

THE RISE OF “CLI-FI”: THE NARRATIVE FRAMING OF ENVIRONMENTAL ANXIETY, CLIMATE-INDUCED MIGRATION, AND ECOLOGICAL COLLAPSE IN POST-2020 ANGLOPHONE SPECULATIVE FICTION

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Abstract

This article examines the consolidation of climate fiction (“cli-fi”) as a distinct literary mode within contemporary Anglophone fiction, with particular attention to novels published after 2020. Drawing on Amitav Ghosh’s (2016) diagnosis of a representational “derangement” in realist fiction, Rob Nixon’s (2011) theory of slow violence, and recent affect-theoretical scholarship on eco-anxiety and solastalgia (Albrecht, 2019; Pihkala, 2022), this study analyzes how post-2020 novels—including Kim Stanley Robinson’s *The Ministry for the Future* (2020), Jenny Offill’s *Weather* (2020), Richard Powers’s *Bewilderment* (2021), and Abi Daré’s *And So I Roar* (2024)—develop new narrative strategies for rendering the Anthropocene, climate-induced migration, and ecological collapse legible to readers. The paper argues that post-2020 cli-fi is characterized by four converging formal tendencies: scalar recalibration between the intimate and the planetary; fragmented and paratactic narration that mimics the affective texture of climate anxiety; a documentary-hybrid mode that borrows from policy discourse and nonhuman narration; and an emergent turn from dystopian spectacle toward “hopepunk” and “solarpunk” registers of collective agency. The study further situates climate-induced migration narratives, exemplified by Mohsin Hamid’s *Exit West* (2017) and its post-2020 successors, within postcolonial and environmental-justice frameworks that resist the securitization of the “climate refugee.” The article concludes that cli-fi’s rise reflects not merely a thematic trend but a structural renegotiation of the novel form’s capacity to narrate the unrepresentable temporalities of planetary crisis.

1. Introduction: The Emergence of a Genre for the Anthropocene

The term “climate fiction,” compressed colloquially to “cli-fi,” was coined by the journalist Dan Bloom in 2007 and gained wider critical and journalistic currency after being

popularized by National Public Radio and *The Christian Science Monitor* in 2013 (Rocca, 2025). Yet as a mode of writing concerned with anthropogenic environmental change, the genre’s genealogy reaches back further, growing out of 1960s eco-fiction and New Wave science

fiction—J. G. Ballard’s *The Drowned World* (1962) is frequently cited as an urtext (Rocca, 2025; “Climate Change and Dystopian Fiction,” 2025). What distinguishes the contemporary moment is not the novelty of climate-themed storytelling but its rapid consolidation into a recognizable, critically theorized, and commercially visible literary category. The inaugural Climate Fiction Prize, awarded in May 2024 to Abi Daré for *And So I Roar*—a novel centered on a Nigerian teenager scapegoated amid drought and patriarchal violence—crystallizes this institutional turn, with finalists including Kalliane Bradley’s *The Ministry of Time* (2024) and Samantha Harvey’s *Orbital* (2023) (Rocca, 2025). The prize’s founding premise—that “for societies to fully grasp the climate change threat and to embrace its solutions, we need better stories” (quoted in Rocca, 2025)—articulates a widely shared assumption in the environmental humanities: that the climate crisis is, at its root, a crisis of narrative imagination.

This assumption receives its most influential theoretical formulation in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016), a work that has become the obligatory reference point for cli-fi scholarship (Dimick, 2019; Heise, 2018; Leskanich, 2017; Singh, 2017). Ghosh’s central claim is that “the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination” (quoted in Heise, 2018), and that the modern bourgeois realist novel is structurally ill-equipped to represent it. As Ghosh argues, the realist novel’s reliance on “narrow scales of time and space that rarely exceed more than a human lifespan” renders it “not only neglectful of climate change but... partly complicit in the dissociation of the mind from the vulnerability of its corporeal situation,” since catastrophic weather is rarely permitted to “violently intrude upon the habitual routines and ordinary concerns” that realist fiction prefers to portray (Leskanich, 2017). Ghosh contends that “hundred-year storms and freakish tornadoes simply feel too improbable for the novel” and are consequently

“automatically consigned to other genres” (University of Chicago Press, n.d.)—a diagnosis that helps explain why serious engagement with planetary ecological crisis migrated first into genre fiction (science fiction, dystopia, fantasy) before infiltrating literary fiction proper.

