

Mary Murphy as the Planetary Citizen in Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future*: An Ecocritical and Ecocosmopolitan Study



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Abstract: *This study examines Kim Stanley Robinson's novel The Ministry for the Future using the theoretical concept of Ecocosmopolitanism and Planetary Citizenship developed by Ursula K. Heise. The focus of the study is on the character of Mary Murphy, who plays a major role in the global efforts to confront climate change. The study investigates how Mary acts as a planetary citizen, boosting collective responsibility and global cooperation to resolve environmental crisis. The novel also depicts some main environmental issues, such as rising global temperatures, melting glaciers, sea-level rise, severe heatwaves, loss of biodiversity, and acidification and deoxygenation of oceans. The research is qualitative in nature. The primary source of collecting data is the novel itself, while the secondary data is gathered from different research articles, theses, and academic papers. Furthermore, this research highlights how speculative fiction like The Ministry for the Future can provide new dimensions of thinking about planetary ecological problems. It also presents how Literature can assist the concept of global citizenship and mutual responsibility to control climate change. This investigation enhances to the developing field of ecocritical literary studies, especially in relation to climate fiction and global ecology.*

Keywords: Ecocriticism, ecocosmopolitanism, planetary citizenship, Mary Murphy, speculative fiction, *The Ministry for the Future*, climate change

Introduction

Combining the terms "criticism" and "ecology," ecocriticism is a relatively new literary theory that looks at literature from an environmental perspective. William Rueckert coined the phrase in his 1978 essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." It investigates the ways in which texts address, reflect, and critique ecological issues. Shikha (2011) refers to it as "the study of nature writing," while Glotfelty (1996) describes it as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment." Ecocriticism is further emphasized by Rueckert (1978) as "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature." The relationship between people and their surroundings is at the

heart of this strategy.

Eco-cosmopolitanism's primary focus is on realizing the environmental issues and it also emphasizes humans understanding that how both, local and global environmental issues, can be resolved simultaneously because they both are in association with each other. Moreover, It stresses that ecological problems go beyond the cultural and national boundaries. Heise (2008) believes that eco-cosmopolitanism is a mean of expanding nationalism to encompass the earth and nonhuman entities. It encourages the collective efforts and shared responsibilities to save the planet. People are encouraged by this viewpoint to consider themselves as belonging to a larger planetary community that transcends human boundaries.

Well-known American science fiction author Kim Stanley Robinson has dedicated his career to using speculative fiction to explore the relationship between human cultures and their environments. His novels are *2312* (2012), *New York 2140* (2017), and *The Ministry for the Future* (2020), which highlight environmental degradation and offer futuristic solutions. Robinson is renowned for developing protagonists who are scientists, diplomats, or academics who support sustainability (Rothman, 2022). One example of climate-focused speculative fiction is *The Ministry for the Future* (2020). According to Oziewicz (2017), any non-mimetic genre that deviates from everyday reality is considered speculative fiction. Because of its emphasis on societal reform, climate change, and technological innovation, the book has a science fiction foundation (Glatch, 2022). The Paris Agreement led to the establishment of an international organization called *The Ministry for the Future* after a devastating heatwave in Uttar Pradesh, India, killed twenty million people. The Ministry wants to safeguard the earth and future generations.

While relating the concept of ecocosmopolitanism to the selected novel, one can examine that Mary Murphy's character realizes the ecocosmopolitan principles such as planetary citizenship. Mary Murphy personifies a planetary citizen and ecocosmopolitan character. She is the leader who represents a global point of view, promoting structural shifts that operate beyond national interests. Engaging with the 2000-Watt Society reflects her dedication to sustainable lifestyles, where energy use is shared fairly. "The 2,000 Watt Society, started in 1998 in Switzerland." (Robinson, 2020). She proactively works with international institutions, negotiating with central banks to roll out the carbon coin scheme, a money mechanism used to cut carbon emissions. Kittelsen (2023) writes that Mary Murphy consistently attends central bank meetings during the decades the book covers, tenaciously attempting to convince them to endorse her viewpoints. Her persistent call for post-capitalist economic shifts is testament to her commitment to a more equitable and

sustainable world order.

