

## Studies in Canadian Literature Études en littérature canadienne

SCL  ELC

# Colony Collapse Disorder: Settler Dreams, the Climate Crisis, and Canadian Literary Ecologies

Pamela Banting

Volume 39, Number 1, 2014

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1062352ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1062352ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

University of New Brunswick, Dept. of English

ISSN

0380-6995 (print)

1718-7850 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Banting, P. (2014). Colony Collapse Disorder: Settler Dreams, the Climate Crisis, and Canadian Literary Ecologies. *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne*, 39(1). <https://doi.org/10.7202/1062352ar>

# Colony Collapse Disorder: Settler Dreams, the Climate Crisis, and Canadian Literary Ecologies

PAMELA BANTING

As I sit down to write this Introduction on an unseasonably warm October morning, Ebola — a preventable zoonosis associated with deforestation and poverty — is raging in West Africa and has made landfall in the United States. The Harper government has declared war on a Middle Eastern terrorist group of uncertain acronym and at the same time, via Revenue Canada, is threatening to revoke the charitable tax status of a group of Ontario bird-watchers. The group had invited a guest speaker to one of their meetings to talk about the implications of oil pipelines, and they had written a letter to the government urging that serious consideration be given to banning the agricultural use of neonicotinoids, which many scientists suspect are at least one of the causes of Colony Collapse Disorder among bees, without whom the world stands to lose one third of its food supply. As I write, a Russian oil tanker full of bunker oil has lost its engines and is listing in thirty-five-foot swells in the Pacific Ocean just off the pristine shores of Haida Gwaii. In a Canadian court, a Texas-based energy company is suing an English professor at a Canadian university, along with several others, for protesting the company's planned pipeline and its incursions into a public park preparatory to laying pipe. Not your mother's Canada, to paraphrase the jean ads, most likely not even your own version of the country. It is not bee colonies alone that are under assault: under the imposition of a neoliberal agenda, Canada is being forcibly recolonized from within and without through the combined forces of capitalism, globalization, and the oil and gas industries. The nation whose literature most Canadianists here and beyond have taught for many years as a postcolonial literature is rapidly becoming a neocolonial state. What happens now to our critical and theoretical approaches?

One of the most distinctive developments in late twentieth- and early twenty-first century literary criticism has been the impact of ecocriti-

cism, and in Canada, as elsewhere, the country's writers have exhibited a growing preoccupation with ecological issues, with the relationship between humans and the natural world, and with human impact on the environment. This current trend, however, has a long genealogy; unsurprisingly, in a nation with such a huge landmass, a concern with nature runs through the entire history of the orature and literature of the country. As editors, while we were particularly interested in ecocritical approaches to Canadian literature, more broadly we welcomed original submissions on Canadian writing concerning nature, the environment, and ecology, with no limitations as to region, time period, or type of writing. Interdisciplinary approaches were also welcomed. Some of the many topics ecocritics address and in which we were specifically interested are the following: ecocriticism and its particular implications for Canadian literature; the nature/culture divide; literary representations of animals and/or natural spaces; rural and urban environments; borderlands and liminality; globalization, neoliberalism, and ecology; biodiversity and cultural diversity; nature, colonialism, and decolonization; the exploitation and/or despoliation of the natural world; the local, the bioregion, and sense of place; intersections between textuality and ecology; Indigenous knowledges and becoming "native" to a place; hunting, gathering, gardening, agriculture, and food; children and nature; environmental ethics and activism; and experimental pedagogies.

Once submissions were received and the reading, sifting, editing, and revisions were complete, I began to consider the best way of arranging the contents of the issue. I had decided in advance that I was *not* interested in an historical progression, primarily because I distrust notions of progress and also because most anthologies of Canadian literature and criticism alike follow that pattern, and for very sound reasons, so I was hoping a different arrangement would emerge organically from the submissions. However, no matter how much I resisted historical chronology, moving the page proofs of the articles around on my living-room floor, exploring alternate groupings and sequences, the implicit storyline ranged ineluctably from an examination of a nineteenth-century long poem permeated by principles of scientific agriculture and farming practices in the rural Maritimes to an analysis of a contemporary West-Coast writer's novel about a world in which bees have become extinct. It became evident that, taken together, the

