

CLIMATE FICTION



Instructor: Christopher A. Walker

Course Number: EN/ES 337

Lecture: MW 2:30-3:45 in Miller 319

Office Hours: Mondays 4:00-6:00 (and by appointment) in Miller 216

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Course Description

Contemporary fiction is now investigating the possibilities and limits of story-telling in the era of global climate change. These works, referred to as “climate fiction” or “cli-fi,” explore humanity’s connection to- and impact upon Earth by asking questions such as: what will human and nonhuman communities look like after sea-level rise, desertification, and biodiversity loss remap our planet?; how might species evolve in response to ecological collapse?; what affects—melancholy, despair, hope—will eulogize a lost home-world?

Reading cli-fi novels, short stories, poetry, and film, this course will situate our texts within the Environmental Humanities, an interdisciplinary field that combines scientific and cultural discourses about the environment with humanistic concerns for social justice. Working through the narrative conventions of the utopian, dystopian, and apocalyptic genres, we will ask how cli-fi not only narrates impending disaster on a global scale but also strives to imagine a more just future, one that combines environmentalism and social equality. These texts will be paired with excerpts from philosophical and ecocritical writings which will aid our development of the humanistic methodologies needed to analyze and appreciate this new genre.

Course Materials

Items with an asterisk (*) on reserve in Miller Library.

Books to purchase: (Available at The Colby Bookstore)

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (ISBN 978-0-385-72167-7) (2003) *

J. G. Ballard, *The Drowned World* (ISBN 978-0-87140-362-9) (1962) *

Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (ISBN 978-0-226-52681-2) (2016) *

Nathaniel Rich, *Odds Against Tomorrow* (ISBN 978-1-250-04364-1) (2013) *

Kim Stanley Robinson, *New York 2140* (ISBN 978-0-316-26234-7) (2017) *

Excerpts: (On Moodle)

Margaret Atwood, "Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet" (2009)

Dan Beachy-Quick, "Endangered Species" (2016)

Maurice Blanchot, from *The Writing of Disaster* (1986) *

Rosi Braidotti, "Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism" from *Anthropocene Feminism* (2017)

Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses" (2009)

Diane Cook, "The Way the End of Days Should Be" from *Man v Nature* (2014)

Paul N. Edwards, from *A Vast Machine: Computer Models, Climate Data, and the Politics of Global Warming* (2010) *

Carol Farbotko, "Wishful Sinking: Disappearing Islands, Climate Refugees and Cosmopolitan Experimentation" (2010)

Andreas Hejnl, "Ladders, Trees, Complexity, and Other Metaphors in Evolutionary Thinking" from *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* (2017)

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Fifth Assessment Report* (2014)

Donna Haraway, from *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016)

Myra J. Hird and Alexander Zahara, "The Arctic Wastes" from *Anthropocene Feminism* (2017)

Maggie Kainulainen, "Saying Climate Change: Ethics of the Sublime and the Problem of Representation" (2013)

Frank Kermode, from *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (1967)

Lydia Millet, "Zoogoing" (2009)

Alexandra Nikoleris, et al. "Narrating Climate Futures: Shared Socioeconomic Pathways and Literary Fiction" (2017)

Uncertain Commons, *Speculate This!* (2013)

Films and Media: (Screenings on Campus)

"Anthropocene: The Human Age" (<http://www.nature.com/news/anthropocene-the-human-age-1.17085>)

The Day After Tomorrow (2004), Dir. Roland Emmerich

Flooded McDonald's (2010), SUPERFLEX

Mad Max: Fury Road (2015), Dir. George Miller

Snowpiercer (2013), Dir. Bong Joon-ho

World Wildlife Fund posters (2012-14)

Calendar

Week 1: Introduction: Climate Change and the Environmental Humanities

Feb 7th: Introduction
Margaret Atwood, "Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet"
Dan Beachy-Quick, "Endangered Species"

Screening: *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), Feb 7th at 7:30 in Lovejoy 100

I. Origins of the Genre: Climate Apocalypse

Week 2: Climate Change and Apocalyptic Discourse

Feb 12th: Discussion of *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004)
Maggie Kainulainen, "Saying Climate Change"
Journal Entry Due

Feb 14th: J. G. Ballard, *The Drowned World* (Chapters 1-8)
Andreas Hejnol, "Ladders, Trees, Complexity, and Other Metaphors in Evolutionary Thinking"

