

## CULTURAL MEMORY STUDIES INITIATIVE

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# IMAGINING CLIMATE CHANGE FICTION, MEMORY, AND THE ANTHROPOCENE

Climate change, arguably the greatest global challenge of our time, is usually treated as a strictly scientific phenomenon; however, it also has a cultural dimension. The last two decades have seen the publication of a spate of literary texts that adapt, transform, or reinvent conventional modes of representation in an attempt to capture and communicate the nature, causes, and effects of climate change and the urgency required to address it. This project explores how literature is grappling with the problems posed by a warming planet, with particular attention to issues of memory. Its overall aim is to contribute to the humanistic endeavour to help incorporate the far-reaching consequences of climate change into human experience and thereby to assist us in confronting them more effectively. The project consists of three interrelated strands.

### 1. Formalist

The first strand explores the literary innovations demanded by climate change, a phenomenon whose magnitude and complexity challenge familiar forms of narrative. With distant and uncertain consequences of actions, without easily identifiable or clear-cut villains, and with diffuse, gradual, drawn-out processes barely perceptible to the human senses, climate change is hardly fertile territory for conventional literary treatment. We study the kinds of stories, images, and symbols writers have devised to make visible, tangible, legible, and morally salient this elusive phenomenon.

### 2. Historicist

The second strand links climate change fiction to literary responses to earlier crises that radically altered humanity's relationship to the past, present, and future: the discovery of geological time in the early nineteenth century and the Cold War threat of nuclear annihilation. We attend to both parallels and differences between the historical and the contemporary, the latter including the fact that the Victorians were frightened by the universe's indifference to human action whereas what scares us is its reactivity, as well as the fact that nuclear destruction and climate change, while both potential total disasters of our own making, represent forms of fast and slow violence respectively.



Isaac Cordal, *Politicians Discussing Global Warming*

*The importance of story-making and story-telling around climate change needs elevating alongside that of fact-finding. . . . The positivist disciplines are ill-suited to engaging with and articulating the deeper human search for values, purpose and meaning—and yet this search is exactly where humanity's new entanglement with global climate is taking us.*

Mike Hulme, "Meet the Humanities"

### 3. Postcolonial

As a global problem, climate change invites an expansion of the customary frameworks of the novel beyond individuals, families, and nations, creating opportunities to explore issues of environmental justice across the world. However, this invitation is not always accepted, and in any case a globalizing dynamic can also serve to flatten out difference. The project's third strand investigates to what extent and in what ways climate change fiction remembers or forgets inequalities in the global distribution of responsibility for and vulnerability to climate change, which the developing Anthropocene narrative with its species-level understanding of humanity risks obscuring.

### Publications

- Craps, Stef, and Rick Crownshaw, eds. *The Rising Tide of Climate Change Fiction*. Spec. issue of *Studies in the Novel* 50.1 (2018). Contributors include River Ramuglia and Mahlu Mertens.
- Craps, Stef, Rick Crownshaw, Jennifer Wenzel, Rosanne Kennedy, Claire Colebrook, and Vin Nardizzi. "Memory Studies and the Anthropocene: A Roundtable." *Memory Studies* 11.4 (2018).
- Craps, Stef. "Climate Change and the Art of Anticipatory Memory." *Memory after Humanism*. Ed. Susanne C. Knittel and Kári Driscoll. Spec. issue of *Parallax* 23.4 (2017): 479–92.



Daniel Kreher, *Stranded Ships at the Port of Mo'ynoq or Muinak, Aral Sea, Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan*

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