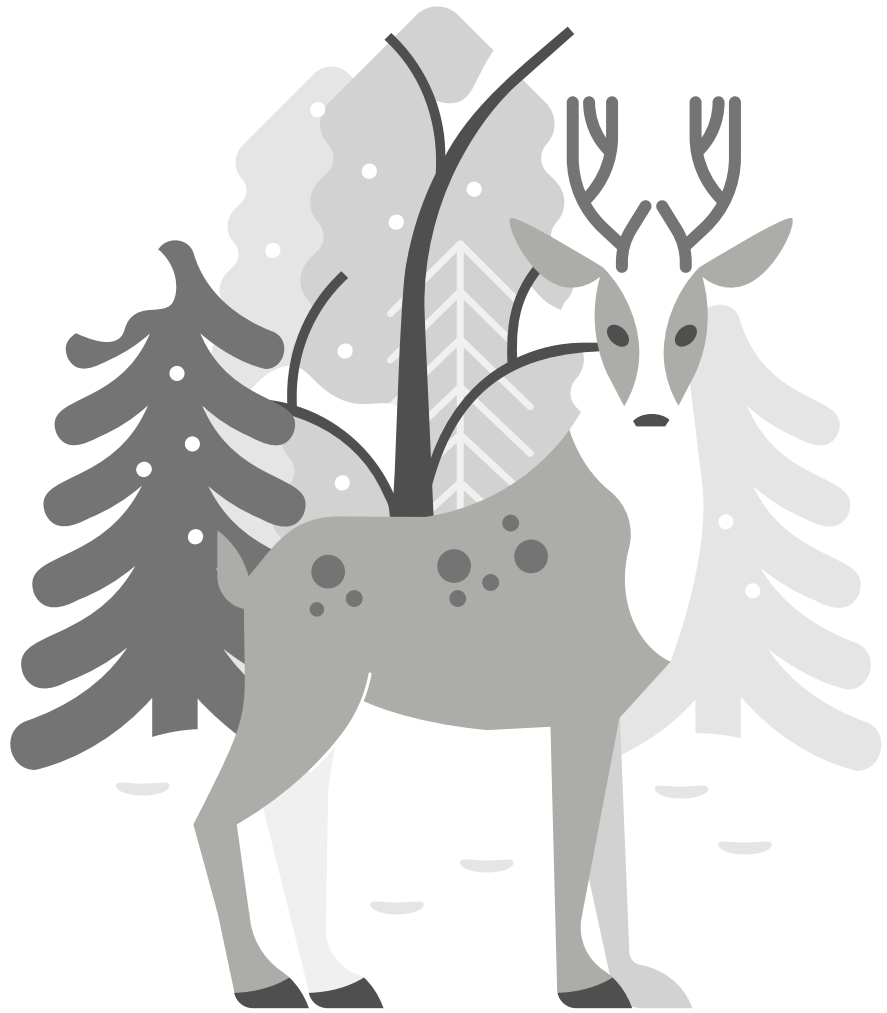




Lake Isle of Innisfree



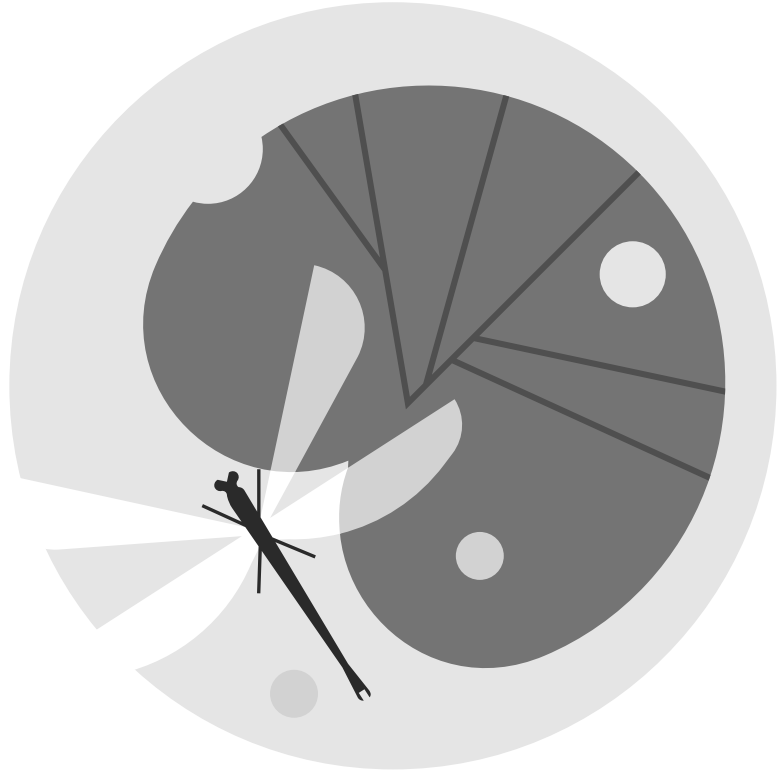


Ecology in Fiction:

Getting nerdy with eco-fiction

by Mary Woodbury





Introduction

Learn More at
Dragonfly.eco





Introductory Thoughts

What unites people? Armies? Gold? Flags? Stories. There's nothing in the world more powerful than a good story. Nothing can stop it. No enemy can defeat it. —Tyrion Lannister, *Game of Thrones* (S8, E6)



What is Eco-fiction?

Some Easy Answers

Stories set in fictional landscapes that capture the essence of natural ecosystems. –Mike Vasey

Fiction that deals with environmental issues or the relation between humanity and the physical environment. –Jim Dwyer

A component of two related literary phenomena: nature-oriented literature and environmental literature. –Patrick D. Murphy

A way to intersect natural landscape, environmental issues, and usually human connection, into any genre and make it come alive. –Mary Woodbury

Fiction with a conscience. –John Yunker

An elastic term, capacious enough to accommodate a variety of fictional works that address the relationship between natural settings and the human communities that dwell within them. –[Cambridge](#)





Is diverse in emotional outcomes: can be weird, hopeful, joyful, scary, disastrous, and so on



Can take place in the past, present, or future



Can be a novel genre on its own or a composite subgenre; when a composite subgenre, it may take place in other genre and literary fictions (i.e., in science fiction, fantasy, or literary fiction)



