

1 **Imagining Intergenerational Climate Justice. Critical notes on Jan Terlouw's *Het*** 2 ***hebzuchtgas***

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12 **Introduction**

14 You are failing us. But the young people are starting to understand your betrayal. The
15 eyes of all future generations are upon you. And if you choose to fail us, I say: We will
16 never forgive you. (NBC News)

18 Greta Thunberg famously spoke these lines at the UN Climate Action Summit in 2019,
19 where she denounced the assembled world leaders for their inaction on climate change. Her
20 impassionate speech channelled the rage and frustration of climate activists around the world.
21 It was a moral indictment, steeped in the language of generational conflict.

22 The *we* that Thunberg assumes in her speech comprises younger people and “all future
23 generations.” It is opposed to the potentates of today, members of the preceding generations
24 who continue to block life-saving climate policies. This rhetoric of generational conflict is
25 common not only in certain parts of the climate justice movement but also in the wider cultural
26 sphere. On social media, hashtags such as #okayboomer or #boomerremover (used for older
27 victims of the coronavirus pandemic) exemplify the workings of “intergenerational
28 discounting” – they mark a “breakdown in reciprocal obligations of care, giving rise to
29 accusations of hypocrisy, expressions of resentment and rage” (Elliott, p. 74). It is this
30 breakdown of intergenerational relations that underlies the sense of betrayal so powerfully
31 expressed by Thunberg.

32 While generational thinking is a potent conveyor of younger people’s grievances, it can
33 stand in the way of effective climate activism. When considering who is most affected by
34 climate change and who is most responsible for it, economic and racial inequalities are the key
35 parameter. It is well known that poor populations emit the least CO₂ while being the most
36 vulnerable to the effects of a warming climate (Chancel & Piketty; Woetzel et al.). Similar
37 disproportions are at play in the relation between the Global South and the Global North and
38 resonate with the structural forces that obstruct equitable climate policies, such as corporate
39 power and climate racism (InfluenceMap; Táiwò). Framing climate change as a generational
40 conflict obscures this reality and runs the risk of dividing otherwise natural allies. On the other
41 hand, an intergenerational imaginary can be useful for building bridges between activists.
42 When combined with an intersectional analysis, it can connect present with past struggles,

thereby providing “inspiration, knowledge and a deep well of emotional support” (Little & Winch, n.p.).

In this article, we explore the potentials and pitfalls of such an intergenerational climate imaginary by turning to the work of the Dutch writer Jan Terlouw. In his children’s book *Het hebzuchtgas*, Terlouw envisions a response to the imminent climate catastrophe based on intergenerational solidarity. The book tells the story of the 18-year-old Julia who tackles the environmental crisis in her country by leveraging the parental feelings of its economic leaders. In this endeavour she receives crucial support from older members of her community. *Het hebzuchtgas* foregrounds the complementary contributions of Julia and her older allies and invites its readers to imagine a cross-generational time scale that transcends the obsession with short-term profits. In this regard, the book offers important ingredients for an intergenerational climate imaginary. Yet, its intergenerational vision also falls short in a number of ways: readers learn very little about the emotional life of the protagonist and are confronted with problematic heteronormative and colonial tropes. We argue that a critical climate imaginary needs to avoid these pitfalls by incorporating the insights of intersectionality, decoloniality, queer theory, and affect studies.

We begin our article with an exposition of key concepts, followed by a section on *Het hebzuchtgas* in the context of Jan Terlouw’s climate activism. Subsequently, we analyse the two main elements of the book’s intergenerational climate imaginary: narrative entanglement and cross-generational time. Lastly, we present our points of criticism and conclude our text with a call for a more intersectional intergenerational imagery of climate activism.

Conceptual framework

Since “intergenerational solidarity” became an explicitly named project in the Global North (roughly in the 1960s), it has most commonly been understood as the creation of cohesiveness between grandparents, parents, and children in one (biological) family. More broadly, it has been defined as “[t]he social compact [. . .] based on reciprocity and the belief that society progresses because of the investments past generations have made in carrying knowledge and culture forward. It recognizes that people of all generations [. . .] are bound together in order to survive and thrive” (Donna M. Butts, cited in Deszcz-Tryhubczak and Zoe Jaques xii). Although critics have pointed out its inherent complexities (cf. Cruz-Saco), intergenerational solidarity is widely heralded as a necessary project for support, healing, and creating sustainable communities. In the introduction to their important collection on *Intergenerational Solidarity in Children’s Literature and Film*, editors Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak and Zoe Jaques argue that this project is more urgent than ever:

“Promoting two-way intergenerational relationships and developing new ways of communicating between generations is especially imperative in view of the structural age apartheid affecting both interpersonal relationships and political, social, and cultural life, which prevents the development of age diversity at all levels of our societies. Age segregation is currently one of the most aggravating factors fueling intra-social divides harming communities.” (xv)

86 This provocative stance has been nuanced and criticized by several scholars, particularly
87 regarding the parallels it suggests to the marginalization of BIPOCs (recognizable in this quote
88 via the term “age apartheid”). Age-based segregation quite obviously functions differently
89 from racial segregation and has different impacts on the communities afflicted—not in the least
90 because the factor that separates people from different ages, i.e. time, is a relative quality while
91 racial identities that are often understood as fixed (cf. Beauvais, Joosen). Against the
92 background of this ongoing debate, the call for strengthened intergenerational ties is steadily
93 increasing.

