

The Rising Popularity of Climate Fiction

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"When it comes to a war between the races, I'm with the bears."

The aforementioned statement by John Muir, a renowned naturalist, inspired the title to a collection of short stories, which presents the nascent realities invited by climate crisis through the windows of literature. Authors like Margaret Atwood, David Mitchell, and Nathaniel Mitch, among others, have contributed to the urgent, prophetic, and apocalyptic anthology *I'm With the Bears*.

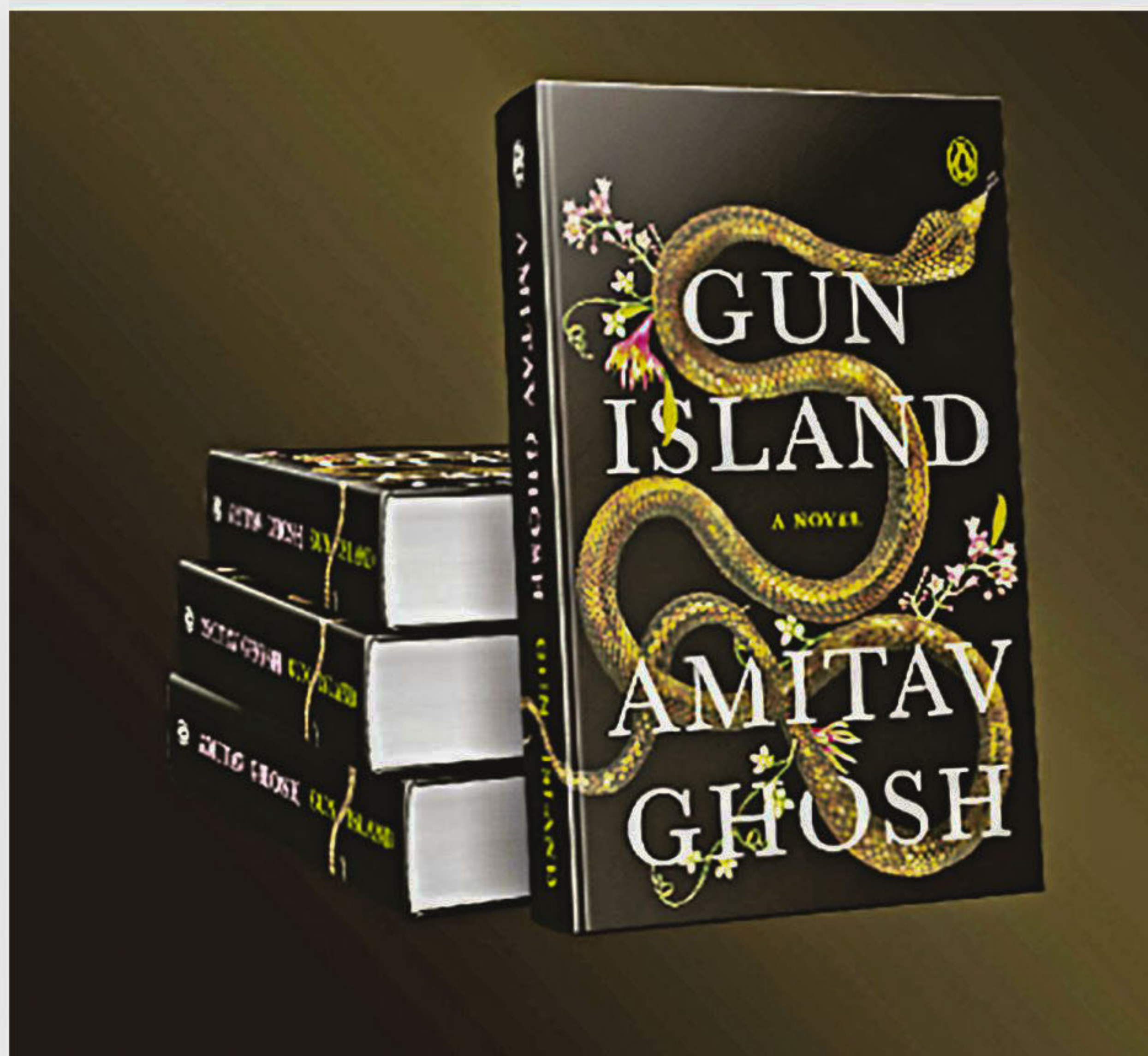
It came out in 2011. But its theme is relevant now, more than ever, as carbon-spitting factories, vehicles, and air-conditioners keep blooming, mountains, forests, rivers, and ecosystems keep disappearing, oceans keep rising, and hostile gases keep colonizing the air we breathe. The collection can be hailed as a literary foreteller.

