

The Rise of Climate Fiction: Environmental Anxiety and Narrative Strategies in Contemporary American Literature

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Abstract

This study investigates the rise of climate fiction (cli-fi) as a powerful literary response to the global climate crisis, with a focus on contemporary American literature. In the face of escalating environmental degradation and mounting climate anxiety, cli-fi has emerged as a distinct narrative form that not only reflects societal fears but also reimagines human relationships with nature. Through the analysis of selected 21st-century American novels and short stories, this research explores how authors employ speculative realism, dystopian futures, fragmented temporalities, and ecological symbolism to articulate the psychological, ethical, and existential dimensions of climate change. Drawing on ecocriticism, narrative theory, and affect studies, the study reveals how cli-fi destabilizes anthropocentric narratives, challenges neoliberal ideologies of progress, and offers alternative imaginaries rooted in environmental justice and interspecies solidarity. By foregrounding the affective and cognitive impact of environmental storytelling, the research positions cli-fi as both a cultural barometer and an agent of awareness—inviting readers to confront ecological precarity and to envision sustainable futures. Ultimately, this study argues that climate fiction plays a vital role in shaping public discourse, deepening environmental empathy, and fostering critical engagement with the planetary crisis.



Keywords: Climate Fiction (Cli-fi), Environmental Anxiety, Ecocriticism, Speculative realism, Environmental Justice, Posthumanism

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1. INTRODUCTION

The increased rate of environmental degradation in the 21st century has transformed climate change into a cultural crisis that transcends science to become an element that lingers in the consciousness of the globe and transforms the way societies view the future. Whether it is devastating wildfires in California or extreme heatwaves in every

corner of the world, we can no longer talk of ecological instability as mere speculation. Humanity is in a crisis not only of life-forms but also of the potential to renew life, as mounted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2021) in case the crisis is not immediately addressed. This growing environmental sense of dread has spawned a phenomenon that has also been called climate anxiety- a collective mental process characterized by dread, helplessness, and an ethical dilemma (Clayton et al., 2017).

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But as Americans struggle to find policy and technological answers, the arts, at least the arts of interpretation, processing, and communicating, have subtly emerged as a key to processing, writing, reading, and experiencing the multiplicity of crises of the climate.

After being the mirror to the changes and existential challenges in society, the available literary production has reached what some theorists refer to as the Anthropocene turn. Narrative inquiries are posed by the Anthropocene, a possible name to designate a change in geological time based on the human description of the world: how to narrate a world in the state of emergency, how to present a time scale and the extent of impacts that are incommensurable with a human lifespan (Chakrabarty, 2009; Heise, 2016). Here, a new genre, climate fiction, commonly referred to as *cli-fi*, has found a way of not only depicting a possible future embodied in the ecological situation but also representing the psychological, ethical, and emotional experience of surviving environmental breakdown. In contrast to previous environmental fiction that would be directed on the beauties of nature or the need to save wilderness, *cli-fi* would grapple with the threat to real life that is posed by global warming, sea rise, ecological extinction, and ecological injustice. Speculative dystopias are not the only stories or narrative genres of such nature, as they commonly extend to domestic realism, historical fiction, and political satire and serve as multidimensional depictions of climate change and its consequences.

Commonly understood to mean literature concerned specifically with climate-related themes, settings, and conflicts, Climate fiction, in a broad sense, is literature, usually novels and short stories, that places pre-eminence on climate-related themes, settings, and conflicts. Over the last two decades, the genre has obtained significant scholarly attention, and critics have noted it as a literary, as well as cultural, reaction to the inadequacy of mainstream discourse to meet the urgency of environmental concerns (Trexler & Johns-Putra, 2011). Although *cli-fi* is a worldwide phenomenon, American literature plays a dominant role in the genre. The US, with its position as one of the biggest carbon emitters and cultural hegemon, has introduced a new set of political, economic, and social tensions into *cli-fi*. *Cli-fi* writers in America are more often preoccupied with the following concepts: climate denialism, capitalist excess, structural inequality, and even the myth of American exceptionalism- all of which find a sympathetic hearing among Americans (Ghosh, 2016). Authors such as Kim Stanley Robinson, Barbara

Kingsolver, Richard Powers, and Jenny Offill are following precisely this trend and end up writing works that cross the border between scientific reality and literary experimentation.

This study is going to explore how current American *cli-fi* is not only concerned with environmental anxiety but also uses the specific narrative devices that help to appeal to the minds, hearts, and consciences of the readers. The main research questions are the following: (1) to discuss the thematic preoccupations and the cultural anxieties represented in the 21 st century American *cli-fi*; (2) to examine the narrative devices applied in the representation of a sense of the ecological precarity, including fragmentation, speculative realism, and non-linearity of time; (3) to assess how these texts contribute to the emergence of environmental awareness and the deconstruction of the anthropocentric perspective of the world. The most important research questions that the study tries to answer are as follows: How is American *cli-fi* a representation of climate anxiety and ecological crisis? How are these representations organized by use of narrative techniques? How are these readings both anti-cultural critique and imaginative interventions?

To address such questions, the authors resort to the integration of a trio of ecocriticism, affect theory, and narratology. According to Lawrence Buell (2005), ecocriticism analyzes the connection of literature with the material environment, whereas the contemporarily emerged branch of material ecocriticism and posthuman ecocriticism (Alaimo, 2010; Iovino & Oppermann, 2014) question the complicities of people, nonhumans, and nature. Emotions, such as fear, grief, and guilt, in *cli-fi* circulate in their specific affect-theory underpinning, namely, the one provided by Sara Ahmed (2010) and Glenn Albrechts (2011). In the meantime, narratological concepts provide an explanation of the way that the feeling of temporal disjunction, the variety of voices, and the layer of symbolism contribute to the construction of the way environmental crisis is visualized for the reader. Through the synthesis of these theoretical approaches, the paper presents a cross-dimensional approach to the interpretative side of the literary reactions to ecological trauma and imaginaries about the future.

As a methodology, it will be a close reading of some well-known works of American writers such as *Flight Behavior* by Barbara Kingsolver, *The Ministry for the Future* by Kim Stanley Robinson, *Weather* by Jenny Offill,



American War by Omar El Akkad, and *The Overstory* by Richard Powers. They were selected on the basis of their narrative variety, levels of thematic development, and critical response, and their capacity to reflect the series of reactions to environmental anxiety, including a personal state of confusion to mass action. All the texts will be analyzed according to the degrees to which they reflect climate-related anxieties, the creation of ecology consciousness, and/or critique or re-imagining of social-political frameworks.

The value of the study is that it is an addition to the current discussion of literature and the climate crisis. Fiction is much needed as a method of communication in a world full of scientific facts and political propaganda that only appeal to the mind. It reaches the imagination and the heart as well. As critics, including Ursula Heise (2016) and Rob Nixon (2011), suggest, narrative can form a way to bring into view the slow violence of climate change and develop human and non-human empathy. Using American climate fiction as a case study, the study reveals how the genre can modify knowledge, influence cultural perception, and transform moral belief in relation to the planetary crisis. In this way, it not only affirms the eternal purpose of literature, not escape but ecological witness and narrative activism.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Emergence of Climate Fiction

The link between literature and environmentalism is long and complex. It can be traced back to the 19th-century Romanticism movement. Authors such as Henry David Thoreau and William Wordsworth felt that nature was sacred. They also criticized industrial society. However, due to the current environmental crisis, Kuhlmann has had to modify both the tone and the form. The emergence of *cli-fi* novels, which address the impact of man-made climate change and envision different futures after an environmental catastrophe, is a most pertinent manifestation of the transformation at hand.

The origins of *cli-fi* lie deep in the environmental activities of the 20th century. *Silent Spring* (1962) by Rachel Carson is a seminal work of literature on the environment that produced a shock on ecological consciousness by the horrifying effects of pesticides on ecology and the biosphere, and aroused the conscience of people on environmental matters in the societal domain.

Although Carson was a nonfiction author, her writing made it clear to readers that there was a human story at the center of the environmental concern, as well as an appeal to moral conscience. The earliest eco-literature related to climate change, although not with a direct mention, is found in the works of Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire* (1968), or John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) which documents the themes of human displacement and environmental destruction, and the conflict between nature and Industry.

