****Semester One Genre Study – Climate Fiction****

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| **Conventions of the genre ‘climate fiction’ – these are generalised conventions that we often see in the climate fiction genre.** | **In what way are the two short stories typical of the climate fiction genre for setting, plot, characters, themes, motifs? Give specific quotes or examples and explain them.** |
| **Setting – when/where**   * **Near-future: often assuming that the turning point for stopping climate change has already been passed** * **Cities enduring destruction from extreme weather** * **Islands disappearing** | **SSL:**  **“poor drowned Liverpool” – Liverpool has been flooded, one important aspect of setting of climate disaster in the short story of SSL is flooding.**  **“sinkhole that had opened up in their living room”**  **“floodwater… city swamps, slushing around her ankles.” – The setting is a flooded apartment. A sinkhole has opened up in their living room and is no longer habitable. “their flat was inhabitable” Represents the idea that climate disaster has changed the places we live and reduced the liveable land.**  **“freak weather conditions”**  **“Little England is shrinking. The tides creeping in everyday. The ground water is surging up from below. This country’s just a lifeboat now”**   * **Near Future –the setting in the short story projects our current climate crisis into an imagined future where characters struggle to survive. This near future setting is typical of climate fiction. The setting of a GMH imagines the solution to climate disaster is to ‘hibernate’ and repair the world. “closed for maintenance”**   **“Better that they’d been young when the sun was still shining and the streets were still dry.” This quote is an example of the effect of the climate disaster on their life shown through setting. Their world went from sunny, green and happy, to cold, wet and miserable. Their setting had been largely altered from the way it used to be.**  **HCTSTS:**  **Destroyed environment, the ocean is acidic, humans can’t swim in it anymore and there is no life in it anymore. “Fishing. It had been years since he’d see anyone catch anything. Dead seas.”**  **;the smell of death…they’d turned the oceans from a font of life to an acidic crypt’**  **“We used to ride those waves, Will.” ‘far from how he remembered it’ The use of past tense explains the change in setting, comparing the ocean to how he remembers it in his youth, and how the water used to be clean and swimmable, though now they are toxic and acidic; a large change had occurred.**  **“The aromas hit him like a fist, poised there over five decades.” In HCTSTS, the acidic, rising ocean has caused loss of all marine life, flora and fauna, causing scarcity of food for coastal cities much like the Outer Banks on the north east coast of the US.**   * **Water scarcity and drought inland are due to large bushfires.** * **No power or electricity because of the destructive hurricanes. “The electricity was off again, so the damn cottage would be 100 degrees anyway.”**   **‘the whole place was a ghost town. A ghost coast.’ – setting focuses on the impact of climate disaster on human environments such as cities. Here’ people have abandoned cities as unliveable.** |
| **Plot – conflicts, pacing, resolutions**   * **Disastrous climactic event and dystopian aftermath** * **Loss of home, place** * **Anthropogenic climate change** * **Accelerated pacing punctuated by crisis** | **The characters are usually struggling against the current climate disaster and so a majority of the plot is taken up by the protagonist trying to overcome challenges thrown at them by the climate disaster.**  **In HCTSTS, there are a lot of flashbacks or talk of past memories before the climate disaster which helps paint a clearer picture of the world before the disaster. This is similar to Shelly’s memories of life pre-climate disaster in SSL.**  **HCTSTS is fast paced, set over a few hours with multiple conflicts. Person vs person conflict with the dangerous gangs who kill anyone ‘the new apex predator’, person vs nature conflict with the fast-rising toxic ocean threatening to drown Grandpa and Will ‘the water was moving in fast now…the aroma of death and dying’, internal conflict with Grandpa aware that he is dying and will be leaving Will alone to face a dangerous world ‘he slumped on the bench aware it was too late’.**  **SSL survival in the face of global climate disaster and fighting with other people to survive “There were three main ways an umbrella could save your life….use it in combat…using it as a raft…using her umbrella as a shield…straight out ahead of her…to brave the outside”**  **“they’d come to find their own dirty lungful of breathing space in the already bloated population of Manchester”. This indicates the generic convention of plot has a micro focus on the effects of climate disaster where people can no longer live in their home and populations are forced to condense in the remaining viable land, creating further issues of overpopulation and fighting for scarce resources.** |
