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Flooded London: Sensory Lexica in
The End We Start From by Megan Hunter

OLEKSANDR KAPRANOV
NLA University College, Norway

Abstract

As London is flooded due to unprecedented rainfall that is caused by the negative consequences of climate change in Megan Hunter's novel *The End We Start From*, a journey of joy, loss, sadness, and homecoming begins. Whereas Hunter's apocalyptic novel about a female Londoner escaping the flooded capital with her newborn baby has been successfully adapted into a film, her novel has, so far, attracted insufficient attention in the field of climate change fiction (cli-fi) studies and ecocriticism. Seeking to overcome the current research gap, this contribution presents a qualitative study whose aim is to shine light onto sensory lexica in Hunter's novel *The End We Start From*. The sensory lexica in the study are defined as lexical items that are involved in the manifestation and interpretation of such categories as hearing, smell, taste, touch, and vision. The study employs a qualitative methodology of identifying and classifying the sensory lexica in *The End We Start From* in order to gain insight into the protagonist's authentic experiences of the flooded London of the not-so-distant utopian future. Arguably, the sensory lexica in *The End We Start From* may deepen the readers' understanding of the protagonist's feelings, emotions, and perceptions. The results of the qualitative analysis indicate that the sensory lexica in Hunter's novel are skilfully employed in order to portray the protagonist's encounters with the negative consequences of climate change in a realistic and, at the same time, relatable manner.

Keywords: climate change fiction (cli-fi), ecocriticism, London, Megan Hunter, sensory lexica, *The End We Start From*

Introduction

The negative impact of anthropogenic climate change is manifested in the United Kingdom (the UK) and the rest of Europe by a substantial increase in extreme weather events, such as floods, heatwaves, and hurricanes (Manwaring 4). Against this backdrop, the British corporate and political circles attend to the issue of climate change thoughtfully (Kapranov 85) by means of introducing a range of measures associated with amelioration and mitigation of the negative consequences of climate change. One of the projects of mitigating the negative consequences of climate change is represented by the Thames Barrier, which is a system of movable flood barriers that protect London from high tides and surge from the North Sea (Kelly 206). In this regard, it should be noted that the flooding of London is not at all a novel challenge, since floods in London have happened several times, with one of the first recorded floodings dating back to the Roman era (O'Shea and Lewin 581). However, the negative consequences of climate change have exacerbated the flooding of London substantially due to excessive and often unseasonal rainfall and extreme surge from the North Sea (McRobie, Spencer, and Gerritsen 1263).

Whilst some of the dramatic events associated with the flooding of London are real, such as the Great London Flood of January 1928 (O'Hara 55), there are also fictional descriptions of the flooded London that are found in several climate change novels, for instance, Richard Doyle's *Deluge* and *Flood*, and Megan Hunter's novel *The End We Start From* (Andonova-Kalapsazova 252). It should be noted that Hunter's novel was adapted into a film in 2023. In addition, the novel has attracted interest by scholars (Andonova-Kalapsazova 253; Kasurka 44) and journalists (Wilkinson C6).

It should be emphasised, however, that *The End We Start From* has not been properly elucidated yet from the vantage point of ecocriticism, linguistics, and literary studies. Specifically, there

is no published research on its style, lexical and grammatical choices, and sensory lexica. Arguably, an investigation of the sensory lexica (e.g., “bad smell”) that are employed by Hunter in *The End We Start From* could facilitate our understanding of the novel in general and, specifically, of the novel’s female protagonist, whose name is not disclosed to the readers by Hunter. To be precise, *The End We Start From* is a first-person narrative and the female protagonist’s name is not given. Instead, we refer to her as Mother and argue that a study of sensory lexica may unveil the feelings, emotions, and perceptions that she experiences during her journey with her newborn baby through the labyrinth of the flooded London of the very near future.

Seeking to compensate for the current lack of publications on the sensory lexica in *The End We Start From*, this article involves a qualitative study that looks into sensory lexica associated with the Aristotelian five senses (Brandt, Dieterich, and Huppert 1), i.e. (i) hearing, (ii) smell, (iii) taste, (iv) touch, and (v) vision. Accordingly, the study aims at answering the following **research question (RQ)**:

RQ: What sensory lexica associated with hearing, smell, taste, touch, and vision are found in Hunter’s novel *The End We Start From*?