Week 3: Writing Disaster Now

Feb 19th: J. G. Ballard, *The Drowned World* (Chapters 9-End)
Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of Disaster*
Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*
Journal Entry Due

Feb 21st: Diane Cook, "The Way the End of Days Should Be"
Lydia Millet, "Zoogoing"
Discuss: Climate Story Assignment

II. Modeling, Speculation, and Climate Futures

Week 4: The Varieties of Speculation

Feb 26th: IPCC, *Fifth Assessment Report*
Paul N. Edwards, *A Vast Machine*
Alexandra Nikoleris, et al. "Narrating Climate Futures"
Journal Entry Due

Feb 28th: Nathaniel Rich, *Odds Against Tomorrow* (Part One)
Discuss: Climate Futures Project

Week 5: Anticipating Disaster

March 5th: Nathaniel Rich, *Odds Against Tomorrow* (Part Two)
Uncertain Commons, *Speculate This!*
Journal Entry Due

March 7th: Nathaniel Rich, *Odds Against Tomorrow* (Part Three)

Week 6: Adaptation Scenarios

March 12th: Kim Stanley Robinson, *New York 2140* (Parts One-Three)
Journal Entry Due

March 14th: Kim Stanley Robinson, *New York 2140* (Parts Four-Five)
Carol Farbotko, “Wishful Sinking”

Screening: *Flooded McDonald’s* (2010) ***TBD***

Week 7: Imagining the New Metropolis

March 19th: Kim Stanley Robinson, *New York 2140* (Parts Six-Seven)
Discussion of *Flooded McDonald’s* (2010)
Climate Story Assignment Due

March 21st: **Guest Lecture by Kim Stanley Robinson**
Kim Stanley Robinson, *New York 2140* (Finish)

Week 8: Spring Break!

March 24th – April 1st: Work on Climate Futures Project

III. Moving Beyond Apocalypse

Week 9: Welcome to the Anthropocene

April 2nd: **Workshop:** Climate Futures Project

Screening: *Snowpiercer* (2013), April 2nd at 7:30 in Arey 5

April 4th: Discussion of *Snowpiercer* (2013)
“Anthropocene: The Human Age” (<http://www.nature.com/news/anthropocene-the-human-age-1.17085>)
Myra J. Hird and Alexander Zahara, “The Arctic Wastes”
Journal Entry Due

Week 10: Catastrophe and the Possibility of Utopia

April 9th: Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (Chapters 1-4)
Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement* (Part I)
Journal Entry Due

April 11th: Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (Chapters 5-10)
Discuss: Final Project

Week 11: Being (Post)Human in Times of Environmental Change

April 16th: Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (Chapters 11-END)
Rosi Braidotti, “Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism”

April 18th: **Field Trip:** Colby College Museum

Week 12: Climate Histories

April 23rd: Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses”
Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement* (Part II)
World Wildlife Fund posters (2012-14)
Journal Entry Due

April 25th: **Guest Lecture by Thomas Doran (RISD)**

April 27th: **Field Trip:** Allen Island

IV. Utopian Entanglements

Week 13: Mapping Climate Futures

April 30th: **Climate Futures Presentations**

May 2nd: **Climate Futures Presentations**

May 3rd: **Poster Session:** Colby Liberal Arts Symposium, 2:00-3:55 in Parker-Reed

Screening: *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), May 6th at 7:30 in Arey 5

Week 14: Multispecies Climate Justice

May 7th: Conclusion
Discussion of *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015)
Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*

TBD: Class Dinner
Presentation of Final Projects

May 16th-21st: **Final Projects Due**

Your Obligations:

Grading:

15%: Weekly journal entries (8)

20%: Participation

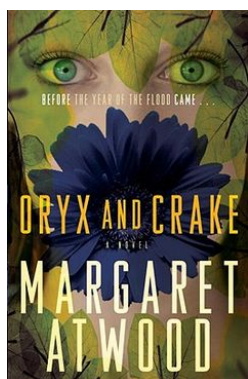
15%: Climate Story (March 19th)

25%: Climate Futures Project (Week 13)

25%: Final Project (Finals Week)

Weekly Journal Entries:

In preparation for class, each student will submit a short (1 page, ~300 words) journal entry exploring any aspect of the readings or films to be covered that week. Journal entries must be submitted via Moodle by 10:00 PM the night before class. These entries can be quite informal and should serve as a record of your engagement with the material before we have had the opportunity to discuss it in detail as a group. Appropriate topics for this assignment might be literary form, perspective, themes, uncertainties, anxieties, excitations—or anything else that catches your eye. In other words, have fun writing!

