



PROJECT MUSE®

---

The End of the World as We Know It: Four Novels of Climate Change

Stephanie Carpenter

The Missouri Review, Volume 41, Number 3, 2018, pp. 170-183 (Review)

Published by University of Missouri

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mis.2018.0039>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/706074>

# The End of the World as We Know It: Four Novels of Climate Change

Stephanie Carpenter

*Clade* by James Bradley. Titan Books, 2015, 297 pp., \$14.95 (paper).

*Beast* by Paul Kingsnorth. Graywolf Press, 2016, 164 pp., \$16 (paper).

*The Sunlight Pilgrims* by Jenni Fagan. Hogarth, 2016, 272 pp., \$16 (paper).

*Future Home of the Living God* by Louise Erdrich. HarperCollins, 2017, 267 pp., \$28.99 (hardcover).

In his 2016 book-length essay, “The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable,” Amitav Ghosh writes about the gradual erosion of humanity’s respect for nature’s power. He suggests,

human beings were generally catastrophists at heart until their instinctive awareness of the earth’s unpredictability was gradually supplanted by a belief in uniformitarianism—a regime of ideas that was supported by scientific theories . . . and also by a range of governmental practices that were informed by statistics and probability.

Assuring ourselves that change happens slowly and predictably, we grew increasingly confident over the past four centuries in our mastery of the nonhuman environment, lapsing into a “complacency that was almost madness.” Ghosh cites as an example the fact that we began building metropolises in flood zones.

---

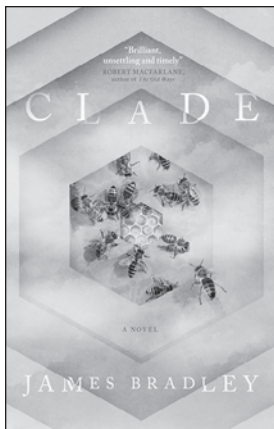
Now, as this and other technological assertions falter in the face of “unprecedented” weather events, Ghosh says, “we recognize something we had turned away from: that is to say, the presence and proximity of nonhuman interlocutors.” Unforeseen meteorological, geological, and animal behaviors remind us that we are not the only active agents on this planet. Such forces constitute what Ghosh calls an “environmental uncanny”: “the mysterious work of our own hands returning to haunt us in unthinkable shapes and forms.”

The four novels considered here explore the uncanniness, the familiar strangeness, in human beings’ relationships to unstable natural environments. The novels have in common moments of wonder, as characters enmeshed in unfolding crises of the near future encounter never-before-seen phenomena, the results of natural systems tampered with and distorted by humans—or, in the case of *Beast*, as they reacquaint themselves with the mystery of the natural world. Families in these books tend to be small and scattered; the only child is prevalent here. The fact that none of these books’ characters reproduce at the replacement rate gives the impression that humans are ceding ground. In the end times of the Anthropocene, these narratives depict the nonhuman environment not as inert victim but as transforming force, which humans can no longer make the mistake of pretending to control.

James Bradley’s *Clade* takes place primarily around the author’s own home of Sydney, Australia, in the late twenty-first century. The story unfolds chronologically but with years or a decade in between chapters and with frequent shifts in focal characters and narrative mode, varying from third-person limited to the unvarnished first person of a teenager’s

journal. This episodic structure allows Bradley to emphasize escalating climatic and technological changes, along with characters’ reactions to these changes—which are, essentially, its plot.

The book’s many characters are linked through Adam Leith, a climate scientist. Adam is the focal character of the first, second, and



Clade

James Bradley. Titan Books, 2015, 297 pp.,  
\$14.95 (paper)

---

fifth chapters, and, as his biblical name suggests, a kind of diminished latter-day patriarch. Adam's only marriage breaks up, he has just two direct descendants (his estranged daughter, Summer, and her son, Noah), and his familial ties to several other characters are honorary rather than biological. But Adam's projects monitoring Antarctic ice and the South Asian monsoon connect him closely to climate change, and he's the only character at the center of multiple chapters. The novel ends with news of *his* end—somewhere offstage, a decade or so after his grandson, Noah, has reached maturity in his own career as an astronomer.