Prior to answering the RQ, it seems pertinent to proceed with an outline of previous studies on sensory lexica in climate change discourses. Thereafter, the present qualitative investigation is given, inclusive of its theoretical framework, a short description of the plot of *The End We Start From*, a description of the methodology of qualitative analysis, the results of the investigation and their discussion, and the conclusions.

An Outline of Previous Studies on Sensory Lexica in Climate Change Discourses

Previous studies on sensory lexica per se in climate change discourses are not numerous. Whilst some of them focus

exclusively on sensory lexica in climate change discourses (Falcone; Krysanova; Pratolo et al.), a number of the studies only touch upon a range of sensory elements and/or provide a broad and unspecified picture on the use of sensory lexica from a theoretical perspective (Alacovska and Holt; Della Bosca; Nerlich and Koteyko). We will commence our analysis of the literature with the research direction that examines sensory lexica per se and, thereafter, proceed to the prior studies that only marginally mention sensory elements in climate change discourses and fiction.

A study by Mariasophia Falcone is focused exclusively on sensory lexica in the discourse on climate change by young climate change activists. Specifically, Falcone analyses a corpus of web-based texts on climate change written by young people who represent three different environmental organisations (52). Falcone investigates such facets of sensory lexica as perception verbs, which express and share the interlocutors' perceptions in the contexts of personal experiences and observations. To be more precise, Falcone analyses phraseological units that contain perception verbs in order to unpack how the members of environmental organisations understand and perceive the issue of climate change (53). Falcone demonstrates that perception verbs play a critical role in understanding and communicating the intricacies of climate issues by young climate change activists (55).

Quite similarly to Falcone, Tetiana Krysanova investigates the discourses on the environment, sustainability and climate change by Greenpeace, an international network of environmental organisations. Krysanova explores how Greenpeace's videos construct environmental issues. She argues that sensory lexica form an inalienable part of Greenpeace's multimodal discourses, which stimulate the public at large to be actively engaged in environmental advocacy. More specifically, she posits that Greenpeace's sensory lexica are comprised of a range of linguistic means, as shown below:

Verbal means include verbs of sensory modalities *see, hear, smell, feel, breathe*, and *taste*, etc., adjectives *dirty, beastly, fragrant*,

fresh, vibrant, etc., emotion words *sad, depressive, worry, concerned, alarmed, fear, happy, interested*, etc., and emotion-laden words, which evoke emotions through connotations *enthusiastic, inspiring, successful, fail, criminal, monster, warn*, etc. Within a contextual framework, action words can elicit specific emotional states since abstract word meanings are rooted in affective knowledge. In videos, action verbs like *fight, tear, warn, combat, defend, kill, destroy, burn, bury* indirectly convey a sense of threat through their association with struggle. Nouns implying the meaning of *threat, damage, danger, challenge, battle, stake, risk* evoke sensory experiences that amplify the emotional and psychological impact of the perceived danger. (41)

Whilst Falcone's and Krysanova's data stem from the discourses on climate change and the environment produced by climate change-related organisations, Bambang Widi Pratolo, Eko Purwanti, Eko Setyo Humanika, Dat Bao, Ali Hassan Najmi, Ikmi Nur Oktavianti, Surono Surono, and Dhian Marita Sari explore how sensory lexica are represented in English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks. These authors analyse environmental narratives taken from a range of textbooks that are used in ELT and, chapter by chapter, delve into how sensory lexica are employed in them in order to communicate the issues of environmental sustainability and climate change to young learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). They have found that sensory lexica in the context of climate change- and environment-related classroom activities involve EFL students' reflections on what they see, smell, and hear. Furthermore, Pratolo and his colleagues argue that sensory lexica in ELT textbooks increase the students' awareness of climate change and care for the environment in an easily accessible and relatable ways. The authors illustrate their argument by referring to activities, in which EFL students are requested to describe the smell of waste or the sound of garbage trucks (Pratolo et al. 5) and then reflect on the importance of proper waste management as one of the key measures to keep the environment clean.

