Review of Cli-Fi and Class: Socioeconomic Justice in Contemporary American Climate Fiction

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The idea of climate fiction, or cli-fi, has expanded greatly over the last twenty years as it has grown from a speculative niche genre that primarily emphasized dystopian futures. Early criticism around cli-fi texts was able to neatly categorize and catalogue an emerging genre by merely describing the fictional happenings of each plot and how the story related to what seen as as the temporally and often geographically distant threat of climate change. *Cli-Fi and Class*, however, is an important shift from those sorts of efforts to a more holistic approach that explores the range of inequities that our global climate crisis makes more apparent each year. The label of cli-fi now applies to rapidly diversifying set of creative productions that are so numerous and diffuse as to defy neat categories. The exploitation of the natural world and of underprivileged people is a hallmark of modernity’s extractive economies, as detailed by scholars such as Amitav Ghosh in *The Nutmeg’s Curse*, and this collection examines many different texts in an effort to understand how both slow and fast violence is inflicted through asymmetric climate impacts across class divisions. Editors Debra J. Rosenthal and Jason de Lara Molesky argue that cli-fi is actually “a form of protest literature” (1) with links to Marxian climate theory and powerful labor movements. The intersection of class with race, nationality, gender, and more is also carefully attended to in this book.

*Cli-Fi and Class* is part of the long-running and highly regarded series “Under the Sign of Nature: Explorations in Environmental Humanities.” The fifteen authors of the various essays collected here are largely established scholars in the field of ecocriticism. The editors organized the book into three sections: “Class Structure and Resource Extraction”; “Class Differentiation and Climate Risk”; and “Class Privilege and Climate Anxiety.” As such, the collection offers clear thematic strains. By offering sustained attention to areas and texts that feature extractive industries, the first section highlights how historical and contemporary settler colonialism continues to play out in fictionalized stories. Several authors, including Jessica Cory in her chapter on Cherie Dimaline’s novel *The Marrow Thieves*, explore how Indigenous understandings of climate disaster are not of a new phenomenon but rather are an echo of the recent past; this work builds ably upon the scholarship of Kyle Powys Whyte and Robin Wall Kimmerer.

Chapters on class differentiation show how lower-class white characters deal with the wicked problem of climate crisis. For example, Debra J. Rosenthal examines *Flight Behavior* by Barbara Kingsolver (as do others in the collection) and Jennifer Horwitz writes on *Strange as This Weather Has Been* by Ann Pancake; both of these essays also cover additional stories by authors of color.

Interestingly, several contributors focus sustained critiques on best-selling climate fiction novels from 2000-2015 that were early influencers of cli-fi. These primarily appear in the latter half of the collection, which moves from exploring extraction to exploring class privilege. For example, Jennifer Schell’s chapter is about the “Erasure of Indigenous Resilience in Alaskan Cli-Fi” (117),
while Andrew Milner discusses in his full exploration of Kim Stanley Robinson’s many cli-fi novels how few working-class people appear, much less labor movements. Matthew Schneider-Mayerson shows how books by Robinson and others such as Nathaniel Rich’s *Odds Against Tomorrow* need the following question asked: “Where are poor people and people of color...?” (190). One of the earlier novels that is also explored in *Cli-Fi and Class* that more fully embraced explorations of socioeconomic justice is Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*, which is discussed in multiple dimensions, including in Martin Premoli and B. Jamieson Stanley’s look at the Afrofuturist cli-fi films *Pumzi* and *Black Panther*.

While the collection is a strong addition to studies in cli-fi and admirably explores issues of socioeconomic justice in ways that have been lacking in earlier works, the editors specifically limited their scope to American climate fiction. Indeed, anyone looking for American cli-fi narratives would be very well served using this as a starting point to understand the blind spots of early cli-fi and to find options for a robust justice orientation. However, the climate crisis is global in scope. Given that many of the contributors call out America and other western countries for their high carbon emissions even as countries in the Global South bear wildly disproportionate impacts, scholars and instructors would do well to use this book in tandem with other stories and criticism from the rest of the world.