The environmental conflicts of *Clade* are projections of our own: the planet is warming, leading to loss of the polar ice caps, intensification of tropical storms (one of which floods England), and displacement of millions of people from coastal and low-lying regions. Young children die of cancer or suffer from acute asthma. Bees, having been saved in the early twenty-first century, are imperiled again. Whereas the previous die-off was linked to pesticide, this collapse seems to have multiple entwining causes. Learning of the bees' problem, Ellie, a visual artist and Adam's ex-wife, considers Adam's prediction that if the planet's ecosystems reach the point of collapse, it could lead to a chain reaction that would "trigger a similar collapse in the human population."

Fascinated and sympathetic, Ellie takes the bees as a subject for a virtual installation, combining magnified 3-D models of bees with archival videos of healthy swarms in motion. Looking intently at something small, she renders it spectacular. But later in the novel, we learn the fate of the species. In the midst of a global pandemic, sixteen-year-old Lijuan, who serves as a caretaker for Noah (they are the same age, but Noah is autistic), catalogs things lost and saved. Lost: "Birds, Bananas, Tigers, Frogs, Bees, Coffee, Polar Bears, Coral"; saved: "Seeds, Elephants, Dolphins, Each Other." Lijuan is able to experience some of these missing things through her lenses, personal computing devices that can be used to project simulations (or to explore artworks such as Ellie's). Lijuan can have sensory experiences of the natural world as it once was, but its biological diversity has diminished.

"Each Other," the last item in Lijuan's "saved" list seems especially optimistic; Lijuan is making these lists in her journal while sheltering with Noah and Adam in the bush. They're able to see Sydney looted and burning on the distant horizon as their disease-ravaged society rapidly unravels. But Lijuan and all the novel's other major characters survive

---

the Acute Viral Respiratory Syndrome (AVRS) pandemic that kills millions globally.

The details of *how* they survive this highly contagious disease and the social chaos around it are lost in the chronological gap between one chapter and the next; Bradley shows us the characters in crisis but doesn't depict their way out. Structurally, the novel isn't interested in climactic scenes. Nor is it, on a plot level, concerned with interrogating the privileges that must have facilitated the various characters' survival. Our clearest glimpses of the suffering during and after the pandemic come instead through the perspective of Dylan, an unrelated character introduced in the eighth chapter, whose mother died of AVRS and who now produces simulated versions of deceased loved ones for a company called Semblance. Dylan's profession gives us an idea of the morally queasy industries growing out of devastating loss.

A clade is "a taxonomic group of organisms classified on the basis of homologous features traced to a common ancestor"; primates are one example. While the characters at the center of *Clade* would more aptly be described as a family, later chapters suggest who or what might inhabit the earth in the distant future. Noah's lab picks up a regular, repeating signal from deep in the galaxy—the first such message ever detected. Considering this, Noah muses:

The ice is almost gone, but while it may take millions of years, there is little doubt that one day it will return, creeping back to cover the land, and the world will change once more. . . . Perhaps there will still be humans then, men and women as different from him as he is from those ancient people on the plains of Africa; perhaps some of them will have spread outward, to the stars, borne there in great ships just as boats bore the first humans across Earth's oceans.

The connections contemplated here stretch further than a mere family's, yet Noah imagines an intimate and innate connection with the future members of his hominoid clade: "they will carry within them the memory of this time, this past, like a stone borne in the mouth, just as he bears the memory of those ancient travelers in him."

This assertion speaks to the most intriguing aspect of *Clade*: The book presents disaster after disaster on different scales—from divorce to flood to global pandemic—and after sketching out the agonies of each problem, its action jumps ahead, a decade maybe, subverting our

---

readerly attachment to the characters and showing how conflicts are not resolved; they just lose precedence to new problems.

