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Narrative Empathy in James Bradley's *Clade*: Disability, Ecosickness and Hope

Abstract I: Nel suo romanzo più recente, *Clade* (2015), lo scrittore australiano James Bradley segue i percorsi conflittuali di tre generazioni della famiglia Leith, ritraendo scenari apocalittici sulla scia del cambiamento climatico che sta condizionando profondamente il nostro pianeta. Ciò nonostante, questo articolo sostiene che il romanzo tende a privilegiare una modalità ottativa invece della catastrofe di massa tipica dell'eco-narrativa canonica. A tale fine, si analizzano alcune strategie formali di empatia narrativa, come l'identificazione con i personaggi e la focalizzazione multipla, che favoriscono la partecipazione emotiva del lettore. Le manifestazioni della vulnerabilità che *Clade* traccia rivelano profonde implicazioni empatiche, richiamando un'etica della cura che coinvolge il lettore sul piano affettivo.

Abstract II: In his latest novel *Clade* (2015), Australian author James Bradley portrays apocalyptic scenarios in the aftermath of the ubiquitous climate change that is affecting our planet, while following the human conflicts of three generations of the Leith family. And yet, this article argues that the novel privileges an optative mood instead of the traditional collective catastrophe of canonical eco-fiction. To do so, the article scrutinises some formal strategies of narrative empathy, such as character identification and multiple focalisation, which favour the reader's emotional engagement. In the novel, vulnerable manifestations disclose a profound empathic orientation, addressing an ethics of care that implicates the reader affectively.

James Bradley and the Ethics of Writing

While commenting on the power of literary writing to elicit reactions from the reader, Australian novelist James Bradley asserts that "the book people seem to read is never quite the book you thought you were writing" (Bradley 2015b: n.p.). Although Bradley does not use the word "empathy", his works, by exhibiting the vulnerability of human life and the fragility of our environment, allow for the reader's involvement in the ethical issues embodied in his fiction. The animating topics of *Wrack* (1997), *The Deep Field* (1999) and *The Resurrectionist* (2006) are natural disasters, economic crises, human tensions and technological changes, themes that perfectly embody the interaction between the human and the non-human in the age of the Anthropocene. In certain respects, Bradley's fiction addresses the impact of human life on the planet, providing "a medium to explain, predict, implore and lament" (Trex-

ler 2015: 9) the ethical conundrum of the Anthropocene. Bradley's fourth novel, *Clade* (2015), similarly activates emotional responses in the audience by means of empathic engagements in human vulnerability and environmental catastrophes. On the one hand, the novel portrays apocalyptic scenarios from Antarctica to Oceania in the aftermath of the ubiquitous climate change that is affecting our planet. On the other, the narrative follows three generations of the Leith family from the present to a possibly catastrophic future. In *Clade*, therefore, human vulnerability and ecological decay are a means to arouse empathic responses in readers, by promoting ethical concerns with both human and non-human questions.

As far as the title of the novel is concerned, the word "clade"[1], as Bradley himself puts it, is "a biological term for a group of organisms believed to comprise all the evolutionary descendants of a common ancestor" (Pierce 2015: n.p.). In Bradley's story, the "clade" is represented by Adam Leith, an Australian scientist studying the melting ice caps in Antarctica in the late 1980s. While his name inevitably evokes biblical connections, the narrative chronicles two generations of the Leith family with a consistent use of shifting focalisation and multiple narrators. Divided into ten chapters, which continuously shift the chronological axis of the novel forward, up to the first decade of the third millennium, the novel juxtaposes third-person viewpoints with first-personal accounts. The story opens with Adam's perspective, but the events are narrated in a diegetic structure that breaks temporal linearity, combing the other characters' viewpoints: Ellie, Adam's wife, their daughter Summer, and their grandson Noah. However, *Clade* is also narrated by characters who do not belong to the Leiths, thus interspersing the story of this Australian family with external perspectives. Such a kaleidoscopic narrative frame, which experiments with time, space, form and focalisation, well captures the eerie sensation of living in a world moving "upwards in that cold immensity of space, of time" (Bradley 2015a: 251), thus alerting the reader to the complexity of our contemporaneity.