This article investigates how the novel form has responded to the representational challenge Ghosh identifies, focusing specifically on Anglophone fiction published after 2020. The choice of this temporal boundary is not arbitrary. The years following 2020 mark a convergence of the COVID-19 pandemic—itself a rehearsal in slow-motion planetary crisis and global interdependency—with the publication of a cluster of formally ambitious climate novels (Robinson’s *The Ministry for the Future* and Offill’s *Weather*, both 2020; Powers’s *Bewilderment*, 2021) and the institutionalization of cli-fi as a marketing and critical category culminating in the 2024 Climate Fiction Prize. This article asks three interrelated questions. First, what narrative and formal strategies do post-2020 novels deploy to render the Anthropocene—an epoch defined by human beings acting as a geological force (Sharma, n.d.)—legible within the temporal and spatial economy of prose fiction? Second, how do these novels frame climate-induced migration, and to what extent do they reproduce or resist the securitizing discourses that dominate policy treatments of the “climate refugee”? Third, does the genre’s post-2020 turn toward “hopepunk” and “solarpunk” registers represent a meaningful departure from the dystopian mode that has historically dominated environmental storytelling, or a market-driven softening of ecological anxiety?

In pursuing these questions, this article situates itself within an interdisciplinary body of scholarship spanning ecocriticism (Trexler, 2015; Trexler & Johns-Putra, 2011), postcolonial environmental humanities (Nixon, 2011), and affect theory (Albrecht, 2019; Pihkala, 2022). It argues that the rise of cli-fi after 2020 should be understood not merely as a thematic proliferation—more novels simply

“about” climate change—but as a structural renegotiation of novelistic form itself: a set of experiments in scale, voice, temporality, and affect that collectively constitute what this article terms the *narrative infrastructure of environmental anxiety*.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 The Great Derangement and the Problem of Scale

Ghosh’s (2016) triadic argument—organized around the essays “Stories,” “History,” and “Politics”—locates the failure of climate representation in the aesthetic ideology of the modern novel (Singh, 2017). The realist novel, Ghosh contends, developed alongside the “regularity of bourgeois life” and encodes an assumption of environmental stability that climate change violently disrupts (Leskanich, 2017). Sarah Dimick’s (2019) response to Ghosh usefully complicates this account, cautioning against concluding that realist fiction is categorically incapable of representing climate change; rather, Dimick suggests, the difficulty lies in “a limited perception of climate change as primarily spectacular weather events,” when in fact “climate change also infiltrates the very ordinary, everyday experiences that are the bread and butter of realist novels” through “gradual alterations—a tick upwards in a thermometer, an early melt of lake ice, an insect species steadily expanding its range” (Dimick, 2019). This distinction between spectacular and gradual climate representation proves critical for understanding the formal choices of post-2020 novelists, several of whom (notably Offill and Powers) locate climate anxiety precisely within the textures of ordinary domestic and professional life rather than in scenes of catastrophe.

2.2 Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor

Rob Nixon’s (2011) *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* supplies a second indispensable theoretical vocabulary. Nixon defines slow violence as “a 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” (Nixon, 2011, as cited in “Understanding Nixon’s Slow Violence Theory,” 2025). This concept is inspired by Johan Galtung’s theory of structural violence but reoriented toward questions of temporality, scale, and representation that Nixon argues structural-violence theory does not adequately address (“Rob Nixon: Slow Violence,” 2023). Crucially, Nixon frames slow violence as disproportionately borne by “the poor of the global south, those lacking the means to leave areas suffering the consequences of toxic pollution” and observes that because slow violence “hardly fits into narrative templates,” it “eludes memory and activist consciousness” (“Rob Nixon: Slow Violence,” 2023). Nixon’s challenge to writers and “writer-activists” is thus explicitly representational: to devise “stories, images and symbols adequate to the pervasive but elusive violence of delayed effects” (Digital Commons, n.d.). This article applies Nixon’s framework to demonstrate that post-2020 cli-fi’s formal innovations—particularly its manipulation of narrative time—constitute attempts to render slow violence narratable within a literary marketplace still oriented toward “the politics of speed” (“Slow Violence,” Carruth review, 2021).