In contrast to the aforementioned studies that are centred on sensory lexica in climate change- and environment-related discourses, there is, as mentioned, a research direction in which sensory lexica are epiphenomenally embedded into a range of other issues. For instance, Brigitte Nerlich and Nelya Koteyko in their seminal publication on carbon reduction activism in the UK mention sensory lexica under the aegis of lexical creativity and lexical framing in the context of climate change. Particularly, they regard sensory adjective-based descriptors as part of the so-called carbon compounds, i.e. “lexical combinations of at least two roots, such as ‘carbon footprint,’ ‘carbon finance,’ ‘carbon sinner,’ or ‘low-carbon diet’” (207). Additionally, sensory descriptors appear to be implied in the topic of a ‘low-carbon’ lifestyle, such as ‘low-carbon lives,’ ‘low-carbon living,’ ‘low-carbon lifestyles,’ etc. (Nerlich and Koteyko 217).

Identically to Nerlich and Koteyko, sensory lexica are only marginally mentioned in relatively recent research publications by Ana Alacovska and Macon Holt, and Hannah Della Bosca. In particular, Alacovska and Holt seek to develop a sensory approach in order to investigate how climate fiction (cli-fi) operates affectively within environmental activism. Drawing on ecocriticism, Alacovska and Holt propose a range of speculative, utopian, and sensory methodologies for the study of cli-fi as an affective potentiality. Further in their study, Alacovska and Holt expand upon their methodology of cli-fi analysis and briefly allude to sensory lexica as a means of fine-tuning an affective dimension in cli-fi. To reiterate, their work is of a theoretical and methodological nature and, accordingly, their attention to sensory lexica in cli-fi is cursory. However, Alacovska and Holt’s contribution to the literature on sensory lexica in climate change fiction is valuable due to their emphasis on sensory linguistic elements in the interpretation of cli-fi.

Just like the study by Alacovska and Holt, Della Bosca’s research paper is tangent to sensory lexica in climate change discourse without any particular elaboration. Nevertheless, Della Bosca provides an insightful point by arguing that sensory lexica

may be reflective of a distinct form of climate change denial. Della Bosca analyses responses to the extreme heatwaves in Australia and discovers that sensory responses to the extreme heat events are overshadowed in case of those individuals who are privileged to work and live their quotidian lives in the air-conditioned environment. She posits that such individuals respond to the climate crisis in a denialist manner, which maps onto their discursive footprint, inclusive of their sensory lexica.

As outlined in the literature review, sensory lexica in climate change discourses seem to be studied from two quite distinct research perspectives, which either provide an in-depth account of sensory lexica in a variety of climate change discursive settings or mention the lexica under the auspices of theoretical considerations and other climate change-related issues. Also, it follows from the literature review that there are no published studies on sensory lexica in climate change fiction, i.e. in cli-fi. Further, in the subsequent section of the article, sensory lexica will be explored qualitatively in the context of Hunter's novel *The End We Start From*.

The Present Study: Setting the Scene

Extreme weather events, such as floods, high surge, hurricanes and wildfires are a telltale mark of the climate change emergency (Bromhed 1). No wonder that cli-fi takes the apocalyptic scenes of flooding, for example the flooded London, as a harrowing symbol of the climate crisis. In fact, the flooded London is at the heart of the cli-fi novel *The End We Start From* by Hunter. Published in 2017 by Picador, the novel, as mentioned previously, is a first-person narrative of the flooded London by one of its inhabitants, a woman whose name is never disclosed to the readers by Hunter. In this article, we will refer to her as Mother, given that other options, for instance, a female Londoner, sound too formal and distant. In her narration of the day London was flooded, Mother recounts the following: "The news on the hour, 14th June, one o'clock. Tine Murphy reporting. An unprecedented flood. London. Uninhabitable.

A list of boroughs, like the shipping forecast, their names suddenly as perfect and tender as the names of children. Ours” (Hunter 8).

In the wake of the flood, Mother, her newborn baby, and her husband move out of London to the mountains, where her husband is from. And that is only the beginning of a journey that, eventually, will lead Mother back to London again at the end of the novel. Interestingly, Hunter does not provide the name of her husband either. He is referred throughout the novel as R. The name of the baby, apart from the enigmatic Z, is not given in full either. There are other innuendos in the novel as well, for instance, locations outside of London are never referred to by their proper names, with the exception of Scotland and Surrey. Given that Hunter, perhaps intentionally, obscures some of the aspects of the novel, it seems pertinent to have a closer look at the way she employs sensory lexica in order to gain insight into the life of Mother in the apocalyptic circumstances of the submerged London and other parts of the UK. Based on this contention, the RQ of the study (see the introductory part of the article) is formulated.

