



Climate Fiction and Global Ethics: An SDG Perspective on Claire Vaye Watkins' Gold Fame Citrus

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Abstract

Claire Vaye Watkins' Gold Fame Citrus is an ethically charged work of climate fiction that stages the moral crises generated by water scarcity, displacement, and ecological collapse. The lens of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been applied to the novel to reveal how Watkins dramatizes urgent intersections between climate action (SDG 13), clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), reduced inequalities climate fiction, sustainable development goals, (SDG 10), life on land (SDG 15), and well-being (SDG 3). An attempt has been made in this paper to highlight the primary ecological concerns like water scarcity, migration, official hitches and environmental psychology, that had been reframed by Watkins as global-ethical responsibilities. The novel explores the fragility of desert ecosystems and the impact of human activities on the environment.

Keywords: climate fiction, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), global ethics, climate action, environmental conservation

Introduction

Claire Vaye Watkins' Gold Fame Citrus is an ethically charged work of climate fiction that stages the moral crises generated by water scarcity, displacement, and ecological collapse. The lens of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been applied to the novel to reveal how Watkins dramatizes urgent intersections between health and well-being (SDG 3), clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), climate action (SDG 13), and life on land (SDG 15). An attempt has been made in this paper to highlight the primary ecological concerns like water scarcity, migration, official hitches and

environmental psychology, that had been reframed by Watkins as global-ethical responsibilities.

Role of Climate Fiction in Abating Environmental Collapse

Climate change is perpetuating the daily lives of the public these days. It shapes societies, economies, and ecosystems endlessly. Literary responses to this crisis—particularly in the form of climate fiction (cli-fi)—play an increasingly vital role in raising awareness and shaping public discourse. More and more, climate fiction, or cli-fi, is used as both ethical challenge and creative forecasting. Cli-fi questions



human values, social institutions, and responsibilities rather than only speculating about future disasters.

A prime example is *Gold Fame Citrus* (2015) by Claire Vaye Watkins, which is set in a near-future American Southwest that has been turned into deserts and dunes. The story focuses on Luz and Ray's personal experiences as a result of institutional collapse. Watkins' depiction of social disintegration, ever-changing landscapes, and progressive drought compels readers to examine the moral framework that works upon underlying environmental degradation and it gives a severe warning to prevent such environmental mishaps in future.

Global Ethics

A set of moral standards and ideals that are thought to be generally relevant across all cultures and communities, regardless of their disparate origins and worldviews, are referred to as global ethics, world ethics, or universal ethics. It addresses problems like poverty, human rights, and environmental sustainability by identifying, defending, and putting ethical standards into practice in a global setting. Global Ethics Declaration, International Human Rights Law and Sustainable Development Goals are some of the offshoots of Global Ethics in the contemporary scenario. Sustainable Development Goals has been chosen as the critical lens to analyze Claire Vaye Watkins' Novel *Gold Fame Citrus* in this work.

The SDGs provide a framework for how global citizens may collaborate to create a better world. Since Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) goals can only be accomplished by working together—across borders and disciplines, as well as with community partners—Global Ethics, Responsibility, and Intergenerational Justice are crucial in the ultimate realization of SDGs. The SDG framework rests on the recognition of shared global responsibilities, particularly toward future generations.

Alignment with Sustainable Development Goals

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),

“Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The 17 SDGs are integrated—they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability”.

Good health and well-being (SDG 3), clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), climate action (SDG 13), and life on land (SDG 15) are just a few of the 17 interconnected Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that aim to direct thought and action on the most important issues and opportunities confronting both humanity and the environment.

Gold Fame Citrus aligns with several SDGs and offers a powerful exploration of sustainability themes. Reading the novel by applying the SDG framework reveals how its imaginative scope intersects with concrete development priorities. The novel serves as a warning about the consequences of environmental degradation and climate change. The importance of collective action is emphasized. An attempt had been made in this paper to align the novel with the indispensable Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) so that the readers will feel the quantum of the environmental issues which may lead to such catastrophe in the near future. If all the countries of the entire world join hands to tackle the emerging environmental issues, then this global village can escape from the verge of a global environmental collapse.