The transformation of eco-literature into *cli-fi* was a di-hard shift. When eco-literature tended to be donned with the emphasis on celebrating the beauty and goodness of nature and the necessity of a moral vow to preserve that beauty and goodness, *cli-fi* takes a much more realistic look at a world about to explode. According to Trexler and Johns-Putra (2011), climate fiction represents a "generic transformation," moving away from pastoral nostalgia and toward *speculative realism* and dystopian projections. Eco-literature is said to be based in terms of place and preservation, whereas *cli-fi* is said to be centered on urgency, irrationality, and the pull of the system - Diego Luna as Azul in *The Book of Life*. This change reflects a more general human fear of the so-called Anthropocene, the age of man exerting direct influence over the geological processes of the planet (Chakrabarty, 2009).

The thematic difference not only characterizes the difference between early and contemporary climate-themed literature but also structural. An example of such is the comparison of *Silent Spring* and that of Richard Powers and *The Overstory* (2018). Carson wants to inform and warn, basing her arguments on scientific evidence and ethical reasoning, and Powers tries to use intertextual novels and a polyphonic-like structure by providing answers to the question of how human lives and trees are deeply intertwined. By the same token, Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* (2012) fictionalizes climate-driven species movement on an intensely personal and local scale, and Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future* (2020) projects climate collapse on a vast, international scale of speculative world politics. The *cli-fi* expanding is a multifaceted array that has become more complex, both in the environment as a discourse, and in the means of literary writing alone to reflect the environment in all its multifaceted ways of being.



2.2 Key Theoretical Approaches

Examining *cli-fi* would entail employing various theoretical models, the use of which enables scholars to transform the narrative form of the genre and its cultural connotations. Ecocriticism as a literary movement. Ecocriticism is a proven environment-friendly approach developed during and post-human development. Even the popes have declared it the eco-movement or the pro-ecology movement of our age. As Greg Garrard (2012) notes, ecocriticism seeks to "*investigate the relationship between literature and the physical environment*" and to question how literary forms shape ecological consciousness. On the same note, Lawrence Buell (2005) opines that literature is important in portraying and creating environmental values, with him singling out four features of environmentally conscious literature, which include: environmental awareness, interconnectivity, sense of place, and ethical attention to non-human things.

Later manifestations of ecocriticism have widened the application of the concept to nature writing and themes of protection. According to *Ecology Without Nature*, Timothy Morton (2007) rejects continuous conventional environmental thought and demands a more radical reimagination of human-nature relationships. The notion of *hyperobjects* as presented by Morton (e.g., the phenomenon of climate change, which exists vastly and non-locally in space and time) has played a significant role in how such *cli-fi* stories are read, seeking to understand phenomena too large to perceive in real-time and in real space by human senses. His contribution establishes an invitation to readers to address the magnitude and the intricacy of the scope of climate change without recourse to nostalgic and anthropocentric paradigms.

Together with ecocriticism, post-humanist theory is highly essential in the study of climate fiction. The *posthumanism* also questions the primacy of the human subject and requires rethinking regarding agency, subjectivity, and ethical responsibilities between and within species, and ecologies. Within the *cli-fi* fictions, post-humanist interpretations place the mutual and intertwined fates of humans and non-humans in the forefront and, it is increasingly proposed, the interdependence over the dominance. In such a view, scholars such as Donna Haraway (2016) encourage individuals to remain with the trouble and not to manage it, but live and think in its mess instead. Such spirit can be observed in such pieces as *The*

Overstory in which the human characters are deemphasized, and trees are placed as the narrative agents.

Cli-fi can be well explained as well using the theory of trauma and affect. Due to the growing loss of a sense of place as an embodied, physical experience (as well as a psychological and emotional one), affect becomes central to the manner in which literature may reflect the breakdown of ecologies. According to Sara Ahmed (2010), the emotional process involves sticking to objects, bodies, and narratives, which bind the readers to read through the environmental anxiety. Borrowing the concept of solastalgia, or the sadness of place (Glenn Albrecht 2011), i.e., the loss of home or unease caused by environmental changes, provides a conceptual basis of the current study in examining the first such *cli-fi* characters, namely the response to environmental loss expressed in terms of existential grief. Such theories are assistive in the manifestation that *cli-fiction* not only describes but touches, according to the impression, inclining readers into a fleshy experience with the planetary crisis.

2.3 Existing Research on *Cli-fi*

The academic interest in *cli-fi* has been developing significantly over the past ten years and is indicative of its rise towards cultural prominence. As noted by scholars, *cli-fi* takes certain narrative approaches in order to render the abstract and frequently intangible consequences of climate change readable and affectively evocative. In her popular book *Imagining Extinction* (2016), Ursula Heise suggests that *cli-fi* also creates what she calls multispecies justice that incorporates the wellness of not only humans but also of animals, plants, and ecosystems. Heise believes that these tales interrogate the endangerment sensibility and nudge the readers towards new ecological empathies.

Cli-fi relies on narrative technique. *Fragmentation*, nonlinear tonality, and *speculative realism* dominate numerous *cli-fi* works to reflect the confusion and multifaceted nature of the climate crisis. To give one example, *Weather* by Jenny Offill (2020) takes the form of disjointed diary pieces and black comedy to display the mental instability at the prospect of ecological demise. This form is not only an impression of the state of mind of the protagonist, but also an imitation of the slow, discontinuous, and non-sequential evolution of climate change itself. In a similar vein, *The Ministry for the Future* by Kim Stanley Robinson uses policy briefs, first-person testimonies, and journalism loosely through chapters to



create a sense of the messy and polyphonic state of worldwide climate action. These tactics reflect what Trexler (2015) refers to as the generic hybridity of *cli-fi* because it has the tendency to cross the waters between realism, science fiction, and politics.

The other motif common in *cli-fi* is ecological disaster, not presented as a single event but rather as a gradual process. In this respect, the notion of *slow violence* discussed by Rob Nixon (2011) can be quite helpful. *Slow violence* is neither spectacular nor visible like spectacular visible violence; instead, it is gradual, it is a delayed violence whose effects might be so subtle that it remains invisible, like the contamination of ecosystems or the insidious rise of sea levels. *Cli-fi* makes this kind of violence noticeable, emotionally, and morally charged. As an illustration, the poem *Flight Behavior* by Barbara Kingsolver tells of the displacement of the monarch butterflies caused by the shift in climate, lending itself to the more general ecological imbalance in which the consequences run understated at first glance but can be traced back to the roots.

In addition to the narrative of disaster, *cli-fi* also raises the questions of moral imagination and the agency of nature. According to Amitav Ghosh (2016), contemporary literature fails to depict climate change in any meaningful way, as modern fiction tends to neglect nonhuman agency and planetary levels. *Cli-fi* attempts to fill this gap, however, by trying to enlarge the imagination of the fiction. Such books as *The Overstory* or Lydia Millet's *A Children's Bible* invite readers to take trees, animals, and even *Weather* systems not only as a setting but also as characters with some narrative importance and muster. Such movement of interest can be contrasted with Morton's (2007) request to reimagine the borders of narrative subjectivity.

The cli-fi pedagogical and activist potential has also been explored. According to Goldthwaite (2014), *cli-fi* may be viewed as a genre that opens the door to science, particularly to the younger readers, so they may experience the world of science in emotionally powerful narratives. This connects with the overall shift towards affective ecologies as an approach that examines the possibility of literature being the medium that could arouse empathy, moral thinking, and anxiety about environmental problems (Tuhkanen, 2021). In this sense, *cli-fi* is gaining more and more appraisal not merely as an artistic contribution to the climate change problem but also as the kind of narrative

activism that can ascertain the development of the collective consciousness and environmental ethics.

3. METHODOLOGY

Using qualitative literary analysis, this study examines how contemporary American climate fiction addresses environmental anxiety using specific narrative strategies to convey ecological messages. A qualitative framework is well-suited for literary inquiry. It allows for close and interpretive reading of texts. However, it emphasizes thematic depth, narrative form, and cultural context over statistical generalization (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research focuses only on American novels published in the 21st century. It has selected those that directly engage with the climate and are culturally relevant in depicting the specific American sociopolitical response to climate. *Flight Behavior* by Barbara Kingsolver; *The Ministry for the Future* by Kim Stanley Robinson; *Weather* by Jenny Offill; *American War* by Omar El Akkad; *The Overstory* by Richard Powers. This is a highly divergent space, ranging from speculative dystopia to fragmented realism and ecological allegories. Collectively, these works testify to the thematic richness and formal experimentation of the genre as a whole.