altogether unintentional yet powerful narrative arc posed by the articles assembled here constituted a series of analyses of the colonial settler occupation of Canada, beginning with Travis V. Mason's essay on Oliver Goldsmith's canonical long poem *The Rising Village* and culminating in Jenny Kerber's article on Douglas Coupland's near-futurist novel about a post-bee world, *Generation A*. Although initially dismayed to succumb, albeit not without a struggle, to the inexorable pull of literary history, I came to realize that while the essays as arranged here follow a roughly chronological order according to the publication dates of the literary and cultural texts of their respective foci, the fact that Kerber's essay speaks meaningfully back to Mason's essay — insofar as both explore issues pertaining to the imposition of colonial and neocolonial agricultural practices — relieved me of the pressures of linearity and freed me into a structure more circular in outline and more dialogic within. To take a second example, within the issue, Rob Ross's essay chimes with that of Cheryl Lousley in their dual examination of suburban spaces and places in the work of two Toronto-based writers, with Tanis MacDonald's work of narrative scholarship about measures to cope with her own feelings of displacement after moving to the suburbs of another Ontario city, and, given that suburbia is often figured as a kind of isolated enclave, with Sherrie Malisch's reconsideration of Frye's long-standing trope of the garrison mentality. I also found it ecologically and poetically satisfying to give bees the last word in a special issue devoted to Canadian literary ecologies.

It seemed to me then and seems to me now that too few Canadian literature specialists heeded Lee Maracle's charge back in 1992 that the "post-" in postcolonial was merely yet another settler fantasy and that, in her words, Canadian writers (and, I would add, literary critics) "still hover about the gates of old forts, peek through the cracks of their protective ideological walls and try to write their own yearnings for freedom from the safety of their intellectual incarceration" (14). In light of the First Nations' "Idle No More" Movement that emerged in Saskatchewan in November/December 2012 and quickly spread around the globe, on the one hand, and dramatically regressive political changes in Canada over the past several years, on the other, one cannot help but think that, in the study of Canadian literature, the "post-" in postcolonialism was in fact premature. In what sense can we say that Canada has shaken off the chains of empire when the word "Royal"

has apparently been painted back onto our military aircraft; when our businesses and industries are bringing in “temporary foreign workers” from other countries to work for significantly less than Canadian wages and, in some cases, to slave away for little or no remuneration at all; when the Treaties are being blatantly violated and toxic substances are infiltrating the air, water, and animals downstream of the tar sands; when Indigenous women are four times more likely to be harmed or killed than their non-Indigenous counterparts; when this year Canada earned the moniker of The Deforestation Nation, since we now surpass Brazil as the country most rapidly destroying its own forests; and when Canada is a world leader in carbon emissions and slated to increase them to markedly higher levels even while scientific consensus states that we have until about 2017 to make significant carbon reductions or face irreversible climate change and all that that will entail.

It is a failure of imagination that a significant number of Canadians have yet to wake up to the reality that with their extreme wealth and power some multinational corporations — particularly those in the unimaginably rich energy industries — can acquire control over and direct nation states even in the so-called developed world. The spectre of Canadians feverishly digging the democratic ground out from under our very own feet — literally, in Alberta and Saskatchewan — and sending our democracy along with bitumen off to foreign markets in railcars and pipelines presents a spectacle worthy of a Bugs Bunny Roadrunner cartoon — in which we are the less-than-wily coyote. Indeed, in the arguments of energy-company apologists, our oil is “ethical” oil. If that is the case, then our democracy is itself a form of diluent, a chemical lubricant used to sluice viscous, tarry bitumen through pipelines to the west, east, or Gulf coasts.

In what sense, then, can a petro-state be said to produce a postcolonial literature? As I read and responded to the essays included here, I could not help but notice both in the essays and in my own handwritten notes about them that our own workaday critical vocabulary is imbued with what might be called settler metaphors. That is, we refer to especially insightful articles in our field as “ground-breaking” work that will “pave the way” for future “discoveries.” One might think that we literary critics were employed in some combination of colonial exploration (“discoveries”), pioneer agriculture (“ground-breaking”), or extraction (“paving” the way) even as we engage in the process of critiquing