The Present Study: Its Theoretical Considerations

From the vantage point of theoretical considerations, the study is informed by several prior publications in the field of eco-linguistics and ecocriticism. In particular, the study factors in the theoretical indications associated with an eco-linguistic approach, which are provided by Harriet Hawkins and Anja Kanngieser. They argue that the issue of climate change is often perceived as an abstract notion, given that the readers may not always see “the distances in time and space between those who cause climate change and the places its effects are felt” (1). Accordingly, human perception of the proportions and realness of climate change and its negative consequences can benefit from providing the readers with a combination of vision and sound, art forms, and sensory lexica, which activate emotional and experiential responses to the piece of writing on the issue of climate change (Hawkins and Kanngieser 1).

Additionally, the present study is grounded in the theoretical considerations outlined by Kevan Manwaring, who posits that the current climate crisis necessitates the re-orientation of eco-fiction from the description and involvement of nature towards depicting nature as a phenomenon that is situated in the heart of the ongoing climate emergency. In this light, Manwaring conceptualises eco-fiction as a literary form that increasingly merges with cli-fi (i.e., climate change fiction), e.g.

An alternative, more recent, term for ecofiction is “Climate Fiction” or “Cli-Fi” – writing that takes climate change and global warming as its inspiration, foregrounding the environmental crisis through a fictional lens. Cli-Fi is indistinguishable from ecofiction except for it being more commonly used in the marketing copy of recent titles than the earlier term. (18)

Notably, Manwaring asserts that cli-fi is steeped in sensory elements, given that sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations form the foundation of any piece of eco-fiction or cli-fi, for that matter (39).

The Present Study: Its Methodological Considerations

In terms of methodological considerations, the study employs a qualitative methodology of identifying and classifying sensory lexica that is based, in a substantially modified way, upon Bodo Winter’s analysis. Taking Winter’s methodology (20) as a point of departure, the qualitative analysis of sensory lexica in *The End We Start From* involves a close reading of the novel in order to identify lexical items that explicitly manifest the Aristotelian modalities of (i) hearing, (ii) smell, (iii) taste, (iv) touch, and (v) vision.

In line with Winter (32), the identification factors in both the nominal meaning of the given lexical item that manifests one of the aforementioned sensory modalities and its contextual realisation in the particular piece of writing. Importantly, the analysis is enlightened by Winter’s observation that (nearly) all sensory word

meanings are fluid and, as such, can be modulated by the immediate context they occur in (131).

In light of the contextual factors and, presumably, the deep entrenchment of sensory lexica in highly personalised and subjective “Weltanschauung” of Mother in the novel, the qualitative analysis does not aim at assigning the sensory lexica in the novel to fixed and, arguably, rigid domains of experience. Rather, it focuses on unveiling how the sensory lexica in employed by Hunter in order to shed light on Mother, i.e. the protagonist of *The End We Start From*.

The Present Study: Its Results and Their Discussion

The qualitative analysis reveals that the five sensory modalities, i.e. (i) hearing, (ii) smell, (iii) taste, (iv) touch, and (v) vision are represented by a range of descriptors. They are further given in Tables 1 – 5, together with the illustrative material taken from the novel. Sensory descriptors of each sensory modality are further discussed after each respective Table. The word classes represented by the descriptors are given in brackets, for instance adjective (Adj), noun (N), preposition (P), verb (V), etc. We will commence our discussion with the first sensory modality, namely hearing (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. The Sensory Lexica associated with Hearing

#	Descriptors	Examples
1	Hear (V)	I am eating lime jelly with the boy in the crook of my arm when I hear (7). H gets an old radio working. We hear static, a fruity, post-coital crackle (80). We’d heard the change on the radio-wind, but it is a revelation anyway, like the first warm night of the year (99).
2	Listen (V)	If I listen carefully enough I can hear him hammering in the garden (12). I try not to listen for the engine . . . This means I listen constantly (28).

