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# ENVISIONING A DEMOCRATIC FUTURE: IMAGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE

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## **Envisioning a Democratic Future: Images of Climate Change in International Literature**

### **Synopsis:**

Since the publication of the international bestseller, *The Limits to Growth* (1972) by the Club of Rome, many authors in many countries made environmental issues a central theme in their works. Due to the growing number of scientific warnings about climate change since the late 1980s, authors have increasingly addressed this topic in their novels. The result has been a sharp shift in aesthetics, putting the questions about the future of democracy squarely in the center of their narratives.

**Peter Keitel**

**Abstract**

**Envisioning a Democratic Future:  
Images of Climate Change in International Literature**

During the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many authors in many countries, reacting directly to the economic and ecological suggestions presented in the international bestseller, *The Limits to Growth* (1972) by the Club of Rome, made environmental issues a central theme in their works. While such narratives first concerned themselves with topics such as air and water pollution, environmental degradation, and deforestation, authors, influenced by the accelerating process of economic globalization and the growing number of scientific warnings about climate change since the late 1980s, have increasingly addressed this topic in their novels directly. The result has been a sharp shift in aesthetics. While the works by authors in the 1970s and 1980s mostly described positive aspects in regard to economic, social, and political change, such visions have almost exclusively been replaced by dystopian visions of the future. Nonetheless, such authors have not simply joined the ranks of cynics in their false assumption that it is too late to act, but instead, have renewed their quest for a democratic future, based on the enlightenment principles of liberty, fraternity, and equality.

In my paper, I discuss the importance of climate change in works by international authors such as T.C. Boyle, Gudrun Pausewang, Margaret Atwood, Anton-Andreas Guha, Kim Stanley Robinson, Norman Spinrad, Till Bastian, Günther Grass, Jean-Christophe Rufin, and Klaus Peter Lehner.

Within the historical, economic, and political context, I intend to discuss the following questions: How do the authors address the problems of globalization and climate change? Do

these works, directly or indirectly, offer solutions to environmental problems? What political consequences can be surmised from these works? Is there hope for a just and democratic society in the future? I will argue that while the authors no longer provide a positive outlook, they still strive to convince their readers of the need for social, economic, and political change on a local level in order to avoid global barbarism.