CHAPTER 15

"I Can't Believe This Is Happening!": Bear Horror, the Species Divide, and the Canadian Fight for Survival in a Time of Climate Change

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In his introduction to the collection of animal tales *The Wild Animal Story*, Ralph Lutts remarks that the "realistic wild animal story" is a "distinctly Canadian form of literature" (1998, 1). For Canadian writers, he continues, animals have always been "ideas as well as living, breathing creatures" (Lutts 1998, 2). Indeed, the editors of the *Literary History of Canada* acknowledged the centrality of animal narratives to Canadian literature as early as 1965 when they included Alec Lucas's chapter on "Nature Writers and the Animal Story" in their volume, in which Lucas argues that the main reason for the prevalence of nature writing, including animal narratives, in Canadian culture may be traced to the early days of the Canadian experience: "the greatest single fact of the new country was nature – and a most unWordsworthian nature" it was (1976, 383). According to Lucas, many of the early settlers "saw nature as an obstacle on the road to civilization" and "[m]an's kinship with the

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wild creatures was usually expressed with rod and gun" (1976, 383). However, as Canadians grew urban and physically removed from the natural world, Lucas suggests, animals increasingly appeared in the realm of representation.

Lucas thus constructs a history of Canadian human–animal relations first characterized by an epistemological divide, which later transformed into an ontological, or even onto-epistemological, one. Similar to human–animal relationships, the spatial and conceptual separation between Self and Other also defines horror narratives. Indeed, scholars such as Roger Salomon have stressed that horror is characterized by the crossing of these divides, as "some spook invades our commonplace reality, or our apparently sane and rational self enters a categorically malign environment" (2002, 9). Tellingly, in their seminal book on animal horror, Katarina Gregersdotter, Niklas Hållén, and Johan Höglund argue along similar lines, suggesting that the sub-genre's narratives center on "how a particular animal or an animal species commits a transgression against humanity" (2015, 3).

In this chapter, I examine some recent narratives that showcase animals' "transgressions against humanity," a process which goes hand-in-hand with the animals' return to human lives. In particular, I discuss three examples of Canadian bear horror: Claire Cameron's novel *The Bear* (2014), Susan J. Crockford's sf/horror hybrid *Eaten* (2015b), and the movie *Backcountry* (2014; released as *Blackfoot Trail* in the UK). Unsurprisingly, these texts feature bear attacks and even scenes of bears preying on humans. This animal predation on humans provides a powerful symbolic vehicle for overcoming the human–animal divide.

As Charles Taylor has argued, "The 'two solitudes' of Hugh MacLennan are still a fundamental reality in Canada; the ways that the two groups envisage their predicament, their problems, and their common country are so different that it is hard to find a common language" (1993, 24). French Canadians and Anglo-Canadians may live in the same country, but, effectively, they are alone. Similarly, the (non-native) human population of Canada has been conceived as alone in the wild—separated from the nonhuman world. While this divide is rooted in Canadian cultural history and conceptions of Canadian identity, the gap between the human and the "natural" environment is at the same time a global phenomenon, affecting humankind at large. Of course, "human" is not a term free from ideological trench warfare, as it operates with "ideological ferocity and triumphalism" (Said 2003, 37) to

prevent certain groups from accessing this select category. Rosi Braidotti asserts that "[n]ot all of us can say, with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human […]. Some of us are not even considered fully human now, let alone at previous moments of Western social, political and scientific history" (2013, 1). Yet regardless of whether someone belongs to Anglophone Canadian culture, a First Nation culture, or some culture in the Amazon removed from what Westerners might refer to as "civilization," the borderlines between human and other animal species inhabiting this planet are more or less rigid across cultures. A trait specific to Western civilization, however, is human exceptionalism—the idea that humankind is both in some way superior to other animal species and exempt from the laws of nature. However, as I will argue, animal predation on humans bridges the divide between the species, as it reintegrates human beings into the natural food chain, reducing them to their fleshly materiality.