2.3 Eco-Anxiety, Solastalgia, and Affective Poetics

A third theoretical strand draws on the psychology and affect theory of climate emotion. Glenn Albrecht’s (2019) concept of *solastalgia*—“profound sadness and frustration about irreversible changes to one’s home environment and the feeling of powerlessness” (“Storm, Stress, and Solastalgia,” 2020)—has become a central term in what recent scholarship calls “eco-anxiety poetics” (“Climate Change and Eco-Anxiety,” 2025). A 2025 thematic analysis of six major cli-fi novels—Barbara Kingsolver’s *Flight Behavior* (2012), Richard Powers’s *The Overstory* (2018), Omar El Akkad’s *American War*

(2017), N. K. Jemisin's *The Fifth Season* (2015), Jenny Offill's *Weather* (2020), and Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* (2019)—coded 312 passages using a rubric derived from Albrecht (2019), Clayton and Karaszia (2020), and Pihkala (2022), finding 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%)” (“Climate Change and Eco-Anxiety,” 2025). Significantly, this study found that eco-anxiety is “not merely depicted thematically but formally enacted through narrative fragmentation, temporal disruption, and second-person address,” and that “cross-cultural analysis reveals that postcolonial cli-fi encodes eco-anxiety as inseparable from racial and political dispossession, challenging Western-centric psychological frameworks” (“Climate Change and Eco-Anxiety,” 2025). This finding directly informs the present article’s formal analysis in Section 3 and its treatment of migration narrative in Section 4.

A parallel study of narrative resistance in the Anthropocene identifies three complementary formal strategies operative across the genre: *scalar recalibration*, which “restructures narrative time and space to bridge intimate lifeworlds with geological epochs”; *affective disruption*, which “unsettles readers’ emotional complacency through irony, lyric excess, or tonal whiplash, cultivating what Glenn Albrecht terms ‘earth emotions’”; and *counter-hegemonic storytelling*, which “amplifies marginalised human and nonhuman voices, challenging extractivist ideologies and foregrounding multispecies kinship in Donna Haraway’s sense of ‘making-kin’” (“Narrating the Anthropocene: Literary Resistance,” n.d.). These three categories organize the formal analysis that follows.

3. Formal Strategies for Narrating the Anthropocene in Post-2020 Fiction

3.1 Scalar Recalibration: From the Domestic to the Planetary

Kim Stanley Robinson’s *The Ministry for the Future* (2020) offers the most formally radical post-2020 attempt to solve the scale problem that Ghosh identifies. The novel, which follows a fictional United Nations subsidiary body “charged with defending all living creatures present and future who cannot speak for themselves, by promoting their legal standing and physical protection” (Cleveland Review of Books, 2025), abandons the “single soul” structure of the realist novel in favor of a multi-perspectival, encyclopedic form. As one reviewer observes, “rather than immerse us in a single mind—the ‘individual imaginary’ critiqued by Ghosh—Robinson dips us into perspectives from around the globe, and sometimes beyond it,” including chapters narrated from nonhuman and even geophysical points of view, such as a “paragraph-length riddle” voiced by the sun or the biosphere itself (Cleveland Review of Books, 2025). Scholarship on the novel notes that Robinson employs what has been called a “subtle and self-reflective weaving” of narrative strands, “bringing together strands of history, literature, psychology, and a wide range of sciences” so as to “offer each character his or her own unique identity without sacrificing the authorial perspective through which the novels move from fractious conflict to a guarded yet hopeful unity” (“Mapping the Contours of the Future,” 2021, quoting Dynes).

