

Climate Fiction as a Means of Encouraging Conversations Regarding our Reasonability to Land

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Climate fiction brings the conversation of climate change to a wider audience, allowing for greater opportunities of personal growth. It creates deeper understanding and engagement with the topic of climate and strengthens our sense of reasonability to land. It has been argued that cli-fic is not an effective way to create change (Ramuglia 157). However, it provides a safe space to think about climate change. This begins to mould the way that people understand their relationship and reasonability to land (Leavenworth & Manni, 739). It pushes people to consider the planets' potential future and with an increased readership, the media is bringing more awareness about climate change to the general public (Ramuglia, 155). Studies conducted by Maria Lindgren Leavenworth, Annika Manni and Matthew Schneider-Mayerson examine the effects cli-fic has on the reader. Through an analysis of these effects climate fiction plays an integral role in generating conversations about climate change. In addition, it creates more awareness on the topic, thus leading to a future with the potential for change.

**Fostering Safe Conversations through Climate
Fiction**

*This paper was written on the territory of
Kwantlen, Musqueam, Katzie, Semiahmoo,*

*Tsawwassen, Qayqayt and Kwikwetlem peoples*¹.
It is written through the lenses of a settler and it should be noted that when approaching the topic of climate fiction there must be a sense of caution and an awareness of the historical pattern of appropriation of Indigenous narratives. Climate fiction deals with topics of land and our relationship to land which is deeply embedded in many Indigenous cultures²

With pressure building to find a solution for climate change, scholars are looking for different ways to engage the public. Climate fiction (cli-fic) interweaves discussions of land, land ownership, environmental reasonability, the effects of global warming, and sustainability into the story that is being told³. Some suggest that cli-fic is not a viable way to create change and spark people's interest in the environment⁴. However, what critics fail to consider is that it provides a non-

Land in Literature, Volume 6, Issue 1, 2023 threatening space to think about the climate crises, shaping the way people understand their relationship to the land⁵. It pushes readers to consider the planet's potential future, and with an increased readership, the climate fiction is bringing more awareness about climate change to the general public⁶. These aspects combine to promote the first step towards considering the impact we have on the environment and the ways in which we can work to create a better future. Cli-fic is a non-threatening space to engage with the heavy topic of climate change. Fiction create distance between the reader and the content, allowing for analysis of the narrative. While not all climate fiction takes place in a made-up world those that do often mirror aspects of real life without readers feeling attacked by the reality of climate destruction. It is a creative way to open readers' minds to concepts of climate change while still leaving room to breathe⁷. The intention

¹ Territorial Acknowledgement." *Kwantlen Polytechnic University*, 8 Dec. 2021, <https://www.kpu.ca/about/territorial-acknowledgement>.

² Maria Lindgren Leavenworth, and Annika Manni. "Climate Fiction and Young Learners' Thoughts—A Dialogue between Literature and Education." *Environmental Education Research*, vol. 27, no. 5, 2020, pp. 272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2020.1856345>.

³ Matthew Schneider-Mayerson. "The Influence of Climate Fiction." *Environmental Humanities*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2018, pp. 473. <https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-7156848>.

⁴ River Ramuglia. "Cli-Fi, Petroculture, and the Environmental Humanities: An Interview with Stephanie LeMenager." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2018, pp. 157. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sdn.2018.0008>.

⁵ Leavenworth, p. 739.

⁶ Ramuglia, p. 155

⁷ Schneider-Mayerson, p. 476

of cli-fic is not to persuade readers to change opinion, but rather to open the door to contemplation⁸.

