

## **Imagining Climate Change through Cli –Fiction**

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### **Abstract**

In the last few years, climate change has emerged as a dominant theme in literature. The twenty-first century is considered as an Anthropocene epoch, as unfavourable environmental phenomena are occurring frequently which gradually creates disruption and imbalance in the environment affecting humans at large.

Nature which has always been part of literary narratives began to explore these various unpredictable natural crises caused due to human intervention. Writers have glorified the aesthetic beauty of nature once through their narratives, now, they have started to focus their attention on the destruction and imbalance in the environment caused by human intervention through their narratives. These narratives by creating scenarios in the text on coping with diverse challenges and conflicts created by ecological imbalance, awaken the readers to be environmentally conscious of the surroundings. In that sense, climate change fiction affects the collective consciousness of humanity.

This article attempts to analyze the text *Polar City Red* by Jim Laughter for the portrayal of an eventuality due to climate change and attempts to awaken the readers to the unrepresented or underrepresented environmental realities. The paper also proposes to foreground the efforts of the author to bring to the consciousness the responsibility of mankind and their intricate role in the Anthropocene, thereby encouraging them to make a positive change.

**Keywords:** Climate Change, Imagined future, Anthropocene, climate fiction

### **Introduction**

Climate fiction which is a product of the Anthropocene era reflects the massive impact of climate change on humankind and other living beings on Earth. It focuses mostly on the major part that humans play resulting in the Anthropocene. Climate fiction ironically reminds us of the various inconsequential and helpless states in which both humans and non-humans

find themselves. The state of helplessness is due to climate change. Climate fiction has become more popular in recent times and has emerged as an important genre that represented the Anthropocene era.

As a popular literary genre of our time, climate fiction addresses various issues foregrounding human responsibility to counter the destruction of the earth. By making the readers understand their place in life whilst reading about the associable and realist struggle for the survival of the characters in the inhospitable conditions of the world. Thus, Climate fiction gives voice to the pressing concerns of humanity on climate change and related issues through these narratives.

Climate change fiction (or Cli- Fi), is an umbrella term that encompasses Anthropocene fiction that portrays various human experiences and how humans are coping and adapting to climate change. It also focuses on depicting the factual environmental conditions in the fictive world of the novel conveying a grave message for civil society and politicians. These texts act as an early warning to enable corrective measures on environmental transformation before it gets too late. Many of these fictional narratives have used the possibility of rising sea levels to dramatize the effects of climate change and fictionally represent the consequences of such a scenario through climate change fiction. As the present time has been widely regarded as the Anthropocene epoch, there is a growing interest in climate change fiction, which has the potential to alert readers to the possible consequences of changing and changing climate and its aftermath.

#### Climate Fiction and the Anthropocene

The twentieth century is now being considered as an Anthropocene Epoch as it entails various negative environmental phenomena that include climate change, and loss of biodiversity and which may gradually disrupt the environment. In that sense climate change is one of the serious repercussions of the Anthropocene time and the fiction which represented various issues with climate change emerged as one of the readiest pieces for the display of evidence, of a new climate imaginary in the time of the Anthropocene.

It was the Nobel Prize-winning chemist Paul J Crutzen who defined this human-dominated time as the Anthropocene Era as humans become the agents who alter the entire environment resulting in self-destructive irreversible damage. The term Anthropocene suggests that the earth is now moving out of its current geological epoch which is called the Holocene and human activity which is largely responsible for this exit from the Holocene that is that humankind has become a global geological force in its own weight and right. Climate fiction in recent times portrays more on human-made climate changes and its after effects, so understanding climate fiction during the Anthropocene makes us fear humanity take imperative measures against these changes that are caused due to the various climate apocalyptic.

Coined by the North American activist and journalist Dan Bloom in 2007, Cli Fi is the term for the works that focus on anthropogenic environmental problems and their diverse effects on human beings. Climate change fiction is an umbrella term that even encompasses Anthropocene fiction. Since it is popular in the novel genre it moves beyond the conventional novel forms as it lays more emphasis on the impact of environmental changes on humans rather than on the specific generic qualities.

So its main focus is on depicting the environmental conditions in the fictive world of the novel and ending with messages to take action against the environmental transformations before it is too late to act. So climate fiction bears the responsibility of conveying a message, to humankind, on their intricate role in the Anthropocene time. For this reason, climate fiction always holds a key position as a literary phenomenon to awaken the reader about the unrepresented underrepresented environmental realities of the twenty-first century.

The American writer Jim Laughter lives in Oklahoma. Retired from the U.S. Air Force as Master Sergeant, he had a distinguished service of thirteen years at overseas duty stations. He is a master in young adult fiction, crime, murder thriller, and children's books. He has co-authored young adult fiction *The Galactic Axia*. His writings are based on the premise: "Can humanity survive his own worst enemy? Himself...."