The book's final focal character, Izzie, is a teenager at a solstice party, floating over the Floodline, "a watery graveyard of partly submerged streets and buildings, sprawling half a kilometer inland along much of [Sydney's] fringe." Above these ruins, she enjoys the spectacle of bioluminescent "Gengineered" fish in the water and the thrill of interfacing with elaborate virtual party decorations and music. Her joy is interrupted by a call from her mother, Lijuan, conveying the news of Adam's death. Izzie contextualizes this against larger losses: "Shanghai and Venice, Bangladesh, all those millions of lives." Izzie's not oblivious to any of that, as she considers "the Shimmer" overhead—an inexplicable aurora that scientists think might herald a flipping of the poles. Even so, Izzie feels, "this is not an end but a beginning. / It is always a beginning." The episodic structure of the book reinforces this, suggesting that life goes on even after cataclysmic loss—refusing, in fact, to really grapple with the losses it chronicles. There is no resolution, only technologically enabled human adaptations and a somewhat vapid assertion that beginnings will never end.

*Clade* is a book about change over time, as measured by the span of Adam Leith's late-twenty-first-century adulthood. The other novels considered in this review unfold more succinctly, marking time over months and adhering more closely to the experiences of fewer protagonists. This is nowhere more true than in the immersive, sometimes stream-of-consciousness *Beast* by English author Paul Kingsnorth.

*Beast* is narrated in the first person by Edward Buckmaster, who ventured onto the moors of England thirteen months prior. He's been living alone since then, seeking refuge from

All the weight I threw down, my retreat from the encircling, from the furious thoughts and opinions, the views and the positions soldered together with impatience and anger, enfolding the world in underwater cables and radio waves,

Beast

Paul Kingsnorth. Graywolf Press, 2016,  
164 pp., \$16 (paper)



---

singing in the air, darting from brain to brain, jumping from raindrop to thundercloud, glueing the world up, roaring like a storm wave.

Such references signal that he is a denizen of the modern world, rejecting its technologies and fleeing its encumbrances of the soul. He's also fled a female partner and a child. In remembered conversations, Edward's partner reminds him of his responsibilities to his family, while he insists on his responsibility to a higher truth: to be "what I could be" is his most important charge.

A dilapidated cottage serves Edward as "the place where I would sit in silence and wait for the presence." But as the novel opens, a storm arises that threatens Edward's makeshift repairs. The first chapter ends with Edward atop the flaying roof: "If I don't do something now, the whole roof is going to co" And after several blank pages, the next chapter begins "y eyes. I was lying wet wet through on wet stone slabs." These truncated words exemplify the tension between the novel's past-tense voice, which implies that these events are being recollected, and its breathless immediacy.

Unlike the other books in this review, *Beast* does not engage directly with climate change. Edward's thoughts and observations convey no awareness of this problem. However, the world around him is indisputably altered after his fall from the roof. The sky is always white. "It always seemed to be hot and light I never saw the darkness come or go and I had no watch so I simply told myself that it was morning when I woke." Edward attempts to walk to town for supplies and observes a profound stillness over the land: no humans or animals are about; the road is made of dust. He finds his way to a church, from which he can see a village in the near distance, but he can't get there; the road brings him back again and again to the church. The emptiness of the landscape is profound and unsettling: What's happened?

Whether or not a catastrophe has befallen other humans, something has happened to Edward, and he is on the defensive. Alone and vulnerable, he imagines antagonists everywhere. Even trees are menacing. His thoughts become more jumbled as he envisions a posthuman landscape. Tellingly, he attributes to vegetation an antagonistic, colonizing spirit.

We also see scraps of this mentality in Edward's dreams, which blend with the present action. In his first dream, Edward finds himself in "a Third World city" populated by "barefoot little black children" who call



---

him sir and teach him how to swim. This reads like a colonialist fantasy, in which the white man is helped and honored by black subjects. Later Edward dreams himself riding a white horse that turns into a white stag with golden antlers. “And then I remembered that there were no forests anymore that you could not ride for days anywhere that you would be stopped by fences roads shops cars people . . . outside the window the only whiteness was the sky and there was no whiteness in me and I was heavy.” Here, whiteness seems to represent the nobility of the dream animals in some kind of romantic idyll or country estate—and as in the Third World dream, the symbolism suggests a desire for lost white male imperial power and prominence. Another dream or vision, in which Edward bludgeons a woman to death and drowns a child, suggests that family encumbrances are inhibiting his quest for meaning. Though he has set himself in opposition to society, Edward carries within himself familiar, regressive, and violent fantasies.