Based on ecocriticism and narratology, these works depict climate anxiety and reconfigure narrative forms to represent ecological realities. According to the ecocritical theory developed by Buell (2005), Garrard (2012), and Morton (2007), we are able to understand how literature represents the relationship between humans and nature, challenges anthropocentrism, and invokes nonhuman agency. A narratological analysis enables one to delineate how literary strategies (fragmentation, non-linearity, multiple focalizations, environmental symbolism) are representative of the climate crisis' ambiguity. The study will also explore how affect theory and posthumanism help us understand the making of grief, fear and guilt and challenging of anthropocentric ideas by characters and settings in *cli-fi* texts. When looked at together, this consideration of theory allows for a more nuanced understanding of American *cli-fi*. It considers how these texts are not only imaginative fictions. They can also serve as a form of critique, awareness, and activism.



4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Environmental Anxiety in Contemporary American Cli-fi

4.1.1 Psychological Landscapes of Fear

As climate change increasingly burdens humans and society because of their emotional condition, psychological reactions to the ecological collapse have become important themes in modern American climate fiction. Terms like climate anxiety, which refers to chronic anxiety about environmental doom, or *eco-grief*, which refers to grief caused by ecological losses, have entered clinical as well as commentary literature. This indicates that climate discourse now has a new affective layer (Clayton 2017; Cunsolo and Ellis 2018). In contrast to the previous environmental literature based on natural beauty and wilderness preservation, the *cli-fi* of the present day deals with the landscapes of the soul of the characters who are between the knowledge of environmental catastrophe and their inability to stop it. Those stories theatrically exploit the psychological cost of living on a dying planet, and the main characters are frequently toyed with between paralysis and action. By its close documentation of mental agony, contemporary *cli-fi* not only reflects a shared state of anxiety but serves as one portal of cultural work on the trauma of climate change.

In the novel *Weather* by Jenny Offill (2020), the climate anxiety is portrayed with a mind-blowing acumen of the human mind through the character of Lizzie, a librarian at a university and an unlicensed counselor to her hometown. Composed in half-developed, almost diaristic vignettes, the novel follows the thoughts of Lizzie and the panic that is increasing among scientists and society as the ecological breakdown becomes common knowledge. "How am I going to handle the ensuing mayhem, people question her. It seems I am turning out to be more neurotic. Is that any kind of preparedness?" (Offill, 2020, p. 49). This line is the symbol of this struggle between attention and agency that is characteristic of *climate-anxiety* literature. Lizzie's avoidance behaviors, hoarding water, Googling apocalypse bunkers, pining over survivalist blog sites, seem to emulate the obsessive-compulsive actions and behaviors well known to be attended by the generalized anxiety disorder, though in her case, the actions are recontextualized through an actual and personal worsening of the environmental crisis. The disjointed consciousness of a character that is overridden by the contrasting desires to do otherwise forces

Offill to resort to entries that are short and clipped in order to give an idea of the severed nature of the mind. According to Lisa Duggan (2020), the aesthetic of doomscrolling in the novel refers to the piecemeal chronology that characterizes life in the age of the Anthropocene because slow violence, such as climate change, does not have a resolution that can be fashioned into a story.

In Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* (2012), the speaker eco-grieves through a working-class looking-glass that mires a rural dweller because the main protagonist Dellarobia Turnbow finds a displaced community of monarch butterflies on her Appalachian farm setting, which is the outcome of climate-driven habitats. The entrance of butterflies into the life of Dellarobia, whose life is marked by the stagnation of the domestic environment and deprivation, she at first represents as a miracle. Yet as one of the visiting scientists enlightens her on the environmental implication, she slips into despair after the initial ecstasy. So why, on the face of the whole world attempting to tell her it was not her fault, did she feel so bad? Kingsolver, on her part, writes (2012, p. 268). An instance of recognition reflects what the moral burden of *eco-grief* means: to the individual, even when their burdens have systematic origins, they translate it into personal responsibility for environmental destruction. The loss is not the loss of butterflies only, but it is the loss of the coming future, the future of her children, the future of her community, the world. Kingsolver resorts to the images of fallen and rotten death in order to make the grief tangible: the forest is described as "a collapsed manscaping". It was sumptuous and unjust" (p. 271). The comparison of beauty with wrongness brings out cognitive dissonance that is at the core of *eco-grief*, when the loss of something is both deeply personal and enormous in ecological terms.

Kim Stanley Robinson, in *The Ministry for the Future* (2020), expounds on each human aspect of the problem by beginning the novel with a devastating account of a heatwave in India, killing millions of people due to wet-bulb temperatures rising beyond the survivability of human parameters. Frank May is the lead character of the novel; he is an American aid worker who survives the cataclysm but succumbs to PTSD and moral injury. The development of his character shows a long-term impact of the psychological pressure of observing mass ecological death. One of Frank's therapy sessions is as follows: "he says that the people flew like flies, he lived" (Robinson, 2020, p. 47). His trauma of survival becomes full of anger, and one day, radicalism. Robinson illustrates that raw trauma can give



rise not just to a mental collapse but also to politics, of any rudeness and fretfulness. In doing so, the novel links affective experience with structural critique: Frank's individual grief becomes a lens through which readers confront the failures of global governance and the inadequacy of existing climate policies. Robinson knew when to give a multi-perspective structure to the novel, as it enabled it to follow the process through which emotional trauma is spread to institutions and communities that can then inform decisions and massive changes in community morals.

In the same manner, Omar El Akkad, in *American War* (2017), employs the example of the eponymous Sarat Chestnut to descend into extremism as a case study on the deformation of the individual psychology by the effects of climate-induced displacement and grief. Telling the story of a child growing up in a refugees camp in a divided America in the future, torn apart by climate disaster and civil war, the novel charts the transformation of Sarat as a radical insurgent. Instead of taking her psychological breakdown as a natural condition, it is instead presented as a result of the long-term exposure to ecological and sociocultural violence. "Sarat receives this as another factor of manipulation when her figure grieves over the death of her brother following a bioterror attack in the camp. Later on, she describes it as not revenge. It is not that only. There is nothing left but it" (El Akkad, 2017, p. 223). This quote represents a central observation of the trauma theory that unresolved or unabated grief develops into the defining axiom of identity (Caruth, 1996). In the case of Sarat, the development of world collapse of an ecological and a family mingle into the nihilistic ambiance in which violence is the only manifestation of agency. El Akkad, therefore, produces a psychological world, where *eco-grief* colludes with political extremism, so that the victim-hero binarity is difficult to accomplish.

The Overstory (2018) by Richard Powers is something else, authenticating psychological reaction to ecological malamies through the larger plot of environmental familialism. The novel is about nine protagonists whose lives trees change to turn some of them into environmental activists and others give up hope and isolate themselves from the rest of the world. Olivia Vandergriff who is one of the main characters experiences a near-death experience which makes her think that trees had been talking to her. "Powers suggests that the character heard something, something gigantic now, and now she understands that the remaining part of her life is going to be a responding"

(2018, p. 142). Olivia is not a pathological but a spiritual transformation; however, it is based on the trauma concentrated in the awareness of human destructiveness and emergency of nonhuman suffering. Other characters, such as Adam Appich and Patricia Westerford, suffer more common forms of *eco-grief*, in terms of depression, insomnia, and compulsiveness. The multi-layered structure of the novel is sprawling and polyphonic replicating the psychological dislocation accompanying global ecological meltdown. Powers sees it redemptive but not without the mental trauma of awakening to the fact of the environment.

All in all, these texts reveal a trend in American *cli-fi* now, where the characters seem to approach climate change not as a question of scientific absurdity, not as a science, but rather as a troubling psychological state. Internal challenges include anxiety, guilt, grief, and radicalization, which are embodied in climate anxiety per studies performed on real-life events. According to Clayton et al. (2017), many people, particularly young people, admitted that they experienced heightened levels of worry, hopelessness, and even suicidal ideation resulting from the imminent ecologist apocalypse and the state of things. According to a report by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020), climate anxiety is a condition that more often applies to frontline communities or communities that have a better awareness of environmental threats.

Cli-fi is not only a reflection of these feelings, but it promotes and confirms them, providing readers with the means to describe their fears and grief. By doing this, it fills in the gap between scientific and emotional truth and experiences on the part of the audiences that they can connect with fictional characters living in fear of other fictional characters, whose fears are also exemplified on their part. In the words of ecocritic Ursula Heise (2016), climate stories build a sense of shared emotional geographies of risk: a shared sense of connection to danger that readers and characters feel together.

In addition, those texts reveal moral contradictions of climate anxiety. As Elizabeth Rush (2018) explains in her nonfiction book *Rising*, the people who have gained the least in terms of climate change emissions are the people who suffer most, whereas those who have the privilege of awareness are faced with the guilt and unwillingness to act. Such tension is present in the likes of *Flight Behavior* and *The Ministry for the Future*, in which characters must



wrestle with their contribution to the system of destruction, even as they seek to act to resist it.