This scalar experimentation is not without critical cost. Shields (2023) situates Robinson’s technique in relation to Ghosh’s own preferred figure for climate representation—the Sundarban tigers, which are “everywhere and nowhere, but by which, one can be sure, one is always being observed” (Ghosh, 2016, p. 28, as cited in Shields, 2023)—arguing that where Ghosh seeks a mode of uncanny, ambient presence, Robinson’s nonhuman narrators remain fundamentally “didactic”: “the moment the riddle is solved, there is no mystery left” (Shields, 2023). This tension between didacticism and defamiliarization recurs

throughout post-2020 cli-fi and marks an unresolved formal problem: novels that attempt encyclopedic planetary scope risk subordinating narrative mystery to explanatory transparency, even as they succeed in dramatizing interdependencies that realist, single-protagonist fiction cannot easily register.

By contrast, Jenny Offill's *Weather* (2020) pursues scalar recalibration through radical compression rather than expansion. The novel—one of the six core texts in the 2025 eco-anxiety corpus study discussed above—renders planetary dread through the fragmented, aphoristic interiority of a university librarian who moonlights answering letters for a climate-doom podcast. Here scale is negotiated not through multiple narrators spanning continents but through the juxtaposition of trivial domestic detail (school pickups, marital friction, elder care) against apocalyptic information absorbed in fragments from news and correspondence—precisely the formal strategy the eco-anxiety corpus study identifies as “narrative fragmentation” and “second-person address” that formally enacts anxiety rather than merely describing it (“Climate Change and Eco-Anxiety,” 2025).

3.2 Documentary Hybridity and the Limits of the Novel Form

A second dominant strategy in post-2020 cli-fi is what this article terms documentary hybridity: the incorporation of nonfictional discursive registers—policy memoranda, scientific reportage, economic modeling, meeting minutes—into the fictional frame. *The Ministry for the Future* again exemplifies this tendency; its chapters alternate between “surprisingly readable treatises, academic discussions, and minutes from the ministry’s meetings” and more conventional dramatic scenes (Cleveland Review of Books, 2025). Scholars analyzing the novel as “operative literature” have argued that this hybridity reflects a deliberate strategy of using fiction to model real climate policy interventions, treating the novel as what might be called a discursive laboratory for post-carbon

governance (Shields, 2023). This documentary impulse has drawn both praise and skepticism: Bill McKibben’s (2020) review in *The New York Review of Books* was titled, tellingly, “It’s Not Science Fiction,” while Francis Fukuyama has characterized the novel’s optimistic political trajectory as “ludicrously unrealistic,” observing that “Robinson posits the most optimistic possible political developments at every turn” (Wikipedia, 2026, citing Fukuyama). This split reception illustrates a structural dilemma facing documentary-hybrid cli-fi: the closer such novels approach the discourse of policy and science, the more they risk being judged by criteria of predictive plausibility that are properly extrinsic to fiction, while the more they retreat into pure literary abstraction, the more they risk reproducing the very deficiencies of imagination that Ghosh diagnoses.

Critics working from within the genre itself have proposed formal correctives to this dilemma. Nick Admussen’s influential proposal that climate fiction must eschew the “portrait of the single soul” in favor of more collective narrative modes anticipates the ensemble structures found in *The Ministry for the Future*, while Matthew Schneider-Mayerson’s research on activist reception suggests that collective-protagonist narratives are more effective at motivating real-world environmental engagement than individualist ones (both cited in Fantasy-Hive, 2024). Toby Litt and Rupert Read have coined the term “thrutopia” to describe a proposed third narrative mode positioned between dystopia and utopia—one that, in their formulation, illustrates and empowers collective agency in getting society through the climate crisis rather than merely depicting its aftermath or an idealized escape from it (Fantasy-Hive, 2024). This “thrutopian” framework provides a useful bridge to the hopepunk and solarpunk tendencies examined in Section 5.

