

Ecocriticism and the Rise of Climate Fiction (“Cli-Fi”)

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Abstract:

This research paper examines the intersection of ecocriticism and climate fiction (cli-fi), tracing the theoretical evolution of ecocritical thought and its application to a burgeoning literary genre that has emerged as a cultural response to anthropogenic climate change. The paper argues that cli-fi represents not merely a thematic subcategory of speculative fiction but a significant literary-cultural phenomenon that performs essential cognitive, affective, and ethical work in the Anthropocene. Through an analysis of the theoretical foundations of ecocriticism—from its first-wave nature-writing preoccupations through its second-wave environmental justice expansions to its third-wave posthumanist and intersectional developments—the paper demonstrates how cli-fi has become a crucial site for ecocritical inquiry. Drawing on Timothy Morton’s concept of hyperobjects, Rob Nixon’s notion of slow violence, and emerging frameworks of empirical ecocriticism, the study analyzes representative works including Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy and Kim Stanley Robinson’s *The Ministry for the Future* to illustrate how climate fiction narrativizes the otherwise ungraspable scales of climate crisis. The paper concludes that cli-fi functions as a form of “cultural modelling” that shapes climate imaginaries and offers readers frameworks for apprehending, mourning, and responding to ecological collapse, while acknowledging the genre’s representational limitations and the ongoing debates within ecocritical scholarship regarding the efficacy of narrative in fostering climate action.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Climate Fiction, Cli-Fi, Anthropocene, Environmental Humanities, Hyperobjects, Slow Violence, Climate Imaginaries, Narrative Theory, Environmental Justice.

Introduction

The twenty-first century has witnessed the convergence of two transformative developments in literary and cultural studies: the maturation of ecocriticism as a sophisticated theoretical framework and the emergence of climate fiction—or “cli-fi”—as a distinct and increasingly prominent literary genre. This convergence is no accident. As the physical realities of anthropogenic climate change have become undeniable, literature has responded with narratives that attempt to render visible, comprehensible, and emotionally palpable the vast and often abstract phenomena of planetary ecological transformation. Ecocriticism, in turn, has found in climate fiction a rich and urgent object of analysis, one that tests the boundaries of its theoretical apparatus and demands new modes of critical engagement.

The term “ecocriticism” was first coined by William Rueckert in his 1978 essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism,” wherein he proposed “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature”. However, it was not until the 1990s, with the publication of Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm’s *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996) and Lawrence Buell’s *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), that ecocriticism coalesced into an academic discipline. Glotfelty famously defined ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical

environment,” elaborating that “just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-consciousness perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class... ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies”. This definition established ecocriticism’s foundational commitment: to read literature with attention to its environmental dimensions and to interrogate the anthropocentric assumptions that have long governed literary criticism.

Climate fiction, by contrast, is a more recent coinage. The term “cli-fi” is generally credited to journalist and climate activist Dan Bloom, who proposed it in either 2007 or 2008 as a shorthand for fiction dealing with climate change. As Brian Merchant notes, Bloom coined the term “to denote climate fiction” in 2007. The genre has since expanded rapidly, encompassing works ranging from literary novels to genre science fiction, from dystopian nightmares to cautious utopian visions. As one scholar observes, cli-fi “knits these tendencies together into a description of the effects of a dramatic change in the Earth’s climate on a particular location and a vision of the options available to a population seeking to adapt to or mitigate those effects”.

The relationship between ecocriticism and cli-fi is symbiotic and mutually constitutive. Ecocriticism provides the theoretical vocabulary and analytical frameworks through which climate fiction can be understood, while climate fiction offers ecocriticism a corpus of texts that grapple directly with the defining crisis of our time. This paper argues that cli-fi performs essential cultural work in the Anthropocene—work that is cognitive (helping readers comprehend climate change’s vast scales and complex causalities), affective (generating emotional responses that may motivate action), and ethical (exploring questions of responsibility, justice, and intergenerational obligation). Yet the genre is not without its critics, who question its representational adequacy, its political efficacy, and its tendency toward certain narrative conventions that may actually foreclose more radical forms of ecological imagination.

