

Funny Bones: What Comes to Grief in Chris Flynn's *Mammoth*

Rūta Šlapkauskaitė

Vilnius University, Lithuania

KEYWORDS

Flynn
Mammoth
Humor
Fossil
It-narrative

ABSTRACT

Judging from the sway of dystopian and (post)-apocalyptic scenarios in contemporary Anthropocene fiction, our concern for climate change and ecological upheaval has been particularly receptive to narrative forms derived from the catastrophic imaginary, with comic modes often getting evicted from the province of environmentalist thought. Chris Flynn's novel *Mammoth* (2020) is a notable exception, deploying humor to culturally process loss, (ecological) grief, and memory. Flynn's use of the conventions of the *it-narrative*, with a mastodon fossil as the novel's narrator, brings the scales of megafauna extinctions, imperial expansion, resource extractivism, and de-extinction eschatology into a shared fold of planetary temporality, where the comic register is offered as a medium for rethinking multi-species encounters and (pre)historical acts of aggression. In attending to the political animation of fossils in the narrative, whose stories shuttle across spatial and temporal scales, this paper examines how the novel's use of humor illuminates the legacies of species extinctions and colonialism, while its engagement with the ethics of de-extinction abates the novel's satirical sting. In this, *Mammoth's* loyalties are shown to oscillate between critique and conformity, highlighting the ethical impasse of comedy as a genre of the Anthropocene.



1. Ted Toadvine, *The Memory of the World. Deep Time, Animality, and Eschatology* (University of Minnesota Press, 2024), 55.

2. See, for example, Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman, *Mourning Nature. Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017); Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino, *Affective Ecocriticism. Emotion, Embodiment, Environment* (University of Nebraska, 2018); Glenn Albrecht, *Earth Emotions, New Words for a New World* (Cornell University Press, 2019); Mauro J. Caraccioli, "A Sorrowful Storm. Between Penitence and Anthropopolitics in the Anthropocene," in *Between Catastrophe and Revolution: Essays in Honor of Mike Davis*, ed. Daniel Bertrand Monk and Michael Sorkin (Terreform/UR, 2021).

3. Emily Yu Zong and Daisy Bisenieks, 2025. "Dark Humour and Invasive Species Storytelling in the Age of Extinction," *Journal of Australian Studies* 49, no. 1, (2025): 20.

4. Zong and Bisenieks, "Dark Humour," 6.

5. Chris Flynn, *Mammoth* (UQP, 2020), 147.

6. Jonathan Lamb, *The Things Things Say* (Princeton University Press, 2011), 47.

7. Liz Bellamy, "It-Narrators and Circulation: Defining a Subgenre," in *The Secret Life of Things. Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Mark Blackwell (Bucknell University Press, 2014), 124.



Funny Bones: What Comes to Grief in Chris Flynn's *Mammoth*

Rūta Šlapkauskaitė

Introduction

Imagine – an entire species can evolve, thrive, decline, and disappear and leave just half a tooth as a memorial to its existence.

Henry Gee, *In Search of Deep Time*

Silent powerbrokers of carbon modernity, fossils give us grief. This is literally through the material effects and affects resulting from the industrial use of fossil fuels as the main energy source of the Anthropocene's cultural formation. Conceptually, through the epistemic opacity of the immemorial past which fossils expose in a way that, to quote Ted Toadvine, "both invites and refuses us."¹ These contradictory impulses highlight the ethical stakes of the fossil as a cultural figure indexed simultaneously to the mass extinction events of the deep time and the contemporary conditions of planetary imperilment. As a trope of ecological accountability, fossils bring to the surface the multi-scalar ramifications of climate breakdown and its attendant affective relays of Anthropocene anxiety, solastalgia, grief, ecological penitence, and mourning.² Yet the fossil's affective remit is not limited to sad passions. Australian cartoonist Mark Knight's humorous use of extinct megafauna to comment on the politics of contemporary environmental activism is a good case in point. The two protesting dinosaurs and woolly mammoth in his 2019 cartoon "Extinction Rebellion" are locked in a stand-off with two angry cavemen, prompting the mammoth to lament that now they face not only extinction, but also social ostracism. As Emily Yu Zong and Daisy Bisenieks observe in their analysis of humor in Australian discourse on species extinction, the reanimation of fossilized fauna in Knight's satire "invites a rethinking of radical environmentalist tactics of reverence while spotlighting the social and cultural fears of being sidelined for unpopular beliefs."³

What makes humor ethically ambiguous is that it can both catalyze subversive social energies and reinforce existing "cultural attitudes towards environmental challenges,"⁴ particularly in the context of emerging technological solutions. This complicates our grasp of the cultural labor of the fossil as a figure of extinction, on the one hand, and an affective trope of ecopolitics, on the other. The conceptual frictions intrinsic to this dialectic bear on my reading of Australia-based Irish writer Chris Flynn's novel *Mammoth* (2020), which features a mastodon fossil as its narrator. Set in 2007 in a New York warehouse, the novel gives voice to a "motley band of irascible fossils"⁵ who await to be sold off at a natural history auction. Here, we encounter humor as an affective infrastructure of the *it-narrative*, a literary genre Flynn employs to reflect on the cultural value of megafauna extinctions in relation to human histories of destruction, loss, and recovery. Much of the satirical tenor of the *it-narrative*, as Jonathan Lamb explains in his landmark study of the genre, derives from the "moral initiative and speech"⁶ that the narrative confers on nonhuman storytellers, turning them into critical observers and commentators on human follies and foibles. In compositional terms, the social mobility of the *it-narrators* generates a loose structure of interpolated accounts, none of which gain a satisfactory resolution but provide insights into the mechanisms of circulation and exchange that underpin the capitalist logic of social formation. Though lacking "a structure of fictional containment,"⁷ as Liz Bellamy points out, the *it-narrative's* satirical vision explores different ideological positions, ultimately refusing to endorse the social



Ecokritique

8. I use *comic* as a broad term that accommodates both the generic and structural aspects of comedy as a literary form and the tonal quality of humor as a narrative mode and social praxis.

9. Ursula K. Heise, *Imagining Extinction. The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species* (The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 55.

10. Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): 220.

11. Timothy Clark, "Ecological Grief and Anthropocene Horror," *American Imago* 77, no. 1 (2020): 67.

12. Judith Butler, *Frames of War. When is Life Grievable?* (Verso, 2016), 7.

13. Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Geontologies. A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (Duke University Press, 2016), 4.

14. Douglas Burton-Christie, "The Gift of Tears: Loss, Mourning and the Work of Ecological Restoration," *Worldviews*, no. 15 (2011): 29.

15. Alfred Sköld, "Climate Melancholia," *Environmental Humanities* 17, no. 2 (2025): 450.

16. Caraccioli, "A Sorrowful Storm," 23.

17. Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Harvard University Press, 2011).

