

## The End of Progress? Four Tropic Patterns for Climate Fiction

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### Abstract

While much work has been done to define climate fiction, most of this has been limited to the tropes of fire, flood, drought, famine, and societal collapse. A deeper historical view can find its origins in the progress myth, defined by Bury, and critiqued by Mumford, Ellul, Meadows, Schumacher, Tainter, Latour, and others. A comparison of climate nonfiction and fiction (which has not been done) reveals four consistent tropic patterns from 1945 to the present based along two trajectories: fast or slow depletion of resources and proactive or reactive responses to climate change. While many future scenarios are discussed by climate futurists, they fall into four tropic groups based on these trajectories into which most cli-fi can be placed. Holmgren's four "future scenarios" provide effective metaphors for these groups: Brown Tech (slow, reactive); Green Tech (slow, proactive); Lifeboat (fast, reactive); and Earth Steward (fast, proactive). Most climate nonfiction and fiction fit into the Brown Tech or Lifeboat categories, anticipating collapse, with a minority of texts falling into the more hopeful Green Tech, and only a handful illustrating Earth Steward as a possibility. This suggests a civilization anticipating collapse while remaining hopeful for what Read has termed a "successor civilization."

### Keywords

Climate fiction, climate change, cli-fi, collapse, genre, literary criticism, science, progress, myth.