American *cli-fi* not only projects climate change as an ecological or scientific problem but also as a cultural and affective trauma. Therefore, delving deeper into the psychological terrains of American *cli-fi* would reveal that it highlights the emotional side of climate change. The pieces utilize fragmentation in their storytelling, heavily internalized tensions and ethically complex characters. As such, they seek to examine how people respond to the world, to one another, and to themselves in terms of *eco-grief* and climate anxiety. Through this, they provide reflections of not just the modern-day anxieties but also a venue of collective grieving and reflection and, possibly, renewed hope.

4.1.2 Intergenerational Trauma and the Future

Among current, emotionally and philosophically urgent issues that are integrated with climate fiction is the feeling of burden that future generations will have to inherit. Modern American *cli-fi* often deals with what academics call intergenerational trauma the mental scarring that is transmitted through families and communities due to disruptions to systems and ecological breakdown, accompanied by constant anxiety as to your own future (Bourgon, 2020). Here, the future turns into a place of hope and store of fear. Legacies of what will be left in the world, who leaves, who has to take up the burden, are questions that move throughout texts that place a premium on children, families, and legacies of crisis passed down. As rising climatic uncertainties come to define the material as well as affective grounds of daily life, *cli-fi* details the experience of ecological trauma as one that is not only experienced in the 'now', but that also transfers to the projected life of the future, in the often highly personal form of trauma.

The theme of intergenerational injustice prevails in the story *The Ministry for the Future* (Robinson, 2020). The Ministry is an agency of UN and was created to protect the interests of unborn generations and thus it constitutes an institutionalized effort to lend a voice to the unborn. At an early stage of the novel, one of the characters says, "The future of the children are people also, you know" (p. 56). The predictive nature of the speculative framework proposed by Robinson revolves around the ethical reasoning that the current actions should be answerable to the people who will be left to deal with the outcomes of the decisions that were made (a prominent tenet in climate

ethics) (Gardiner, 2011). And this ideal is continuously complicated by the political inertia, economic greed, generation power imbalance, as presented in this very novel. This is probably one of the biggest battles in the Ministry, persuading the current actors to forgo short term benefits in favor of long term sustainability. Conversations and bureaucratic standoffs as well as eco-terrorism are emotionally charged against the needs of the now and the rights of the future. Even the characters who do not have direct contact with ecological violence are traumatized by climate as they are pummeled with the realization that their posterity might have to live on a planet that is no longer habitable. Robinson accordingly turns to intergenerational trauma as a structural and an affective influence in the moral construction of the novel.

Likewise, the theme of this subject is presented by Barbara Kingsolver in *Flight Behavior* (2012), based on maternal consciousness. The leading character, Dellarobia Turnbow, is a young mother with two children, who reside in the low income Appalachian community that experiences stagnation in the economy, as well as ecological imbalances. The more she is being conscious about the wrong movement of the monarch butterflies in search of disaster as a result of climatic change across the world, which too can be seen as a consequence of climatic destabilization, the more she tries to bring it nearer to home where in this case a home means the future uncertainty of her children. She asks herself a question: "What type of world am I leaving them with, and this is the same question that millions of parents in the real world are also struggling with due to similar anxieties" (Kingsolver, 2012, p. 312). The story by Kingsolver does not present easy solutions. It does this, instead, by offering the ecological knowledge as empowering, yet psychologically burdensome, and, in particular, to those charged with caretaking duties. Climate anxiety is on a personal level, but there is something even more severe at play in this novel. Anticipatory grief is grief over futures understood as never to be achieved (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018). Dellarobia's experience in *Flight Behavior* demonstrates this. She is brought up with a lot of environmental consciousnesses so much so that every day choice like giving a son an open option to walk that the forest becomes a metaphor of precarulia of the future life. With this portrayal *Flight Behavior* gives intergenerational trauma a chiefly appointed place in the realm of domestic realism. Moreover, it captures how the global crises filter through the personal fears of everyday life.



The Overstory (Powers, 2018) depicts the ways of burdening environmental legacy by means of several generations. Its title character is an example of the characters who wake up to the importance of trees and ecological interconnectedness and it is frequently influenced by their taste of personal trauma or that of their predecessors. Among the most compelling is the one of Patricia Westerford, a scientist whose discovery of the means where trees can communicate is found opponent to the rest of science, only to be proved correct decades later. "In combination with the love of the land and a sense of professional exile, this is what drives her to the active preservation of ecology. Late in life, she says that the world is failing, but maybe, just maybe, we can also sew a plant, which will memorize the way" (Powers, 2018, p. 381). The space that Patricia can be optimistic about is not personal salvation as much as the preservation of knowledge, memory and ecological morals. The idea of planting seeds for resistance will play a crucial role in the novel. It is only by undertaking this act that we can be assured of future success. A successful harvest may not present itself but planting the seed is necessary.

The lives of Nick and Olivia dramatically reflect intergenerational issues as they get involved in radical activism concerning environmental issues. They are driven by a sense of ethical obligation to the future generation's life, realizing fully that they might die in the process. The psychological pressure in these kinds of decisions is enormous, which has shown through anxiety attacks, conflict with others and emotional isolation. However, Powers pairs these descriptions with instances of transcendental connection. Thus, suggesting that intergenerational trauma can be a catalyst to direction as well. According to the ecritic Timothy Clark (2015), the possibility of noticing epochs across human and nonhuman lifetimes proposes the temporality of modern fiction as well as encourages readers to think like a forest, which means to locate human experience within even longer ecological temporalities.

An even more dismal picture of intergenerational trauma is portrayed in Omar El Akkad's *American War* (2017): the readers witness how children are left with a damaged land, but also with the ideological legacies of violence and vengeance. The novel is set in a destroyed world due to the climate change-related civil war and rising ocean waters, and charts the life of Sarat Chestnut, who grows up to be a refugee and a militant insurgent. The factor that influences Sarat psychologically is loss-loss of home,

family, security that all have the basis in environmental collapse. The trauma that she is going through is passed down to the next generation as she leaves the story with her nephew, whom she hopes would at least understand, and hopefully accept the violence she has perpetrated. She asks him, not because it is her own story: not only. It is yours as well now (El Akkad, 2017, p. 320). According to the novel, the effects of the ecological terror cannot be contained in each generation; they extend and trace themselves on the memory, identity, and politics. The spheres of environmental and emotional trauma, absenteeism, where trauma-related injury isn't resolved, are presented in El Akkad's work as a blueprint to future violence and suffering.

The more personal yet no less relevant study of intergenerational anxiety is offered by Jenny Offill in her *Weather* (2020). A mother and a librarian, the main character Lizzie is also obsessed with the fact that civilization will collapse amid climate change. Her mind regularly goes to her little boy, Eli, whom she attempts to prepare psychologically and practically for a destiny of poverty. She recounts that she has begun to hoard medication, canned foods, and water (p. 73). Later she confesses, I am not sure I am preparing him or me (p. 73). This confession can be considered the psychic ambivalence of parenting in the Anthropocene: part care, part guilt, part futility, and part hope. Internal thoughts of Lizzie are full of searches in the Internet, regarding climate migration, as well as the existence of survivalist blogs, which is indicative of a somewhat split mind, likely corresponding to a lack of fantasy towards the future. Offill hits the right note of ridiculousness and futile efforts to live a normal family life and at the same time facing the apocalyptic perspective. According to the novel, parenting is a form of resistance in itself, and just as resilient, but it is also an incredibly emotional journey.

This repetitive use of children, future heirs, and speculative progeny in these novels can be referred to by literary scholar Ursula Heise (2016) as the speculative ethics of climate fiction: stories that elicit a moral imperative to acknowledge not only present human and nonhuman life, but also future life that will live in a post-ecological world. According to Edward Said, fiction enables readers to think of themselves as ancestors. Furthermore, not only are those ancestors who will help secure their own survival, but also those who will contribute to the emergence of futures which they will never see. The creation of art brings about a major shift in



the perception of climate change. This shift is evident not only in the range of phenomena associated with environmental protection but also in the way this notion is conceived. In this way, it becomes a deep-ethical and emotional problem that either unites or separates generations.

In addition, when you approach the climate discourse through literature, especially through works dealing with intergenerational trauma, it is made more immediate. Studies show youth globally feeling betrayed, abandoned, and despairing about inaction on climate change by older generations (Marks et al., 2021). This sensation can be found in the emotional landscapes of *cli-fi* heroes who, on one hand, tend to illustrate climate change victims, but turn out to be the climate catastrophe agents on the other. The generational gaps are negotiated in literature that essays are published. Further, the intervening work of maintaining hope has to be dramatized and subjected to critical self-reflection.