In this regard, *Clade* is a fit illustration of the issue raised in the present number of this journal because it exposes a double perspective on the use of empathy, understood as a narrative device about both human conflictual states and environmental justice. Bradley's novel dwells on the edge of time, places and human loss: not only does the narrative straddle temporal and spatial boundaries, it also thematises diseases and ecosickness[2], thus revealing a world in pieces. Seen in this light, Bradley's story can be said to disclose the ethical power of literary writing, bringing to the fore the vision, supported by scholars like Martha Nussbaum, that literature may be instrumental in expanding human understanding. According to the American philosopher, creative writing, specifically novels, contributes to the

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[1] According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "clade" finds its roots in the Greek word *klados* ("branch") and it designates "[a] group of organisms believed to comprise all the evolutionary descendants of a common ancestor" (n.p.).

[2] This article takes the term "ecosickness", as conceptualised by Heather Houser in *Ecosickness in Contemporary U.S. Fiction: Environment and Affect*, as the starting point of the ecological reflections in Bradley's novel. In Houser's approach, ecosickness narratives, such Leslie Mamon Silko and Marge Piercy's writings where somatic and ecological vulnerabilities are intertwined, "attest that crises of bodily and planetary endangerment are also affective crises" (Houser 2016: 222), thus hinting at parallels between human fragility, ecological apocalypse and emotions.

cultivation of human beings. Narrative empathy, or "literary imagination" as Nussbaum calls it, is "an essential ingredient of an ethical stance that asks us to concern ourselves with the good of other people whose lives are distant from our own" (Nussbaum 1995: xvi).

Interestingly, narrative empathy grants readers insights into vulnerable manifestations, reminding them that there is "a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect" (Keen 2007: 4) induced by reading, viewing or hearing about another's condition. In *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), however, Suzanne Keen questions the general assumption that reading literature might automatically expand the reader's empathy, claiming that "scant evidence exists for active connections among novel reading, experiences of narrative empathy, and altruistic action" (xiv). Whereas empathy, its etymological roots coming from the German word *Einfühlung* ("feeling into"), involves "being emotionally affected by someone else's emotions and experiences" and "making inferences about another's mental states" (Coplan and Goldie 2011: 4), narrative empathy entails "a complex imaginative process involving both cognition and emotion" (Coplan 2004: 143). Not only does the notion of "narrative empathy" seem a viable formal solution, it also works as a literary device for measuring the impact of a book on the reader. Against this theoretical backdrop, *Clade* conveys empathy by displaying techniques of "strategic empathizing" (Keen 2007): the novel's chief interest lies in depicting the exposure to disability, ecosickness and hope and, to this end, Bradley attempts, in Keen's words, "to direct an emotional transaction through a fictional work aimed at a particular audience, not necessarily including every reader who happens upon the text" (142)[3].

This article explores the reader's possible empathic responses to *Clade*. Bradley's evocation of human vulnerability and ecological fragility stems from his view of the mutual transformations between human and nature in the age of the Anthropocene. As he claims, "we inhabit a world in which we ourselves are being altered, not just by technology and social transformation, but by the shifting terms of our engagement with what we would once have called the natural world" (Bradley 2015b: n.p.), thus highlighting empathic and metamorphic connections between the human and the non-human. In a novel where climate change, birds' extinction, generational conflicts, economic crises, cancer, storms, autism, infertility, epidemic viruses and biopolitical issues converge, the emotional and cognitive impact is an ineluctable consequence. The article will proceed by first tracking the devices of narrative empathy, namely character identification and multiple focalisation, which are subject to Bradley's treatment of human vulnerability. Then, it will be shown that ecosickness raises important emotional responses by means of strategic empathizing techniques which attempt to foster the reader's engagement. Finally, it will be argued that despite its tone of anxiety, *Clade* privileges an optative mood instead of the traditional collective catastrophe staged in cli-fi literature. What makes Bradley's *Familienroman* deviate from canonical eco-fiction is that it shows the potentialities of vulnerability by promoting a strong ethical orientation.

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[3] For Keen, empathic responses are also shaped by the moment when one reads a text. As she argues, "[t]he capacity of novels to invoke readers' empathy may change over time" (Keen 2007: 136).