Problem Statement

Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future* is a science fiction or speculative fiction. In speculative outlook the novel deals with the theme of climate change as a severe threat to the world where global collaboration is one of the most important steps. Related to this theme is the character of Mary Murphy who is the protagonist of the novel. She encourages the rights of the whole planet and future generations while representing the principles of ecocosmopolitanism. There is limited scholarly attention given to the analysis of *The Ministry for the Future* through the perspective of ecocosmopolitanism in general and the character of Mary Murphy in particular. This research investigates ecocosmopolitan principles through Mary Murphy's character and her role which promotes planetary citizenship and ethical responsibility. Through the analysis of these dimensions, the research aims to portray how speculative novel can provide significant observations into the obstacles and possibilities while dealing with global issues, specifically it concentrates on the issue of climate change. This study is conducted from the perspective of ecocosmopolitanism.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the character of Mary Murphy through eco-cosmopolitan perspective.
2. To explore the planetary citizenship role played by Mary Murphy in *The Ministry for the Future*.

Research Questions

1. In what ways does Mary Murphy embody the ecocosmopolitan ideals in the selected novel?
2. Why is the Mary Murphy's character valuable for analyzing planetary citizenship in *The Ministry for the Future*?

Significance

The present study of *The Ministry for the Future* from the lenses of ecocriticism and ecocosmopolitanism is significant for many reasons. Firstly, this study provides help in recent growing field of ecocriticism and offers

an investigation of a linkage between literature and the physical world. Secondly, it emphasizes the ecological consciousness to save the world which suffers from ecological devastation. Thirdly, the application of ecocosmopolitanism stresses the interconnectedness of all lives and their collective responsibilities to tackle the environmental hazards specially climate change. The research is conducted that the focus of the novel is on innovative and systematic solutions to climate crisis that align with ecocosmopolitan beliefs. These beliefs include the shift from individual to collective and local to planetary efforts for sustainable future.

Literature Review

Kittelsen (2023) examines Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future* and narrative techniques to solve the catastrophe of socioeconomic and environmental problems that are associated with the climate change. Kittelsen's research is one of the first researches because of the recent publication of the novel. In this research he stresses on the critique of neoliberal capitalism in the novel, that concentrates on the reconceptualizing human agency. For Kittelsen this ideology of neoliberal capitalism is "the main antagonist in the face of the climate crisis"(2023) because it obstructs successful climate activities. The researcher further investigates the narrative strategies of Robinson's novel that the blend of fictional and non-fictional features of writing inspire the readers to think of practical solutions for prosper future. Additionally, he examines the role of both human and nonhuman agencies in the novel to assist in examining that how neoliberalist ideology is confronted by *The Ministry for the Future*. The scholar finalizes that in the novel, through Robinson's narrative techniques the climatic hazards are productively communicated and it has also confronted the status-quo of neoliberal ideologies.

Tejero-Marin (2023) explores the notion of "good Anthropocene" and diverse narrative strategies used by Robinson in *The Ministry for the Future* that portray more fair society. The researcher navigates that how this concept is historically associated with devastating imagery because it emphasizes on devastating impacts of

humans on environment. The researcher presents the progress of Anthropocene both theoretically and historically as it is chosen by different fields as a framework to grasp recent environmental problems. Furthermore, The researcher derives that Robinson's narrative techniques in the novel, imagine a future where humans deal with climate issues through fair and sustainable methods. While examining the concept of anthropocene, the researcher also refers socio-cultural aspects such as postcolonial and Marxist critiques. These schools of thought believe that the concept conceals the real causes for the destruction of nature. Tejero-Marin uses the term "Capitalocene" which refers that how capitalist ideology perpetually exploits the ecological resources. Finally, her thesis highlights that literature plays an important role and brings optimistic thoughts for more effective future.

