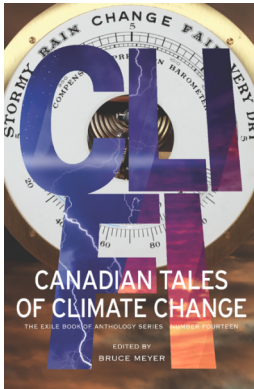


# Cli-Fi: Canadian Tales of Climate Change

Edited by Bruce Meyer. Exile (IPG, dist.), \$19.95 trade paper (304p) ISBN 978-1-55096-670-1



In his introduction to this all-original set of (at times barely) futuristic tales, Meyer warns readers, “[The] imaginings of today could well become the cold, hard facts of tomorrow.” Meyer (*Testing the Elements*) has gathered an eclectic variety of eco-fictions from some of Canada’s top genre writers, each of which, he writes, reminds readers that “the world is speaking to us and that it is our duty, if not a covenant, to listen to what it has to say.” In these pages, scientists work desperately against human ignorance, pockets of civilization fight to balance morality and survival, and corporations cruelly control access to basic needs such as water. The most affecting tale, Wendy Bone’s “Abdul,” is also the least futuristic, an emotional story that touchingly contrasts Western guilt against the life of a captive orangutan. The anthology may be inescapably dark, but it is a necessary read, a clarion call to take action rather than, as a character in Seán Virgo’s “My Atlantis” describes it, “waiting unknowingly for the plague, the hive collapse, the entropic thunderbolt.” Luckily, it’s also vastly entertaining. It appears there’s nothing like catastrophe to bring the best out in authors in describing the worst of humankind.

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With stories about the effects of climate change in the news almost every day — despite loud denunciations by naysayers — it was inevitable that speculative fiction writers would test the warming waters for immersion.

Science-fiction authors have always explored “If this goes on...” as a way of criticizing political or societal problems, and climate change has been a topic for many books and short stories, some of which have been turned into films such as *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Snowpiercer* and even the kids movie *Wall-E*.

*Cli-Fi* is an anthology of speculative fiction stories about climate change, all written from a Canadian perspective and several with strong Indigenous themes. Editor Bruce Meyer explains that the anthology is the result of a challenge by Margaret Atwood in 2015 who, at a discussion around the Al Gore film *An Inconvenient Truth* at a literary conference, asked pointedly: “Where are all the Canadian writers who should be addressing the greatest crisis of our age?” There’s some small irony here, as cli-fi is a

term coined by Dan Bloom, an American environmental activist who was invited to provide an afterword to this volume.

Many stories are by award-winning authors whose works have already won acclaim, whether in poetry, theatre, literature or music. The story *You Need Me at the River*, by internationally recognized poet Linda Rogers, gives a brief glimpse into the life of a woman who becomes pregnant in a future world where children are raised together, away from their parents and where food and luxuries are scarce. "Tell me about ice cream," one character implores.

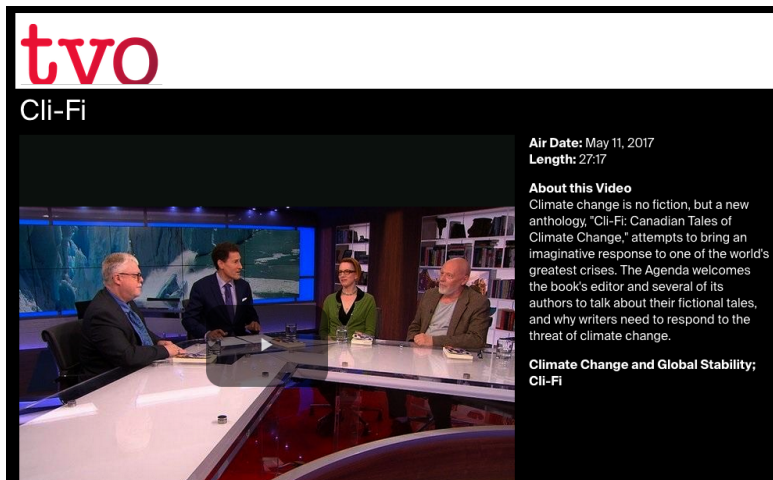
A variant of this is the case in *Degas' Ballerinas*, by Leslie Goodreid, where everything bad predicted about climate change has come true. The weather has changed dramatically, and dust storms roll across much of Canada. Food is also scarce here, but procreation is frowned upon and abortion pills are a commodity. American drones patrol the skies and gangs control territories, holding the fate of many in their hands.

The story *After* by John Oughton centres on a group of survivalists called Woodmen who need to protect their tribe from belligerent outsiders such as the Christers of Alberta. Food is scarce and ammunition is the currency of the day.

In almost all of the stories in *Cli-Fi*, climate change has brought misery to everyone. Agriculture has become impossible, flooding is everywhere, disease has wiped out flora and fauna, cities are ruled by warlords and science is unable to provide solutions. Government is either ineffective or nonexistent, and the perseverance of the human spirit is the only possible shred of optimism in a bleak future. Some of the stories are less approachable than others — and a few contain overtly "hard" science fiction takes on the future — but most explore the emotional and spiritual ways in which humans in Canada will likely be dealing with predicted coming changes to our way of life.

The theme of cli-fi is not new; most of the ideas in this anthology have been expressed many times before as post-apocalyptic stories, such as in American author Cormac McCarthy's 2006 novel *The Road*. But in using Canada as the setting for depressing end-of-the-world visions, Meyer allows the voice of Canadians to join the chorus of those concerned with the future of all who live on this fragile planet.

*Cli-Fi* might well be required reading for educators and students who need to be made more aware of the danger of not paying attention to what Mother Earth is trying to tell us.



<http://tvo.org/video/programs/the-agenda-with-steve-paikin/cli-fi>