94 The urgent need for intergenerational solidarity results from the ethical impasses posed
95 by climate change. The assessment of climate science is unequivocal: if present-day
96 generations do not curb their emissions of greenhouse gases, the resulting global warming will
97 eradicate the livelihoods of future humans and countless non-human lifeforms. While few
98 people would deny that the presently living owe something to their successors, the devil is in
99 the details. For, to what extent exactly ought present generations sacrifice their wealth
100 (understood as the freedom to burn fossil fuels) for the benefit of future people? And what
101 would be the philosophical foundation of this obligation? Such questions are the stuff of
102 intergenerational justice, a subfield of ethics that has struggled to get up to speed with the
103 realities of climate change.

104 According to the philosopher Matthias Fritsch, the problem of traditional theories of
105 intergenerational justice is that they start from the idea of a sovereign individual that is
106 contained in the present. A framework of this kind structurally undervalues the concerns of
107 future people, since it treats these concerns as mere derivations of present circumstances. To
108 overcome the bias of traditional theories, Fritsch proposes a revision of the fundamental
109 concepts on which intergenerational ethics has been built, including the concept of linear time.
110 In Fritsch’s account of asymmetric reciprocity and ethical turn-taking, past, present, and future
111 are not closed off against each other, but are interpenetrating and porous. Partaking in the chain
112 of inheritance, present people are indebted to both previous and subsequent generations: they
113 receive institutions, meanings, and material wealth from the past with the task to pass them on
114 to the future. On this view, no generation has an exclusive right to its inheritance, but “owns
115 only its turn with power” (175). Different generations take turns with each other as they take
116 turns with the Earth, acting in the spectral presence of both the past and the future.

117 While the idea of a porous, cross-generational time may sound revolutionary for
118 Western ears, it has been the default mode of thinking in many Indigenous cultures. In contrast
119 to the linear conception of time “as a race, an arrow or a flowing commodity,” Indigenous
120 philosophies tend to regard time as “an environment, which simply surrounds us as we live”
121 (Glenn, p. 79). In the environment of time, there is no sharp distinctions between the deceased,
122 presently living, and not-yet born. Catherine Winter puts it poignantly when she notes that,
123 from the perspective of Māori philosophy, “I am concurrently future generation, living and
124 ancestor” (155). Olúfẹmi Táíwò spots a similar simultaneity of generations in Yoruba culture,
125 where elders are addressed with plural pronouns. He interprets this linguistic particularity as
126 expressing the view “that to speak to someone older is to speak to history, and all its attendant
127 accumulations” (202). These examples of cross-generational time belong to a view of the
128 world as a vast web of relations connecting humans and nonhumans, the material and the

spiritual, as well as the deceased, living, and not yet born (Watene; Vidiella & García Valverde). Many Indigenous philosophies have built their conceptual frameworks on this understanding of life's profound interconnectedness. As such, they hold enormous potential for the development of intergenerational justice, alongside and in conversation with Western approaches such as Fritsch's.

The urgency of a temporally expansive and deeply relational approach to justice is nowhere clearer than in the confrontation with catastrophic climate change. Climate change not only puts pressure on intergenerational relations; it also defies basic perceptual categories. Being massively distributed in time and space and only observable through its effects, climate change is what Timothy Morton has called a "hyperobject," more akin to a black hole than to an object of earthly experience. If we are to face the mind-boggling reality of climate change, we need to move beyond mainstream ethics and epistemology toward radically relational ways of thinking, acting, and imagining.

Literature seems an important place to start building a relational climate imaginary. By creating a poetic response to climate change, literature works to create a narrative imagination around the topic that can guide our actions. And although Amitav Ghosh famously argued that traditional literature has failed in this effort so far, critics like Mark Bould demonstrate how marginalized literary genres such as science-fiction, horror, and fantasy have made significant contributions to this project already. Children's literature, another marginalized genre, could contribute in an equally meaningful way. It has the important advantage of already possessing a cross-generational structure. In children's literature, there is an encounter between adults (who primarily write and facilitate books) and children (who primarily read books). Being inherently a crossover genre, children's literature can function as a platform for intergenerational dialogue.