This paper proceeds in four parts. The first section reviews the evolution of ecocritical theory, tracing its development through three “waves” and examining key concepts—including the Anthropocene, hyperobjects, and slow violence—that have shaped contemporary ecocritical thought. The second section explores the rise of climate fiction as a genre, examining its origins, defining characteristics, and the critical debates that surround it. The third section offers close ecocritical readings of representative cli-fi texts, demonstrating how these works engage with the theoretical concerns identified in the preceding sections. The fourth section addresses the limitations and critiques of both ecocriticism and climate fiction, acknowledging the complexities and contradictions that attend any attempt to narrativize climate crisis. The paper concludes by reflecting on the future of ecocritical-cli-fi inquiry and the role of literature in an era of planetary emergency.

Review of Literature

The Origins and Evolution of Ecocriticism

The field of ecocriticism has undergone significant transformation since its emergence in the late twentieth century. Lawrence Buell, one of the field’s foundational figures, has described its development in terms of successive “waves”. The first wave, influenced by Romantic poetry and nature writing, aimed to give “a voice to nature,” recognizing the intrinsic value of all living beings. This phase was characterized by a focus on wilderness, pastoral landscapes, and the celebration of nature’s beauty and spiritual significance. Critics in this tradition—figures such as Buell himself, as well as Scott Slovic, Patrick D. Murphy, and others—sought to recover and valorize literary works that demonstrated environmental awareness and to develop critical practices that were themselves ecologically informed.

The second wave, emerging around 2000, expanded ecocriticism's purview to include urban and industrial landscapes, environmental justice, postcolonial ecocriticism, and ecofeminism. This expansion reflected a growing recognition that environmental issues are inseparable from questions of social inequality, racial injustice, and colonial exploitation. As Glotfelty articulated, ecocriticism seeks "to negotiate between human and non-human world" by placing "one foot on literature and other on land". The second wave's broadening of scope acknowledged that the "land" includes not only pristine wilderness but also polluted cities, toxic waste sites, and the degraded environments in which marginalized communities disproportionately reside.

The third wave, proposed by Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic in 2009, called for an even broader scope, drawing insights from posthumanism, animal studies, and intersectional approaches. This phase has been marked by a critical interrogation of the very category of "nature" and a recognition that the human-nature binary is itself a construct that enables ecological domination. Third-wave ecocriticism has also engaged more seriously with questions of scale, temporality, and the nonhuman, responding to the conceptual challenges posed by the Anthropocene.

The Anthropocene and Its Literary Implications

The concept of the Anthropocene—the proposed geological epoch in which human activity has become the dominant influence on climate and the environment—has profoundly shaped contemporary ecocritical thought. As one recent review observes, "the Anthropocene concept maintains a central role in ecocriticism". The term, popularized by atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and ecologist Eugene Stoermer, names the unsettling recognition that humanity has become a geological force, capable of altering the planet's systems on a scale previously associated only with natural catastrophes.

For literary scholars, the Anthropocene poses profound challenges to narrative form. As one critic puts it, "although we live in the Anthropocene—the geological age of humankind, wherein humans have measurably impacted the biosphere—we struggle to narrate the Anthropocene". The difficulty lies in the Anthropocene's vast spatial and temporal scales, its distributed causality, and its resistance to conventional narrative structures that privilege individual human protagonists and linear plots.

Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" has been particularly influential in addressing this narratological challenge. Nixon defines slow violence as violence that "occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all". Climate change exemplifies slow violence: its effects are incremental, diffuse, and often invisible until they reach catastrophic proportions. The challenge for climate fiction, then, is to render this slow violence narratively compelling, to make visible what is ordinarily unseen and to make urgent what unfolds over generational timescales.