Malnutrition, dehydration crises, child welfare (Ig), psychological trauma, stillbirth and sickness potentials in the novel display the indispensability of Good Health and Well-being as envisaged in SDG3. Extreme drought, rationing of water and cola, scarcity of food (e.g. black-market blueberries), failed conservation campaigns highlight the essentiality of clean water and sanitation to correlate the novel with SDG 6. Institutional neglect (Baby Dunn), border enforcement, Mojave exclusion and stigma expose the reduced inequalities in the novel that reinforces the



importance of SDG 10. Ecological collapse via relentless dune sea, moral weight of collective inaction in the novel express vividly the need for the implementation of SDG 13 to enhance climate action.

The importance of climate-fiction can be easily summarized in this manner if the public are made aware of the ecological concerns. The speculative fiction book "Gold Fame Citrus" imagines a near-future California devastated by severe drought that inevitably leads to the formation of the enormous Amargosa Dune Sea. The narrative follows two lovers, Luz and Ray, as they set out to discover a better future while residing in the ruins of Los Angeles.

Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3) and the Novel's Psychological Dimensions

One of Watkins' most distinctive contributions to climate fiction is her attention to the mental health toll of environmental change. She depicts heat and dehydration as assaults on perception itself. This hallucinatory sequence compresses physical suffering and psychological disorientation into a single sensory overload.

"His world was a photo negative of itself, a kind of heat vision... Colors... somersaulted across his field of vision... the drought of droughts through a kaleidoscope." (Watkins, 216).

Such moments illustrate "solastalgia," the term for distress caused by environmental change at home. They also align with SDG 3's call for ensuring well-being. The novel suggests that climate adaptation strategies must address not just infrastructure but mental health care — an area often underemphasized in policy yet central to lived experience.

Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6) and the Novel's Water Scarcity as Ethical Crisis

Watkins' dystopian world revolves around water. She depicts an arid California where nature has denied its energy in the opening chapter: "Nature had refused to offer herself to them. The water, the green, the mammalian, the tropical, the semitropical, the leafy, the verdant, the mother-loving citrus, all of it was denied them..." (Watkins, 7). In this case, the lack of water eliminates a wide range of life, including

ecosystems and human civilization, making deprivation both material and existential. The story emphasizes the need of clean water and sanitation while highlighting the battle for water resources in drought-stricken California. The destructive effects of water scarcity are symbolized by the Amargosa Dune Sea.

"Still came sand in sheets, sand erasing the sun for hours then days, sand softening the corners of stucco strip malls, sand whistling through the holes bored in the ancient adobe of mission churches." (Watkins, 117)

"Gold Fame Citrus" emphasizes the value of clean water and sanitation while highlighting the battle for water resources in drought-stricken California. As Watkins writes early in the novel, "The earth was a parched tongue, thirsting, cracked with thirst" (p. 7), a visceral image that underscores SDG 6's emphasis on sustainable water management.

As Luz and Ray journey through the desert, they encounter the harsh reality of water scarcity: "The white was not a rind of ice, not a snowcap, but sand piling up inland where the Mojave had been." (Watkins, 7). This imagery underscores the impact of drought on the environment and human settlements. Ray's survivalist mindset reinforces this centrality. His scrawled lists, which often end with nothing but "— water," are stark reminders of a single, non-negotiable priority. In terms of SDG 6, Watkins' decision to deny water to her fictitious society is consistent with UN estimates that billions of people could experience water stress in the coming decades. The Colorado River is exploited beyond capacity. Irrigation and urban consumption are unsustainably high. "Water was rationed. You didn't drink it from a glass; you sucked it from a pouch like a baby animal. (Watkins, 216)". Universal and equitable access scarcity strips dignity and normalcy from daily life.

Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10) and the Novel's Climate-Induced Migration

Characters are forced into new areas of exclusion by climate-induced migration, which is a direct result of the novel's drought. The idea that alternate routes are blocked, borders are patrolled, and resources are being



hoarded casts a shadow over Luz and Ray's flight across a shifting desert. Watkins captures the grotesque inversion of plenty when she writes:

“Enough money could get you fresh produce... the fish was mostly poisoned and reeking... hard sour strawberries and blackberries filled with dust... an avocado whose crumbling taupe innards once made you weep.”