The importance of intergenerational storytelling has been examined in a number of influential interventions in the field of children's literature. Significantly, Sandra Beckett explored the concept of "crossover fiction", referring to literature that "blurs the boundaries between two traditionally separate readerships: children and adults" (3). This kind of fiction can refer to crossovers on the side of the writer (authors who write texts for both adults and children) and on the side of readers (readers who read texts that are intended for different age groups). Both manifestations suggest a breaking down of the barriers that confine different generations to separate storyworlds. Although several authors have pointed out that crossover fiction does not immediately undo the traditional marginalization of children's literature and child readers (cf. Shavit, Kümmmerling-Meibauer), the concept certainly captures the genre's potential to bridge the gap between people from different ages and generations. This being said, there is as of yet little clarity on how children's books can fulfil this important function, particularly in the context of climate change. How can children's literature actualize its potential to create cross-generational connections? And what are the pitfalls of this project? We will approach an answer to these questions by examining the case of a Dutch children's book that explicitly positions itself as a platform for the intergenerational dialogue on climate change: Jan Terlouw's *Het hebzuchtgas* (2016).

Jan Terlouw's *Het hebzuchtgas*

Climate activists have operationalized generational belonging to organize their actions in different ways. One example of this is the platform *Grandparents for Climate*, which invites people to join the climate movement based on their old age and/or their position as a grandparent. The Dutch subsection of this platform, called: *Grootouders voor het Klimaat*, foregrounds children's books as an important platform for creating intergenerational solidarity in the context of climate change. It promotes this project via so-called *klimaatvoorleesgrootouders*: older people who visit schools and other children's institutions to read environmental books to children (*Grootouders voor het Klimaat*, "Bewustzijn"). Besides providing material on how to become a *klimaatvoorleesgrootouder*, the movement presents a list of appropriate books to read to children. What is striking about this list is the absence of older characters in the suggested books. This lack of representation in the reading lists echoes a larger absence of older people in Dutch children's literature portraying environmental activism. As a consequence, the genre provides as yet little opportunity for younger readers to imagine their own involvement in the climate movement in relation to the work of older activists.

An important exception to this general rule in the Dutch context is the work of Jan Terlouw. Terlouw (born in 1931) is a well-established public figure in the Netherlands and one of the grandparents featured on the movement's website. He has been writing children's books about societal issues, including climate change, for over 60 years. As he has grown older, Terlouw has become more outspoken about children's role in societal issues, particularly the fight against climate change. In both his literary works and his public appearances, Terlouw promotes the importance of working across generations to preserve a liveable planet for future generations. Commentators often see a paradox between Terlouw's advanced age and his continuing public engagement—a concern which the author himself does not share. Terlouw rejects the notion that he, as an old person, would not have any socio-political agency, and points out explicitly that he wants to use his agency to empower children, a group of people who are often denied this agency. Terlouw is therefore invested in understanding his own socio-political agency in the context of environmental issues in direct and continuous dialogue with younger generations. He uses his public appearances and his literary works to develop an imagination that facilitates this intergenerational approach to climate activism.¹

These themes are clearly present in his most recent work *Het hebzuchtgas – een sprookje voor jong en oud* that is featured on the *Grootouders voor het Klimaat's* reading list. The novel explores the ways in which people of different ages can work together to tackle environmental issues. The protagonist is 18-year-old Julia, who lives in the fictional country Tradicië. Julia does not understand why no one seems to be interested in fighting climate change, until she discovers that the people in charge of the four major energy companies in Tradicië are all addicted to *hebzuchtgas* ("greed gas"). This addiction makes it impossible for people to think of anything besides making money. Together with her friends, parents, and grandparents, Julia sets up a plan to cure this addiction and restore environmental balance. At the beginning of 2021, Terlouw announced that he would not be writing any more books for children, which makes *Het hebzuchtgas* his last work as an author of children's books. In this

¹ For examples of Terlouw's public performances, see: *De grote vriendelijke podcast*; *EenVandaag*; *De Wereld Draait Door*.

article, we explore how Terlouw facilitates a way to imagine climate justice that foregrounds intergenerational solidarity. We conclude our analysis by pointing out shortcomings we perceive in Terlouw's take on intergenerational solidarity and by proposing a number of concerns that need to be addressed in our imagination of a just future.

Narrative entanglement

Terlouw's book foregrounds the importance of narrative imagination by having the protagonist, 18-year-old Julia, find out about the greed gas through intergenerational storytelling. This happens in the context of her internship with an energy company called *Solide* (Dutch for "solid") in the town of *Dalgaarde* (which in Dutch indicates a green valley). Directly to the North of Dalgaarde lies a large swamp. One of the first things we learn about the city is that the older inhabitants curate the knowledge about the mythical creatures that used to live in the swamp:

"In het moeras huisden volgens de overlevering trollen en boosaardige moerasgodinnen. Je moet in Dalgaarde niet zeggen dat moerasgodinnen niet bestaan, de oudere inwoners weten beter." (36)

Translation:² "According to tradition, the swamp house used to be home to trolls and evil swamp goddesses. You should never mention in Dalgaarde that swamp goddesses don't exist, the older inhabitants know better than that."

Immediately, the text invites us to imagine this city in the context of a larger tradition. We are to take into account the history of the city and the previous inhabitants, both human and non-human. Similarly, our own present-day knowledge of reality, that might not account for trolls and swamp goddesses, should not be valued over the traditional knowledge of older generations that remember living alongside these other beings.

