

# “A DESERT DESERTED”: HYDROFICTIONAL RELATIONALITY IN CLAIRE VAYE WATKINS’ *GOLD FAME CITRUS* (2015)<sup>1</sup>

ANDREA RUTHVEN  
Universidad de las Islas Baleares  
[a.ruthven@uib.cat](mailto:a.ruthven@uib.cat)

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper considers climate fictions as narratives that interrogate the present by analysing Claire Vaye Watkins’ 2015 novel *Gold Fame Citrus*. It proposes to read the novel as an example of hydrofiction, a subgenre of climate fictions, to argue that Watkins’s work critiques discourses that frame water as nothing more than a resource to be yoked to anthropocentric desires. It contends that climate fiction, and hydrofiction in particular, is uniquely situated to interrogate how the rejection of relationality, in particular the (lack of) engagement with water as an agential being, can be read in conjunction with the environmental (and other crises) epitomised by the desiccated landscape in the novel, as represented by the agentic potential of the newly-formed desert.

**RESUMEN:** Este artículo considera las ficciones climáticas como narrativas que interrogan el presente, a partir del análisis de la novela *Gold Fame Citrus* de Claire Vaye Watkins (2015). Propongo leer la novela como un ejemplo de hidroficción, un subgénero de las ficciones climáticas, para argumentar que la obra de Watkins critica los discursos que enmarcan el agua como un mero recurso que está ligado a y controlado por los deseos antropocéntricos. Sostengo que las ficciones climáticas, y la hidroficción en particular, ocupan una posición única para interrogar cómo el rechazo de la relacionalidad,

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en particular la negativa a concebir el agua como un ser agencial, puede leerse en conjunción con la crisis ambiental (y otras crisis) personificadas por el paisaje desecado en la novela, tal como lo representa el potencial agencial del desierto recién formado.

## INTRODUCTION

Claire Vaye Watkins' 2015 novel *Gold Fame Citrus* imagines a dystopic future where the repercussions of the drought in California are so advanced that the entire state has dried up and a massive desert—the Dune Sea—is engulfing vast swaths of the interior. The novel's protagonist, Luz Dunn, and her boyfriend, Ray, along with Ig, a baby they have kidnapped, attempt to cross the Dune Sea and seek refuge in the as yet non-desertified regions to the north. Their journey takes them into the Amargosa Sand Dune, a massive, moving desert that is submerging, glacier-like, the entire South-West. Ray abandons Luz and the baby to go in search of help after their car breaks down, and Luz is rescued by a group of desert-dwellers, led by the charismatic cult leader Levi. While living in the desert, Luz is forced to negotiate between her desire for an imaginary “lush and infinite miracle world” or “its brutal scaffolding [...] Barren and bereft and lifeless” that “no trick of the eye or ear or heart could make otherwise” (312). In recounting Luz's efforts to understand herself in relation to the desert, the novel draws attention to the ways in which climate fictions can help us make “sense of the contemporary, drawing on an imaginary future and its pasts” (Parikka 41). In the case of *Gold Fame Citrus*, the “imaginary future” is increasingly present. This paper turns to the question of climate fictions as narratives of interrogation of the present by analysing the materiality of the Dune Sea itself, as well as the human protagonist's attempts to imagine an alternative future for herself and her ad hoc family. In so doing, it proposes to read *Gold Fame Citrus* as hydrofiction, a subgenre of climate fictions, to argue that Watkins's work critiques discourses that frame water as nothing more than a resource to be yoked to anthropocentric desires. I contend that Luz's failure of imagination and her rejection of relationality, in particular her (lack of) engagement with water as an agential being, can be read in conjunction with the environmental (and other crises) epitomised by the drying up of the landscape in the novel. The protagonist's inability to move beyond neoliberal notions of fierce individuality is interrogated as a warning against “clinging to the

remnants of past behaviors" (Messimer 51) as a means out of the contemporary climate crisis.

In what follows, I consider the novel through Kaplan's work on climate trauma and Nixon's reflections on slow violence to show how the novel, as climate fiction, offers a critique of the present ecological crises. Next, I turn to hydrofictions as a specific mode through which to read the novel, focusing on the protagonist's (failed) relationship to water relationality. Finally, and returning to Nixon, I show how, even though Luz refuses to recognise it, the Dune Sea is an agentic being that offers resistance to any attempts to manage its movements. Ultimately, this paper shows that, by understanding the Dune as a hydrofictional space with the potential for more-than-human entanglements, the novel gestures towards new modes of relationality beyond the human and to alternatives to apocalyptic scenarios for futures-in-common.

