

Everything Is Awful? Ecology and Affect in Literatures in Canada

Stephanie Oliver and Kit Dobson

ssoliver@ualberta.ca // christopher.dobson@ucalgary.ca

ORCID: 0000-0002-7782-9971 // 0000-0003-1667-9946

University of Alberta, Canada // University of Calgary, Canada

Submitted: 14/07/2023

Accepted: 16/07/2023

What kinds of shared futures can you and I imagine and bring into the realm of the possible, despite a highly organized investment in business as usual?

–Min Hyoung Song,
Climate Lyricism

We want to restore balance, right relations, ethical being. We cannot afford delusional hierarchies. We will not race each other to the bottom. We commit to live up to the future's call. We want our lives to not be wasted.

–Rita Wong,
"bisphenol ache"

... even the 'bad' [affects] might be important to cultivate in our present environmental moment, in which the diametrically opposed feelings of hope and despair are too often framed as the only options.

–Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino,
Affective Ecocriticism

We began the call for papers for this special issue with a focus on environmental catastrophes. At that time, we found ourselves asking the following: “How might literary scholars and writers in Canada respond in meaningful ways to ongoing ecological crises?” This call for papers is one that was issued amidst prairie drought, Rocky Mountain and Boreal forest fires, flooding in both Alberta and British Columbia, rapid Arctic warming, and rising sea levels, as well as politically significant ecological concerns such as logging in Fairy Creek, pipelines impacting the Wet’suwet’en, and the Site C dam on the Peace River, environmental crises that were unavoidable in this moment. It was becoming increasingly clear that literary critics and creative writers needed to (re)train themselves to respond to the climate emergency. These concerns have not abated; if anything, they have only intensified.

The call was also issued during the COVID-19 pandemic, during a time at which it had become very difficult to be attuned to the moment, disconnected as we were from one another and grappling with the spaces between us. We were asking how we might position ourselves as scholars emerging from a period of time that felt awful—but, at the same time, we wanted to listen to alternative possibilities. We found ourselves, in effect, asking a version of the ironic question that became the title of this issue: everything is awful? Or, rather, is everything awful? We ask this question through the lens of the song “Everything is Awesome!,” a song by Canadian pop duo Tegan & Sara, but we deliberately mishear the word “Awful” where “Awesome” should rightly be. This mondegreen moment in our title riffs on the context in which Tegan & Sara’s song occurs, the heavily ironic 2014 children’s film *The Lego Movie*, in which the instruction manuals with which Lego-branded sets are built shift from being helpful guides for how to build useful things into becoming oppressive, limiting signifiers that forestall meanings and possibilities. Tegan & Sara’s song quickly becomes a harbinger not of an excellent and unified society, world, and environment, but rather of a darkly dystopic realm in which surface-level happiness masks deeper discontents. Mishearing “awful” in the place of “awesome” becomes, then, one index of the affective ambivalence with which we meet the contemporary moment.

If *The Lego Movie* shows a world that is deeply invested in business as usual—in that film’s case most deeply emblemized by the villain President Business (voiced by Will Ferrell)—and then proceeds to show viewers how deeply wrong that world is, what alternatives might we point toward? In the first epigraph above, Min Hyoung Song suggests that there is a need to reinvent a new “realm of the possible” that moves beyond quotidian investments in “business as usual.” The question mark in the title of this issue holds onto such a form of questioning: perhaps everything isn’t awful. Perhaps it is. At a moment when we were endeavouring to think beyond the pandemic and its own series

of ugly feelings (to borrow for a moment from Sianne Ngai), we found a need to hang onto the ambivalences, too. Is it ironic or playful to question the possibility that everything is, indeed, awful, when the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report suggests that, in many respects, we have already reached a tipping point in climate change? Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino, in their introduction to *Affective Ecocriticism*, argue that, as in our third epigraph above, “bad” affects and negative emotional registers are ones that might usefully be valorized in this moment as a way of getting beyond the polarized environmental responses of either unthinking technocratic optimism or outright despair. The times call for more complex responses, as, indeed, our own experiences of the pandemic have highlighted for us in turn.

