

Fostering Environmental Consciousness: Analyzing The Ministry for the Future by Kim Stanley Robinson and The New Wilderness

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Introduction

Forrest Brown in his work “What is Climate Fiction?” (2019) defines, “Climate Fiction, or cli-fi, is a form of speculative fiction that features a changed or changing climate as a major plot device.” Climate change is a big issue for the whole world. The change in the climate was recorded and noticed first time by a Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius in the late 19th century who proposed that the burning of fossil fuel could lead to an increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide and result in global warming.

The term climate fiction was coined recently however the ideas and themes of the genre were interpreted for centuries. Writers from the Romantic age like Wordsworth, Coleridge, P.B. Shelley, Keats, and Lord Byron, have interpreted the beauty of nature and its intersection with human beings. After industrialization, climate change has been significantly observed, through releasing of harmful gases. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), “the increase in global temperature since the industrial revolution is largely attributed to human activities, including the burning of fossil fuels and deforestation.” Modern writers like Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence often delve into the intricacies of human consciousness and its connection with nature. At the time of the First and Second World Wars, science and technology were advanced, many weapons and equipment were made from extraction and the result of the war was devastating.

Dan Bloom, an American reporter and writer coined the term “climate fiction” in the year 2007 to describe his novella *Polar Red City*, a post-apocalyptic story about climate refugees in Alaska set in 2075. In the 21st century, people started writing more about climate change in their works as this century has recorded the worst impact of climate change due to Anthropogenic activities (IPCC, 2023). Climate Fiction helps readers to know the consequences of climate change through anthropogenic activities as most climate fiction works are set in the post-apocalyptic near future.

This paper focuses on climate fiction works as Kim Stanley Robinson’s *The Ministry for the Future*, Diane Cook’s *The New Wilderness* will explore through narratives how they help society for a better and sustainable future.

Objective:

1. To examine how climate fiction works can help raise awareness about the urgent need for environmental conservation by analysing the books *The Ministry for the Future* by Kim Stanley Robinson and *The New Wilderness* by Diane Cook.

Kim Stanley Robinson’s *The Ministry for the Future*

Stanley Robinson is an American writer. He is the author of more than 20 books including the international bestselling Mars trilogy. Though he is considered a science fiction writer, his contribution to the climate fiction genre is commendable. In 2008, he was named a “Hero of the Environment” by *Time Magazine*.

The Ministry for the Future is set in the near future where a ministry is made to take care of the world’s future generation. The climate crisis has become the most generated problem for the people. The issues of climate change and the increase in the temperature due to global warming are illustrated by Stanley Robinson through the character Frank May who has been assigned to protect and help the outside people facing the hottest weather in an ordinary town of Uttar Pradesh in India which is underdeveloped. The people were searching for cool places to stay as the outside world was unbearable and the temperature was the hottest ever recorded. As Frank asked the people of the town,

But there’s nowhere!

Then it came to him. “Go to the lake! Get in the water!”

This didn't seem to register. Like Kumbh Mela, during which people went to Varanasi and bathed in the Ganges, he told them the best he could.

“You can stay cool,” he told them. “The water will keep you more cool.”

A man shook his head. “That water is in the sun. It's as hot as a bath. It's worse than the air.” (Robinson,14)

Through the portrayal of the main characters of the novel like Mary Murphy and Frank May, Robinson has depicted the true picture of the agencies and the government who are working to stabilize an eco-friendly environment for future generations. A subsidiary body of an international organization is led by the central character Mary Murphy who advocates the problems of climate change for future generations.

In this book, Robinson demonstrates the ecological issues and the initiatives that can be taken by the present generation to have a better environment-friendly and sustainable future for the next generations. In this book, various initiatives were taken by the main characters like Mary Murphy who worked for net zero carbon emission, the monetary concept called Carbon quantitative easing. At the end of the book, at the time of the retirement of Murphy, many things have changed positively.

This is not the only responsibility of the government or specific organizations to take care of the ecology but everyone's. Climate change and crisis are the consequences of human greed.

Diane Cook's The New Wilderness

Diane Cook author of the book *The New Wilderness* and short story collection *Man V. Nature*. She is an American Cli-Fi emerging writer, her short-story collection was a finalist for the Guardian First Book Award, the Believer Book Award, and the Los Angeles Times Art Seidenbaum Award. Her work *The New Wilderness* is a hope for the readers for a better future.

In *The New Wilderness*, the issue of climate change is demonstrated by Diane Cook. The setting is the near future where the people are struggling for fresh air to inhale due to climate change the air is polluted. A decision is taken by the government to send 19 volunteers to the

new Wilderness State including the main characters like Bea, and Agnes. Diane Cook established a set of awareness to contextualize the tremendous ecological calamities that our human civilization has been facing over the past few decades.

Through the main characters of the book like Bea and Agnes and the volunteers who represent deep ecology, work to preserve ecological sustainability. Cook highlights the worth of deep ecology through the central character Bea. The decision was taken by Bea to take her daughter Agnes far from the polluted city to save her life. Despite many hurdles faced by them in the Wilderness State, they survived. Bea unemotionally values nature and takes the hard decision to get isolated from the city. Cook demonstrates the role of nature in moulding living beings. Nature has given us every basic need, but the greediness of humans is the main reason for destruction. The annihilation of the environment is shown in the story through the perspective of the main character Bea, when she moves to the Wilderness State. The city was surrounded by polluted air.

Diane Cook, in her book *The New Wilderness*, captures the true picture of the existence of humans' future where they have to struggle for their survival if the problems of climate change are not taken seriously.

Conclusion

The insensitive behaviour of man towards nature is troublesome. For a more materialistic life, humans have created competition towards them, willingly harming nature. They are even ignoring the rights of other species to survive. In the current scenario, the reciprocated nature of humans as well as nature is needed. For this firstly human civilization must pay the penalty for destruction and climate change to make a balance with nature by taking immediate steps for climate crisis in the present to make our future more sustainable and ecofriendly. Thus, in his book *The New Wilderness*, Diane Cook brightly captures the idea of ecology and the sudden moves that society needs to take for its existence. Kim Stanley Robison, in his book *The Ministry for The Future*, portrays the picture of our future planet which can be both sustainable as well as devastating if we fail to protect our environment.

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