| **Characters**   * **Intergenerational responsibility** * **Base human nature** * **Climate refugees, moving place and migration** * **Originally privileging perspectives of scientists, technologists, engineers but this has changed as the genre evolved to focus more on ordinary individuals** | **Both orient around family – privilege the perspectives of ordinary people and their experience in a near future climate disaster. Humanises the disasters facing a near-future society.**  ****SSL****  **“Flea has learned to live with a lot of things since the superstorms had first brought her family to this city two years ago…So they’d come to find their own dirty lungful of breathing space in the already bloated population of Manchester.”**   * **This quote from SSL shows how Flea and her family became climate refugees and had to leave their country.**   **-Flea: Flea is headstrong, determined and hopeful for a better future, holding onto values of family and companionship over that of individualism, “Somebody still had to fend for the family. One of them still needed to brave the outside.” Her perspective highlights the moral questionability of the actions needed to survive, such as with the guilt she feels when she takes the umbrella from the old woman on the floor above them, “Flea winced. She would have felt a whole lot better if she had nicked the umbrella from one of the big chain stores.”**  **“…that’d been looming over Flea’s entire existence” “Shell wasn’t old but she’d lived long enough to remember the sunshine. Long enough to miss it like hell and lose hope that is was every coming back”**   * **Compares the life experiences of Shell and Flea. Flea, being a part of the younger generation, is an example of someone who was born into the climate disaster and isn’t old enough to remember a time before that. Shell, however, is a part of the generation who is old enough to remember times before the climate distaste, and they represent the loss of hope of life returning back to normality.**   **“Don’t give up, Shell. Not now. Please”**   * **In SSL, Flea tries persistently to save her mother from her imminent demise of being stuck inside the sinkhole. Her base human nature is present, and she doesn’t consider leaving her mother behind, no matter the cost and trouble of having her along. Flea’s brother Wes, however, abandons his mother for the betterment of himself, as he believed that she would only “slow him down”.**   **-Shelly: Shelly is a depressive individual who has lost all hope for a better future, “She’d lived long enough to remember the sunshine. Long enough to miss it like hell and lose hope that it was ever coming back.” As she is unable to cope with the state of the outside world, she turns to alcoholism to cope, “…Shell started washing her headache pills down with cheap gin, which sunk her faster than any flood.” This individual struggle to live with the climate disaster represents the greater erosion of society and its psychological and physical inability to continue fighting against the heightened forces of nature.**  ****HCTSTS****  The Climate Fiction Genre tends to have representations of many generations. This is seen in the relationship between Grandpa and Will.  *“Much later he’d come here with his own child. At least for a while.” “We used to ride those waves Will” … “Me and your great uncle, Hank” “The boy was staring out at the surf, desire filling his eyes just like Tim used to. They looked so much alike.” “The little boy cast his eyes downward but said nothing. A generation used to disappoint, the old man thought.”*  Within ‘How Close to Savage the Soul’, written in limited third person point of view, highlighting the perspective of Grandpa, he tends to reflect on his past memories with his son Tim, and shares them with his grandson Will. This three-generation relationship highlights the different perspectives, knowledge and experiences surrounding their deteriorating world, increasingly riddled with violence, climate disaster and scarcity.  **The characters are threatened by either the violent gangs in the streets, the climate disasters that have made the environment unsafe, or both. The older character is killed representing the end of the world that existed before climate disasters and the younger character is left to fight for their own survival. HCSS quotes “pay attention to the warning signs” “he heard a now-familiar cacophony- the mindless rumbling of the new apex predator” “he’d seen things no six-year-old should see” “the water circling around their feet” “The water was moving in fast now… he remembered his son.”