## **IMAGINING OTHERWISE THAN CLIMATE DISASTER**

E. Ann Kaplan's work in *Climate Trauma* (2016), while focused on film, can help readers understand how climate narratives are "showing us the end of the world that is, rather than standing for abstract meanings" (Kaplan 58). Thus, when we approach climate fiction, it is important to keep in mind a sense of temporality: as "the end of the world that is" they are certainly "a fictional future that we should avoid. But we also need to consider how these imaginaries of the future in turn shape constructions of the present and the past" (Kaplan 12). What dystopic climate fictions imagine for readers and viewers are ways of rethinking our past and present in relation to the future that they could create. In so doing, they participate in making visible scales of time and violence that otherwise might be difficult to appreciate. As Crownshaw argues, in *Gold Fame Citrus* "epochal change, from the Holocene to the Anthropocene, measurable in temporal terms that exceed human history, is here compressed so as to be imaginable within the humanist purview of the novel" (Crownshaw 116). By dramatizing the effects of Anthropogenic climate change, and bringing the "deep time" (Ginn, Bastian, Farrier and Kidwell, 2018) of environmental change into view, the novel addresses Rob Nixon's question (2011) of "how to devise arresting stories, images, and symbols adequate to the pervasive but elusive violence of delayed effects" (3).

For Dylan M. Harris, “cli-fi opens imaginative doors, engaging both the scientific and the sociopolitical to imagine futures otherwise and to begin imagining the suite of solutions needed to realize them” (Harris 64). However, rather than imagining possible solutions, *Gold, Fame, Citrus* depicts the failure of imagination as both society’s and the characters’ inability to conceive something other than the prevailing social and environmental relations, highlighting instead that “both individual and institutional failure is everywhere in recent cli-fi: the dystopian setting so common in these cases is the result of failed states and failed policies that either were ineffective at curbing climate change or accelerated it” (Yazell 170). For Luz, this failure of imagination manifests in her inability to live a life that is not desperately clinging to (and failing to return to) her life as a symbol of the environmental collapse: As a child, Luz was made famous by the Bureau of Conservation as her birth coincided with a new aqueduct project, promising “*that Baby Dunn and all the children born this day and ever after will inherit a future more secure, more prosperous, and more fertile*” (Watkins 11; italics in original). Both events, birth and the aqueduct, may have promised a bright future, but in the following years Luz’s image as “Baby Dunn” was used to signal the events leading up to the state’s desiccation—empty swimming pools, drained water reserves, etc. (Watkins 11). Even so, when taken in by Levi, Luz is offered the opportunity to once again take up the mantle of false hope and, with Ig, become Baby Dunn once again, and even though she “could not agree to it” (229), she goes along with Levi, and finds that “she already had” agreed and “was already swept into the current of his plan” (230). Thus, Luz’s inability to move beyond past patterns of behaviour makes visible the ways in which climate fictions can help narrate the effects of ignoring how, as Jason Moore argues, “The kind of thinking that created today’s global turbulence is unlikely to help us solve it” (Moore 1; 2019).

Within the novel, Watkins’ depictions of the Dune function as a means of making present the delayed effects of climate change, while simultaneously dramatizing the slow violence (Nixon 2011) that accrues within and around the materiality of the Anthropocene. In the descriptions of the Dune Sea, the novel renders visible, almost tangible, the effects of drought on the Southern United States. The new desert is seen from space and:

the mind lurches vertiginous. The vast bleached gash we once took for chasm protrudes [...] Closer and the eyebrain swoons again: these

mountains move as if alive, pulsing, ebbing, throbbing, their summits squirming, their valleys filling and emptying of themselves. Mountains not mountains. Not rock, or no longer. Once rock. Dead rock. The sloughed-off skin of the Sierra, the Rockies, and so on. Sand dunes. Dunes upon dunes. A vast tooth-colored superdune in the forgotten crook of the wasted West. (114)

Much like in the cinema, where the camera pulls back and our eyes can encompass a broad expanse, here the immensity of the Dune is made visible. While it may seem counterproductive to equate an image on such a large scale with the technique of rendering visible the invisible, the novel does more than just show readers the extent of the Dune. The description is visceral as our "eyebrian swoons;" from this position, we can see the Dune move, as it ebbs and throbs, as it pulses and sloughs off its skin. This trick of scale shows the extent of the damage we have wrought, as even the rock is now "dead," although it still moving and possesses agency.