#### Polar City Red

Set in an imagined geographical space - Alaska - in the year 2075, the novel *Polar City Red* revolves around the family of Mr. Carson Moore (professor) his wife Lou Ellen (medical doctor), and their children Abby (12), Robbie and baby girl Lydia. Global warming forces them to migrate from their town in Minnesota to Alaska Territory about three hundred miles north. The family having travelled far and long had lost track of time. During their journey, they lose their nine-year-old son when he falls into a crevasse. For almost six months since the start of their journey in September, they had not seen the Sun - the typical long winter night in the Alaskan territory.

The family is initially outside the city where the scavengers or the outcasts (mostly criminals, wanderers, and scavengers) - from the city life. Concern for his family forced Carson Moore, to decide to go with Jerky - a hunter volunteer to guide them to a city out on the tundra. *Polar City Red* is one among six such cities at that time.

*Polar City Red* consists of a large central geodesic dome linked together with more than a dozen smaller domes and enclosed walkways made of transparent material. Jerky led the family toward the large dome in the centre of the city. Alexi Romanov the administrator of the city encourages Moore and his wife to work in *Polar City*. Carson as a schoolboy was aware of the existence of geodesic polar cities established as scientific outposts across the northernmost parts of the world. But his present condition forces him to seek his existence in one such dome. Inside the polar city, Carson and his family faced many problems to adjust the new settlement which was entirely a different experience. The scavengers who are been attacking the city, damage the storage bunker and killed their citizens. The lottery is a simple way we ensure the survival of the city. At first, they thought it was a simple refugee camp with people just trying to survive from climate change and global warming but *polar city red* showed every sign of being an advanced military presence. If Carson and Louella were going to invest the future of the family in *Polar City Red*, they had to know everything that could affect them whether positive or negative told them about the fleet of helicopters and their potential military power or about the salvage mission to the lower continued scavenger attack affect them when they entered to the polar city. The *Polar Red City* was not only a survival city or refugee camp. The people inside the city have got various responsibilities and charges.

Jim Laughter to create a sense of reality and make the text more contemporary incorporated Raven Rock, Virginia's Mount Weather project, and the tsunami that hit

Fukushima. However, the inclusion of Raven Rock is of more significance in the sense that the idea behind the project is to protect people in case of a natural calamity.

#### Period

Jim carefully crafts the timing of the text by way of a shipping label on a container that was salvaged by the crew from the southern hemisphere and brought to Polar City Red. The date mentioned on the shipping label on the container is March 12, 2060, and in the narrative, it is stated that the container was over fifteen years fixing the date of the events approximately in the year 2075.

#### Causes imagined

Jim traces the causes that might have caused climate change. Romanov the elder in the Polar Red City accuses the previous generations who have inhabited the Earth during the 20th century of burning billions of tonnes of fossil fuels resulting in climate change resulting in the catastrophe that they the future generations are encountering. He opines that it was just the pride that drove them to explore the moon or establish armaments in space. (45) Jim Laughter makes use of some of the conspiracy theories to project the cause of disasters. The Japanese tsunami that hit Fukushima in March 2011 was attributed to the tunnelling process, and many natural calamities were attributed to the boring of underground tunnels. The existence of permafrost and the release of methane gas that is of serious consequence was also the result of climate change which future generations might encounter.

#### Possible Scenarios

Jim Laughter in the text explores one possible scenario and mentions other systems that evolved parallelly throughout the world by stating that Polar City Red is one among the ten cities designed to experiment with the possibility of deep winter. There is a mention of Umka - a Russian experimental polar city in Siberia from where Romanov escaped. Romanov explains to the Moores that the city which was originally designed to be an experimental one with ten geodesic domes to research the effects of global warming on the melting of ice caps ironically turned into a post for survival with the result of global warming of the ice caps, rising sea levels, loss of salinity in the sea leading to decreased absorption of carbon-di-oxide.

The result of climate change has also contributed to the long winter where Carson Moore loses track of day and night hours reflecting the enormous darkness that continues unabated a gloomy forecast where he travels for almost six months with his family without daylight.

Romanov guides the understanding of Carson with scientific details regarding the emergence of methane and the release of Carbon-di-oxide and the need for constant monitoring of the signs.

Despite the harsh physical realities, Jim Laughter sketches a society that is subjecting itself to defined systems and rules. He thereby pins hope on humans who would evolve over some time.

