



Literature and Climate

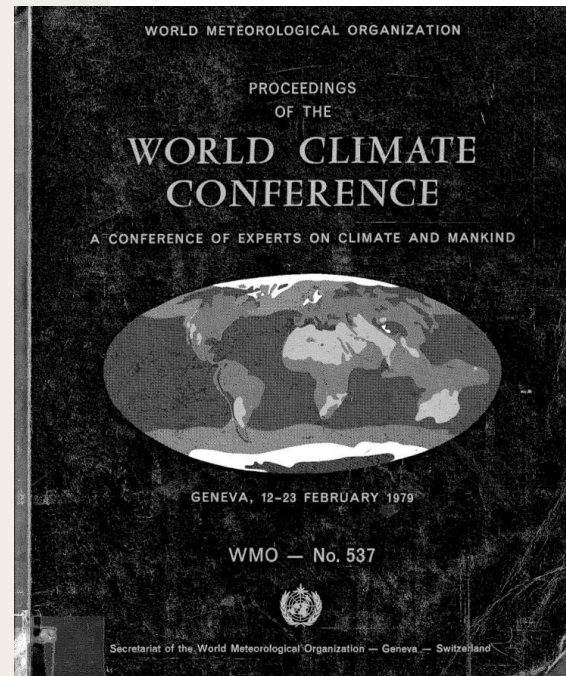
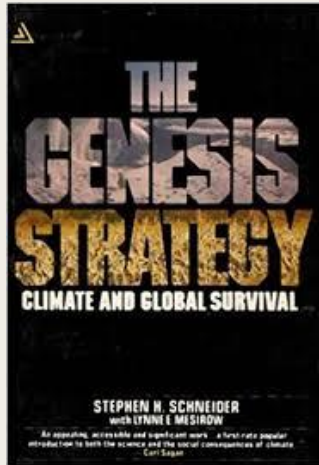
A Short History and Reconsideration of Climate Fiction

Adeline Johns-Putra,
Queen's University, Canada

Literature and the environment

- Nature poetry
 - Origins of English and other European forms of nature poetry: Virgil (70-19 BC), Theocritus (300-260 BC)
 - Origins of nature poetry in Asia: *shan-shui* 山水 or landscape poetry (China) or Sanskrit seasons poetry such as *Ritusamhara* ऋतुसंहार; ऋतु (India) – both around 500 AD
- Narratives about climate
 - Old Testament: story of the deluge
 - *Epic of Gilgamesh*
- Literature after climate change
 - Nature poetry → ecopoetry (contains “a warning concerning the very real potential for ecological catastrophe”, J. Scott Bryson, *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction*)
 - Theatre → climate theatre (e.g. Richard Bean’s *The Heretic*, Simon Stephens’s *Wastwater*, Monica Buffini et al’s *Greenland*, all in 2011)
 - Fiction → climate fiction

Climate change awareness: beginnings



GREENPEACE



Joseph Fourier



John Tyndall



Svante Arrhenius



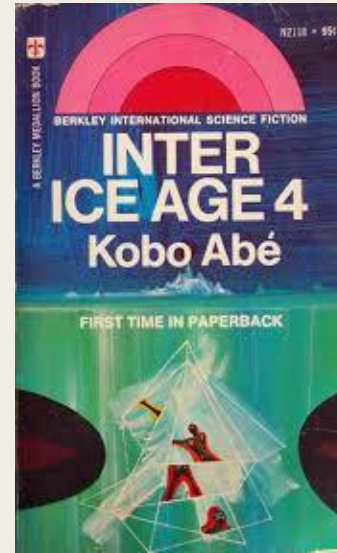
Eunice Newton Foote



Climate fiction: beginnings



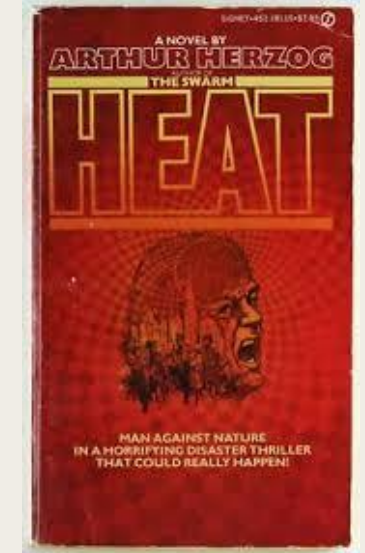
*The
Drowned
World* (1962)