3.3 Counter-Hegemonic and Postcolonial Framings

The eco-anxiety corpus study's finding that "postcolonial cli-fi encodes eco-anxiety as inseparable from racial and political dispossession" ("Climate Change and Eco-Anxiety," 2025) receives further theoretical grounding in scholarship applying Nixon's environmentalism-of-the-poor framework to specific texts. A comparative reading of N. K. Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* trilogy (2015–2017) and Jeff VanderMeer's *Southern Reach* series (2014–2024) argues that these "climate-fantastic" novels activate speculative and fantastic possibilities that "exceed the limitations of Western-capitalist-colonial storytelling" that constrain more realist modes of environmental fiction (Cambridge Core, 2025). Climate change, this scholarship argues, functions as a "hyperobject"—a phenomenon so vast in its spatial and temporal distribution that it exceeds ordinary perceptual and narrative grasp—and fantastic or New Weird registers may in fact be better suited to conveying this scale-exceeding quality than the constrained realism Ghosh critiques (Cambridge Core, 2025). This suggests an important qualification to Ghosh's thesis: it may be less that realism as such fails to represent climate change, and more that the specific ideological commitments embedded in the Western bourgeois realist tradition—its individualism, its assumption of stable property relations, its Eurocentric temporal horizons—constitute the actual obstacle, one that postcolonial speculative and fantastic modes are structurally positioned to circumvent.

4. Climate-Induced Migration and the Politics of the "Refugee" Narrative

4.1 *Exit West* and the De-Territorialization of Migration Narrative

Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017), though published three years before this article's temporal focus, functions as the indispensable formal precursor for post-2020 climate-migration fiction and remains the most extensively theorized migration narrative in the contemporary Anglophone canon. The novel follows Saeed and Nadia, who flee an unnamed

city convulsed by civil war through a series of magical doors that transport them instantly to Mykonos, London, and San Francisco. Scholarship converges on the significance of this device: rather than depicting migration through the conventional linear, arduous journey narrative, Hamid, as one recent discourse analysis observes, "does not use the tropes of linear migration by making migration process both inevitable and universal" (Cox, 2021; Sultana, 2021, as cited in "Displacement and Migration," 2025). By eliminating the journey itself, Hamid redirects narrative attention toward what precedes and follows displacement, and toward its psychological and relational aftermath rather than its physical ordeal.

Critically, although *Exit West* is not explicitly a climate novel, Sarah Dimick (2019) identifies within it a crucial gesture toward climate causality that has become paradigmatic for subsequent climate-migration fiction. Dimick highlights Hamid's description of the migrations driving the novel as including "people slipping away from where they had been, from once fertile plains cracking with dryness, from seaside villages gasping beneath tidal surges, from overcrowded cities and murderous battlefields" (Hamid, 2017, as cited in Dimick, 2019). As Dimick notes, this is "a fleeting reference to altered weather and the increasing crisis of climate change refugees" embedded within a narrative more overtly organized around war and political violence (Dimick, 2019)—precisely the kind of gradual, background climate signal that Dimick argues realist and quasi-realist fiction is in fact capable of registering, contra the strongest versions of Ghosh's thesis. This textual detail exemplifies what Nixon (2011) would recognize as an attempt to braid slow violence ("plains cracking with dryness") into the more narratively "spectacular" violence of war and border conflict, reflecting the real-world entanglement of climate stress, resource scarcity, and armed conflict that policy literature increasingly documents.

Scholarship on *Exit West* also foregrounds its ambivalent politics of representation. One critical strand, working through discourse analysis, argues that the novel functions as “a counter-discursive work of literature in that it espouses empathy, inclusion, as well as reconstructions of the concept of home and identity,” disrupting “the hegemonic discourses of refugees and world inequality” through “figurative wordplay, transnational scenes, and sympathetic stories” (“Displacement and Migration,” 2025). A competing strand is more skeptical, arguing that the novel’s optimistic resolution—in which Saeed and Nadia are gradually absorbed into new urban economies—constitutes “a problematic acceptance into a capitalist framework rather than a true resolution of refugee crises,” and that the text can be read as “co-opting refugees into global capitalism” even as it humanizes them (“Mohsin Hamid’s *Exit West*: Co-Opting Refugees,” 2019). A third body of scholarship, informed by trauma theory, emphasizes the novel’s attention to “hybrid identities, belonging, and personal transformation,” arguing that Hamid “challenges conventional representations of refugees by emphasizing their agency, emotional complexity, and capacity for renewal” (“Exploring the Interconnected Dimensions,” 2026). This triangulated reception—counter-hegemonic, capital-critical, and trauma-affirmative—demonstrates the interpretive richness that the novel’s formal innovations (particularly its magical-realist compression of geographic distance) have generated, and establishes an interpretive template subsequent climate-migration novels have inherited.