The Lures of Vulnerability: Disability and Generational Conflicts
Definitions of vulnerability position the phenomenon in an interdisciplinary field comprising health, economics, ecology and ethics. Vulnerability presents itself in a variety of forms, a wide range of options well synthesised in Marianne Hirsch's open letter to the MLA in 2014, in which she defines our age as one dominated by vulnerability, with regard to "studies of the environment, social ecology, political economy, medicine, and developmental psychology as terms that help address the predisposition of people and systems to injury" (Hirsch 2014: n.p.). Jean-Michel Ganteau similarly describes vulnerability as "a paradigm of the contemporary condition and of contemporary culture" (Ganteau 2015: 4). Drawing on Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy of alterity, Ganteau sees vulnerability as entailing an "ethical gesture" which tends to create empathic connections between self and other.

In *Clade*, forms of vulnerability constantly appear, affecting the characters physically and mentally. The convergence of negative situations may be said to direct the reader's attention to vulnerabilities, recalling Keen's contention that "empathetic responses to fictional characters and situations occur more readily for negative emotions" (Keen 2007: xii). A clear example of vulnerability can be found in the very first chapter, "Solstice", where vulnerability takes the shape of disability. Adam Leith, who is collecting data for his scientific research in Antarctica, learns that his wife Ellie is eventually pregnant. While studying the changing nature of the place, "using fossilized plants and traces of ancient pollen to chart the transformation of the landscape" (Bradley 2015a: 19), Adam indulges in recollections of the past, revising, in a long flashback, the troubles with the impossibility of having children. The motif of infertility is disclosed indirectly through connections with the image of Antarctica "that exists without reference to the human" (20) because of the infinite presence of the ice. Moreover, Antarctica is presented as a bare landscape in that it is associated with a moment of the year, the summer solstice, perceived as a symbol "of loss" (4), marking the transition from light "into the dark" (4). From the very initial pages, then, the reader of *Clade* is confronted with an inextricable relationship between human disability and environmental decay. The link established between the Leiths' troublesome childbearing and the melting of the Antarctic permafrost, where "the ice sheets were destabilising, their deterioration outpacing even the most pessimistic models" (11), aligns readers not only with the precariousness of human life, but also with the delicate question of climate change. Interestingly, the reader learns, through Adam's thoughts in indirect speech, that Ellie herself, who is an artist, shares a fascination with precariousness. Adam does allude to Ellie's project on Alzheimer's and "the erasure of the past" (39), by recalling her statues showing "the faces of the sufferers" (39) and videos filming "people shouting and weeping" (40). The reader cannot but realise that a range of negative feelings affects both Adam and Ellie, involving them emotionally, and suggesting, as Adam himself muses, "some desire to escape the present" (40).

What can be observed in the two characters is that, to put it with Keen's words, "a character's negative affective states, such as those provoked by undergoing prosecution, suffering, grieving and experiencing painful obstacles, make a reader's empathizing more likely" (Keen 2007: 71). In these situations, the character identification is accomplished thanks to the author's formal solutions. As Keen explains, a "narrated monologue has a strong effect

on readers' responses" (96), a narrative strategy that seems to favour the reader's identification with the character. If identifications are accompanied by a "spontaneous emotional sharing" (73), the use of indirect speech may provide empathic responses since it "catches the feelings embedded in the fictional characters" (136). In *Clade*, the exposure to physical disability, with the emotional and cognitive crises it brings about, is performed through free indirect speech, a solution allowing for the eruption of empathy towards the characters' manifestations of vulnerability.

This is suggested in the portrayal of Summer's problematic youth. Albeit born in a sunny season, as her name suggests, Adam and Ellie's daughter is instead a character with a bleak and cold personality. Her "shifting vulnerability" (Bradley 2015a: 62) is symptomatic of a wounded subjectivity as her step-grandmother, Maddie, observes: the old woman "cannot but feel there is an edge to Summer's manner, a sharpness to her judgments that is unsettling" (62). Surprisingly, Maddie, who still mourns the death of her first husband, consumed by cancer some years before, seems to empathise with her young step-granddaughter, in an attempt to imagine Summer's thoughts. In this example, Maddie is recalling her own complicated pregnancy, but suddenly the narrative switches to her step-granddaughter Summer since Maddie knows that Ellie had had difficulties in giving birth. Thus, Bradley's use of indirect discourse allows the reader to access Summer's mind via Maddie, an entry that otherwise would not be possible owing to Summer's silence. Behind this sharing of emotions between Maddie and Summer may lie an empathic approach that Peter Goldie defines "in-his-shoes perspective shifting" (Goldie 2011: 302), a condition that occurs when "consciously and intentionally shifting your perspective in order to imagine being the other person" (302). Not only are empathic connections, therefore, aroused in the reader, they are also elicited among the characters, a point that Bradley intensifies through a multifocal narrative perspective which facilitates this "in-his-shoes" approach.