texts that portray Canadians as mere hewers of wood and drawers of water or work-addled stubble-jumping pioneers such as Niels Lindstedt in Frederick Philip Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh* or some of my own relatives. As Canada slips and slides toward the goal of becoming "a global energy superpower," soon we may not have to worry about being nothing but drawers of water because the water may be too contaminated with chemicals from horizontal hydraulic fracturing to export. Nor may we have to be concerned about being nothing but hewers of wood because the northern boreal forest could become nothing but a land of stumps and coastal old-growth forests, the kind of place future generations of Canadians may associate only with quasi-mythical times. We will no longer have to wince when we read those embarrassing passages in the journals of European fur-trade employees and surveyors in which they describe vast and remarkable tracts of the country as desolate "wastes" because one third of Alberta, for instance, *is* slated to become an ecological wasteland.<sup>1</sup> Although along with breaking new ground and paving it, we also claim in our work-related rhetoric to "deconstruct" binary oppositions, "disrupt" hegemonies, "dismantle" hierarchies, and "trouble" the status quo, it may be time to begin to re-examine our claims to political effectivity and to bracket any pieties that allow vested interests — including our own — to co-opt our intellectual "praxis" and assume control over our universities.

Over the past year or so, the public relations arm of the energy industries has been deploying a metaphor comparing the proposed Enbridge Northern Gateway and Energy East pipelines for the transport of bitumen to market to the "nation-building" mega-project of building the Canadian transcontinental railway. However, despite functional similarities between trains and pipelines, as well as the similarities with regard to the anticipated costs to citizens, in terms of nation-building the more apt analogy for the proposed pipelines is not so much historical railroad construction as the extirpation of the buffalo. The majority of Canadians who are not of First Nations origins seem to have yet to realize that, as the big red arrow on interpretive maps indicates, you are here. We are ourselves as dependent upon clean airsheds, waterways, soils, and a relatively stable climate — both in Canada and around the globe — for our physical, psychological, and sociopolitical sustenance as the Indigenous nations of the West were upon the buffalo for food, clothing, shelter, and social and spiritual practices.

Canada is rapidly reverting to colonialism under its new manifestation, referred to, variously, as neocolonialism, neoliberalism, neoconservatism, corporatism, or globalization. In light of this regressive political transformation of the Canadian state and its *zeitgeist*, then, a roughly historical-chronological arrangement of the essays in this issue, each of which interrogates some aspect of settler society, goes against the grain of the neoliberal trajectory, which is often referred to in shorthand as “moving forward” when its actual direction is anything but. This issue of *Studies in Canadian Literature* demonstrates a renewed commitment via ecocriticism — in some cases hybridized (to use another agricultural metaphor) with other critical approaches such as poststructuralist theory, animal studies, gender studies and queer theory, materialist ecocriticism, and narrative scholarship — to excavating and archaeologizing the structure and machinations of settler colonialism. For all intents and purposes, non-Indigenous Canadians have yet actually to absorb the legal, social, and ecological ramifications of the fact that they, too, are treaty people, that the processes of the colonization of this land did not end in 1867 with Confederation, in 1918 following World War I, or in 1945 with World War II, but continue on, primarily via the “conquests” of territory by assorted resource industries laying claim and doing violence to the necessities of life, just as it was when Christopher Columbus and his men washed up in the Caribbean in search of gold and precious stones. As such, to paraphrase the late Robert Kroetsch, the moment of the discovery of North America must continue until what all Canadians finally discover is a sense of place and the stories, ethics, and alliances that come over time with being deeply rooted in a specific habitat.

Of all the critical and theoretical keywords and practices that have devolved from poststructuralism — decentering, deconstructing, dismantling, disrupting, disturbing, problematizing, resisting, troubling, undoing, and others — at least in Canada at the present time the most important such keyword might be “unsettling,” both in the sense of creating a disturbance within the hegemony of the moment but also in the more direct and applied sense of un-settling settlement. In the context of a three-way dialogue in “Unsettling Settler Colonialism: The Discourse and Politics of Settlers, and Solidarity with Indigenous Nations,” Jeff Corntassel states that

There are several Indigenous words for settlers that provide deeper insights into the violence and destructiveness of historic and ongoing colonization. For example, yonega is a Tsalagi (Cherokee) term for white settlers, which connotes “foam of the water; moved by wind and without its own direction; clings to everything that’s solid.” Wasicu is a Dakota term for settlers, which means “taker of fat.” In the northwest, hwunitum is a Hul’qumi’num and SENĆOTEN word for settler, that some have described as “the hungry people.” None of the above terms are positive reflections of settler society and represent the lived experience of Indigenous nations amidst settler occupation. (Snelgrove 16-17)