And, so, as literary scholars, we found ourselves asking, in concert with Dionne Brand, about what it means to think about land and environment at a time when scholars and writers are navigating the “return to normal” that ostensibly comes with COVID becoming endemic—“as if that normal was not in contention,” Dionne Brand cautions. How is literature uniquely positioned to investigate what this “return” will look like? Instead of individualistic forms of adaptation, how, instead, might the literary point toward alternative, social lines of flight away from an environmentally destructive form of “return”? We do not propose simple answers to these challenging questions. Rather, we have sought the answers from our community of fellow thinkers, and we have been gratified by the nuanced range of questions proposed in the submissions that we received.

1. The Turn to Affect and Environment

What are the literary affects of this moment of ecological crisis? What models do writers offer to us for thinking through this time? In assembling this special issue, we found ourselves compelled by the ways in which criticism has begun to combine work in ecocriticism with the realm of affect theory, in part as a way of endeavouring to think through the pitfalls of ecological grief as a potential endpoint for many people who find themselves grappling with environmental loss. Both ecocriticism and affect theory are established academic (and critical as well as creative) practices, and these are in the process of being brought together in crucial ways.

In the context covered by the journal *Canada and Beyond*, we start by noting that Canadian ecocriticism has seen an upsurge in critical interest early in the millennium. The landmark anthology of ecocriticism in Canada, *Greening the Maple: Canadian Ecocriticism in Context* (2013), edited by Ella Soper and Nicholas Bradley, brings together what is already an established set of

practices. That volume takes as its point of origin re-readings of the thematic criticism of Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood and moves through to present practice. Soper and Bradley note that "'Canadian ecocriticism' is a capacious term" ("Introduction," xix), and this practice might be said to be in-built to a literary tradition that concerned itself with maple leaves, the Rocky Mountains, and animal stories since well before Frye and Atwood's respective interventions. Indeed, ecocriticism in Canada might be said to intersect and overlap with the rise of U.S. American ecocriticism since the 1996 *Ecocriticism Reader* edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. The recent prominence of ecocritics situated in Canada (such as Adam Dickinson, Cheryl Lousley, and Catriona Sandilands) in contexts like the 2014 *Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, edited by Greg Garrard (who is also situated in Canada), suggests that Canadian and international modes of ecocritical work frequently overlap. As Pamela Banting notes in her valuable overview of Canadian ecocriticism, this overlap is not surprising given that "our shared watersheds, bioregions, weather systems, plants, animals, oil pipelines, and other factors are important to the field of ecocriticism" (729). In addition to the ecocritical journal *The Goose: A Journal of Arts, Environment, and Culture in Canada*, recent work in this area in Canada includes two special issues of leading journals in the field: first, the 2021 "Neoliberal Environments" issue of *Studies in Canadian Literature* edited by Tania Aguila-Way, Kit Dobson, and Nicole Shukin; and the 2023 "Poetics and Extraction" issue of *Canadian Literature* edited by Max Karpinski and Melanie Dennis Unrau. Both issues continue to develop particular approaches to ecocritical practice in Canada and (in these examples) demonstrate the intersections between ecocriticism, critiques of neoliberalism as an economic system bound up in settler colonialism and racial capitalism, and the growing body of research on petrocultures and the energy humanities. This work is wide-ranging, well beyond what we are able to note here.

Affect theory, in turn, emerges from a range of thinkers whom we might associate with feminism, psychoanalysis, queer theory, new materialism, and intersectional modes of analysis, although even such a broad statement feels highly reductive. While the 2007 edited collection *The Affective Turn*, edited by Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley, shortly followed by the 2009 *Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, might be the two most obvious signposts for this field of study, affect theory is characterized broadly by investigations into a range of affects and feelings that might be described as "ugly" (Ngai), "ordinary" (Stewart), or otherwise. These investigations have prompted some critics, like Lauren Berlant, to note that affective ties can be used in order to manipulate and control our behaviours, as with her analysis of what she calls "cruel optimism," a term that identifies the ways in which affective ties to ideas of, for instance, "the good life" might limit the ways

in which we respond to toxic states of being. This field, too, has clear impacts across literary studies in Canada, perhaps most evidently as collected in the 2021 volume *All the Feels / Tous les sens: Affect and Writing in Canada / Affect et écriture au Canada*, co-edited by Marie Carrière, Ursula Mathis-Moser, and Kit Dobson. That volume is a reflection of growing directions across literary criticism's concerns in the fields of Indigenous literatures, literatures in Canada, and Québécois writing.