Hyperobjects and the Problem of Scale

Timothy Morton's concept of the "hyperobject" has provided another crucial theoretical resource for ecocritical readings of climate fiction. Morton defines hyperobjects as entities that are "massively distributed in time and space relative to humans". Climate change itself is a hyperobject, as are nuclear radiation, microplastics, and the biosphere itself. Hyperobjects defy human scales of perception and understanding; they are "nonlocal," "temporally undulating," and "phased" in ways that exceed ordinary human cognition.

Rachel Fetherston, drawing on Morton's framework, argues that "climate-fantastic novels are well-positioned to narrativise climate change as a hyperobject due to the ability of speculative, fantastic genres to exceed the limitations of Western-capitalist-colonial storytelling practices". The fantastic, in other words, offers formal resources—such as nonhuman perspectives, altered temporalities, and reality-defying events—that realist fiction may lack for representing hyperobjects. This insight has important implications for understanding the generic diversity of climate fiction and for evaluating the relative merits of different narrative approaches to climate crisis.

Empirical Ecocriticism and the Question of Efficacy

A significant recent development in ecocritical scholarship is the emergence of empirical ecocriticism, which combines environmental humanities methods with social science approaches to study the impact of environmental narratives on readers' affects, attitudes, and actions. As Matthew Schneider-Mayerson and colleagues have demonstrated, empirical ecocriticism asks questions such as: Does climate fiction work? Does reading cli-fi increase readers' willingness to engage in climate activism? What kinds of narratives are most effective at fostering pro-environmental behavior?

This line of inquiry represents a departure from earlier ecocritical approaches that assumed rather than demonstrated the efficacy of environmental literature. As Bartosch and Hoydis argue, "a focus on the representational capacity of fiction occludes other, equally important, functions of fiction" and "insufficiently reflects on its own didactic bias that leads critics to endorse or even instrumentalize literary narrative for the seemingly obvious good cause of educating or mobilizing readers". Empirical ecocriticism seeks to move beyond such assumptions by testing them empirically, asking whether and under what conditions climate fiction actually produces the effects that critics claim for it.

Climate Fiction as Cultural Modelling

An alternative framework, proposed by Roman Bartosch and Julia Hoydis, suggests that climate fiction should be understood not primarily as representation but as "cultural modelling"—a form of future-making that shapes climate imaginaries. Climate imaginaries are defined as "shared sets of beliefs, practices and norms, that define the scope of individual and collective future-thinking". On this view, cli-fi is not merely a mirror held up to climate reality but an active participant in constructing the conceptual and affective frameworks through which we understand and respond to climate change.

This framework has the advantage of moving beyond debates about representational accuracy or didactic effectiveness. Whether or not a given climate novel "accurately" represents climate science or successfully "persuades" readers to change their behavior, it nonetheless participates in the cultural work of imagining possible futures—and in so doing, shapes the range of futures that seem conceivable, desirable, or inevitable. As Bartosch and Hoydis put it, "cli-fi is a future-making technology directly impacting climate imaginaries".

Main Discussions

The Theoretical Foundations of Ecocriticism: From First Wave to Third Wave

The evolution of ecocriticism from its origins in the late twentieth century to its current configurations reflects the field's responsiveness to both literary developments and environmental crises. Understanding this evolution is essential for appreciating how ecocriticism has come to engage with climate fiction.

The first wave of ecocriticism, as Buell describes it, was characterized by a focus on nature writing and the pastoral tradition. Critics in this tradition sought to recover neglected environmental writers, to demonstrate the ecological awareness embedded in canonical texts, and to develop critical practices that honored rather than exploited the nonhuman world. This phase was marked by what Glotfelty called an “earth-centered approach to literary studies”—a deliberate departure from the anthropocentric assumptions that had long dominated literary criticism.

However, the first wave was not without its limitations. Its focus on wilderness and pastoral landscapes tended to obscure the environmental concerns of urban and industrialized spaces, and its celebration of nature often romanticized the nonhuman world in ways that elided the complexities of human-environment relations. As Glotfelty acknowledged, ecocriticism’s task is not simply to celebrate nature but “to negotiate between human and non-human world”—a negotiation that requires attention to the full range of environments humans inhabit and affect.

