

# Situating Solastalgia within Climate Fiction: Anthropogenic Expansions of Dystopian Fiction

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**Abstract:** Climate fiction is a relatively new sub-genre of science fiction, gaining notoriety in the last decade. Throughout cli-fi familiar landscapes are framed by solastalgia—a relatively new term that describes mental distress triggered by environmental change—emphasizing to readers the catastrophic environmental effects of contemporary, ‘right now’ human choices. Using solastalgia as a framing device, this chapter offers an ecocritical analysis of Joyce Carol Oates’ “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” (2019) which contemporizes the environmental sins of man within a landscape that is eerily familiar, but clearly apocalyptic. In emphasizing the ways that environmental landscapes are shaped by human choices, this article offers a holistic approach to reading solastalgia; a reading not grounded in solely in Western, monological, and colonial constructs of science, but extending into the axiological inclinations of the humanities that contextualize human relationships with surrounding landscapes as dialogic and constructivist. Situating solastalgia at the core of the cli-fi genre, this chapter will offer a reading of “Sinners” that

examines the many interconnected dimensions of natureculture, emphasizing the competing forces of the human condition at play across dystopic, climate fiction.

**Keywords:** Solastalgia, cli-fi, natureculture, Joyce Carol Oates, dystopia

Initially, the question is: Who in our circle will die first?

Then: Who is next?

Then: Don’t Ask.

(Oates, 2019: 65)

These lines are taken from Joyce Carol Oates’ short story, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” published in the *New Yorker’s* fiction section in October 2019. The frontispiece image that accompanies the narrative features a green, surgical face mask (an object we are intimately familiar with now, but one which held much less significance at the time of publication) set against flames. Both these flames and the story’s title reference a much earlier text of the same name, authored by American theologian Jonathan Edwards.

However, whereas Edwards' 1741 sermon situates God as a wrathful and vengeful arbiter of the sins of man, Oates' short story recasts and contemporises sin in the context of environmental catastrophe. Whilst both the story's imagery and the selected epigraph presage the ensuing COVID-19 pandemic, this post-publication context might encourage contemporary readers to interpret the story from an anthropocentric perspective. Although the epigraph is most easily related to the human characters of the narrative, a closer reading of the text—one which decenters human perspectives and centralises those of the landscape—gives readers pause and positions ethical questions not only in terms of the story's human actors, but also throughout the fiery landscape wherein the narrative is set.

"Sinners," is a story of climate catastrophe which falls under the burgeoning category of climate fiction (cli-fi). A subgenre of science fiction, cli-fi has steadily gained significance over the last several decades; in the last decade alone, "[l]iterature focused on climate change has become a major trend in English-language publishing and reading" (Schneider-Mayerson, 2018: 473). Cli-fi texts work to resituate human relationships with nature, particularly in relation to dystopian catastrophes characterised by human illness, infection, and infirmity. The subgenre situates nature, and natureculture broadly, in terms of the corporeal, emphasising and interrogating the catastrophic environmental effects of human choice. As defined, "[n]atureculture is a concept that emerges from the scholarly interrogation of dualisms that are deeply embedded within the intellectual traditions of the sciences and humanities (e.g., human/animal; nature/culture)" (Malone & Ovenden, 2006: 1). Such dualisms regularly pervade the dystopian themes of cli-fi, manifesting across landscapes

roiling with the many horrors of environmental destruction.

A recurrent theme that is exacerbated by such readings of natureculture is duplicity, as characters endeavor to survive in a 'brave new world' whilst attempting to maintain the semblance of a near, but increasingly distant past. In cli-fi texts this longing can be theoretically framed via solastalgia—a twenty-first century term originally used to describe mental distress triggered by environmental change (Albrecht, 2003). More recently, solastalgia has been framed in terms of physical illnesses, particularly those heightened by the catastrophic environmental effects on landscapes caused by contemporary 'right now' human choices. To position the human experience as one framed by natureculture accentuates solastalgia and also incites deep-seated fears of unknown futures. By offering a close reading of Oates' "Sinners," this article positions solastalgia as an important trope within both cli-fi literature and environmental humanities scholarship, situating environmental distress as not simply medical, but also sociocultural. This fosters acknowledgement that "[a]s a species, [...] we are not aloof from our biosphere, however great our power to alter it; we are enmeshed within it. The decimation of plant and animal life entails the potential destruction of humanity" (Hughes & Wheeler, 2013: 4). Solastalgia—which I argue is inherently an extension of natureculture—is used as a framing device to offer an ecocritical analysis of Oates' "Sinners," and explore how the story contemporises the environmental sins of man within a landscape that is eerily familiar, but clearly apocalyptic. In emphasising the ways that environmental landscapes are shaped by human choices, this article offers a holistic approach to reading solastalgia, one which examines the many interconnected dimensions of natureculture and considers the competing

forces of the human condition at play across dystopian, climate fiction.