Affective studies of environment are, in turn, also becoming prominent. Some scholars, like Alexa Weik von Mossner, have sought to study these questions within empiricist modes of thought. Although this is not the mode that we have pursued in this issue—and neither is it a dominant mode of the critics, writers, and poets whose work appears here—the capacity for such study is potentially great. Indeed, Weik von Mossner is interested in genuinely testing out the “great trust” that ecocriticism has had “in the ability of environmental narratives to have lasting effects on the attitudes and behaviors of their readers” (8). The seeming despair expressed by some that media and art do not in fact seem to change environmentally destructive behaviour warrants a wide range of scholarly approaches so that we might better understand how to motivate and then create more livable ecological futures. Weik von Mossner's call for “empirical studies” of the narrative engagements of readers and viewers of environmental narratives is a welcome one (196), although, in this context, it is mostly so for the ways in which it makes space for additional scholarship to unfold.

It is work such as Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino's *Affective Ecocriticism* from which we take our more immediate cues. Bladow and Ladino's collection offers provocations that build on their recognition that “the Anthropocene is fundamentally estranging” (“Toward” 26). Jobb Arnold, for instance, in an analysis of Alberta's bitumen extraction projects, develops a notion of “land affect” in order to analyze “nontechnologically mediated experience of affective energy that cause people to *feel with the land*” (italics in original; 97). Similarly, perhaps, Brian Deyo analyzes the registers of the “‘negative’ affects set in motion by nature's unpredictability” by interrogating a notion of “ecophobia” (195). Lisa Ottum, in turn, takes seriously the question of what it might “mean to be disappointed by a landscape” (258), endeavouring to theorize ways in which disappointment itself might become a motivational political praxis. These suggestions and approaches all seem to be prompted by something like the question asked by Allyse Knox-Russell in the same volume: “how do we grieve, or encourage others to grieve, that which does not fit into normative conceptions of ‘the grievable’... ?” (214); that is, how might we mourn environmental loss and change that may exceed grief as it has thus far been understood? While the possible approaches vary widely, the turn to an affective ecocritical mode provides new paths for investigation.

One particularly provocative set of possibilities is offered by Nicole Seymour. Building on queer theory's analyses of modes such as drag, camp, and humour, Seymour argues for the political efficacy of affective modes that depart from negativity. Seymour's contribution to *Affective Ecocriticism* proposes "inappropriateness," "overinvestment," and "excessiveness" as potential "rallying points for environmental activists" ("Queerness" 251). Expanding on these points in her 2018 monograph *Bad Environmentalism*, Seymour notes not only that environmental movements are typically mired in forms of negativity and guilt, but also that the forms of normative appeals to "wholesome, healthy citizenship" to which environmentalism makes recourse can be readily co-opted by conservative movements and "corporate greenwashing" (15). In this context, she develops a notion of "bad environmentalism," which she defines as "environmental thought that employs dissident, often-denigrated affects and sensibilities to reflect critically on both our current moment and mainstream environmental art, activism, and discourse" (6). The particular affects on which she draws include "absurdity and irony, as well as... irreverence, ambivalence, camp, frivolity, indecorum, awkwardness, sardonicism, perversity, playfulness, and glee" (4). The texts that she investigates indeed use such affective modes in order to achieve surprising critiques of environmental plight. It is within this context of interrogating affective possibilities that we, too, began this project.

