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Staying With The Ruins: Crip Afters, Waiting, And Climate Survival In *The Tamarisk Hunter* And *Emergency Skin*

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Abstract: Climate fiction often centres on moments of disaster, urgency, and heroic survival, leaving little space for the lives that continue after environmental collapse. Drawing on Alison Kafer's concepts of crip afters and crip temporality, this article examines how *The Tamarisk Hunter* by Paolo Bacigalupi and *Emergency Skin* by N. K. Jemisin represent climate futures shaped by waiting, endurance, and collective care rather than recovery or repair. Both texts are set long after ecological damage has occurred and reject narratives of rebuilding, technological salvation, or cure. Instead, they focus on bodies worn down by slow harm and on forms of survival grounded in repetition, dependence, and shared vulnerability. Read together, these stories challenge dominant cli-fi narratives and suggest that climate justice must attend to those who remain living within damaged ecologies long after the disaster has passed.

Index Terms **- Crip afters, crip temporality, climate fiction, slow violence, climate justice**

INTRODUCTION: BEYOND THE MOMENT OF DISASTER: RETHINKING CLIMATE NARRATIVES

Climate fiction, commonly known as cli-fi, has become an important form of writing in the twenty-first century as it addresses environmental damage and climate change. As these issues increasingly shape everyday experience, cli-fi allows readers to understand these crises through stories and emotions (Johns-Putra). Many climate narratives, however, still concentrate on dramatic events such as sudden disasters and heroic acts of survival. These stories tend to focus on speed, physical strength, and recovery. As a result, they often support ideas that value able-bodied endurance and fast solutions, while overlooking other ways people live through long and ongoing crises (Trexler 7).

What is often missing from these stories are the lives that continue after the disaster has passed. When the crisis is no longer shocking or new, survival becomes slow and tiring. For many people, especially those already affected by inequality linked to class, race, location, or disability, climate disaster is not a single event. It is something that continues over time. Damage accumulates rather than being resolved. Waiting becomes an ordinary part of daily life, and life continues amid loss instead of moving towards recovery.

This paper suggests that such post-disaster lives can be better understood through crip theory, especially Alison Kafer's ideas of crip temporality and crip afters. Instead of imagining the future as a space where everything is fixed or cured, crip theory focuses on uneven time, dependence on others, endurance, and bodies and environments that remain damaged. Crip afters refer to ways of living that continue after harm, without clear healing or closure. As Kafer points out, "the problem is not disability, but the ableist assumption

that disability has no place in the future" (*Feminist, Queer, Crip* 3). Reading climate fiction through crip afters challenges the belief that future worlds must be free from damage and aligns with disability-informed critiques of environmental futurity (Clare).

Through close readings of *The Tamarisk Hunter* by Paolo Bacigalupi and *Emergency Skin* by N. K. Jemisin, this paper explores how climate fiction can imagine the future through slow time, shared vulnerability, and relationships with others. Both stories take place long after environmental collapse has already happened. Neither offers hope through rebuilding or new technology. Instead, they show lives shaped by waiting, physical exhaustion, environmental damage, and dependence on others. When read together, these texts question dominant climate narratives and present crip afters as an important way to rethink climate justice and survival.

LIVING IN THE AFTERMATH: CRIP TIME, ENDURANCE, AND RELATIONAL SURVIVAL

To examine these post-disaster lives more closely, this paper uses a qualitative and interpretive method of analysis. It brings together ideas from crip theory and posthuman environmental thought along with close textual reading. The main theoretical framework comes from Alison Kafer's ideas of crip temporality and crip afters. These ideas question common beliefs about recovery and cure and challenge linear ideas of time and progress. In this paper, crip theory is not used as a metaphor. It is used as a critical tool to examine how bodies, time, and survival are shaped in worlds that exist after environmental collapse.

Methodologically, the paper depends on close reading of selected texts. It examines how time is represented in the narratives and studies the portrayal of labour and the human body. Special attention is given to waiting and to forms of survival based on relationships with others. The analysis focuses on moments of repetition and narrative stillness, where movement forward is slowed or completely stopped. These features are read alongside ideas from posthumanism and affect theory, which locate human vulnerability within damaged and more-than-human environments (Alaimo; Bennett).

