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"The Influence of Climate Fiction: An Empirical Survey of Readers"

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Climate fiction—literature explicitly focused on climate change—has exploded over the last decade, and is often assumed to have a positive ecopolitical influence by enabling readers to imagine potential climate futures and persuading them of the gravity and urgency of climate change. Does it succeed? And whom does it reach? A qualitative survey of 161 American readers of 19 works of climate fiction finds that these readers are younger, more liberal, and more concerned about climate change than nonreaders of climate fiction. Drawing on concepts from ecocriticism, environmental psychology, and environmental communication, this article suggests that "cli-fi" reminds concerned readers of the severity of climate change while impelling them to imagine environmental futures and consider the impact of climate change on human and nonhuman life. However, the actions that resulted from readers' heightened consciousness reveal that awareness is only as valuable as the cultural messages about efficacious action that are in circulation. Moreover, the affective responses of many readers suggest that most works of climate fiction are leading readers to associate climate change with intensely negative emotions, which could prove counterproductive to efforts at environmental engagement or persuasion. Based on one of the first studies to empirically examine the reception of environmental literature, this article demonstrates a novel interdisciplinary approach to environmental literature (empirical ecocriticism) and points the way to future research in this vein. (Text from author's abstract)

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