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The Great Derangement: Climate Change And The Unthinkable (Berlin Family Lectures)



Synopsis

Are we deranged? The acclaimed Indian novelist Amitav Ghosh argues that future generations may well think so. How else to explain our imaginative failure in the face of global warming? In his first major book of nonfiction since *In an Antique Land*, Ghosh examines our inability "at the level of literature, history, and politics" to grasp the scale and violence of climate change. The extreme nature of today's climate events, Ghosh asserts, make them peculiarly resistant to contemporary modes of thinking and imagining. This is particularly true of serious literary fiction: hundred-year storms and freakish tornadoes simply feel too improbable for the novel; they are automatically consigned to other genres. In the writing of history, too, the climate crisis has sometimes led to gross simplifications; Ghosh shows that the history of the carbon economy is a tangled global story with many contradictory and counterintuitive elements. Ghosh ends by suggesting that politics, much like literature, has become a matter of personal moral reckoning rather than an arena of collective action. But to limit fiction and politics to individual moral adventure comes at a great cost. The climate crisis asks us to imagine other forms of human existence "a task to which fiction, Ghosh argues, is the best suited of all cultural forms. His book serves as a great writer's summons to confront the most urgent task of our time. Â

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Customer Reviews

It's sad that Dr Ghosh wants to be "proscriptive" about what kinds of fiction should be deployed for talking about this subject. While the sections on climate change geo-politics and history are brilliant

analyses, Ghosh's idea for fostering the conditions for novelists to tackle global warming impact issues only in "serious mainstream literary circles" is too proscriptive and silly. Has he never heard of genre novelists? So this otherwise brilliant book is a near-total fail in the section about climate novels written by "genre" writers. The author did not do his homework on this and his prejudice toward genre novelists does not serve him well. There have been sci-fi and speculative fiction and eco-fiction and cli-fi novels about climate change issues from the early 1960s to today, and Amitavji, always smiling in his photographs, does not seem to grasp this point. In India, not one literary critic challenged him on this. But literary critics and reporters in North America and the UK will be sure to challenge him on this. His view of what constitutes "literature" is antiquated and prejudiced. Hopefully, after living in Brooklyn for over 25 years he knows that genre novelists from Ballard to Turner to Atwood to Robinson to Vandermeer have been writing about climate change for over 50 years, and yet he pretends in this book that only "literary fiction" by so-called serious VIP novelists can tackle global warming issues. So I give 2/3 of the book five stars for its brilliance and 1/3 of the book one star for its dismal failure to see contemporary genre literature for what is: a happening form of human communication for both writers and readers. Which is why I found it curious that Ghosh more than once brings up the matter of 'serious fiction' and its upturned nose.

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