第四間氷期
(1958-59)



*The Lathe of
Heaven*
(1971)



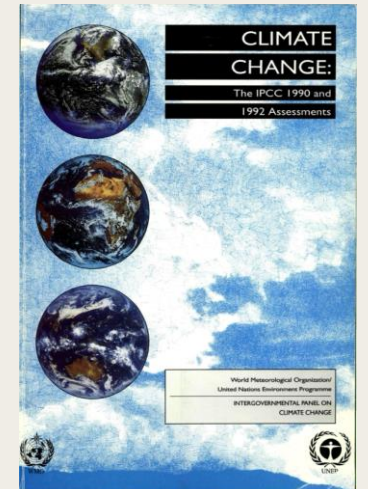
Heat (1977)



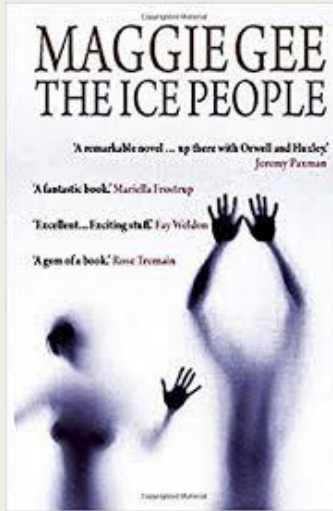
*The Sea and
Summer* (1987)

Climate change awareness: the 1980s-2000s

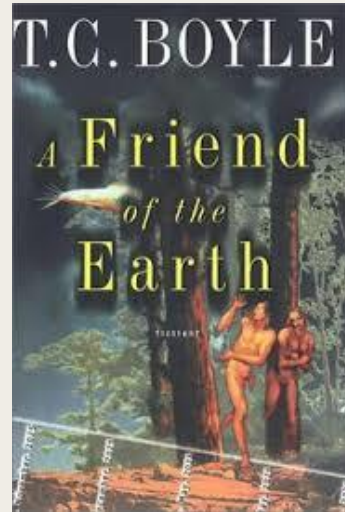
- UNEP and WMO set up a climate advisory group in **1985**
- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) created in **1988**
- James Hansen speaks at the US Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources in **1988**
- IPCC makes first report in **1990**
- UN Framework Convention on Climate Change introduced at Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in **1992**
- Kyoto Protocol agreed in **1997**
- The Al Gore film *An Inconvenient Truth* released in **2006**