In this satellite-eye view of the Dune, we could, arguably, run the risk of being swallowed by its immensity, of losing the specific, the precise, or of pulling so far away that in viewing its geological breadth we are lost or rendered too distant for the Dune to be anything but an abstract concept. The novel, however, zooms in as easily as it pulls out, rendering the Dune material omnipresent as Luz finds "[s]and in the bedsheets and in her armpits and in the crack of her ass" (7). The Dune both looms large and incomprehensible, but is also rendered minute and tangible, the irritation as it lodges in the body's folds and cracks a constant reminder, and also an incorporation into the protagonist's bodily self. The Dune helps readers grapple with slow violence as it pertains to questions of the visible and invisible, the spectacular and the minute, and the more immediate, tangible or material as "a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales" (Nixon 2). The Dune, of course, did not spring up overnight, nor fall from space in spectacular fashion, but rather grew, over time, and over the landscape, slowly becoming what it is in the novel. The spectacular mode of Hollywood disaster films with "some sudden event that takes place to bring on the end" (Kaplan 14), like the tornado, tsunami, or avalanche, is inverted here, focusing instead on the minute, incremental, almost imperceptible non-events that accrete over time, resulting in the "extremely harsh conditions of slow deterioration and increasing

desperation over many years” (Kaplan 14). Thinking through slow violence as an integral mechanism for the functioning of the Capitalocene helps readers imagine beyond the Anthropos as both the centre and as the unifying category for climate change’s violent effects. Key to this is the possibility that the future is already here. For Caren Irr, “[t]he substance of the revelation in cli-fi is not that our own civilization is doomed by a transition we have yet to experience but ought to anticipate; it is, rather, that we may already inhabit a post-apocalyptic future without even realizing it” (Irr 7-8).

The present of the apocalyptic transition is made visible in Luz who clings to the promises of the past which, in turn, were reliant on a cruel optimism founded upon the myth of an achievable “good life” (see Berlant 2011 and Ahmed 2010). She thinks of herself as “professional wallpaper, her job to replicate a human being without the mess of one” (167) and relies on her status as a literally decorative object rather than a “messy” human subject. She is thus incapable of entangling herself within webs of relationality with the world around her, and is equally incapable of navigating the, literally, shifting terrain of a desiccated California. The Dune Sea is a desert that “is not a redemptive space as it so often is in Western thought, but a hostile alien landscape. And because the apocalypse was not total but incremental, partial systems of American capitalism continue. Humanity therefore does not seek a truly innovative way of life” (Messimer 51). One way of recognising this inability to look towards the possibility of innovation is to consider how, despite the evidence demonstrating that the purveyors of capitalist systems, as represented by Luz’s modelling agency, had “fled to the squalid mists of New York” (16), and did not consider her valuable enough to take her with them, she clings to the potential futures of “other lives that might have been, always painfully better than her own” (167). These futures she imagines as possible, if she had managed to better fit into a system that did not want her, did not view her as anything but “the poor man’s Colombian” (167), rather than as worthy in her own right. Luz turns to the trappings of wealth, without any of the means to enjoy them in the mansion she, Ray, and Ig inhabit. They take up residence in the vacated home of a “starlet” where in the closet hung clothes “in every luscious color, each one unspeakably expensive” (3), and yet Luz has nowhere to wear them. Much like the house itself, with its “embarrassment” of a swimming pool—empty of water and with nothing to fill it—the external signifiers of what the state once was are now rendered empty and meaningless.