4.2 Post-2020 Successors: Migration, Drought, and the Global South

Abi Daré’s *And So I Roar* (2024), winner of the inaugural Climate Fiction Prize, extends this migration-adjacent tradition by grounding climate-induced displacement explicitly within a named national and cultural context—rural Nigeria—rather than the deliberately unnamed, allegorical geography of *Exit West*. The novel

follows a teenage girl “blamed for a murder and drought that devastate her home village in patriarchal, climate-stressed rural Nigeria” (Rocca, 2025). This shift from allegorical to particularized geography is significant: where Hamid’s de-territorialized doors universalize the migrant experience by stripping it of specific national referents, Daré’s novel insists on the intersectional specificity of climate vulnerability, embedding drought within existing structures of gender, kinship accusation, and rural patriarchal authority. This move is consistent with the postcolonial cli-fi tendency, identified above, to encode “eco-anxiety as inseparable from racial and political dispossession” (“Climate Change and Eco-Anxiety,” 2025) and demonstrates the genre’s post-2020 movement away from universalizing allegory toward what might be called situated climate realism.

A parallel case is Imbolo Mbue’s *How Beautiful We Were* (2021), set in the fictional African village of Kosawa and centered on the slow-violence consequences of oil extraction across a multigenerational timescale. Reviewing the novel alongside *The Ministry for the Future*, one critic observes that Robinson’s planetary, technocratic scope can be productively contrasted with Mbue’s “single village” focus and “child’s point of view,” noting pointedly that in Robinson’s future-oriented, globe-spanning narrative, “children are strangely absent” (Cleveland Review of Books, 2025). This juxtaposition illuminates a structural trade-off in post-2020 cli-fi between planetary scope and intimate, embodied stakes: novels that scale up to encompass the Anthropocene’s geological time horizon risk losing the child’s-eye immediacy that grounds slow violence in lived, generational experience, while novels that remain village-scaled risk underrepresenting the systemic, transnational forces—carbon markets, multinational extraction, international law—that produce local ecological collapse in the first place.

4.3 Toward a Critique of the “Climate Refugee” Frame

Taken together, these texts suggest that the most formally and ethically successful post-2020 climate-migration fiction resists the securitized, dehumanizing framing of “climate refugee” discourse common in policy and media contexts—a framing that risks what Nixon (2011) would describe as rendering slow violence’s victims “dispensable citizens” (“Rob Nixon: Slow Violence,” 2023). Instead, novels such as *Exit West* and *And So I Roar* restore interiority, agency, and relational complexity to displaced characters, consistent with the trauma-theoretical finding that such fiction “challenges conventional representations of refugees by emphasizing their agency, emotional complexity, and capacity for renewal” (“Exploring the Interconnected Dimensions,” 2026). This represents cli-fi’s most significant ethical contribution to public discourse on climate migration: a counter-narrative to the anonymizing, threat-oriented vocabulary (“waves,” “floods,” “crises” of migrants) that circulates in journalistic and political registers.

5. From Dystopia to Thrutopia: The Post-2020 Turn Toward Hope

If the dominant mode of twentieth- and early twenty-first-century environmental fiction has been dystopian—from J. G. Ballard’s *The Drowned World* (1962) through Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003–2013) to Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* (1993), a novel whose depiction of a climate-ravaged, socially fractured 2024 America has been widely noted for its uncanny prescience (“Eight climate fiction... books,” 2023; “Solarpunk Narrates Futures,” 2025)—post-2020 cli-fi exhibits a marked, though contested, turn toward non-dystopian registers. This turn manifests in two related but distinct literary movements: hopepunk and solarpunk.