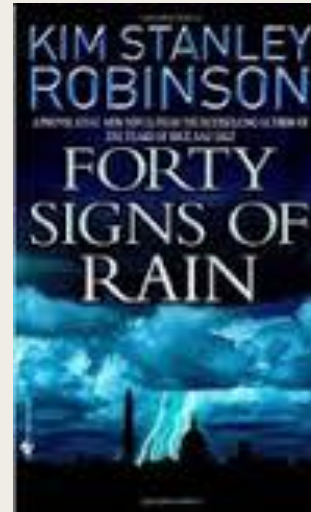
Climate fiction: 2000-2010s



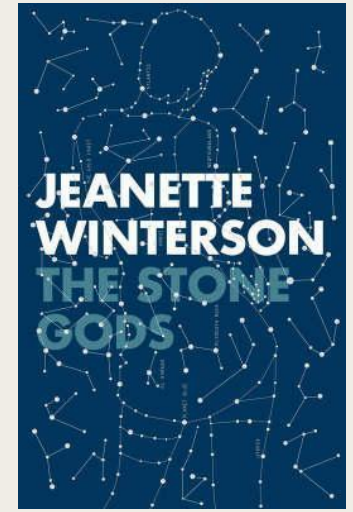
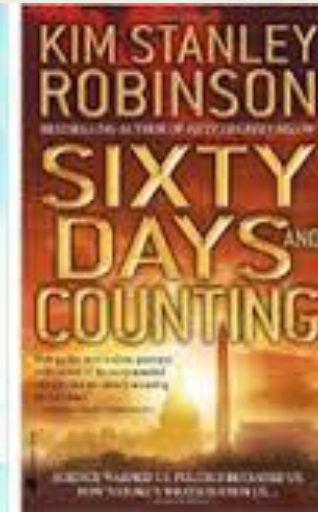
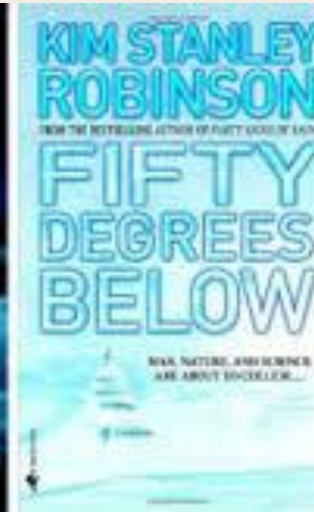
1998



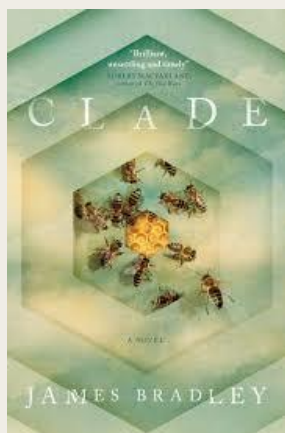
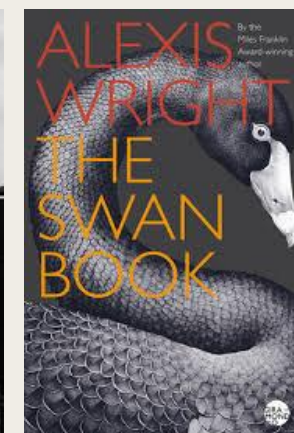
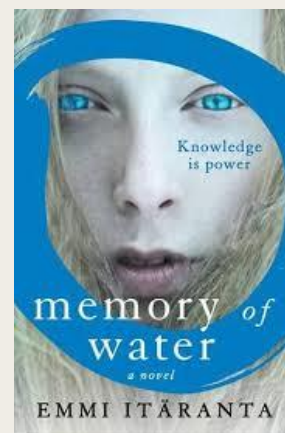
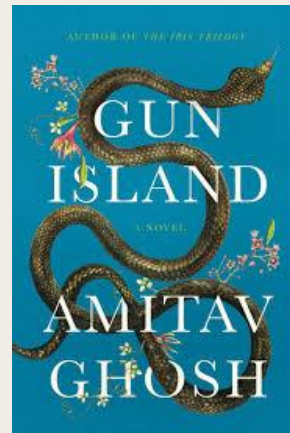
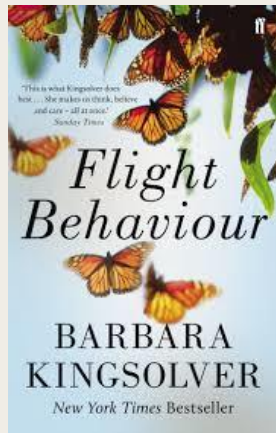
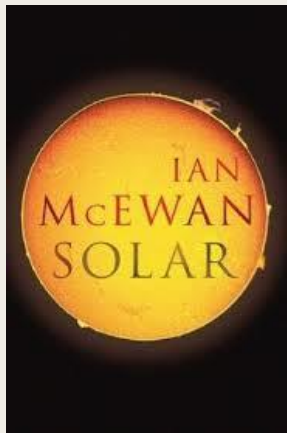
2000



'Science in the Capital', 2004, 2005, 2007



2007



“cli-fi” – term attributed to Dan Bloom

Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change by Adam Trexler (2015)

