

Editorial

María Jesús Llarena-Ascanio and Silvia Caporale-Bizzini

mllarena@ull.edu.es // caporale@ua.es

ORCID: 0000-0003-4593-6323 // 0000-0003-4127-959X

University of La Laguna, Spain // University of Alicante, Spain

In her book *The Promise of Happiness*, Sara Ahmed explains how the concept of happiness is related to heteronormative notions of the “good life.” Questioning the promise of a good life leads to unhappiness, but unhappiness (unlike happiness) can be productive for social change as it fosters a possibility to open to new affective spaces in the subject’s life. Ahmed describes individuals’ urges toward “the good life” as frequently grounded in attachments that, while often toxic and ultimately unsatisfactory, are not recognized as such by the people who engage in these negative relations. Those feelings derive from the impossible emotional fantasy of living a good life—an emotional state that Lauren Berlant aptly defined as “cruel optimism,” a situation in which what people most desire is actually an obstacle to their flourishing. The cruelty comes from the fact that people tend to depend on “objects that block the very thriving that motivates our attachment in the first place” (“Lauren Berlant”). Both notions of the good life and cruel optimism are connected to Kathleen Stewart’s “ordinary affects,” a “kind of contact zone where the over-determinations of circulations, events, conditions, technologies, and flows of power take place” (3). For Stewart, ordinary affects happen through unexpected events which may be shocking, perturbing, traumatic, or even funny, but which offer individuals the opportunity to move forward. The ordinary and the unexpected can merge to transform individuals’ lives and allow them to form new connections (95). In both Berlant’s and Stewart’s thinking, the unexpected has the power to redefine individuals’ inner landscapes and their perceptions of self—both of which are structured by a lifelong dynamic of intimate relationships and attachments.

The aim of this issue of *Canada & Beyond* is to analyze narratives of Canada that unravel the notions of the good life (Ahmed), cruel optimism (Berlant),

ordinary affects and the unexpected (Stewart). The turn to affects writes back to the neoliberal vision of contemporary society, subjectivity and their representations. The complexity of affects and the emergence of more fluid and mobile affective clusters show how life events can be interpreted as interconnected encounters, and how they represent interrelated systems of lives. In light of this, the contributors to this issue have examined from different perspectives how these notions and possibilities articulate new places of critical potential in contemporary cultures and writings of Canada.

Meghan Mantei delves into how girls living in one extractive community face and deal with gender expectations, loyalties, ideologies and moralities within their family structures, their places of employment and their affective communities. She explores the strategies that they employ to navigate within the processes of social acceptance, belonging and notions of the “good life.” **Shyam Patel**’s article analyses the novel, *The Foghorn Echoes* (2022) by Danny Ramadan. The author points out how the two refugee protagonists are obliged to face, during and after the Syrian civil war, the toxic attachments of cruel optimism and their relation to an ideal good life in Canada in the quest, among other things, for their queer romantic life. **Daniel Coleman, Lorraine York and Kathryn Waring** examine the creative potential that originates from community-based story-makers’ navigation of the tension between life stories of the “good life” and the everyday, emergent strategies the storytellers invent in the midst of challenging times. **María Jesús Llarena-Ascanio** interprets the “border turn” in twenty-first-century refugee writing in Canada -Kim Thúy and Sharon Bala, respectively. By proposing new alternative epistemologies to Eurocentric notions of disability and aphasia, the author shows how these narratives enable a new view of refugees as ontological subjects shaping history and transforming their characters’ subjectivity in their search for a *Good Life*. In his analysis of Margaret Laurence’s *A Jest of God*, **Jesús Varela-Zapata** shows how the protagonist of the novel encompasses all the trappings around the notion of cruel optimism: her fantasies of the good life are linked to the feeling of suffocation in her life that she will have to dismantle to move on with her life story. **Sheila Hernández-González** presents an intersectional reading of Hiromi Goto’s *The Kappa Child* (2001) by drawing on Ahmed’s *The Promise of Happiness* and Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism*. The author shows how the affects and expectations presented in the novel become monstrous because of the protagonist’s abusive childhood as a racialized migrant in the Canadian Prairies; it is when she chooses to let go of these expectations that the main character is driven towards a state of emotional healing and (encounters) new possibilities of happiness. **Sara Tabuyo-Santaclara** analyses the representations of girlhood in the recent additions to *The Handmaid’s Tale* franchise: Bruce Miller’s 2017 Hulu series and Margaret Atwood’s 2019 novel *The Testaments*.

She draws on girlhood studies and Ahmed's notion of the feminist killjoy as a key mode of dissent to show the protagonists' encounter with the dissonance produced between the objects that are collectively imagined to cause happiness and how they are affected by them. Finally, in the interview by **Sheila Hernández-González** and **Jennifer Estévez-Yanes** to **Larissa Lai**, this celebrated contemporary author speaks of the convergence of history, myth and affects, while she offers a reflection on the circularity of time and the promise of happiness in her works.

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