Overall, American climate fiction does not present intergenerational trauma as a secondary issue but intervenes as the primary emotional and moral motivator. These texts challenge an understanding of what it is to live ethically at a time of planetary crisis through the characters of parents, children, descendants, and futuristic imaginaries. They do not provide simple answers, yet they demand that the future is not something that can be forgotten. Addressing the issues of legacy, responsibility, and memory is also to address the issue of climate change. Focusing on the emotional inheritance of the ecological collapse, *cli-fi* assists the readers in coping with one of the most agonizing facts about the Anthropocene, that the most severe outcomes of current activities will fall on the next generations.

4.1.3 Representing Invisible Threats

Representation of the invisible, diffuse, and time-delayed dangers of environmental degradation is perhaps one of the most difficult demands that climate fiction has to face. Climate change is not played out in the dramatic timeline of conventions of narrative conflict; it is experienced over years or decades, and in many cases is experienced as non-occurring. In this regard, the notion of slow violence coined by Rob Nixon (2011) has been essential in describing how such threats are hard to bring to light. According to him, we can speak about slow violence that occurs slowly and is out-of-sight, a violence of deferred destruction that is dispersed across temporal and spatial

scales (Nixon, 2011, p. 2). This type of violence, in specific, is typical of the Anthropocene: it appears in bodies through the contaminated air and polluted waters, invisibly gathers in the soil and invades ecosystems, and occurs generations later. The current American *cli-fi* drama meets this interpretive challenge by relying on narrative processes of turning abstractions into visible things we can touch, making metaphor materiality, fracturing time, breaking down subjectivity, and lyricizing prose to express the unseen.

The main character of the book *Weather* (2020) by Jenny Offill, Lizzie, is driven mad by the news reports, blog posts, and climate apocalypse podcasts about the coming end of the world. The most powerful aspect of this description by Offill is that it coincides with the fact that the spectacle is opposite in this novel, that the apocalypse is not an observed event but rather a background horror, something that is registered as not right yet, but not devastating. What Lizzie can observe is not possible to see or directly measure today; it is the invisible increase in global temperature, the chronically failing populations of pollinators, the acidic creep of oceans, amongst others. Offill tells, the darkness is thick outside. It leans on the windows as on a hand. A soft touch. Or perhaps a claw (2020, p. 64). This metaphor combines the feeling of atmosphere and danger to show how barely noticeable changes of environment creep into the mind and the interior surroundings. The scattered mind and the diary-like form of the novel reflect the scattered, disorienting character of slow violence as related to the mind of the protagonist. By doing so, *Weather* provides the expression of one of the most pivotal points brought up by Nixon in his work, concerning the environmental narration which objects that a key issue is that of the way in which to develop intriguing tales, imagery and symbols equivalent in scale to space-time constraints of ecological disaster (Nixon, 2011, p. 10).

Another way in which slow violence can be experienced is found in Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* (2012), where the sudden, unexplained arrival of monarch butterflies to the forests of rural Tennessee highlights an ecological aberration brought by changes in *Weather* patterns during their migration. The butterflies are a symptom and a symbol of unseen interference of the atmosphere. The protagonist, Dellarobia, first perceives the occurrence of the butterflies as the work of God, but reading on, the reader gets to realize the same awakening of Dellarobia to their true science-based explanation of how they get there. This creature is like a tapeworm eating the



heart of the world, as entomologist Ovid Byron describes to her. You can not even see it” (Kingsolver, 2012, p. 211). Invisible parasite is a metaphor that describes how insidious, slow violence is damage that is consuming itself on the inside, long before it is visible on the outside. The fact that Kingsolver prefers to keep the crisis local and within a household context raises the suspicion that environmental collapse does not have to be spectacular or global-scale. In this case, atmospheric dangers are depicted as overlapping with economic vulnerability, religious opinions, and intergenerational information shortages in illustrating how slow violence works not only ecologically, but also socially and psychologically.

In Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Ministry of the Future* (2020), the violence has been ratcheted up as examples of slow violence moving to planetary systems and political regimes. The first scene of the novel is a heatwave in India that takes the lives of twenty million people and succeeds in death within a few days. Although such incident seems like an exception to the slow violence, it is exactly what Robinson would want to be made out to be the case: “that is that acute disasters are often, the tipping point of much longer slower processes. Through out the novel, characters refer to the invisible accumulation of CO₂, the melting of the glaciers sequestered in polar ice caps, or ocean acidification. As one of the characters mentions, it is invisible, but it keeps striking against the skin of the earth like a hammer blow after blow” (Robinson, 2020, p. 118). The metaphor puts forward violence that can be experienced in its effects but cannot be seen in its deeds, which was a typical feature of the premises of Nixon. Robinson rips policy notes, scientific evidence, and testimonies, introducing them to follow the permeation of temporal and atmospheric threats to the realm of politics, economy, and atmosphere. But even the story form represents the intricacy of the topic of climate change itself: expansive, multi-layered, hard to pin down. In the process, he offers an example of how slow violence can be rendered in a manner that is hard-hitting, and moving.

The narratives are innovative even in the depiction of chemical threats. The *American War* (2017) written by Omar El Akkad presents a splintered United States ravaged by the effects of climate change and warfare that is biopolitical. Slow violence in the novel is offered by means of the landscape and body contamination through second American Civil War, with the aid of a genetically engineered virus. The Red River camp where the protagonist Sarat spends his childhood years is filled with

poisoned remains of industrial wastes and chemical weapons- a battleground built not by an incidence but decades of abuse and indifference. The river was rancid and tart. There was the breath of the broken things in the air, El Akkad writes (2017, p. 91). These wordings give reality to the past abuse to the environment making air and water sources become trauma agents. The viral weapon employed by the killers to eliminate the brother of Sarat is invisible, which reveals the silent deadly nature of the chemical weapons. It is unsuspected, unspectacular, but transforms the whole course of the novel. El Akkad employs this theme to point towards the fact that the slow violence tends to affect the groups of marginalized people the most, particularly refugees, children, and people economically marginalized, echoing the line of thinking developed by Nixon regarding the unfair distribution of environmental damages across race, income, and geographic lines (Nixon, 2011).

In a more lyrical reaction to slow violence, Richard Powers *The Overstory* (2018) presents an account of centuries-long deforestation of the North American forests witnessed by trees and people who eventually realize that trees are replete with sentience. The storyline demonstrated by Powers has transversed centuries, which implies that the environmental abuse is not new but old. Trees, which live much longer than human beings live, are observers of the processes of industrial extraction, land clearing, and ecological memory. What the forest is undergoing in the process of slow death is deprived of sensational showdown but its decades-spanning erosion, silence, and void. A life that has evolved through four billion years seems to need assistance to create the most miraculous things, Powers writes. What they require is to be heard (2018, p. 386). This is an invitation to listen which is literally and figuratively at once, an invitation to be attentive to violence that does not scream but whispers. This ethic can be seen in the narrative structure employed by Powers: non-linear, diffuse, polyphonic, the narrative structure corresponds with the dislocation of time at the core of slow violence. The novel tasks its audience to tune to long durations of time, to the mechanisms of corrosion and regeneration working across generations, and to the moral duty of saving that which can never be replicated.

The aesthetic problem of the telling of atmospheric and time threat of such things as carbon deposits, depletion of biodiversity or acidification of the ocean is also at hand. Traditional forms of narratives cannot adequately portray slowness, invisibility, and displacement of ecological



violence as Nixon (2011) believes. Climate fiction turns to experimental forms to meet this challenge: non-narrative forms, kaleidoscopic vantage points, mixed genre, poetical imagery. Such narrative devices enable the writers to create a sense of urgency without a dramatic climax and causality. They are representative of the texture of the change of climate itself: erratic, asynchronous and systemic.

In addition, these novels provide a remedy to the spectacle purview that characterizes modern media that are more often than not viewing the short-term crises as opposed to long term patterns. However, slow violence cannot be commodified since it is not as explosive as bombings, duration of floods or hurricanes. In comparison, even climate fiction teaches the reader to pay attention to the signs, to notice that there is something wrong even though they cannot see it with their own eyes. It is a radical political gesture: it demands that damage not be discredited by the fact that it is invisible or suffering by the fact that it is abstract statistically.