Mikes and New (2023) explore the necessary options we encounter between a eco-friendly future or ecological disaster. These researchers rely on Kim S. Robinson's concept to investigate how economics, finance management and accounting are affected by climate crisis. Their purpose is to confront present capitalist structures and offer solutions for a sustainable economy. The researchers prioritize democratic government and collective responsibility of the citizens to tackle climate action. Instead of Isolating between these two, government and coordination of people, they want a combined outlook. For academia, Mikes and New visualize a new role as a "Ministry" that embodies suppressed societies and future generations. This role needs other researchers to go beyond highlighting the complications to properly find their solutions. Additionally, they mention Some of the setbacks which are faced in academic research. They discourage the slow processes of publication that prohibit timely collaboration with environmental crisis. When there is rapid change in business, so the academic research remains behind. Its influences are weakened by the slow process of publication on important decisions of environment. Simply they advice for the elastic publications techniques that can be easily

reached to various readers. They emphasize that researchers should relate their writings to the problems of practical life. They should also be able to interact with stakeholders, businesses and other citizens. Furthermore, they have an idea that education should play a vital role to inspire action. Finally, they argue that scholars should support local movements, evaluate their impact, and advocate for justice to create a better future.

Bump (2022) critically evaluate Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future*. It reveals that how we can face our present-day disasters evading both renunciation and misery. A reasonable, optimistic completion makes this book not only a very rare and unusual narrative in this genre, but possibly the book which is most important book read on the subject of environmental hazards and their solutions. There are many side plots and intervals, but the emphasis is on an American aid worker, Frank who suffers from heat-wave and another character Mary, the executive of the an organization *The Ministry for the Future*, formed by the Paris Agreement to support for upcoming generations.

Indriyanto (2021) studies Kiana Davenport 's novel *The House of Many Gods*, which explores the probable area of intersection between globalization and eco-criticism. Within American environmental discussions, there is primacy of local issues, hampers the receiving of global theory, believing that if they think globally, it might lose the importance of local places. However, Ursula K Heise, in her book *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (2008) proclaims that focusing only on local places is incomplete without seeing ourselves as a part of a global ecosystem, which is a "sense of planet". This study explains this idea by taking the character Ana, which intersect her native Hawai'ian understanding of sense of place and sense of planet with a wider viewpoint of ecological calamity.

Byberg (2023) analyses Kurt Vonnegut and Ursula K. Le Guin as ecological intellectuals. This thesis offers a useful viewpoint on environmental concerns in science fiction. The climate change becomes a noticeable threat, this

study gives readers a new perception to approach these problems. The term planetary citizenship is more specifically hypothesized and discovered how both Vonnegut's *Galápagos* (1985) and Le Guin's *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (1974) are stimulating readers to reconsider their thoughts about a citizen. Employed with planetary citizenship and engaging with ecological ideas and themes this study purposes to present how these writers are thoughtful about ecological problems in their writings in the foundation of the ecological movement.

Theoretical Framework

Ecocriticism converges with other theoretical frameworks, including ecocosmopolitanism, which addresses global ecological connectivity. In her book *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (2008), Ursula K. Heise develops the framework of ecocosmopolitanism. Ecocosmopolitanism is the combination of "eco" and "cosmopolitanism". "Eco" is the short of ecology which is related to environment while "cosmopolitanism", according to Merriam Webster dictionary, is "having wide international sophistication". It considers all humans as individual citizens worldwide and does not restrict them to national borders. According to Byberg (2023) "once one can imagine oneself as part of a larger community that is not restricted by the borders of a country, that is when one is moving towards being a citizen of the planet."

Ecocosmopolitanism is an analysis which examines how local system lacks to give details about nature, impacted by humans. Heise claims that in contemporary era, we all are linked. Ursula K. Heise argues that "ecocosmopolitanism" is "an attempt to envision individuals and groups as part of planetary "imagined communities" of both human and nonhuman kinds". (Heise, 2008). Furthermore, this theory enhances an idea that all the ecosystems of the world intermingle, they are not found separately. Therefore, Heise concludes that the humans duty should not be limited to the ecosystem they belong to, rather they have a responsibility to all of the global ecosystems. Moreover, this framework covers

the ecological awareness, the interconnectedness of human and non-human entities. It also emphasizes the rights and interests of non-human species. About the worldwide interconnectedness of everything, Heise (2008) writes, “deterritorialization implies that the average daily life, in the context of globality is shaped by the structures, processes, and products that originate everywhere.”

