



Post-melt dystopia anyone? Climate change and the Manchester Literature Festival

Contributed by Karen Regn on 21.10.2013 in Education, Energy, Nature and Society

Karen Regn reports on how the Manchester Literature Festival is tackling climate change with 'Shackleton's Man Goes South' and a concerted effort around its own sustainability.

Dubbed by critics to be a "bold novel-cum-manifesto", Tony White's ambitious work of climate change fiction Shackleton's Man Goes South is satire with a stern warning as it follows characters on both sides of a human trafficking dichotomy making their way in the grueling dystopia of a post-melt world. **The Manchester Literature Festival** welcomed the author as part of its 2013 festival and he appeared on 15 October with Gregory Norminton at the Manchester Museum in an event sponsored by Gaeia (Global and Ethical Investment Advice).

Surrounded by a variety of animal taxidermy and under the majestic skeleton of a sperm whale in the museum's Life Gallery, the author explained how his work was inspired by his time as artist in residence at the Science Museum London and was eventually published through its Atmosphere commission, marking the first time in the museum's long history of publication that a novel was published.

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The work is an indictment against indifference, critical of the blind eye society turns to issues such as human trafficking and the aggregation of waste in the environment. It aims to personalise the climate change rhetoric, and on Tuesday White reiterated the need to be wary of politicians who make environmental policy decisions based on economic considerations rather than on human experience.

"The novel is an artistic response to climate change," said White. "But everything's based on issues that are happening now."

"The future of climate change has arrived, it's just unequally distributed," said co-host Norminton, a novelist who recently edited the short fiction collection **Beacons – Stories For Our Not So Distant Future** and shares White's passion for eco-consciousness through art.

White's novel is structured with a converging dual narrative in which a fact-based strand telling of the discovery of an "overlooked" short story, written in 1911 by polar explorer and scientist George Clarke Simpson, plays off and adds tension to what White calls the "melodrama", a tale of refugees fleeing south, who are undertaking Shackleton's journey in reverse. In this second strand, Emily and daughter Jenny are traveling to meet John, Emily's husband, who has gone ahead to find work. They travel with Browning, a sailor who has already saved their lives more than once. In the slang of their post-melt world, Emily and Jenny are known as "mangoes", a corruption of the saying "man go south".

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HIGHLIGHTS



Haven in the city: parks and squares



The garden city of downtown Manchester



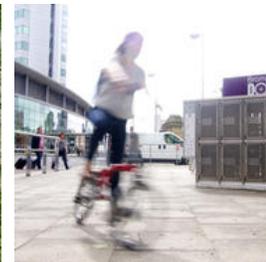
Turn up the volume



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City infrastructure and the great bicycle economy

THEMES

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The dual structure reflects White's belief that science and human experience are inextricably linked and that while IPCC literature is concerned with scenarios (a word, White points out, that has been co-opted to discuss climate change but originally belonged to the dramatic arts in the world of Commedia dell'arte), the reaction to these scenarios is both uncreative and apathetic. For example, the response in parts of Europe has been to move chalets higher uphill as snows recede, with little consideration for the potential flooding below.

In publishing through the Science Museum, the promotion of the work via a current exhibition and distribution on digital book readers have seamlessly blended sustainability, technology and art, affording attendees a reading experience with an unprecedented level of immediacy. "People can be reading the novel within three taps of the screen, or email it to themselves right there in the gallery," said White, explaining the printed copy in his hand was one of only a limited number. The exhibition will continue at the Science Museum for a year, but Mancunians not traveling south themselves can find Shackleton's Man Goes South free to download by [clicking here](#).

Ecologically-minded

Manchester Literature Festival organisers chose White's novel as part as a ecologically-minded commitment to sustainability in the hopes that through this event and others of climate change-themed literature audiences will engage with sustainability agendas.

"We specifically selected Manchester Museum as the host venue for our Shackleton's Man Goes South event with Tony White," said director Cathy Bolton. "The Museum is very proactive in promoting awareness on the consequences of climate change both through its research projects and public exhibitions and engagement programme, for example their **Changing Planet** project."

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MLF organisers researched supplier sustainability policies and wherever possible worked with environmentally aware suppliers, used products made from sustainably aware sources and considered how all materials could be reduced, reused or recycled.

Other efforts by the MLF included:

- Choosing venues as environmentally friendly as possible with good public transport links
- Sourcing organic, local and fair trade produce caterers whenever possible
- Encouraging all participating authors to use the most environmental travel option available to them
- Aiming to recycle or reuse 100% of paper products used by the festival
- Ensuring no more than 5% excess marketing materials were printed and encouraging audiences to recycle or pass on unwanted publicity
- Organising the events and projects using digital methods of communication

Tony White's previous works include the critically acclaimed novel Foxy-T (Faber and Faber), numerous short stories and the non-fiction work Another Fool in the Balkans (Cadogan). His recent novella Dicky Star and the Garden Rule (Forma) was specially commissioned to accompany works by artists Jane and Louise Wilson. He is chair of London's arts radio station, Resonance 104.4 FM.

The Manchester Literature Festival, now marking its seventh year, hosted notable talents Helen Fielding, Jo Nesbo and Neil Gaiman and will hold its final affiliated event on 18 November, An Evening With Donna Tartt.

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