

Grim news from Cape Grim alerts novelists not Turnbull Government

By Dan Bloom

10 October 2016



News from Cape Grim that CO₂ levels are at the point of no return may have scientists concerned and writers penning dystopian "cli-fi" works but the Turnbull Government is sticking to its non-policies on climate. [Dan Bloom](#) reports.

THERE'S BEEN SOME rather grim news in the global media recently and it's coming from a scientific CO₂ monitoring station in Tasmania, situated on Cape Grim.

But more on this later. First the good news, if it can be called that.

If there's one continent on Earth where the twin impacts of global warming and climate change are very much on the minds of the people who live there, it's Australia. It doesn't help that the Australian Government is lagging behind on legislating progressive climate change policies.

But there's something about living on a massive island nation so much of which is desert, which makes some poets and novelists think about climate change. And in recent years, a small army of "[cli-fi](#)" (climate change fiction) novelists have taken up the topic in a variety of ways, from Alice Robinson in [Anchor Point](#) to [James Bradley](#) in [Clade](#).

A new cli-fi novel by Jane Abbott titled [Watershed](#) sheds some light, too, on what Australia's future might look like in the new few centuries — if not sooner.

Meet the irrepressible Dan Bloom! Climate gadfly whose literary term to save the planet, 'Cli-Fi' has gone viral. <https://t.co/qLRaEvNllw>

— IndependentAustralia (@independentaus) [October 7, 2016](#)

The British-Australian writer [Nevil Shute](#) wrote the novel [On the Beach](#) in 1957 as a warning about the very real dangers of global nuclear war and a possible longterm "nuclear winter" putting an end to the human species. Certainly, there are also novelists from Sydney to Perth today thinking very hard about the very real dangers of global warming and its possible impacts on their beloved country.

The new literary genre of cli-fi has also become popular in Australian literary circles, with notable novelists like Bradley and Mireille Juchau ([The World Without Us](#)) leading the way.

Now the bad news.

There's been some grim alerts coming from Tasmania's Cape Grim scientific outpost recently, too. According to measurements that the monitoring station there has assembled, the parts per million (ppm) of overloaded carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere has reached a tipping point.

Said [The Guardian](#) newspaper in a recent [headline](#):

'World's carbon dioxide concentration teetering on the point of no return.'

This was followed by a subheadline which was chilling for those who follow such news:

'Future in which global concentration of CO₂ is permanently above 400 parts per million looms.'

David Etheridge, a CSIRO atmospheric scientist in Melbourne, was quoted in the article:

"We wouldn't have expected to reach the 400 ppm mark so early. Even if we stopped emitting [CO₂] now, we're committed to a lot of warming [in the future]."

It is real. World's carbon dioxide concentration teetering on the point of no return

<https://t.co/H3VKNyfSOT>

— Niko Waesche (@cafelido)
[May 12, 2016](#)

If the threat of nuclear war inspired Nevil Shute to pen *On The Beach* in the late 1950s, followed by the popular Hollywood movie of the same name in 1959, perhaps a Nevil Shute of climate change will arise somewhere in the world – perhaps Australia – to tell a similarly powerful story that might serve to wake up humanity.

Not only Australian novelists and playwrights are using the arts to tell stories about climate change, but academics are also focusing on the issues. In a recent online [op-ed](#) in [The Conversation](#), ANU doctoral student [Elizabeth Boulton](#) called for 60,000 artists and writers across the land to add their voices and performance pieces to the public discussion on stopping global warming before it's too late.

One reader, Chris Harries, left a telling comment after the piece appeared:

There is [a] small problem, identified by George Monbiot I think. All previous vexing environmental issues had a hard target identified as causing the problem — usually a naughty corporation or a government. Every way we look at climate change we

see that the big problem is us.

There are, of course, the coal corporations, but climate change is caused by a huge myriad of factors, all of them pointing back to the load that industrial human society imposes on planet Earth. Still, I'm sure that apart from protest singing and such there's plenty of scope for [the arts] to engage in expressing the spiritualism behind nature connection and with the many creative ways that people all over the planet are coming to terms with the human predicament.

It's time for a new age of Enlightenment: why climate change needs 60,000 artists to tell its story
<https://t.co/nag07FXYJ>
[P](#)

— ANUgreen
(@ANU_ANUgreen)
[August 10, 2016](#)

In related literary news from Australia, Merlinda Bobis was [awarded](#) the Christina Stead [Prize](#) for Fiction in the 2016 NSW Premier's Literary Awards for her novel [Locust Girl: A Love Song](#).

The Philippines-born Bobis, who lives in Canberra, came to Australia as a student 25 years ago and is the author of novels, stories, poetry and radio dramas in

English, Filipino and her native language of Bikol. Her prize-winning novel, she [told](#) reporters, grew out of a concern for the future of both her countries.

In announcing the prize, the judges said of her book:

Bobis' story sounds loudly not only in today's Australia, but also throughout an environmentally and politically disrupted world where repression and violence are rife, and where huge numbers of the otherwise lost leave their homes to undertake dangerous journeys in the search for life. There were many fine and stylistic ally-accomplished works among this year's entries, but the distinctiveness, sweep and visual power of this short novel set it apart.

Congratulations to Merlinda Bobis for winning the Christina Stead prize for her novel *Locust Girl*. A must for...
<https://t.co/BX>

[U4sXYmhQ](#)

— Belén
Martín Lucas (
[@bmartinlucas](#)
) [May 26, 2016](#)

For novelist
[Jane Abbott](#) in
Melbourne,
writing
Watershed
Watershed was an
act of faith. Set
in a post-
apocalyptic wo
rld – probably
in Australia,
but certainly so
mewhere in the
southern hemis
phere – many
years after the
last rains have
fallen, her cli-fi
has caused
waves in the
nation’s literary
world.

In explaining
how her novel
came to be,
Abbott told the
Sydney
Morning
Herald:

*I have a countr
y property in
Victoria, just a
small place,
and water has
become
increasingly an
issue up there.*

Again this year we aren’t getting any rain. I’ve developed this habit of watching the rainfall on the Bureau of Meteorology website and I’ve been noticing over the years that the rain seems to be falling more and more over the water than land.

I incorporated that idea and thought, "If it stops raining on the land what would happen? What would be the worst thing that could possibly happen?"

Watershed
Watershed
proposes a
future climate
change
scenario that
even the most
pessimistic
climatologist
might hesitate
to predict. The
oceans haven’t
just risen,
they’ve
inundated,
drowning the
old world
beneath ocean
waves. You
might say it’s a
Mad Max-
esque literary
thriller.

Oh yes, *Mad
Max*, the movie
franchise from
savvy film
director
George Miller.
If any one
movie
franchise has
put Australia
on the map of
world cinema,

it's the *Mad Max* series.

And with [Mad Max: Fury Road](#) winning over even more fans this decade, the next instalment in the franchise promises to tell us even more about the future world we might all face, in all corners of the world.

Australia, in both literature and cinema, is leading the way.

[Dan Bloom](#) is a **freelance writer who edits the [Cli-Fi Report](#). You can follow Dan Bloom**

[@do_you_cli_fi](#).

Turnbul
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dysfunc
tional
politics:
Foolish
and
deadly
for
climate
<https://t>

[.co/PkX
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— Mich
elle Pini
(@vmp
9)
[Septem
ber 14,
2016](#)