In theory, the performance of invisible threats in *cli-fi* also transforms to affect theory, specifically, how emotions are formed in things that are to be regarded as imperceptible. According to Sara Ahmed (2010), emotions tend to become attached to things and concepts and therefore predispose our perceptions of the world. In *Weather*, Lizzie becomes afraid of the most ordinary things of everyday life, light bulbs, mosquito bites and *Weather* forecasts. The emotional terrain of her body turns into a chart of a slow violence, a *Weather* of emotion caused by a world that is subliminally unraveling. In the same manner, *Flight Behavior* tells the story of Dellarobia who shared the grief and awe with the butterflies whose distorted migration serves as a symbol of confused life.

To conclude, the exploitation of the form and metaphor, as well as perspective can be considered as the way, through which American climate fiction can expect to confront the narrative issue of slow violence. Authors like Offill, Kingsolver, Robinson, El Akkad and Powers demonstrate that not all the most important ecological crises can be called grandiose and spectacular, but they are much more destructive the lesser they are noticeable. These writers render atmospheric, chemical, and temporal threats into image-less aspects of the story, into manifestations that can be perceived and not just observed by an audience. By so doing they realize a desperate appeal by Nixon in his search of stories which render the invisible visible, which constitute a filament between science and sensation, and

which give rise to an ethical attention to the slow, the dispersed and that which is deferred.

4.2 Narrative Strategies in Climate Fiction

The genre of climate fiction (*cli-fi*) is faced with a specific problem of representation of scale, complexity, and duration of climatic change through literary form. The process of climate change, instead, exists in enormous time scales, involves a wide range of species, and in many cases resists causal explanation. Consequently, post modern American *cli-fi* is dependent on form and experimentation with structure, voice and symbolism as means of communicating the ecological disturbance and emotional intensity. Such significant narrative approaches to *cli-fi* as fragmentation and nonlinear time, dystopia and speculative realism, multiple prospective narrative, and environmental allegory and symbolism are assessed in this section. An understanding of this subject not only shows us the jagged, broken reality of the planet we use to live on. But it also gives art aesthetic means to connect with the readers through a new sense of planetary crisis.

4.2.1 Fragmentation and Nonlinear Temporality

“Climate change is an ongoing process. There is no clear beginning or ending to climate change deposition.” In response to this, works of *cli-fi* frequently abandon the linear form of storytelling, opting instead for more fractured narrative forms that mirror environmental uncertainty and emotional all-at-seas-ness. The phenomenon of fragmentation can be use by writers to reconnect with this complication caused by an intentional overwhelming of information, intellectual disturbance and existential angst, which is the characteristic of life under the shadow of the environmental collapse.

One good instance of this technique in use can be found in Offill’s *Weather* (2020). The book has a vignettes format with disconnection and connection. This mimics the state of the protagonist, Lizzie, who is a librarian. She experiences climactic anxiety. The short, aphoristic pieces of Offill dart between the gauzy world of waiters, the rabbit holes of the Internet, the end of the world, and maternal care, showing how it is that the crisis of the planet has intruded into the lives of the consciousness of quite ordinary people. As Lizzie remarks, today is all bad news. All bad, every day, but today it was worse” (Offill, 2020, p. 34). Simply stated, this is a deceptively complex line that blurs the feeling of passing time and constant crisis, which



characterizes the Anthropocene. The construction opposes linear flow and instead tries to follow a cycle of anxiety, investigation, and acceptance.

Narratological, the form of Offill can be viewed as a translation of the scattered temporality of slow violence (Nixon, 2011). Instead of accruing reflection or revelation, the novel circles on fear and futility, and the feelings of these construct a sense of past, present, and speculative futures that scholar Jennifer Wenzel (2019) terms chrono spectra, the overlaying of past, present, and imagined futures in one and the same story moment in time. This is a time stratification like that in the real world, where the past emissions, the current misery, and the uncertainty of the future meet us in everyday life. Much of the discourse about environmental effect in *Weather* is thus organized around fragmentation, not just as an aesthetic judgment or an aesthetic decision, but these forms of organization represent the psychic cost of living within these conditions of anticipated ecological disaster.

4.2.2 Dystopia, Speculative Realism, and Near-Future Settings

Narrative strategies. The other recruitment strategy of dominant narratives in climate fiction is making use of dystopia and speculative settings to show what climate inaction or inherent failure might lead to. Climate fiction or ‘cli-fi’ that anticipate autumnal apocalypses are neither dystopias without hope nor procession fantasies. They are more like ethical speculations, in so far as they are staged—though dramatized versions—of the very logic of the environmental trends we all know about and are suffering through in real life today. These hypothetical worlds bring into view the ramifications of ecological carelessness, oil economics paralysis, and social-political complacency.

The *American War* (2017) by Omar El Akkad and *The Ministry for the Future* (2020) by Kim Stanley Robinson are both authors using dystopian realism to judge the current situation by a far future one. El Akkad envisions the second American civil war after a ban on fossil fuels and a rise in sea level with mass migration in the *American War*. Sarat Chestnut, the main character, is born in the world below water of Louisiana, with refugee camps in the American South. Although the setting is unfamiliar, the sociopolitical relations are frightfully consciousness-raising, with militarization, inequality, and climate denial still at work. It is not a war story, writes El Akkad. It is a story of violence” (2017, p. 5). Viewing climate collapse as

a unique and extreme event obscures the potential for reversibility and actual monetary value of the driver of said collapse.

Robinson in *The Ministry for the Future* is in sharp contrast to speculative realism as he envisions a future where scientists, activists, international organizations try to change climate change. The novel brings together some of the world’s biggest challenges like extreme *Weather*, immigration crisis and ecoterrorism with policy change, geoengineering and unified governance. One of the characters says, like reflecting, how some of us live in a history that is not yet happened. (Robinson, 2020. p. 232) The core goal of Robinson’s project is to shape visions of the future that are not predetermined but will be determined by human choice and imagination. This goal is what lends the novel its tension of disaster and hope. The minor futurism of the writings of Haraway and their regeneration allows readers to experiment with ethical doings, envisage new forms of systems, and deal with the material capacities of planetary politics.

The two novels reveal how dystopia and speculative realism are plots of foresight. They are not prophecies of what the future will actually be like, but plans of potentialities, beaming cautionary signals of error, ethical cartography, and emotional plans. In that manner, they accomplish the role that Amitav Ghosh (2016) directly attributes to climate fiction: to “increase the imaginative reach of its audience” during an era of ecological amnesia.

4.2.3 Multi-perspective and Polyphonic Narratives

Climate change is global and multispecies, and, therefore, in a considerable number of *cli-fi* texts, authors are renouncing the single-protagonist narrative in favor of the multi-voiced narrative, polyphonic one. Such an approach to the distributed ecological agency basis demonstrates the role of interconnectivity, which is emphasized and not only between people but also between species and systems. The multiplicity of the subject positions in polyphony enables the multitude to be represented as people, activists, and scientists, trees, rivers, and at times as a separate piece of music in the worldbuilding.

A paradigmatic example is that of *The Overstory* (2018) by Richard Powers. Nine of the most important characters in the novel have their lives intertwined with trees in one way or another: a Vietnam War veteran, a dendrologist, a programmer, an artist, and so on. At the beginning of the



novel, the individual story lines seem independent of one another, but as the novel moves on, they merge towards each other, just like the roots of forests. The story-telling form is like these mycorrhizal networks that shape this book, fungal responses, where trees talk and share nutrients. According to the author, a tree can speak in pre-verbal words. The characters being stripped of their humanity has the effect of emphasizing the ecological interdependence and the need to question standards of anthropocentrism in fiction.

The polyphonic narrative structure of the novel also challenges the idea of a linear cause-and-effect relationship. The characters in the book have an impact on each other, not always directly, not always right away, and in ways similar to the feedback loops of ecosystems. Timothy Clark (2015) would argue these narrative forms are scaled to the climate—that is, they can accommodate independent causality, non-human agency and overlapping timescales. *The Overstory* uses polyphony to show all life is connected and we cannot do anything without affecting something.

4.2.4 Symbolism, Metaphor, and Environmental Allegory

Among the most persistent stylistic choices frequently met in climate fiction, one can mention a concept of using symbols and metaphors with the intention of transcribing complicated ecological ideas into emotionally appealing imagery. Metaphors allow the choosing of the invisible and provide shape to delayed violence, systemic breakdown, and environmental distress. The most prevalent of these symbols are fire, water, trees, seasons, as well as migration, meant to hold historical, cultural, and even environmental connotations.

In *Flight Behavior*, Kingsolver incorporates the cast-off monarch butterflies as the symbolic set of traversing climate havoc, spiritual skepticism, and motherly jitters. Their unnatural placement in the mountains in Tennessee is an indication of more than an ecological discontinuity, but also a spiritual disturbance. The swarm is described by Dellarobia as a lake of fire, a Biblical term of wonder and dread (Kingsolver, 2012, p. 17). The butterflies turn into the symbols of climate dislocation: gorgeous, enigmatic, and sadly out of place.

