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A Forevision Of A Life In A Flooded City: A Study Of Kim Stanley Robinson's New York 2140

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Abstract:

New York 2140 presents a different metropolitan lifestyle adopted by the New Yorkers in the future year 2140.The half sunken New York is presented with unique details of the two massive sea level rises that is the First Pulse and the Second Pulse. The Second Pulse of the 2070s witnesses a huge melting of the Antarctic ice sheets which results in the fifty feet sea level rise. Though New York is portrayed as a hell of a bay, the citizens adopt new modes of transportation such as water taxis, airships, and vaporettos. Burning of the fossil fuels which leads to the increase of green house gases is described by Robinson precisely. He has woven the story with characters trying to cope up with the climate crisis. Migration of endangered species, creation of intertidal water tracking index, refugee crisis, sunken treasure hunt are the some of the climate issues addressed by the author.

Key Words: *sea level, migration, green house gas, Antarctic, endangered, New Yorkers.*

Introduction

Kim Stanley Robinson with a futuristic vision describes the partially submerged New York in the future year 2140.As a realistic science fiction writer, he begins his description of a flooded city by giving a statement of an American writer, Carl Van Vechten that "New York is fluid" (31). The intense winters of New York is once presented with reference to the usage of heaters to melt the snow. But after the Second Pulse that is the massive sea level rise after the melting of the Antarctic ice sheets in the 2070s completely puts an end to the usage of heaters. New York, one of the commercial centres of the world is addressed by Robinson as "a hell of a bay" (32). Manhattan, one of the five boroughs of New York is "technically an island; rocky, hilly, forested, meadowed, ponded" (33) but now it is "a forest of skyscrapers" (33). Fifty feet sea level rise has converted the city into a bay with all their meadowlands and the other boroughs Brooklyn, Queens, south Bronx into deep seas.

The half drowned New York is not deserted by the New Yorkers. On the other hand, the life in the city is modified to that of a life in Venice. Gerry Canavan in his Utopia in the Time of Trump addresses the partially submerged city as "a Supervenice: a hacked-together improvisation they navigate via water taxis, skybridges, airships, and private boats they store in the ruined lower floors of Manhattan. Robinson compares the New Yorkers to cockroaches which means no one can completely eradicate a New Yorker from New York even though it is half drowned. The Tyranny of Sunk Costs, the title given by him to the first part of the novel New York 2140 clearly reveals the hidden reason behind the citizens not leaving the city. This adamant nature has turned them into a "monomaniacal New Yorker" (33) till their death. Robinson compares the New Yorkers to lemmings which belong to the category of mammals whose behaviour is to live in groups. But, he sarcastically refers them as "morons" (35). People have already invested in high paid projects that they are not ready to leave the city.

Real estate is the culprit behind such an unremitted disaster. New York is once a place known for the serene beauty of the Nature with the hills and ponds. Business in the name of globalization has altered the face of the city to a leading commercial centre. Ponds are filled with industrial waste like gravel and the skyscrapers occupy the fertile farm lands. Sara Seddon Kibinger in her Real estate industry a top culprit in destroying biodiversity states that the real estate industry is one of the main causes of species extinction and the destruction of natural ecosystems due to land sealing and resource consumption. In the name of improving road traffic, trees are cut down and the roads are laid. But the Nature has given the place for roads in lower Manhattan to remain under the water in the future year 2140. On the contrary, the traffic of the waterways increases. "The Anthropocide, the Hydrocatasrophe, the Georevolution" (34) are the terms suggested by Robinson to present the First Pulse and the Second Pulse of the melting period of the Antarctic ice sheets. Such a watery decade is a warning for all the citizens worldwide.

Robinson portrays the details of the flooded New York City through elaborate narration. Water reaches up to the third floor of the buildings in the Fortieth Street of Lower Manhattan but the buildings withstand the current of the flowing water. The northern side of the Forty Second Street is unaffected by the fifty foot sea level rise but in the eastern side, water surrounded the buildings of Harlem and Bronx. The northern side of the Staten Island is an elevated area so the people seek refuge in that surroundings. The flood increases the land value of the Yonkers or Westchester County because the crowd rushes to occupy such areas unaffected by the flood. Madison Avenue, one of the great trading centres and also "money-crazed megalopolis on the planet" (35) is completely shattered like other intertidal areas of New York. New Jerusalem, one of the busiest cosmopolitan cities of New York with their unique mixed culture of English and Jewish also too lost the hype as capital of the world.