As Rick Cronshaw notes, Luz's "materialist attitudes are an extension of the extractive capitalism that has consumed organic and inorganic resources with abandon, including her own body" (Cronshaw 107). Upon kidnapping (perhaps rescuing) the baby Ig (Watkins 46), Luz makes a mental list of things to do now that she, Ray, and the baby are a "family." Among others, these include building a life away from the dusty remains of California, where she can "take Ig walking in the rainforest, barefoot" and "show her velvet moss and steady evergreens" (55). Along with the dreams of vegetation, of the things she "must do," in the imperative, Luz notes: "return home, where Ray must be stirring a big pot of chili and I must assemble a rainbow salad and Ig must set her dolls kindly on the redwood windowsill" (55). The fantasy of domesticity is imbricated within the dream of a life within a vegetal world that no longer exists. Luz's desire for what she considers "charismatic" nature underscores the fact that she is only interested in nature that can fulfil her needs. Rather than "scorpions coming up through the drains," she wants "water, the green, the mammalian, the tropical, the semitropical, the leafy, the verdant, the motherloving citrus" (6-7). Luz refuses to see or align herself with the natural world around her, instead feeling frustrated because "[n]ature had refused to offer herself to them" (7), has refused to comply, in a move that mimics capitalist systems of exploitation, with what she wants of the natural world, has refused to become an offering.

Luz dreams of a natural world that will fulfil her preconceived notion of what that looks like, "more charismatic," "green," "leafy." She does, at times, evince a disposition to extend her material self beyond the confines of anthropocentric logics. At one point she "hunkered, unfurled her sagey petals, breathed through boreal ruffles, absorbed with her felt fins snowmelt and fog and mist and dew, all things moist, all things cool" (78). This impulse to become "lichen" (77) is less about an ethical recognition of mutual relationality and more about the failure to imagine nature as outside Luz's dominion. Nature, for Luz, is not a forest of desiccated yucca trees that crumble to dust (86-88), but a green, leafy, moist existence that helps distance her from her current circumstances. While she may imagine herself as green and verdant, her imagined nature reinforces anthropocentric oppression that see all but human systems (and even some of those) as subordinate and measured only by their utility. Indeed, Luz refuses to "become with" (Haraway 2016) the world around her, seeking instead a means of reinstating what is now past. As Claire Curtis notes,

“postapocalyptic fiction offers the fantasy of starting over” (5), and yet Luz patently refuses to embrace this fantasy, refuses “to abandon the dream of California, even though that dream has clearly ended” (Messimer 51) and Watkins underscores the hazards of speculative thinking that seeks to rebuild what was lost rather than reimagine what could be. Reading Luz’s struggles through Stacy Alaimo’s work in *Bodily Natures* clarifies that the protagonist is unable to understand “the substance of [her]self as interconnected with the wider environment” and as a result “what was once the ostensibly bounded human subject finds herself in a swirling landscape of uncertainty” (Alaimo 20).

As a way of thinking otherwise, of ethically and creatively recognising others on their own terms and in their own contexts, I turn back to Kaplan who asks “what happens to empathy, morality, and caring as humans enter the Anthropocene and confront the collapse of infrastructures needed to sustain human life. What happens to bodies as resources decline?” (Kaplan 20). The novel’s response is, for the most part, disheartening. Luz describes her feelings as she is momentarily left alone in a multitudinous gathering of Los Angeles’ remaining inhabitants:

Suddenly Luz was breathing everyone else’s foul, expelled air and Ray was angry and gone and there was only so much air down here and everyone was sucking it up and where was he? Had he not heard of girls carried up out of the canal and into one of the vacant houses whose dry private docks jutted overhead, homes once worth three and four and five million and now, every one of them, humid with human fluids? Had he not been with her the night she’d seen a woman stumble out of one of the houses, used and bewildered, and start to make her way back down to the canal and the music, only to be dragged back up again? (Watkins 27)

Watkins clearly condemns the abuse of the woman who cannot escape and is continually “dragged back up again,” an abuse that indicates that the empathy Kaplan asks about does not magically appear when systems break down. Again, we are not, by dint of being human, “one and the same” (Braidotti 2020). Further, the text itself, the language and pacing all contribute to a sense of fear, anxiety, hopelessness, and alienation from the world as the questions Luz asks spill out in sentences bereft of commas as a series of semi-rhetorical questions. This style, repeated throughout the novel whenever Luz is the focaliser, viscerally calls to readers to experience in the flesh the



horror of the post-apocalypse. As Luz breathes in "everyone else's foul, expelled air" her disdain for her fellow creatures is combined with her fears about dwindling resource allotment as "there was only so much air" and "everyone was sucking it up." Luz's reticence to breathe the shared air around her is understandable, indeed, the sensation described, the anxiety Luz experiences, and the thoughts winging to the violence against women she has witnessed are indicative of the trauma she has experienced. However, we can read too Luz's desire to cling to an idea of the body as bounded, individual, in her rejection of the shared air around her, in her need to flee from the press of the dirty, haggard, malnourished and dehydrated bodies, like her own. Indeed, she rejects any commonality with those around her. Her rejection of relationality can be read metaphorically as the drying up of the landscape. As the water disappears, so too do the connections it generates, as "we require other bodies of other waters (that in turn require other bodies and other waters) to bathe us into being" (Neimanis 3). Unable to be bathed into being, Luz is isolated from those who might share her condition.