While all three texts discussed in this chapter knock humankind off its horse, *Eaten* emerges as the text most explicit in its reflection of contemporary questions in green cultural studies and ecocriticism. As I will suggest, although Crockford does not believe in the negative effects of man-made climate change, *Eaten* paints a wonderful picture of life in the age of the Anthropocene—an era in which humankind has (purportedly) come to understand that the complex entanglements of different forms of life on the planet undermine simple cause-and-effect logic, which, at the end of the day, implies that humankind cannot control the natural environment.

The Canadian Fight for Survival

Backcountry, *The Bear*, and *Eaten* echo what Canadian writers and Canadian Studies scholars (not necessarily mutually exclusive groups, of course) during the 1960s and 1970s considered the distinguishing feature of Canadian national identity: survival in the face of a malevolent environment.[1] Whereas the American psyche has been shaped by the Frontier, the most dominant symbol in the Canadian national consciousness, Margaret Atwood argued, is "undoubtedly survival" (1972, 32). Tellingly, Northrop Frye likened the arrival of early European immigrants to "being silently swallowed by an alien continent" (1971, 217).

Backcountry reflects Frye's construction of Gothic imagery in order to highlight humankind's insignificance on a cosmic scale. The movie

translates a real-life story to cinema. In 2005, a black bear attacked Jacqueline Perry and her husband, Mark Jordan, in Missinaibi Lake Provincial Park, Ontario. Mark successfully fought off the bear, but his wife succumbed to her injuries on their way to the hospital ("Black Bear" 2005). In the film, Alex (Jeff Roop) drags his girlfriend Jenn (Missy Peregrym) to Blackfoot Trail in Alberta. Alex has been in the area several times and wants to take Jenn to a lake in the forest, where he plans to propose to her. However, the couple gets lost in the woods.

The film introduces Jenn as an urbanite who can barely leave behind the comforts of civilized life, as she has a tough time putting her cell phone down while Mark loads their car. Since Mark wants to spend an uninterrupted weekend in the wilderness, he removes the phone from Jenn's backpack in an unwatched moment. Implicitly, Mark is thus characterized as a (would-be) outdoorsman who can negotiate his way in the wilderness without twenty-first-century technology. This character trait is made explicit when he declines the park ranger's offer for a map, saying, "I know this park well." Unsurprisingly, this hubris does not bode well for his chances for survival.

After journeying through the woods for more than twenty-four hours, Alex believes that they are about to reach their destination. As he predicted, the couple "come[s] up a steep rocky trail" before "it [suddenly] levels off." Once they have reached the top, however, reaction shots suggest that the two face something terrifying. Instead of the "beautiful, pristine lake" Alex expected, they can see a vast forest and no signs of civilization. For miles, Jenn and Alex can spot nothing but high-rising trees. As they confront the "profoundly unhumanized isolation" Frye considered so typical of Canada (1971, 164), Jenn and Alex look into the great unknown. At this moment, the "overwhelming of human values by an indifferent [...] nature" (Frye 1971, 10–11) dawns on the two characters.

Jenn and Alex's terrified look "paralyzes [the characters] in such a way that distance is overcome," as Linda Williams put it in her seminal piece on the female look in horror cinema (2002, 62). As they unwillingly begin to bridge the divide between human and nonhuman worlds, Jenn and Alex appear like a "tiny Jonah entering an inconceivably large whale" (Frye 1971, 214). Indeed, they become one with the nonhuman world, as the vast forest effortlessly swallows them up. Tellingly, Rosemary Sullivan has argued that in the Canadian wilderness, "the very idea of the human must be reinvented" (2013, 38), since the very

existence of "unconquered" nature questions humanity's self-ascribed dominance of the planet. In this way, the film transcends its anchoring in Canadian culture and communicates ideas about Western civilization at large.

