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Rewriting History: Alternative Memories in Climate Fiction

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Abstract

Climate fiction comes forth as a powerful intermediate for revising history and remoulding cultural memory against advancing ecological crisis. Alongside other central texts, this article examines how crucial texts like *New York 2140* by Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Overstory* by Richard Powers, and *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood mould alternative memories that upset traditional human-centred narratives. These narratives reenvision memory as ecological, affective, and spread out across species and time through the lenses of memory studies, ecocriticism, and posthumanism. Climate fiction asserts collective amnesia and allows new ethical frameworks for facing the Anthropocene by reconstructing landscapes, technologies, and species into living archives. The objective of this study is to reveal how speculative storytelling is proof of environmental trauma and champions critical reflection and hope, setting up memory as a vital tool for envisaging just and sustainable futures.

Keywords: Climate fiction, memory studies, Anthropocene, ecocriticism, posthumanism.

1. Introduction

The global climate crisis is responsible for altering physical ecosystems and thoroughly transforming cultural consciousness and historical imagination. Literature has taken up an essential role in bringing to fore what is so often

politically or perceptually blurred. Among the most distinguished literary responses to the Anthropocene is the genre of climate fiction (cli-fi), which expresses speculative and realist involvements with climate change and its decussating social, political and ontological dimensions. While cli-fi is praised for its imaginative premonition, this paper aims for a sounder function of the genre: its role in amending history through assembling of alternative cultural memories.

Utilizing the interdisciplinary field of memory studies, this article investigates how cli-fi works as an evocative tool that examines, impedes, and finally topples the hegemonic historical narratives based on anthropocentrism, progressivist ephemerality, and capitalist modernity. Instead of projecting dystopian futures, climate fiction embarks on what Pierre Nora calls “lieux de mémoire” --- locations of memory that turn up exactly when lived memory is threatened. These novels do not just mirror or mourn environmental destruction; they intercede in cultural memory by creating counter-memories that recover suppressed ecological knowledge, reinvigorate multispecies agency, and confront the epistemic infrastructures of denial and forgetting.

This paper centres on eight key works of contemporary climate fiction—Kim Stanley Robinson’s *New York 2140*, Richard Powers’ *The Overstory*, Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*, Barbara Kingsolver’s *Flight Behavior*, J. G. Ballard’s *The Drowned World*, Ian McEwan’s *Solar*, Emmi Itäranta’s *Memory of Water*, and Jeff Goodell’s nonfiction *The Water Will Come*— as case studies in literary memory work. All these texts employ different temporal, spatial, and affective registers of memory, recreating ecological histories and contemplating alternative futures. The variety in genre, narrative form, and cultural context among these works provide a potent basis for appreciating how cli-fi arbitrates historical consciousness in the Anthropocene.

The theory of alternative memory expressed in this article refers to counter-hegemonic anamneses and recreations of the past that defy dominant historical ideologies. Focussing on Dr. Astrid Erll’s framework of transcultural memory, the study argues that the mnemonic work of climate fiction often goes beyond national or personal memory, taking into account planetary, posthuman, and ecological perspectives. These texts are proof of environmental devastation and create speculative archives that include nonhuman agents such as forests, oceans, species, genetic codes, and digital remnants, thereby challenging the anthropocentric assumptions implanted in traditional historiography.

2. Statement of the Problem

At the very theoretical basic of this paper is an effort to bring together insights from memory studies with ecocriticism and posthumanist theory.

The structure for analysing how environments and ecologies work as sites of memory is provided by ecocriticism. Posthumanism scrutinises the anthropocentric borders of memory production and agency. The need to rethink human-nature relations in light of the Anthropocene has been emphasised by thinkers like Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti and Bruno Latour, addressing forms of storytelling that recognise interdependence, vulnerability and relationality.