In the context of her internship, Julia goes door to door to ask the citizens of Dalgaarde to participate in a survey about waste disposal. This does not prove to be very productive until she knocks on the door of Trijn Vroege, who is described as "een gebogen vrouwtje" ("a bended little woman", 45). The narrator suggests: "Ze lijkt wel een heks, spitse neus, rimpelige wangen, uitstekende kin, maar ze heeft vriendelijke ogen" ("She looks like a witch, pointed nose, wrinkly cheeks, pronounced chin, but her eyes are friendly", 45). Although we do not learn her actual age, Julia reflects that she "is vast over de tachtig" ("must be over eighty", 45). Trijn, on the other hand, refers to Julia as "mijn kind" ("my child", 46) even if Julia is technically off-age as an 18-year-old. Trijn refuses to discuss waste disposal with Julia and instead insists on telling her about the history of the region. This is how Julia learns about the greed gas that corrupts the owners of the large energy companies. Trijn also explains the workings of the gas: greed gas is usually trapped in rocks but can escape when these rocks are brought to higher altitudes – such as the top floors of skyscraper buildings. When released, the humans who work on these altitudes – which are usually the people occupying the highest positions of a company – become easily addicted to the gas. If this happens, their entire lives

² All translations from the Dutch are our own.

start to revolve around money. Thus, greed gas causes the economic leaders of the country to systematically prioritize financial gain over environmental justice.

By providing all this information, Trijn plays an essential role in the development of the plot – it is only through her that Julia discovers the secret mechanism behind climate change. Trijn’s account of the greed gas strikes a delicate balance between scientific explanation and mysticism. She stresses that “[v]roeger wist iedereen dat” (“[b]ack then, everyone knew this”, 45) and is often perplexed by the ignorance of the younger generation (“Sommige dingen weet je gewoon”, translation: “Some things one simply knows”, 60) and their narrow understanding of different sources of knowledge (“Jongen toch. Denk je nou echt dat je alles in boeken kunt vinden?”, translation: “My dear boy. Do you really think you can find everything in books?”, 61). At face value, greed gas belongs to the conceptual apparatus of chemistry, yet its existence is established by unscientific means: you simply know about it. The point not being that Trijn’s knowledge is without basis (her predictions prove to be correct eventually) but that effective climate action requires the integration of different kinds of knowledges. Trijn’s story brings to life a kind of reality that would otherwise be inaccessible to Julia. On the other hand, it is Julia’s activism that renders Trijn’s knowledge operative, bringing about its effective survival. In this way, the dynamic between Trijn and Julia illustrates the power of intergenerational exchange.

It is not hard to recognize in this exchange between Julia and Trijn the intergenerational dynamic that is inherent in children’s literature in general. As mentioned above, the academic conversations on crossover fiction have helped us to identify the way in which children’s literature connects generations. The dynamic at display here is a very familiar one: that of the adult storyteller and the child reader or listener of stories. Although this exchange is often interpreted in a negative manner, as reproducing aetnonormative power structures (cf. Nodelman), the scene between Julia and Trijn suggests that this traditional exchange can be beneficial as well. In this scene, different kinds of knowledge are offered and received by both parties which leads to a more complete understanding of the situation and a dedication to a collaborative solution.

Terlouw’s interest in crossgenerational exchange is not only noticeable in his thematization of intergenerational dialogue but is also apparent in his writing style and choice of genre. Like many of his other books, *Het hebzuchtgas* is explicitly addressed to readers of all ages. The subtitle reads: “een sprookje voor jong en oud”, which translates as: “a fairy-tale for young and old”. Terlouw plays with this multi-generational address in his own storytelling practices throughout the book. The choice to present the book as a “fairy-tale” is one example of this. The genre of the fairy-tale holds a specific position in the literary landscape in that it is closely related to the tradition of direct oral transmission from which it stems. This links the genre to practices of communal storytelling, in which readers and listeners of different ages are joined via a narrative performance. Today, the genre continues to relate the individual readers and listeners (those who have the narrative read out to them) with a body of work and knowledge that reaches out into the past and the future. Some critics of Terlouw’s book have noted that its address of the multiple generations manifests itself in its repeated shifts in style and register. In a review on *Hebban* (a popular Dutch platform for literary discussions), one critic points out the stylistic discrepancy between two fragments from the book:

Fragment 1: “Hij heeft jaren besteed aan onderzoek naar economische systemen die minder verspillend zijn dan de groei-economie waar een groot deel van de bevolking welvarend is geworden, maar de aarde arm.”

Translation of Fragment 1: “He spent years conducting research into economic systems that would be less wasteful than the growth economics which made a large part of the population very wealthy, but which depleted the earth.”