I begin by examining various aspects of the cli-fi genre, followed by a review of the ways that scholars have situated solastalgia as an interdisciplinary concept. I then offer an overview and close reading of Oates' text in order to reposition solastalgia as a narrative device operative within cli-fi. This move attends to the ways that speculative landscape representations within cli-fi are framed by both place and health, and positions the landscapes we live in as actant and agentive territories. On these grounds, I argue that a defining feature of twenty-first century cli-fi is a lack of separation between human and environment. As such, this article points to ways that cli-fi texts work within the genre of speculative fiction to disrupt human-centric experiences, intertwining human existence with the natural world—a world that, while increasingly shaped by the human hand, is anything but tamed.

Dystopian fiction, itself a subgenre of speculative fiction, emerged in the nineteenth century as a response to utopian literature. Now, more than a hundred years later, as climate change escalates and ensuing climate catastrophes become increasingly normalised across our daily lives, media, and popular culture, it has proven necessary to coin a further and even more-specific genre-label for narratives that embody “dystopian visions of post-apocalyptic futures” (Kotva & Mebius, 2021). Cli-fi is “[c]haracterized most frequently by efforts to imagine the impact of drastic climatological change on human life and perceptions, cli-fi narratives can be set in the past, present, or near future of the planet” (Irr, 2017: online). Moreover, cli-fi narratives are now prevalent under the umbrella of dystopian fiction; for more than a decade they have, “eclipsed nuclear terror as the prime mover of

the apocalyptic and dystopian imagination” (Hughes & Wheeler, 2013: 1).

For twenty-first century readers, this subgenre narrates a present that is both strange and familiar; often, even the future settings of these texts are scarcely discernible from our current reality. Equally however, as Irr (2017) explains, a defining feature of cli-fi is its concern “with a temporality that is retrospective”, meaning there remains a stable before and after, in addition to an attention to species adaptation, specifically human adaptation. In these ways, “cli-fi synthesizes past and present and projects the result into a largely unavoidable but still emergent or creeping future” (Irr, 2017). Aligning with cli-fi's retrospective nature is solastalgia—a term coined to capture the “relationship between ecosystem distress and human distress” (Albrecht, 2005: 41). Temporally speaking, “[t]he concept of solastalgia is a condition that captures the sense of lost home when still at home” (Askland & Bunn, 2018: 18), embodying a looking backwards while living within the present moment. As Galway *et al.* explain:

Solastalgia is an increasingly useful concept for understanding the links between ecosystem health and human health, specifically, the cumulative impacts of climatic and environmental change on mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Given the speed and scale of climate change and the unbridled advancement of resource extraction, more and more people will experience the unwelcome transformation of cherished landscapes and solastalgic distress. (2019: 15)

Central to this reading of solastalgia are implications of natureculture; articulated in their description of the “links between

ecosystem health and human health” as well as the contextualising of landscapes as “cherished;” both of which point to the entanglement of human lived experience in terms of place, specifically home. Solastalgia, then, situates the landscapes we live within as something more than simply inhabited by humans; they are places that are integral in how we psychically define ourselves and those around us. As such, landscapes comprise a physical arbiter of mental geography.

### Solastalgia

The term solastalgia was coined in 2003 by Glenn Albrecht—an environmental philosopher with theoretical and applied interests in the relationship between ecosystem and human health—and was later elaborated upon in a collaborative 2005 publication in PAN (Philosophy, Activism, Nature). As a term, it has been linked to the interdisciplinary field of medical humanities, but is also prevalent in scholarship ranging from psychiatry, to public health, philosophy, and history. As Albrecht (2012) explains:

Solastalgia has its origins in the concepts of “solace” and “desolation.” Solace has meanings connected to the alleviation of distress or to the provision of comfort or consolation in the face of distressing events. Desolation has meanings connected to abandonment and loneliness. The suffix *-algia* has connotations of pain or suffering. Hence, solastalgia is a form of ‘homesickness’ like that experienced with traditionally defined nostalgia, except that the victim has not left their home or home environment.

