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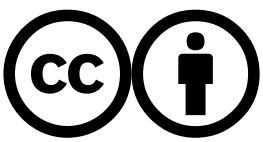
"To Delight and Misinstruct: Strategic Environmental Narratives in *New Yorker* Fiction"

Schneider-Mayerson, Matthew, Christopher A. Walker, Veronica Romero, Kiara McCellon, Claire Campbell, Moya Stringer, Charlotte Snow, and Samantha Chilton

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How has contemporary literature responded to, helped mitigate, or exacerbated the climate and nature crises? To begin answering this question systematically, we developed the Strategic Environmental Narratives codebook and applied it to 474 short stories published between 2014 and 2023 in The New Yorker, the most prestigious Anglophone literary magazine. We find that climate change exists in just 10.1% of these stories and freshwater pollution, marine pollution, air pollution, deforestation, species extinction / biodiversity loss, or toxic waste exists in 15.6%. When present, these environmental problems are mostly marginalized and minimized; structural culprits – governments, corporations, and the wealthy – are rarely assigned responsibility; and pro-environmental actions and behaviors are rarely modeled. Synthesizing these results with recent data on popular films suggests an unspoken "cultural climate consensus" across contemporary media on how often climate change can or should be included in fictional narratives. Through a typology of "strategic environmental narratives" – including "eco-lite narratives", "normalizing narratives", and "symptomatic climate fiction" – we discuss how fiction can pursue its time-honored goal of both delighting and instructing readers in an era of planetary polycrisis.

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