Evolves with natural history and newest ecological and climate crises and, when realism, accords with science



May have common environmental topics such as droughts, floods, wildlife, extinction, and place-based issues as well as common human topics such as cultural diaspora, refugee crises, love, politics, mystery, and survival



Can take place anywhere in the world, representing cultural and environmental diversity

Eco-fiction Characteristics and Traits



Does it have to be preachy and gloomy?

Nope!

Eco-fiction evolved with ecocriticism, which simply examines the relationship between literature and the environment. Fiction that falls under the umbrella happens in all genres, in all times, in all ages, and in all places, even those not found on our Earth.

The ecology, nature, or environmental issues within the story generally drive the plot, character development, and/or provide a natural landscape that is important, however.

Ecologically oriented fiction has been around since people began telling stories long ago. As eco-fiction evolved with natural histories and currently with environmental “hyperobjects,” such as climate change, an uptick has shown that more and more authors are writing in this field, especially since the 1970s. Many authors, even when writing about disaster, inspire with courage, strength, and community rebuilding.

Also, readers don't like to be preached at, and a lot of readers hate grimdark, so, yeah, papa don't preach and we shall overcome.



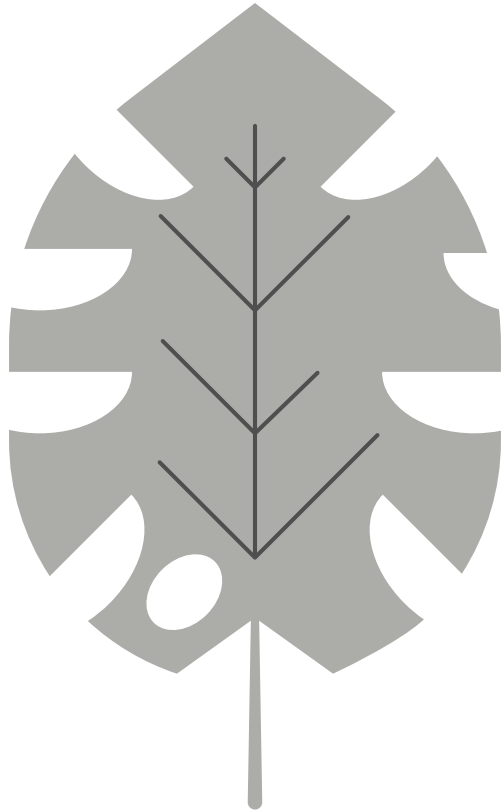
Genres & Stuff



One genre does not rule them all. Other similar modes of storytelling have specific traits on their own.