(Watkins, 18).

The detail of the ruined avocado encapsulates the collapse of former comforts into symbols of scarcity and inequality. The physical landscape participates in this exclusionary dynamic. The Amargosa Dune Sea, which swallows towns and migratory routes, is described as

“A steamroller, a plow. A hungry beast... a bloated blob gobbling land...” (Watkins, 99).

This anthropomorphic imagery renders environmental collapse not as neutral change but as an active force that accelerates social dislocation. SDG 10 calls for reducing inequalities both within and among countries. The novel's layering of ruined foodscapes and predatory geographies embodies the compounded vulnerabilities of the displaced.

Climate Action (SDG 13) and the Novel's Manifestation of Inaction

SDG 13 urges immediate action to mitigate, adapt, and build resilience in order to battle climate change and its effects. Watkins weaves the story in such a manner that it serves as a warning and a striking literary representation of what occurs when such immediate action is either missed or postponed.

“The desert was not new. It had always been coming.” (Watkins,5).

It suggests the predictability of the crisis and the failure to act.

According to Watkins, climate change is a serious social justice concern in addition to environmental deterioration not only to the present generation but also to the forth coming generations. As far as the present generation is concerned, the impoverished are left stranded in crumbling cities or "repat" camps that resemble internment camps, while the wealthy and politically connected flee to protected enclaves. She

deftly steers the thought that the future generation will be immensely affected by the overconsumption of the previous generations. In Watkins' novel, the child character functions as an emblem of intergenerational vulnerability — inheriting a world shaped by past overconsumption. This ethical framing matches climate justice principles that emphasize the rights of those yet to be born. Recognizing that disadvantaged communities bear the brunt of climate consequences, this aligns with SDG 13's connection to climate justice. Watkins adeptly handles the narrative that it stands as a standing testimony that the world of climate-fiction can be used as a Narrative Tool for Climate Action around the globe. Thus it proves that SDG 13's focus on awareness and institutional capacity can be met by using fiction as an environmental education tool.

“We ran out of ways to pretend it wasn't happening.” (Watkins,47).

Moral and Ethical Obligations must be collectively sought by all the stake-holders occupying this global village. Governments, businesses, and residents all have some of the blame for the collapse portrayed in Gold Fame Citrus, which was caused by a series of careless actions rather than a single catastrophe.

“The dunes swallowed towns the way the sea swallows ships.” (Watkins,129).

It evokes the unstoppable nature of environmental collapse without mitigation. This embodies the spirit of SDG 13: that climate change is a shared challenge that calls for shared accountability. Characters like Luz and Ray, who exist in survivalist limbo, serve as examples of the mental health costs that climate scientists are increasingly documenting, including estrangement, pessimism, and eco-anxiety. The novel portrays the catastrophic effects of climate change, including droughts and environmental degradation.

Life on Land (SDG 15) and the Novel's Fragility of Desert Ecosystem

The novel explores the fragility of desert ecosystems and the impact of human activities on the environment. The Amargosa dune sea's expansion



threatens the lives of those who inhabit the surrounding areas. Luz's observations of the natural world serve as a poignant reminder of the interconnectedness of human and environmental well-being:

"John Muir had written how when we try to pick out anything by itself we find it hitched to everything else in the universe."

(Watkins, 72)

This quote underscores the importance of preserving the natural world. Nonhuman Agency and Life on Land. In essence, *Gold Fame Citrus* is a literary case study on the failure of SDG 15.

Conclusion

Claire Vaye Watkins' *Gold Fame Citrus* uses the intimacy of fiction to sharpen the ethical edges of the SDGs. By integrating deprivation, inequality, mental

distress, and ecological transformation into a single narrative fabric, the novel insists that sustainable futures depend not only on technical solutions but also on moral imagination. In showing how climate change erodes both landscapes and the human spirit, Watkins makes the goals of the SDGs not just necessary but urgent. The novel explores the fragility of desert ecosystems and the impact of human activities on the environment.

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