18. Clark, "Ecological Grief," 74.

values that mediate the human-nonhuman entanglement in modernity's commercial networks. These genre coordinates anchor my own pacing through *Mammoth*, as I examine how its fossil narrator's circulation through time and space reappraises the ethical and affective bonds that connect us to the geological and social pasts. In so doing, I aim to show how Flynn's ecologically-attuned use of the comic form and register complicates the novel's commitment to the (re)animation of memory.⁸ I therefore begin by taking a brief note of the ethical stakes and intellectual provocations generated by the affective work of remembering in the context of human-nonhuman enmeshment and loss of planetary life.

The complexity of the personal and collective psychic landscape in the Anthropocene maps onto the critical debate regarding the shortcomings of its nomenclature, with questions about the dubious origins, stratigraphic markers, and undifferentiated subject of the new geological epoch registering an emerging ambivalence about the human efforts (and failures) to "adequately capture the magnitude of a crisis that affects thousands of species and the entire globe."⁹ Echoing Dipesh Chakrabarty's observation that we "never experience ourselves as a species"¹⁰ to be able to tally with our own collusion with environmental collapse, Timothy Clark notes that neither do we have a "direct perception or sense of the earth as a finite planet in our basic sensorium."¹¹ This highlights the difficulty of finding a critical language that accounts for the vertigo of conflicting affective responses to the cascading violence of climate damage.

Judith Butler's theorizing of grievability as a set of socially produced conditions for making the loss of life matter is useful here. Grief, she argues, only becomes possible for us if we recognize the lost subject as intelligible and therefore grievable, life.¹² Within the ecological contexts of collective death the concept of grievability becomes also a corollary of the dynamics of what Elizabeth Povinelli calls "geontopower," a mode of governance in late capitalism which complements the injunctions of biopower through the conceptual distinction "between Life and Nonlife."¹³ The implication for ecological grief here is that unless we place nonhuman nature in the category of life, its loss may go unnoticed or produce "a kind of psychic numbing"¹⁴ that leaves us stuck in a melancholic deadlock. In such an affective impasse, as Alfred Sköld contends, "we cannot grieve and, given the intimate relationship between grief and action, cannot act."¹⁵ More problematically, it can shore up the discursive seductiveness of eco-penitence, through which, in Mauro J. Caraccioli's reading, transnational global capitalism continues to ensure "the contemporary diffusion of ecological responsibility" and promote "the larger Oppression Olympics of who has it worse: the stunted middle and professional classes or the working, starving, and undeserving poor."¹⁶

Indeed, seeing as the effects of the current climate emergency and the concomitant loss of biodiversity are often obscured by the inequalities in their global distribution through the circuits of "slow violence,"¹⁷ it is fair to say that we are also differentially positioned for grieving, with people most exposed to environmental decay bearing the greatest material and emotional burdens of distress and of mourning. This is why Clark suggests that we should distinguish between ecological grief, an emotion anchored in the experience of threats to or loss of a specific place or species, from a less distinct sense of "Anthropocene horror," whose affective pull insists that "more ought to be felt, hence it is also a disorientation and an unfocused guilt."¹⁸

The moral upshot of this affective ambiguity, as Deborah Bird Rose reminds us, is that species extinction has the structure of "double death," wherein death is amplified in such a way that "the

H-EcoLit





Ecokritike

19. Deborah Rose, "What if the Angel of History Were a Dog?," *Cultural Studies Review* 12, no. 1 (2006): 75.

20. Deborah Bird Rose, "Multispecies Knots of Ethical Time," *Environmental Philosophy* 9, no. 1 (2012): 128.

21. Rose, "Multispecies Knots," 136.

22. Cunsolo and Landman, *Mourning Nature*, xxi.

23. Rose, "Multispecies Knots," 136.

24. Jennifer Wenzel, *The Disposition of Nature. Environmental Crisis and World Literature* (Fordham University Press, 2020), 15.

25. Wenzel, *Disposition of Nature*, 15.

26. Wenzel, *Disposition of Nature*, 17.

27. Meeker, *Comedy of Survival*, 24.

28. Meeker, *Comedy of Survival*, 58.

29. Lauren Berlant and Sianne Ngai, "Comedy Has Issues," *Critical Inquiry* 43, no. 2 (2017): 233.

30. Mark McGurl, "The Posthuman Comedy," *Critical Inquiry* 38 (2012): 533.

balance between life and death is overrun"¹⁹ and intergenerational ecological relations can no longer be recovered and renewed. Inherent in Rose's reading of contemporary mass extinctions, then, is the recognition of "the embedded and embodied qualities" of temporality, made manifest through the "[c]onnections between generations of living beings," whose irreparable loss constitutes no less than the "multispecies murder of ethical time."²⁰ Seen through the lens of "double death," the work of mourning has to be understood as keyed to the "embodied knots of multispecies time"²¹ so that acknowledgment of shared interspecies precarity can elicit a more just response to the dead "beyond human bodies"²² and be articulated outside the expedient ethic of commodity capitalism.

Faced with both the socio-political and ontological stakes of the ongoing environmental breakdown, the ethical call of "multispecies time"²³ sets up new tests for contemporary cultural forms and interpretive practices that survey and commemorate ecological loss while also speculating about the possible post-disaster futures. Indeed, as Jennifer Wenzel shows, narrative conventions not only "provide the forms through which human understandings of nonhuman nature and its dispositions are forged,"²⁴ but also "shape our sense of what is natural, or just."²⁵ The sway of tragic, dystopian, and (post)-apocalyptic scenarios in contemporary Anthropocene fiction raises important questions about the ecological affordances of other literary forms, including comic modes, for rethinking "what counts as 'nature,' 'environment,' 'crisis,' or even 'human.'"²⁶

By and large, the ecocritical perspectives on the comic unfold along two main conceptual axes. One focuses on cultural imaginaries that measure the conditions of the social world against the laws of the (natural) environment. The other addresses the discourse of environmentalism itself, gauging the efficacy of rhetorical conventions by their capacity to incite political actions. Foundational to the first line of reasoning is the work of Joseph Meeker, who reads the comic view of life as congruent with its biological origins and subversive of the systems of morality that elevate the human above its evolutionary conditions. Unlike tragedy, which derives from man's assumption of superiority over nature, comedy, for Meeker, works against human narcissism and self-aggrandizement, landing punches at the structures of thought that enshrine man's agency and authority in the cultural narrative of progress. Insofar as evolution itself can be compared to "a gigantic comic drama" concerned with the preservation and proliferation of life, comedy sanctions "a ritual renewal of biological welfare as it persists in spite of any reasons there may be for feeling metaphysical despair."²⁷ The ecological constraints of Meeker's formalist reasoning being what they are, its conception of environmental breakdown cannot accommodate tragedy (and by extension grief), anticipating, by more than two decades, the Anthropocene tenet that environmental disasters "cannot be conceived as the moral error of an individual."²⁸