#### Non-society

Contrasting the societies that evolved inside the geodesic domes, Jim Laughter imagines a clearly demarcated space for those within the confines of society as within the domes considered as a city and those outside the accepted norms of the city as scavengers - the scavs where anarchy rules. They consist of people who do not obey laws, just wanderers making trouble. The clear depiction of a space where there is no system or governance, sense

or order. It is not just contrasting but also a reflection of division of the humankind where there are people who would not obey an order. It is not just livability that is being depicted it also contrapuntally projects disorder and chaos outside, cold and conditions that are unlivable, against the security that is provided within the confines of the city contrasted to violence and death outside.

Despite the breaking up of civil society in its current form, due to the destruction of habitat caused by climate change, Jim is being very hopeful that humans would evolve a new order and semblance of society in the new space inside the domes. He provides hope for the sustenance of life, food, and shelter. Jim also imagines a ray of hope - light that was reflected by the clouds - contrasted with the gloomy dark space outside Polar City Red - created inside the glass domes.

#### Society

Laughter visualizes through Romanov a transformation from a 'frozen wilderness camp' to a 'thriving, viable community'. It was a collective effort of the people who made it and, in the process, did cost many lives. However, the key focus Laughter foregrounds are that people forged together for a common cause - to survive as a human. Romanov ensures that Polar City Red is a city, not a charity as 'Everyone must earn their keep.' Not be a burden on the city. People in the city work towards mutually beneficial work where everyone works and pay by labor. The society is so imagined in such a way that everyone is practically useful to the city and anyone who does not contribute to the society is considered to be stealing the scarce resource of the city.

There is a sense of order inside the city. It is maintained by defining common goals, collective living, and cooperation.

Though the infrastructure of the society is conditioned by the physical constraint of the dome, Laughter imagines a complicated design with extensive infrastructure with elevators, strong rooms, and shafts for the transport of men and materials incorporating complex structures inside the dome. The city and its infrastructure were built using salvaged materials and were reused by retrofitting them into houses for the people in the city.

The council meeting and a sense of discipline and rule in the Polar City Red are discernible. The use of a gavel to draw attention and an ensuing discussion on how to tackle an invasion from scavs is a case in point as to how they have developed a system for arriving at a consensus-based decision.

In the beginning, there was chaos, no rules, and people were not organized. With one woman for every twenty men, Romanov recollects that rape was rampant, and murder of the husband or a woman was common due to lust. So, the city developed a system and named it the Lottery system where a woman is allotted six men and she decide her interaction with each man. Women are given the upper hand in deciding the choice of men she has to be with. She is free to have multiple partners. But some people like Mr.Pearson who refused to participate in the system left the city with his wife and children and became scavengers. From Romanov's perception, women are seen as treasures rather than cattle for breeding. He talks about the informed consent of the women of Polar City Red where children were made known to the lottery system that is in existence in the city. Women are treasures to the men that love them says Romanov. They are provided a home and every available creature comfort, and the only thing asked of them is they love the men they have themselves chosen

to spend their lives with. ... The man listed that week is responsible for providing food and shelter and protection for the family. ... Sexual intercourse between man and woman is by mutual consent. Not forced, not obligated. ... If the lottery for man falls during a woman's menstrual cycle, then intercourse impossible. Must wait for the next lottery week.

Jim also ponders over the defense of the city with the help of equipment salvaged from the previous generations. The introduction of defence capabilities of the city with military helicopters like Chinooks and AH-1W Super Cobra attack helicopter gunships against possible attack by scavengers or from other cities is a well-thought-out strategy.

#### Demography

The narrator questions the lottery system as prostituting the women of the city and using them as child-bearing livestock and there are no reservations about the moral consequences of the system. Lou Ellen was emphatic when she said. "So, you take the young women of Polar City Red and you prostitute them to six men?" but for Romonov, who is the eldest of all inhabitants, it's a way of life there in the city.

Carson observes that the city had more men than women and therefore they had to follow a certain system to regulate the society and had founded the lottery system. The mention of the father does not arise in the medical records the list of men and women in the Polar City Red is very definitive: 688 men, 112 women, and 72 children. Romonov defends the lottery system by stating that the city is dying, and this is probably the only way to replenish the population.

#### Energy

Sensing and imagining that the future would be dark with less or no sunlight, the imagined future exists with artificial light created by low-heat fluorescent bulbs where natural sunlight is simulated. The self-sustaining space where there is a windmill for electricity projects a scenario in the future.

#### Food security

Food has not only become a scarce commodity but also a prized one as the Scavengers raid the domes for food. Jim presents one such scenario in the text where the scavengers raid the city with weapons of yesteryears to steal precious food, tools, and medical supplies. A city militia was organized to defend the city from the scavengers who are scurrying for their families' food and other materials. The instance of a scavenger getting killed for two cases of green beans reveals the pathetic living conditions outside and the importance of food held in the dome. Apart from what is grown in the city, also salvages materials from the southern hemisphere using helicopters regularly to supplement their resources. Jim calls them the 'salvage mission' - where the materials especially food and clothing were brought and stored in safe houses inside the city.