Confronted with a forest that has existed for thousands of years (albeit most likely shaped by humans in the last two hundred years or so), Jenn and Alex begin to understand that the history of humankind "is but a momentary blip" in the geological history of the planet (Grosz 2011, 24). This insight is accompanied by the implicit acknowledgment that humankind is "as much at the mercy of the random forces […] of natural selection […] as any other form of life" (Grosz 2011, 24). Accordingly, humanity is not the center of the universe, but rather "*entangled*" in "a maze of unexpected associations between heterogeneous elements" (Latour 2003, 36). This moment of grasping the interconnectedness of human beings with the nonhuman world brings the film's meaning full circle, back to Canada. Indeed, this bridging of the gap between the species is a distinctly Canadian experience, since "[t]o feel 'Canadian' [is] to feel part of a no-man's-land with huge rivers, lakes, and islands" (Frye 1971, 218).

Fatal Bear Encounters in Canada

There are three bear species in Canada: the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), the American black bear (*Ursus americanus*), and the polar bear (*Ursus maritimus*). Despite their ability to kill human beings easily, bears rarely attack humans. In the 110 years between 1900 and 2009, wild American black bears mauled forty-nine human beings north of the 49th parallel (Herrero et al. 2011), Canadian brown bears killed seventeen people in the twentieth century (Herrero 2002), and polar bears accounted for twenty human deaths across their habitats (Canada, the United States, Russia, Norway, and Greenland) between 1870 and 2014 (Wilder et al. 2017). While brown bear attacks tend to be defensive, with female bears usually defending their cubs (Herrero and Higgins 1999, 2003), polar and black bear attacks are much more likely to be of a predatory nature (Wilder et al. 2017).

Typically, fatal bear encounters are exploited by sensationalist reporting in the media. These reports feed into the image of large predators as deadly threats to human lives. Indeed, even "educational" programming on channels such as Animal Planet and Discovery Channel may tap

into and reinforce these ideas (on bears, see Fuchs 2018; on sharks, see Lerberg 2016). While bear predation on humans features prominently in all three narratives discussed in this chapter, none of the texts indulges in overly excessive portrayals of bear attacks. Indeed, despite representing the horrors of experiencing bear attacks and the psychological trauma caused by witnessing a bear attack, the texts depict these moments in a strangely calm, partly even objective and distanced way, as if to suggest that nothing out of the ordinary is happening.

The Bear and *Backcountry* employ the same basic narrative premise: humans go out into the wilderness, where they encounter bears. *The Bear* is loosely based on an incident that occurred in the fall of 1991 on Bates Island in Lake Opeongo in Algonquin Park, Ontario, where a healthy eight-year-old black bear killed 48-year-old Carola Frehe and 32-year-old Raymond Jakubauskas at a camping site ("What Can We Learn?" 1994). As Norm Quinn has explained, the general consensus was that "one or both [victims] put up a heroic fight," as "long bruises were observed on the bear and a broken oar was found at the scene" (2002, 94). Cameron attributed her fictionalized couple, the Whytes, with two children, Anna and Alex, to reinforce the couple's heroics and to tap into the children's vulnerability for dramatic effect.

Indeed, the entire story is told from the perspective of Anna, the couple's five-year-old daughter. Cameron wastes little time in presenting the narrative's seemingly climactic moment: In the two-page first chapter, the Whyte family is about to go to sleep at a camping site on Bates Island, but Anna's comments foreshadow things to come: "I feel nervous and I don't know why," she remarks before "hear[ing] a sniff" outside her tent (Cameron 2014, 3–4). Despite the sounds, she falls asleep, only to be roused by her mother yelling outside; she "screams like a monster is tackling her" (10). Since Anna knows that monsters are not real, she concludes that she must be dreaming and closes her eyes again. Only moments later, Anna's father rushes into the children's tent. When Anna opens her eyes, she believes that her father "looks mad," which is why she surmises she must be "in trouble" (11). Anna sees this belief confirmed when he drags her out of the tent. She cannot understand what is happening: "Daddy is hugging me but it's not a huggle," she remarks (11). Her father puts Anna and her younger brother Alex into a cooler, from which the two children witness the attack without grasping what is going on outside:

> Outside I hear a growl and a nose breath that isn't Stick's [Alex's nickname]. It's from a longer nose like Snoopy's. He is a dog that lives next door and usually he is behind the fence and he barks at Stick and me when we play with a ball […]. I can hear Snoopy outside of Coleman [i.e., the cooler] and it's not Toronto but Snoopy came to visit near the cottage and maybe doesn't like it because he growls […]. And I hear Daddy talking and I wonder why he has so much to say to Snoopy when usually he does not. (15)

This passage is emblematic of the novel's narrative approach, as Anna's stream of consciousness narration constantly and effortlessly bridges past memories, dreams, fantasies, and actual objects she sees, smells, and feels in the present moment. These constant slippages between ontological levels puzzle the reader in ways similar to how Anna is confused by the goings-on in the diegetic reality. In addition, the inability of Anna's innocent mind to comprehend the events and her attendant mistaking a black bear for the neighbor's dog fuel the narrative's suspense and creates much of the book's horror. For example, after the attack has ended and the bear has begun to devour her father, Anna reports that she can hear something outside:

> The noises are Snoopy breathing. Mrs Buchanon [their neighbor] has given Snoopy a bone. I am not allowed but Mrs Buchanon lets me hold the bone out and Snoopy takes it. He does it gentle with his lips back so that I can see his teeth aren't going to bite me and he keeps them far away from my hand. When he is done with the bone for his dinner he gives me a wet kiss on the cheek and I smile.
>
> Snoopy is eating the bone and I can hear the snap snap snap of his jaws on the bone […]. His teeth go scrape on the bone and I hear it pop. I think Snoopy has broken the bone and he's not supposed to do that. […] And the sounds outside crack crack snap and I know that Snoopy has broken the bone but Mrs Buchanan is not stopping him. Maybe she is sleeping because it is night-time for her. (18–19)

Anna begins to understand that the animal outside is not Snoopy only when the "black dog" starts sniffing at the cooler. As the bear comes closer, Anna notices that the "black dog has tomato juice on his jaw" (23). Apart from the fact that readers fear for the children's lives, Anna's lack of awareness adds to the horror. While she does feel increasingly uncomfortable, she never appears afraid, since she fails to grasp the

degree to which her and her brother's lives are in danger. Indeed, the following morning, she seems more troubled by the fact that her brother "poop[s]" (37) in the tent than by the ursine threat roaming the small island.

Throughout the novel, Anna continues to be more concerned by their father's absence and more disturbed by her younger brother's misdeeds than by the anthropophagic bear close by. Indeed, Anna's voice is the voice of a young girl not only desperately trying to make sense of the world, but also looking for guidance and striving to protect her younger brother. In fact, in terms of narrative action, barely anything happens after the opening attack, as the narrative focuses on Anna's confusion and depicts her mind wandering around as she attempts to pass time, on the one hand, and deal with the situation she finds herself in, on the other. These mental journeys are repeatedly interrupted by the physical presence of the bear. For example, after the children have safely made it to the mainland, Anna notes:

> I see that the black dog is nosing around and sniffing and walking to the water that is across the lake from me. I stay quiet and try not to breathe and hope Stick will stay quiet too. […] The black dog is more like the raccoon and sniffs and eats something and puts his nose in the air. He sticks his nose out and sniffs for a minute and then walks slowly along the water […].
>
> […] The black dog noses around and it grabs something in its mouth and I look and I can't tell what it is besides long. But it waves around and on the end it's red and it might be the meat with Daddy's sneaker. Daddy won't like a bear chewing his sneaker. (89–91)

Yet as much as readers might worry about the children's well-being, at the same time, they are constantly aware that Anna narrates the story. And even though her narration is in the present tense, readers infer that she will make it out alive. Indeed, Cameron saves Anna's terrifying acknowledgment of what truly happened on that October day in 1991 for the novel's conclusion.