According to this article, climate fiction responds to those summonses by enacting a form of posthuman mnemonic ethics, one that highlights multispecies memory, collective trauma and intergenerational justice. Cultural trauma theory by Jeffrey C. Alexander and Michael Rothberg also enlightens this investigation of cli-fi's memory work. Ecological disasters in most cli-fi works are presented as both an environmental loss and a type of cultural trauma that upsets normal temporalities and identities. These works address Rothberg's concept of "multidirectional memory," a technique of remembering that connects disparate histories and themes without surrendering to their distinctions through the narratives. Cli-fi associates through narratives colonial exploitation to the current climatic catastrophe, or the loss of species caused by institutional racism, so situating environmental degradation within larger patterns of historical violence.

The antes associated with memory work can be extremely political. Andreas Huyssen contends that memory in the late modern age is a conflict to define its constraints instead of a sanctuary from the present. Cli-fi serves as a type of cultural resistance, contesting the deletions and rebuttals that discern climate discourse and neoliberal history in this setting. These works highlight a form of narrative justice that holds the present accountable and reacquires memory as a place of ethical and creative possibilities by imagining futures haunted by past ecological crimes and failures.

Temporal complexity is one of the paramount climate change issues. Scholars like Dipesh Chakrabarty and Rob Nixon have detected that climate change always unravels in nonhuman temporal scales (glacial, geological, planetary) that evade mainstream forms of historical narration. A permeative sense of cultural amnesia and "slow violence" is nurtured by this temporal disconnectedness, where the ever-increasing destruction of ecosystems is rendered neutral within dominant media and political discourses. Cli-fi makes use of processes like fragmented chronology, generational narrative, archival fictions and multiple perspectives to show the long durations and the postponed consequences of environmental degradation. In this way, it aligns with narrative practices that intentionally reshape collective memory to provoke ethical reflections and action which is referred to as 'memory activism' by Ann Rigney.

Each of the texts under examination resemble this mnemonic function in several ways. *New York 2140* portrays a dystopian New York flooded by

rising seas, working as a blueprint of economic inequality, urban memory and environmental durability. An arboreal chronicle highlighting interspecies memory and ecological mourning is presented in Powers' *The Overstory*. The bioengineered legacies of environmental and ethical failure are delved in Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, where genetic memory is a contended area. A dramatic crossing of climate change and rural epistemologies is presented in Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior*, placing memory within gendered and classed experiences. A surreal, post-apocalyptic landscape where memory shatters into dream, entropy and geopsychic decline is the setting of *The Drowned World* by Ballard. Scientific hubris and climate denial has been examined in minute detail in *Solar* by McEwan, showing memory as a farcical, self-serving construct. Indigenous and feminine traditions of oral memory in a dystopian drought-stricken world is the setting of Itäranta's *Memory of Water*. *The Water Will Come* by Goodell is a journalistic testimony that serves a hybrid archive of real-world environmental memory and anticipatory grief.

The concept of history as a linear progression is challenged by these books while they offer "entangled temporalities" which are narrative structures that decline the separation of past, present and future, as termed by Karen Barad. Memory is not nostalgic but generative in these works. Alternative imaginaries and ethical commitments are opened up by memories. The reorganizing of memories in cli-fi serves two-fold purpose --- warning, and catalysing reflection, resistance and resilience.

To demonstrate that cli-fi comprises a significant for of mnemonic intervention in the cultural politics of climate change is the aim of this article. These texts take part in the creation of ecological counter-histories essential to face the amnesia that comes along with capitalist modernity by organising speculative archives and triggering forgotten or marginalised narratives. Cli-fi offers plural, affective and posthuman narratives of loss, entanglement and survival in lieu of master narratives of dominion and progress.

3. Research Methodology

A qualitative, interpretive research methodology based on interdisciplinary frameworks of memory studies, ecocriticism and posthumanist literary theory is utilized in this study. The research probes how climate fiction (cli-fi) builds alternative forms of memory that dispute hegemonic historical narratives and highlight ecological consciousness through close textual analysis of the eight literary texts. the methodology aims to highlight thematic content, narrative structure, form and affective resonance.

