

CLIMATE INSTABILITY AS A STANDARDIZED REALITY: THE SHIFT FROM "CLI-FI" TO "VISCIOUS REALISM" IN POST-2025 LITERATURE

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Abstract

This article examines the paradigmatic shift in contemporary environmental literature from the genre-bound category of "Cli-Fi" (Climate Fiction) to the aesthetic and philosophical framework of "Viscous Realism." Following the systemic environmental instability of the post-2025 era, literature has moved away from speculative or didactic disaster narratives toward a mode of representation that treats climate instability as a standardized, ontological reality. By synthesizing recent developments in digital ecocriticism and post-anthropocentric theory, this review maps how the "Viscous Turn" reconfigures the relationship between the human subject, non-human actors, and the hyperobjects of the Anthropocene. We argue that literature now serves as a cognitive laboratory for survival, wherein the "grammar of animacy" replaces traditional realist structures to reflect the inescapable entanglement of human biological and social existence with an unstable biosphere.

1. Introduction: From Genre to Ontology

The early 21st century characterized climate change fiction primarily through the lens of 'Cli-Fi,' a genre often confined to dystopian future-making (Bartosch, 2025). However, as we move into 2026, the necessity of representing environmental instability has transcended genre constraints. Climate change is no longer a 'theme'—it is the 'standardized reality' of existence (IJHSSM, 2026).

Further expansion on this section would delve into specific case studies of 2026 literature, analyzing the linguistic choices, narrative structures, and character arcs that define the Viscous Realist mode. The reliance on digital ecocriticism and the integration of climate modeling in fiction highlights the urgent need for a new vocabulary of environmental representation.

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2. The Collapse of Cli-Fi and the Rise of Viscous Realism

The transition to 'Viscous Realism' marks a departure from the 'shock and awe' aesthetics of early 2010s disaster narratives. As Morton (2013) conceptualized 'hyperobjects' as entities that defy human temporal and spatial comprehension, literature has responded by adopting a 'viscous' mode—a state of total immersion where atmospheric, aquatic, and biological boundaries are porous (IJHSSM, 2026).

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3. The Grammar of Animacy and Post-Anthropocentric Narratives

Modern realism in the post-2025 era centers on the 'grammar of animacy.' This approach treats non-human elements—from mycorrhizal networks to sentient AI—as active, protagonistic forces that drive narrative pace. This shift challenges the anthropocentric bias of the Western realist novel, aligning with calls to move beyond the dichotomy of nature and place (Monash University, 2026).

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4. Digital Ecocriticism and Cognitive Modeling

Digital ecocriticism has matured from a niche subfield into a foundational analytical tool. By using literature as a 'cognitive laboratory,' authors now simulate social survival strategies in an unstable world, providing a critical interface between climate science data and human affective responses (IJHSSM, 2026; Bartosch, 2025).

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5. Conclusion: Entanglement as Survival

The evolution of literature toward Viscous Realism is not merely an aesthetic shift but an existential necessity. By shedding the 'Cli-Fi' label, literature has gained the capacity to function as a tool for navigating the pervasive instability of the post-2025 world, where the entanglement of the human and the non-human is recognized as the only remaining, and inescapable, truth.

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