In the epilogue, set in 2011, Anna and Alex return to the place their parents died. Anna admits that the traumatic experience has haunted her for twenty years; she has "had the same nightmare about this island" since her childhood days (211). Cameron taps into pop psychology here, as Anna hopes that her journey to the place will allow her to master

the traumatic experience which she failed to comprehend when it happened, and which she has re-experienced in dreams ever since. Tellingly, Sigmund Freud connected the compulsion to repeat traumatic events in the imaginary domain "to the impulse to obtain the mastery of a situation" ([1923] 2001, 252). This mastery is usually of the cognitive kind—the traumatic event is dissected, rationalized, and accordingly comprehended. However, what happened to the Whyte family is, in a way, beyond comprehension: "I've always wondered, why them and not us? We were little kids and would have been the easier prey," Anna tells her brother. "We will never know exactly why," he responds. "'Why' is missing the point," she insists. "He was full," Alex drily concludes (213–14). Alex's conclusion is the most logical explanation; but we will never know whether this anthropocentric interpretation of the events even comes close to representing the bear's perspective.

Indeed, in an article published several months after the actual attack, the park service stated that "animals, just as […] humans," have "a tremendous range of physical and mental attributes" ("What Can We Learn?" 26). On the one hand, this explanation elevates animals from instinct-driven beasts; on the other hand, it suggests that humans cannot understand the reasons for the bear attack. Similarly, in her novel's preface, Cameron points out:

> There is no clear reason for what happened, other than the assumption that a hungry bear decided to take a chance on a new source of food. What is most frightening about this explanation is the idea that there is no blame to place on either the people or the bear […]. [I]n this case there is no apparent rationale for the attack, other than predation. The couple happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. (xii)

Accordingly, humans cannot grasp the bear's rationale for the attack. I do not mean to thus emphasize rationality as a distinguishing feature of the species *Homo sapiens*, as this claim would support human exceptionalism and the attendant deepening of the chasm between human beings and other animal species. Instead, Cameron's bear attack story bridges the divide between human and nonhuman animals by re-integrating human bodies into the food chain. While the novel highlights differences between humans and other animal species, the bear's uprising against human domination reveals humankind's "pathological belief in our ability to control the […] natural world" (Williston 2015, 35).

Backcountry achieves the same effect, employing film's multimodality to full effect. On the second day of their trip, Alex first notices bear tracks on the trail. That night, Jenn hears something sniffing around and moving close to their tent. Against the nearly black visual backdrop, the film uses its 5.1 audio track to create the illusion of the creature orbiting the tent, as indistinct sounds first move between the three front channels before switching to the rear. Alex assures Jenn (and the audience), "[T]hat's acorns – just falling from the trees on our tent." While nothing happens that night, nor the following one, when Alex unzips the tent on the third day of their trip, he sees a large black bear lying in the grass just a few hundred feet from the tent. Alex and Jenn's hopes that the bear will not notice them if they remain silent do not come true, as the bear comes closer and eventually bursts into the tent.

Moments prior to the bear attack, all environmental sounds disappear, endowing the gory bear attack with a documentary-like feel. As the camera frantically changes positions, primarily alternating between the bear and shots of Alex in pain and Jenn in despair, the film engages viewers somatically. *Backcountry* thus produces a very particular kind of realism, as the movie seeks to create a kind of corporeal, experiential realism. Julian Hanich has suggested that this generation of bodily responses typical of the horror genre returns viewers to their lived bodies; a (re-)recognition of their organic existences (2012, 586). The bear attack thus calls to mind the fragility of the human body, which highlights that humans live "in a messy, complicated, resistant, brute world of materiality" (Grosz 2004, 2). Animal predation on humans accordingly "remind[s] us that humans, too, are animals, despite a long philosophical tradition […] that insists upon a separate kind of being for human subjects" (Vint 2010, 8).