These, then, are approaches that might both build from and lead to further practice. For instance, Lisa Lowe's key 2015 historical study of globalization and the interconnectedness of trade, slavery, and settler-colonialism, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, crucially relies upon an affective notion of intimacy. This concept of intimacy allows Lowe to theorize the ways in which seemingly disparate practices may in fact have points of unacknowledged, yet still deeply present, intimate contact, and she explicitly builds upon Lauren Berlant's examination "of intimacy as the affective medium for republican citizenship and the subject's felt sense of individual belonging" in her project (21). In turn, Min Hyoung Song's 2022 book *Climate Lyricism* relies deeply on a mode of optimistic lyricism and the ongoing affects of "feeling bad" (80). Song notes that this pairing seems at first to be "counterintuitive" (80). Yet the goal of that project is to "find ways to democratize agency that break the spell of powerlessness, so that thinking about climate change emboldens rather than leads to a shrinking back" (2). This approach of working across seemingly contradictory or counterintuitive affective modes may be one way of acknowledging the nuance and complexity needed in order to make effective environmental interventions in the contemporary moment. Indeed, invoking a range of possible affects is crucially important to this issue's interrogation of the possibilities of ecocritical practice.

Attending to these complex affects involves orienting to the environment in ways that attune us to our sensory relationships with the land. Warren Cariou

(Métis) is one of many writers and critics whose work grounds readers in such forms of attunement. For instance, in “Landsensing: Body, Territory, Relation”—a 2023 essay inspired by Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan), renowned writer and scholar of Okanagan Syilx language, oral literature, and environmental ethics—Cariou reflects on his relationship with the land as an intimate and deeply embodied way of knowing grounded in taste, smell, and the other senses. Indeed, he contends that Indigenous resurgence movements that perpetually resist the environmental injustices of settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and extractivism “connect with and learn from their surroundings” by relying on “particular skills of ‘sensing’ the land” (309). He suggests that this highly developed skillset, crucial to Indigenous peoples’ survival for generations, became a prime target of colonialism, as Indigenous philosophies grounded in sensory engagement with the land value forms of intimacy that threaten ideologies of separation required to commodify and exploit land as resource (310-11). Cariou calls for “reestablishing an intimacy with the land” and “improv[ing] our skills of sensing our environment” not simply through scientific methods and technological means, but also through “something more personal, more rooted in affect” that allows us to “find better ways to *feel* our connection to the environment, and the sources of our energy, so that we understand at a deep bodily level what is at stake in our relationship with the world” (322). Like Cariou’s essay, which he invites readers to “think of... as a walk on the land” (308), a number of essays in this issue contribute to these rich discussions by exploring the links between affect, environment, and the senses.

2. In this Issue

In her opening article “Bears and Scents of Place in Sid Marty’s *The Black Grizzly of Whiskey Creek*,” Pamela Banting reconsiders “sense of belonging” and “sense of place” to suggest that such affective relationships to the environment are not solely reserved for humans. Tracing the limits of scientific thinking about animals, which often frames the more-than-human in terms of basic survival, observable traits and behaviours, and abstract notions of ecology, habitat, and territory, Banting argues for the recognition of place attachments for bears. Her illuminating analysis of Marty’s 2008 animal biography, which offers a detailed account of a series of bear attacks in the popular resort town of Banff, Alberta, in the summer of 1980, illustrates how literary nonfiction offers a starting point for thinking about bears’ sense of place. Emphasizing that sense of place is a “sensuous construct,” Banting reads Marty’s descriptions of ancient bear roads and the impressive ursine sense of smell as maps, as she convincingly argues that bears are consistently grounded in a deep sense of specific locales. As she

puts it: "Learning about scent with bears as our teachers, as Sid Marty's *The Black Grizzly of Whiskey Creek* allows us to do, can help us rethink place and develop a fuller relationship with places and rethink who we are as sensing animals." Banting's provocative analysis not only advocates for, but also practices an art of attention that grounds readers more firmly in a sense of place not only accessible to humans.