## **HYDROFICTION IN A WOLRD WITHOUT WATER**

As Ashley Cahillane has argued, drought is "a legacy of colonialism and a manifestation of a crisis of capitalism" (Cahillane 4). This legacy and crisis are made manifest in Luz's attempts to cling to a worldview which casts the human as both separate from, and dominant over, a natural world rendered object for extraction and gain. As the visual and material proof of extractive capitalist practices, like the Dune, Luz's body is unmoored from watery relationality, reminding readers, as Astrida Neimanis notes, that "[d]iscrete individualism is a rather dry, if convenient, myth" (Neimanis 2). I would argue that, though it may seem paradoxical, because of the extreme *lack* of water, Watkins' novel can be read as hydrofiction (Boast 2020), highlighting the relationality of water. Hydrofiction underscores "the co-constitutive relationship between water and society, in which neither water nor society is a pre-existing, independent thing; instead, they are created through their interaction" (Boast 19). Arguably, the lack of water in *Gold Fame Citrus* stands in for the lack of interaction and "co-constitutive relationships" that could give both water and society meaning. Further, it offers a critique of the ways in which capitalist society—in which the binary Nature/Society is fundamental to the organization of reality (Moore

2016)—brings about its own demise through its quest to dominate and control the world around it rather than recognise the interconnectedness and interdependence of global systems of life, both human and other-than-human. Thus, the Dune, though at first glimpse would appear devoid of watery relations and interconnectivity, demonstrates the ways in which Luz's desire for water is misplaced, as it is when she is "playing house" that she ends up "dying of thirst" (126). This underscores the way in which her attachment to the heteronormative family structure impedes her relationality beyond the imagined "nuclear" ideal.

Reading *Gold Fame Citrus* through hydrofiction can help understand the imbricated state of capitalism and climate change and illuminate how Watkins's work dramatizes the failure to see water as something more than a resource for exploitation. For Sherar Deckard, in hydrofictions "water functions as a thematic element, but also as representation and symbolic regime, product and producer of the contingent socio-ecological relations stabilizing the neoliberal disposition" (111). Indeed, Deckard's understanding of hydrofictions dialogues with Jason Moore's analysis of the Capitalocene, calling attention to the ways in which "[t]he present response to the relative exhaustion of cheap water has been to extract more water, not less, at rising unit costs amplified by the rising cost of energy. Such intensified extraction leads to the water supply not only being "maxed out," but "wiped out." This is "extreme water," the exhaustion of historical hydrological frontiers, where intensified extraction incurs rising costs and surpasses the capacity for renewal" (Deckard 110). "Extreme water" is the result of a rhetorical strategy that conceives of water—and the planet as a whole—as a resource that can be extracted, commodified, and apportioned out as though it were not an integral part of the very life and lives of the planet. Astrida Neimanis, in her work on hydrofeminism, reminds readers that:

Water has certainly always been an intense site and agent of planetary terraforming, but in an Anthropocene narrative, this shapeshifting is figured either as a result of our attempts to control water (damming, irrigation) or as an out of control response by water to these attempts at control (storms, sea levels). Put otherwise, adopting an aqueous orientation to the Anthropocene reminds us that the keyword of this epoch is control – where, unsurprisingly, the perverse antidote to waters out-of-control is more control and managerialism. (Neimanis 161)