Instead of treating environmental collapse as a single dramatic event, this approach focuses on long periods of living with damage. It highlights endurance and everyday survival after crisis. By combining theory with close textual analysis, the paper shows how cli-fi can imagine futures that do not depend on repair or escape but on continuing life within conditions of lasting harm.

With this critical approach in place, cli-fi can be reconsidered beyond its usual praise for turning environmental crisis into strong narrative form. By presenting floods, droughts, pandemics, and large-scale disasters, it helps readers understand scientific ideas through stories and feelings. However, this focus on dramatic events can hide slower and less visible forms of harm. Rob Nixon explains that climate damage often appears as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space" (*Slow Violence* 2). When climate stories focus mainly on sudden disasters, they risk ignoring people who live with long-lasting environmental damage rather than brief moments of catastrophe (Whyte).

Despite this understanding, many cli-fi texts still follow familiar ideas of time and progress. Disaster happens first, action follows, and some form of recovery ends the story. Characters are expected to endure or overcome hardship. Within such narratives, disability, exhaustion, and dependence are treated as personal failures instead of being recognised as outcomes of environmental collapse.

This way of thinking becomes especially troubling when environmental damage is understood as ongoing rather than future-oriented. For communities already living with degraded environments, there is no clear separation between before and after. Damage builds up over time. Waiting becomes part of daily life. Survival depends on repetition rather than heroic action. At this point, crip theory becomes necessary because it rejects the idea that recovery is always possible and questions the belief that futurity must involve repair.
From a posthuman point of view, the emphasis on recovery also supports human-centred ideas of control over nature. Humans exist within ecological systems rather than outside them and share the same limits and breakdowns as nonhuman life. Affect theory further explains how environmental harm is experienced not only as crisis but as mood and atmosphere. Feelings such as tiredness, anxiety, and dull persistence shape everyday life. These emotional states resist neat endings and closely match the idea of crip temporality.

Crip theory grows out of disability studies but is not limited to questions of physical impairment. It examines cultural and political ideas that shape whose lives are valued and whose futures are imagined. Alison Kafer's *Feminist, Queer, Crip* is especially important for environmental studies because it questions the belief that a good future must be free from disability or damage.

Kafer introduces the idea of crip time to describe forms of time that do not follow speed, efficiency, or straight lines of progress. She explains that crip time "bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds" instead of forcing bodies to fit dominant ideas of time (27). This idea is useful for understanding climate futures shaped by waiting, delay, and exhaustion rather than urgency or resolution. Crip time shows that survival does not unfold evenly and that delay itself can become a political condition.

Building on this idea, Kafer develops the concept of crip afters, which rejects the expectation of cure or closure. Afters are not endings but ongoing ways of living with damage. As Kafer states, "not all stories have happy endings and not all futures depend on cure" (162). This idea is especially relevant for climate fiction, where environmental damage cannot always be reversed and is unevenly experienced.
When applied to cli-fi, crip theory shifts attention away from dramatic moments of disaster. Instead, it focuses on everyday life after environmental collapse. It raises important questions: who remains after the disaster, what kinds of bodies continue to live, how time is experienced in damaged worlds, and whose lives are seen as worth sustaining.

These ideas become especially clear in *The Tamarisk Hunter*, which is set in a future American Southwest where water scarcity has caused severe environmental damage. The story follows Lolo, who survives by cutting tamarisk trees and trading the wood for water credits. The land is already destroyed when the story begins. There is no warning of disaster because collapse has already taken place.

Lolo's daily life is marked by repetition. Each day he walks long distances, cuts trees, carries heavy wood, and bargains for water. Bacigalupi highlights this routine when he writes that "every day was the same—walk cut haul trade." This repeated pattern reflects a slow sense of time where life is about endurance rather than progress. Time does not move forward toward improvement. It circles back again and again. The body becomes tired and worn down by the harsh environment.