Carys Hughes raises a different set of ursine-related concerns in "'Significant Otherness' versus Othering in Marian Engel's *Bear*." Bringing contemporary discussions of settler colonialism, indigenization, and animal studies to bear (pun intended) on Engel's 1976 novel, Hughes joins other critics in re-examining protagonist Lou's relationship to indigeneity and the natural world. The article challenges the idea that Lou's treatment of Lucy Leroy, a Cree woman and seemingly peripheral character in the novel, is part of a broader aesthetic strategy that relies on narrative irony to create a deliberately ambiguous text. Hughes highlights the tensions in Engel's re-telling of the Haida story of Mouse Woman and offers a nuanced reading of racism and speciesism in the novel, illustrating how Engel's feminist interventions are complicated by Lou's settler desire to indigenize on the land. Analyzing how Lou's desire to indigenize underwrites her relationships to Lucy and the bear, Hughes traces the similarities and differences between how both are treated in the text, ultimately suggesting that the bear is given the opportunity to contest his instrumentalization while Lucy is not. By focusing on how Engel's novel emphasizes the limits of fetishizing and anthropomorphizing animals while leaving appropriative relationships to Indigenous characters intact, Hughes underscores the difficulty of disentangling affects connected to racism and ecological imperialism. The article makes a valuable contribution to scholarship on a canonical text that has played a significant role in critical conversations of affect and environment in Canadian literary studies.

Zahra Tootonsab's expansive and cross-disciplinary essay "'Niagara as Technology': Rupturing the Technological for the Wordy Ecologies of Niagara Falls" echoes earlier discussions of the senses by tuning into decolonial practices of listening. Positioning herself as a settler, woman of colour, and poet committed to engaging with critical listening practices, Tootonsab takes up Dylan Robinson's (Stó:lō) and Adrienne Maree Brown's respective concepts of hungry listening and murmuration in order to explore how readers might attune themselves to other bodies and lands through collaborative movements and affective-sonic experiences grounded in trust and radical love. Blending personal reflections with theoretical meditations on research creation, Tootonsab extends Eve Tuck's (Unangax̂) thinking in order to develop a "thirdspace" listening positionality through found poetry written in response to environmental historian Daniel Macfarlane's 2020 book *Fixing Niagara Falls: Environment, Energy, and*

Engineers at the World's Most Famous Waterfall. In her poetry, which portrays the falls as "a critical place for ecologies coming-to-being," Tootonsab re-appropriates extractive practices of capture and transformation to critique and disorient neo-colonial representations of "Niagara-as-technology." She concludes by considering a call-and-response video game about the falls created by Waylon Wilson (Tuscarora), which teaches a listening practice based in reciprocal relationships with other human and more-than-human beings that has the power to heal industrialized landscapes.

Lucía López-Serrano's contribution to this special issue finds its particular focus on examining relationships between ecocritical, ecofeminist, and Indigenous practices. Her article, "Indigenous Ecofeminism? Decolonial Practices and Indigenous Resurgence in Lee Maracle's Works," analyzes the late Stö:lö writer's texts in order to understand the possible convergences and divergences of these fields. Tracing the importance of the climate crisis and current governmental and supra-governmental efforts to confront the enormity of the issues leads directly to the article's engagement with the specificity of Maracle's politics and literary craft. An acute awareness of the ways in which ecocritical and ecofeminist politics can risk replicating the extractive exploitations of late capitalism lies at the crux of Maracle's intersectional practice, the article's argument shows. Concerned with how to respectfully engage with Indigenous knowledge systems leads López-Serrano to analyze the ways in which a resurgent practice in Maracle's work might complement the work of ecological feminist thinking without being appropriated to it. Nuanced readings of Maracle's novels *Ravensong* and *Celia's Song* alongside Maracle's nonfiction works allows for the affective weight and measure of such efforts fully to be realized.