In the journal *Green Matters: Ecocultural Functions of Literature* David Creelman writes an article titled “Representing the Environment in Victorian, Modern, and Postcolonial Fictions: Three Maritime Canadian Novels”. Here we see different representations of the environment in fictional narratives and how they create space for reader engagement. Creelman analyzes the book *Stones and Switches* by Lorne Simon, and because there is a deep connection between “colonialism, racism, neoliberalism and climate collapse”⁹ it makes it the perfect book to use when looking at understanding a non-threatening space. With topics as heavy as these, cli-fic puts readers at a distance while still allowing for personal engagement. The novel *Stones and Switches* follows a man named Megwadesk and his encounters with the colonial world, in relation to culture, beliefs, politics and land. Megwadesk’s relationship to land shifts as traditional fishing practices are restricted and

Land in Literature, Volume 6, Issue 1, 2023 controlled by the government¹⁰. He recognizes this shift in his relationship with the land and the fracturing of power dynamics¹¹. It takes many changes in his life before there is a sense of unity with the land again. Most significantly is after he has a child. From this moment on there is a shift in mood within the novel. This occurs as he comes to realize the importance of traditional practices which so heavily depend on the health and well-being of the land. As the novel ends there is a sense of hope that the relationship to land can be restored as Megwadesk works at forsering these connections¹². While the relationship to land has yet to be restored this story cultivates a setting of family and community. The government limited their traditional fishing rights and settlers lined the shores with rocks. But in the face of opposition, it is his community that makes Megwadesk recognize the importance of tradition and the value that the land has. And it is his family that allows him to see the land outside of the settler framework of extraction¹³. Similarly, it is community that allows the modern reader to

⁸ Schneider-Mayerson, p. 495

¹⁰ Creelman , David. “Chapter 4- Representing the Environment in Victorian Modern, and Postcolonial Fictions: Three Maritime Canadian Novels .” *Green Matters*

Ecocultural Fictions of Literature , Brill , Leiden , Netherlands , 2019, pp. 85.

¹¹ (Creelman, p. 86).

¹² (Creelman, p. 88)

¹³ (Creelman, p. 86).

reassess old views and consider our own relationship to the land. A relationship essential to human survival.

Within this frame it allows readers to identify and relate to a character of which they may or may not have shared experiences. Through the dissections of colonial fishing practices it shows the complexity and depth at which cli-fic can go, through the destruction of natural processes from over fishing and the destruction of habitat. The severity of climate change can give rise to people having feelings of anxiety and concern, but it can also open the door to new feelings of hope and prospects for the future¹⁴. *Stones and Switches* is evidence of how fiction can broach heavy topics in an inviting and safe space, allowing readers to engage with the content at their own pace.

Climate fiction pushes people to consider what the future may look like. Some texts invite people to consider the worst of the worst, while others offer a sense of hope for renewal. It is interesting to consider looking towards the future with those who are our future. Cli-fic being incorporated into the classrooms allows for children to connect with

¹⁴ Leavenworth, p.728

¹⁵ Leavenworth, p.739

¹⁶ Leavenworth, p. 731

Land in Literature, Volume 6, Issue 1, 2023 possibilities for the future in a safe space¹⁵. Maria Lindgren Leavenworth & Annika Manni's study "Climate fiction and young learners' thoughts—a dialogue between literature and education, *Environmental Education Research*" asked 209 children aged 10-12 to write about what they knew about the environment and what type of knowledge they felt would be important for us to know in the future. From this several themes emerged. They observed that when kids expressed positive emotions towards nature they were often followed and connected to more negative emotions towards humans¹⁶. They noted that readers had an awareness of how important and venerable the land was and expressed a desire to protect and care for it¹⁷. Traditional education systems are designed with the intention of preparing kids to become contributing members in the economy. An economy which intentionally or unintentionally participates in harming the environment¹⁸. However, it is this knowledge that helps inform and enable us into action¹⁹. As children interact with climate fiction, they are seeing the connections between humans and land. This creates a space for new ideas and solutions;

¹⁷ Leavenworth, p. 734

¹⁸ Leavenworth, p. 738

¹⁹ Leavenworth, p. 737

solutions which could save our future²⁰. An example of this could be in the case of David A. Robertson's series *The Misewa Saga*. It follows two children Morgan and Eli who are separated from their families but together find a magical portal where they travel to an enchanted place with talking animals and learn about traditional ways to survive and must save the land from another ice age²¹. It is in texts such as these that children can find themselves and see the land in relationship to humans under a different framework, allowing new ideas to grow.