Robinson gives a brief account of how the role of carbon dioxide, one of the green house gases intensifies the global warming. Carbon dioxide gas like that of a green house traps heat in the atmosphere. Such increase of Carbon dioxide by burning fossil fuels converts the reflected sunlight from the surface of the Earth back as heat in the surface of the Earth. This trapped heat transfers easily into the oceans which in turn lead to the warming of the oceans. Warmer ocean currents circulate all over the waterways easily which eventually reaches the Antarctic Ocean. Antarctic ice sheets gets melt down easily by the warmer ocean currents. Robinson predicts that if Antarctica, a continent with ten thousand feet and fifteen hundred miles ice sheet melts down completely, it will lead to a massive sea level rise of two hundred and seventy feet.

The First Pulse of the 2050s witnesses a massive sea level rise of ten feet in ten years. Robert Kopp in his New York 2140: A novelist's vision of a drowned city that still never sleeps gives a contradictory statement to the vision of the sea level rise of Robinson that the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s 2013 report estimated that, under a future with greenhouse gas emissions, global average sea level would likely rise by about 1.5 and three feet over the course of this century. Diesel burning ships and trucks releases carbon into the atmosphere. Carbon burning leads to the warming of the planet is the sole reason for the melting of the Antarctic ice sheets which in turn raises the sea level. After the First Pulse, there seems to be a heavy blow in the shipping trade all over the world. People stopped using diesel burning ships to decrease the atmospheric carbon dioxide level. The impact of such a sudden slap in the shipping trade affects the global distribution system because goods exchanged via sea route are the cheapest way of trading. This sudden stop of carbon usage results in the depression whose impact on the lives of the Americans is equalled the damage done by fifty Katrinas, a hurricane that blasted the city of New Orleans.

Another decarbonising project experimented by the people is pouring out tons of sulphur dioxide in the atmosphere which will deflect sun light back into the atmosphere.

This experiment may slow down the heating of the planet for some ten years but the bottom of the ocean is already heated up to the extreme. Intense ocean heat results in the breakdown of the First Pulse which in turn brings forth the Second Pulse. Robinson gives reference to the account of the Paleoclimatologists regarding the carbon dioxide rate in the atmosphere as "CO2 levels screaming up from 280 to 450 parts per million in less than three hundred years" (140). This drastic increase of carbon dioxide level is not as high as compared to that of the Eemian period. "Creative destruction" (141) is the term given by Robinson to denote the great depression that followed the First Pulse.

Greenland, West Antarctica, Wilkes/Victoria basin are the major victims of the First Pulse. Robinson predicts that 2052-2061 are the greatest years of sea level rise. The melting of the Antarctic ice sheets doubles every ten years once. The impact of the Second Pulse is too worse than the First Pulse. There is a massive sea level rise of fifty feet in the Second Pulse. One of the aftermaths of the Second Pulse is refugee crisis whose impact is equal to ten thousand katrinas. People in the intertidal areas suffer directly from the Second Pulse with a heavy blow in the fishing, aquaculture, shipping and coastal agriculture.

Robinson hints that there is some progression following the Second Pulse which he has criticized as creative destruction. The recently drowned coastlines are abandoned at first by the people, then it is occupied by "desperate scavengers and squatters and fisherpeople" (144). He criticizes those occupiers as "water rats" (145). The words of Bertolt Bercht, a German playwright are quoted by the author to describe the new course of life after the Second Pulse. The line begins thus, "they dismissed the people and elected another one" (145). Robinson portrays such a new way of living as "an experiment in living wet" (145). The capitalists moved to Denver, the most populous city of the American state Colorado leaving all the water rats to thrive in the flooded New York City.