Part of the problem with Meeker's argument – and I can only address as much in this article – is how his reduction of all human systems of ethics to a version of vanity and moral expediency seduces us into accepting both a simplified image of nature and a flattened notion of comedy. What escapes his attention in the dialectic of tragic/comic is how epistemologically troubling and affectively incoherent comedy is. As Lauren Berlant and Sianne Ngai's analysis shows, "[c]omedy has issues": "it risk[s] transgressions, flirt[s] with displeasure, or just confus[es] things in a way that both intensifies and impedes the pleasure."²⁹ In this respect, Mark McGurl's concept of "the posthuman comedy"³⁰ offers a wider ambit of comic epistemology, showing how literary works, especially genre fictions, use "the spatiotemporal vastness and numerousness of the





Ecokritique

31. McGurl, "Posthuman Comedy," 537.
32. McGurl, "Posthuman Comedy," 549.
33. Mark McGurl, "Gigantic Realism: The Rise of the Novel and the Comedy of Scale," *Critical Inquiry* 43 (2017): 408.
34. Michael. P. Branch, "Are you Serious? A Modest Proposal for Environmental Humor," in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. Greg Garrard (OUP, 2013), 385.
35. Nicole Seymour, *Bad Environmentalism. Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age* (University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 6.
36. Joshua DiCaglio, "Ironic Ecology," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 2, no. 3 (2015): 459-460.
37. Seymour, *Bad Environmentalism*, 6.
38. Seymour, *Bad Environmentalism*, 7.
39. Patrick Whitmarsh, *Writing Our Extinction. Anthropocene and Vertical Science* (Stanford University Press, 2023), 30.
40. Rose, "Multispecies Knots," 136.
41. Toadvine, *Memory of the World*, 214.
42. Toadvine, *Memory of the World*, 214.

H-EcoLit



nonhuman world"³¹ to rescale humans to "forms of ontological lowliness"³² that reveals them as planetary fools rather than metaphysical sovereigns and the measure of all things.

Lodged in the posthuman comedy's scalar imaginary is the perplexity regarding human agency in the Anthropocene, where the human scale, to quote McGurl, appears "at once too small (ethically and otherwise) and too large, an irremovable burden on itself and others."³³ Recently, this paradox has lent weight to critical scholarship aiming to track the affective footprint of environmentalist discourse in an effort to pry open its propensity for earnestness, self-righteousness, and sentimentality. Michael Branch's call for humor as a response to grief is a good case in point. For too long, he says, "[e]nvironmental rhetoric has been dominated by the jeremiad – the fuming tirade aimed at those perceived as environmental backsliders – and the elegy – the self-indulgent expression of grief and mourning in the face of loss."³⁴ Nicole Seymour's analytical turn to the "dissident, often-denigrated affects and sensibilities [which] reflect critically on both our current moment and mainstream environmental art, activism, and discourse"³⁵ heeds the same intellectual concerns. Like Joshua DiCaglio, who champions irony's capacity to "act as a kind of litmus test for our ability to comprehend the implications of ecology,"³⁶ Seymour's vision of "bad environmentalism"³⁷ recruits the critical power of irony, irreverence, ambivalence, playfulness, perversity, and other related affects to forge a "non-normative, self-reflexive, and non-instrumentalist"³⁸ approach to cultural works that has the potential to liberate environmentalist thought from its fixation on piety, didacticism, and lament. Seen through the lens of irreverence, as this argument suggests, the ethical wager of laughter can embolden us to redraw the affective boundaries of grief and to risk the pleasure of uncertainty.

Understanding the conceptually and affectively stratified nature of the comic in the multiscale contexts of remembering opens interesting avenues for reading the reimagining of geological and historical pasts in Flynn's *Mammoth*. The novel's use of the conventions of the *it-narrative* brings the scales of megafauna extinctions, colonial expansion, resource extractivism, and de-extinction eschatology into a shared fold of planetary temporality. Here, the comic register becomes a medium for rethinking multispecies encounters and (pre)historical acts of aggression. Informed by the insights of affective ecocriticism and the critical analytics of "fossil labor,"³⁹ "multispecies time,"⁴⁰ and "the ecotechnical,"⁴¹ my reading of *Mammoth* pursues two main lines of inquiry. First, I examine the cultural labor of the fossil as a memory trope that brings megafauna extinctions into conversation with the human experience of violence in industrial modernity, showing how the narrative uses affective ambiguity to challenge human exceptionalism and expose the ethical and ecological costs of colonial projects. Second, I consider the ethical implications of using fossils as a trope of ecopolitics, where the narrative's championing of de-extinction recasts the impasse of Anthropocene anxiety as an eschatological promise of the techno-fix. Here I draw on Toadvine's concept of "the ecotechnical," which "makes salient the global regime of economic, technological, and political interdependence that presumes a general equivalence or interchangeability between all means and ends"⁴² while obscuring the ethical and ecological risks of scientific solutions. In so doing, I argue, the novel's comic closure becomes both emotionally cathartic and politically conformist, making the point of its critique all the more liable to its appropriation by contemporary capitalism.



Ecokritique

43. Susan Stewart, *On Longing. Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Duke University Press, 1993), 86.

44. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 5.

45. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 5.

46. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 1.

47. Claudine Cohen, *The Fate of the Mammoth. Fossils, Myth, History* (The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 102.

48. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 15.

49. Despite its awareness that mammoths and mastodons are different species, the novel uses both terms synonymously. I will follow suit, mostly opting for "mammoth" as a general term to refer to the extinct proboscideans and "mastodon" to refer to the narrator.

50. W.J.T. Mitchell, *The Last Dinosaur Book* (The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 119.

51. Cohen, *Fate of the Mammoth*, xxxiii.

52. Cohen, *Fate of the Mammoth*, 145.

53. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 10.

54. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 6.

55. Ashley Dawson, *Extinction. A Radical History* (OR Books, 2016), 21.

56. Rose, "Multispecies Knots," 136.

57. Rose, "Multispecies Knots," 131.

58. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 6.

Fossil Labor and the Politics of Multispecies Time

Flynn's use of the mastodon fossil as narrator befits both *Mammoth's* historical scope and the cultural values attached to fossils and giants as figures of memory. As Susan Stewart's analysis of aesthetic size demonstrates, the gigantic "represents the order and disorder of historical forces."⁴³ This brings the mastodon's memory work in Flynn's novel into a critical perspective. "The passage of time," Mammut tells us at the beginning of the story, "is difficult for me to parse."⁴⁴ Distanced from his Pleistocene origins by "[t]hirteen thousand, three hundred and fifty-four years,"⁴⁵ his memories shuttle across different temporal scales and locations in a way that highlights the proboscidean's own movement through time and the social values it mobilizes.