To explore what it has been and what it still is to be exploiters; to be flotsam; to be fat-taker (after all, oil is the new fat); to be insatiable, hungry people or hungry ghosts seems to me to be the overall arc that emerges from the essays collected here. It is an unflattering, ungainly, embarrassing, uncomfortable, and uncertain identity, to be sure, but unless settlers are willing to occupy that unsavoury and unsustainable positionality as long as it takes to learn who they are here in this country, along with some better ways of living, they cannot begin to heal the broken and increasingly dangerous relationship with the earth, the animals, the seasons, the terrain, the stories and histories of the peoples whose languages, ecological knowledge, and relationships with specific geographies and with one another run deep. For truly, as long as non-Indigenous Canadians lurk like wraiths (or like Atwood’s humanoid Crakers in *Oryx and Crake* in Lee Frew’s reading of that novel) about old garrisons and forts and mining pits, and as long they continue to increase their carbon footprint and poison the land, air, and water, they are indeed fostering a version of Colony Collapse Disorder — for the bees, for this nation, and for nations everywhere.

As the essays collected here demonstrate in diverse ways, it is time for non-Indigenous rural sodbusters, suburban commuters, and metropolitan pavement pounders alike to unsettle themselves and not wait around for First Nations people to do it for them. Instead of merely curating wilderness and wilder places — a process Sarah Wylie Krotz depicts in her essay about a unique tourist pamphlet and which is echoed in other ways by Wanda Campbell’s analysis of early modern women writers — it is time for all Canadians to embed themselves in country and in interrelationship by thinking and acting ecosystemically before it is too late.<sup>2</sup> While neither literature nor literary criticism



can remove carbon from the atmosphere, I would argue that they do have the potential to extract some of the carbon imaginary from the sociocultural milieu of the reading public and perhaps even to persuade us that the best carbon capture technology we have is that of leaving it below the surface in the first place. Grounded in their studies, experiences, and meditations upon the natural world and its representations, Canada's nature poets, environmental prose writers, and ecocritics are tracing paths along which Canada might begin to transform itself from being an international climate criminal and the winning contender for the title of Deforestation Nation and become instead a Decolonization Nation.

The archaeological interrogation of settler colonialism running through the collection begins with Travis Mason's "Having Cleared and Embellished the Earth': Agricultural Science and Poetic Tradition in Oliver Goldsmith's *The Rising Village*." In analyzing the published letters of merchant John Young (who writes under the pseudonym *Agricola*) on matters of scientific agriculture as intertexts to Oliver Goldsmith's long poem *The Rising Village*, Mason's ecocritical-post-colonial essay teases out the implications of the Lockean-based claim of settler entitlement not only to farm the land but to do whatever else the settler wants with it. Goldsmith's poem, Mason argues, goes against the reading of early Canadian literature as the product of a kind of environmental determinism. Considering "how pre-Confederation modifications of the land physically changed the ground on and about which a certain author wrote," Mason examines how Goldsmith's very colonial determination to clear the ground to ameliorate not just the geography but also the climate itself anticipates current debates about the impact of climate change.

Wanda Campbell's use of the framework of island biogeography reopens both the work of three early twentieth-century Canadian women writers — Susan Frances Harrison, Marjorie Pickthall, and Katherine Hale — as well as representations of touristic perceptions of landscape and is a welcome addition to the body of feminist ecocritical scholarship. Campbell offers a poetic and eloquent exploration of the ways these early Canadian women writers use the Island motif to contest colonial approaches to nature and women. Using an ecocritical approach linked to three areas of concern in the field of island biogeography — colonization, competition, and trophic cascade — Campbell argues that

all three authors present “nature as a place of ambiguous potential and power, depending on the attitudes and actions of those who approach it.” Because islands are especially prone to ecological (and imaginative) disruption, they offer a rich location for authors interested in ecological concerns. Campbell explores the ways these women writers posit a nature ethic that necessitates living with as well as on the land, a form of equilibrium that emerges from the ecological awe inspired by nature.