The titular beast features in another of Edward’s fantasies, this one of man-as-explorer. The only other living creature in this bleached countryside, the beast first strikes Edward as a low black animal not featured in his guidebooks. Later he sees it more clearly as a giant cat. Alternately stalking and stalked by the cat, Edward finally reaches peace with it in the conclusion. But not before he vents his frustration:

someone found this place centuries ago and built a city here and now  
it’s all neon and glass and contrails and rainbow slicks of diesel . . . there  
is nothing left to find nothing to discover it’s all gone i came too late

“There is nothing left . . . to discover”: Edward’s predicament is his insistence on discovery as a model for meaning-making. There are no new lands left; there is no enlightenment awaiting him on the moors. And the big cat is “just a cat”—not a mythical adversary. Once Edward recognizes this, his head clears a bit. The spirit-quest of *Beast* pits a man against his environment to arrive at the recognition of his own physical and mental limitations. “I once thought that my challenge was to understand everything, to build a structure in my mind that would support all that I experienced in the world. But there is no structure that will not fall in the end and crush you under it.”

Paul Kingsnorth is one of the founders of the Dark Mountain Project, an international cultural movement begun in 2009 and dedicated to facing “the ecological, social and cultural unravelling that is



---

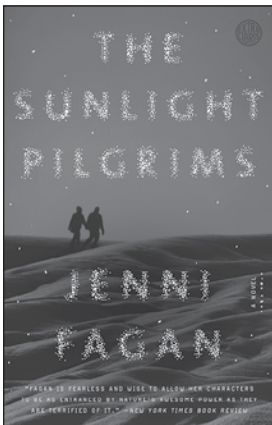
now underway.” The group’s “Uncivilization Manifesto” calls upon us “to challenge the stories which underpin our civilisation: the myth of progress, the myth of human centrality, and the myth of our separation from ‘nature.’” *Beast*, the second book in Kingsnorth’s planned trilogy of thematically linked works, approaches this call through a critique of Edward Buckmaster’s ingrained ideologies rather than through direct treatment of specific environmental issues.

The environmental uncanny of *The Sunlight Pilgrims*, by Scottish novelist Jenni Fagan, is summarized in the opening paragraph of the prologue:

There are three suns in the sky and it is the last day of autumn—perhaps forever. Sun dogs. Phantom suns. Parhelia. They mark the arrival of the most extreme winter for 200 years. Roads jam with people trying to stock up on fuel, food, water. Some say it is the end of times. Polar caps are melting. Salinity in the ocean is at an all-time low. The North Atlantic Drift is slowing.

The year is 2020—now, basically—and the book is divided into sections according to the falling temperatures: November 2020,  $-6$  ( $21$  F); December 8, 2020  $-19$  ( $-2.2$  F); January 31, 2021  $-38$  ( $-36.4$  F); March 19, 2021,  $-56$  ( $-68.8$  F). News reports track escalating global mayhem, flooding and freezing and social upheaval, delegates unable to travel to United Nations meetings. For the novel’s main characters, the looming embodiment of this problem is a giant iceberg drifting toward their home in remote Clachan Fells, Scotland. The iceberg is personified and anticipated throughout the novel as characters trade myths and scientific theories—stories to assuage the dread the iceberg inspires. Fagan shows us characters at the margin of modern society trying to situate themselves in a rapidly changing environment.

*The Sunlight Pilgrims* is written in third person limited, alternately following Dylan and



The Sunlight Pilgrims

Jenni Fagan. Hogarth, 2016, 272 pp., \$16 (paper)

---

Stella. In the novel's early chapters, thirty-something Dylan MacRae leaves the art-house cinema in London where he was raised by movies and by two recently deceased single women—his mother, Vivienne, and his grandmother Gunn—to travel to Clachan Fells. There, months before her death and knowing that the debt-encumbered cinema would have to close, Vivienne secretly purchased a caravan (trailer home) for her son. Dylan takes little with him besides his mother's and grandmother's ashes; he finds his mother's sketchbook waiting in the trailer.