**  **A sad or regretful older generation**  **HCTSTS – “It wasn’t going to be okay. Ever. That world was gone, now.” “We didn’t know”. But he knew it was a lie….Too late for corrections.”**  **A younger generation left to deal with the destruction of environment and collapse of society**  **“A generation used to disappointment”**  **“But the boy knew. He’d seen things no six-year-old should see…they killed his father.”**  **Secondary characters represent the collapse of society and order including looting and survival of the fittest (gangs, people not caring for others etc)**  **HCTSTS - “Even the gangs stayed off the Outer Banks these days. The place had been picked clean for a decade, now;” “mindless rumblings of the new apex predator”, “the sound of a malevolent hoard of bees” “just like a wolf pack”**  **SSL – all the stores were looted, Wes represents this individualism that is shown as a result of collapsing social norms “Wes hadn’t helped their mum because he knew she’d only slow him down.”**  **Characters represent the need to have a will to survive and persevere in their situations.**  **Flea is a survival driven person who wants to improve others and help them survive even if they have lost all hope. This is a stereotypical climate fiction character as she has a will to survive and perseveres in a time that she shouldn’t be able to survive.**  **Flea feels responsible for the survival of not only herself but also her family. “Somebody still had to fend for her family. One of them still needed to brave the outside.” The grandpa feels responsible also but recognises that his time has come, and it is now too late.**  **HCTSTS adopts a far more pessimistic tone with the resolution for both main characters. Grandpa dies with all his regret. Will is left alone, contemplating joining the violent gangs. This represents a bleak vision of the future of humanity if such a climate disaster were to occur.**  **Characters represent the trauma of climate disaster and how people may become secondary victims if they are unable to adapt, rebuild, endure and survive.**  **The characters are deeply psychologically impacted by the trauma of climate disaster and in Will’s case, the murder of his father. In SSL, Shell’s individual internal despair can be seen when she is described as, “A lonely little spider of a woman flushed down the earth’s toilet bowl.” Similarly, in HCTSTS, “The cocoon of hopeless,” Will has experienced PTSD after seeing his father killed and he used to “retreat into that hollow-eyed catatonic silence”.** |
| **Themes (purpose)**   * **Individuals impacted by climate change** * **Communities and societies reshaped by climate change** * **Moral responsibility when under threat** * **Rebuilding, adaptation, survival and endurance rather than prevention** * **Can humanity respond to and solve climate change?** | **Survival -**  **SSL - “she’d just have to get her mum out of the sinkhole herself” – Flea has an attitude of motivation and optimism towards thriving and living in the new, destroyed world, and so places lots of value on survival. She has to survive superstorms, possible attack and living in a flooded world when everyone else is underground hibernating.**  **“the skinny trunk… was just another thing the wheelers had learned to live with. They could hang their washing up to dry on it. they could sharpen knives on its bark.” – shows the hopelessness and lack of power of the human generation once a situation is out of their hands. Also shows human resilience and ability to adapt to some situations in order to survive.**  **In SSL survival is about finding a viable place to live, fighting for scarce resources, being able to defend yourself – the only other option is hibernation.**  **SSL focuses on one character, Flea, and so is typical of cli-fi in it’s narrow, microscopic exploration of how climate disaster may impact individuals. But at the same time it paints a picture of a collapsed society with a background of looting, global hibernation and characters who value self over community.**  **HCTSTS explores a much bleaker picture of survival – in that survival isn’t really possible at all. Will’s trauma and gradual loss of identity is build through the progression of the narrative until Will contemplates joining a violent gang. Grandpa dies. One of the gang members shoots another gang member. Will’s father has been killed sometime before the narrative begins.**  **Collapse of society –**  **“during the spate of riots and looting that had broken out” – representative of the selfishness of the human race – as soon as a life threatening disaster occurs, there is no more ‘community’, sense of family or ‘connection’. It is every man for themselves.**  **Hopelessness –**  **Comparison of attitudes towards new way of life with older and younger generations –**  **“where can we go now? There’s no shelter left in this country…this country’s just a lifeboat” – Shelly’s attitude towards the new changing world,**  **“Tell him how it goes, disappearing more quickly with each year?... how he could feel that last inexorable tug on him even now?”