Now relating the concept of ecocosmopolitanism to the selected novel, one can explore that Mary Murphy’s character realizes the ecocosmopolitan principles such as planetary citizenship and interconnectedness of human and non-human entities.

Discussion

Mary Murphy, the protagonist of *The Ministry for the Future*, embodies planetary citizenship in her global leadership and robust environmental ethos. She is a retired union attorney and ex-Irish Foreign Minister who leads a new United Nations department created in 2025. This organization is tasked with solving world issues like climate change. Her practice is grounded in a profound commitment to sustainability and justice, not national self-interest (Kittelsen, 2023). Her leadership and guiding values reflect a far-reaching sense of responsibility that transcends borders, generations, and species.

Mary exhibits ecocosmopolitan values unmistakably in her empathetic response to India’s catastrophic heatwave. She directly addresses Chandra, the representative of India, and provides assistance based not on political interest but humanity. This is a moment that shows her compassion and moral agency beyond national and personal limits (Robinson, 2020, pp. 17–18). Mary’s mind expresses Heise’s (2008) concept of “imagined communities,” in which individuals take responsibility not only for their respective nations but for all life on the planet. In declaring she wants to “give the world back to the animals,” she expresses an ecocentrically deep sense of justice (Robinson, 2020).

Mary employs diplomacy as an ethical and pragmatic instrument of change. She listens carefully, is composed in confrontations, and

strives incessantly to forge cooperation among different interests. Her method resonates with the UNFCCC spirit of inclusiveness (1992), which promotes common discourse and green cooperation. Salonen et al. (2024) believe that planetary citizenship demands individuals to respond beyond the human-nature dichotomy. Mary’s discussions and decisions are characterized by empathy, humility, and mutual responsibility beyond political imperatives.

Mary Murphy’s commitment to long-term justice is one of her characteristic features in *The Ministry for the Future*. She has a strong belief that humankind must “bend the arc” toward more good than evil, even if this takes decades (Robinson, 2020, p. 33). Her position combines optimism and realism, both of which are central features of ecocosmopolitan resilience. Hicks (2023) further stresses that confronting global crises is not only a matter of scientific understanding but also the strength of imaginative culture. Mary’s faith in gradual progress demonstrates her trust in humanity as a whole. She acts with persistence and forbearance, looking towards gradual global change over time rather than personal achievement in the short term.

By virtue of her leadership position in a UN agency, Mary acts beyond national borders. She represents the voice of future generations, the marginalized, and even nonhuman entities. Her collaborative work brings together specialists from diverse fields such as climate science, law, economics, and ethics to advance a worldwide, interdisciplinary approach to addressing climate change (Kittelsen, 2023). This type of leadership is a good example of a robust model of planetary citizenship that emphasizes inclusivity, flexibility, and moral rectitude. Heise (2008) submits that ecocosmopolitanism demands compassion towards all species and long-term environmental responsibility. Mary embodies this ideal by advocating for large-scale sustainability initiatives and legal rights for unborn species, giving nonhuman life moral significance (Robinson, 2020, p. 85).

Mary’s transformation from national politics to global caring is evident through her reaction to climate catastrophes such as the one that

occurred in India. Instead of employing force, she employs diplomacy, empathy, and dialogue (Robinson, 2020, pp. 17–18). This reinforces the cooperative values of the UNFCCC (1992) and corresponds with Salonen et al. (2024), who outline a planetary citizen as a person operating between ecological and social axes. Mary's peaceful and moral decisions make her a figure of global leadership. Yet, she is not portrayed as flawless. She feels frustration and doubt, once admitting, "we're not managing to do it," which shows her emotional vulnerability (Robinson, 2020, p. 104). Leppänen (2020) notes that true ecocosmopolitanism must adapt to climate emergencies. Mary's urgency, "we have to do something", matches this call for flexible and responsive thinking (Robinson, 2020, p. 110).