In his contribution, Max Karpinski moves from the macro to the micro with the essay "'My Body is a Spaceship': Technoscience and Experiments Otherwise in Adam Dickinson's *Anatomic*." A close reading of and scholarly meditation on Dickinson's experimental poetry collection, Karpinski finds in *Anatomic* a fixation upon toxins that disrupts—in all senses—the totality of the western liberal subject. That *Anatomic* is concerned with the (im)possibilities of representing human subjectivity as it fragments in a time of proliferating waste and chemical impurity becomes a form of paradox. On the one hand, the worry with which the subject's demise is foretold in its disunity marks a crisis of both representation and totalizing forms of control. On the other hand, the toxicity that Dickinson reads through his own body demonstrates the very real tolls of such dissolution. Neither celebratory nor pessimistic, Karpinski instead analyzes Dickinson's corporeal ruins in an effort to understand the entangled stakes for the human subject in this era sometimes known as the Anthropocene. Writing in and of this time, this essay provocatively demonstrates, is a hugely fraught endeavour, but one that might, too, work across multiple scales in order to forge links between those

with whom we co-exist, both human and otherwise. The specificity of Dickinson's project, moreover, intimately links settler-colonial modes of extractivism and violence back to the body, drawing intersecting lines of accountability between the settler poet and Indigenous communities most directly harmed by the toxins that Dickinson traces back to his own embodied form.

Finally, Sarah Krotz completes the articles in this special issue with a piece entitled "Outside Words." A lyrical essay that shifts the grounds of what the essay form in the discipline of English might achieve, this piece is an offering and provocation to renew our considerations of land, environment, and literary works. Beginning at the University of Alberta's campus on the banks of the North Saskatchewan River in the city of Edmonton, the essay descends both to the river and into the muddy complexities of poetry that concerns itself with these lands. The essay works geocritically and ecocritically through the works and words of Dwayne Donald (Cree), Tomson Highway (Cree), Robin Wall Kimmerer (Potawatomi), a. rawlings, and Christine Stewart, among others. Doing so allows Krotz to weave an insistent argument for the necessity of returning, again and again, to the land. Concerned also with how readers might meaningfully teach students with landscapes through texts, Krotz's essay provides a thoughtful, care-filled response to the persistent anxiety with which we initially wrote our call for papers. It therefore serves wonderfully as the final essay of this special issue.

The issue also includes "Everything Is Awe-ful: A Conversation on Climate Change Fiction" between Stephanie Oliver and Rebecca Campbell, a Canadian author of climate change fiction and other works of science fiction, speculative fiction, body horror, and weird stories. Campbell engages deeply with questions of affect and environment in her work, making her well-suited to exploring this issue's themes in relation to climate change fiction. Her recent novella *Arboreality* (published in 2022 with Stelliform Press, a small independent Canadian publisher committed to challenging dominant narratives of climate change) provides inspiration for the conversation. Set on Vancouver Island in the near future, the novella spans multiple characters and generations, weaving an intricate tale of the entangled lives of trees and people as both try to survive the intergenerational impacts of climate change. In this wide-ranging conversation, Campbell shares her thoughts on the affects that inspired *Arboreality*, the importance of "sense of place," the uneven ways in which climate disasters unfold, and the ways in which writers and literary scholars might address the question of "what do we save?" Emphasizing the power of shared vulnerability, Campbell underscores the need to make space for a range of complicated affects in fiction and in broader discussions about climate change—affects that include not only hope and despair, but also dread, anxiety, grief, joy, pleasure, and satisfaction. She reflects on the importance of storytelling, and specifically "CliFi" and genre fiction, for exploring these affects alongside the complex scalar impacts of climate change. As part

of this discussion, Campbell offers illuminating thoughts on Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement*, including his comments about the dearth of (realist) climate change novels; she also reflects on the recent rise of tree-centric eco-fiction and responses of "Literary Tree Fatigue." Situating her work in relation to the (often marginalized) literary traditions of science fiction and speculative fiction, Campbell invites readers to follow her into the forests of Ursula K. Le Guin and, leading us into the world of *Arboreality*, considers what trees have to teach us about community, connection, and survival in the face of climate change. She also addresses the concept of resilience and adaptation in future generations, outlines her approach to addressing climate change in the classroom, and reflects on what she has learned about being a "good ancestor" by sitting with the inheritances of settler colonialism, capitalism, and climate change.