Fragment 2: “Als er veel kooldioxide in de lucht zit, kan de warmte die de aarde iedere dag van de zon krijgt de aarde minder goed verlaten. En warmte moet wel weg kunnen, want de temperatuur van de aarde mag niet te hoog worden. Die van de oceanen evenmin. Als de temperatuur op aarde te hoog wordt, smelt het ijs, het zo ontstane water stroomt naar zee, de zeespiegel wordt hoger.”

Translation of Fragment 2: “If there is lots of carbon dioxide in the air, the heat that reaches earth every day from the sun has a hard time escaping. This heat needs to leave because the earth’s temperature should not rise too much. Nor the ocean’s temperature. If the earth’s temperature rises too much, ice caps will melt, and the resulting water will reach the seas and raise the sea levels.” (Farkas)³

While the first fragment appears to address an older audience, the language of the second fragment seems more appropriate for younger readers. According to the critic, this mixing of registers points to a serious flaw. They judge that the mixing of languages does not appeal to one age group and therefore effectively excludes all age groups from the work. In this criticism, we can recognize concerns by literary critics who have pointed out that focusing on the crossover value of children’s books can lead to the genre being excluded from both the children’s literary field and the adult literary field – thereby ending up in limbo. (cf. Grenz) But we question whether these two fragments do in fact address different age groups. Terms such as “growth economics” are political buzz words that are not necessarily understood by all adult readers. Similarly, the simple language of the second fragment in no way excludes adult readers but could actually be appealing to many of them. Rather than creating a stylistic monster that is inappropriate for all ages, Terlouw’s mixing of registers could be understood as experimental multi-generational storytelling. His experiment addresses the question of how to tell the story of climate change in a way that is inclusive and conducive of collective sense-making. Should climate science act as a master narrative or should it make room for other types of stories? To be sure, juxtaposing different stylistic registers does not in itself establish an inclusive climate change narrative. Yet, it challenges the assumption that any one register would be sufficient to come to terms with this greatest crisis of our time.

Cross-generational time

³ This critic on Hebban is not alone in their remarks. For reviews that make a similar argument, see for example the reviews posted on goodreads.com and on ikvindlezenleuk.nl.

339 We have argued above that *Het hebzuchtgas* explores the power of multi-generational
340 storytelling. In this section, we locate a specific dynamic of response-ability in the encounter
341 of people of different ages. When Trijn first introduces Julia to the existence of greed gas, Julia
342 asks her if the gas scares her. Trijn immediately dismisses the effects of the gas to her own life
343 and redirects it towards the younger generation: “Mijn tijd zal het wel duren. Ik ben oud. Maar
344 jullie zullen meemaken ... Ach, ik weet het niet. Ja het maakt me bang.” (“I will outlive this.
345 I’m old. But you will experience... Ah well, I don’t know. Yes, it scares me”, 60). In this
346 hesitation, we can recognize Trijn’s cross-generational understanding of the dangers of the
347 environmental threat. On first consideration, she remarks that she will not be the primary
348 recipient of the danger, as she will most likely be dead when the most destructive effects of
349 climate change become manifest. However, she finally does admit to being scared, not on the
350 basis of a threat to herself directly, but on account of the harm that will be done to younger
351 people. In this stance, we recognize the asymmetric reciprocity between generations outlined
352 by Matthias Fritsch.

353 Fritsch’s moral approach to climate change, as outlined above, stresses the
354 interdependency between generations in the context of climate change. By the sheer vastness
355 of its nature, climate change forces us to look beyond the autonomous position of the present
356 and acknowledge the moral obligations we have to both the generations before us, from whom
357 we inherited norms, symbols, institutions, and resources, and the generations to come, for
358 whom we will have to leave behind a liveable planet in turn. The model of reciprocity and
359 ethical turn-taking he proposes implies an ontological turn in intergenerational ethics toward
360 an alternative understanding of time and the self. To imagine the future life conditions of your
361 own offspring is therefore the first step in the full realization of intergenerational justice. It
362 involves the recognition that the meaning of our existence does not exhaust itself in the things
363 that we experience right now. Beyond the present moment, our existence stretches into the past
364 and into the future where it is often quite literally in the hands of others. We received care when
365 we were an infant and we will again, hopefully, be looked after in our old age. Our dependence
366 on others extends further still. It involves the people before us, who prepared and furnished the
367 particular place that we occupy in the world, but also involves the people after us, who will
368 carry on our projects and legacy. Fritsch’s point – which is echoed by Terlouw’s concern for
369 his descendants as expressed in his public appearances – is that existence is never sovereign and
370 solitary but sustained by a complex order of intergenerational give and take. This insight into
371 the entanglement of existences carries an ethical charge: by exhausting the Earth’s resources,
372 we are getting into debt with our children. What happens in the present – the destruction of
373 eco-systems and the depletion of natural resources – violates an implicit norm of co-existence:
374 to take a fair turn with the resources you are given, so as to ensure the uninterrupted flow of
375 gifts from the past into the future.

