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Nicole Seymour, *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irreverance in the Ecological Age* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 291 pp.

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Like the emancipatory schools of thought that preceded it (I am thinking of Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial criticism in particular), ecocriticism has its roots in personal commitment to the environment. For most, if not all of us, to a greater or lesser extent, our relationship to environmentalism is not just one of scholarly interest, but a form of engagement in the wider world in which we are emotionally and affectively invested.

From this standpoint, Nicole Seymour's *Bad Environmentalism* is a doubly important contribution to the field of Environmental Humanities more broadly, and ecocriticism in particular. The book examines a diverse archive of texts—including novels, films, and performance art—that she considers examples of “bad” environmentalism, that is, environmentalism that is not performed with the requisite degree of gravity, or by the right kind of person. Her work both gives us scholars the vocabulary we need to analyse a whole new range of texts in terms of their environmentalism, and also encourages us to consider our own environmentalism more fully.

Taking the scholarly angle first, Seymour's analysis shows convincingly how texts that have generally been ignored or dismissed by scholars display in fact an outlier but nonetheless important and sometimes radical environmental position. Her five chapters each supply a different set of case studies configured around a mainstream affective mode—the centrality of “expert” knowledge, the role of awe in nature documentaries, and the straightness, whiteness, and middle-class-ness respectively of environmental activists—and present us with multiple examples of “bad” environmentalisms that question, subvert, or challenge these modes while nonetheless showing concern for environmental issues, presenting us thereby with alternative ways of doing environmentalism.

Her solid and extensive theoretical labour lays out the ways in which bad environmentalisms are not merely an alternative to the mainstream, but complex offerings that show up its blind spots and failings; bad environmentalisms are often ambiguous and depend on the affective complicity of their audience in challenging assumptions or displaying what these assumptions even are. As she writes in her introduction, “the works in my archive do not simply offer alternative modes of environmental engagement—which readers could take or leave; they teach us

something crucial about what is intrinsic to environmentalism as most of us know it, and what environmental stewardship already is or entails.” (p.5)

The archive Seymour draws on in *Bad Environmentalism* is diverse in the extreme, encompassing poetry, performance art, film, YouTube clips, animations, novels, and stand-up comedy; some of these works have achieved a degree of commercial success or critical acclaim (e.g. Edward Abbey’s novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and *The Simpsons* movie) whereas others are little known or indeed, considered beneath criticism by all but the most unflinching of cultural scholars (e.g. IDA live shows, *Wildboyz*). The somewhat arbitrary impression given by the range of genres serves to underline the innovation in Seymour’s work; she has cast the net wide to make her arguments, leaving plenty of ground still to be covered by subsequent studies, and allowing her theoretical insights to speak to a wide range of scholars and disciplines. Her ability to draw on such a breadth of sources without seeming random is a signal of the clear focus of her approach, as well as tribute to her thoughtful and well-grounded work; while her critical examinations of the texts themselves comprise close readings, the overall work of the book is a much broader and more daring interpretation of entangled cultural currents.

On the other hand, the works Seymour examines in her book are restricted almost exclusively to North American texts, with a few excursions into other Anglophone areas (Australia and Great Britain) and one example drawn from Austria. This makes for cultural coherence, but cries out for answering research in other cultures and language areas to bring out differences and similarities to the North American model.

Moving beyond the significance of Seymour’s book for the study of environmentalist art and literature, I want to raise the issue of its repercussions for those of us whose scholarship is bound up in our own personal concern and advocacy for the environment. Reading the book could be discomfiting for any of us (and will be for many of us) who subscribe to some or all of the modes of environmentalism Seymour has identified—trusting in science, awed by the natural world, straight, white, and middle-class. It is always hard to acknowledge, especially perhaps for those of us who pride ourselves on our inclusiveness and liberalism, how exclusive the church of environmentalism at times can be. But ultimately, *Bad Environmentalism*, besides reminding us to check our privilege and our blind spots, gives us permission to employ affective modes that we might, in these troubling times, be tempted to suppress. Perhaps it’s not wrong to laugh as well as cry, even as the Amazon burns. Perhaps we can allow ourselves to be irritated by the sanctimony of some environmentalist voices. And anyway, who are “we”?

Bad Environmentalism’s answer is an inclusive one. The “we” that sees and is threatened by a changing planet is diverse, fairly strange, and full of conflicting feelings. We need to be open to and embrace all manifestations of environmental concern, improper and proper, to get any hold on the wicked problem of climate change—both as scholars, and as human beings.