Notably, the consistent use of multi-perspectivity also materialises through the change of narrative voices, with the alternation of third and first-person perspectives. In chapter seven, symbolically titled "A Journal of the Plague Year", scenes of ecological disaster are depicted, as it will be discussed in the next section of the article. Here, the narrative voice is that of Li Lijuan, a Chinese boy living in Australia, who recounts in the first person, using the narrative format of the personal diary, the terrible events of a third millennium viral infection. The teenager agrees to replace his mother, who temporarily returns to China, in the assistance to Noah, a boy "on the spectrum" (Bradley 2015a: 189), suffering from autism. Among the various losses the chapter records, namely the death of many people afflicted by the virus and a pervading feeling of obsession with infected people whom are killed in the streets because they are considered potential infectors, the narrator also alludes to Noah's mother, Summer, declaring that she "had just vanished" (210). When we meet Noah, through Li Lijuan's eyes, we learn about his problematic life and that he is half-Indian, thus gathering information about Summer's partner who, however, is never featured in the novel. It is no coincidence that the characters readers are more likely to empathise with are those, like Noah and Li Lijuan, who live without care, abandoned by their mothers and in search of affection. By using a narrative focalisation unrelated to the Leiths, Bradley ampli-

fies the reader's empathic response towards Noah. The fact that the reader is deprived of this crucial piece of information, and should be given access to Noah only pages and years after the last moment when Summer appears in the discourse-level, is indicative of the "manipulative" (Keen 2007: 134) nature of narrative empathy.

Shifting perspectives and multiple focalisation are among the narrative elements that, for Keen, "have been supposed to contribute to readers' empathy" (93), an authorial strategy that Bradley well condenses in the novel. Through Li Lijuan's eyes, who is sixteen like Noah but a stranger to him, Bradly eventually delves into Noah's disease. As already argued above, disability intensifies the empathic orientation in the novel. While people suffering from autism are generally considered, as Keen explains (6), as lacking empathy, Noah's affliction favours Li Lijuan's relational care and search of intimacy. The Chinese boy reads about autism, learning that it is not a simple condition since it may impact on language, feelings and information processing and, in the throes of a difficult "in-his-shoes" approach, he imagines how hard it must be "to live in a world filled with signs and signals you don't understand, with people who do baffling things and expect you to react in particular ways" (Bradley 2015a: 214). This shows that empathy does not entail alleviating one's grief or suffering; rather, it implies knowledge of the mental state of the other. Li Lijuan's reflections corroborate Bradley's strategy of arousing empathy both into characters and readers by means of nuanced perspectives, while the use of ellipses allows for the creation of a distance that tends to complicate the overflow of an "easy empathy". The elliptic organisation of the novel, with information reconstructed at a later stage, not only indicates the haunting presence of the past that leaks into the present; it rather complicates the reader's spontaneous distribution of empathy insomuch that it "pushes the limits of our understanding in reaching out to those with whom we might not otherwise wish contact or association" (Leake 2014: 176).

There are moments in *Clade* when Summer's fragility elicits empathy because of her complicated youth in the aftermath of her parents' separation and of her being a single mother with an autistic son. And yet, if apparently Summer's role can be that of a victim, the multifocal perspectives and the elliptical discourse-level contribute to subvert the direction of an "easy empathy", promoting instead a deeper understanding of her complex personality. According to Eric Leake, "[d]ifficult empathy fosters the development of more expansive identities that incorporate the best and worst of people" (184). In other terms, when readers find out that Summer has first left Australia for moving to England, where she leaves in a remote rural mansion with Noah, concealing him to both Adam and Ellie, and that she later abandons her child without any explanations, they are invited to see things differently. Her father Adam, for instance, comes to blame himself and his wife for the tensions of their final years of marriage, in the awareness that "the presence in early childhood of chemicals associated with stress can alter the brain's chemistry for life" (Bradley 2015a: 114). Furthermore, in the penultimate chapter, where the point of view is that of an omniscient extradiegetic narrator capable of getting to grips with the temporal disarray of the narrative, Noah's recollections of his last hours spent with Summer, during a storm that flooded England, become more clear: although Summer is seen as a victimiser, the absence of his mother is "like

a hollow at the centre of him, the feeling so huge, so overwhelming, he was afraid to give into it" (275-276). What seems to be recorded in these thoughts is Noah's vulnerability, some form of fragility also intensified by his awareness of autism, knowing enough about "the differences between his brain and those of most people" (266). Bradley's formal choices reveal a narrative form preoccupied with the evocation of feelings: by scattering the plot with multiple focalisers, the novelist establishes connections, while also defying the reader's easy distribution of empathy.