What precedes Mammut's story, however, is a letter from Thomas Jefferson, dated December 14, 1800. In it the future US President expresses his interest in "the discovery of some large bones, supposed to be of the Mammoth" and promises to "gladly pay for them whatever you shall agree to as reasonable."⁴⁶ The structural significance of this paratext is two-fold. First, it reminds us that "[t]he beginnings of vertebrate paleontology in North America can only be understood against the backdrop of the conquest of a territory and the birth of a nation by way of its political and cultural institutions."⁴⁷ Second, its metonymic logic reinforces the animating powers of prosopopoeia and personification, by means of which Flynn's mastodon fossil, "an original American"⁴⁸ exhumed by Charles Wilson Peale in 1801, is figured as a narrative mouthpiece of both the Pleistocene past and industrial modernity. Magnifying the symbolic meanings of the mammoth⁴⁹ as both the first "political animal" of the United States⁵⁰ and an image of "those ice ages that in our mind tend to merge with the earliest history of humanity,"⁵¹ the narrative purchase on scalar ambiguity sharpens the dramatic edges of the reconstructed ecologies and their resonance for Anthropocene readers. We are reminded here that the mammoth "is an essential witness to humanity's most ancient past, not only because it has served to date man's remains, but also because it was an integral part of his cultures, images, and sustenance."⁵²

The description of the Mammoth Steppe that emerges from the novel's opening pages is a Pleistocene ecology of multispecies dependencies, with the mastodons sharing the plains with "thirty million *Bison*, *Equus*, *Camelus*, *Glyptodon*, *Megalonyx*, *Ursa*, *Canis dirus*, and an endless swathe of *Smilodon*, *Panthera* and *Acinonyx*, all of whom were, quite frankly, a pain in the rectum."⁵³ The comic rendition of the scientific terms jars viscerally with Mammut's memories of early hominids, which highlight the conditions of violence and abuse that shaped the life of Pleistocene creatures: "You used our bones to fashion ever more complex butchery devices. You burnt the grasslands and forests. You starved us. You drove us to our deaths over cliffs."⁵⁴ Implicit in the list of the narrator's accusations is the modern scientific reckoning of megafauna extinctions, placing the Clovis-linked Pleistocene defaunaution⁵⁵ in parallel to the contemporary experience of "double death"⁵⁶ in the Anthropocene. Indeed, the ethical thrust of Mammut's thinking about species life chimes well with Rose's idea of the "knots of embodied time"⁵⁷: "When one of us dies, the experiences of thousands disappear with them [...] To kill a mammoth is to kill its primogenitors."⁵⁸

In the context of hominid attacks, Mammut's recollection of an alliance with the dire wolves foregrounds the multispecies relationality that constitutes the material fabric of nature's generational knots: both species cooperate in an attempt to postpone their impending annihilation, where in a moment of bleak irony, the leader of the dire wolf pack tells Mammut: "I

H-EcoLit





59. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 48.

60. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 8.

61. Zong and Bisenieks, "Dark Humour," 6.

62. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 8.

63. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 70.

64. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 72.

65. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 72-73.

66. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 73.

67. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 40.

68. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 207.

69. Caitlin Macdonald, "Animal Communication in Hyper-Contemporary Australian Literature: Genre, Ethics, and Climate Change" (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 2025), 133.

70. Mitchell, *Last Dinosaur Book*, 62.

71. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 12.

72. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 57-58.

fear we are entering the age of man."⁵⁹ That said, the narrator's teasing of Clovis' lack of hygiene, while also comparing their resilience to "the ferocity of a cave bear,"⁶⁰ knits the hominids into the multispecies texture of the Pleistocene in a way that showcases humor's "exploration and expression of evolving biocultural perspectives on living in climate-changing worlds."⁶¹ The analogy is particularly suggestive in Mammut's killing of a hunter by "plac[ing] a foot on [his] chest and press[ing] down until [his] heart was crushed."⁶² This scene echoes in Mammut's mercy killing of the dying alpha wolf: "I raised my foot, brought it down on his neck and it was over."⁶³

Despite their solidarity and collaboration, neither the wolves nor the mastodons survive the compound effects of the melting glaciers and wily Clovis. Mortally wounded and unable to locate the mastodon graveyards and join his ancestors, the narrator staggers into a forest clearing, where, in a scene reminiscent of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, Mammut follows a fox, who promises that in death he will meet "[a]ll the Mammut that ever lived."⁶⁴ Wondering if his kind would "live on, elsewhere, out of reach of man, somewhere in abyssal time?,"⁶⁵ the mastodon watches the dancing waves of aurora borealis and accepts that his earthly sojourn "had come to an end."⁶⁶ Paradoxically, however, despite the narrative's emphasis on the grievability of nonhuman life, his death ultimately escapes the reader's emotional grasp. This is in no small measure due to how Flynn's poetic description of the mastodon's passing troubles the affective relay of remembering and grief, so that our recognition of Mammut's sad passing finds itself at odds with the logic of animation that moves the "historical jibber jabber"⁶⁷ of the novel's plot. For all intents and purposes, Mammut lives on. Not only that, he performs the work of a historian, reinforcing his own point that "[h]istory is written by the survivors [. . .]."⁶⁸

Importantly, the mastodon is not the only fossil whose stories mediate the novel's perspective on the loss of planetary life. There is also the Mongolian *Tyrannosaurus bataar*, *Palaeo*, the ancient Patagonian penguin, and the German *Pterodactylus*, whose recollections of the Nazis' fascination with a Bavarian mammoth offset the comic hijinks of the Mesozoic and Miocene fossils. The presence of the mummified hand of Queen Hatshepsut amplifies Flynn's speculative conceit, refiguring the narrators into oral witnesses, even as they turn into commodified objects. As Caitlin Macdonald observes in her PhD thesis, "Flynn employs oral testimony and irreverence to interrogate the objectification of animals and their relegation to symbols of human power, strength, and potency."⁶⁹ In this respect, *T. bataar*'s comic interruptions and interventions are particularly interesting in terms of how they convey the narrative's buddy act logic and structure the relationship between the tragic and the comic in *Mammoth*.

Exhumed only in 1991, Flynn's Mesozoic fossil's fondness for vulgarities and comic banter stays close to the "kitsch" and "juvenile wonder"⁷⁰ that W.J.T. Mitchell underlines in the cultural discourse on dinosaurs. For example, when running short on patience with the tragic flair of the mastodon's storytelling, *T. bataar* asks him to "[c]ut me a break, furball," pointing out that he is "just a teenager, really, when you think about it. *Teenage rex*" and "an immigrant too", English being "not my first language, bro."⁷¹ If Mammut laments the disappearance of Pleistocene plenitude and the violence of death, *T. bataar*'s account of his own demise from a mortal wound eschews the elegiac drift of the mastodon's tale: "I'd lost a lot of blood and eventually the old pins gave way but by that time I was clear of the flow [of lava]. Don't get me wrong, I still popped my clogs but at least I wasn't burnt to death. That would be quite painful, wouldn't it?"⁷²





Ecokritike

73. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 58-59.