The Ministry for the Future by Robinson is no exception since the author implements glaciers and carbon molecules as repetitive images. In one of the chapters, the perspective is of a carbon atom entrapped in the atmosphere, and how

it traveled in the course of industrialization, combustion, and geoengineering. This strange point of view makes the abstract processes of global warming quite personal and very real. It also substantiates the ethical intent of the novel, namely that there is no inert and irrelevant part in the biosphere.

In *American War*, fire and flood serve as dual metaphors of a moral and environmental ash heap. Flooded southern states symbolize both the actual and metaphorical rise of the sea levels, but also the loss of national cohesion and solidarity. The utilization of bioengineered plagues has provided the movie with another level of metaphor, comparing human violence to environmental effects. All these symbols merge into an allegorical self-destruction, in which climate inaction equals committing national suicide.

The symbol that is central in *The Overstory* is trees themselves: they are representatives of time, resilience, memory, and resistance. The weight of the trees (oak, chestnut, pine) that appear in the novel produces personal transformations of the characters. Powers uses tree imagery, discussing themes like growth, decay, interdependence, and rebirth. Human and animal lives depend on the existence of other life forms. The seeds of rebellion and hope are sown at the end of the novel, which makes nature a kind of agent of the story as well as a moral guide.

These metaphors and symbols are not used for mere decoration but rather as something that works as a walking stick and an anchor with regard to cognitive and emotional visibility in a way that allows the reader to understand how massive environmental collapse can be. They make something complex simple and by doing so, they use storytelling to achieve a storytelling against forgetfulness (Nixon, 2011). The environmental allegory fills the gap between ecology and social perception, so you can understand climate change and it is also assigned value.

The stylistic features of a narrative in climate fiction are more political and ethical than innovative. With recalling fragmentation, speculative realism, polyphony, and symbolic system, contemporary American *cli-fi* novelists create novel literary forms on the new planetary realities. These are the tactics that ensure that the readers can understand the non-linearity, enormity, and ethical imperatives of climate change, and the tactics of prompting imaginative immersion, as well as ethical provocation. We are living in a time when the climate crisis is ever-increasing, so is the necessity of its magnitude and depth



being reflected in the stories. The strategies of narration mentioned in the paper are therefore a community-wide literary work to redesign the grammar of narration in the era of ecological breakdown. They serve to remind us that form is not neutral, what we say about the Earth has profound consequences on what we know and experience, and how we act on the Earth as it unravels.

4.3 Climate Fiction as Environmental Discourse and Activism

Amid the escalating urgency of the climate crisis, scientific papers, policy plans and activism have seen an upswing. Simultaneously, there has been an increased engagement in fiction that replicates and responds to environmental concerns. The response has come in two forms. Climate fiction (*cli-fi*), at least in twenty-first-century American literature, has become less a genre than a discursive and affective intervention, not only how climate change can be viewed but also how it is experienced, and even what one ought to do to respond to it morally. By presenting emotionally appealing stories that speculate on the future, *cli-fi* makes people aware and helps to criticize existing ideologies by setting out a moral rethinking of the connection between humanity and the non-human world. This section discusses three related roles of climate fiction: as a means of environmental education, as a method of envisioning new ways of relating human and nature, and as a type of activism that can be both culturally and politically influential.

4.3.1 Fiction as a Tool for Environmental Awareness

The ability to render scientific information into emotional experience becomes one of the key functions of *cli-fi*. Although climate change has been well reported in terms of reports, graphs and statistics, these tend to lack the emotional investment needed to matter in terms of behavioral and cultural adoption. Fiction, in turn, is effective in power- it affects people. Climate fiction, according to Rob Nixon (2011), brings substance to the haziness of threats and makes the invisible in conspicuity of environmental violations visible (p. 10). *Cli-fi* is emotionally immediate; placing ecology in terms of human narratives, and placing abstract risks in lived consequences.

As an example, in *Weather* (2020) by Jenny Offill, the climate facts are presented not straight, but filtered through the voice of a neurotic mother, Lizzie, who is under the influence of climate anxiety. What will come first off the

shelves, in the stores? Medicine, or rice, or toilet paper” (Offill, 2020, p. 68), the reader gets to witness the slow panic that often comes with ecological awareness. Such an interiority is mostly not present in texts of science or journalism; however, it is necessary to generate empathy. Clayton et al. (2017) provide evidence to support their own theory since, according to it, factual knowledge is a weaker predictor of climate interest as compared to emotional engagement. Then fiction, as a means of behavioral and psychological response, is an effective tool providing the care via storytelling, but not via proving.

Affect and awareness are also blended in the Flight Behavior (2012) by Barbara Kingsolver. By means of finding displaced monarch butterflies, Kingsolver turns a complicated biological process, such as climate-driven migration, into an instance of amazement, surprise, and tragedy through Dellarobia. She was standing before the miraculous with open and closed wings in the flickering orange and black of wings (p. 19). This is because this sensory experience with the disturbance of nature allows the reader to sense the loss, and not merely comprehend it. With an emotionally involved environmental literacy, *cli-fi* makes the readers observers, but not bystanders. It is in this witnessing, an experience of ethical and affective attention, that the change to place climate change in the heart of the moral perception must happen.

4.3.2 Reimagining Human-Nature Relationships

One of the philosophical works of *cli-fi* involves the decomposition of human supremacy in storytelling. In classical Western literature, much is made (either by emphasizing or neglecting) of the human subject in the center of the narrative universe, framed by nature as background, hindrance, or asset. Climate fiction breaks this hierarchy with the depiction of non-human life as an agent that has narrative importance, a memory, and an ethical status. In terms of ethical responsibility, this directional change significantly contributes to a re-imagining of the Anthropocene.

Richard Powers' *The Overstory* (2018) is an embodiment of such transfiguration. According to Powers, trees in a novel aren't just environ but the protagonists in the novel's stories. Those readers of characters who learn from Patricia Westerford, a researcher who proves that trees can talk, go to reflective thinking on vegetal intelligence and cross-species solidarity. As Patricia points out, the world was not created by humans; it is an amalgamation of people and trees, soil, and rivers, all



speaking (Powers, 2018, p. 321). This moral re-anchoring is indicated by the polyphonic form a novel takes, and which reflects a view of the novel as a large ecology comprising many nodes of characters. It replicates what Donna Haraway (2016) terms as *Staying with the Trouble*, the ethic of co-existence and entanglement in multispecies worlds.

The Ministry for the Future (2020) by Kim Stanley Robinson also transforms human-nature relations, but this time by means of systems thinking and design within the geopolitical milieu. Robinson confuses the environment and character by designing characters in such a way that they represent glaciers, carbon molecules, or ecosystems. In one chapter written in the voice of a carbon atom, the reader is asked to think about the life of elements in their journey through time and their influence. These maneuvers widen the moral imagination so that nature is brought into the moral world as an actor. This way, *cli-fi* is sowing a posthuman sensibility, the sensibility that acknowledges the agency of non-human systems, demands that they respect one another in relationships, and that they be treated ethically instead of being dominated (Alaimo, 2010).

Spiritual, emotional, and political consequences apply to this reimagining. It makes the readers question that they don't hold anthropocentric presumptions together and that they ought to view themselves as an ecological net. According to the argument presented by Ghosh (2016) in *The Great Derangement*, the modern novel has never been able to figure out ways to represent the non-human world, as it has been reflective of a cultural blindness to the existence of nature in general. *Cli-fi*, however, is a literary and moral course correction - putting non-human life back into the plot and the human characters back on model as co-dwellers, not owners.

4.3.3 Literary Activism and Cultural Impact

In addition to raising consciousness and moral re-imagining, *cli-fi* can be seen as a kind of literary activism, which may establish a public discourse and affect climate imaginaries. Literature can not legislate or put up solar panels, but it can establish an emotional and moral landscape in which these decisions are formulated. Stories can change the context of a debate, shake the pillars of a movement, and spark policy. With this, according to Nixon (2011), the strongest writing on the environment can never be non-political in nature (p. 8).

The Ministry for the Future by Kim Stanley Robinson has been referenced in policy and in climate conferences, and think tanks. Its form, which is a mixture of fiction, economics, science, and speculative policy, has endowed it with a groundbreaking attribute that has inspired the concept of imaginative solutions to real-life challenges. Even at the COP26 climate summit, the novel had been cited as an example of how literature could be used to simulate choices in the future (Sloat, 2021). The book by Robinson is a little bit between fiction and policy proposal, providing space in which utopian thinking and practice of reform intersect. It shows how *cli-fi* may help in technocratic rhetoric and human emotion mingle, and model radically different futures, but futures that are also imaginable.