In an essay in which ecocriticism meets mountain literature and parks history, “A Poetics of Simpson Pass: Natural History and Place-Making in Rocky Mountains Park,” Sarah Wylie Krotz examines *A Sprig of Mountain Heather*, an early tourist pamphlet designed by J.B. Harkin and Mabel Williams to promote Canada’s dominion parks. Familiar in some historical circles but less so in literary ones, the pamphlet provides a fascinating glimpse into the colonial practice of natural history and its role in shaping European relationships to wild spaces such as Simpson Pass, on the border of Rocky Mountains (now Banff National) Park. Containing both an actual specimen — a pressed flower from an alpine meadow on the pass — and “a story of the heather” that connects it to Scottish lore and culture, *A Sprig of Mountain Heather* demonstrates how natural history made it possible for European settlers to imbue even a remote and alien space with the homely resonance of place — a key attribute of the national parks’ colonial and curatorial relationship to wilderness. Read in the light of a wider history of botanical inventory and description both in the mountain parks and elsewhere in Canada, *A Sprig of Mountain Heather* exemplifies the potency of the natural object as a locus of memory that could at once transport and transplant emigrants, allowing them to establish a deeper connection to lands that were remote both geographically and culturally. At once an essay on mountain park history, botanical illustration, settler colonialism, and on how space becomes place, it raises intriguing points such as, for example, the audacious role white European settlers assumed when they decided to “curate” the wilderness.

In “Herman Voaden’s *Romantic Ecology*: Settler Identity and the Canadian Sublime,” Nelson Gray engages in what he argues is a “long-overdue” examination of how the work of early twentieth-century dramatist Herman Voaden is overwhelmingly “concerned with issues of settler identity vis-à-vis what he conceived of as a distinctly Canadian (that is, wilderness) environment.” Gray argues that Voaden’s work is

characterized by a romantic nationalism infused with a pantheistic and ecocritical consciousness that values the nonhuman as much as the human. Gray stresses how Voaden's characters arrive at a sense of belonging not by overcoming an often hostile environment but indeed through an identification with the non-human world. Examining how an animate nature runs through Voaden's naturalism and "symphonic expressionism," Gray stresses "the notion that to identify with nature requires accepting one's embodied existence as part of a physical world of other agencies." Voaden's drama, Gray suggests, anticipates a post-human sensibility that the ecological crises of the present have made necessary, including a fundamental appreciation of non-human nature "as an animated materiality in its own right."

Subsequent essays in this issue examine urban, suburban, and ex-urban spaces and places. Rob Ross's essay presents us with an ecocritical reading of representations of wilderness and "natural" spaces in cities, particularly the suburbs, via his reading of Margaret Atwood's novel *Cat's Eye*. Canadian critics have long construed suburbia as existing somewhere in between the concrete jungle and the verdant wilderness; however, *Cat's Eye* invites us to consider the ecological implications of this geographic and critical positioning. In the course of the novel, Elaine's "crumbling ecological awareness" is a product of her traumatic childhood and her socialization into middle-class suburbia. Her journey through adulthood and artistic creativity involves reconciling her contradictory relationship to nature over the course of her life, leading her to come to terms with nature as "both a human construct and something that actually exists." Elaine's experiences in both the Ontario bush and a Toronto suburb raise the question as to whether the ravine system constitutes wildish urban spaces or mere recreational corridors. That is, is a suburban girl's childhood devoid of wildness? Are suburbs essentially outdoor versions of indoor spaces?

Cheryl Lousley's "A Feminist Carnavalesque Ecocriticism: The Grotesque Environments of Barbara Gowdy's Domestic Fictions," pairs very nicely with Ross's examination of the nature of the suburbs. Lousley argues that Barbara Gowdy's grotesque fiction "makes 'freaks' ordinary through domestic realism, and in doing so her narratives make strangely surreal the hyper-regulated and contained environments of late modernity with their nuclear bombs, closet-like suburbs, and animal deaths." In the process, Lousley successfully opens up a number of Gowdy's

works for reconsideration. Lousley contends that Gowdy's "carnival-esque" domestic realism "makes a contribution to the 'material turn' in ecocriticism and feminism," challenging the widespread environmental tendency to privilege pristine wilderness and disturbing suburbia as a heteronormative patriarchal sanctuary. In Gowdy's grotesque fictional world, "the ordinary freak . . . functions to show the normal environment as a tenuous construct that suppresses and denies an ecological world of relational flows of energy and desire," thus opening up to a more expansive vision of the ecological and of women's agency.