74. McGurl, "Posthuman Comedy," 537.

75. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 18.

76. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants. Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minnesota University Press, 1999), 165.

77. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants*, xvii-xviii.

78. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 111.

79. Zong and Bisenieks, "Dark Humour," 19.

80. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 16.

81. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 62.

82. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 14.

83. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 84.

84. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 65.

85. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 102.

His rendition of the Cretaceous extinction event is similarly scaled down to the asteroid's comic timing:

A big one arrived about two million years after I carked it and slammed into Earth – BOOM! That thing came down hard. Must have made one hell of a crater. All the dirt and water and whichever poor schmucks happened to be standing around chewing the cud and minding their own business suddenly found themselves up in the air – WHOOSH! [...] No, that was it for us. Dead, dead, dead. An extinction-level event, the hominids call it. An ELE. Pretty cool, as long as it ain't happening to you. They'll get theirs eventually. Then who'll be laughing?⁷³

Insofar as this description works to solicit laughter while also making available to human imagination what is unavailable to cultural memory, it draws on the onomatopoeic resources of the comics tradition, amplifying the ironic absence of the material referents evoked by the sound riffs. At the same time, in recasting dinosaurs as receivers of the comic moment in deep time, Flynn is also repurposing humor for pessimism, which trails our own sense of the unfolding environmental catastrophe. Contiguous with the ethical stakes of the "posthuman comedy,"⁷⁴ *T. bataar's* send-up of Mesozoic doom is also a comic indictment of the human delusions of ontological superiority and planetary domination: in the face of "[c]ataclysmic environmental damage," he says, "[t]hese puny cockroaches don't stand a chance."⁷⁵

The affective incongruities of narrative perspectives in *Mammoth* align with the dominant cultural representations of gigantism and monstrosity, which link the novel's charismatic megafauna to the material contingencies and social institutions of human life. "Laughter and giants," writes Jerome Jeffrey Cohen, "have always coexisted in some monstrous form."⁷⁶ This is in no small part because giants have been foundational to "the structure of subjectivity, as both its limit and its history in eternal return."⁷⁷ Repurposed for the traffic of megafauna memories in *Mammoth*, the cultural freight of gigantism foregrounds the ways in which the geological dimension of the novel's historical imaginary and its affective provocations cast in relief the ironic contradictions of both "fossilife"⁷⁸ and the social life of power. In so doing, Flynn's novel reinforces Zong and Bisenieks' point that "humorous cultural works offer refreshing ways to engage and question the fault lines of society, affective frictions in eco-political realities, and mainstream environmentalist dialecticism."⁷⁹ Now reduced to a selection of bones, Mammut remarks: "We represent power, for that is what we were: Behemoths. Colossi. Titans."⁸⁰

A significant instance of irony in the it-narrator's remembering concerns the role of fossils in the nineteenth-century scientific dispute over the span of planetary history and the question of species extinction. Here, the narrative focuses on Paris, where Mammut's bones are transported from Peale's museum in Philadelphia. Keen to showcase "American might"⁸¹ and overthrow Comte de Buffon's derisory claim that "animals in America were weaker, smaller and fewer in number than in the rest of the world,"⁸² Peale sends his son Rembrandt and former slave Moses to Paris to display the reconstructed mastodon to paleontologist Georges Cuvier and the French scientific community. Insofar as the resurrected beast is meant to "fly in the face of accepted dogma,"⁸³ which holds that "the earth is six thousand years old, give or take the few days it took their God to cobble it all together,"⁸⁴ the display does provoke a vigorous discussion. The defenders of the scientific orthodoxy make their case against catastrophism: "Entire species do not simply vanish from existence. It is against the laws of nature."⁸⁵ By contrast, Cuvier emerges as "the first biped to correctly speculate as to the fate of all our kind," retorting to his critics that "it is my firmly held belief that there existed a world previous to our own, a world without man, ruled





86. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 103.
87. Cohen, *Fate of the Mammoth*, 115.
88. W.J. T. Mitchell, "Romanticism and the Life of Fossils, Totems, and Images," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001): 176.
89. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 195.
90. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 121.
91. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 122.
92. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 37.
93. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 123.
94. Whitmarsh, *Writing Our Extinction*, 30.
95. Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 3.
96. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 61.
97. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 126.
98. Rose, "Multispecies Knots," 136.

by huge, cold-blooded creatures."⁸⁶ Cuvier's conception of time, as does us well to remember, "is the discontinuous time of geological catastrophes,"⁸⁷ a scientific perspective which, in Mitchell's words, helped redefine fossils as "a metaphor for human as well as natural history and specifically for the human relics left behind by the French Revolution."⁸⁸

Requisite to Cuvier's scientific view on fossils, however, is his thinking about human species, which makes manifest how the geontological distinction between life and nonlife in the nineteenth century worked in tandem with the biopolitical scaling of humanity based on race. For example, Flynn's Cuvier regrets that Moses is "of Ethiopian origin"⁸⁹ because his "studies show there are three distinct races of man. Caucasian, Mongolian and Ethiopian,"⁹⁰ with Caucasians constituting "the master race."⁹¹ Knowing that Moses is "still the technical property of CW until he turned twenty-seven," Mammut castigates the ethical and ecological costs of colonialism and racial capitalism: "The bipeds are obsessed with staking their claim over places, people and things. [. . .] No beast of air, land or sea ever asserted the right of possession over another creature, except to devour it. The hominids don't even eat each other anymore."⁹² What this humorous take on social oppression reveals is that science, too, offers a way for humans to annihilate and consume one another. Intrigued by Moses' intellect, Cuvier admits he would love to examine his cerebellum, adding "Once you are dead, of course."⁹³

The obscenity of this request calls attention to how geological and paleontological research in the novel is shown to be part of a project of social engineering that blends imperial science with colonial politics and uses both animal bones and racialized bodies to ground ideas about life and subjectivity in relation to resource extraction, plantation slavery, and land dispossession. Patrick Whitmarsh's notion of "fossil labor" and Kathryn Yusoff's reading of the politics of geology are useful here. "Fossil labor" defines "a practice of cyclical exploitation in which Black bodies are managerially forced to work the earth while simultaneously being associated or identified with the earth."⁹⁴ For Yusoff, this becomes possible because the science of geology itself derives from the categorization of life and nonlife through the extraction of properties and property from (bodily) matter: "Geology is a mode of accumulation, on one hand, and of dispossession, on the other, depending on which side of the geologic color line you end up on."⁹⁵

In *Mammoth*, the ideology of "fossil labor" frames Moses's social experience as a racially marginalized subject. The narrative highlights his metonymic intimacy with the geological: in Philadelphia, Moses reconstructs the mastodon and "poses as a Native American Indian, complete with elaborate headdress"⁹⁶ to advertise the display; in Paris, he visits Mammut every evening when the exhibition is closed. Lamenting the public's abuse of Mammut's bones, Moses acknowledges their kinship: "The Ethiopian and the Mammoth. We are two clowns for their amusement."⁹⁷ This ethical relationship tests the novel's narrative commitment to addressing the legacies of colonial violence and restoring the parameters of "multispecies time."⁹⁸ A nexus of intersecting historical threads, political contexts, cultural codes, and affective registers, the animated fossil in Flynn's novel seems an apt metaphor for the Anthropocene's ethical reckoning with both planetary memory and human social legacies.

