

Cli-Fi in American Studies: A Research Bibliography

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by Susanne Leikam and Julia Leyda

Over the last two decades, the global landscape of cultural production has been teeming with a cornucopia of fictional texts, in print, in live performance, and on the screen, engaging with the local and global impact of advanced human-induced climate change. In academia as well as in popular culture, this rapidly growing body of texts is now commonly referred to by the catchy linguistic portmanteau ‘cli-fi.’

- 1 That cli-fi has transitioned from a subcultural colloquialism circulating around the blogosphere into both a cultural buzzword and staple academic term alike can be seen, to name but a few examples from a long list, by its recent addition to the *Oxford Dictionaries*, its appearance in numerous academic conferences and publications, the emergence of the first how-to manuals such as Ellen B. Szabo’s *Saving the World One Word at a Time: Writing Cli-Fi* (2015), the establishment of Amy Brady’s monthly column, “Burning Worlds,” examining cli-fi in the *Chicago Review of Books*, and the increasing inclusion of cli-fi as a label in award classifications and marketing endeavors.
- 2 Despite the wealth of cli-fi primary texts across all media, there has not yet been a comprehensive compilation of secondary sources facilitating the engagement with cli-fi in the environmental humanities. Our research bibliography aims to close this gap by providing an extensive, albeit necessarily fragmented and incomplete, pool of resources for scholars, educators, and the interested members of the public. This list extends from journalistic considerations of cli-fi texts and of the term itself to academic scholarship theorizing the generic and disciplinary implications of cli-fi for research and teaching, capturing the heterogeneity, productivity, and heteroglossia in the field. It is meant to provide a stepping stone into cli-fi’s diverse, at times hotly debated, conceptual trajectories, disciplinary appropriations, and ideological underpinnings. Up to now, there is no general agreement on how cli-fi is defined, and the same pertains to its conceptual frameworks, methodological approaches, and theories. Various understood as merely an abbreviation for climate fiction, its own standalone literary and/or cultural genre, a subfield of science fiction, or a comprehensive concept for assessing the cultural production in the Anthropocene (to name but very few of the many current designations), cli-fi thus provides a momentum, instigating the (re)visitation of fundamental disciplinary questions—some of them novel, some of them long-established and intimately familiar, as we and our contributors discuss at greater length in regard to American Studies elsewhere (see Leikam and Leyda).
- 3 As one of the most prolific generators, disseminators, and adaptors of literary and cultural texts, North America participates at the forefront in the recent spate of cli-fi. Even more importantly for American Studies, as one of the key fossil-fuel consumers with global political influence, North America, particularly the United States, features prominently in cli-fi narratives. To date, the Trump administration’s decidedly anti-environmentalist agenda, especially its stated intention to withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord, is further fueling the production of cli-fi and intensifying the scholarly and public attention paid to these texts. The next few years will certainly provide scholars and students in American Studies and related disciplines with rich ground for new research and classroom debate, calling for an even more rigorous scrutiny of the multiple contact points and interlockings between cli-fi and American Studies. As more scholars take up the topic in their work and as greater numbers of students enroll in courses centering on climate change, it is our intent to aid these endeavors in academic research, pedagogy, and outreach projects through the compilation of this secondary source bibliography of cli-fi.

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