While the above definition does not directly situate solastalgia as an anthropogenic construct, Albrecht (2012) goes on to clearly contextualise the term in regard to human impacts on earth’s various ecosystems: “Under the intertwined impacts of global development, rising population and global warming, with their accompanying changes in climate and ecosystems, there is now a mismatch between our lived experience of the world, and our ability to conceptualise and comprehend it”. For the purposes of this article, my interest is in the “key theoretical aspect of solastalgia that sets it apart from related concepts”; namely, its “explicit focus on place: solastalgia is a place-based lived experience” (Galway *et al.*, 2019). However, Askland and Bunn extend solastalgia further, both recognising the term’s dependency on place, but also connecting it to community—the people that live within a specific landscape. They explain that the:

sense of lost community [...] relates to [...] material and social ruptures [...] it is, however, not just the scars on the physical and social landscapes that underpin this experience but also a temporal rupture, manifesting as dissonance between past experiences, present realities and future ideas of sociality and sense of self in place (Askland & Bunn, 2018: 18).

Drawing upon the work of these scholars, this essay argues that solastalgia—an emerging way of being with the lived environment—should be recognised as an inherent element within, and dominant theme of, cli-fi.

As individuals and communities continue to grapple, witness, and exist throughout the many escalating climate catastrophes and degradations of familiar landscapes, it is necessary to adapt solastalgia as a literary device within readings of cli-fi. As a state of

being, solastalgia is increasingly familiar and lived; it describes the experiences that we—as humans—are experiencing frequently and repeatedly, as will be demonstrated through the analysis of Oates' narrative. It describes a distress that many of us have experienced, yet do not have any other word for. And, it is more than simply a “distress caused by the unwelcome transformation of cherished landscapes resulting in cumulative mental, emotional, and spiritual health impacts”—it is a direct assault on our home landscapes. Or, as Galway *et al.* articulate, when we connect solastalgia to place, we are using place to describe “home”; to articulate the loss of these “cherished landscapes” is to “emphasize the deep emotional attachment to places that is common among those experiencing solastalgia” (2019). For the purposes of this article, solastalgia is used to illustrate the ways that the destruction of “cherished” landscapes, as represented in cli-fi and particularly in Oates' “Sinners,” give rise to various dimensions of human illness, both mental and physical.

In its earliest formulation solastalgia was created to describe mental anguish associated with loss of place. Accordingly, the majority of the academic research surrounding the term is mental health related, and focuses on cognitive, behavioural, and emotional well-being. Solastalgia nevertheless strongly aligns with cli-fi literatures in respect to their explicit framing of “familiar experiences such as anxiety, depression, loss, grief, and regret as related to climate change” (Schneider-Mayerson, 2018: 486). This essay, however, argues that solastalgia affects more than mental health. I suggest that we must position solastalgia as impacting physical well-being in line with, or alongside, the physical desolation of home landscapes. Increasingly, public health research connects the health of mind and body, arguing that these factors are interconnected. Poor mental

health contributes to and often encourages poor physical health. Thus, in witnessing or imagining the desolation and degradation of familiar, cherished landscapes, the “sense of disease or distress when loved environments are transformed” (Askland & Bunn, 2018: 18) is deeply relevant, due to its holistic effects upon population health. Just as we cannot separate mind from body, we also cannot separate nature from culture, nor global health from population health.

Positioned as a literary framing device, solastalgia provides one approach to understanding the ways that devastated landscapes are themselves agentive—that the illness of our planet, on either a local or global scale, impacts the health of its inhabitants including humans. This is a familiar concept to ecologists, but remains far from a mainstream perspective. Accordingly, when human illness is recontextualised in terms of natureculture, cli-fi becomes an invitation to audiences to embrace these co-dependencies, to position readers as “entangled with a range of nonhuman others; and to imagine what it means to be with each other in devastated landscapes” (Clary-Lemon, 2019: 2). The symbiotic implications of natureculture push back against the competing nature vs. culture dichotomy, and invite us to “stay with the trouble” (Haraway, 2016: 118; Clary-Lemon, 2019: 176); to unite “the complex metaphors people use to mediate their relationship with nature” (Langston, 2007: 5), and to exist on a “continuum of *natureculture*” (Clary-Lemon, 2019: 9, emphasis in original). Ultimately, “[p]lace is a defining element of solastalgia, and people-place relationships are central to the ongoing study of the links between environmental change and human health and wellness” (Galway *et al.*, 2019).

## Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God

Oates' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" is particularly useful for examining some of the ways that natureculture, via solastalgia, is epitomised within the cli-fi subgenre. The narrative itself, while mundane—focusing on the primary character, Luce, and her husband, Andrew, who are planning a small party for friends—is ominous. The story's landscape, while set in a speculative fictional near future, mirrors the many human-induced environmental catastrophes that those who currently reside in the western United States are already experiencing annually: mudslides, firestorms, drought. The caveat—what sets this narrative in a time other than right now—is its location; Luce's town, "Hazelton-on-Hudson, is a hundred miles from New York City" (Oates, 2019: 65). Whilst fictional locations are common within Oates' work, the choice of the northeast United States is telling. In our own world, climate change is not yet overt in this region, and while increased temperatures and precipitation are forecast, they have not yet made their way there (US EPA, 2016). Thus, this choice of landscape is one of many which situates "Sinners" as a dystopian narrative.

Other aspects which will be discussed include the story's attention to illness, as embodied by both human characters and the home landscapes they inhabit. For instance, the upper-middle-class suburb of Vedders Hill, which is located in Hazelton-on-Hudson, is populated by what contemporary audiences would recognise as retired, middle-aged lawyers, academics, musicians, athletes, and so forth. However, an important caveat is that these characters—the youngest not even sixty-five—are, for the most part, plagued by multiple physical ailments; "Stage III colorectal cancer," "stenosis of the spine," "a mysterious

autoimmune disorder that mimicked certain of the symptoms of lupus but was (evidently) not lupus," "Crohn's disease" (65). Moreover:

Others in the Stantons' approximate generation, whom they've known since they moved to the area, in the early nineties, are reporting cases of diverticulitis, stomach cancer, pancreatic cancer, lung cancer (in someone who hasn't smoked for thirty-seven years), leukemia, lymphoma, failing kidneys, failing hearts, inflamed joints, neurological 'deficits,' even strokes! (65)

Both the afflicted landscape and its afflicted inhabitants have carefully been chosen to illustrate the nearness—perhaps, the consequences—of our contemporary, immediate, and everyday choices. Moreover, both the near future setting and Oates' declarative listing of health conditions serve to invite commonalities between audiences' now and the characters' now, temporalities that are evidently quite close. Yet, precisely how close remains unclear. In cli-fi, it is necessary to spark these temporal commonalities "[b]ecause identification with a narrative's character(s) is motivated by perceived similarity, it is likely that the alignment of worldviews, values, or ideology between the audience and the character can impact the level of identification that the audience feels" (Schneider-Mayerson *et al.*, 2020: 2). In this regard, it is notable that for the most part, nothing in "Sinners" is unknown. The landscape destruction, while transposed, is already a reality for many readers. The human illnesses, while exacerbated, are also familiar. Oates' creation of a fictional landscape mimics the increasingly devastated landscapes of the western United States—namely California. Yet, other than Luce, the story's characters do not seem to notice anything out of the ordinary; her

husband regularly chides her for “what he calls her ‘overreacting’ or ‘catastrophizing’” (65). Accordingly, it is vital to examine how Luce’s character manifests solastalgia in response to the environmental destruction of her home landscape.

The trope of Luce catastrophizing is weaved throughout the narrative. We see it emerge not only in Luce’s thoughts (or asides), but also in her husband’s subtle misogyny, which he uses to downplay her reactions to the environmental degradation all around them:

Is that even a word—‘catastrophizing’? Luce understands that Andrew means to affect a comical tone, a sort of cartoon rhetoric, to soften the mockery and the annoyance he so clearly feels; yet ‘catastrophizing’ also acknowledges the very real, the surely imminent catastrophe. (65)

Andrew’s dismissal is intentional and repeated. Moreover, Oates’ choice to use parentheses for words like “sometimes,” “evidently,” “seemingly,” and so on point to a tone of misogyny throughout—one which dismisses and trivialises Luce’s climate and health concerns. When positioned in terms of natural landscapes, which are traditionally characterised as female, we can perceive Oates offering an analogy which aligns society’s dismissal of female health-related concerns (both physical and mental) to its similar dismissals of the catastrophic impacts of climate change.

This socially conditioned avoidance of uncomfortable truths is epitomised in a later excerpt when Andrew, reading to an academic audience and “channeling the voice of the eighteenth-century Puritan minister Jonathan Edwards,” explains:

“We are spiders dangled by fate over the fires of Hell, and the slightest slip will plunge us into an eternity of misery—kept alive by machines, for which we may have to pay ‘out of pocket.’”

