

Climate Fiction (Cli-Fi) is a genre of literature and film that addresses climate change and its environmental, social, and political consequences. Cli-Fi has become increasingly popular in recent years as a way of imagining the future impacts of climate change, while also inspiring people to take action to mitigate these impacts.

One of the earliest examples of Cli-Fi is the movie "The Day After Tomorrow" starring Dennis Quaid and Jake Gyllenhaal. The film tells the story of a series of extreme weather events that cause a global catastrophe. The film was a critical and commercial success, and it helped to raise awareness of the issue of climate change. Interestingly, the film "The Day After Tomorrow" was based on a non-fiction book published in 1999 called "The Coming Global Superstorm". Written by radio personalities Art Bell and Whitley Strieber, the book warns that global warming might produce sudden and catastrophic climate change.

A more recent example of climate fiction is the novel "The Ministry for the Future" by Kim Stanley Robinson. The novel tells the story of a future where the world has been ravaged by climate change. The novel follows a group of people who are trying to build a better future for humanity. The novel was a critical and commercial success, and it was praised for its realistic portrayal of the effects of climate change.

Although for the most part, Cli-Fi is a fairly recent phenomenon, the journalist Rick Morton has made the case that John Steinbeck's classic "The Grapes of Wrath" should be considered an early example of Cli-Fi: "It would be too neat to observe that Grapes of Wrath begins with the El Niño pattern into which we are likely to slide, again. Too neat, I say, because it was actually a La Niña at the time of the Black Blizzards that swallowed the top-soil from the Great Plains and spat it out across the continent. There was a bit else going on, and this model from researchers published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA found

that anomalous sea surface temperatures [SSTs] combined with “land-surface feedbacks” as a result of crop failures in the newly opened farming frontier explain much of what actually happened at the time." To translate, the Dust Bowl was an environmental disaster exacerbated by human factors, and Steinbeck's novel traces the suffering faced by Joad family by that disaster.

While there are several well-known Climate Fiction novels such as "The Water Will Come" by Jeff Goodell or "The Road" by Cormac McCarthy, there are many lesser-known examples of the genre that are equally thought-provoking and engaging. Here are a few examples of lesser-known Climate Fiction novels:

"The Memory of Water" by Emmi Itäranta (2014) - This novel is set in a future world where water is a scarce resource and controlled by a military regime. The story follows a young woman named Noria, who is training to become a tea master and learns a secret that could change the course of her society. Itäranta's poetic writing style and vivid descriptions of a world in which water is both beautiful and deadly make for a haunting and unforgettable read.

"The Carbon Diaries 2015" by Saci Lloyd (2008) - This novel is set in a near-future Britain where the government has implemented strict carbon rationing in response to climate change. The story follows a teenage girl named Laura, who is forced to confront the reality of a world in which even the smallest actions have consequences for the environment. Lloyd's novel is a sobering reminder of the urgency of climate action and the ways in which individual choices can make a difference.

"The Sea and Summer" by George Turner (1987) - This novel is set in a future Australia that has been ravaged by climate change and economic collapse. The story follows a group of people living in a high-rise apartment building as they struggle to survive in a world that is both hostile and eerily familiar. Turner's novel is a bleak but thought-provoking examination of the

consequences of inaction on climate change and the dangers of allowing inequality to go unchecked.

"The Children of Men" by P.D. James (1992) - This novel is set in a future world where infertility has led to the collapse of society and the extinction of humanity. The story follows a middle-aged man named Theo as he becomes embroiled in a plot to transport a pregnant woman to safety. James' novel is a chilling reminder of the fragility of human existence and the need for action to address the root causes of social and environmental problems.

"The Water Knife" by Paolo Bacigalupi (2015) - This novel is set in a future southwestern United States where water scarcity has led to the rise of ruthless water barons and violent conflicts over resources. The story follows a journalist, a water knife, and a refugee as they navigate this dangerous world in search of safety and justice. Bacigalupi's novel is a gripping thriller that exposes the dark underbelly of a society in which water has become a precious commodity.