This study looks at cli-fi as a cultural technology of memory by way of which collective remembrance, trauma and historical revision are arbitrated. Cli-fi proposes speculative and nonlinear forms of narrative that undermine conventional memory paradigms when compared to empirical historiography

that focusses on linear causality and human-centric accounts. The methodology brings together theories from multiple disciplines to interpret texts as mnemonic texts and ecological discourses, just to ensnare this complexity.

3.1 Theoretical Frameworks

a. Memory Studies

The works of Pierre Nora, Astrid Erll, Jan Assmann and Michael Rothberg in cultural memory studies will be the central theoretical lens in this article. How cli-fi creates representative memory sites (cities, forests, species, technologies) that replace dissolving “real” memory with representational forms is expressed through Nora’s idea of *lieux de mémoire*. Unlike static memorials, these literary memory sites are dynamic constructs that reply to the crises of memory and identity in a swiftly transforming world.

Transcultural memory theory by Erll is helpful to find out how climate fiction goes beyond national and temporal boundaries. Cli-fi frequently clashes with planetary memory (memories that are spread out through time, cultures, and species) based on the global nature of the ecological crises. Multidirectional memory model of Rothberg shows how cli-fi unites disparate histories (colonialism, industrialisation, racial violence and environmental degradation) without breaking down their uniqueness. Memory in cli-fi is not zero-sum, but relational and dialogic.

This scheme also makes use of Jeffrey Alexander’s concept of cultural trauma to analyse how existential hazards disputing the identity and continuity are processed by collectives. Cli-fi responds to ecological collapse, extinction and climate migration as rising trends of cultural trauma by constructing new mnemonic scripts and ethical inclinations.

b. Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism, especially material ecocriticism and econarratology, delivers the necessary tools to examine the environmental dimensions of memory. Serenella Iovino, Serpil Oppermann, and Timothy Morton are scholars who theorise environments as storied matter (sites containing, transmitting and generating memory) than just setting. Cli-fi landscapes are active mnemonic agents in this view instead of being inert backdrops.

Narrative agency in nonhuman entities (rivers, plants, buildings, genes) is the centre of material ecocriticism which identifies how cli-fi inflates the domain of memory beyond the human. Hubert Zapf’s concept of eco-narratology brings to fore how ecological processes like feedback, interdependence and nonlinearity are mirrored through literary form. Narrative strategies are important in the reconstruction of time and history, especially through cyclical, fractured or multi-perspectival structures.

Questions of environmental justice, especially the works of authors like Rob Nixon and Kate Rigby are also attended to by this ecocritical lens. The investigation traverses how memory in cli-fi is embedded in power relations, divulging the erasure of environmental histories often cuts through with the marginalisation of indigenous, racialised and impoverished communities.

c. Posthumanism

Posthumanist theory is the third and equally analytical dimension. This study views memory as spread across human and nonhuman bodies, systems and technologies employing the works of Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, Karen Barad and Stacy Alaimo. Haraway's summons to "stay with the trouble" is especially vibrant in cli-fi's embrace of messy, entangled and co-evolving futures. A key concept in Haraway's thought, the idea of 'becoming with', devises how characters in cli-fi create mnemonic attachments across species and temporalities.

Critical posthumanism and stress on zoe-centred ethics by Braidotti notify the examination of how cli-fi decentres the liberal human subject and highlights life in its broadest, most inclusive forms. In this structure, memory emerges from assemblages (networks of biological, technological, and affective relations) instead of being situated in isolated individuals.

Cli-fi as a posthuman mnemonic genre challenging traditional bounds of memory and technology, organism and environment, subject and object. Memory is sketched in the minds, genes, data archives and ecosystems in case of texts like *Oryx and Crake*, *Solar*, and *Memory of Water*, driving home an ontological redefinition of memory itself.

3.2 Text Selection and Rationale

The eight texts chosen for this evaluation include a diverse spectrum of climate fiction across genre, geography, and form:

1. Kim Stanley Robinson, *New York 2140* (2017)
2. Richard Powers, *The Overstory* (2018)
3. Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (2003)
4. Barbara Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior* (2012)
5. J.G. Ballard, *The Drowned World* (1962)
6. Ian McEwan, *Solar* (2010)
7. Emmi Itäranta, *Memory of Water* (2014)
8. Jeff Goodell, *The Water Will Come* (2017)

These texts were selected based on three criteria:

1. Thematic relevance: every text handles the outcomes of climate change, ecological disruption and multispecies susceptibility.

