cosmovisions and social hierarchies.

Literature written on the contemporary environmental crisis, as *Empty House* does, proposes new and critical points of view regarding our relationship with nature and the socioeconomic roots of climate change. As analysed in the first chapter, environmental justice is becoming a relevant topic in climate change discussions because the environmental crisis affects people differently depending on their social status and postcolonial conditions. Fiskio (14-15) advocates for a postcolonial understanding of the environmental crisis so that we acknowledge our responsibility for it. *Empty House* presents several texts where economic, political and scientific perspectives on climate change are critically connected with the state of things globally and in Ireland. An instance of this is Ingrid Casey's essay "Art in the Climate of Change", which condemns that Ireland ranks among "the worst offenders in all of Europe when it comes to plastic pollution" (in *Empty House* 144). Nixon argues that invisibilised environmental catastrophes such as the pollution of oceans, which he terms 'slow violence', must become the centre of attention in climate change discussions and literature.

The second chapter of this dissertation has studied how climate change exposes mainstream Western discourses where nature is represented as an object inferior to humans. These cosmovisions are the main cause of the exploitation and despoliation of the environment and the accelerated extinction of nonhuman beings. Ecofeminist theorists such as Plumwood, Alaimo and Neimanis have argued that Western hierarchies do not only place nature in an inferior position to white male humans but also women and racialised people, among others. Correlating all these different kinds of oppression and abuse emphasises the necessity for a

more critical activist movement against the environmental crisis and our socioeconomic realities. Then, acknowledging our trans-corporeality is one way to defy Western worldviews (Alaimo). Neimanis further proposes a discussion of water embodiment since it highlights human and nonhuman physical trans-corporeality through water and the contemporary water crisis. Water embodiment also underlines the problematic Western discourses on water, typically associated with feminine fertility and the dangerous mystery of the oceans (Neimanis). This doubled nature of water, both geophysical and cultural, opens a new field in ecocriticism to explore environmental, corporeal and discursive relationships between human and nonhuman phenomena (Neimanis). This paves the way for reconnecting humans to a degraded environment and challenging human exceptionalism.

Furthermore, emotion has become as relevant as embodiment in ecocritical discussions. The third chapter of this dissertation has explored how affect also intensifies our trans-corporeal perceptions and ethical responses to the environmental crisis. Houser, Bladow and Ladino study affect and its significance for environmentalism. Eco-anxiety, or in Merola's terms, 'Anthropocene anxiety', together with solastalgia or grief, proves that humans feel for nonhuman phenomena and the environmental crisis. Literature, in visibilising and even provoking these affects, provides a method for raising awareness and action against climate change. Haraway, therefore, argues that feeling for and looking after ourselves and nonhuman phenomena, in short terms, "cultivating multispecies justice" (4) is the most important task in the face of the environmental crisis. Moreover, placing value in emotion is interesting for the creation of a critical new framework that surpasses our current worldviews, where human reason has been privileged over feeling, body and environment.

*Empty House* exemplifies a developing ecocritical literature on climate change in Ireland. The anthology, in its diversity of authors and topics, introduces a wide spectrum of points of view and feelings regarding the environmental crisis. Many authors in the anthology have focused on contemporary events, scientific data and predictions related to the despoliation of our environment and the mass extinction of nonhuman beings. Many others have decided to pay attention to their complex emotions and anxieties surrounding the climate crisis. Some authors decided to write science-fiction as a vehicle to imagine what can happen if climate change is not stopped or at least slowed down. All these authors share a concern for the crisis human and nonhuman phenomena are experiencing and the will to motivate the reading public to think about these matters and act on them. It is precisely the combination of such various topics,

points of view and literary genres that allows this anthology to make use of as many resources as possible to describe, represent and confront climate change. These ‘writer-activists’, as Nixon calls them, have the power to challenge our anthropocentric cosmovisions, create new and environment-friendly frameworks and move the general public towards feeling and experiencing their more-than-human natures.

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