Besides, the cultural life of *cli-fi* has spread to education, film adaptation, and reading in the streets. Environmental humanities have used texts such as *The Overstory* in their syllabi and name-check environmental movements like Extinction Rebellion and Fridays for Future. Such an addition is an indication of the pedagogical capacity of *cli-fi*, that is, its competency not just to educate about facts, but values as well. The precarity of climate change can also be created in fiction, as it helps readers share the experiences of collective precarity despite whichever reactions they are facing, creating so-called perceived communities of risk (Ursula, 2016).

This activist role revolves around reader interest. *Cli-fi* is not an act of prescription; but it insists on an empathic prescription in that we engage affectively with both human and non-human characters. It also assists in practicing the narratives of future crisis: what is likely to happen and how we will respond to it, as well as what type of ethics system we shall need. It refers to a creative response. Which is required at a time of ecological instability, when planning and adaptation require more than technical knowledge; they need story foresight, story awareness, and cultural adaptability.

Moreover, *cli-fi* is a part of an increasing literary body of works criticizing extractives, capitalism, and colonialism as types of systematic environmental degradation. The genre is associated with those known as environmental justice, individual sovereignty, and decolonization movements by connecting the environmental degradation of the world to historical injustice. It could be observed in works such as *American War*, where there is a fight against environmental weaponization against oppressed



communities, and it is clear that climate violence is never spontaneously condensed or unprejudiced.

On these and other grounds, *cli-fi* is a mirror and a megaphone: a register of the deficiencies of the present, as well as an endorsing declaration of the needs of the future. It works within the field of the symbolic economy where value is made, identity is formed and future is dreamt. It makes it necessary for the larger climate movement as much as other aspects of cultural change, rather than its appendage.

Climate fiction serves more than just a fun read or artistic reflection. It falls under a category of environmental work and activism that can engage readers on emotional, moral and political levels. *Cli-fi* is effective where mere facts do not work because it creates awareness through emotion and a good story. The view expands their ethical vision and ecological empathy by decentering humans. As imagination and culture ebb and flow one can condition both policy and protest and planetary stewardship. In the Anthropocene age when the future of the planet is decided, not only by science but also by the tales, *cli-fi* is as much a literary movement as an epoch. It helps us live the crisis, look over our shoulders and start imagining another world, one that would be worth saving, not to say our own, but the whole of life that is presently caught in the finely woven web of nature on this planet.

4.4 Challenges and Critiques of *Cli-fi*

Though climate fiction has won acclaim with their ground-breaking storytelling and ethical appeal, they are not deprived of their flaws and even contradictions. With the growth of its popularity, especially within the American literary marketplace, more critics are arising with regard to its commodification as well as aestheticization of disaster. Books that once raised an alarm bell regarding the ecological catastrophe are now commonly sold as exciting dystopias or suspenseful stories of existence. During this process, the political sharpness of *cli-fi* may be edged down, turned into easily digestible products of entertainment as opposed to provocation. It is difficult to ignore the paradox of packaging the apocalypse in order to make money. In other instances, the climate crisis is even shown in just a background role, i.e., a scene, instead of a structural critique of environmental injustice. The process of late capitalism even appropriates, which was how cultural theorist Frederic Jameson has argued, its own critique of itself, translating radically-minded thinking into

commodities (Jameson, 1991). This danger can be observed in some of these works in which the aesthetics of devastation are stated more than the socioeconomic reasons or human duties regarding them, as such representations are at the risk of being transformed into visual spectacles, which emotionally separate readers from the reality of them.

The second significant problem of the genre is the possibility of eco-fatigue or indifference due to the third of stories that seem bleak and dystopian. Although dystopia serves as one of the emotional tools of warning, such frequent use can have a negative outcome. As *cli-fi* novels keep repeating that collapse is inevitable, that the future is bleak, and systems of destruction are impossible to overcome, readers can be traumatized or go numb. This effect is frequently called climate fatigue, which creates disengagement instead of motivation. Excess exposure to dystopian situations may lead to cynicism and the feeling of futility, as Matthew Schneider-Mayerson (2018) points out, particularly in younger readers already dealing with eco-anxiety. Devoid of opportunities for resistance, agency, and imaginative potential, *cli-fi* can dangerously become a reaffirmation of nihilism it aims to criticize. Other theorists have urged a move to surfpunk or optimistic futuristic fiction of sustainable worlds and a strong community. On the one hand, pessimism can gradually evolve as a culturally branded artistic backlash to the planetary crisis; on the other hand, a genre of despair, hanging on despair, might not become a sufficiently effective tool of mobilizing cultural change.

Along with these criticisms, *cli-fi* has also faced criticism over a limited range of diversity and inclusivity, especially in its more popular, Western-centric manifestations. The most visible part of American climate fiction is the work of white, middle-class writers; their cultural assumptions and anxieties are likely to appear in it. The protagonists of such stories are therefore personal, reflective, and usually policymakers or elitists, thus dimming the voices of the Indigenous people, people of colour, and those of the Global South, the folks to whom climate change has the most immediate effects. Such narrative imbalance is in danger of promoting the very inequality that the genre aims at redressing. Amitav Ghosh (2016) has outlined how the contemporary literary novel has failed to represent any meaningful interaction with the non-Western ecological crisis in good faith, and that the climate imagination has been secluded into childish cultural compartments. Even in cases when marginalized characters



do appear in *cli-fi*, this is commonly done through the prism of suffering but not resistance or agency. Such a representational gap not only imposes limits on the moral compass of the genre but also fails to recognize the designs of knowledge, resilience-building strategy, and the cosmologies of those people who have sustainably coexisted with the land for many decades.

Furthermore, the trends of the preoccupation with speculative futures in *cli-fi* obfuscate the existing realities of the environmental injustice that persists today. The future of climate change is not what everyone sees as a risk. For them, it is something that is happening already. Novels that only take place in the future may undermine or overlook the voices of those who are already impacted by it. To ensure climatic fiction doesn't erase affected communities, their narratives need to be respected. Their access to climatic fiction should also be intersectional. The new writings by authors Nnedi Okorafor, Kawai Strong Washburn, Cherie Dimaline or even John Todorow offer positive signs for a more inclusive and culturally localized climatic narration.

In general, climate fiction is probably something particularly essential in environmental discourse, although it needs to ruminate about its practices and oversights constantly. The capacity to imagine and its power obligation to represent is not enough. We need to do it ethically, inclusively, and critically. To continue acting as a radical force in the literature, *cli-fi* must also avoid being seduced by commodified disaster, must be able to envision ways out of despair, as well as give voice to the people who are historically marginalized in both literature and the climate movement.

5. CONCLUSION

Considering the current sphere of global climatic crisis, the given study proved that the modern American climate fiction holds a significant and strong place at the crossroad of environmental sensitivity, cultural commentary, and narrative novelty. With a careful consideration of several chosen novel examples, it has been realized that not only does *cli-fi* allow exploring the psychological and societal implications of the environmental crisis e.g. climate anxiety, *eco-grief*, and intergenerational trauma, but also re-configures the structure of stories in such a way that reflects the non-linear, slow, and frequently, invisible nature of environmental degradation. Other authors such as Jenny Offill, Kim Stanley Robinson, Barbara Kingsolver,

Richard Powers, and Omar El Akkad use fragmentation, speculative realism, polyphony, and symbolism to trigger the feeling of resonance and ethical thoughts, making fiction an instrument of public discussion and an engagement practice. The genre is not only a commentary on art but, in some sense, a form of literary activism, in which abstract scientific information can be turned into a graspable human experience and measured and shaped in its perception, imagination, and understanding of climate change. Nevertheless, the paper also admits some legitimate attacks on *cli-fi*, such as its tendency in certain cases to treat disaster as a commodity, narrative burnout caused by an abundance of dystopias, and a lack of accessibility that silences people most personally affected by climate change. To proceed, the development of *cli-fi* should take into account the broadening of perspectives, address current issues of environmental justice, and implement visions of world resilience and hopeful futures, as well as negative examples. Finally, the best thing about *cli-fi* is its ability to push the ethical and creative limits of literature so that the audience of literature not only becomes observers of the ecological crisis but also becomes the co-creators of the possible solutions to finding a new lifestyle. By so doing, climate fiction not only emerges as a genre but also as a narrative imperative, the imperative that causes us to rethink the narratives that we are telling about the planet and ourselves.

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