May 2nd, 3:30 PM - 5:00 PM

SESSION 1.2: Teaching BC Literature: Ecocriticism, Eco-grief, and Rage

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Teaching BC Literature: Ecocriticism, Eco-grief, and Rage
Richard Pickard

Abstract:

Ecocriticism’s potential to unsettle literary studies and English departments, through instruments as various as climate change anxiety, animal ethics, and the love of nature, has been a regular theme of field-surveying overviews. From Cheryl Glotfelty’s introduction to the 1996 Ecocriticism Reader, through Ella Soper and Nick Bradley’s to their 2013 Greening the Maple: Canadian Ecocriticism in Context, such overviews provide ecocritics with ready solace and strength for their potentially transformative missions as green researchers, writers, and teachers.

This potential, however, remains unrealized. While such principled statements are enabling and empowering, ecocriticism remains to some extent a liberal fantasy and neoliberal distraction. Such, at least, has been my recent experience with a variable-content environmental humanities course I’ve taught regularly over the last decade, which this year featured Rita Wong’s undercurrent, Theresa Kishkan’s Winter Wren and Larissa Lai’s The Tiger Flu.

And yet I remain convinced, as do my students, that a peculiar potency resides within place-attentive literature from and of a place where a course is running. In this paper, which will draw heavily on my students’ contributions, I will describe how we managed to open up to and about our eco-grief and rage, in reading these three literary works and through successive encounters with key ecocritical texts (notably Wong’s “Decolonizasian”). The act of placing our intellectual and emotional responses to environmental crisis helped us, as one student put it, to “bring everything we’ve ever learned, to bear on everything we’re doing”: to productively unsettle ourselves and our studies.
Works Cited