The Tall Tale of Comic Closure

That *Mammoth* delivers its critique of scientific racism through the narrative device of the it-narrator has important implications for our reading of the tangled destinies of humans and





100. Henry Gee, *In Search of Deep Time. Beyond the Fossil Record to a New History of Life* (Cornell University Press, 1999), 46.

101. Cohen, *Fate of the Mammoth*, 2.

102. Brian Noble, *Articulating Dinosaurs. A Political Anthropology* (Toronto University Press, 2016), 13.

103. Noble, *Articulating Dinosaurs*, 7.

104. Noble, *Articulating Dinosaurs*, 99.

105. Noble, *Articulating Dinosaurs*, 68.

106. Zong and Bisenieks, "Dark Humour," 6.

107. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 83.

108. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 15.

109. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 127.

110. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 142.

111. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 140.

112. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 233.

113. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 234.

fossils in the novel. Indeed, Mammut's self-description as an Irish *seanchaí*⁹⁹ prompts us to recall paleontologist Henry Gee's claim that "[f]ossils are mute. Unable to tell us their stories, we tell their stories for them, to flatter our own prejudices [. . .]."¹⁰⁰ All the more important, then, is how by foregrounding the social performance of "fossilife" in different historical contexts, *Mammoth* also shows us that, to quote Claudine Cohen, "reconstruction embodies not only science's concepts and techniques, but the images and dreams of an era."¹⁰¹ Insofar as Flynn's *it-narrative* offers a literary equivalent of fossil resurrection, Brian Noble's concept of "the specimen-spectacle complex"¹⁰² seems well suited to delineate the ethical and epistemological implications of the novel's satirical animation of extinct nonhuman subjectivity. Locating fossilized megafauna in the traffic between scientific epistemologies, museal practices, aesthetic conventions, and cultural imaginaries that produce the "articulating power"¹⁰³ of our planetary past, Noble's anthropological reading shows that our explanatory frames always stage nature as a politics. This politics is "meant for particular publics and particular purposes" and "assembles certain kinds of agents and things, non-humans and humans, into collective relations."¹⁰⁴ Shuttling across different scales of space and time, Mammut, too, operates as a politically animated figure: a curator of multispecies memories and histories, on the one hand, and a critical analyst of carbon modernity's "habitual performances of the manly, the imperial, the capitalist, and the expansionist,"¹⁰⁵ on the other.

Inherent in the fossil's twofold epistemological orientation is Flynn's understanding that eco-comedy works across scales, connecting seemingly discontinuous temporalities into a narrative complex of knowledge and affect, made manifest most explicitly in the novel's intertwined accounts of the colonial experiences of the Irish, Black, and Indigenous peoples. Here, too, Flynn's use of humor aligns with Zong and Bisenieks' observation that the comic register "enables inquiries into the eco-social dimensions of biodiversity loss as they intersect with issues of belonging, accountability and nonhuman agency in the wake of settler colonialism."¹⁰⁶ The comic resonance of Peale's dream "to make America great again,"¹⁰⁷ for example, reframes the figure of the mastodon in relation to both the colonial past and the current moment so that Mammut's satirizing of the politics of "overcompensation for the feelings of inadequacy"¹⁰⁸ carries the novel's critique of the intersecting legacies of imperialism, racism, and extractivism. In this respect, Moses' observation that the Irish "are slaves too, after a fashion"¹⁰⁹ prepares the ground for Mammut's account of the Irish insurrection of 1803. Its dark humor also links up with the descriptions of the Indigenous people's clashes with the colonial settlers, revealing through their comic violence the material continuity between human bodies and fossilized bones.

Keyed to the affective slippages of grievability, the synecdochic depiction of the mastodon bones scattered across Shawnee lands, with "[t]usks and femurs and teeth everywhere [. . .] as if the hellyphants had only died a couple of year back,"¹¹⁰ ties in with the images of the dead bodies and extinguished fires looking "like rotten teeth planted in the dirt"¹¹¹ after the Shawnee raid on a settler outpost. At the same time, Mammut's observation that by the end of the nineteenth century "[t]he Shawnee were mostly gone" too, with twenty-first-century developers planning to turn their forested land into "a hillside casino resort,"¹¹² is a good reminder of how US colonial politics brought about the conditions of an Indigenous apocalypse whose traumatic effects haunt the social ecologies of our own time. Correlative to the destruction of Indigenous livelihood, the mastodon fossil is also "little more than money lying on the ground", sold in the auction in order "to finance a gambling den."¹¹³





Ecokritike

114. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 134.
115. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 152.
116. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 244.
117. Macdonald, "Animal Communication," 149-150.
118. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 244.
119. Seymour, *Bad Environmentalism*, 1.
120. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 250.
121. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 249.
122. Macdonald, "Animal Communication," 153.
123. Macdonald, "Animal Communication," 151.
124. Toadvine, *Memory of the World*, 214.
125. Nicolai Skiverin, "Humour as Hope? On Critique and Affirmation in Ecological Parody and Satire," *Environmental Humanities* 16, no. 2 (2024): 441.

H-EcoLit



As an affective trope of ecopolitics, the fossil's link to human suffering occasions Flynn's reappraisal of disaster as a vessel for both tragedy *and* comedy. Here too, the novel leans into synecdochic logic, enabling Mammut to reject accusations of telling tall tales and explain his knowledge of history by virtue of having one of his molars end up in the pocket of Caoimhe O'Neill, a participant in the Irish rebellion of 1803. Despite her romantic dalliance with Moses in Paris, where she fails to secure French support for the republican cause, Caoimhe organizes the theft of Mammut's bones and transports them to the Guinness brewery in Dublin. Her plan is to sell the bones for the benefit of Irish anticolonial activities. Unsurprisingly, the episode's darkly comic denouement gives Mammut another opportunity to land a punch at human hubris when he recalls that Arthur Guinness also had a great plan when he signed a lease that runs out in the year 10,759, when, according to the fossil narrator, "[t]here simply won't be any hominids around, or Guinness for that matter."¹¹⁴

The inadequacy of Irish weapons gives similar cause for mockery, where the sight gags of "the long poles with sharpened metal tips," which "had a tendency to bow" and were "impractical against projectile weapons,"¹¹⁵ reiterate the scalar profile of Clovis spears in a way that not only anticipates the Irish rebels' defeat but also aligns them with the extinct creatures. A related use of disaster humor characterizes the description of an explosion resulting from the negligent dispatching of a burning taper onto the ground covered with gunpowder. Here, the sting of comic horror lingers in the tragic fate of the remaining rebels, who are imprisoned, hanged, and beheaded, their bones disappearing not unlike the buried fossils.