The second wave of ecocriticism, emerging around the turn of the millennium, addressed these limitations by expanding the field’s scope to include environmental justice, postcolonial ecocriticism, and ecofeminism. This expansion was motivated by a recognition that environmental degradation disproportionately affects marginalized communities and that any truly ecologically informed criticism must attend to the intersections of environmental and social injustice. Postcolonial ecocriticism, in particular, has been important for understanding how colonial histories of resource extraction and land dispossession have shaped contemporary ecological crises. As one study observes, “postcolonial cli-fi encodes eco-anxiety as inseparable from racial and political dispossession, challenging Western-centric psychological frameworks”. The third wave of ecocriticism, proposed by Adamson and Slovic in 2009, has pushed the field in yet more expansive directions, incorporating insights from posthumanism, animal studies, and intersectional approaches. Third-wave ecocriticism interrogates the human-nature binary itself, recognizing that this binary has been central to the logic of environmental domination. By questioning the category of the “human” and its privileges, third-wave ecocriticism opens space for more relational and less hierarchical modes of understanding ecological relationships.

This theoretical evolution has equipped ecocriticism to engage with climate fiction in sophisticated ways. Climate fiction, by its very nature, challenges the human-nature binary, represents nonhuman agencies, and grapples with questions of scale and temporality that exceed conventional narrative frames. The theoretical resources developed across ecocriticism’s three waves—from its first-wave attention to nature representation, through its second-wave concern with environmental justice, to its third-wave interrogation of anthropocentrism—provide a rich analytic toolkit for reading cli-fi.

The Rise of Climate Fiction: Origins, Definitions, and Debates

Climate fiction, despite its recent coinage, has roots that extend deep into literary history. As one source notes, “the term was coined in the late 2000s, but its roots go as far back as the 19th century”. Precursors to contemporary cli-fi can be found in works such as Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* (1826), which imagines a future depopulated by plague, and in the scientific romances of H.G. Wells, which often featured environmental catastrophes. However, it was only in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, as climate change became a matter of urgent public concern, that climate-themed fiction coalesced into a recognizable genre.

The term “cli-fi” itself has a specific history. Dan Bloom, a freelance journalist and climate activist, coined the term in either 2007 or 2008, inspired by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s 2006 report. Bloom framed cli-fi “as a distinct genre to focus on human and ecological responses to climate disruption”. The term has since gained widespread currency, appearing in major media outlets and becoming a recognized category in publishing and literary criticism. However, as one critic notes, cli-fi “is not a genre in the scholarly sense: it lacks the plot formulas and stylistic conventions that characterize genres such as sci-fi and the western”; rather, it “provides a convenient term for a significant body of narrative work broadly defined by its thematic focus on climate change”.

This definitional looseness has both advantages and disadvantages. On one hand, it allows cli-fi to encompass a wide range of texts—from realist literary novels to speculative science fiction, from dystopian nightmares to utopian visions. On the other hand, it makes the genre difficult to delimit and raises questions about what, precisely, qualifies as climate fiction. Does a novel need to have climate change as its central subject, or is a climate backdrop sufficient? Must cli-fi engage with climate science, or can it treat climate change metaphorically?

These questions are not merely academic; they have practical implications for how the genre is studied, taught, and marketed. As Fetherston observes, “the repositioning of climate fiction, or ‘cli-fi,’ within more literary, realist fiction spaces, rather than the speculative, fantastique genres that arguably characterised cli-fi’s beginnings, has significantly changed the landscape of ecocritical scholarship in recent years”. The migration of cli-fi from the margins of genre fiction to the center of literary culture has made it more visible and more respectable—but it has also raised concerns about the genre’s critical edge and its capacity to challenge dominant narratives.