Twelve-year-old Stella and her mother, Constance, live nearby in the caravan park. Constance has kept two lovers for over twenty years, to the disapproval of many in the community, but she's currently at odds with both. She makes a living salvaging furniture and transforming it into shabby chic—or “shabby shit,” her daughter says. Stella is transgender, having transitioned in the past year; she discusses the development of sex and gender cozily with her mother but also copes with her schoolmates' cruelty while agonizing over her emerging male secondary sex characteristics. Stella bypasses parental controls on the household computer to watch porn, hang out in chat rooms, and make unauthorized purchases—other reminders that the novel takes place in our own era. The village doctor is reluctant to prescribe hormone blockers to someone Stella's age, and in one of the novel's cliff-hangers, Stella takes supposed blockers that she ordered from the Internet.

The characters' twenty-first-century problems with love and identity are foregrounded, occupying much of their energy as the iceberg steadily approaches. Man-child Dylan, having never known much about his heritage, finds a distressingly tangled family tree left for him in his mother's sketchbook. For the first time, he must live independently, outside SoHo, and he immediately imprints on the first maternal figure he spots. Dylan longs for Constance with the same adolescent intensity that Stella exerts toward Lewis, her classmate and pretransition best friend. Stella and Lewis have kissed, but Lewis ignores her afterward for many months. Stella thinks, “If he would kiss her again, it would be enough to keep her happy for the rest of her life. Except that isn't true. Kissing must be like smoking. If you like it, you always want another.” Meanwhile, Dylan “can't work out what is worse: wanting a kiss and not getting one, or getting one and never getting another.” With school closed due to the weather and no market for shabby chic, the characters are largely housebound, making their own throwback fun with aurora parties and snowmen, tobogganing and bonfires (and sometimes kissing).

---

Fagan describes these diversions with such lively, lovely language that the deepening winter seems almost like a lark.

But the whimsy is barbed. Fagan uses the evolving myth of the sunlight pilgrims to emphasize the characters' peril. The story of the pilgrims comes to Dylan from his grandmother and to Stella perhaps from the same source: an unfamiliar white-haired woman whom Stella encounters at their garden fence, staring directly at the sun. The woman explains that she learned this ability from "the sunlight pilgrims . . . from the islands farthest north. You can drink the light right down into your chromosomes, then in the darkest minutes of winter, you will glow and glow and glow." Later we learn that these light-absorbing pilgrims were monks, living in isolation and eating only gannets. "One year they all went mad, threw themselves off the cliffs, about seventy of them." No one knows how the monks sustained themselves or what led to the deaths of all but one. Still, Dylan and Stella identify with the mythic, mad pilgrims and with the model of living off available resources, however improbably. This is all well and good in Dylan's domestic fantasies and Stella's dank vision of an iced-over "Goth paradise," but neither of them is attuned to practicalities, as Constance is. Though Constance has amassed a significant "apocalypse larder," it is finite; Dylan calls her "a survivalist pilgrim," but all her preparedness and ingenuity can't mother them through an ice age. As Constance puts it, "Now we have this endless fucking Narnia, and where is it all going to end?"

Constance's frustration with fantasy signals the book's biggest conflict: in this story, the enchantment of winter can't be broken. The iceberg is a consequence not of magic but of climate change. Finally the iceberg does reach Clachan Fells, looming behind a field of penitentes, tall, prostrated blades of ice. Nature is seen worshipping itself, and the characters join in, in their way—awestruck by the spectacle, joyful, bantering, despite the incredible cold. Stella proposes that the iceberg, millions of years older than humans, is a kind of time traveler:

—So, if winter has come to us now from millions of years ago, then time travel really is possible. If the world has fifteen million years of frozen geology there and it can enter the present and melt and bring forth another Ice Age, then it's like the planet has kept them as an insurance system.

—Insurance against what?

—Humans. I took my first hormone blocker this morning. . . .