2. Narrative innovation: formal strategies like fragmented timelines, multiple perspectives and metafiction are used by these texts to reflect and expedite alternative memory structures.

3. Mnemonic depth: these texts are perfect for cultural memory analysis to deal with memory, history, and archive-making.

Despite difference in genre each of these texts takes part in a larger cultural conversation about how societies remember or forget ecological catastrophe.

3.3 Analytical Procedure

A close reading of the selected texts reveals the following dimensions:

- **Temporal structure:** How does the book depict ecological histories or futures through exploitation of narrative time?
- **Mnemonic agents:** How do humans, animals, plants, technologies, landscapes serve as bearers of memory?
- **Affective modes:** Which emotional registers-- grief, nostalgia, anxiety, resilience-- influence the memory work of the text?
- **Narrative ethics:** How does the text handle the climate justice while exploring ethical ramifications of remembering and forgetting?

The above-mentioned frameworks are used to analyse the textual evidence, keeping in mind that literary analysis is posited within broader discursive and philosophical contexts. The readings highlight interpretive depth over taxonomic breadth and are comparative but not extensive.

The examination also prioritises cultural specificity and intersectionality, since geography, race, class and gender influence ecological memory. For example, Itäranta's *Memory of Water* highlights indigenous ecological knowledge and gendered inheritance, and classed experiences of climate knowledge in rural Appalachia is the crux of Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior*.

3.4 Limitations

Even though the study aims for diversity in its choice of texts, it is restricted to Anglophone climate fiction, mostly from Western and Global North settings. The deletion of indigenous and Global South narratives that provide unique variations of ecological memory is called to question. To expand our horizon of understanding of mnemonic devices in ecological literature, future investigation would extend this approach towards oral, vernacular and non-Western cli-fi.

This study continues maintaining its focus on literary texts instead of those visual, digital, or performative media which are progressively gaining importance in discussions on climate memory. These are recognized as significant directions for future research, especially in the areas of algorithmic preservation of climate data and testimony and digital memory ecology.

4. Results and Discussion

How climate fiction engages with memory provides crucial information about historical responsibility, ecological trauma and potential futures are appreciated by society. The novels and non-fiction under selection as a whole express memory as a multifaceted and distributed occurrence that goes beyond human-centred historiography. This section will expand on the modalities of memory in cli-fi through three interconnected lenses: archival and ecological memory, affective and embodied remembrance, and the posthumanist reframing of mnemonic agency.

4.1. Archival and Ecological Memory

The difficulty of portraying ecological pasts that are repeatedly absent or underrepresented in mainstream historical archives is at the core of most cli-fi narratives. Here, Aleida Assmann's differentiation between communicative memory (everyday, lived memory) and cultural memory (institutionalized, symbolic memory) proves helpful. Lost ecological memories that have been marginalised from dominant cultural archives based on capitalist modernity and anthropocentric narratives are often reconfigured in climate fiction.

In *The Overstory*, a cultural memory of the forest that works on Pierre Nora's "lieux de mémoire", is established by Powers. Trees convert into living archives, documenting environmental aggression, human aggression and conserving biological history. This ecological archive gives nonhuman actors mnemonic status, thereby making the typical humanistic focus more muddled. Power's narrative places memory as a living, breathing system than just a static record, asserting the concatenation of human and nonhuman temporalities.

In the same way, a multi-layered palimpsest where social injustices, environmental change, and economic histories all intersect is envisioned in *New York 2140* through urban infrastructures drowned by rising seas. Robinson's flooded Manhattan serves as an archive where memory unfolds through urban geography, architecture, and financial speculation. This flooded city serves as a metaphorical digging ground of the effects of neoliberal capitalism's denial of ecological limits, bringing to light memory as deposited in both natural and constructed environments.

Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* presents archival memory through genetic and technological manipulation as a challenge. Crake's desire to

engineer history by removing unwelcome memories and revising evolutionary trajectories is represented in his development of new posthuman species to replace imperfect humanity. Snowman's fragmented memories become a traumatised and loss-marked personal repository by withstanding this erasure. This conflict between resistance and erasure shows how memory in cli-fi can be both a location of subversion and weapon of control.

Jeff Goodell's nonfiction work *The Water Will Come* enhance these fictional archives by validating real-world impacts, bringing together scientific data and anecdotal histories. The alternative archive of ecological risk and human relocation created by Goodell's reporting emphasises how important it is to preserve memories in order to hold people accountable and take action. The conjunction of nonfictional and fictional archives emphasises the contribution of cli-fi to broadening cultural memory to encompass planetary and multispecies issues.

4.2. *Affective and Embodied Remembrance*

Affective memory arouses the emotional and sensory dimensions of ecological loss, when archival memory delivers structural basis. To allow readers to feel the psychological and physical effects of environmental change, climate fiction repeatedly uses embodied experience to channel distress.

The interruption of monarch butterfly migration as an affective symbol of ecological disorientation is the focus of Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior*. Scientific discourse clashes with the protagonist's rural community embodiment of place, labour and oral tradition. This conflict reveals memory to be cognitive, highly relational and linked to connection to a place, culture and identity. Empathy for the loss of species and environmental instability is aroused by the butterflies' recast patterns, which arouse feelings of loss and uncertainty.

Emmi Itäranta's *Memory of Water* also analyses intergenerational memory as an embodied secret that is passed down through ritual and familial ties. Water scarcity is a lived reality that fashions identity and moral obligation instead of being a background. Memory is delicate and brittle, held in bodily experiences and intimate histories that defy forgetfulness and commercialisation. This ecological knowledge is passed down to the protagonist, signifying memory as a form of resistance to ecological erasure and cultural amnesia.

Affective memory is extended into psychological and evolutionary registers in J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World*. Characters encounter ancient memories that dissipate the lines between ecological forces and human consciousness as the Earth deteriorates to a primaevial climate. This embodied mnemonic experience casts doubt on human exceptionalism and

linear temporality by arguing that memory is a biological echo with roots in the evolutionary histories of multiple species.

Recent research on trauma and memory that stresses affective and embodied forms of recollection is consistent with these affective dimensions. A relational ethics that emphasises concern and accountability for non-human worlds is fostered by the emotional and sensory reactions evoked by cli-fi stories.

4.3 Posthumanist Reframing of Mnemonic Agency

By bringing to fore the agency of nonhuman agents in cognitive processes and repositioning the human subject, posthumanist philosophy challenges anthropocentric views of memory. The ideas of Timothy Morton's "dark ecology" and Donna Haraway's "response-ability" clarify cli-fi as interacting with distributed memory systems that involve people, animals, technology, and surroundings.

The mnemonic function of the trees in *The Overstory* is an example of a posthuman archive where memory is shared across temporal scales and biological networks. This cast doubt on human supremacy over memory and history, encouraging a multispecies perspective that perceives other living beings as co-authors of memories. Powers' novel alludes to a global memory that considers ecological linkages and histories that extend beyond human timescales.

Robinson's *New York 2140* positions memory within the reciprocity of environmental dynamics and human systems. The city's financial institutions and infrastructure act as memory mechanisms, perpetuating social disproportion and environmental degradation histories. The novel's speculative future presents a posthumanist criticism of capitalism temporality and anthropocentric memory, with new forms of recollection emerging through adaptable socio-ecological systems.

Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* addresses posthuman memory complications. The narrative does so by presenting genetic engineering as a means to manipulate and erase past memories. The novel goes on to explore the moral implications of such technological intrusions. Snowman's resolute memories highlight how important affect and narrative are to survival. In this setting, memory turns into a disputed space where posthuman and human temporalities converge.