Tanis MacDonald's personal project of seeking out and watching wild animals, which she dubs FaunaWatch, is the topic of her piece of narrative scholarship — a blend of personal essay and ecocritical analysis — and it is also in its own way a kind of settlement narrative. FaunaWatch, as practice and as project, grew out of the author's desire to fix herself in the realities of her geographical location in southwestern Ontario. In the essay, the author traces her practice of observing and archiving animals, and writing about such archiving practices, making it clear that nothing about the FaunaWatch initiative is simple. MacDonald examines the practice of recording a bioregional creaturely list as an important critical and creative process, though one that is powered by an acquisitive energy, raising questions about the culture of sighting and "collecting" sights. The author's feelings of displacement and lack of rootedness in a small southwestern Ontario city offer a way of paying attention and trying to root into that place, and then self-reflexively questioning elements of that very project.

Élise Lepage s'intéresse à la reconstruction du concept de paysage dans la poésie québécoise contemporaine, soulignant les tensions et les paradoxes du sentiment d'appartenance dans une société consumériste, mondialisée et postindustrielle. « Les envers de la ville : de nouveaux paysages en poésie québécoise » se penche sur des œuvres de Michael Delisle, de Robert Melançon et de Louis-Jean Thibault pour examiner leurs représentations d'espaces urbains périphériques tels que ruelles, arrière-cours, sites industriels désaffectés et banlieues résidentielles et commerciales. L'auteure explore aussi l'engagement de ces poètes dans de nouveaux modes d'habitation et de nouvelles praxis qui caractérisent cet environnement mondialisé et postindustriel, tels que les transformations du paysage par l'industrie touristique et la célébration paradoxale du rural dans une société urbaine activement engagée dans sa destruction.

« C'est dans un contexte contemporain d'une grande fragilité des paysages, conclut-elle, que plusieurs poètes, notamment au sein de la jeune génération, mettent en mots de nouveaux paysages ».

Sherrie Malisch's provocative essay, "In Praise of the Garrison Mentality," revisits one of the foundational settler texts of Canadian literature, Northrop Frye's "Conclusion" to the *Literary History of Canada*. Malisch offers a controversial re-reading of Northrop Frye's infamous "garrison mentality" thesis from the perspective of contemporary eco-criticism, particularly in view of the global crisis of climate change. According to Malisch, the essential ecological logic of Frye's account is that human isolation from nature impedes humanity's "fullest functioning as a species." Through incisive argument, Malisch contends that the logic of Frye's garrison thesis has been implicitly shared by critics who purport to oppose Frye's approach; at base, she argues, both Frye and his critics assume that human-nature interconnection fosters human potential and creativity. Drawing on a number of prominent environmental biologists and ecocritics, Malisch demonstrates that the garrison mentality, in which humans maintain a respectful distance from nature, may be the most ecologically sound response. Her approach thus complements, in some challenging ways, many of the questions raised by MacDonald's FaunaWatch project. Malisch leaves us with a provocative question: "What if the most crucial role for literature . . . is not to fuel and thrive on the individual quest for creative fulfillment and self-understanding, but to harness itself to the task of bringing human aspirations, collectively, within limits?"

Lee Frew's "A Whole New Take on Indigenous: Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* as Wild Animal Story" reads Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel *Oryx and Crake* as a variation on the wild animal story, which she herself influentially defined in *Survival* in the 1970s. Characterizing the wild animal story as an indigenizing strategy for the settler subject of the Second World, Frew examines Atwood's principal characters, Crake and Snowman, as inhabiting an exogenous modernity that has all but obliterated the nature that makes indigenization possible. In Crake's utopian Paradise Project, Frew sees "the rebirth of the Second World, in which the settler subject's proximity to indigeneity can be imagined as playing out in the morally improving context of rigorous pioneer life." Snowman is forced, in the wake of Crake's vengeful eradication of humanity, to engage in a kind of post-apocalyptic woodcraft, uneas-

ily “roughing it in the bush” while envying the genetically engineered indigenization of the post-human Crakers, indicating, Frew concludes, “the limits of our colonial episteme.”