Within the last ten years there has been an influx in the popularity of cli-fic; with this increase comes the hope that people will begin to develop a greater awareness of the land and environment, sparking action and changing environmental policies²². With an increase in both media attention and in the production of cli-fic there is always the potential that writers and media outlets are using hot button topics to gain attention, rather

²⁰ Leavenworth, p. 740

²¹ "The Misewa Saga." *PenguinRandomhouse.com*,

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/series/EWS/the-misewa-saga>.

Land in Literature, Volume 6, Issue 1, 2023 than to promote conversations regarding climate change²³.

In "The Influence of Climate Fiction: An Empirical Survey of Readers", Matthew Schneider-Mayerson seeks to understand both the readership base for cli-fic and the impact it has on creating social/personal change²⁴. The qualitative study was done with 161 American readers surveying their thoughts and opinions on 19 different works of climate fiction²⁵. The participants are asked a series of open-ended questions that relate to their intellectual, emotional, and behavioural reaction to the climate crisis²⁶. Some limitations outlined in the article are as follows, this study has a fairly small sample size, due to the self-reported nature of the responses there is a higher potential for the answers to be filtered and finally not all of effects will be known by the reader, thus they cannot report it²⁷. Schneider-Mayerson wanted to understand who is reading cli-fic and how they are interpreting the content. This is important because

²² Schneider-Mayerson, p.474

²³ Ramuglia, p.157

²⁴ Schneider-Mayerson, p.473

²⁵ Schneider-Mayerson, p.473

²⁶ Schneider-Mayerson, p. 474

²⁷ Schneider-Mayerson, p. 477

the power of recommendation should not be discarded. If people are recommending climate fiction to others there is a stronger possibility that they may read the material.

The shift in cli-fic's popularity has been so significant that author and esteemed professor from Oregon University, Stephanie LeMenger, views this as sociological phenomenon due to the intensity and passion that the general public has shown³². While knowledge must always be met with action, there is a sense of hope surrounding the potential cli-fic has to spark change³³. It is unfortunate that climate fiction is not engaging those who have a limited understanding of climate change; however what is encouraging is young readership base. The young are seeking out this form of literature, reflecting their desire for change and their interest in the land. By reaching the youth it provides hope that the future leaders will have a heart and passion for our climate and land.

if media outlets truly have the intention of shining light on the climate crisis they need to know who they're target audience is. The study found that 37.7% of all cli-fic readers were between the ages of 18-34 with only 23.4 of the American public being in that age range (as of 2016)²⁸. Additionally, 50.1% claimed they were of the liberal political perspective with only 25% of the American public identifying as liberal²⁹. It was also determined that 80.6% of Americans who read cli-fic were concerned about climate change. The highest response rate as to why someone read a cli-fic book was based on a recommendation from a friend³⁰. It was determined that most readers already had concerns about climate change before reading cli-fic, meaning that there will be aspects of confirmation bias for many readers when interacting with the text. But this does not mean that cli-fic is ineffective at drawing attention to concerns regarding climate change³¹. It allows those with a pre-existing interest in climate change to engage more deeply with the material and it also allows for them have a platform to share about this topic. While other ways of

²⁸ Schneider-Mayerson, p 479

²⁹ Schneider-Mayerson, p. 479

³⁰ Schneider-Mayerson, p 481

³¹ Schneider-Mayerson, p. 492

³² Ramuglia, p. 155

³³ Leavenworth, p. 737

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Conclusion

Even though cli-fic’s readership is primarily composed of young, liberal people who and have a pre-existing concern for the well-being of our land, the increase in popularity is still promoting conversation around climate change³⁴. It might not necessarily change the views of those reading the novel, but it opens up a safe place to consider topics such as the impact we are having on the planet (Leavenworth & Manni 739). For school aged children they are expressing an interest in learning about the environment and climate fiction has a unique opportunity to spark interest and cultivate the seed of activism³⁵. While I would be cautious with the idea that this “new kind of novel [cli-fic] might save the world”, climate fiction gives people ideas and it is people’s ideas fueled by passion that has the potential to create positive change³⁶. Work Cited

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³⁴ Schneider-Mayerson,, p. 479

³⁵ Leavenworth, p. 735

³⁶ Ramuglia, p. 155

“The Misewa Saga.” *PenguinRandomhouse.com*,
<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/series/EWS/the-misewa-saga>.