If *Mammoth's* cross-cutting through layers of time moves in line with the *it-narrative's* satirical gambit, then its closing with "Epilogus hominum" and "Epilogus mammut" plays with the conventions of the genre in a way that troubles its ethical relationship with anthropogenic extinction and gives both memory and comedy grief. Narrated by Flynn and placed outside of the novel's diegetic frame, "Epilogus hominum" takes stock of the proceedings of the New York auction while also cueing us to the capitalist plunder of both dead and living megafauna defined as "a finite resource."¹¹⁶ As Macdonald rightly notes, "Flynn's authorial presence in the epilogue allows him to directly comment on the absurdities of the fossil auction, where relics of deep time are reduced to collectibles for celebrities like Nicolas Cage, Leonardo DiCaprio, Russell Crowe, and John Oliver."¹¹⁷ At the same time, Flynn's injunction "If you see it, don't buy it."¹¹⁸ does not square easily with the idea of species revivalism with which he closes the novel. At best, it ignores the ethical and economic stakes of the ongoing scientific debate surrounding de-extinction projects, obscuring the ways in which sociopolitical and environmental issues "compound one another."¹¹⁹

Functioning as a comic *parabasis*, "Epilogus mammut" places the *it-narrator* in the Pleistocene Park in Siberia, where he champions de-extinction and rewilding as a "mammoth solution" to "a mammoth problem."¹²⁰ Indeed, Mammut waxes lyrical about the salvific power of human technology: "I am alone no more. The great herd has been restored. Somehow, those bipeds I always resented for their wanton savagery found a way to undo their mistakes. They have wound back the clock and, discovered a means of cheating oblivion. Annihilation has been averted."¹²¹ Tempting though it is to accept Macdonald's reading of Flynn's vision as an effort "to mend"¹²² and offer "a path toward renewal amidst ecological loss,"¹²³ we must also acknowledge that in so doing, the narrative pledges its ethics to the promise of "the ecotechnical"¹²⁴ as a vehicle of hope that scholars of eco-comedy claim is "necessary in moving beyond the debilitating registers of apocalyptic rhetoric and crisis discourse."¹²⁵



126. Britt Wray, *The Rise of the Necrofauna. The Science, Ethics, and Risks of De-Extinction* (Greystone Books, 2017), 113.

127. Stephen D. Turner et al., "De-extinction Technology and its Application to Conservation," *Journal of Heredity* 00 (2025): 8.

128. Ben Ware, *On Extinction. Beginning Again at the End* (Verso, 2024), 94.

129. Dawson, *Extinction*, 77.

130. Ware, *On Extinction*, 94.

131. Thom van Dooren and Deborah Bird Rose, "Keeping Faith with the Dead: Mourning and De-extinction," *Zoologist* 38 (2017): 377.

132. Van Dooren and Bird Rose, "Keeping Faith with the Dead," 376.

133. Emily Thew, "Narcissistic Attachments," *Environmental Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2017): 112.

134. Flynn, *Mammoth*, 252.

As a metaphor for de-extinction eschatology, the Pleistocene Park speaks on behalf of ecological ethics that promote scientific achievement, the recovery of lost and creation of new value, and conservationist efforts to enhance species survival and biodiversity. In *Rise of the Necrofauna*, Britt Wray describes the park "as a giant rewilding experiment that is trying to return the ecosystem to what it was like ten thousand years ago."¹²⁶ The mammoth in this ecosystem is a keystone species, whose presence on the steppe would reduce soil moisture, keep carbon locked up in the permafrost, and consolidate ecosystem resilience.¹²⁷ Given the promise of apparent ecological benefits, it is hardly surprising that the "resurrection" of the woolly mammoth is one of the most important de-extinction projects developed by the US-based company *Colossal Biosciences*. Indeed, given their success in bio-engineering dire wolves in 2025, the de-extinction of the mammoth is no longer a fantasy or a tall tale but a tall order in economic, ecological, and ethical senses.

On the seemingly positive side, philosopher Ben Ware argues, "resurrection biology offers a redemptive counternarrative to the pessimism that pervades much ecological discourse."¹²⁸ However, it replaces the language of crisis with the language of eschatological hope, all the while concealing the work of capital as it commodifies nature through the political endorsement of scientific solutions that reinstate the human as the source of epistemological authority, ecological penitence, and ecotechnical might. In Ashley Dawson's words, "The fundamental problem with de-extinction is that it relies on the thoroughgoing manipulation and commodification of nature, and as such dovetails perfectly with *biocapitalism*."¹²⁹ From this perspective, de-extinction may be seen as an "extreme instance of the *anthropocenic sublime*," generating "new forms of 'wonder and awe' on the back of global planetary wreckage"¹³⁰ without addressing the causes of extinction or preventing their proliferation.

This is why the ecopolitical celebration of de-extinction in *Mammoth* ultimately forecloses its comic reckoning with anthropocentrism that the novel ostensibly claims to pursue. If we understand extinction as an ethical call "to dwell with our actions and their consequences,"¹³¹ as Thom van Dooren and Rose aptly put it, then thinking about the loss of planetary life requires mourning as a means of remaking multispecies relations of time. Framed this way, de-extinction becomes "an ostentatious display of bad faith toward both the living and the dead,"¹³² reinforcing what Emily Thew has identified as the narcissistic basis of de-extinction discourse, which capitalizes on our affective attachments to particular extinct species by virtue of their inherence in the construction of the human ego.¹³³ In this respect, the eschatological appeal of charismatic megafauna in *Mammoth* makes for a similarly unsettling reading of species revivalism. Glossing over the social and political implications of bio-engineering, Flynn turns away from ecological grief to embrace the promise of the techno-fix as a human "epiphany", which gives "another chance"¹³⁴ to the mammoths, all the while putting in suspension Mammut's comic derogations of the vanity of human exceptionalism.

Conclusion

The comic labor of the *it-narrative* in *Mammoth* sets up an ambivalent intervention into the memorial space of extinction as a culturally legible form. In making the trope of the animated fossil the site of conjoined histories of geological and industrial pasts, Flynn illuminates the ethical scope of humor as a form of memory work that enables us to dwell both *on* and *with* the legacies of social and ecological violence and the loss of planetary life. In the novel's affective





relay of the tragic and the comic resides the political value of ecological grief, which holds the promise of staying with the trouble in a way that knits humans back into "multispecies time"¹³⁵ and reinforces the benefits of humor for contemporary environmental thought. Flynn's staging of species resurrection, however, impedes the plasticity of the novel's comic argument. By sidestepping the bioethical implications of de-extinction projects, wherein the value of life is made contingent on its proximity to capital, *Mammoth's* closure runs the risk of upending the work of its acerbic humor, recasting the pressures of the ongoing ecological disruptions as commodified pleasures of the techno-fix rather than an ethical call for a new ecopolitics for the Anthropocene.