The Affective Dimensions of Climate Fiction: Eco-Anxiety and Narrative Form

One of the most significant contributions of ecocritical scholarship on climate fiction has been its attention to the affective dimensions of climate reading. Climate change, as recent research has shown, precipitates not only an ecological crisis but a profound psychological one, giving rise to “eco-anxiety”—a chronic, multidimensional emotional response to environmental degradation.

A recent study employing qualitative ecocritical and affective literary analysis of six internationally significant cli-fi novels found that “ecological grief (29.8%) and anticipatory loss (25.6%) constitute the dominant affective registers of the corpus, followed by helplessness and powerlessness (22.1%), solastalgia (21.2%), affective resilience (18.3%), and intergenerational despair (16.7%)”. These findings suggest that climate fiction is not merely a vehicle for conveying information about climate change but an affective technology that generates specific emotional responses in readers.

Moreover, the study demonstrated that “eco-anxiety is not merely depicted thematically but formally enacted through narrative fragmentation, temporal disruption, and second-person address”. This is a crucial insight: climate fiction does not simply represent eco-anxiety as a theme but performs it through its formal choices. Fragmented narratives, disrupted temporalities, and direct address to the reader all contribute to an experience of reading that mirrors the disorientation and urgency of climate crisis.

This formal dimension of climate fiction has been explored by other scholars as well. One analysis of Korean climate fiction notes that the genre’s “attempt to create cracks and disruptions in today’s sense of seamless reality in order to escape from the awareness of the climate crisis and maintain an inertial

understanding of reality seems to be succeeding in individualizing the genre". Climate fiction, in other words, disrupts the "seamless reality" of everyday perception, forcing readers to confront the reality of climate change that ordinary life tends to obscure.

Case Study I: Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam Trilogy

Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy—comprising *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013)—stands as one of the most significant works of climate fiction in contemporary literature. The trilogy depicts a near-future world devastated by ecological collapse, genetic engineering, and pandemic disease, following the fortunes of a small group of survivors as they navigate the ruins of civilization.

From an ecocritical perspective, the trilogy is remarkable for its sustained engagement with questions of human-nature relations, environmental ethics, and the consequences of technological hubris. As one study notes, the trilogy "includes the elements of 'ecocollapse'" and explores "future worldviews, disease, the abuse of cloning technology, and crises in humanity and politics". Atwood's depiction of a world in which corporations have privatized genetic material, created new species for commercial purposes, and ultimately unleashed catastrophic pandemics serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of treating nature as a resource to be exploited rather than a system to which humans belong.

The trilogy also engages with questions of environmental justice and inequality. The privileged "Compounds" where corporate employees live in comfort contrast starkly with the "Pleeblands," where the poor struggle to survive in degraded environments. This spatial division reflects the global distribution of environmental risk, in which the wealthy insulate themselves from ecological devastation while the poor bear its brunt. Atwood's trilogy thus exemplifies the second-wave ecocritical concern with environmental justice, demonstrating how ecological crisis exacerbates existing social inequalities.

Ecofeminist readings of the trilogy have been particularly productive. As one analysis observes, Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy "underscores that overcoming the climate crisis and its aftermath necessitates recognition of the deeply rooted hierarchical dualism of self/other". The trilogy challenges the binary oppositions—human/nature, male/female, culture/wilderness—that have historically justified environmental domination and gender oppression. By giving voice to female characters and depicting alternative, more relational forms of community, Atwood gestures toward modes of being that might prove more sustainable than the competitive individualism that has driven ecological destruction.

Case Study II: Kim Stanley Robinson's The Ministry for the Future

If Atwood's trilogy represents climate fiction's dystopian pole, Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future* (2020) represents its utopian—or, more precisely, its "anti-anti-utopian"—counterpart. The novel depicts a near-future world in which humanity has begun to take serious action to address climate change, through a combination of technological innovation, policy reform, and direct action. The novel's protagonist, the Ministry for the Future, is an international body charged with advocating for the rights of future generations; its efforts, though often thwarted, gradually bear fruit.