Because of course, our planet hasn't become any better. It's still breathing

with pipes into its lungs, and with more difficulty.

In *The Overstory*, Richard Powers presents trees as the significant characters of a story. It's the trees that are on the pulpit. It's the trees that dictate our imagination. It's the trees that pull our eyes out to focus on real things, imminent disasters lurching towards us. He shows us the enormity of Redwood Summer, a three-month movement of environmental activism, staged in the face of the old-growth redwood trees' deaths at the hands of Northern California's timber companies. He shows us how the fight against deforestation can often assume a brutal version.

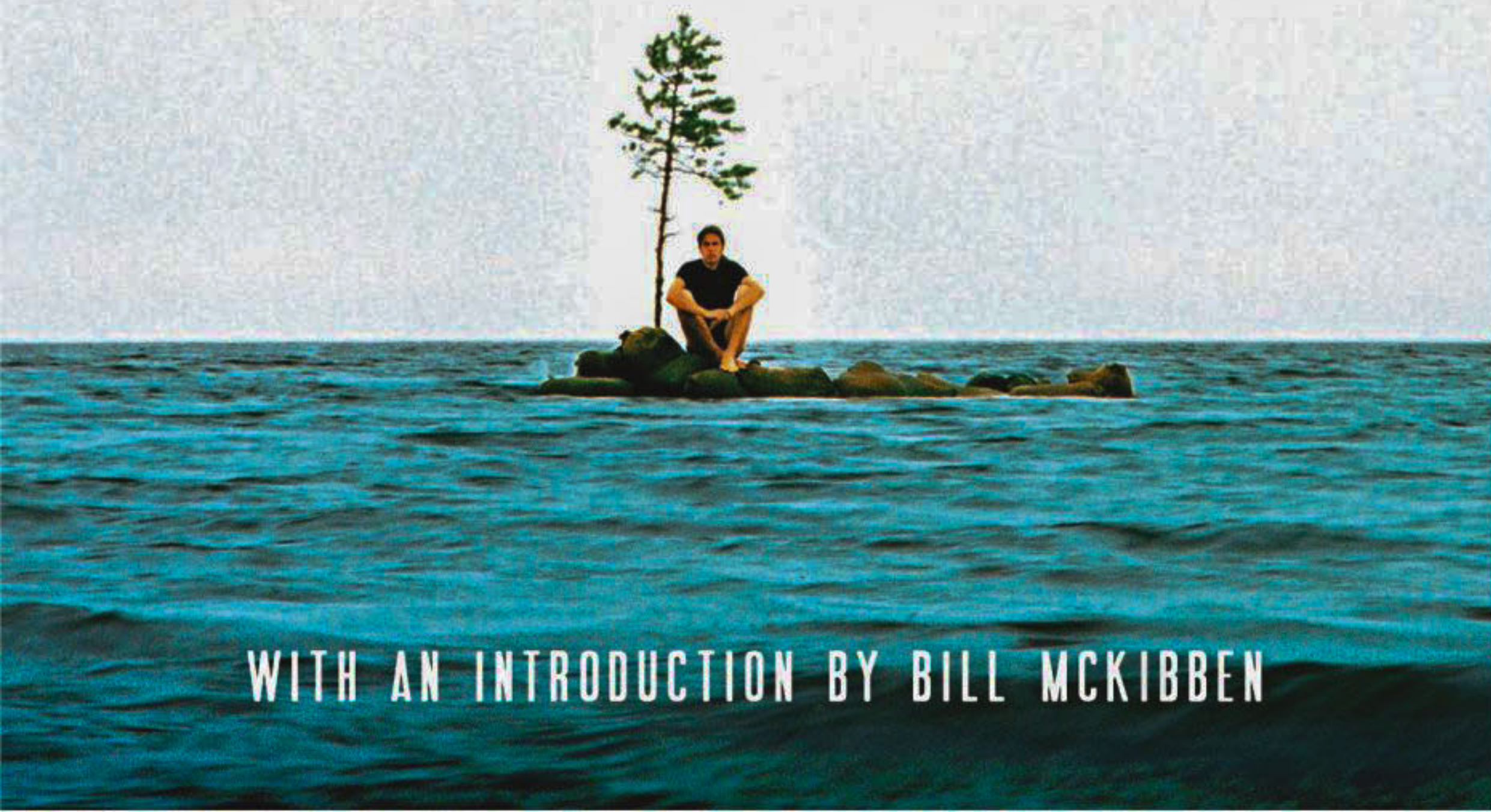
Factory Air by Omar El Akkad, in *Guernica's* Climate issue, portrays a young mother who is conflicted between choices that pressurise her to choose motherly affection over morals and vice-versa, set against the backdrop of noisy protests. Protests against corporations that keep on making the air unbreathable. Pitchaya Sudbanthad's