#### Agriculture

Even though the city is surrounded by snow and scanty sunlight, the food security of the city is ensured with plants that were grown in the simulated light and are closely monitored more systematically.

"Inside those domes' life begins by small seed tended by caretaker. When plant has sufficient strength, is given to farmer who transplants to soil he has already prepared for it. He cares for it, nurtures it, protects from elements until it produces fruit or vegetable. Farmer harvests crop and feeds his family with portion but brings rest to market where is traded for

other fruits, meats, and vegetables from other farmers and hunters. Everyone does their share. Everyone benefits."

#### Travel

Concerning the travel within the city which obviously is narrow in the closed space, electric conveyances are being used to move around. The use of lifts and motors inside the caverns is well-imagined. While travel outside the dome was challenging, inside the dome it was a smooth flow.

#### Pieces of equipment

The remains of all the old types of equipment like the laptop, G.E. Signa EXCITE 3T High-Field MRI, and scarce supply of medical supplies stacked inside a cave dug on the hillside are well protected and have a long shelf life. Some of this equipment was disassembled from the lower regions and were brought to the Polar Red City, re-assembled, and is being used. Jim demonstrates that the technology continues to support them and people are well aware of using the same even when removed from their original places.

#### Medical

Separate segments for medical emergencies were made available and the medicines and hospital equipment were kept in a very secure vault. The department was thrown open to LouEllen who was a medical professional. They also had a nurse who was a native Indian. A full-fledged medical hospital was inside the geodesic dome. Laughter provides instances of medical activity in the city where delivery was portrayed and when there was a skirmish, the wounded were treated.

#### Education

What Jim Laughter had imagined in a distant time had become a reality in the present world due to the Covid pandemic - it is remote learning - students having online classes. Science fiction has become a reality. He also mentions the lack of a library in the dome where people can access the books. However, books were salvaged to form a library inside the dome and they were in the process of establishing a library.

#### Conclusion

Jim Laughter should have had a vision in him about the possible future when the earth reacts to the invasive actions of humans on this earth. A fantastic imagination that has been floated by Jim is a creation of a plausible future. By just describing a lonely outpost in the Arctic wilderness, he creates a city inside a geodesic dome, a semblance of power, rule, discipline, defense, and society. He has projected a global future and has considered in all earnestness the temporalities, ecologies, and distinct spaces within the imagined future.

Laughter used references like the Fukushima nuclear disaster caused by the tsunami that is contemporary and events that have happened in the near past to illustrate the timeliness of events and the consequences of the events in the possible future. By creating a text close to reality, Jim Laughter incorporates instances from the current period and contemporary events that are likely to cause climate change or the effect of climate change and clings to the hope that humanity will adapt to changes even if it is debilitating.

Jim extensively uses the character of Romanov to explain the reasons for climate change and the new city inside the domes. By conceptualizing a possible future, the text takes a tour of a possible future scenario that was caused by human activity. The text apart from creating a picture of an ideal future also hinted at the unchanging attitude of people who

are exploiters. The text informs about salvaging which creates a disastrous picture as not everything could be recreated when destroyed. Except for a few machines and equipment, the future generation is not in a position to recreate the whole world.

The paucity of resources, both in terms of equipment and basic supplies like food, clothing, and materials for shelter drives the scavengers to raid the geodesic domes. The use of archaic weapons by the scavengers and the people inside the domes reveals the residual vestiges of weapons in the armory. The text is more of a warning of the possible scenario that humans are likely to face at the onset of climate change and the sense of unpredictability that one faces due to the impact of climate change.

It was curious to note that an Inuit woman Ahnah (meaning wise woman in Inuit) who uses broken English was introduced as a mid-wife or a birth attendant and the absence of people of African / Asian descent in the Polar City Red clearly depicts a Euro-centric futuristic world.

Romonov confides to Lou Ellen in the context of scavenger's raid for green beans, and their killing for the cans of beans, a stark reality that the "World is hard place to live now, ... sometimes ... smallest things matter." What was taken for granted is of immense value in the days to come. It was more a warning given by Laughter to the readers.

In Romanov, Laughter had devised an ideal administrator, who is more humane, just, and democratic which enables him to run the Polar City with ease while ensuring sufficient food, shelter, medicine, and human relationships even ensuring the next generation to procreate.

Even though innate human behaviors like being cutthroat and selfish had not waned even after the climate crisis-induced catastrophe, humankind will survive and Laughter is very positive that human's kindness to survive. However, with the birth of a baby "...in this wilderness ... Maybe there's hope for mankind yet."

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