

***Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction (2014).* Gerry Canavan and Kim Stanley Robinson, eds. Middletown: Wesleyan UP.
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Renowned Science Fiction (sf) writer William Gibson once remarked that '[t]oday, the sort of thing we used to think in science fiction has now colonized the rest of our reality' (Linneman). Taken as a measure of the proleptic calibre of science fiction or literature in general, this could be positively inferred; add anthropogenic climate change to this equation, and things become distinctly alarming. We are now, then, living in '[t]he future', which, as Gerry Canavan puts it in his preface to *Green Planets*, 'has gone bad; we need a new one' (xi). The urgency of this call to action—to fashion a more just, sustainable, and eco-conscious world, textually and actually—reverberates throughout this essay collection.



The first half of *Green Planets* investigates the notion of ecology and its historical use in sf, beginning with H.G. Wells before moving to twentieth-century writers such as Ursula K. Le Guin, Thomas Disch, and John Brunner. Although new and sophisticated readings are offered here—particularly Christina Alt's search for the ecological in Wells's oeuvre and Michael Page's 'Biotic Invasions: Ecological Imperialism in New Wave Science Fiction'—it is not until the latter half of *Green Planets* that things get really interesting. Focusing on the emerging body of contemporary literature that

treats climate change as its primary subject matter (what Daniel Bloom dubbed 'cli-fi' in 2007), the authors set themselves the difficult task of venturing through this relatively uncharted literary field (Merchant). In this, they succeed. What becomes sadly apparent therewith, however, is that no text has yet produced what I would call the Shute Effect, whereby a work of fiction noticeably influences public opinion, as did Nevil Shute's *On The Beach* (1957), which mobilised the anti-nuclear movement. Andrew Milner in his essay on George Turner's *The Sea and Summer* (1987) underscores the very same 'need for a parallel contemporary effort [to *On The Beach*] to imagine the unimaginable' (117).

Nevertheless, certain champions persist: Margaret Atwood, Paolo Bacigalupi, Maggie Gee, and *Green Planets* co-editor Kim Stanley Robinson. Adeline Johns-Putra, while performing a remarkable close-reading of Gee's *The Ice People* (1999), summarises the challenge such writers face:

These dystopian visions consider the lived experience of climate change, and attempt to refract through the personal the almost incomprehensible scale of this global ecological crisis . . . to adapt the conventions of the novel form—the insistently concrete questions of setting, character, and plot—to the notoriously abstract nature of climate change. (127)

Beyond the generic bounds of sf, I might recommend textual forays such as T.C. Boyle’s *A Friend of The Earth* (2000), James Bradley’s *Clade* (2015), Jonathan Franzen’s *Freedom* (2010), Barbara Kingsolver’s *Flight Behaviour* (2012), and Alexis Wright’s *The Swan Book* (2013) – some of which are discussed in Adam Trexler’s *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* (2015). Readers of *AJE* might not agree fully with Michael Page’s bold assertion that ‘sf is the genre of literature best suited to probing . . . environmental limits’ (41). *Green Planets* presents a strong case, displaying the significant ways in which sf writers are attempting to grapple with and create narratives about anthropogenic climate change. I would further argue for a lack of theoretical division; even those authors who write about climate change under the aegis of ‘literary’ or ‘speculative’ fiction are, in fact, working within a subgenre of sf.

Within this subcategory, *Green Planets* uncovers deeper niches. Elzette Steenkamp provides a regional focus on South African speculative fiction, including Neill Blomkamp’s 2009 film *District 9*; Eric C. Otto surveys the short fiction of Paolo Bacigalupi; Brent Bellamy and Imre Szeman offer an astute verdict on the fascinating new subgenre of ‘Science Faction’. The collection comes to a precise and poignant head, as it were, in the Afterword – a discussion between co-editors Canavan and Robinson. As one of the great practitioners of contemporary sf, Robinson’s admission that he ‘puzzled over how to narrate a story about climate change’ while developing his *Science in the Capital* trilogy should be equally troubling and inspiring. He reminds us that something akin to the Shute Effect is graspable here, since ‘the novel proper has the flexibility and capaciousness to depict any human situation’ (245).

Green Planets, while attesting to the ecological tradition of sf, performs the difficult and timely act of tying that history to our present and future. Without overplaying literature’s hand, it is with a desire called utopia that I hope literature, or art in general, might help to trigger widespread change; because ‘if this goes on’, to invoke the title of Canavan’s introduction, and our current political and scientific trajectory prevails, then the planet loses, and so too we.

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