		We listen to the crackle like the wind (85).
3	Listening (N)	It is hard to get used to listening again (47).
4	Noise (N)	There is no rain, and the noise of the wipers, and that is it (34). The first night, Z cries every hour. We are swallowed in his noise (74).
5	Rustle (V)	We nearly called him Noah, but we heard it rustling between the curtains (9).

It follows from Table 1 that the modality of hearing is represented by verbs (V) and nouns (N), such as “listening” (N), “noise” (N), “hear” (V), “rustle” (V), and “listen” (V). Apparently, Hunter employs this modality in order to cast light onto the way Mother orients herself in the apocalyptic new world by relying on auditory senses. In the novel, Mother’s auditory senses seem to be activated, first of all, in the circumstances that are related to the pieces of news that announce the unprecedented flooding (e.g., hear on the radio) and the evacuation measures associated with it. Also, Mother’s auditory senses are acutely attuned to the perception of the world around her after she flees London and tries to adjust to living first with her husband’s parents (see examples with “listen” and “listening” in Table 1) and then to the life as a climate refugee on the island off the coast of Scotland. Furthermore, her auditory senses are reflective of the very intimate narrative moments that are related to her son, named Z, who makes constant noises. Even his name, i.e. Z, is indirectly related to Mother’s auditory perceptions. Specifically, she wanted to call her son Noah, but that name reminded her of the rustling in the climate refugee camp, where a lot of newborns were named Noah.

We can argue that auditory perceptions are cast into play by Hunter in order to depict, predominantly, two facets of Mother’s portraiture, namely (i) her attention to the news on the flooding disaster and (ii) noises emitted by her baby son. Surprisingly, these two seemingly distant facets are intimately intertwined, since Z’s birth coincides with the events of the London flood, thus conflating Mother’s auditory attention to the news on the radio and Z’s noises. This skilful involvement of the modality of hearing by Hunter is

poignantly reminiscent of the contention formulated by Hawkins and Kanngieser, who suggest that the deployment of sensory lexica, which *inter alia* pertains to auditory senses, crystallises the issue of climate change as a very real, even intimate phenomenon, rather than an abstract notion (3).

Judging from the data summarised in Table 2 below, the sensory lexica associated with the olfactory modality (i.e., smell) amplifies the already referred to concept of intimate perceptions and Mother's reflections based upon them.

Table 2. The Sensory Lexica associated with Smell

#	Descriptors	Examples
1	Breath (N)	Her breath was salmon caught leagues away (27). Through Z's breath: heavier now, more solidly alive (28). He wakes to my sour breath on his cheek . . . (29) The insistence of her hot words in my ear, the yeasty foreign blast of her breath (73).
2	Smell (V/N)	I take the baby away. He smells like his father (18). . . . and smell the point just above his ear, the smell that makes me want to eat him (24.) I have come to admit that I love the smell of his nappies (26) The smell of G's wardrobe, of light through slats and moth wings, I imagine (26). Its blankets and smells of wet dog and grass (43). I put his full hand over my face . . . even though smells can't be held (46). A stronger sense of smell (53). . . . we all started to smell the same (66) We felt fifty people shift around us, the reality of human smells we kept hidden for so long (72). The coach has the same smell of all coaches since the beginning of time. Chemical mixed with nothing (101).
3	Waft (N)	Memories started to leak: the faint, perfumed waft of the photocopier in my office (30).

It follows from Table 2 that the olfactory modality is represented by three descriptors, such as “breath” (N), “smell” (V/N), and “waft” (N). Notably, as mentioned above, they pertain to (i) Mother’s perceptions of people around her that form her innermost circle of relatives (for example, the smell of Z) and those few climate refugees she befriends, (ii) descriptions of the immediate surroundings in the refugee camps (e.g., the smells of, admittedly, unwashed human bodies on the refugee boat and in the camps), and (iii) distant and deeply personal memories of her life before the flood, for instance, the waft of the photocopier at her London office. The presence of the olfactory modality in the novel is evocative of Manwaring’s assertion that sensory lexica, inclusive of olfactory descriptors, form a critical aspect of the genre of cli-fi, which is saturated with sensory elements (39).