Clearly, the novel aims at exposing the production of empathy, drawing on the lures of negative feelings. The combination of multiple focalisation, different narrative voices and the suspense generated in the gaps between the discourse-level and the story-level of the narrative can contribute to the evocation of empathic responses. The fact that there is not a dominant narrative viewpoint orients readers along a more complex and nuanced empathic path, leaving them with various options. While it is easy to empathise with Noah, we might also show emotional involvement with Summer, despite the mistakes she makes as both a daughter and a mother. Moreover, as it will be argued in the following pages, the reader might also adopt the perspective of the wounded planet as it is portrayed in a condition of ecological apocalypse.

Environmental Apocalypse, Melancholia and Solidarity
Clade opens in Antarctica, an environment characterised by "icebergs and then by fields of drifting ice, their surfaces sculpted by wind and waves" (20). As already mentioned, the place is filtered through Adam's scientific eyes, a viewpoint that connects the barren landscape with the infertility that is afflicting his marriage with Ellie. Adam cannot but perceive the wounds of the landscape, since he remarks that "the ice has retreated further than ever, exposing rock and stone buried for millions of years" (21). The metamorphic process of the natural scenario is a reminder to both Adam and the reader of the ecological implications within the broader discourse of climate change, an ethical issue arousing empathy and engagement. Antarctica represents a tangible example of Bradley's vision of the planet as being "on a collision course with disaster" (18), though, albeit the apocalyptic tones, the novel opens itself to hope: as Adam wonders, "the world will go on […] what else is there to do, except hang on, and hope?" (22-23).

Cli-fi literature frequently relies on apocalypse and disaster, alerting readers to the dangers of a future marked by catastrophes. According to Greg Garrard, the rhetoric of the apocalypse is always "proleptic" in that it describes what "has yet to come into being" (Garrard 2004: 94). The tragic consequence embedded in environmental apocalypse is an ethical one, its mission entailing the necessity of taking responsibility for our future. Whereas it is true that the apocalypse is a major trope in contemporary literature, its ethical scope is "not about anticipating the end of the world, but about attempting to avert it by persuasive means" (107-108). In *Clade*, a wide range of pressing environmental matters are recorded. In chapter three, for instance, a calamitous flood occurs while Adam is in England to visit Summer and Noah. As his grandson's name suggests, in line with the biblical episode of Noah's Ark, Adam and his descendants are spared death during a tremendous storm leaving behind a disastrous scenario where "trees lie tumbled and bent, branches and leaves spread across

the open ground […] great pools of water cover the road and the footpath" (Bradley 2015a: 122). Here, as in other strands of the novel, ecological mayhem is described as an ordinary situation. Adam, therefore, is not only a scientist investigating climate change, he is also a witness and a survivor to death and destruction. What the reader should note is that Bradley does transpose the rhetoric of apocalypse from man to nature, modelling *Clade* as an instance of what Garrard calls "comic apocalypse", because it does not succumb to self-destructive impulses; rather, its temporality is "open-ended and episodic" (Garrard 2004: 87) and empathy and solidarity act as palliative measures against violence and destruction. In the novel, therefore, human agency is not tragically framed by death as its exclusive climax; it instead revolves around an ethical struggle between light and darkness, disability and hope, death and survival. Despite apocalyptic rhetoric, life prevails, becoming a catalyst for empathic engagements in a novel where disasters impinge darkly on the flora and the fauna of the planet.