- Afrofuturism & Africanfuturism
- Nature writing
- Ecological weird fiction
- Eco-horror
- Literary fiction
- Rewilded novels
- Green fiction
- Environmental science fiction
- Eco-Fantasy
- Climate fiction
- Solarpunk, biopunk, ecopunk, lunarpunk
- Anthropocene fiction
- Indigenous speculative fiction





History

Originally evolved with the study of natural history, along with ecocriticism; became popular in the 1970s, though earlier works predated the term

The anthology *Eco-fiction*, edited by John Stadler and written by major science fiction authors, was published by Washington Square Press in April 1971

Jim Dwyer's academic and reading studies lead to *Where the Wild Books Are: A Field Guide to Ecofiction*, University of Nevada Press in April 2010

The field is evolving thanks to modern media and academic groups (Dragonfly.eco, Cambridge Ecofiction Group, New York Times, ASLE, etc.)



Why Is this Fiction So Important?



Fiction humanizes the world around us



Fiction can foster more empathy for others, including for plants and animals, and can guide the reader to other world views



Science fiction can provide real futuristic warnings and inspire new and cleaner technologies



Symbolism, a tool used in fiction, helps create impact by enhancing dry facts and figures and allowing us to see things in a different light



Fiction entertains but also informs, widening our knowledge of the natural world but usually without being didactic or preachy





Historical Examples (Up to 2000)

Moby-Dick, Herman Melville (1851)

The Grapes of Wrath, John Steinbeck (1939)

The Giving Tree, Shel Silverstein (1964)

Hainish Cycle Series, Ursula K. Le Guin (1984)

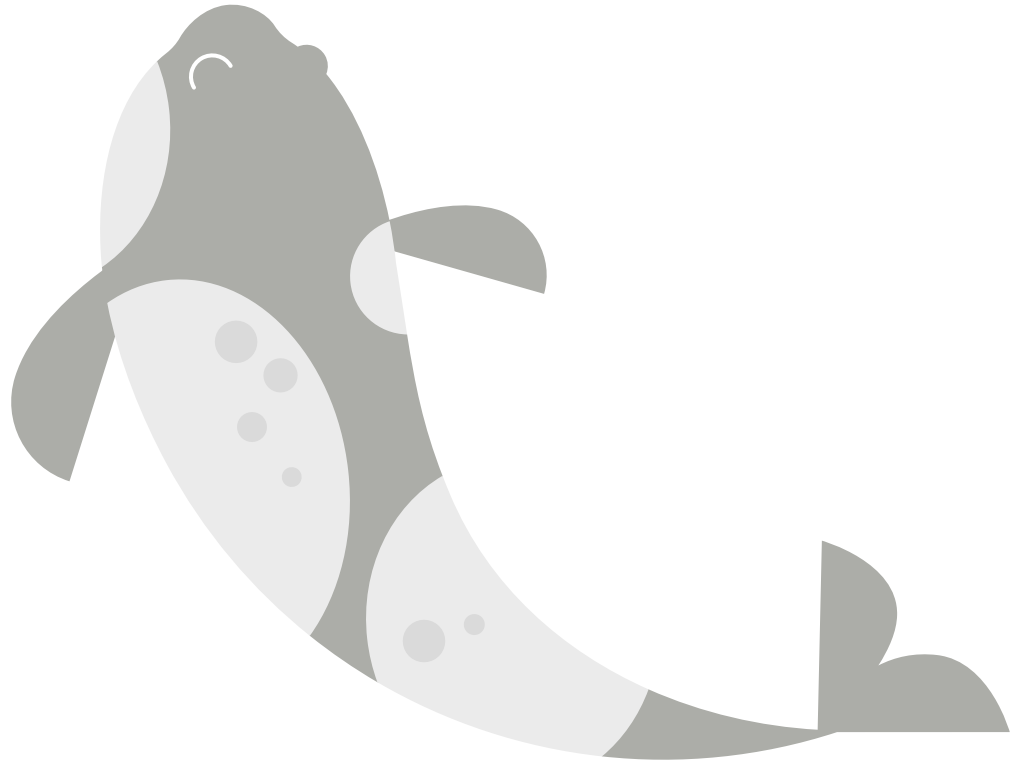
Dune, Frank Herbert (1965)