Finally, this special issue wraps up with a selection of poetry that takes up the invitations in the call for papers to consider affective elements of ecocritical thinking. Shazia Hafiz Ramji's "Morning Ritual" opens this section with a long-lined, compressed and imagistic interrogation of mediation, photography, and space, an interrogation that considers the affects of witnessing. Matthew Rader's "Atmospheric Moon River" mashes up the experience of the atmospheric river—a meteorological event that led to recent widespread flooding in British Columbia—with the classic song "Moon River" in its title and works through a personal reckoning with grief and loss. Our third poetic contribution, David Janzen's "Canoeing the Milk River: A Theory of Lines," works closely with the experience of paddling the Milk River in southern Alberta, investigating both human and nonhuman relations and the historical and ongoing relationships between Blackfoot and settler-colonial communities on the land. Finally, we include an excerpt from Ariel Gordon and Brenda Schmidt's forthcoming book *Siteseeing*, a collaborative call-and-response project written during the heights of the pandemic. In this book, Gordon and Schmidt mull over their experiences of place in order to find shared vocabularies to describe their felt environments. This contribution aptly, we feel in turn, ends this special issue on a note that demonstrates a commitment to dialogue, to collaboration, and to the ongoing building of community conversations, be those conversations between poets, critics, and writers; between humans and nonhumans; or between agents and actors that exclude the realm of the human entirely.

3. Conclusion

We have not yet discussed the second epigraph with which we opened this introduction, which comes from the poem "bisphenol ache" by Rita Wong. We find ourselves returning to Wong's thinking as we head toward this special

issue itself. In the afterword to the book *Current, Climate: The Poetry of Rita Wong*, an afterword written in the tenth month of the pandemic and during a series of environmental cataclysms and legislative overhauls, Wong writes: "I am weary. I don't have much energy to write poems these days.... I feel a widely shared ecological grief at this desecration caused by short-sighted colonial occupation, and I cope... by directing my energy into supporting collective action" ("Afterword" 71-72). What is the relationship between grief, literature, collective action, and joy? When is poetry possible? When is it impossible? When does that (im)possibility link to affective moments? If Wong finds herself unable to write in a poetic register due to an affective weariness, what, we find ourselves asking, does it mean to take on the labours of returning to speech, to writing? These things are literally exhausting in a world where we are simultaneously also choking in the exhaust of a system that consumes energy, both petroleum-based energies and emotional energies, that leave us drained. We do not wish simply to recommit to individual forms of resilience that might become only too complicit with neoliberal forms of governance, but we do need to theorize ways to (re)commit on an ongoing basis to an awareness of how we can attune ourselves to the environment so as to mitigate our impacts upon it, while celebrating, too, the creative modes of address that we can create in response. In their 2022 book *Rehearsals for Living*, Robyn Maynard writes the following to her Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg collaborator Leanne Betasamosake Simpson: "I am writing to you so we can think together about what it means for us to build livable lives together in the wreckage" (10). Such thinking aligns with the impetus of this special issue. Maynard and Simpson invoke forms of future-oriented action that might bring forth as-yet unrealized possibilities. These are the possibilities to which we might now direct ourselves. The contributors to this special issue have created such directions, in our view, and for that we thank them.

Works Cited

- Aguila-Way, Tania, Kit Dobson, and Nicole Shukin, editors. "Neoliberal Environments." Special issue of *Studies in Canadian Literature*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2021.
- Arnold, Jobb. "Feeling the Fires of Climate Change: Land Affect in Canada's Tar Sands." *Affective Ecocriticism: Emotion, Embodiment, Environment*, edited by Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino, U of Nebraska P, 2018, pp. 95-115.
- Banting, Pamela. "Ecocriticism in Canada." *The Oxford Handbook of Canadian Literature*, edited by Cynthia Sugars, Oxford UP, 2015, pp. 727-54.
- Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke UP, 2011.
- Bladow, Kyle, and Jennifer Ladino, editors. *Affective Ecocriticism: Emotion, Embodiment, Environment*. U of Nebraska P, 2018.