In terms of the direct connection between the negative consequences of climate change, which are portrayed as the flood in the novel, and Mother’s quotidian experiences, we argue that the olfactory modality is employed by Hunter to emphasise the apocalyptic descriptions of Mother’s encounters in the refugee camp. Specifically, Mother narrates that the first refugee camp she is placed at strikes her as a place with blankets to sleep in a communal hall, which smells of wet dog and grass (43). In this regard, it should be explained that Mother’s olfactory descriptors of the refugee camp facilitate the depiction of the dire circumstances the climate refugees find themselves in. Specifically, Hunter adroitly applies the olfactory descriptors in order to foreground the Spartan amenities or, rather, the lack thereof at the refugee camps, where Mother, as well as other refugees, cannot wash themselves and, consequently, smell. Their body odour (see Table 2) serves as a stark reminder of the scantiness of resources after the flood and, as such, sends an implicit message of dissatisfaction and, apparently, frustration that Mother experiences at the refugee camp. This finding supports the study by Krysanova, who demonstrates that sensory lexica, inclusive of the lexical items that manifest the olfactory modality, may evoke an emotional reaction that is quite intentionally transmitted by Hunter in order to provide a graphic

portrayal of the ordinary lives of climate change refugees, who “all started to smell the same” (66). These findings are, to an extent, evocative of the publication by Pratolo et al., who show that sensory lexica associated with (bad) smell are a potent device that calls the readers’ attention to an unpleasant, yet relatable way of life in the apocalyptic circumstances caused by the negative consequences of climate change (6).

It follows from Table 2 that the olfactory descriptors are not at all numerous. The same can be said about the gustatory descriptors that render the modality of taste. Here, we find only three of them, as evident from Table 3 below.

Table 3. The Sensory Lexica associated with Taste

#	Descriptors	Examples
1	Delicious (Adj)	I find myself wanting to give her the details: how delicious his mouth was to me, like sweets (61).
2	Taste (V)	I taste it: it is sweet and thin (29).
3	Worse (Adj)	The food becomes a lot worse (8).

It could be argued that the scantiness of the gustatory descriptors (see Table 3) may constitute a peculiarity of Hunter’s writing style. Indeed, her writing is not florid; on the contrary, it is rather frugal, almost reminding one of Ernest Hemingway’s sparing manner of using words. Apart from the economical use of words, Hunter, however, deploys a very limited number of gustatory descriptors on purpose. Presumably, she employs the aforementioned three descriptors in order to intensify the portrayal of Mother’s (i) husband, e.g. “how delicious his mouth was to me, like sweets” (61) and (ii) baby, e.g. “it is sweet and thin” (29).

Apart from these two references to Mother’s family members, there is only one gustatory descriptor that refers to food, namely “worse” in “The food becomes a lot worse” (8). The notable absence of gustatory descriptors that pertain to the domain of food is easily explicable by the food shortages and constant food rationing that plague Mother and her family throughout her forced escape from her native London. Even during her stay at the refugee

camp on the island off the Scottish coast, where food supplies are plentiful, Mother does not digress much into the description of her daily diet. In light of the above, we may contend that Hunter's meagre use of the gustatory descriptors that are related to food magnifies the food shortages as one of the apocalyptic consequences of the climate crisis.

In contrast to the very few occurrences of the gustatory descriptors, Hunter avails herself of the tactile descriptors more generously, as shown by Table 4 below.

Table 4. The Sensory Lexica associated with Touch

#	Descriptors	Examples
1	Hold (V)	And yes I scream and hold their clothes and tell them not to go (23).
2	Lace (V)	I lace my fingers in hers and tell her no (59).
3	Pat (V)	I never used to know what to say to G, but now I pat Z's bottom and smile at her (14).
4	Press (V)	Instead of putting him in his basket I lay him next to me, and fall asleep with my nose pressed against his pulsing temple (15).
5	Skin to skin (N + P + N)	I carry out with the skin to skin, like the midwives showed me, stripping our two bodies in the silent midday sun (24).
6	Softness (N)	He is the most comfortable person on the boat, his softness slouching against mine, the rocking motion undulating his cheeks (70).
7	Squeeze (V)	She squeezed my fingers until they hurt (27). The woman ignores my question. She squeezes Z's cheeks, purses her lips (111).
8	Suck (V)	Tristan, Caleb, Alfred, he recites, whilst the boy sucks seriously on my still-empty breast (9).
9	Touch (V/N)	Sometimes our hands touch (34). We have divided here, hidden behind walls that feel like bodies to touch: dense, filled with something (74). They touch noses. Eskimo kiss, goes a phrase from long ago (122). We have this touch, our fingers in the ruined room,

		the new slow light drifting around us, our child squirming in my arms (126).
10	Wet (Adj)	Every morning when I wake up the sheets are wet (12).