Andrew’s listeners laugh, uneasily. He may be joking—or half joking—but this is the nightmare that everyone in America dreads.

*We know what our punishment is, but what was our sin?* (66, emphasis in original)

What is most telling, perhaps, is that Andrew entirely fails to connect human sin to climate change—to the devastated landscape around him. Yet, what Luce and attuned readers recognise—as is made apparent via Luce’s italicised thoughts and the subsequent scene—is that, even when living through the “floods, landslides, and firestorms” (65), there are two distinct segments of society: one that fails to recognise ecological changes, and one which fully recognises these shifting landscapes. In response to Andrew’s wild ignorance, the following scene begins:

Global warming, Luce thinks, digging with a trowel in the rich, dark soil that she has created over many years of composting, but which now smells strange to her, rotting, feculent, as if teeming with toxic microscopic life. The hairs at the nape of her neck stir. There is no longer in this part of North America a guarantee of the protracted subzero temperatures that once killed off such virulent life.

If she wears gloves, Luce reasons. If she never actually touches the earth with her bare fingers... (66)

This shift to the garden is important for several reasons; it contextualises Luce's connection to the earth, her love of gardening (evident by her "many years of composting"), and her recollection of what has changed ("no longer"). Of most importance, however, is the way this narrative shift illustrates a "poignant moment [...] of solastalgia," which occurs "when individuals directly experience the transformation of a loved environment" (Albrecht, 2005: 46). While it is evident that Luce believes in climate change, connections to illness and place which are obvious to audiences throughout the narrative do not appear to be explicitly recognised by her as the story's central protagonist. It is this ignorance that is particularly unsettling for audiences, particularly in light of the solastalgia this article demarcates. As Albrecht explains, solastalgia is "the 'lived experience' of the loss of the present as manifest in a feeling of dislocation" (2005: 45); above, this is most clear in not only Luce's wearing of gloves, but also her apprehension about touching the earth with her bare skin.

Via the lens of solastalgia we are able to see not simply environmental impacts and changes, but also the ways these manifest within a cherished space, namely Luce's home landscape:

[T]he rank smell of the soil around the house has returned, is, in fact, stronger this spring. Luce has scanned the scene with her binoculars and has discovered nothing to alarm her unduly, except that the repair work on the upper stretch of Vedders Hill Way, which was recently washed away in a mudslide. (65)

This passage epitomises the ways that the lived environment has transformed, illustrating that "[e]verything that was once familiar and trusted in our environment will be experienced as the 'new abnormal' as development and

climate pressures continue to build" (Albrecht, 2012). Nevertheless, as a result of its first person focalisation, this specific excerpt fails to make the connection between human health and environmental health, which furthers audience disbelief that the central characters are themselves unable to make this connection. As the narrative progresses, however, the relationship between the health of the two is made increasingly apparent, particularly in regard to Luce's retrospective questioning of her former life.

This questioning can easily be framed via the lens of solastalgia. As McNamara & Wetoby remind us, "transformation of place through human induced or natural change may diminish solace found in country, enabling the emergence of Solastalgia" (2011: 233). This emergence is made evident in Oates' story throughout the progression of the narrative:

Is it the earth, the water, the air?  
Contaminates?

Something is poisoning them. Seeping  
into their lungs, into the marrow of their  
bones.

*Jesus, darling! Don't catastrophize!*

When they first moved from West  
Seventy-eighth Street and Columbus  
Avenue to Hazelton-on-Hudson, in 1991,  
the air in the Hudson Valley was cleaner,  
the sky a brighter and clearer blue—Luce  
is certain. The white oaks and birches  
did not shed their leaves prematurely, in  
September. That maddening chemical  
odor wasn't borne on the wind, and the  
soil on Vedders Hill seemed more solid,  
substantial. Mudslides were unknown,  
as were firestorms. An excess of pollen  
was a far more serious problem than a  
depletion of ozone was. True, there were  
reports of acid rain in the Adirondacks,  
and the Hudson River had been heavily



polluted, like Lakes Ontario and Erie, upstate, but the media didn't make a fuss over it, and social media, that vehicle for channelling outrage, did not yet exist. Everyone sailed, canoed, kayaked on the Hudson River. Fished! The river's steely beauty prevailed.