Embodied and located knowledge are emphasised as vital In *Memory of Water* and *Flight Behavior*, to posthuman memory practices. The lived experience, local ecological knowledge, the materiality of water, and species movement are stressed upon. Abstract or disconnected concepts of memory are calling to question. Memory under the Anthropocene is intrinsically relational and multispecies, according to these narratives. This makes constant negotiations between nonhuman and human beings necessary.

There are significant political and ethical implications of the posthumanist reading. Cli-fi goes on to doubt the colonial and capitalist erasures entrenched in dominant historical narratives. It dehumanises humans and spreads memory across species and environments. This allows more egalitarian and inclusive ecological memory practices that acknowledge fragility and connection.

4.4. Political and Ethical Dimensions of Alternative Memories

Cli-fi's alternative memories have major implications for Anthropocene politics and ethics. Memory becomes a weapon for future-oriented justice and political resistance. this reconstructs history to take into account ecological trauma and multispecies perspectives.

The role of capitalism in environmental degradation and neoliberal urbanisation is called to doubt by the drowned city in *New York 2140*. Memory is rendered as a cooperative history that can be recaptured in order to envision equitable and versatile futures. How important memories—economic, ecological, and racial— mould a democratic storehouse of environmental knowledge are brought to light by the heterogeneous narrative voices in the novel.

The Overstory fosters memories of Indigenous peoples and activists stressing on the forest preservation and hostility to extractive industries. Powers accentuates memory as a type of witness that supports ongoing endeavours for sovereignty and environmental justice. mnemonic persistence of the trees brings to fore the resilience and determination of different histories previously suppressed by dominant narratives.

The ethical risks of genetic engineering and scientific hubris are warned about in *Oryx and Crake* by Atwood. Conflicts between dystopian realities of loss and extinction and utopian yearnings of control are presented through the novel's contradictory recollections. Memory is a moral reminder of past misdeeds. Memory can also be a call to humility in technologically sophisticated futures.

The importance of localised knowledge and cultural practices in climate adaptation is the crux of affective and embodied memories in *Flight Behavior* and *Memory of Water*. In order to survive and fight against cultural amnesia, these stories go on to highlight the moral obligation to transmit and maintain ecological memories.

These narratives demonstrate collectively how alternate memories in cli-fi dispute dominant ideologies. They also bring vitality to the imagination of just and sustainable futures. Memory calls for responsibility, nurturing, and cross-species unanimity among generations, hence turning into a political activity.

5. Conclusion

By reinventing history through alternative mnemonic frameworks that emphasise ecological pain, multispecies interdependence, and speculative futures, climate fiction, as this study has shown, performs crucial cultural memory work. The chosen novels and nonfiction works jointly demolish linear and anthropocentric ideas about memory, exposing it as a posthuman, emotive, and dispersed phenomena. These stories create memory devices—such as trees, flooded towns, engineered species, butterflies, and water scarcity—that preserve marginalised histories and provide counternarratives to prevailing paradigms that are influenced by environmental neglect and capitalist modernity.

The intersection of memory studies, ecocriticism, and posthumanist theory has shed light on how cli-fi's mnemonic methods not only document environmental destruction, but also challenge collective forgetfulness and denial. Climate fiction promotes ethical awareness and relational responsibility for both human and nonhuman beings by broadening the archive to encompass nonhuman temporalities and emotional embodied experiences. This re-evaluation of memory challenges human distinctiveness while encouraging political and ethical reflection on how histories of exploitation and resilience affect present and future climate action.

Importantly, these texts demonstrate memory's significance as a dynamic process that includes a variety of voices and types of knowledge, ranging from Indigenous and rural experiences to scientific and technical imaginaries. This variety calls into question dominant narratives and enables a more inclusive ecological memory that recognises interconnectedness, vulnerability, and justice. Alternative memories in cli-fi become vital weapons for resistance and repair in the Anthropocene.

Rewriting of history in climate fiction through different memories becomes a basic societal act encouraging readers to solve environmental issues while picturing positive, ethical futures founded on empathy and planetary care. These narratives help shape how societies reminisce, adapt, and re-examine their role in the Earth's unfolding story as climate issues become rampant.

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