Lolo's work does not restore the land. The tamarisk trees continue to grow no matter how much he cuts them, and the lack of water never improves (Bacigalupi). His labour helps him survive for the moment but does not change the larger situation. This refusal of progress breaks from common climate stories where individual effort leads to wider change. Instead, the story shows life continuing within clear limits.

Lolo's body shows signs of environmental damage. Although he is not described as disabled, his constant exhaustion and physical strain place him within a crip experience. His survival depends not on strength or invention but on his ability to endure slow and ongoing harm. This reflects Kafer's idea of crip afters, where life continues after damage without cure or resolution.

From a posthuman viewpoint, the environment plays an active role in shaping survival. Tamarisk trees, dry soil, and lack of water influence human life as strongly as human effort does. Bacigalupi often describes the harsh physical setting using images of "dust heat and the long walk back." These details create a sense of constant exhaustion. Waiting for water, payment, and the next day's work is not temporary. It is built into everyday life. For Lolo, environmental collapse is not something that will happen later. It is something he already lives with.

While *The Tamarisk Hunter* focuses on survival through physical labour and endurance, *Emergency Skin* shifts attention toward survival through relationships with others. The story is told by a human consciousness that returns to Earth after powerful groups escape into space. These groups abandon the planet and describe it as uninhabitable. At the beginning, the narrator sees Earth as ruined and views those who remain as failures. This reflects popular ideas about escape and technological progress.

Jemisin challenges this view by showing how abandonment is presented as unavoidable rather than chosen. The narrator is taught that Earth was left behind because it was "too broken to save" (*Emergency Skin*). This mirrors real-world climate discourse that treats certain people and places as expendable (Whyte). As the story develops, the narrator's understanding changes. The people who remain survive without advanced technology or individual heroism. They survive through care for one another and shared vulnerability. Jemisin writes that "they survived because they took care of one another." Bodies are fragile and environments are damaged. Life remains uncertain. Even so, survival continues through dependence on others.

This portrayal questions ideas of independence and self-sufficiency. Survival in *Emergency Skin* depends on cooperation, shared resources, and acceptance of bodily limits. The story rejects the idea that escape offers safety and insists on remaining within damaged worlds.

Abandonment thus functions as a form of environmental violence. Those with power protect themselves while others face the consequences. This uneven pattern reflects real climate injustice where vulnerable communities suffer the most. Crip theory helps explain this by framing vulnerability as structural rather than personal.

Affect theory further explains how survival in *Emergency Skin* is sustained through shared emotions such as fear, care, and trust. From a posthuman perspective, vulnerability exists across human and nonhuman systems, creating an ethic based on care rather than control. Crip afters appear here as collective and ethical forms of survival.

When read together, *The Tamarisk Hunter* and *Emergency Skin* present related views of crip afters in climate fiction, leading directly to questions of climate justice. Both texts reject recovery-focused futures and centre lives lived after disaster.

Crip afters deepen climate justice by insisting, as Kafer writes, that "a future with disability is a future worth wanting" (170). When futures are imagined only for those who can escape or adapt, many lives are rendered disposable (Clare). These stories instead argue that justice must include those who remain.

Crip afters do not present suffering as admirable. Neither story treats endurance as heroic. Fatigue, loss, and vulnerability persist. Yet life continues. This persistence offers a more ethical vision of climate survival.

CONCLUSION: AFTER THE STORM: CARE, CONTINUANCE, AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

Climate fiction must move beyond dramatic scenes of disaster if it is to remain politically and ethically meaningful. Narratives focused only on urgency and recovery risk hiding the experiences of people already living in environmental aftermaths. Crip theory offers a way to understand life that continues after damage rather than life that returns to normal.

Through close readings of *The Tamarisk Hunter* and *Emergency Skin*, this paper has shown that survival after environmental collapse is shaped by slow time, bodily vulnerability, and shared care. These stories remain with ruined environments and damaged lives. In doing so, they question able-bodied ideas of resilience and offer a different understanding of what it means to continue living in harmed worlds.

Seen through crip afters, climate futures are not mainly about recovery. They are about care and about how damaged human and nonhuman lives continue together over time. This shift is necessary if climate justice is to address not only the prevention of disaster but also the ethical responsibility of living with harm after it has already occurred.

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