*What have we done? What have we failed to do?* (67)

This excerpt echoes Andrew's earlier derision in its inclusion of the familiar dismissal "*Jesus, darling! Don't catastrophize!*," yet pushes back against his disregard by repeating Luce's counter "*What have we done? What have we failed to do?*" With this line, she recognises environmental loss in the graying of the sky, trees that no longer follow their natural leaf cycle, and degradation of the soil. The quote also connects to contemporary audiences, taunting readers for a lack of concern over the various environmental adversities most have lived through; high pollen counts, ozone depletion, acid rain, water pollution. Luce's looking backward, in conjunction with the gradual assault on her health, as well as that of friends and neighbours, clearly aligns with "the dominant components of solastalgia," namely "the loss of ecosystem health and corresponding sense of place, threats to personal health and wellbeing and a sense of injustice and/or powerlessness" (Albrecht *et al.*, 2007: 96). These threats and allusions to powerlessness increase as the narrative progresses, and as the line between human health and ecosystem health becomes increasingly blurred.

Oates' narrative, by its close, jumps between accounts of the devastation of landscape "[o]n this ravaged hill where half the landscape seems to have disappeared and the sky beyond the mountains is a fireball"; to that of the humans who live there, party guests in "[w]heelchairs, walkers, canes. Little knitted caps on (bald)

heads. A contingent of chemotherapy's walking wounded" to the concession via simile that the two are intimately connected, "[t]heir friends and neighbors are collapsing all around them—in mimicry of the collapsing roads of Vedders Hill," and imagery that unites rather than dissociates: "A dazzling, beautiful, bloody sunset beyond the mountains, like a cluster of burst capillaries" (69). It is noteworthy that it is most often Luce making these connections between human health and planetary health at this late point in the narrative. It is her act of recognition that is central to our reading of solastalgia; the pain—either mental or physical—must be understood as interconnected in order for the full impacts of climate change on humanity to be realised. This recognition, however, appears to be embodied only by Luce, which can itself be read as a commentary upon female attunement to the natural world *and* our collective societies' inability (either conscious or unconscious) to position ourselves with (or alongside) nature—our failure to recognise natureculture as an inherent aspect of human existence. Oates' story, then, ultimately offers a commentary upon the ways that humans, as a species, continue to extract ourselves from the environments we live in, despite the growing and ever present linkages between who we are and where we live.

Still, what is perhaps most apparent across any reading of Oates' "Sinners" is the deep connections it posits between human agency and landscape agency. As the narrative recapitulates, humans continue to avert attention to—and even scorn—the reality of natureculture. We continue to turn away from our symbiosis with nature and refuse to see the inherent unity of the human and the natural. While the trajectory of Oates' narrative works to decenter human-centric experiences in an effort to privilege the landscapes we inhabit,

it is equally significant that so many characters within “Sinners,” like so many members of our own contemporary societies, fail to make this connection. The actant role of the landscape in “Sinners” is clearly articulated, particularly in regard to the multitude of ways that desolate landscapes affect human health. Yet rather than issuing any call to action, its narrative functions to remind us of our continued inaction and the many impending catastrophes that lie ahead.

The landscapes that Oates offers are, in many senses, speculative, yet they are also looming and absolute. Stobbelaar and Pedroli define landscape identity as “the unique psycho-sociological perception of a place defined in a spatial-cultural space” (2011: 62). Although this definition is pertinent, in light of the ways that solastalgia affects landscape identity, it is also important to add temporality to our understanding of landscape identity, particularly as our landscapes are now changing at a pace where we can witness the ecological devastation of place—especially those places that are cherished—within a single lifetime, rather than generationally. Galway *et al.* (2019) also expand upon this theme, noting that inherent to “landscape identity is the ability to see oneself in the on-going creation

of landscapes and to acknowledge how one has been shaped by landscapes” (Galway *et al.*, 2019). If we place landscape identity as a measure of natureculture, “Sinners” makes clear that many humans still locate themselves within a nature vs. culture binary, separating out human agency and environmental agency. As long as we, as a society, maintain this precarious duplicity, alien landscapes—many of which are no longer so alien—will continue to be exiled to the realm of the cultural imaginary as speculative possibilities, rather than the authentic and tangible physicalities they are and will increasingly become. Ultimately, whilst the subgenre of cli-fi works to destabilise these dichotomies, particularly those with settings easily recognisable to our lived experiences, it does not seem to encode affective potential. To incite change, a first step must be recognising the ways that the lived experiences of fictional characters embody our own relationships with place. Still, “the gulf between environmental awareness and efficacious action” (Schneider-Mayerson, 2018: 495) persists, despite both the proliferation of dystopian modes, like cli-fi, and the retrospective cautions that these narratives expose.

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