376 The main plotline of *Het hebzuchtgas* echoes this logic. After Julia discovers the
377 existence of greed gas, she learns that the addiction to this gas is the reason why the heads of
378 all four energy companies in the country are continuing their environmental pollution. She
379 reaches out to the children of all four company leaders and organizes a kind of summit in which
380 the children discuss their options. During this meeting, Julia’s grandfather Stefan reminds them
381 of the one thing that remains to be even more important to their parents than money: their
382 children. He assures them: “Het gaat goed komen. Als julle goed in je hoofd houden dat ze

jullie uiteindelijk nog belangrijker vinden dan geld, dan gaat het goed komen.” (“It will be alright. As long as you remember that they value you above money, it will be alright”, 168). Based on this principle, Julia and her co-conspirators devise a plan to cure the company heads from their addiction. Every company head is lured away from their high-altitude office by appeals on their parenting instincts. When they are told that their child is in need of their help, the parents are willing to go through extreme challenges to help them out – all the while inadvertently curing themselves from their addiction. The moral appeal to their indebtedness to their children proves strong enough to break their polluting institutions.

In the first instance, the parents’ sense of responsibility is limited to their own children. However, the book later extends the circle of care from their own children to a more general address of generations to come. This happens after the four company heads are cured from their addiction. The four parents organize a meeting to discuss possibilities for creating a more sustainable form of generating energy. Now that they are no longer consumed by greed, they are free to create innovative ways of energy production that do not pollute the environment. The children, however, demand to be a part of this adult summit:

“We denken dat wat u gaat bespreken alles te maken heeft met onze toekomst. En dus willen we erbij zitten, opdat u niet vergeet dat wat u gaat bespreken van belang is voor uw nageslacht. Dat het ons en onze kinderen aangaat” (219).

“We think that what you will discuss here has everything to do with our future. And so we want to be there, so that you won’t forget that what you are about to discuss is of significance for your posterity. That it impacts us and our children.”

The adults immediately agree with this and even commit to reserving a seat for the future generations whenever the company makes any important decision – whether it directly relates to the environment or not:

“Als we vergaderen over belangrijke zaken, als we belangrijke besluiten nemen, wij samen, maar ook in onze eigen bedrijven, zetter we er altijd een lege stoel bij. Dat is de stoel voor de mensen die er nog niet zijn, voor toekomstige generaties. De stoel van de toekomst. In onze gedachten vergaderen de kinderen van onze kinderen, de kleinkinderen van onze kinderen, mee. Hun belangen komen voortaan tijdens onze vergaderingen altijd ook aan bod” (221).

“Whenever we discuss important matters, whenever we make important decisions, us together, but also in our companies, we will always include an empty chair. That is the chair for those who are not yet present, for the future generations. The chair of the future. In our minds, our children’s children, and our grandchildren’s children, take part in the discussion. Their needs will always be a part of our discussions from now on.”

Via this empty chair, representing future generations, the book presents us with a concrete symbol for the acknowledgement of the asymmetric reciprocity outlined by Fritsch. Even though the adults are in direct control of organizing institutions that impact climate change

(such as energy companies), they commit to understanding their position as a situational and temporal one. They undermine their absolute sovereignty by highlighting the importance of “turn taking” and by acknowledging the responsibility that they have to create an infrastructure which can safely be inherited by the next generations. The emptiness of the “chair of the future” is also a powerful reminder of the opacity inherent in time. The company heads the appeal to the interests of their descendants which they want to take on board in their meetings. But how do they know what those interests are or who those descendants will come to be? Being empty, the chair of the future stands in for an otherness that is irreducible to the knowledge and interests of the present. By symbolically occupying the empty chair, future generations are spectrally present, that is, both present *and* absent. Their interests will enter into the choices of the business leaders even though these interests are not calculable or otherwise knowable in advance. Paying heed to this opacity requires leaving the firm ground of our own point of view, to act as if we were ignorant of future vicissitudes – because we are. This is the opposite of sovereignty, which deems itself in the possession of the all the power, knowledge, and entitlements, because it excludes from its midst the trace of otherness.

Radicalising Terlouw’s Solidarity: Queerness, Decolonial Imaginaries, and Eco-grief

When it comes to intergenerational solidarity, one of the most salient features of *Het hebzuchtgas* is its emphasis on kinship. Addicted to greed gas, the economic leaders of Tradicië disregard the environmental damage caused by their companies. It is only when thinking their children are in danger that they step out of the gas’s sphere of influence—an act of parental love that, eventually, leads the managers to assume their full responsibility for future generations. This intimate connection between kinship relations and intergenerational solidarity is not coincidental but pervades much of Terlouw’s environmental activism. During interviews, Terlouw frequently brings up his children and grandchildren, whom he cites as the main driver behind his activism. He wants to kindle the same motivation in other parents as well, often reminding them of their responsibility toward their offspring.