The story line of New York 2140 revolves around a co op skyscraper Met Life Tower. The characters of Robinson in the flooded New York City are an internet celebrity, two computer hackers, chairperson of the executive board of a co-op building, a day trader, and two kids after a treasure hunt, an old man obsessed with maps, an inspector, a superintendent of a co-op building. Amelia Black, an internet celebrity is involved in migrating endangered species which are in the verge of extinction safe ecozones. Niall Alexander in Storms of the Century: New York 2140 by Kim Stanley Robinson states that Robinson struggles to make Amelia especially relevant. Her airship Assisted Migration assist in the selfless dedication of saving endangered species. Her cloud show telecasts Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem which brings before the eyes of the audience the lives of the native wild animals such as wolves, grizzly bears, buffaloes, wild horses. Amelia has a separate fan base of an average of about thirty two million for her adventure moves from the airship. From her airship the flooded city stands "in all its watery magnificence, visible as a patchwork under a light marine layer of white clouds" (41). With all the excitement of saving animals, Amelia narrates the sights which she has encountered in her trip.

One of the life risking projects which Amelia undertakes is migrating six polar bears from Manitoba, a Canadian province to Antarctica. During the month of October, polar bears come to the Manitoba town in search of food get shot every year. Manitoba Conservation has created the Polar Bear Alert Program, a twenty four seven help line number through which one can inform the arrival of the polar bears to the concerned authorities. The bears which mark their entry in the town are tranquilized and relocated to the Polar Bear Holding Facility, a kind of jail. At the end of November, they are released on to the Hudson Bay when the ice covers the shore.

Amelia engages in transporting six polar bears to Antarctica. But all her efforts end up in vain when she lands the bears in Antarctica. The migrated polar bears are blown to death using a small neutron bomb by a group called Antarctic Defense League. Conflict between the humans is explicitly cited by Robinson as one group trying to protect the

endangered animals and the other group destroying the animals. Even after a great hydrocatastrophe, humans are not aware of the impending danger in the near future.

Ralph Muttchopf and Jeff Rosen is a pair of computer coders who plays the role of angry youth looking forward to alter the fundamental systems of the capitalists. Residing in a hotello of the Met Life Tower, both of them involved in changing the codes of the computers. They accuse capitalism as "a set of stupid laws" (5). Adam Roberts in his review, New York 2140 by Kim Stanley Robinson review - an urgent vision of the future states that the villain in the novel is capitalism itself. According to Ralph and Mutt "mass extinction event, sea level rise, climate change, food panic" (4) are the miseries inflicted by the ruling class. The sudden disappearance of the coders leaves the residents of the Met Life Tower in distress. They are kidnapped and locked in a container under the water. Later, they are released.

Charlotte Armstrong, chair person of the executive board of Met Life Tower and also the representative of the immigrants files a missing case about the two computer coders who have resided in the farm floor of Met Life Tower. As a responsible head, she initiates the step to deal the missing case. Suddenly, there comes an offer to buy the building from an unknown source and she is not interested to accept the offer. She considers it to be a fake one, likely to trap the residents of the building into some financial crisis. Her insight to reject the offer clearly reveals her genuineness in caring the homeless immigrants.

Inspector Gen Octaviasdottir, a woman of fifty seven deals with the missing case of the computer coders. She investigates in the farm floor occupied by the missing guys with the help of Charlotte and Vlade, the superintendent of Met Life Tower. Through her investigation in the farm floor, one can easily understand how the food production in a flooded city is shifted from ground to hydroponics mode of cultivation. Robinson places the responsible duty of dealing with the legal and political issues of the futuristic New York in the hands of a brave and cunning woman.

Another interesting character is Franklin Garr, a hedge fund day trader who has created a water tracking tool, Intertidal Property Pricing Index. His index helps the New Yorkers to get information regarding the investments in intertidal areas. Such an invention shows how technology varies with changing times. A couple of homeless kids, Stefan and Roberto symbolize the desire of the middle class people for money. With the help of Mr.Hexter, an old man who is obsessed with books and topographical maps of the Manhattan and the surrounding harbour areas, both the kids with a diving bell has undergone a treasure hunt in the underwater. Both the kids are luckily saved from the flowing water by Franklin. The building in which Mr.Hexter resides portrays the condition of the vacated buildings which are in the verge of fall. "Smell of mildew and mold and unemptied chamber pots" (109) describes the condition of the buildings in the water.

New York 2140 is a combination of optimistic and pessimistic view of life. Robinson has presented a different lifestyle of the future citizens of New York. Despite the challenges of living in a flooded city, his characters invent new technological solutions to combat the climate crisis. His futuristic vision urges the present generation to leave a safer Earth for the future generation.

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