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# Winds of Change: Short Stories About Our Climate edited by Mary Woodbury

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**Review of *Winds of Change: Short Stories About Our Climate***

***Winds of Change: Short Stories About Our Climate* edited by MARY WOODBURY**

Moon Willow Press, 2015 \$14.95

Reviewed by **VERONIKA KRATZ**

*Winds of Change* is a book that asks what our relationship to this planet is, what we know, and what we are doing about it. In asking about our views and especially our actions towards the environment and sustainability, the book begins with what can be on the surface a very negative association. But this isn't a collection meant to engender only guilt in its readership for not doing enough to help. Instead, the varied perspectives that it contains on the issue are meant to encourage questioning and inspiration. The creation of the book itself gestures to the power of people to act on their knowledge of climate change as its authors have—moving towards communication and investigation of the topic through the fiction contained in these pages.

The collection is the product of a short story contest held by *eco-fiction.com* in 2014. Robert Sassor's "First Light" opens the anthology as the winning entry, followed by a number of honourable mentions and other stories from the event. It is unique in its focus on fiction writers, rather than poetry in the vein of 100 Thousand Poets for Change, making it a colourful addition to the growing genre of climate-change fiction.

Sassor's story begins the collection with a subtle depth that overruns its entirety. "First Light" gestures quite beautifully and sadly to the personal relationships that we all have with the

world, the unique points of view that shape us as individuals, and which will be lost or changed as environmental degradation continues. "First Light," in other words, enacts in small scale the focus of the book as an investigation, a discussion, and a memory which delves into these questions in full force.

The collection focuses on issues of sustainability with emphasis on what people actually *do*, and as a result, the forms of what climate action can and could look like are wonderfully varied. This encapsulates one of the great strengths of climate fiction as a genre that inspires a multitude of writing modes, from dystopic science fiction to tales of present loss and struggle.

Some stories are less successful at avoiding the pitfalls of a didactic environmental cautionary tale. Among these I would mention Paul Collin's story, which takes on the interesting format of an imagined presidential address, but falls flat and vague in its delivery of America's many environmental shortcomings. Aside from a few creative, future climate historical events, these are things that we know.

M.E. Cooper's "Everlast" follows in a similar vein with an interesting format that moves between families who are all facing the environmental crisis in differing situations as climate refugees or industry workers, but the story engages less with questions of sustainability than it does with the troubling and familiar tale of fictional apocalyptic destruction. This book is not just about solidifying the sense of doom that so often pervades in forays into the future of our climate; these tales are useful, but so too are the stories whose purpose asks us questions and considers new perspectives.

Rachel May takes the fight for sustainable action to a place as unlikely as it is needed: consumerist suburbia. Here, amongst freshly mown lawns and overstocked pantries, “The Audit” tells a story that we all need to hear—one of actual change. In her story, the everyday gas-guzzling family of four is faced with a new government program for climate action, and it works, unexpectedly and unconventionally. The proud symbol of order and control that was once the green lawn becomes, by the end of the story, just another restriction keeping them from installing a chicken coop.

The change in perspective for the suburbanites in May’s story joins other works in the collection that present a message of hope and in some cases, optimism. This idea of what has been called “eco-optimism” by Rebecca Tuhus-Dubrow follows a growing mindset that human impact on the environment could be a positive thing. It comes as something of a reaction to the pessimistic nature of traditional environmentalism which requires the misdoings of humanity in order to function.

May’s story, along with several others, presents a tale of positive environmental change. Even so, “The Audit” still relies on a specific relationship between humans and the environment that focuses on the need to limit impact (because all human impact is harmful). Rebecca Tuhus-Dubrow’s conception of an optimistic environmentalism asks us to question whether our relationship and effect on the environment can be changed, rather than strictly lessened. It’s an attractive idea that places agency in our hands and takes into account the fact that humanity can’t negate all impact on the biosphere that it is part of and living within. It is a different kind of

conception and a new viewpoint that the contributors of *Winds of Change* excel at exploring.

For example, Charlene D’Avanzo’s work, “Hot Clams,” explores the idea of working with environmental change rather than strictly working to negate any human change on the environment. It is also one of a few stories that present a particularly harrowing vision of the struggle between individual sustainability and individual difference. Karen is a researcher fighting the battle of New England’s newly-warmed seas by genetically engineering clams that can grow in the warmer water. The story explores one woman’s attempt to save the livelihood of her childhood friend, a struggling New England fisherman, and the curious way in which this doesn’t align with the environmental ethics of others.

Everyone has a different way of relating to the world, and these ideas, as with our ideals, don’t always match up. *Winds of Change* presents just a handful of ways that authors are exploring sustainability, and works like “Hot Clams” challenge the reader to see how all of these perspectives are connected. From the geneticists working in their New England labs to the philosophical questioning of street artists in Victoria, this anthology presents the change that is happening everywhere. As readers of the book we have the power to bring these varied stories together as differing viewpoints on the same question of climate change—and as people we must remember we have that connecting power as well.

### Works Cited

Tuhus-Dubrow, Rebecca. “The Eco Optimists.” *Dissent* 62.1 (2015): 15-20. Web.

**VERONIKA KRATZ** is currently completing her MA in English Literature at Carleton University. Her research focuses on the early use of ecology in science fiction from the 1950s, as well as how we create and interact with fictional ecosystems.