There is some plausibility to the idea that kinship relations prefigure intergenerational responsibility. In the encounters with parents, grandparents, uncles, and aunts, many of us learn for the first time what it means to care, love, and commit—a lesson that is inherently intergenerational. These kinship relations form the experiential and material basis for the family model of generation, which locates the meaning of generation in the succession of parents by their children. There is a marked difference, however, between the understanding of generation as based on kinship relations and its understanding as a social category. The latter, social, understanding of generation is at work when one speaks of the “younger generation,” the “older generation,” Baby boomers, or Gen alpha (Purhonen). To model an intergenerational ethics on the parent-child relationship, as Terlouw does, not only confounds the registers of the familial and the social; it also severely restricts our ethical imagination.

In *Het hebzuchtgas*, the kinship relation stands for the reproduction of the—white, Western, upper-class, heterosexual—same at the exclusion of other *others*. One can glimpse this exclusionary matrix in the promises of the heads of corporations. Their concern for future generations is mediated, if not determined, by their parental feelings toward their own children and grandchildren. The “chair of the future” is introduced not to heed an open-ended ethical call, a commitment to unknown others, but with the implicit intention to continue the bloodline

of the white upper class of Tradicië. It is unlikely that the interests of these children and grandchildren would seamlessly align with the interests of poor people, people of colour, and other marginalized groups. Untouched by intersectional sensibilities, then, *Het hebzuchtgas* promotes intergenerational solidarity at the expense of other salient differences that are not tied to age. This problem becomes manifest in the book's affective poverty and its reiteration of colonial and heteronormative tropes.

The book's appeal to kinship relations echoes Terlouw's personal motivation for environmental activism; it also matches the logic of *Grootouders voor het Klimaat*, which explicitly ties climate activism to family ancestry. Although the website of *Grootouders voor het Klimaat* notes that the group also welcomes "senioren die geen grootouder zijn maar zich wel kunnen verenigen met onze missie" ("seniors who are not grandparents themselves but can align themselves with our mission"), this sentiment comes more as an afterthought. From the perspective of a diverse ecology of movements, there is no inherent problem if climate activists form a group around their shared identity as grandparents. Arguably, the climate movement can only thrive by embracing the plurality of activists and their diverging forms of resistance (cf Sovacool & Dunlap). It creates an exclusive imbalance, however, if the identity of parent- or grandparenthood becomes the dominant framework for environmental activism (Howard et al.).

Underlying the moral appeal to "protect the future of your children" is the heteronormative imperative to perpetuate the nuclear family as the basic form of the social. Queer theory scholar Lee Edelman has pointed to the conservative impasse of a politics that is wed to the promise of futurity, symbolized by the figure of the child. In Edelman's reading, political discourse, both on the Left and the Right, appeals to the child as the ultimate container of meaning: it is for *our children*, for *future generations*, that we commit ourselves in the present. This rhetoric of "reproductive futurism" renders the continuation of the status quo indisputable; it preserves "the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relation" (2).

Applying Edelman's argument to *Het hebzuchtgas* reveals how the facile equivocation of "future" and "children" can stifle our intergenerational imaginary. To assume uncritically that the present order needs to survive—which is what the call to "protect our children's future" implies—skips over the questions which part of the current system we would actually like to die. As long as the focus remains on the continuation of the same, other possible futures, other ways of relating across generations cannot come into view. This stifling of the intergenerational imaginary is visible in different parts of Terlouw's book; but it is nowhere as glaring as in the case of Thula.

Het hebzuchtgas introduces Thula as the adopted brother of Julia. He joins the family after Julia's father Oscar returns from a journey to the neighbouring country of Gandrië, where he investigated the damage caused by the latest environmental disaster. Gandrië clearly invokes a stereotypical image of the Global South: it is located to the south of Tradicië, described as being poor in wealth while being rich in natural resources, and is populated by brown- and black-skinned people. Oscar first encounters Thula in the arms of his dying mother, who asks Oscar to take care of her son. After judging the local orphanage too untrustworthy to take care

of the baby, Oscar resolves to adopt him as his son. His family welcomes the baby with open arms and Thula integrates easily into the family and the surrounding community.

On first sight, Thula's "adoption" seems to extend the moral vision of *Het hebzuchtgas*. It suggests that the task to sustain our children's future is not determined by biological kinship alone. Arguably, Julia's parents are good-natured people who care for Thula just as if he was their biological child. Yet, it is important to consider *how* he enters the sphere of their concern: not as an anonymous Black boy, but as their son, as part of the family. To become a subject of concern in the first place, Thula needs to be extracted from his Black community and incorporated into the white heterosexual family. It is only through this extraction and incorporation that he becomes identifiable as a "child," as part of the "future generation." So, instead of subverting the primacy of kinship relations in Terlouw's book, Thula's abduction and adoption actually solidifies it.