For the most part, the tactile descriptors are reserved to illustrate Mother's interactions with her baby, such as patting the baby, the baby pressing against her body, skin on skin practicing, and touching the wet sheets etc. Also, the tactile descriptors in the novel are exploited in order to showcase physical interactions with the baby and people, in particular, Mother's female friends whom she befriends at the refugee camp, e.g. "they touch noses" (122).

It seems that the tactile descriptors in the novel are utilised by Hunter to show Mother's interconnectedness and contact between her and her female friends, "I laced my fingers in hers" (59). Such a tactile portrayal is suggestive of the metaphor of interdependence and mutuality of climate change refugees, who seem to share the same plight of being uprooted from their abodes and cast into a situation in which their predicament becomes a common denominator of the apocalyptic climate crisis. In this regard, it could be argued that an implied metaphoricity is indicative of Winter's argument concerning the metaphorical underpinnings of sensory lexica (111). We will, however, leave the contention concerning the role of tactile descriptors in figurative language for future investigations.

Finally, we will discuss the sensory modality associated with vision. It is quite amply represented by a number of visual descriptors, as outlined in Table 5.

Table 5. The Sensory Lexica associated with Vision

#	Descriptors	Examples
1	Brightly lit (Adv + V)	The hospital now seems to be a ship, a brightly lit ark housing all the new ones aloft (8).
2	Gaze (V)	I gaze at the wooden floor (5).
3	Glance (V)	Pinch of salt, R grumbles, glancing at my belly (5).
4	Look (V)	J phones an ambulance and S looks out of the window palely (5).

		We do not want to explore, to look through the drawers of someone who has fled (65). I look for clues in their shirt seams, the grooves of their shoes (99).
5	See (V)	R and N sit in the house like they've never seen it before (16). We see no cars for a while, but that is almost normal here (33). I can see people by the roadside, walking in groups (34). I can see every star in the sky (37). So we stop next to the first one we see after I say enough (43). At the toddler group there are more toys than Z has ever seen in his life (50). I think, if I see R, I will jump from the bus and wave my arms (56). The young men are boys, I see now (64). D and L waved at us until we couldn't see them anymore, the only people against the straight lines of earth and tide (70). From its windows, all you can see is miles and miles of it. The shimmering green-grey-blue terror. (74) O sees it before me, sees the new white glint in his mouth, the waiting mound that has finally pushed through. A tooth (75). When I try to see his face all I get is Z, who pushes his bald head into my neck at night (78). One day we are seeing our own breath above the bed, my cloud big and diffuse, his small and segmented, like a train (82). As for me, I see R in a vessel on the ocean, and then I don't (85). At the straightest edge of the world I think I can see a hulking thickness, a black mark growing. The mainland ... (91). I see my hands on the rigging, letting the sails out into knots of wind like sheets. I can see it, and it means it is possible (93-94). We see nothing but abandonment for a long time

		(97). I try to read the sky, to see what the clouds are moving for (100). We see our first people (99). Other things we see on our walks: families, men and women and children who have managed to stay together (106). I see R's face in the following objects: empty drink cans, rain splash on river, the heads of spoons (115).
6	Stare (V)	At night I stare at the blank ceiling until my eyes win and I let them close (42) Z stares and his voice gurgles through his chest (44). O stares out of the window until her eyes shut themselves (56). Once he is asleep, I stare at the flushed oblivion of his cheeks (75).
7	Trace + Eyes (V + N)	We trace the new high-water marks with our eyes (104).
8	Watch (V)	They watch me from a corner of the room as though I am an unpredictable animal, a lumbering gorilla low-slung belly and suspicious eyes (1). We watch the talent show channel for two to three hours a day. We watch the earth, as though it might suddenly sprout vegetable matter. We watch the drive, in case it sprouts a car (24). I watch. Not a single car passes by (57). Sometimes, Z sits with O or F and watches my steps (88).

