

## JAN MICHALSKI PRIZE FOR LITERATURE 2010 FINALIST

**Tim Flannery**

***The Weather Makers : The history and  
future impact of climate change***

Tim Flannery combines several essential qualities which help to explain the success of this book. He is at the same time a recognized scientist, a passionate reader, an experienced explorer and a gifted writer. He places his talents at the service of his convictions, but does not hesitate to share his doubts with us. The result is an extremely convincing book sounding the alarm at the urgency of climate change, which will affect all aspects of our everyday lives, the economy and society by 2050 if we do nothing about it.

Structured in chapters, the work is well documented and difficult to summarize. The practical examples used cover the whole of the world. Flannery explains that over the past 10,000 years the Earth's thermostat has been set at an average temperature of 14 degrees Celsius at its surface, which in general has been very well adapted to the human race, which has been able to organize itself impressively by planting cereals, domesticating animals and building towns. Over the past hundred years, a truly global civilization has been created. By way of comparison, throughout the history of the earth, the only other creatures that have reached this level have been ants, termites and bees, whose needs are significantly more basic than our own. Unfortunately, this thermostat is very fragile and it has been affected by greenhouse gasses, changes in the earth's orbit and sunspots.

The observations of naturalists are useful in assessing the effects of climate change. The geographical distribution of certain species has changed, as well as the sex ratio in species in which gender is sensitive to the temperature of the water when they hatch (turtles, alligators), which is threatening their survival. In Sumatra, fires are breaking out in dried-out forests, causing a thick smog, warming and an increase in the iron content of water, which is damaging coral. In Australia, the Great Barrier Reef is undergoing bleaching as a result of the temporary warming of the water, which will result in the death of the coral if the high temperatures persist. In the Antarctic, where the first tuft of grass emerged in 2004, the changes are more rapid than in tropical areas, and are particularly spectacular in the polar seas. The plankton upon which krill feed, which are in turn the principal source of food for seals, penguins and whales, are

diminishing dramatically. Similarly, *nanuk*, the polar bear, is under threat from the melting of the ice.

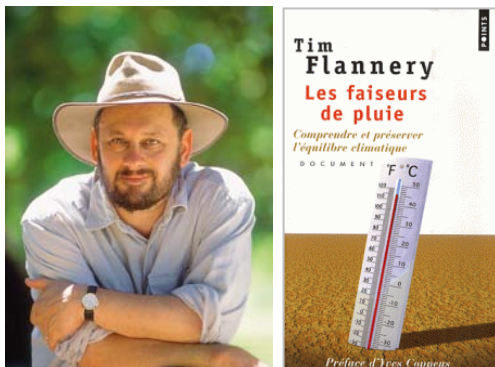
Confronted with this alarming assessment, Tim Flannery reviews the measures adopted to combat the progression of this phenomenon. The Kyoto Protocol and its CO2 emission reduction targets appear to him to be a toothless tiger, but it is still the only treaty in existence, despite the refusal of the Americans and the Australians to ratify it under the pretext of the very high costs of doing so. The transition to a carbon-free economy is under way: following coal, oil is gradually being replaced by gas, although it is the transition to hydrogen that is necessary, despite the space that it requires and the difficulties involved in its transport. Ideally, this source of energy would be supplemented by solar and nuclear energy, sea power and geothermal energy.

Individuals can take action to reduce their CO2 emissions by using hybrid cars. They can also reduce their consumption of electricity by producing their own hot water using solar energy, turning off electrical appliances more frequently, making greater use of public transport ...

Flannery concludes that « we are the generation fated to live in the most interesting of times, for we are the weather makers, and the future of biodiversity and civilisation hangs on our actions ».

Tim Flannery, born in 1956, is the author of a dozen books. He lives in Australia, where he is the director of a zoological laboratory.

*Vera Michalski-Hoffmann*  
*President of the Jury*



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*The Weather Makers: The history and future impact of climate change*  
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