The result of attempts to control water, and the resulting effect of the generation of extreme water, are highlighted in Watkins' novel as the narrator asks "[w]ho had diverted the coast's rainwater and sapped the Great Basin of its groundwater? Who had tunneled beneath Lake Mead, installed a gaping outlet at its bottommost point, and drained it like a sink?" (120) and the questions continue, listing the acts of water thievery committed in the name of water resource management. This is the result of administrative attempts at "control and managerialism," the novel suggests, as those responsible are institutionalised entities: "Los Angeles City Council, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, City of San Diego...." (120). This analysis can be furthered by considering Chen, MacLeod, and Neimanis, who argue that with the "anthropocentric logics of efficiency, profit, and progress waters are all too often made nearly invisible, relegated to a passive role as a 'resource,' and subjected to containment, commodification, and instrumentalization. Where they are not being immediately managed or contested, when they are not unexpectedly flooding or washing away human lives and livelihoods, waters are often conveniently forgotten and assumed to be malleable resources" (Chen, MacLeod and Neimanis 3). In *Gold Fame Citrus* the result of these attempts at "containment, commodification, and instrumentalization" lead to water's rebellion via its absence. The resulting lack of water signifies the extent to which the "passive role" as a "resource" not only denies water its own agency, but it is also paralleled in the way in which the Dune is rhetorically constructed as an empty space, requiring human intervention to fill it with meaning.

By rhetorically draining the desert of life in official documents, "salted with words like inhospitable, barren, bleak, and empty. A desert deserted, the official line" (123; *italics mine*), the effects of Deckard's "extreme water" can be rendered comprehensible as the human failure to recognise inter-connectedness. Relying both on capital's provisions and solutions to the very problems it creates results in a desert that refuses to support the life that abused it. Once it has been "[d]eemed uninhabited, the land can now be exploited to the fullest extent, poisoning the land irrevocably while ignoring the fact that humans (and plants and animals, according to Levi) do continue to live there" (Messimer 55). As Levi, the cult leader, tells Luz: "[t]he Amargosa has been categorized as a wasteland. Inhospitable, they say, as though nature should offer you a cup of tea and a snack. Barren. Bleak. Empty—my favorite. Nearly every species that once inhabited the Mojave Desert has purportedly been erased from this

area. It has been described as the deadest place on the planet” (192). Indeed, Levi argues, not, perhaps, incorrectly, that the government and society need to believe the desert and Dune Sea are empty so that they can turn it into a garbage dump for nuclear waste. In a rhetorical move that is clearly gesturing toward colonial discourses of justifying settlement, appropriation, and violence on the basis of land being uninhabited by recognisable others, Watkins draws attention to the fact that nature and society cannot be separated, rather they are mutually constitutive and, like water, remind “us of the extent to which ‘natural’ hydropolitical realities are socially and politically produced” (Boast 4).

As Levi reminds Luz, the slogan to stop “the unrelenting march” of the Amargosa is the call to stop a “natural process” that “is the inevitable result of our own savagery. And we want to stop it because it reminds us of our tremendous neglect and of the violence we’ve done this place” (206). While Levi’s rhetoric is problematic (suggesting that it is our “savagery,” a word loaded with both anthropocentric and colonial imagery, that has motivated our neglect and violence), he is not wrong in identifying the desire to distance our actions from their results as a way of maintaining the capitalist discourse of nature as resource and humans as possessors or, at the very least, as “knowledge producers.” When the drought began, “[s]till came the scientists [...] all assigned to determine why a process that ought to have taken five hundred thousand years had happened in fifty. All tasked with determining how to stop the mountain’s unrelenting march. All of them failed” (116). The intensity with which knowledge-making is deployed is inherent in the processes of what Jamie Linton has called “modern water,” that is, water that is “tasteless, odourless, colourless, placeless, meaningless” (qtd in Neimanis 180), and rendered an object that can be controlled, subjugated, packaged and sold, and that is separate from the interconnected and intra-active *relata* of world-making. “Modern water,” then, is water that is an “object of social processes” rather than “a nature that is shaped by, and shapes, social relations, structures and subjectivities” (Linton and Budds 170). Recognising the agency of water, much like recognising the agency of the Dune, is to accept “the mutual constitution of entangled agencies” (Opperman 19) that defies neoliberal logics of fierce individualism.