Even more troublesome is the colonial imaginary that speaks through the story of Thula. The boy's rescue by Oscar caters to the well-established trope of the white saviour (Cole). In this context, the sacrificial death of Thula's mother serves as a convenient plot device that establishes the white heroism of Oscar while simultaneously absolving him from the responsibility to actually care: not to appropriate the child, but to inquire into his surviving family. *Het hebzuchtgas* invites us to read the forced anonymity of Thula's origin as a kind of clean slate. He comes to his new family unencumbered, as it were, by previous knowledge of his Black heritage, ready to receive the blessings of white culture. This implicit cultural hierarchy feeds into a sense of white superiority, which pervades the depiction of Gandrië more generally. Charged with the stereotypical attributes of the Global South (poverty, underdevelopment, disaster-proneness, failed institutions), Gandrië only ever appears at the margins of *Het hebzuchtgas*: as a side stage, more akin to a non-place than a country with distinctive peoples, customs, and cultures. Overall, the depiction of Gandrië and Tradicië is eerily reminiscent of the stereotypical opposition between victim countries (Global South) and perpetrator/saviour countries (Global North) that pervades climate change communication (cf. Kahn; Manzo; Van der Beek & Kulkarni).

The promises of the heads of corporations and the story of Thula illustrate how the exclusionary matrix at work in *Het hebzuchtgas* restricts *who* we imagine as the subjects of intergenerational solidarity. Yet, the matrix goes even further than that, since it also limits *how* we imagine our relationships with present and future generations. Much of Terlouw's book suffers from an affective poverty that manifests itself most strikingly at the very beginning. In the first chapter, Julia struggles to survive amidst a catastrophic flood. She witnesses a man drowning and spends a night trapped in a decrepit church tower. Surprisingly, this potentially traumatic experience leaves Julia emotionally unscathed. During her ordeal, she never expresses fear, shock, or despair, and she never reflects back on the flood after her rescue. Her remarkable unaffectedness illustrates the failure of *Het hebzuchtgas* to engage with the emotional impact of catastrophic climate change. It is because of this failure that the narrative forgoes a crucial part of intergenerational sense-making.

As Ashlee Cunsolo Wilcox has shown in her work on eco-grief, collective mourning can be a powerful practice of community-building across generations and species. Mourning, Cunsolo Wilcox argues, is not a fleeting emotional state but a structure of our being with others. From the moment of birth, living together with one another carries a sense of anticipated loss.

Mindful of each other's vulnerability and the certainty of death, "we are at once already survivors and are preparing ourselves to already be survived" (143). On this view, living always already involves the "work of mourning", a work that has grave ethical and political implications. Performing the work of mourning, a subject assumes responsibility for her actions and engages with what has been lost. This kind of engagement builds bridges between generations and is, therefore, integral to the establishment of a political community.

What the framework of eco-grief helps us imagine is the intergenerational community that is lacking in *Het hebzuchtgas*: an open-ended collective of storytellers who find each other not only in the work of mourning, but in the full panoply of shared emotional experience. If we are to imagine ourselves in solidarity with future generations, we should not (and perhaps ought not) picture them—their country of origin, skin colour, class, gender, and age. Rather, we need to reach out to them through the sea of stories, learning how to mourn, love, and hope together with people we have not encountered and will never know. This requires a non-linear conception of time as formulated by a handful of Western and numerous Indigenous philosophies. Parental love and cross-generational storytelling can be an initial opening toward this community of generations, and in this respect, Terlouw's book actually holds some inspiration. Eventually, however, a truly intergenerational imaginary needs to put into play a much more expansive practice of love. At that point, the notion of generation may revert to its original meaning: not as a container of future aspirations but as the creative process that actually makes the future (see van der Tuin & Verhoeff).

Conclusion

While climate change rapidly develops into an all-encompassing threat, it routinely exceeds the limits of Western modes of understanding. It is an important task of the humanities to create a literary imagination that can address this lack of sense-making tools. In this article, we have entered this debate via the topic of intergenerational solidarity—a topic that currently holds a prime position in both academic literature and the public sphere in relationship to climate justice. We proposed a reading of Terlouw's book *Het hebzuchtgas* that explores climate activism as a cross-generational project by means of multi-generational storytelling practices and the negotiation of cross-generational ownership and responsibilities. Nonetheless, Terlouw's approach is not immune to a major pitfall in current understandings of intergenerational solidarity: the ways in which the foregrounding of intergenerational relations works to obscure other, more salient forms of injustice. To avoid this shortcoming, we call for an explicitly intersectional approach to climate justice that build on insights from decolonial theory, queer theory, and affect studies. The question "How far can my solidarity extend?" is an open question that needs to be negotiated again and again, and that cannot be foreclosed dogmatically by taking the white, wealthy heterosexual family, understood as a rational and non-emotional entity, as one's point of departure. Being a political notion, solidarity builds on difference and not on sameness. Solidarity becomes a resource precisely where the logic of sameness fails, where we need to encounter the other on their own terms. A consideration of the existential entanglement across times gives us the conceptual space to imagine the emergence of solidarity along new lines. This project does not only involve climate activists and writers of children's books. To imagine a more just response to the climate crisis is a task that is upon all of us. At the forefront of this re-imagining are artists and writers of all kinds, including

academics. The stories and conversations we create around climate justice enable a more integrated form of activism that allows for solidarity beyond the here and now, across generational divides.

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