

Countering eco-anxiety through young adult climate fiction: Lauren James's *Green Rising*

Chiara Xausa
University of Bologna
chiara.xausa2@unibo.it

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According to a global survey published in *Lancet Planetary Health* in 2021, nearly 60% of young people (aged 16-25) are very or extremely worried about the future of the planet (Hickman *et al.* 2021). These feelings of helplessness are amplified by a sense of intergenerational injustice that makes many young people feel abandoned. At the same time, climate change is often framed as a tale of and for the children (Rogers 2020), with climate change legacy bestowed upon future generations. In climate change fiction, in particular, the so-called climate generation (Ray 2020) is often portrayed as an innocent victim that adults are failing to protect. By adopting an ecocritical perspective, this paper will examine whether young adult climate fiction (YA cli-fi) portrays young adults as assertive leaders and protagonists, shaping their own future. In particular, this paper will propose a close reading of Lauren James's recent YA novel *Green Rising* (2021), a timing story centered around a climate-change activist (Gabrielle), who develops the ability to grow plants from her skin; her story is entangled with that of other teenagers around the world who develop this strange new "Greenfingers" power. My analysis will explore how emotions (personal experiences) and affects (the forces that precede, produce, and inform such experiences) function in environmentally oriented texts for young adults. I will use affective ecocriticism to evaluate the literary structures and devices through which such narratives convey environmental understanding and become engines of affect, stressing that emotional responses are evoked as readers empathize with characters, while also inhabiting emotionally the storyworlds that surround such characters. A particular attention will be devoted to the entanglement between negative/painful emotions (e.g. ecogrief, climate anxiety, solastalgia) and positive emotions (empathy towards victims of environmental injustice and towards the nonhuman, hope that can emerge from grassroot activism, the spontaneous collectives and moments of solidarity that can arise out of disasters [Solnit 2009], and altruistic emotions that can activate trajectories of change). Contending that pedagogy does not have to follow an arc of hope in order to prevent despair (Ray 2020), I will consider the genre of YA dystopia as privileged site of investigation to explore the importance of cultivating both positive and negative emotions, as it deals with dark times but maintains the potential to inspire the 'social dreaming' that is central to utopia, challenging and disturbing young readers (Baccolini 2019). The overall aim of this paper is to investigate the role of YA cli-fi in helping young readers to cope with the negative emotions emerging in the Anthropocene, and to turn climate anxiety into critical thinking.

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