These lesser-known examples of Climate Fiction demonstrate the genre's versatility and power to illuminate complex issues and provoke thought and action. Whether exploring the consequences of water scarcity or the collapse of society, these novels offer unique insights into the challenges of our times and the urgent need for systemic change.

Cli-Fi literature and movies are not always easy to categorize because they can overlap with other genres such as dystopian narratives. As we well know, dystopian media often explore the darker side of human nature and the potential consequences of unchecked power. However, in many cases, dystopian media are set in a future where humanity has failed to address major social or environmental problems and often climate fiction has a more hopeful tone, as it shows how humanity can overcome the challenges of climate change.

Cli-Fi often shares some of the same characteristics as dystopian media. They can be set in a future where humanity has failed to address climate change, resulting in environmental disasters, mass migrations, and social unrest. Cli-Fi might also explore the darker side of human nature and the potential consequences of unchecked power. However, Cli-Fi stories are not always dystopian. Some Cli-Fi stories imagine a future where humanity has successfully addressed climate change and created a sustainable society.

One example of Cli-Fi that overlaps with the dystopian is the 2013 movie "Snowpiercer." "Snowpiercer" is set in a future where humanity has failed to address climate change, resulting in a new ice age that has made the planet uninhabitable. The surviving humans live on a massive train that continuously circles the globe. The train is divided into different classes, with the wealthiest passengers living in luxury at the front of the train, while the poorest passengers live in squalor at the back of the train. The story follows a group of rebels from the back of the train as they try to reach the front of the train and overthrow the ruling class.

Here are a few other examples of these overlapping genres:

"Blade Runner 2049" (2017) - This sequel to the classic 1982 film "Blade Runner" is set in a future where climate change has caused widespread environmental devastation. The story follows a replicant named K as he uncovers a dark secret that could have far-reaching consequences for humanity. The film explores themes of identity, memory, and what it means to be human in a world that is rapidly changing.

"The Hunger Games" series (2012-2015) - This popular film series is set in a future where climate change has caused widespread environmental destruction and social unrest. The story follows Katniss Everdeen, a young woman who becomes a symbol of hope for the

oppressed people of Panem as she fights against the oppressive Capitol. The films explore themes of power, inequality, and the human capacity for both cruelty and compassion.

"Waterworld" (1995) - This post-apocalyptic film is set in a future where climate change has caused the polar ice caps to melt, submerging the world in water. The story follows a lone drifter named The Mariner as he navigates this new world and tries to stay alive while avoiding the violent gangs and pirates that roam the seas. The film explores themes of survival, community, and the consequences of environmental destruction.

"Mad Max: Fury Road" (2015) - This high-octane action film is set in a future where climate change has caused a desertification of the world. The story follows Max, a lone wanderer who becomes embroiled in a conflict between a group of rebel women led by Imperator Furiosa and a tyrannical leader named Immortan Joe. The film explores themes of power, redemption, and the human capacity for both violence and compassion.

However, not all Cli-Fi stories are dystopian. For example, the 2014 movie "Interstellar" is set in a future where climate change has made the Earth uninhabitable. The story follows a group of astronauts who travel through a wormhole to find a new planet for humanity to live on. The movie explores themes of love, sacrifice, and the power of human ingenuity to solve problems.

Cli-Fi stories can be powerful tools for inspiring people to take action to address climate change. By imagining the potential consequences of inaction, Cli-Fi stories can motivate people to take steps to reduce their carbon footprint and support policies that address climate change. Cli-Fi stories can also help people to imagine a better future and inspire them to work towards creating a sustainable society.

Thanks for listening. If you want more information about the Cli-Fi genre, check out this list on Book Riot (<https://bookriot.com/climate-fiction/>). If you want to learn more about the Worldwide Teach-In on Climate and Justice, you can find more from the Graduate Programs in Sustainability at Bard University (<https://gps.bard.edu/world-wide-teach-in-2023>).

And on a final note, I wanted to tell you that this lecture was written with the help of ChatGPT. ChatGPT is a chatbot that uses machine learning and something possibly like Artificial Intelligence to mimic human conversation. I'd love to hear your thoughts on my use of it for this lecture.