**Class Participation:**

In this course, we will encounter myriad theoretical problems central to understanding climate change and the Environmental Humanities. As such, participation in class discussion and activities is required of all students. You should come to class ready to discuss the material (bring your readings and notes!). All comments and questions should demonstrate consideration and respect for the other students in the class. Your participation grade will take into account your attendance (see below), your contribution to discussion, and the quality of your engagement with the material. Daring, risky, and insightful comments are all very welcome! Use class as a space in which to test your ideas and interpretive methodologies.

To earn an A in Participation you will: have consistently done the reading, regularly share your interpretations and analyses with the class, actively engage with comments made by your classmates, and arrive to class on time. In short, you should demonstrate your sustained engagement with the course material and your peers.

Climate Story:

This assignment requires that you experiment with a short, personal narrative. The assignment will be discussed during week 3. You might begin going to <http://www.climatestoriesproject.org/>.

Climate Futures Project:

This collaborative project will introduce you to digital humanities methods to analyze cli-fi narratives. We will use the assignment to consider how the climate fiction genre models many different possible climate futures. The assignment will be discussed during week 4.



Final Project: For the final project, you will either individually or in small groups (of no more than three) produce a creative work of climate fiction. This project may be a short film, screenplay, sculpture, short-story, poem—the possibilities are infinite! Additionally, you will submit an artist statement that discusses how your creative project engages with the theoretical questions addressed throughout the course (problems of scale, representation, climate justice, etc.). You'll have the opportunity to share your final projects with the class in the final week. Details to follow in Week 9.

Attendance Policy:

Your attendance is mandatory. Three (3) absences will negatively impact your final grade. More than three (3) absences will **severely impact your final grade**. Three (3) tardies will count as an absence. If, due to excessive absences, you need to drop the course you should do so by Friday, March 23rd.

In the event of an unavoidable absence, please contact me before class, if possible. Please bring documentation (doctor's note, etc.). You are responsible for the material you miss, including handouts, assignments, announcements, and whatnot. Please get notes from a classmate. If you have questions after you have acquired the notes from someone and talked with them, I am very happy to meet with you.

Cellphones:

There is a strict no cellphone policy in this course. Silence your phone before class. Please let me know ahead of time if you will need to step out to take a call. If you are distracted by your phone or computer during class, you will be counted absent.

Paper Format:

Papers should be typed in 12-point Times New Roman font, have 1-inch margins, be double spaced, and include page numbers. A heading consisting of your name, the instructor's name (that's me), the course number (EN/ES 337), and the date should be typed in the top left corner of the first page. Papers should also include in-text citations and a Works Cited page.

There are many excellent online sources to assist with your paper. Here's a start:

The MLA Style Center: <https://style.mla.org/>

The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL): <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

Additionally, you may schedule an appointment with a peer writing tutor at the Farnham Writer's Center in Miller Library room 206: <http://www.colby.edu/writingprogram/students/>. You may also contact the research librarians who specialize in English: Karen Gillum (kjgillum@colby.edu) and Laine Thielstrom (esthiels@colby.edu).

Accommodation:

Students seeking accommodations may come directly to me for assistance or may contact Joseph Atkins, Assistant Dean of Students (jeatkins@colby.edu or 207-859-4250). Counseling services are available on campus and are accessible by contacting Eric Johnson (esjohnso@colby.edu or 207-859-4460). I'm very happy to help in arranging any accommodations that will aid your success in this course.

Academic Integrity:

Honesty, integrity, and personal responsibility are cornerstones of a Colby education and provide the foundation for scholarly inquiry, intellectual discourse, and an open and welcoming campus community. These values are articulated in the Colby Affirmation and are central to this course. Students are expected to demonstrate academic honesty in all aspects of this course. Any violations of academic honesty will be referred to the Coordinator of Academic Integrity; sanctions may include suspension or expulsion.

Policies and Requirements:

This syllabus is subject to change, adaptation, and evolution (at the instructor's discretion, of course).