To move beyond the concept of “modern water,” Chen, MacLeod, and Neimanis assert that “[w]ater is a matter of relation and connection. Waters literally flow between and within bodies, across

space and through time, in a planetary circulation system that challenges pretensions to discrete individuality. Watery places and bodies are connected to other places and bodies in relations of gift, transfer, theft, and debt. Such relationality inaugurates new life, and also the infinite possibility of new communities" (12). In the post-water world of the novel, the lack of water gestures toward the absence of water's effects: there is a lack of connection, relationality, and the possibility of new communities. There is, as the novel tells us, "no water crisis" but rather, "There was a human crisis" (77). Through the perspective offered by hydrofiction, I would argue that the human crisis goes beyond the question of climate refugees in the novel (though this is certainly present) toward a crisis of eco-cosmopolitan thinking, as Ursula Heise suggests, as "an attempt to envision individuals and groups as part of planetary "imagined communities" of both human and nonhuman kinds" (Heise 44). Indeed, I argue that Luz's ultimate demise results from her inability to consider water outside of capitalist discourses of domination and control, and thus her failure to enact the hydrosocial (Linton and Budds 2014) in a world without water.

In an ironic twist, Luz ultimately fails to imagine a future for herself, Ray, and Ig and as she and Ray leave the cult behind, they are caught in a flash flood. She steps out of the car and is washed away in the freak deluge that surprises the travellers as they head east. Rather than stay safely, with Ray, in their vehicle, Luz abandons both, steps into the water, and is drowned, her final words that she would be fine "if I could just get my feet under me" (338). Clinging to an ideal of stability, of a firm footing, and being unable to accept the shifting, unstable character of both the desert and life, Luz's demise is indicative of her inability to see either the Dune or water as entities in their own right, and not as impediments in her path to a future beyond the promise of gold, fame, and citrus. Indeed, "water represents both an essential resource and a looming threat. We love water. We cannot live without it. It also kills us, by both its absence and its excess" (Mentz 185). It is not the ever-encroaching Dune that finally overwhelms Luz, but the unexpected rush of water—the exact thing Luz imagines will solve her problems. The return of water is held out as the promise and the solution, but Luz is unable to adapt, unable to imagine a watery environment that is not controlled and contained, but in which water is understood as an agentic being that exceeds human conceptualisations. This failure to imagine water otherwise coincides with Luz's return to the old dream of migrating, of returning to Ray and seeking the antidote to the water-less crisis by

moving backward to a place where life can still be oriented around the promises of the capitalist future.

## CONCLUSION

Returning to Nixon, we are reminded that “[r]esistance may assume not just human forms but also arise from an unanticipated recalcitrance on the part of a targeted resource, which may prove harder to commodify and profitably remove or manage than corporate moguls foresaw” (Nixon 20). The novel materialises this resistance of resources, makes it visible in the description of the Dune Sea: “[t]he Amargosa was angry, cruel, or uncaring—personification inevitable and forgivable too, for at times the mass did seem to move with discernment. Witnesses describe occasions when it seemed to pause its march, or reach its steady foot around a town rather than atop it, as though in embrace, allowing the citizens time to hitch their trailers to their trucks and haul them from harm” (Watkins 120). The Dune itself, then, commands agency and offers resistance to the efforts to quantify and manage its movements, resistance to the previous attempts to map and channel it, to understand and know it. While the personification may be “inevitable” only thus can the Dune achieve some sort of agency, a recognition that it may have its own life, its own self that interacts with the world around it, embracing some towns, and townspeople, crushing others. The representation of the Dune’s agency may appear “more consequential than that of humanity” in the novel (Crownshaw 111). And yet, by understanding the Dune as a hydrofictional space with the potential for entanglements that exceed humanist understandings of agentic being, the potential for relationality beyond the human is imagined and alternatives to apocalyptic scenarios for futures-in-common. In the depiction of a sea without water, *Gold Fame Citrus* draws attention to climate fictions as capable of parsing the “representation and symbolic regime, product and producer of the contingent socio-ecological relations stabilizing the neoliberal disposition” (Crownshaw 111). By highlighting the ways in which denying relationality, as envisaged by hydrofictions, reinforces narratives of dominance and control, the novel foregrounds “the human causation of climate change, its comprehensive engagement with the catastrophic results, and—especially and maybe most importantly—the less spectacular, but equally harmful, structural, social, and environmental injustices inherent in anthropogenic modifications of the global climate” (Leikam and Leyda

109-10). Ultimately, understanding the Dune as agentic critiques the inability of the human protagonist to engage in the relationality presented in hydrofictional spaces, with the possibility of entanglements that extend beyond the anthropocentric.

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