Mary is humble and open to learning. While traveling, she hears from local activists and draws encouragement from local initiatives, for example, rewilding in California (Robinson, 2020, pp. 171–176). Mehreen (2024) describes how Mary's insistence on pragmatic measures such as the carbon coin is a clever means of affecting economic systems. Her pressure on central banks to act on planetary survival is a critique of profit-driven postponement by Steffen (2018). As a realistic idealist, Mary accepts that selfish motivations may end up in good results. She comments that if self-interest can save the world, "maybe that didn't matter" (Robinson, 2020, p. 199). This supports Heise's (2008) contention that ecocosmopolitanism provides room for various motivations to converge with world's good. Mehreen (2024) further observes that Mary balances emotional awareness with strategic thinking and makes planetary care a guiding principle.

Mary does not confine her activism to environmentalism that is place-based. Rather, she is supportive of global economic solutions such as decarbonization and green investment. She is convinced that markets can also be allies in saving the world, which coincides with Heise's (2008) emphasis on long-term, planetary thinking. She attempts to reform destructive industries instead of punishing them, utilizing their resources to heal the environment. Davoudi and Brooks (2012) threaten industrial

control, and Mary's carbon-attached currency proposal is a daring move to reverse this destruction into action (Robinson, 2020). Her diplomatic counsel to Tatiana, such as focusing on G20 countries' emissions and six major sectors, aligns with the arguments of Parker et al. (1999) regarding global responsibility, and Gunesh (2004), who interprets cosmopolitanism as cultural openness to diversity.

Mary's emotional resilience is also evident in caring for Frank May, even though he had a history of violence (Robinson, 2020, p. 263). Heise (2008) points out that environmental fiction has to incorporate emotional truth, and Mary illustrates that healing people and healing the earth are linked. She also counteracts short-term fiscal thinking and sustains institutions that prioritize human existence over profit (Robinson, 2020, p. 268). This accords with Byberg's (2023) position that ecocosmopolitanism has to balance both ecological and economic injustice. Mary's request to "blockchain all your money" and socially invest it (Robinson, 2020, p. 297) attests to her application of technology for justice. Both Byberg (2023) and Oxfam (n.d.) also espouse equity-based international cooperation, which Mary still does.

Mary demonstrates personal commitment. She is aware that she is threatened by "vicious petro-states" (Robinson, 2020, p. 312), but remains steadfast. Mehreen (2024) sees how Mary experiences both political and gender pressures, but remains firm. She even alters her travel to minimize carbon emissions, traveling across the Atlantic while continuing her work (Robinson, 2020, p. 385). Kittelsen (2023) refers to it as a tangible decline in emissions, and Heise (2008) and Byberg (2023) concur that genuine planetary citizenship involves shifting individual behavior above national allegiance.

Mary identifies with the landscapes outside her homeland, like when she refers to California as the "Serengeti of North America" and affirms the proposal for ecological corridors (Robinson, 2020, p. 399). Her perception of biodiversity and history is respectfully deep. Heise (2008) refers to this sensitivity as the "sense of planet," an attitude that appreciates nature wherever it is

situated, not simply locally. While working remotely in Zurich, Mary engages in ecological battles around the globe.

Her restoration includes emotion and policy. She views rewilding as means of recovery from colonial and industrial trauma. Ang (2021) contends planetary ethics should look after all life everywhere. Mary recontextualizes local harm in a global sense, illustrating how ecocosmopolitan thinking can make personal and cultural hurt a collective renewal.

In the Alps, she quietly watches marmots and birds, recognizing their lives as complete and meaningful (Robinson, 2020, p. 406). Heise (2017) reminds us that humans are part of broader systems of animals, bacteria, and materials. Mary's moment of peace shows a deep respect for nonhuman existence. Patoine (2022) describes *The Ministry for the Future* as a "patchwork of voices," including nonhuman ones. Mary's humility in nature reflects her belief in shared planetary life.