A relatively generous representation of the visual descriptors in the novel is indicative of Winter's observation that English is a visual language (149), i.e. it uses visual descriptors far more extensively than, for instance, tactile ones. Indeed, we can observe in Table 5 that the visual descriptor "see," for instance, occurs multiple times in the novel, thus signifying the visual bias in *The End We Start From*. Hunter applies the visual descriptor "see" to depict Mother's inner thoughts and feelings (i) after she flees London to live with her in-laws, e.g. "We see no cars for a while"

(33), “I can see people by the roadside” (34), etc.; (ii) during her journey with her female friend and two young men, who drive them to the boat, which, subsequently takes them to the refugee camp on the island off the Scottish coast, e.g. “The young men are boys, I see now” (64), “D and L waved at us until we couldn’t see them anymore” (70); (iii) at the refugee camp on the island, e.g. “One day we are seeing our own breath above the bed” (82), “I see R in a vessel on the ocean, and then I don’t” (85); and (iv) her journey and life back in London, when the water subsides a little, e.g. “We see nothing but abandonment” (97), “We see our first people” (99), “we see on our walks: families, men and women and children who have managed to stay together” (106). Emblematically, Mother starts using the first-person plural pronoun “we,” when she narrates about her return to the still damaged yet more liveable London. Presumably, by means of combining the visual descriptor “see” and the plural pronoun “we,” Hunter implies that the image of London, Mother’s home, is shared between herself and her baby. This suggests a glimpse of hope for Mother and other Londoners who have returned to their semi-submerged homes.

It follows from Table 5 that Mother sees London, but she does not seem to stare at it. What she stares at, however, is related to the refugee camps, where she used to “stare at the blank ceiling until my eyes win and I let them close” (42), or where her female friend “stares out of the window until her eyes shut themselves” (56). These observations, supposedly, demonstrate that Mother sees London and her life there, but she stares at her life and her newly found circumstances at the refugee camps. Hunter’s choice of words related to the use of “see” and “stare” is reminiscent of the argument put forward by Alacovska and Holt, who posit that the use of sensory lexica facilitates the fine-tuning of fictional characters in cli-fi writing (1095).

We may also contend that the fine-tuning of Mother’s character relies on the sensory descriptors that partake in a number of metaphoric construals, for instance, “The hospital now seems to be a ship, a brightly lit ark housing all the new ones aloft” (8). At the beginning of the novel, when Mother gives birth to Z, she needs

to stay at the hospital, which towers like a proverbial Noah's arc amidst the submerged London that drowns in flood water. This observation is in harmony with Nerlich and Koteyko, who suggest that sensory lexica, particularly visual descriptors, are actively involved in the production of creative and metaphorical accounts of the issue of climate change and its negative consequences (206).

Conclusions

The article has presented and illustrated a qualitative account of the sensory lexica in Hunter's *The End We Start From*. The qualitative analysis reveals that the sensory lexica in the novel contribute to filling in the gaps associated with Mother, who is the protagonist and the first-person narrator of the novel. Given that Hunter purposefully leaves out many important details about Mother, inclusive of her real name, the qualitative analysis aimed to provide a deeper insight into Mother's character.

In particular, the sensory lexica in the novel have facilitated our understanding of Mother, who sees and touches, smells and hears, and, less so, tastes. This crude summary of Mother's character through the lens of senses shines light onto her life and her life choices in the context of the apocalyptic flood that inundated London and parts of the UK. Amidst the climate change-related calamity of biblical proportions, Mother narrates her experiences associated with the flood in such a way that they become instantly recognisable and relatable to the readers. The relatability of the climate change disaster, seen through the eyes of Mother, rests, to a substantial extent, upon the skilful use of the sensory lexica in the novel. The lexica unveil not only the complexity of inner dynamics within Mother's maze of perceptions and emotions, but also help the readers to navigate the flooded labyrinth of London's streets, which are now canals to be sailed on.

It could be concluded that, in addition to unpacking the hidden aspects of Mother's character, the sensory lexica in the novel are employed by Hunter in order to convey to the readers the

extent of climate change crisis and the need to mitigate the negative consequences of climate change whilst we can.

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