Bradley may be said to create parallels among the natural world, his characters, who display empathic concerns with the wounds of the planet, and the reader, who can be seen to empathise with both the pains of the characters and the ecological threats, developing a kind of civic engagement which chimes with Nussbaum's stance. Empathy thus plays a central role in Bradley's story, owing to the feeling of responsibility it tries to elicit. Specifically, the type of empathy that Bradley seems to invoke is akin to "*broadcast strategic empathy*" (Keen 2007: 142; emphasis in the original) which "*calls upon every reader to feel with members of a group, by emphasizing our common vulnerabilities and hopes*"[4]. In the novel, this emphasis on hope underscores the limitations of apocalyptic rhetoric, disclosing, instead, human capacity for mercy and redemption. While facing a world in decay, the readers of *Clade* become aware of their position as environmental caretakers, figuring the ecological mission as an ethical one. And yet, despite the feeling of empathy and hope, images of ecological disaster haunt Bradley's narrative. In chapter two, for instance, the reader learns that the climate negotiations in Bangkok "have reached an impasse yet again" (Bradley 2015a: 35), while sudden bird die-offs, the change of the South Asian monsoon, crops failures, food shortages and starvation impact negatively on the economy and on the ecosystem. Among the various environmental wounds depicted in the novel, the extinction of bees, known as accelerated colony collapse disorder (ACCD), and a viral epidemic disease, the acute viral respiratory syndrome (AVRS), come at the top of the list.

The novel provides ample evidence to sustain a universalistic reading of empathy. A good example of this empathic dimension is offered in the chapter where the critical collapse of the bees is narrated. The focal perspective here is that of Ellie. In the aftermath of her separation from Adam, she casually happens on a field with a hive and discovers that its beekeeper, Amir, is an illegal Pakistani immigrant. However, and more importantly, she is also fascinated by the sense of energy conveyed by the swarm of bees. She then starts to

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[4] Keen distinguishes other two types of "strategic empathy". On the one hand, she argues that "bounded strategic empathy" occurs "*within an ingroup, stemming from experiences of mutuality and leading to feeling with familiar others*" (Keen 2007: 12; emphasis in the original). On the other, Keen introduces "ambassadorial strategic empathy" as addressing "*chosen others with the aim of cultivating their empathy for the in-group, often to a specific end*" (Keen 2007: 12; emphasis in the original).

read about these insects, discovering that the first signs of honey production date back to the Mesolithic times, while she also gathers information about the present extinction of the bees. Unlike Adam, who investigates natural phenomena scientifically, Ellie is an artist in search of new creative resources. Specifically, Ellie displays a certain interest in the long existence of the bees and in their conception of time, wondering whether they "understand of the past, of the future, of the deep well of their history […] of passing away and out of time" (177). Notably, her exposure to loss manifests the typical traits of Freudian melancholia, "causing a splitting of the ego such that one part identifies itself with the abandoned object" (Freud 1953: 249). A similar sense of disconnection is exhibited by her inability to establish correlations with linear time. She instead dwells in what Julia Kristeva calls the "truncated time" of melancholia that "does not pass by, the before/after notion does not rule it" (Kristeva 1989: 60). This disarrayed temporality clashes with the long-lasting presence of the bees in the geological archives of history. While Ellie seems to be stuck in the present, the bees exhibit a resilient nature, "shifting and changing and evolving as the world altered around them" (Bradley 2015a: 177). Genetically engineered plants, inflections and spontaneous events seem to be the contributing factors of their collapse, a violation of the ecosystem that in Ellie's thoughts comes to similarly trigger the eventual collapse of human existence, "causing it to crash as well" (167). Ellie symbolically establishes links of vulnerability between human precariousness and ecological decay: feelings of loss and pain torment Ellie, who is the most melancholic character for her inability to work through traumatic experiences. In her view, for example, Amir's illegal condition epitomises the mass migration wave of displaced people "in need of assistance" (167) because of climatic changes. Ellie's melancholic mood amplifies the novel's adoption of "broadcast strategic empathy" by calling upon an assortment of universal negative situations through which she feels a closer bond to certain delicate conditions, such as human migrations and animal extinctions.