Hopepunk, a term coined by Alexandra Rowland in 2017, is defined as “weaponized optimism—intentionally choosing communalism, radical compassion, cooperation (instead of violence) as an organizing principle” (Quinn, 2026). Unlike solarpunk, hopepunk

narratives “are not specifically climate-focused and, more importantly, do not necessitate hopeful worlds” (Ordoña, 2019); rather, the hopepunk sensibility locates political meaning in the ethical choice to extend “kindness, rather than disdain or vitriol” under conditions of catastrophe (Ordoña, 2019). Solarpunk, by contrast, is defined by Wikipedia’s (2026) synthesis of the movement’s critical literature as “a literary, artistic, and social movement... that envisions and works toward actualizing a sustainable future interconnected with nature and community,” in which “the ‘solar’ represents solar energy as a renewable energy source and an optimistic vision of the future that rejects climate doomerism, while the ‘punk’ refers to do-it-yourself and the countercultural, post-capitalist, and decolonial aspects of creating such a future” (Wikipedia, 2026).

Kim Stanley Robinson emerges again as a pivotal figure in this transition; critics trace his post-2020 optimism back to earlier utopian works such as *Pacific Edge* (1990), itself influenced by Ernest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* (1975) (Ahmed, 2024). *The Ministry for the Future* is frequently cited as “an example of resisting dystopia” (Singularity Weblog, n.d.), and Robinson has spoken explicitly of the possibility of “a good Anthropocene” (Singularity Weblog, n.d.)—a formulation that reframes the geological epoch not as an inevitable catastrophe but as a contested terrain whose outcome remains open to political and narrative intervention.

This turn toward hope, however, is not uncontested within the genre or its criticism. Solarpunk scholarship itself is internally divided: some critics celebrate the movement’s capacity to “resist... narratives about decay and doom, offering a hopeful vision of an imminent future in which humans learn to heal our relationship with nature and each other” (“Solarpunk Narrates Futures,” 2025), while others caution against a “techno-optimism” that idealizes “greenified techno-futures” without adequately reckoning with questions of degrowth, resource limits, and settler-colonial injustice (“Solarpunk and Sustainability,” 2025;

“SOLARPUNK: Envisioning Ecological Futures,” 2024). Scholars working in this vein argue for a turn toward “liberatory education and learning futures” grounded in “connection, agency and community and individual flourishing,” framing hopepunk and solarpunk not as escapism but as pedagogically and politically necessary correctives to the paralytic effects of purely dystopian storytelling (“SOLARPUNK: Envisioning Ecological Futures,” 2024).

The critical reception of *The Ministry for the Future* illustrates the stakes of this debate with particular clarity. While Bill McKibben’s (2020) review insisted the novel’s scenarios were “not science fiction” but plausible near-future policy, Francis Fukuyama’s dismissal of the novel’s political trajectory as “ludicrously unrealistic” (Wikipedia, 2026) suggests that hopepunk and thrutopian registers face a structural credibility problem symmetrical to the one facing dystopian fiction: just as catastrophist narratives risk producing paralytic despair or being dismissed as “doom-mongering” (Rocca, 2025), optimistic narratives risk being dismissed as politically naïve wish-fulfillment. A 2024 review of the novel notes with approval that Robinson’s depiction of a devastating opening “heat dome scenario is horrifically prescient,” observing that the novel was being reviewed “when the world’s hottest day in 100,000 years has gone shockingly under-reported” (Fantasy-Hive, 2024)—suggesting that even the genre’s most hope-oriented texts retain catastrophist elements, positioning “thrutopia” less as a rejection of dystopian material than as a narrative strategy for metabolizing catastrophe into collective agency rather than despair.

