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Climate Change Fictions: Representations of Global Warming in American Literature

Our very understanding and experience of climate change has been shaped by an all-encompassing scientific interpretation of the weather. This statistical grid work of emission scenarios and other diagrams has not only enforced a division between the scientific and the human realm but has for a long time suppressed other perceptions of global warming. However, in order to understand this unprecedented phenomenon we need to consider it within a broader context of discourses and narratives, which also implies an awareness of social and cultural spheres through which climatic changes are brought to the fore.

In this dissertation I thus turn to a set of contemporary novels and read them as a unique cultural response to the challenges of representing climate change. Steven Amsterdam's *Things We Didn't See Coming* and Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* provide innovative narrative means to engage with the spatial dimension of climate change and illustrate how global warming challenges attachments to place and question forms of belonging and inhabitation. T.C. Boyle's *A Friend of the Earth* and Jean McNeil's *Ice Lovers* serve to explore how timescapes are rendered visible, negotiating between the short and the long term, creating the narrative relationships between present and future, between human and environment while exposing the potential dangers that a bifurcation of time otherwise harbors. In trying to answer how threats, risks, and uncertainties—another prominent aspect in climate change discourse—may be more effectively narrated, the third chapter turns to Kim Stanley Robinson's *Science in the Capital* trilogy and Nathaniel Rich's *Odds Against Tomorrow*. The novels deal with the paradoxical relationship of a risk society in an age of heightened security and shed light on how to navigate through this world of manufactured uncertainties. Robinson's trilogy also serves to illustrate how climate change defamiliarizes our understanding of nature by challenging Western key dichotomies such as the nature--culture divide. Finally, Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Tamarisk Hunter*, Ben Zeitlin's *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and Dana Stein's *Fire in the Wind* depict those issues so far underrepresented in scientific graphs and illustrations, but crucial to the climate change debate. These cultural texts employ climate change not merely as a setting but use it to tease out questions of justice and responsibility. Climate change fiction thereby gives insight into the ethical and socio-political ramifications of this unparalleled environmental crisis, comments on constellations that impede action on climate change, and explores how risk materializes and affects society. It thus serves as a cultural-political attempt and innovative alternative to scientific ways of communicating climate change.