The Australian feminist ecocritic Val Plumwood has arguably provided the most astute remarks on the ways in which animal predation on humans returns the human experience to the human body. Indeed, her insights were grounded in a horrifying experience, as a large saltwater crocodile attacked her while she was kayaking in Kakadu National Park—and she alone barely escaped to tell us. As Plumwood points out, she was well aware of the fact that hundreds of crocodiles surrounded her, but she "had given insufficient attention […] to [her] own vulnerability as an edible, animal being" prior to the attack (2012, 10). When the crocodile attacked her, she thought that "[t]he creature was breaking the rules, was totally mistaken, utterly wrong to think [she] could be

reduced to food" (Plumwood 2012, 12). Plumwood accordingly found herself thinking thoughts she had vociferously critiqued—she apparently believed in human exceptionalism, after all. Humans are used to "remake the world […] as [their] own, investing it with meaning, reconceiving it as sane, survivable, amendable to hope and resolution," she argues, but the encounter with a large predator discloses "a world no longer [our] own, an unrecognizable bleak landscape composed of raw necessity, that would go on without [us], indifferent to [our] will and struggle, to [our] life or death" (Plumwood 2000, 131–32).

Although she primarily only witnesses the attack on her boyfriend in *Backcountry*, Jenn undergoes a similar experience. Significantly, Jenn does not even try to rationalize verbally the events after the attack; does not try to explain the loss of her boyfriend. To be sure, "[l]anguage is one of the tools we use to […] explain and master nature" (Sullivan 2013, 38). Language, accordingly, allows humans to set themselves apart from nature. However, Jenn resists this urge, implying that she has accepted that she—along with her fellow human beings—is part of the environment, bringing Jenn and Alex's earlier encounter with the unknown forest full circle. While each of the two overcomes the divide between the human and the nonhuman in different ways, both Jenn and Alex come to understand that humans cannot control the natural world, but are part of it. William E. Connelly suggested that the crocodile's eye epitomizes a world where "multiple lines of intersection" between different animate creatures and inanimate objects "produce unexpected effects" (1993, 10). For Westerners, being killed by a large predator represents one such unexpected effect.

Bridging the Species Divide in the Anthropocene

In Crockford's near-future novel *Eaten* (it is set in 2025), the unexpected effect of our worldly entanglements is that polar bears begin preying on human beings in settlements in Newfoundland and Labrador (particularly on Fogo Island). Crockford's book is by far the least engaging of the texts discussed here, in part because the novel's primary function is to push the author's agenda: to convince readers that liberal scientists have exaggerated the effects of climate change for years, and that measures aimed at countering the anticipated effects of global warming may, in fact, endanger humankind.[2]

Writing about Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003–2013), Dunja Mohr suggests that the trilogy reverses the idea that Canadian nature is "actively hostile towards man" (Atwood 1972, 33) by turning the theme of survival from a human struggle "*against nature* [in]to a planetary one *against humankind*" (Mohr 2017, 55). *Eaten* depicts a similar scenario; yet whereas Atwood figures the planetary struggle against humankind as a just retaliation against the wrongs committed by humankind, Crockford seeks to employ polar bears' out-of-control overcrowding of the region as a vehicle to critique "mainstream" science, Canadian lawmaking, and environmentalist groups, among others.

Critically, however, the actual reasons for the bears' encroachment upon human territory remain a mystery. To be sure, the attacks are caused by the lack of food: "It appears that a distemper epidemic has decimated the harp seal population offshore and the polar bears that normally depend on those seals for food are coming ashore," notes a (fictional) CBC news report, continuing, "The Arctic bears are clearly starving, and people have replaced seals as prey for them" (Crockford 2015b, 238). Crockford's polar bears accordingly follow both a narrative template and an actual, lived reality that Atwood diagnosed as early as 1972: "[F]or the Canadian animal, bare survival is the main aim in life, failure as an individual is inevitable, and extinction as a species is a distinct possibility" (Atwood 1972, 79). Indeed, Crockford's polar bears—irrespective of whether she and her fictional stand-ins may claim otherwise—face extinction. And this (more or less) imminent danger of extinction is inherently tied to human progress. Elizabeth Kolbert neatly summarizes humanity's rise in the prologue to her book *The Sixth Extinction*:

> Although a land animal, our species – ever inventive – crosses the sea. It reaches islands inhabited by evolution's outliers: birds that lay foot-long eggs, pig-sized hippos, giant skinks. Accustomed to isolation, these creatures are ill-equipped to deal with the newcomers […].
>
> The process continues, in fits and starts, for thousands of years, until the species […] has spread to practically every corner of the globe. At this point, several things happen more or less at once that allow *Homo sapiens*, as it has come to call itself, to reproduce at an unprecedented rate. In a single century the population doubles; then it doubles again, and then again. Vast forests are razed. Humans do this deliberately, in order to feed themselves. Less deliberately, they shift organisms from one continent to another, reassembling the biosphere.

> Meanwhile, an even stranger and more radical transformation is under way. Having discovered subterranean reserves of energy, humans begin to change the composition of the atmosphere. This, in turn, alters the climate and the chemistry of the oceans […]. Extinction rates soar, and the texture of life changes.
>
> No creature has ever altered life on the planet in this way before. (2014, 2–3)

In terms of their goals Crockford and Kolbert could hardly be farther apart, but through Crockford’s insistence on the ideologically motivated construction of polar bears’ endangerment and Kolbert’s “unnatural history” of humankind’s negative impact on the planet, they do, in fact, have something in common. *Eaten* states that it “appears” as if a distemper epidemic devastated the seal population; however, one cannot be certain—there might be dozens of possible reasons for the drop in the seal population, including global warming. Implicitly, *Eaten* thus inadvertently acknowledges that, at the end of the day, natural phenomena elude human understanding and control. In this way, *Eaten*, in fact, reflects life in the Anthropocene.

After all, this “threshold concept,” to allude to the subtitle of Timothy Clark’s book (2015), suggests that humankind dominates the planet to the point that the species is endowed with nearly god-like powers; at the same time, however, forces that Westerners had purportedly mastered centuries ago demonstrate that mastery is but a mere illusion (e.g. “nature” strikes back in the form of hurricanes). As a result, the Anthropocene is characterized by Westerners’ growing awareness of being out of control, as human and nonhuman lifeforms as well as other nonhuman agents are entangled in complex systems that humankind fails fully to comprehend.

In different ways, *The Bear*, *Backcountry*, and *Eaten* all highlight that human lives are merely singular elements in these complex systems. In this way, these Canadian texts question what scholars such as Bruno Latour consider key to the project of modernity, namely the creation of “two entirely distinct ontological zones: that of human beings on the one hand; that of nonhumans on the other” (Latour 1993, 10–11). Indeed, Canadian literature has mined the interrelations between these “entirely distinct ontological zones” for decades. In particular, the Canadian animal story, John Sandlos has argued, is “a creative attempt to comprehend our relationship to the other beings with which we

co-inhabit the living world" (2000, 76). This presence of the nonhuman world has been a staple of the Canadian imagination since "the country […] greeted […] the pioneers" (McKay 2009, 6), evoking both "dread […] and […] reverence" (Soper and Bradley 2013, xxiv). Yet, significantly, the domain of the nonhuman is always there, as a nodal point for human interactions of different kinds. In the contemporary age of climate change, this understanding of the interconnections between human beings and "the environment" is invaluable.

Notes

1. Tellingly, *Backcountry*'s poster features a very simple tagline: "SURVIVE."
2. Crockford, who has a Ph.D. in zoology, has appeared on a list of "scientists" receiving payment for supporting the Heartland Institute, the primary mission of which is to "undermine the official United National's IPCC [International Panel on Climate Change] reports" (Marriott 2012). She was also included in US Senator James Inhofe's (in)famous list of "scientists" questioning climate change (Morano 2008). She has referred to studies about the endangerment of polar bears and other arctic creatures as the "arctic fallacy" (Crockford 2015a) created and perpetrated by liberals, as she believes animals fit for survival will adapt to the changing environment; those who won't would simply fail to pass natural selection processes.

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