

Future world fiction

JODIE LEA MARTIRE EXPLORES THE NEW WAVE OF LITERATURE THAT ENCOMPASSES CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE FUTURE OF THE PLANET.

Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behaviour*, published in 2012, was one of a new breed of fiction: climate-change literature where authors in some way weave the predicted future of the planet into their stories.

In Kingsolver's 14th novel, she explores the changing weather systems in Appalachia (US) and their effects on local communities. Facing an uncommonly warm winter with torrential rains, a small community in Tennessee finds itself host to a swarm of monarch butterflies which normally roost in Michoacán, Mexico. Although a little too long and didactic to be entirely pleasurable, Kingsolver does well in addressing questions of class and poverty and how climate change affects people on a very personal level.

Last year there were at least three novels in the field. Sydneysider James Bradley's *Clade*, set primarily in Australia, opens in the near future and looks about 60 years into the futures of Adam, Ellie and their family. It canvasses both climate-related tragedies and societal decay (flooding, bee illnesses, pandemics, fires) as well as responses in technology and social structure (solar gliders, holograms of deceased loved ones). Hope comes in the form of new family relations and slightly desperate interstellar connections. Overall, an interesting exploration of possible futures and the most satisfying of the novels reviewed here.

Another Australian contribution is Mireille Juchau's *The World Without Us*. Set in the fictional town of Bidgalong, in a washed-out but recognisable Northern Rivers of New South Wales, it is the near future and farmlands are pocked by coal-seam gas mines. Schoolteacher Jim stumbles onto the mysteries and sorrows within the family of a local woman (Evangeline), and learns the history and after-effects of a now-defunct commune The Hive. Evangeline's husband, Stefan, one of the region's many beekeepers, struggles to maintain the integrity of his commercial hives. Although catastrophic flooding and bee extinction are explored, neither is dealt with

in realistic terms given climate-change predictions (the bee problem is solved much too handily). It is a novel that offers more in its explorations of grief than its thoughts on the future. It won the 2016 Victorian Premier's Literary Award for fiction.

And finally, Claire Vaye Watkins' first novel, *Gold Fame Citrus*. More aggressively dystopian than the works above, it owes much to the solitary grit of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and even the *Mad Max* films. Set about 10 to 20 years in the future, Luz and Ray are among those stranded in leached-dry California, hemmed in by the Dune Sea which has swallowed the US South West. Taking their stolen toddler Ig and fleeing food rations, the black market and streetside anarchy, they seek the water diviner in the Dune Sea – and find conspiracy and control. Bleakly brilliant at moments, this novel ultimately promises survival by escape, in contrast to the other novels' emphasis on community.

While this new genre provides stark perspectives on the effects of climate change in our world, of greater import will be its examples of how communities adapt and respond in creating real possibilities for our future. A genre to be followed with interest. **OG**