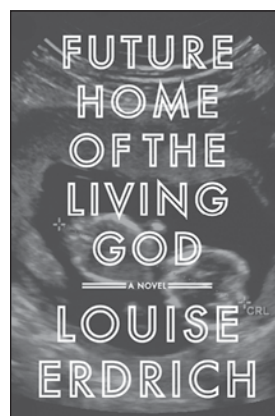
---

Even as Stella proposes that the iceberg has traveled from the past in order to kill them, her train of thought shifts to her own individual problems—as all of ours do. In this scene, however, the iceberg asserts itself. The characters must ski for their lives to escape a sudden blizzard that swirls up from the ice. The novel concludes with the characters sheltered and drowsing around a hearth. Their curiosity and imagination, their faith in transformation kept them safe (or feeling that way), kept the iceberg a novelty, until things got real. As a reader, I would have appreciated a more definitive resolution: the sunlight pilgrims dove, lemur-like, off a cliff, but Fagan’s latter-day pilgrims don’t succumb to desperation or rapture. They just go into “hibernation mode.” Anticlimactic though it may be, this gentle representation of a bigger sleep implies that the characters—like us?—never wake up to the enormity of their crisis.

Storytelling and myth are also essential elements of Louise Erdrich’s *Future Home of the Living God*. The novel takes the form of a diary kept by twenty-six-year-old Cedar Hawk Songmaker from August to February of her first full-term pregnancy and addressed to her child. That child was conceived with an angel (later revealed to be a white guy named Phil wearing a church pageant costume) and is due on December 25. Hoping to learn more about her heritage, Cedar—the “adopted child of Minneapolis liberals”—seeks out her Ojibwe birth mother. She learns that her prosaic birth name is Mary Potts and that her Ojibwe family is Catholic; Cedar herself converted as an adult. Like Cedar, the women of the Potts family venerate Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, the Lily of the Mohawks. Snippets of saints’ lives and works are mixed with family narratives, lore, and lies and the various explanations concocted around the book’s unfolding environmental crisis. As these stories complicate, complement, and undermine each other, they are held by the overarching narrative of Cedar’s pregnancy.

Set in Erdrich’s home state of Minnesota, *Future Home of the Living God* offers a less familiar take on climate disruption than those of

Future Home of the Living God  
*Louise Erdrich*. HarperCollins, 2017, 267 pp.,  
\$28.99 (hardcover)



---

the other books in this review. In *Future Home*, the climate has warmed, and evolution is apparently reversing—though no one is quite certain how or why. However, species are undeniably changing in spontaneous ways; creatures that Cedar cannot name appear in her urban backyard. A lizard-bird, a saber-toothed tiger—visitors that rebut gradualist scientific theories. With this confusion, Erdrich suggests that the real terror of climate change is its refutation of humans' sense of superiority over nature. These biological transformations are not incremental; nature is responding innovatively to crisis, and animals are getting larger and more ferocious. De-evolution is also happening among humans, leading to increased infant mortality and maternal deaths—and to Cedar's speculation that in time humans will lose their capacity for scientific reasoning. She is not even certain that her future child will be able to read the journal she's leaving him. However, as she writes in a forward to *Zeal*, the Catholic theological journal that she founded and edits, "the children born during this present time will be possessed of souls whether or not they are capable of speech, and should be considered fully human no matter what scientists may conclude about their capacity to think and learn." Even if, as Cedar's adoptive mother fears, humans will lose poetry, they will keep their souls—one argument for humanity's exceptionalism.

Unlike the stasis accompanying our own present-day climate "debate," the political situation in *Future Home* has reached a crisis; the United States' borders are closed, and the president is contemplating a state of emergency. Under article V, section 215 of the Patriot Act, the government can "seize entire library and medical databases in order to protect national security"—i.e., identify pregnant women. But the country's centralized, secular government has been destabilized by regional, religious governments such as the Church of the New Constitution. Represented by a middle-aged white woman named Mother, the group renames Minneapolis streets after Bible verses and operates "Future Home Reception Centers," where Womb Volunteers gestate "the leftovers. The embryos not labeled Caucasian. We're going to have them all and keep them all." Throughout the novel, Mother appears to Cedar through computer monitors—even when said computers are turned off or smashed to bits. Her message is mundane but disquieting: "Mother is thinking all about you." Mother seems all-seeing, thanks to her group's employment of next-generation microdrones—one aspect of humanity that has not yet begun to de-evolve.