Taking as its premise the ways politics and the movement of global capital structure national policies that involve animal protection and exploitation in the North, Allison Athens’s “Let Me Breathe of It: A Circumpolar Literary and Ecological Perspective” explores “the clash of worlds” between conservation and Inuit discourses about hunting seals. The commercial hunting of harp seal pups galvanized animal rights in the 1970s, culminating in the banning of sealskin products in Europe and the curtailment of trade in the United States. The seal in animal-rights discourse is figured as a creature distinct from humans that is in need of protection; however, in Indigenous discourse, the seal is a relation whose presence makes all certainties about hierarchy, use-value, moral exemption, and human exceptionalism impossible. This essay rethinks the figural dimensions of seals in Yupiit and Inuit storytelling practices alongside debates around over-harvesting, competing global interests, and animal rights to develop current activism for environmental justice for both humans and seals in a time of rapid change. Focusing on practices of care rather than commodity circulation reframes the relationship of humans and seals beyond binary systems of interpretation that make humans subjects and seals objects. This care momentarily frees seals from their entrapment in an economy of use and provides a basis for understanding the North as a lived environment.

Adam Beardsworth’s article, “‘This page faintly stained with / green’: Compost Aesthetics in John Steffler’s *That Night We Were Ravenous*,” examines how Newfoundland poet John Steffler’s collection *That Night We Were Ravenous* explores the challenges of representing nature and the alienation of the human subject from the natural world. Taking cues from the concept of poetry as a kind of compost, Beardsworth argues that “Steffler’s vision of subjectivity as a composite of usable waste attuned to the chaos of the ecological foregrounds the precarious position of the human in nature.” Rather than evoking the trope of nature as a redemptive space, Steffler routinely represents it as the site of traumatic encounter, particularly because of the unrepresentability of nature. In recognizing the desire for domination implicit in prevailing strategies for representing nature, what Beardsworth describes

as Steffler's "compost aesthetics" entails a self-effacing and fractured ontology that constitutes, paradoxically, a more authentic relationship with nature.

Contrasting Kathleen Winter's *Annabel* with other Newfoundland novels in which protagonists are pitted against the landscape "and in their failures to tame it experience existential panic," Paul Chafe's "'Where the Mysterious and the Undefined Breathes and Lives': Kathleen Winter's *Annabel* as Intersex Text" examines how the intersex protagonist of Winter's novel is associated with the land and elicits in others a disturbing ecophobia, "the fear of an untamed wilderness." The temptation to modify the putatively "unnatural" Wayne/Annabel is thus linked with the desire to exert control over the land. Chafe argues that the novel is not so much about the other characters making a space for Wayne/Annabel but about their redefining their own relationship to the land. Winter's novel, he concludes, emphasizes the importance of accepting the as-yet-unknown.

L'article de Nadra Hebouche, intitulé « Humain/animal : rupture, contiguïté et perméabilité dans *Espèces* de Ying Chen », explore comment le roman *Espèces*, de l'écrivaine sino-canadienne Ying Chen, publié en 2010, déconstruit le système binaire manichéen érigé entre l'humain et l'animal. Hebouche fait valoir que, dans le roman de Chen au sujet d'« une narratrice qui se métamorphose provisoirement en chatte », la frontière érigée est poreuse et reconnaît à la fois l'altérité et la contiguïté. Mettant l'accent sur la relation entre la narratrice-chatte et A., son mari archéologue, Chen explore leurs conceptions différentes du temps, de la mémoire et de l'identité. La libération paradoxale de la narratrice-chatte (paradoxale à cause de son rôle de narratrice) du langage et de la pensée, des forces qui selon elle déguisent l'animalité des êtres humains, et sa reconnaissance de la culturalisation chez les humaines d'actes biologiques comme l'alimentation et les rapports sexuels sont aussi cruciales. Par la métamorphose incomplète et non décisive de la narratrice, conclut Hebouche, « Ying Chen élabore une nouvelle anthropologie qui oscille entre rupture et contiguïté, et tente de rendre compte d'une frontière perméable à travers laquelle s'invitent l'humain et l'animal ».