I'M WITH THE BEARS

MARGARET ATWOOD
PAOLO BACIGALUPI
T. C. BOYLE
TOBY LITT
LYDIA MILLET
DAVID MITCHELL
NATHANIEL RICH
KIM STANLEY ROBINSON
HELEN SIMPSON
WU MING 1

SHORT STORIES FROM A DAMAGED PLANET



WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY BILL MCKIBBEN

Floating presents characters who ready themselves and mold their lives encircling the tensions stemming from rising sea levels that linger in their minds. Lydia Millet's *Woodland* pulls us into a possible reality where forest animals have perished and only a rare few remain, where the rich clients come in flocks to witness those breath-taking creatures inside a strictly-maintained facility.

In *Climate Fiction*, reality approaches dystopia. And sometimes bleeds into it.

The perfect manifestation would be Amitav Ghosh's recent novel, *Gun Island*, where a scene depicts a grave conflagration in Los Angeles. In interviews, he said that he had written the scene way before the wildfires actually swept through Los Angeles. It's almost as if somebody can imagine a disaster one second and its happening will swarm the news headline the next. Amitav Ghosh's foreshadowing imagery lays bare a devastating truth about this damaged planet of ours. The truth is, with climate crisis looming over our existence, anything can happen anytime.

Paolo Bacigalupi puts it more aptly, "[The topic of climate change is] so loaded with speculative uncertainties that it seems like there are unlimited potential stories to write and explore."

Keeping the dark scopes of imagination and their nascent reality in mind, the people living in the southern coast of Bangladesh may lose the earth beneath them at worse levels than before. Their source of drinking water may get contaminated (by salinity) beyond control. Rivers may keep swallowing their homes and livestock at greater rates, ramping up the trend of getting internally displaced. Vessels carrying coal and tar may leak and cover entire

tributaries, rivers, and their animals with thick, dark liquid, driving them to their deaths. Power plants near forests may completely wipe out a natural heritage (which has already been predicted by UNESCO). Riverine countries may slide into dystopian settings even before perceiving the magnanimity of quickly escalating events. An emaciated, timid, powerless tiger may roam in the cities, a leopard, a bear, an elephant, a what-not.

With rising temperatures, depleting ozone layers, and melting ice-caps, climate crisis is surely giving us endless scopes for imagining fiery, gloomy, and prophetic imagery. Imagination that can give one the nudge to work for a better world. To take steps. And most importantly, to write of the impending disaster(s). To create art based on this harsh reality. To open the eyes of those around us, with the convincing hum of literature. To convince the corporations to "leave the bauxites in the mountains". After all, literature entails bearing the past, the present, the future, the tragedies – both the gone ones and the impending – in its bones. When one writes, one needs to do so about the things that are troublesome and in dire need of effective and radical focus and action.

That's why, *Climate Fiction's* popularity is swelling and swelling, unwilling to be tamed.

"It's not climate change, it's everything change."

Margaret Atwood's quote truly is omnipresent in every aspect of this modern age, which is built on concrete and breathes unbreathable air. In literature too. The rising popularity of *Climate Fiction*—a revolutionary shift in the concern with which we read literature—attests to that statement.