Climate fiction: the challenges of representing climate crisis

1. **Scale: the planet**

- climate change affects every human on a vast global scale

2. **Scale: all species**

- climate change affects every living thing, beyond the human species

3. **Scale: the distant future**

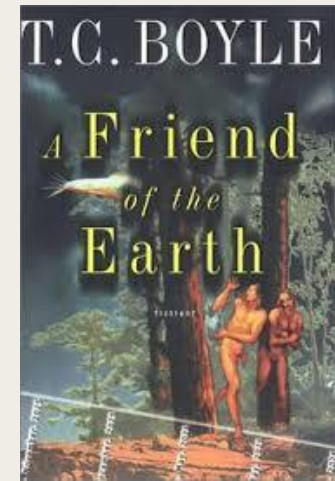
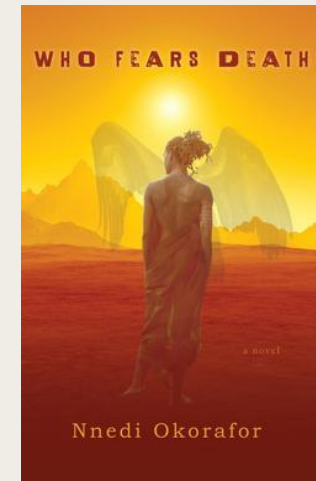
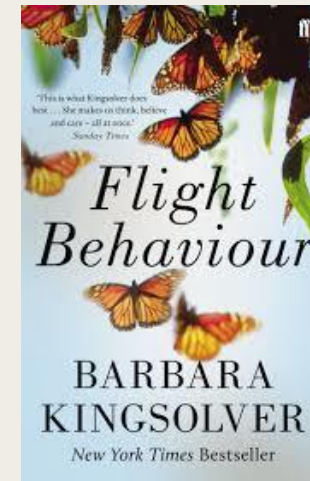
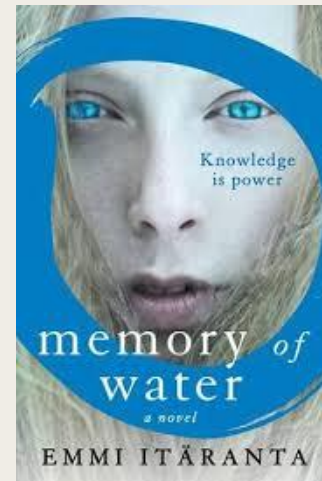
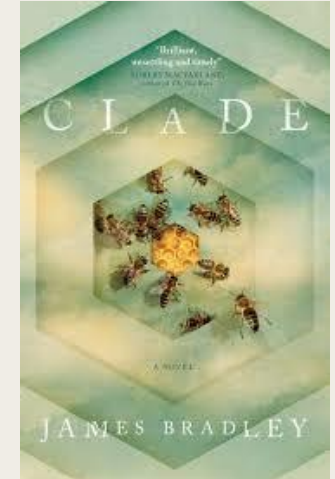
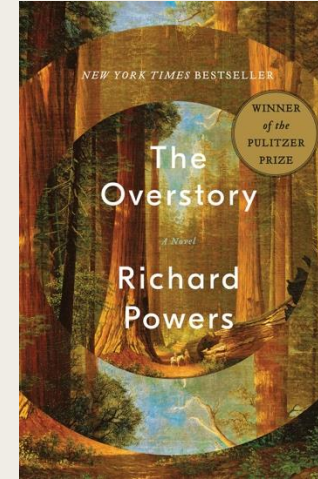
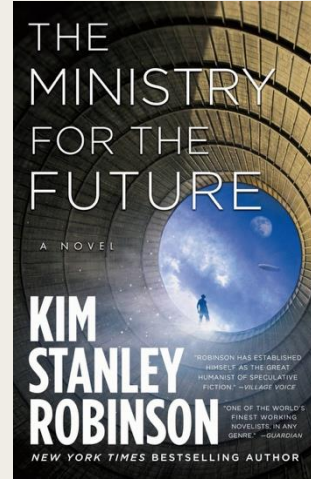
- climate impacts operate on a vast temporal scale

4. **Science and understanding climate**

- climate change is knowable through science, using our reason rather than our emotions