Mary Murphy in *The Ministry for the Future* is depicted as an ecocosmopolitan ideal. She is seen walking silently in Zurich, reflecting on past work and the significance of human toil (Robinson, 2020, p. 453). Her mourning for Frank May resonates with a sense of general human frailty and remembrance. Byberg (2023) states that planetary citizenship requires new thought about a sense of belonging. Morton (2018) goes on to say that local actions must be seen as being part of global transformation. Mary's reflection enables her to develop in ecological awareness and moral discernment.

Mary combines different global issues such as climate policy, emotional resilience, finance, and biodiversity into a single ethical agenda. She employs cooperation, empathy, and remembrance as means of action. Weise (2008) states that we should envision new ways to coexist with all species. Mary's decisions depict this vision not only in policy, but in her daily actions and quiet thoughts. She emerges as a figure of hope and responsibility.

During a world conference, Mary hears Minister Chan talk about the Earth as a living system. Such a vision harmonizes environmental

stewardship with social justice (Robinson, 2020, p. 465). Mary is nodding in confirmation, indicating how she transformed into an actual planetary citizen. Ecocosmopolitanism is what Hicks (2013) thinks links global consciousness to local concern. Mary's championing of emergent leaders indicates how important learning and collective information to her are.

Sailing above the Earth, Mary envisions a future that is improved with more nature conserved (Robinson, 2020, p. 476). She momentarily sees humans as pests but then reconsiders. Her sympathy is restored. Leppänen (2020) asserts ecocosmopolitan thinking involves sensitivity to political and cultural complexity. Mary's broad perspective provides her with a modest, realistic perspective of Earth.

Mary eventually decides to reside in a co-op according to the 2,000 Watt Society (Robinson, 2020, p. 496). She consumes vegetables and uses her energy resources wisely. These behaviors align with her values. Kittelsen (2023) adds that in the 2040s, she leads a completely green way of life. Heise (2008) maintains that small local routines can sustain global care. Mary adapts to her area, demonstrating that ecocosmopolitanism develops through collective living.

She still leads with emotion, reason, and faith. According to Ang (2021), global citizenship ought to transcend borders and species. Mary exemplifies this ideal in action, thought, and daily living.

Lastly, Mary yearns to remain static and look at life profoundly (Robinson, 2020, p. 507). She empathizes and delights in native ways and advocates for land return to animals (p. 513). Heise (2008) appreciates such concern for nonhuman existence. Kittelsen (2023) describes her last vision as a realistic utopia of hope, learning, and care.

Conclusion

The Ministry for the Future by Kim Stanley Robinson is a powerful narrative of climate fiction that explores the real-world ecological concerns and issues and suggests imaginative solutions and answers over a narrative based

framework. By using Ursula K. Heise's theoretical framework of Ecocosmopolitanism and Planetary Citizenship, this study has discovered how the narrative encourages a worldwide perception of responsibility regarding environment. Analyzing the female character of Mary Murphy, the study reveals how people engage with their part of planetary citizens, individuals who identify the interconnected nature of the biosphere and effort jointly to talk about climate change.

As the leading person of *The Ministry for the Future*, Mary Murphy, embodies a moral and practical obligation to save the earth. This study explored her character profoundly involved in global policymaking, global organizations and associations, and the exploration for maintainable solutions. Her character does not perform unaccompanied; instead, she works with a community including scientists, economists, activists and political leaders from all over the world. This mutual determination mirrors Heise's concepts that finding solution of environmental issues involves worldwide action rather than isolated nationwide struggles. The actions of Mary show that planetary citizenship comprises not only concern for the natural environment but also making hard choices for the betterment of both individuals and environments.

Therefore, the conclusion of this study is that *The Ministry for the Future* is not only a fictional work, rather it is also a source for ecological education. It promotes the idea that every individual, despite of nationality or national borders, has a role to play in tackling the climate crisis. Literature like this can motivate real-world shift by aiding people imagine prosperous futures and encouraging collective efforts for the welfare of the earth. It has meaningful leading to ecocritical studies and support for growing movement toward ecological obligation at a global level.

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