6. Discussion: Toward a Model of Post-2020 Cli-Fi Narrative Framing

Synthesizing the formal, migratory, and affective dimensions examined above, this article proposes that post-2020 Anglophone cli-fi is best understood as organized around four converging and often internally tensioned strategies. First, *scalar recalibration* oscillates

between encyclopedic planetary ensembles (Robinson) and fragmented domestic compression (Offill), each offering a partial solution to the representational problem Ghosh (2016) identifies, and each incurring corresponding costs—didacticism in the former case, potential parochialism in the latter. Second, *documentary hybridity* imports nonfictional discourse (policy memoranda, scientific data, testimony) into fictional form, generating both the genre’s claim to real-world relevance and its vulnerability to charges of implausibility or, conversely, of aestheticizing catastrophe. Third, *counter-hegemonic and postcolonial reframing* relocates climate causality within histories of colonial extraction, gendered violence, and global economic inequality, refusing the universalized, deracinated “humanity” often implied by planetary-scale climate discourse, and insisting instead—as Nixon’s (2011) framework demands—on the differential distribution of ecological harm. Fourth, *affective and tonal modulation* between dystopian catastrophism and hopepunk/solarpunk optimism reflects an ongoing negotiation over the political function of climate storytelling itself: whether fiction’s primary task is to shock readers into recognition of catastrophe already underway, or to model the collective agency and cooperative structures through which catastrophe might yet be metabolized or averted.

These four strategies are not mutually exclusive, and the strongest post-2020 texts—*The Ministry for the Future* chief among them—deploy several simultaneously, alternating registers chapter by chapter. This suggests that the genre’s formal instability is not a symptom of aesthetic immaturity but a deliberate, structurally necessitated response to the scale and heterogeneity of the Anthropocene itself: a crisis that is simultaneously planetary and local, gradual and spectacular, ecological and political, and that consequently resists any single narrative mode’s claim to adequacy. In this sense, the genre’s formal restlessness enacts, at the level of literary technique, the very

“derangement” that Ghosh (2016) diagnoses as characteristic of climate cognition—except that where Ghosh treats derangement as a failure to be overcome, post-2020 cli-fi increasingly treats formal heterogeneity as a productive resource, a way of holding multiple, incommensurable scales of crisis in a single narrative frame without collapsing them into false coherence.

7. Conclusion

The rise of cli-fi since 2020 reflects a substantive transformation in the Anglophone novel’s capacity to narrate the Anthropocene, climate-induced migration, and ecological collapse. Where Ghosh (2016) diagnosed a structural incapacity in realist fiction—a “great derangement” rooted in the genre’s commitment to human-scaled time, stable settings, and individual moral adventure—the post-2020 corpus examined here demonstrates a body of formally inventive responses: the encyclopedic, multi-perspectival planetary narration of *The Ministry for the Future*; the fragmented, affectively enacted anxiety of *Weather*; the situated, intersectional climate realism of *And So I Roar*; and the ongoing legacy of *Exit West*’s de-territorialized migration narrative. Read through Nixon’s (2011) theory of slow violence and the affect-theoretical vocabulary of solastalgia and eco-anxiety (Albrecht, 2019; Pihkala, 2022), these texts reveal a genre actively theorizing its own representational limits even as it works to exceed them.

This article has also traced an unresolved tension at the heart of contemporary cli-fi between catastrophist and hopeful registers—a tension that mirrors broader public debates about whether climate storytelling should function primarily as warning or as blueprint. The evidence surveyed here suggests this is a productive rather than a debilitating tension: the genre’s most critically and commercially significant texts, epitomized by the inaugural Climate Fiction Prize’s recognition of *And So I Roar*, succeed precisely by refusing to resolve the question of whether climate fiction should

“spark action” or indulge “doom voyeurism” (Rocca, 2025), instead holding both possibilities in narrative suspension. Future research might extend this analysis through systematic bibliometric mapping of the post-2020 corpus (cf. the methodology of Rong, 2023, and the bibliometric approach applied to earlier cli-fi in *Multidisciplinary Reviews*, 2025), through reader-response studies of the genre’s claimed capacity to motivate real-world climate engagement (building on Schneider-Mayerson’s empirical work, cited in Fantasy-Hive, 2024), and through comparative study of non-Anglophone climate fiction traditions, which remain significantly underrepresented in the scholarship surveyed here. As the climate crisis intensifies, the Anglophone novel’s ongoing formal experimentation suggests that literary fiction retains a distinctive and evolving capacity to do what Ghosh (2016) argued it had forgotten how to do: render the unthinkable thinkable.

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