

Analyzing and Applying Shared Elements of Climate Fiction

Background

Climate fiction, also known as “cli-fi,” is a literary genre that engages with the impact of a changing climate on both humans and the natural world. It often incorporates speculative and dystopian elements to explore extreme weather scenarios, shifting landscapes, mass displacement, and widespread ecological disasters. While not a new genre, cli-fi is gaining traction in mainstream literature as climate change becomes an increasingly relevant global issue, appearing in the works of popular authors such as Margaret Atwood and Kim Stanley Robinson. Moreover, articles encouraging readers to engage with climate fiction are becoming more frequent, suggesting a widening audience for cli-fi, as its themes resonate with the public’s growing awareness and evolving exposure to environmental issues.

The impact of climate fiction on public perceptions and behavior is an emerging area of academic interest, with studies by Matthew Schneider-Mayerson et al. (2020, 2023) and Sophia Hatzisavvidou (2024) arguing that it enhances awareness of climate change and climate justice while fostering emotional connections to the environment. In her research, Hatzisavvidou suggests that cli-fi has the potential to help readers envision possible consequences of climate change and spur collective action. Overall, this existing body of literature underscores the role of climate fiction as a catalyst for engagement with the environment, inspiring action to slow the effects of climate change.

However, while much attention has been paid to the psychological effects of cli-fi on readers, there are gaps in understanding the literary strategies that result in these impacts. Analyzing the rhetoric and emotional themes within the works themselves can provide deeper insights into the impact of cli-fi. Short stories, in particular, provide an interesting angle for this analysis. Given their limited space, short stories challenge authors to concisely but impactfully convey the emotional weight and urgency of climate change. The lower barrier to entry in publishing short stories also means that more diverse voices can contribute to the genre, offering a broader range of perspectives on climate change. By focusing on short stories, this project will examine how authors navigate these constraints to produce climate fiction that leaves a lasting impression on readers.

Research Aims

1. Identify and analyze a group of existing climate fiction short stories and identify shared emotional themes.
2. Produce an original climate fiction short story incorporating identified themes.

Research Approach

This study will investigate emotional themes in climate fiction short stories by analyzing Reddit threads over the past five years to identify at least 30 relevant narratives. A preliminary exploration of Reddit has yielded several subreddits dedicated to climate fiction, with hundreds

of members actively discussing related works. Additionally, there are various threads under [r/climatechange](#) and [r/suggestmeabook](#), all published within the last five years, confirming the availability of sufficient content for analysis. Once identified, all selected stories will be downloaded into a local repository.

To evaluate the emotional impact of these stories, a thematic coding approach will be developed, drawing on existing literature in environmental psychology by Carmi et al. (2015), to create a bank of emotional themes such as hope, sadness, fear, happiness, anger, satisfaction, and anxiety, with the potential to add others, as needed. Initial readings of the stories will help develop and refine this emotional bank based on the elicited responses. Determining whether a story evokes a particular emotion will involve subjective feelings and the objective analysis of specific language that provokes these emotions. Quantitative data will be generated by evaluating the stories using this thematic coding approach and supplemented by representative quotes that illustrate each story's primary emotional focus.

The top five emotional themes identified will be used to create a new climate fiction short story, approximately 20 pages long, with a catalog of words and phrases designed to convey these themes effectively. The analysis of the stories will be completed within the first 2.5 weeks of the term, allowing the remaining 1.5 weeks for writing the original piece of climate fiction. This timeline ensures adequate time for thorough analysis and reflection before engaging in the creative writing process.

Deliverables

- Quantitative analysis and report on emotional themes in 30 climate fiction short stories
- Creation of a novel climate fiction short story
- Final presentation of results, including a reflection on the impact of these emotional themes on public perceptions of climate change

Impact

This research will quantitatively analyze emotional themes across a selection of climate fiction narratives, contributing to the expanding literature on the psychological impacts of cli-fi on public perceptions of climate change. While existing studies have examined how climate fiction influences emotional responses, there is limited insight into authors' rhetorical and literary techniques to evoke these feelings. By focusing on a diverse range of short stories, this study will highlight how writers effectively bring across the urgency of environmental issues in a limited space. This analysis enhances our understanding of the genre's role in shaping public perceptions and fostering a sense of action regarding climate issues.

Career-wise, this research represents an opportunity for hands-on experience in conducting research before I pursue graduate studies. As a senior with an English major and an Environmental Studies minor, I aim to combine my interests in literature and environmental advocacy. This project will not only enhance my research skills but also provide valuable insights that can inform my future academic work and professional endeavors. By engaging

deeply with cli-fi narratives, I hope to contribute to meaningful discussions about how literature can inspire real-world change, making this research both personally fulfilling and academically relevant.

Works Cited

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