Robinson's novel has been the subject of extensive ecocritical analysis. One study examines how the novel "represents environmental crises, resilience, and collective action as humanity grapples with the consequences of anthropogenic climate disruption," employing "Eco-criticism as its theoretical framework" to analyze how the novel "critiques anthropocentric worldviews, capitalist systems, and political inertia

while envisioning pragmatic solutions like geoengineering and policy reform”. The novel thus engages with the core concerns of ecocriticism—anthropocentrism, capitalism, political failure—while also exploring possible pathways beyond them.

Another line of ecocritical inquiry has focused on the novel’s treatment of ecoterrorism. One paper explores “ecological affect through an ecocritical reading of the depiction of ecoterrorism in Kim Stanley Robinson’s *The Ministry for the Future*, examining how climate trauma fuels radical responses and how such responses are portrayed, problematized, or legitimized in fiction”. The novel depicts acts of ecoterrorism—including the sabotage of fossil fuel infrastructure—as understandable, if not always justifiable, responses to the failure of conventional politics to address climate change. This depiction raises difficult ethical questions about the legitimacy of extralegal action in the face of existential threat.

Robinson’s novel has also been read through the lens of resilience. One analysis examines “the possibility of recuperating resilience for a more radical climate politics through a reading of Juliana Spahr’s extended autofictional prose poem *The Transformation* (2007) and Kim Stanley Robinson’s acclaimed cli-fi novel *The Ministry for the Future* (2020)”. Both texts, the analysis argues, “respond to global warming by recoiling from our present path toward disaster,” though “they do so in aesthetically as well as ideologically very different ways”. Robinson’s novel, with its emphasis on collective action and institutional reform, offers a model of resilience rooted in human cooperation and technological ingenuity.

The Representational Limits of Climate Fiction

Despite the significant achievements of climate fiction as a genre, critics have raised important questions about its representational limits. As one special issue on the topic observes, cli-fi’s “dominant narratives often emphasize apocalyptic futures while overlooking ongoing environmental degradation”. The genre’s fascination with catastrophe can obscure the slower, more insidious forms of environmental harm that characterize much of contemporary ecological crisis.

Moreover, cli-fi “has been critiqued for its anthropocentric focus, often centering on a white, Western human experience, excluding the variety of humans as well as the entanglement of humans with non-humans”. This critique points to a significant limitation of much climate fiction: despite its engagement with ecological themes, it often remains focused on human protagonists and human concerns, failing to adequately represent the nonhuman world or to imagine forms of agency that are not centered on human actors.

The genre also faces criticism for its narrative conventions. As one scholar notes, cli-fi “must grapple with tensions between technological optimism and critical environmentalism”. Many climate novels oscillate between hope and despair, between faith in technological solutions and recognition of the need for fundamental social transformation. This oscillation can be intellectually honest—reflecting genuine uncertainties about the future—but it can also be narratively unsatisfying, leaving readers uncertain about what, if anything, the novel proposes.

These representational limits have led some critics to question the political efficacy of climate fiction. If the genre tends toward apocalyptic narratives that may induce despair rather than action, or if it focuses on individual protagonists in ways that obscure the collective nature of climate action, does it ultimately do more harm than good? As Bartosch and Hoydis note, “critiques of its limits and the limits of its efficiency as a tool of persuading broader readerships are also becoming more frequent”.

Climate Fiction and the Challenge of the Hyperobject

Perhaps the most fundamental challenge facing climate fiction is the challenge of representing climate change as a hyperobject. As Morton defines them, hyperobjects are “massively distributed in time and space relative to humans”—they are too large, too slow, too diffuse to be grasped by ordinary perception or represented by conventional narrative forms.

Climate fiction has responded to this challenge in various ways. Some novels adopt what we might call a “macro” perspective, attempting to represent climate change at the scale of the planetary or the geological. Robinson’s *The Ministry for the Future*, with its international cast of characters and its attention to global systems, exemplifies this approach. Other novels adopt a “micro” perspective, focusing on the localized effects of climate change on particular communities. Still others employ formal innovation—fragmented narratives, multiple perspectives, nonhuman narrators—to convey the hyperobject’s resistance to conventional representation.