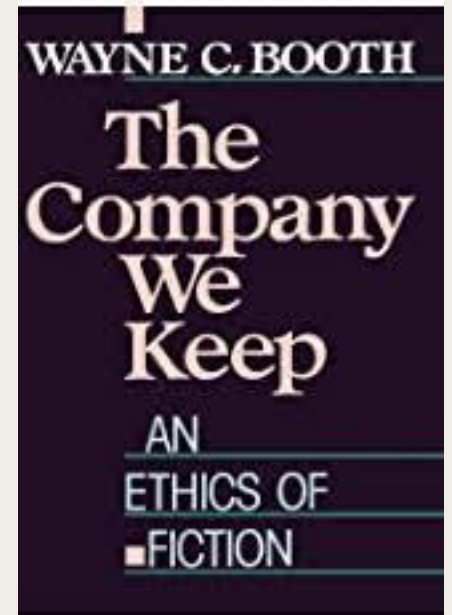
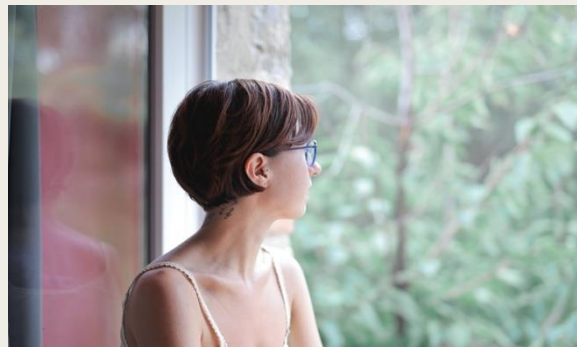
Climate fiction: strategies for representing climate crisis

- **Scale and planet:**
 - montages, ensembles of characters from around the world
- **Scale and species:**
 - intricate relationships between humans and nonhumans over time
- **Scale and the distant future:**
 - futuristic stories of future worlds that are climate changed
 - present-day stories about intergenerational relationships
- **Science and understanding climate:**
 - scientist characters who explain the science and its consequences



The effect of fiction

- aesthetic effect: the readers' enjoyment as they read
- efferent effect: what readers carry away with them
- The reader's identification with characters: **empathy**
- The appeal of the world that characters inhabit: **immersion**
- The interest in what happens to and in them: **investment**



Climate fiction and climate change: the 2020s

Derek Woods:

- “the metagenre of climate fiction”
- metagenres are “atmospheres of wordings and activities, ... that surround a genre and indicate how readers and writers should appropriately take it up”

Tech

Can climate fiction inspire a response to help save the planet?

‘Cli-fi’ has quickly become a recognised genre as more of us imagine possible futures as a way of considering how we are going to get ourselves out of this mess, writes **Chris Pak**

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CULTURE

Climate Fiction: Can Books Save the Planet?

A new literary genre that focuses on the consequences of environmental issues is striking a chord with younger generations—and engaging them in thinking about the Earth’s sustainability.

By J.K. Ullrich

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Global literary circles warm to climate fiction

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Entertainment > Books

Climate Fiction Won't Save Us

As the world burns, readers increasingly look to climate fiction for hope, predictions, and actionable solutions. But can the genre really be a manual for useful change?

By [Jeff VanderMeer](#) PUBLISHED: APR 19, 2023

Climate fiction and climate change: the 2020s



The risks posed by the demands of the “meta-genre”

- undermines the power of fiction to produce empathy, the immersion of world-building, and the narrative interest that comes with creating investment from the reader
 - Ian McEwan: worried about “hectoring” his readers
 - Maggie Gee: worried about being “message-y”
- suggests a too-easy correlation between reading a text and creating action
 - Empirical ecocriticism (Matthew Schneider-Mayerson and Alexa Weik von Mossner): no empirical evidence as yet to support this

Teaching climate fiction as inspiration, not instruction

- Fiction is not a silver bullet
- Hopeful novels that also build investable, believable worlds
- Novels that bring climate crisis into conversation with other issues that matter
- Novels that make students think about broader issues, e.g.
 - why environmental destruction happens and how we can think differently about it
 - how other species contribute to the planet
 - the power of young people and the need to develop resilience