Like Hebouche's reading of *Espèces*, Jessica Carey's "Misfits in the Breach: Between Ecology and Economy in Helen Humphreys's *Wild Dogs*" also explores the boundary between human and animal, specifically in the context of the biopolitics of neoliberalism. Exploring the

response of human characters in *Wild Dogs* to the loss of their pet dogs to a feral pack, Carey underscores the interplay between economic and ecological assumptions under the regime of neoliberalism. Within an ideological framework that prizes utility and efficiency, the fate of both humans and animals in Humphreys's novel suggests, those designated as misfits and remainders are disposable, viewed as liabilities and even threats. Highlighting important continuities of fear and threat, Carey persuasively draws connections between the socioeconomic violence of neoliberalism and constructions of the ecological efficiency of natural violence: "the totalizing manner in which we currently exonerate the violence endemic in ecological relationships . . . is both a symptom of and a licence for our naturalized acceptance of the dog-eat-dog violence of neoliberal capitalism." In contrast, for Carey, Humphreys's novel ultimately emphasizes the importance of trust within and between species as part of a broader resistance to reductive notions of ecological and socioeconomic disposability.

Jenny Kerber's "'You Are Turning into a Hive Mind': Storytelling, Ecological Thought, and the Problem of Form in *Generation A*," offers a fitting conclusion to this special issue through its consideration of stories that "stretch the idea of 'personhood' beyond the corporeal boundaries of the individual." This is a theme that arises in other essays in this collection, most particularly in the discussion of Inuit seal stories by Allison Athens. Exploring the relationship between literary form and contemporary ecological anxiety in Douglas Coupland's 2009 novel *Generation A*, Kerber argues that while Coupland's work envisions a possible future in the wake of Colony Collapse Disorder, the more generalized eco-anxiety the novel explores is applicable to a number of contemporary environmental issues ranging from climate change to ocean acidification. Inviting readers to consider the problem of responding to ecological problems characterized by global scale, temporal uncertainty, and multiple origins, Coupland suggests that the solution, if one is possible, will arise from a model of thinking that is collective (what in the novel is termed a form of "hive mind"). This model opens new possibilities for conceiving of a networked mode of political agency in the era of social media and global-scale effects.

The essays collected herein showcase some of the best work being done in ecocriticism in Canada today. In juxtaposing and exploring the realistic wild animal story in relation to post-apocalyptic and post-



human narratives and Inuit seal stories, in illuminating how a deeply lived connection with the land is no guarantee of equal sensitivity to the coercions of gender- and hetero-normativity, in valorizing a compost aesthetics and the figures of the feral and the “misfit,” and in demonstrating how human-animal relationships are not fixed but aspects of relational and fiscal economies, the work gathered here and the literary texts at their respective cores both clarify and blur some of the categories which form the supportive armature of settler culture. I am grateful to the contributors to this issue for allowing us to engage so thoroughly with their work and to the journal’s editors, Herb Wyile and Cynthia Sugars, for inviting me to guest-edit the issue and to have the pleasure of collaborating with them.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In his book *Tar Sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent* (2008) environmental journalist Andrew Nikiforuk describes the actual pace of reclamation: “after nearly fifty years of mining, the provincial government has certified only 257 acres of forest, or 0.2 per cent of the land dug up since 1963” (95). Even the land the companies claim to have been restored has not been returned to its original state but rather has been converted to pastureland for a small, ornamental, and symbolic herd of bison.

<sup>2</sup> In the words of Deborah McGregor, traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) is not a body of knowledge as product or commodity but a

*process* (a verb) of participating fully and responsibly in such relationships [between knowledge, people, and all of Creation] . . . For Aboriginal Peoples, TEK is not just about understanding relationships; it *is* the relationship with Creation. TEK is something one *does*. . . This means that . . . one cannot ever really “acquire” or “learn” TEK without having undergone the experiences originally involved in doing so. (8-9)

## WORKS CITED

- Maracle, Lee. “The ‘Post-Colonial’ Imagination.” *Fuse* 15.1 (1992): 12-15. Print.
- McGregor, Deborah. “Traditional Ecological Knowledge and the Two-Row Wampum.” *Biodiversity* 3.3 (2002): 8-9. Print.
- Nikiforuk, Andrew. *Tar Sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent*. Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre; Vancouver: David Suzuki Foundation, 2008. Print.
- Snelgrove, Corey, Rita Kaur Dhamoon, and Jeff Corntassel. “Unsettling Settler Colonialism: The Discourse and Politics of Settlers, and Solidarity with Indigenous Nations.” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3.2 (2014): 1-32. Print.