---

The novel's three sections trace different phases of Cedar's experience. In section I, everything is new to her, from her birth family to the social controls cropping up around her to the sensations of pregnancy. Cedar prepares for her child's birth (with a shopping spree at Target) but also for a possible apocalypse as she stashes ammo and booze behind her drywall. Driving away from her childhood neighborhood during a power outage, she reflects, "instead of the past, it is the future that haunts us now." Section II picks up after Cedar's capture, chronicling her time in the Fairview Riverside Hospital, where her pregnancy is carefully monitored. Her adoptive mother and an ability to finger-braid like Grandma Virginia facilitate her escape. Section III finds Cedar ensconced for the first time on the reservation. Rather than succumbing to the despair her adoptive mother feels about the future and about Cedar's pregnancy, Cedar is adapting to these new conditions, under which her Ojibwe family seems poised to thrive (at least for the short term). But Cedar is not allowed to settle here. Kidnapped by white penitents at the Saint Kateri Tekakwitha shrine, she is taken to the maximum-security Stillwater Birthing Center.

*Future Home of the Living God* is a diary and also a hagiography of sorts: Cedar's true name is Mary, after all, and this is a chronicle of her actions and persecution. While detained at Stillwater, Cedar studies a wall of portraits in the common area—pictures of women she terms "martyrs" who've died there in childbirth. Cedar herself sits for such a portrait before going into labor. She hasn't joined them yet—though of course, her diary ends with the end of the novel. We imagine that her portrait might be placed alongside the others with the shared epigraph "She served the future." But in what way?

*Future Home* differs from other gynocentric dystopias in the sense that the abridgement of women's reproductive rights is not in service of a defined ideology or plan: it's not clear where seized infants are taken or how the Church of the New Constitution will prepare them for the changing world. For various reasons the reader anticipates that Cedar's child will be superhuman: within her Catholic paradigm, he could be a savior, born on Christmas. Or the child might be remarkable because of its Ojibwe heritage and the special favor the Potts family holds with Saint Kateri Tekakwitha. (Grandma Virginia even tells Cedar's half-sister that they have "supernatural blood.") Or the child will be persecuted because it's not white; at points in the novel, brown and black people seem to have disappeared. However, in this chaos, simply being born an "orig-

---

inal” human is exceptional. Cedar gives birth to an original son—and that’s the last thing the reader learns about the child.

*Future Home of the Living God* reminds us in a different way than *Clade* of the ultimate insignificance of even the most holy individual human. Cedar reflects, “I am beginning to see that what the paleontologist says is true—we do not understand how much time has passed on this planet, and we have no concept of our limited place in the enormity of that time.” At the end of the novel, Cedar describes to her son what snowfall looked like—it’s something that he will never see and that she, a child of Minneapolis, barely knew herself. The last line of the book could be an elegy for humanity as a whole: “Where will you be, my darling, the last time it snows on earth?”

Like the other novels in this review, *Future Home* ends in contemplation of the nonhuman environment—the last snowfall, the oncoming iceberg, the portentous auroras of *Clade*, the black *Beast*—things that seem spectacular from a human’s perspective. But these four novels also share a source of uncanniness: the characters’ awareness that this planet preceded us and may well carry on in our absence, without us there to see it. In different ways, the four novels illustrate the last item in the Dark Mountain Project’s “Uncivilization Manifesto”: “The end of the world as we know it is not the end of the world full stop.”



### Stephanie Carpenter

Stephanie Carpenter’s story collection, *Missing Persons*, won the 2017 Press 53 Award for Short Fiction. Her prose has appeared in the *Missouri Review*, *Witness*, *Big Fiction*, *Nimrod*, and elsewhere. She lives in Hancock, Michigan.