- Bladow, Kyle, and Jennifer Ladino, editors. "Toward an Affective Ecocriticism: Placing Feeling in the Anthropocene." *Affective Ecocriticism: Emotion, Embodiment, Environment*, edited by Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino, U of Nebraska P, 2018, pp. 1-22.
- Brand, Dionne. "On narrative, reckoning and the calculus of living and dying." *Toronto Star*, 4 July 2020, <https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/books/2020/07/04/dionne-brand-on-narrative-reckoning-and-the-calculus-of-living-and-dying.html>.
- Cariou, Warren. "Landsensing: Body, Territory, Relation." *Land/Relations: Possibilities of Justice in Canadian Literatures*, edited by Smaro Kamboureli and Larissa Lai, Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2023, pp. 307-23.
- Carrière, Marie, Ursula Mathis-Moser, and Kit Dobson, editors. *All the Feels / Tous les sens: Affect and Writing in Canada / Affect et écriture au Canada*. U of Alberta P, 2021.
- Clough, Patricia Ticineto, and Jean Halley, editors. *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. Duke UP, 2007.
- Deyo, Brian. "Tragedy, Ecophobia, and Animality in the Anthropocene." *Affective Ecocriticism: Emotion, Embodiment, Environment*, edited by Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino, U of Nebraska P, 2018, pp. 195-212.
- Garrard, Greg, editor. *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*. Oxford UP, 2014.
- Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. U of Georgia P, 1996.
- Gregg, Melissa, and Gregory J. Seigworth. *The Affect Theory Reader*. Duke UP, 2009.
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. *AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023*. IPCC, 2023, <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/>.
- Karpinski, Max, and Melanie Dennis Unrau, editors. "Poetics and Extraction." Special issue of *Canadian Literature*, no. 251, 2022.
- Knox-Russell, Allyse. "Futurity without Optimism: Detaching from Anthropocentrism and Grieving Our Fathers in *Beasts of the Southern Wild*." *Affective Ecocriticism: Emotion, Embodiment, Environment*, edited by Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino, U of Nebraska P, 2018, pp. 213-32.
- Lowe, Lisa. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Duke UP, 2015.
- Maynard, Robyn, and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. *Rehearsals for Living*. Knopf, 2022.
- Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Harvard UP, 2007.
- Ottum, Lisa. "Feeling Let Down: Affect, Environmentalism, and the Power of Negative Thinking." *Affective Ecocriticism: Emotion, Embodiment, Environment*, edited by Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino, U of Nebraska P, 2018, pp. 257-77.
- Seymour, Nicole. *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age*. U of Minnesota P, 2018.
- Seymour, Nicole. "The Queerness of Environmental Affect." *Affective Ecocriticism: Emotion, Embodiment, Environment*, edited by Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino, U of Nebraska P, 2018, pp. 235-56.
- Song, Min Hyung. *Climate Lyricism*. Duke UP, 2022.
- Soper, Ella, and Nicholas Bradley, editors. *Greening the Maple: Canadian Ecocriticism in Context*. U of Calgary P, 2013.

Stephanie Oliver and Kit Dobson

- Soper, Ella, and Nicholas Bradley. "Introduction: Ecocriticism North of the Forty-ninth Parallel." *Greening the Maple: Canadian Ecocriticism in Context*, edited by Ella Soper and Nicholas Bradley, U of Calgary P, 2013, pp. xiii-liv.
- Oliver, Stephanie, and Kit Dobson. "Call for Papers: Everything Is Awful? Ecology and Affect in Literatures in Canada." *accute.ca*, 8 June 2022, <https://accute.ca/2022/06/08/cfp-everything-is-awful-ecology-and-affect-in-literatures-in-canada-deadline-june-30-2022/>.
- Stewart, Kathleen. *Ordinary Affects*. Duke UP, 2007.
- Weik von Mossner, Alexa. *Affective Ecologies: Empathy, Emotion, and Environmental Narrative*. Ohio State UP, 2017.
- Wong, Rita. "Afterword." *Current, Climate: The Poetry of Rita Wong*, edited by Nicholas Bradley, Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2021, pp. 71-74.
- Wong, Rita. "bisphenol ache." *Undercurrent*. Nightwood, 2015, pp. 46-47.