**  **Destruction of the environment –**  **Both stories showcase massive damage done to the environment.**   * ****In times of chaos the worst of human kind shows**** * ****SSL:** “medical cabinets all emptied, the batteries pinched out of every appliance”, people act selfishly instead of working together to survive** * ****HCTSTS:** “Anything canned was gone. Freezers and refrigerators were smashed in, their shelves empty.” Worst of man-kind shows through times of disaster, unknown and unpredictable events** * ****Time runs out and without quick action future disaster will occur**** * **HCTSTS “So much time, then. Time for life. Time for mistakes. Time for corrections. Time to right wrongs.” After the first climate change disaster they had time to be prepared, to change and act, they had the knowledge but didn’t act therefore a repeat of the past, gangs emerge and live in an uninhabitable place** |
| **Language features: Symbols, metaphors, other language features associated with**   * **pessimism, fear or anxiety** * **survival and scavenging** * **water – floods, drought** * **food – famine, cannibalism, hoarding** * **family – birth, parenthood** * **science – sometimes posthuman modifications to the body** * **writing as abandoned documents, archive, artefact of human species, lost civilization** * **death, judgement, destiny of the soul** | **SSL – yes, it uses typical motifs of survival and pessimism, along with language features that create a flooded landscape and sense of fear.**   * **Umbrella is symbolic of survival in that it enables Flea to protect herself from people and the superstorms. “There were three main ways an umbrella could save your life.”** * **The sinkhole is symbolic of hopelessness and pessimism in the way Shell chooses to remain stuck and not get out because she has given up hope “yawning crater…she peered down into the sinkhole’s shadows, feeling its mouth gaping to swallow her whole.” Personification of sinkhole shows the out of control power of nature after climate disaster** * **“wary” “cautious” “afraid” “a young Scouse girl to survive” – the emotive language focuses on the fear Flea experiences in all the danger she faces from the environment and from other people** * **“city swamps sloshing around”: Sibilance (repetition of s or sh sounds) mimics the sound of water which immerses the reader in this flooded landscape.** * **Zoomorphism “a lonely little spider of a woman flushed down the earth’s toilet bowl” “Before the toxic waste buried down there brings you out in scales” “it looked like her dirty blonde hair was slowly turning to seaweed” “use it to fish her mother out” “you’re just a silly mare that’s stuck at the bottom of a hole” “feeding their mum like a baby bird” This de-evolution creates the idea that possible the time of human species dominance may be at an end. It suggests that nature is more powerful than humankind and that, unless we adapt and change, we may not be able to overcome climate disaster.**   **HCTSTS – yes, uses motifs to explore themes of pessimism and death and language features highlighting the collapse of society after climate disaster**   * **Motif of time: the narrative is structured around the motif of time – thinking there would be time, time running out, having no time left. “So much time, then…But it goes. It goes…like the last suck of water down a drain…There had been time back then…Time enough to believe we’d learn…Time. He could feel it ebb…too late. Too late” The rising acidic tide is symbolic of time running out “pointed at the water circling around their feet” “he could feel it ebb even as the tide reached his ankles…the water was moving in fast now”. The motif of time explores the way some in our current society believe we can move slowly on climate issues. This story shows time goes by more quickly then we think and maybe the tipping point has already past. It emphasises the imperative of immediate action on climate issues.** * **Motif of death: “another odor…-fetid and coppery – the smell of death…Dead seas…they’d turned the oceans from a font of life to an acidic crypt”. This bleak motif imagines the destruction of people along with the destruction of the environment. It shows that our futures are inextricably linked and for our own survival, we need to act on climate change before we have no future at all.** * **Figurative language describing the collapse of society and order, loss of moral conscience: “mindless rumbling of the new apex predator…the gangs” (metaphor) “how thin a veneer civilisation was” (metaphor) “the sound of a malevolent hoard of bees” (metaphor) “just like a wolf pack” (simile) and allusion to novels that explore the collapse of society “a real-world Lord of the Flies” “Brave New World”** |