Interestingly, environmental apocalypse moves the reader from observation to emotional involvement. *Clade* may be said to well represent the ethical responsibility of ecosickness fiction, namely the tendency to "ventriloquize and broadcast others' voices" (Houser 2016: 126). The description of the AVRS mass infection provides a further example of Bradley's broadcasting empathy. As alluded before, chapter seven is narrated by Li Lijuan, while the title bears an intratextual reference to Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1772). As in Defoe's novel, the young Chinese boy writes a first-person account of the tragic pandemic to convey the stream-of-consciousness of a teenager facing a dramatic escalation of death, in which he cannot decide "whether to be afraid or not" (Bradley 2015a: 195), Bradley calls forth compassion and empathy, not only with Li Lijuan, who eventually loses his mother, but with the whole planet. As Li Lijuan registers in his diary, "cities are burning, death rates are way up, and there's still no sign of a cure" (214), but among the various things that he lists as "saved", the reader finds "*seeds, elephants, dolphins* and *each other*" (207; emphasis in the original). This last remark attests to the ethics of care Bradley's novel conveys, whose value lies in its ability to make readers share "perception and responsiveness" (Nussbaum 1990: 44) of the other's vulnerability. Despite the typical "sickness imaginary" (Houser 2016: 4) of apocalyptic fiction, *Clade* ultimately enacts moral solidarity. While the Chinese boy is

a stranger to Noah, the threat of the AVRS fuels connection, fostering a feeling of intersubjective understanding. Thus, Bradley makes use of "broadcast strategic empathy" to remind readers of our common vulnerabilities and to invite them to feel members of the same group, proposing environmental consciousness as a catalyst for imagining an alternative future.

Coda: from Empathy to Hope
If Bradley's novel animates narrative empathy by means of multifocal perspectives, juxtaposition of narrative voices and "broadcast strategic empathy", the reader is positioned in a narrative space that presents both human fragilities and environmental wounds. And yet, rather than conceiving the world as succumbing to anxiety and despair, *Clade* hints at causes of cautious optimism. In chapter eight, through a new narrative perspective, the novel endorses hope, by opening up to the future. The narrative voice here is that of Dylan, a programmer of sims, these being avatars of dead people in the biopolitical attempt "to recreate those who have been lost" (Bradley 2015a: 222). Dylan's challenge is then an arduous one in that it tends to combine the past with the future. Dylan, whom the reader later discovers is Noah's partner, dwells on the border between death and life, past and future, suggesting an empathic approach that invites all the mourners of the AVRS pandemic, as well as the reader, to look ahead: "[w]hat's done is done, what matters now is finding some way to pick up the pieces and carry on" (222). Whereas such an attitude may seem simplistic, Dylan well embodies the novel's tendency to foster hope in the awareness of all the fragilities the story thematises. As the omniscient narrator observes by the very end of the novel, "what of the future? […] the world will change once more […] [p]erhaps there will still be humans then […] perhaps some of them will have spread outward, to the stars" (281). What is suggested here is an invitation to the reader to figure out a possible future. In Noah's perspective, in particular, this means to establish connections with distant times and places. Significantly, Noah becomes an astronomer who studies the stars "to search for signal from alien cultures" (260). While he fails to understand human language, viewing it as "atomised, arbitrary, a collection of sounds the meanings of which might as well be accidental" (281), astronomy becomes a vehicle for imagining "a future that may be wonderful or terrible or a thousand things in between" (297).

It comes as no surprise that disability and ecosickness appear compatible with the articulation of hope. The coexistence of these contrasting stances allows for change, transforming, as Frederick Buell explains, vulnerabilities into "a way of life" (Buell 2003: 183). Paradoxically, apocalyptic rhetoric has become part of our daily life, straddling the border between the threat of the end of the world and feelings of survival and resilience. For Buell, contemporary fiction promotes attention to the present ecological crisis in terms of "environmental mourning" (265), because of the juxtaposition of nature as "deeply and irreversibly wounded" (265), on the one hand, and the urgency to find "a way of comprehending loss without numbing feeling or dwelling only in anger and grief" (266), on the other. When shifted from the level of the individual to that of the collective, the category of sickness, both for humans and nature, leads to the broader question of empathy. The empathic response *Clade* arouses ensues from painful experiences. Rather than a genuine or spontaneous reaction, the novel employs empathy as an ethical imperative, requiring the characters and

the reader to commit themselves, using the novel as a vehicle which "helps determine the nature of the way we see the world, the questions we ask, and perhaps most importantly, the stories we tell" (Bradley 2015b: n.p.). Narrative empathy, to conclude, emerges at the core of vulnerability, unveiling an ethical orientation and illuminating what it means to be human. Along such lines, empathy becomes a tool for refracting diseases and ecosickness in *Clade*, suggesting an ethics of care through which we "are prepared to care where we previously were not" (Coplan & Goldie 2011: xxvii).

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