Parable of the Sower, Octavia Butler (1990)

Forest of a Thousand Daemons D.O. Fagunwa (1993)

Wolf Totem, Jiang Rong (2000)





Modern Examples (2000 and Beyond)

Strange Beasts of China, Yan Ge (2006)

Flight Behavior, Barbara Kingsolver (2006)

The Man with Compound Eyes, Wu Ming-Yi (2011)

Wolf Light, Yaba Badoe (2019)

Dreamtime, Venetia Welby (2021)

Oil on Water, Helon Habila (2016)

Bangkok Wakes to Rain, Pitchaya Sudbanthad (2019)

Oryx & Crake Trilogy, Margaret Atwood (2003-2019)



My Picks

Books that Shaped Me: *Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O' Dell, *Dance of the Coyote* by Bill Hotchkiss, various fables and fairy tales

Where to Start: *Flight Behavior* by Barbara Kingsolver, *Salvage the Bones* by Jesmyn Ward, *Ministry for the Future* by Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Disaster Tourist* by Yun Ko-eun, *American War* by Omar El Akkad; longer titles: *Appleseed* by Matt Bell, *The Overstory* by Richard Power, *The Wormwood Trilogy* by Tade Thompson

Sci-fi and Fantasy Classics: *Dune* by Frank Herbert, *The Dispossessed* by Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Lord of the Rings* books by JRR Tolkien, *A Song of Ice and Fire* series by George RR Martin, *Ice* by Anna Kavin

The Weird: *Southern X Trilogy* by Jeff VanderMeer, *Fauna* by Christiane Vadnais, *The Other Side of the Mountain* by Michael Bernanos, *The Willows* by Algernon Blackwood, *Jagannath* by Karin Tidbeck

Travel the World: *Dreamtime* by Venetia Welby, *Oil on Water* by Helon Habila, *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* by Pitchaya Sudbanthad, *Dark Constellations* by Pola Oloixarac, *Memory of Water* by Emmi Itäranta, *How Beautiful We Were* by Imbolo Mbue

Currently Reading: *The Morning Star* by Karl Ove Knausgård; next: *Broken Earth* trilogy by NK Jemisin



Web Projects

- <https://dragonfly.eco>
- [Research Projects at ASLE](#)
- [Cambridge Ecofiction Bookgroup](#)
- [Empirical Ecocriticism](#)

Web Articles

- Atwood, Margaret. "[It's Not Climate Change—It's Everything Change.](#)" Medium, 2015
- Beres, Derek. "[Why reading fiction is as important now as ever.](#)" Big Think, 2018.
- Gow, Kailin. "[How fiction impacts fact: The social impact of books.](#)" Compass, 2012.
- Longhi, Lorraine. "[Science fiction: Shaping the future.](#)" Arizona State University, 2014.
- Parker, Holly. "[The real-life benefits of reading fiction.](#)" Psychology Today, 2018.
- Wiehardt, Ginny. "[Symbolism in Fiction Writing.](#)" The Balance Careers, 2019.

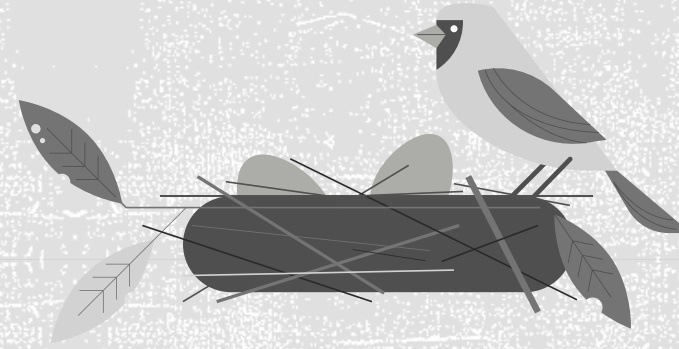
Books and Journals

- Dwyer, Jim. *Where the Wild Books Are: A Field Guide to Ecofiction.* University Press, 2010.
- See [Ecolitbooks.com](#) for a large list of journals and references.

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References



Some Books