Ecokritike

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Albrecht, Glenn. *Earth Emotions. New Words for a New World*. Cornell University Press, 2019.

Bellamy, Liz. "It-Narrators and Circulation: Defining a Subgenre." In *The Secret Life of Things. Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England*, edited by M. Blackwell, 117-146. Bucknell University Press, 2014.

Berlant, Lauren, and Ngai, Sianne. "[Comedy Has Issues](#)." *Critical Inquiry* 43, no. 2 (2017): 233-249

Bladow, Kyle, and Jennifer Ladino, eds. *Affective Ecocriticism. Emotion, Embodiment, Environment*. University of Nebraska Press, 2018.

Branch, Michael. P. "Are you Serious? A Modest Proposal for Environmental Humor." In *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, edited by G. Garrard, 377-390 OUP, 2013.

Burton-Christie, Douglas. "The Gift of Tears: Loss, Mourning and the Work of Ecological Restoration." *Worldviews*, no. 15 (2011): 29-26.

Butler, Judith. *Frames of War. When is Life Grievable?* Verso, 2016.

Caracioli, Mauro J. "A Sorrowful Storm. Between Penitence and Anthropolitics in the Anthropocene." In *Between Catastrophe and Revolution: Essays in Honor of Mike Davis*, edited by D. Bertrand Monk and M. Sorkin, 11-27. Terreform/UR, 2021.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "The Climate of History: Four Theses." *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): 197-222.

Clark, Timothy. "[Ecological Grief and Anthropocene Horror](#)." *American Imago* 77, no. 1 (2020): 61-80.

Cohen, Claudine. *The Fate of the Mammoth. Fossils, Myth, and History*. The University of Chicago Press, 2002.

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. *Of Giants. Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages*. Minnesota University Press, 1999.

Cunsolo, Ashlee, and Karen Landman, eds. *Mourning Nature. Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017.

Dawson, Ashley. *Extinction: A Radical History*. OR Books, 2016.

DiCaglio, Joshua. "[Ironie Ecology](#)." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 2, no. 3 (2015): 447-465.

Flynn, Chris. *Mammoth*. UQP, 2020.

H-EcoLit



Gee, Henry. *In Search of Deep Time. Beyond the Fossil Record to a New History of Life*. Cornell University Press, 1999.

Heise, Ursula K. *Imagining Extinction. The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species*. The University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Lamb, Jonathan. *The Things Things Say*. Princeton University Press, 2011.

Macdonald, Caitlin. "Animal Communication in Hyper-Contemporary Australian Literature: Genre, Ethics, and Climate Change." PhD diss., University of Sydney, 2025.

McGurl, Mark. "[The Posthuman Comedy](#)." *Critical Inquiry* 38, no. 3 (2012): 533-553.

McGurl, Mark. "[Gigantic Realism: The Rise of the Novel and the Comedy of Scale](#)." *Critical Inquiry* 43, no. 2 (2017): 403-430.

Meeker, Joseph W. *The Comedy of Survival. Studies in Literary Ecology*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974.

Mitchell, W. J. T. "[Romanticism and the Life of Fossils, Totems, and Images](#)." *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001): 167-184.

Mitchell, W. J. T. *The Last Dinosaur Book*. The University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press, 2011.

Noble, Brian. *Articulating Dinosaurs. A Political Anthropology*. Toronto University Press, 2016.

Povinelli, Elizabeth A. *Geontologies. A Requiem to Late Liberalism*. Duke University Press, 2016.

Rose, Deborah Bird. "Multispecies Knots of Ethical Time." *Environmental Philosophy* 9, no. 1 (2012): 127-140.

Rose, Deborah. "What if the Angel of History Were a Dog?" *Cultural Studies Review* 12, no. 1 (2006): 67-78.

Seymour, Nicole. *Bad Environmentalism. Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age*. University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

Skiverin, Nicolai. "[Humour as Hope? On Critique and Affirmation in Ecological Parody and Satire](#)." *Environmental Humanities* 16, no. 2 (2024): 441-459.

Sköld, Alfred. "[Climate Melancholia](#)." *Environmental Humanities* 17, no. 2 (2025): 449-464.

Stewart, Susan. *On Longing. Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Duke University Press, 1993.

Thew, Emily. "Narcissistic Attachments." *Environmental Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2017): 101-118.





Toadvine, Ted. *The Memory of the World. Deep Time, Animality, and Eschatology*. University of Minnesota Press, 2024.

Turner Stephen D., Anna Keyte, Andrew Pask, Beth Shapiro. "[De-extinction Technology and its Application to Conservation](#)." *Journal of Heredity* 00 (2025): 1-16, esaf069.

Van Dooren, Thom, and Deborah Bird Rose. "Keeping Faith with the Dead: Mourning and De-extinction." *Zoologist* 38 (2017): 375-378.

Ware, Ben. *On Extinction. Beginning at the End*. Verso, 2024.

Wenzel, Jennifer. *The Disposition of Nature. Environmental Crisis and World Literature*. Fordham University Press, 2020.

Whitmarsh, Patrick. *Writing Our Extinction. Anthropocene and Vertical Science*. Stanford University Press, 2023.

Wray, Britt. *Rise of the Necrofauna. The Science, Ethics, and Risks of De-Extinction*. Greystone Books, 2017.

Yusoff, Kathryn. *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*. University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

Zong, Emily Yu, and Daisy Bisenieks. "[Dark Humour and Invasive Species Storytelling in the Age of Extinction](#)." *Journal of Australian Studies* 49, no. 1 (2025): 4–21.



AUTHOR BIO

Rūta Šlapkauskaitė (email: ruta.slapkauskaite@flf.vu.lt) is Associate Professor of English literature at Vilnius University, Lithuania. Her research interests include Canadian and Australian literature, neo-Victorianism, and environmental humanities. Among her recent publications are articles on Canadian authors Fred Stenson, Emma Donoghue, and Ed O'Loughlin, and Australian writer Richard Flanagan. Rūta is currently researching the conceptual affordances of genre in narrating the climate emergency in contemporary Anglophone literature.

OPEN ACCESS

© 2026 by the author. Licensee [H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online](https://h-net.org/). This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the **Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License** (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.en>).

HOW TO CITE

Šlapkauskaitė, Rūta. "Funny Bones: What Comes to Grief in Chris Flynn's *Mammoth* ." *Ecokritike* vol. 3, no. 2 (2026): 367–383. <https://doi.org/10.33823/eke.2026.3.2.531>.

ABOUT THE JOURNAL

Ecokritike is a peer-reviewed, open access journal from [H-EcoLit](https://h-net.org/), a network of [H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online](https://h-net.org/), and is published through the [H-Net Journals](https://journals.h-net.org/) initiative. It can be found online at <https://journals.h-net.org/ecokritike>.