Fetherston argues that “climate-fantastic novels are well-positioned to narrativise climate change as a hyperobject due to the ability of speculative, fantastic genres to exceed the limitations of Western-capitalist-colonial storytelling practices”. The fantastic, in other words, offers resources—such as nonhuman narrators, impossible events, and alternative realities—that realist fiction lacks. This suggests that the most successful climate fiction may be precisely the kind that departs from realism, embracing the speculative and the fantastic as modes of engaging with a reality that itself exceeds conventional understanding.

However, this argument raises its own questions. If climate fiction must embrace the fantastic to represent climate change adequately, what becomes of the genre’s claim to engage with reality? Is there not a risk that the fantastic, in its very departure from realism, may obscure rather than illuminate the actual conditions of climate crisis? These questions remain open, and they are likely to animate ecocritical debate for years to come.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the intersection of ecocriticism and climate fiction, tracing the theoretical evolution of ecocritical thought and its application to a literary genre that has emerged as a significant cultural response to anthropogenic climate change. The paper has argued that cli-fi performs essential cognitive, affective, and ethical work in the Anthropocene, helping readers comprehend the vast scales and complex causalities of climate change, generating emotional responses that may motivate action, and exploring questions of responsibility, justice, and intergenerational obligation.

The review of literature has demonstrated the richness and diversity of ecocritical scholarship on climate fiction. From the foundational definitions of Glotfelty and Buell to the three-wave model of ecocriticism’s development; from Morton’s concept of hyperobjects to Nixon’s notion of slow violence; from empirical ecocriticism’s questions about narrative efficacy to the framework of cultural modelling—ecocriticism has developed a sophisticated theoretical apparatus for engaging with climate fiction.

The analysis of representative texts—Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy and Robinson’s *The Ministry for the Future*—has illustrated how climate fiction engages with the theoretical concerns identified in the review of literature. Atwood’s trilogy exemplifies climate fiction’s dystopian pole, depicting a world devastated by ecological collapse and exploring questions of environmental justice, ecofeminism, and the consequences of

technological hubris. Robinson's novel exemplifies climate fiction's utopian pole, imagining a world in which humanity has begun to address climate change through collective action and institutional reform.

The paper has also acknowledged the limitations and critiques of both ecocriticism and climate fiction. Climate fiction has been critiqued for its apocalyptic tendencies, its anthropocentric focus, and its uncertain political efficacy. Ecocriticism has been challenged to move beyond representational analysis to engage with questions of affect, empirical impact, and cultural modelling. These critiques do not invalidate the project of ecocritical engagement with climate fiction; rather, they point toward directions for future inquiry. Looking forward, several avenues for further research suggest themselves. First, the relationship between climate fiction and other forms of environmental narrative—documentary, journalism, scientific communication—merits further investigation. How does fiction's capacity for affective engagement and imaginative projection compare with other modes of environmental communication? Second, the global dimensions of climate fiction remain underexplored. While much ecocritical scholarship has focused on Anglophone cli-fi, climate fiction is a global phenomenon, and attention to non-Western traditions is essential for a truly comprehensive understanding. Third, the question of climate fiction's political efficacy—the subject of empirical ecocriticism—demands continued investigation. Under what conditions does climate fiction actually produce the effects that critics claim for it? What kinds of narratives are most effective at fostering climate action?

In the final analysis, the relationship between ecocriticism and climate fiction is one of mutual constitution. Ecocriticism provides the theoretical vocabulary and analytical frameworks through which climate fiction can be understood; climate fiction offers ecocriticism a corpus of texts that grapple directly with the defining crisis of our time. In an era of planetary emergency, this relationship is not merely academic—it is urgently practical. As the environmental humanities continue to evolve, the ecocritical study of climate fiction will undoubtedly remain a central and vital field of inquiry.

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