

2-29-2016

## Reflections on the Arts, Environment, and Culture After Ten Years of The Goose

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Banting, Pamela, Theresa Beer, Sarah Van Borek, Rob Boschman, Nicholas Bradley, Nancy Holmes, Franke James, Jenny Kerber, Sonnet L'Abbé, Larissa Lai, Daphne Marlatt, Stephanie Posthumus, Catriona Sandilands, John Terpstra, Harry Thurston, and Rita Wong. "Reflections on the Arts, Environment, and Culture After Ten Years of The Goose." *The Goose*, vol. 14, no. 2, article 41, 2016, <https://scholars.wlu.ca/thegoose/vol14/iss2/41>.

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# Reflections on the Arts, Environment, and Culture After Ten Years of The Goose

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# Reflections on the Arts, Environment, and Culture After Ten Years of *The Goose*

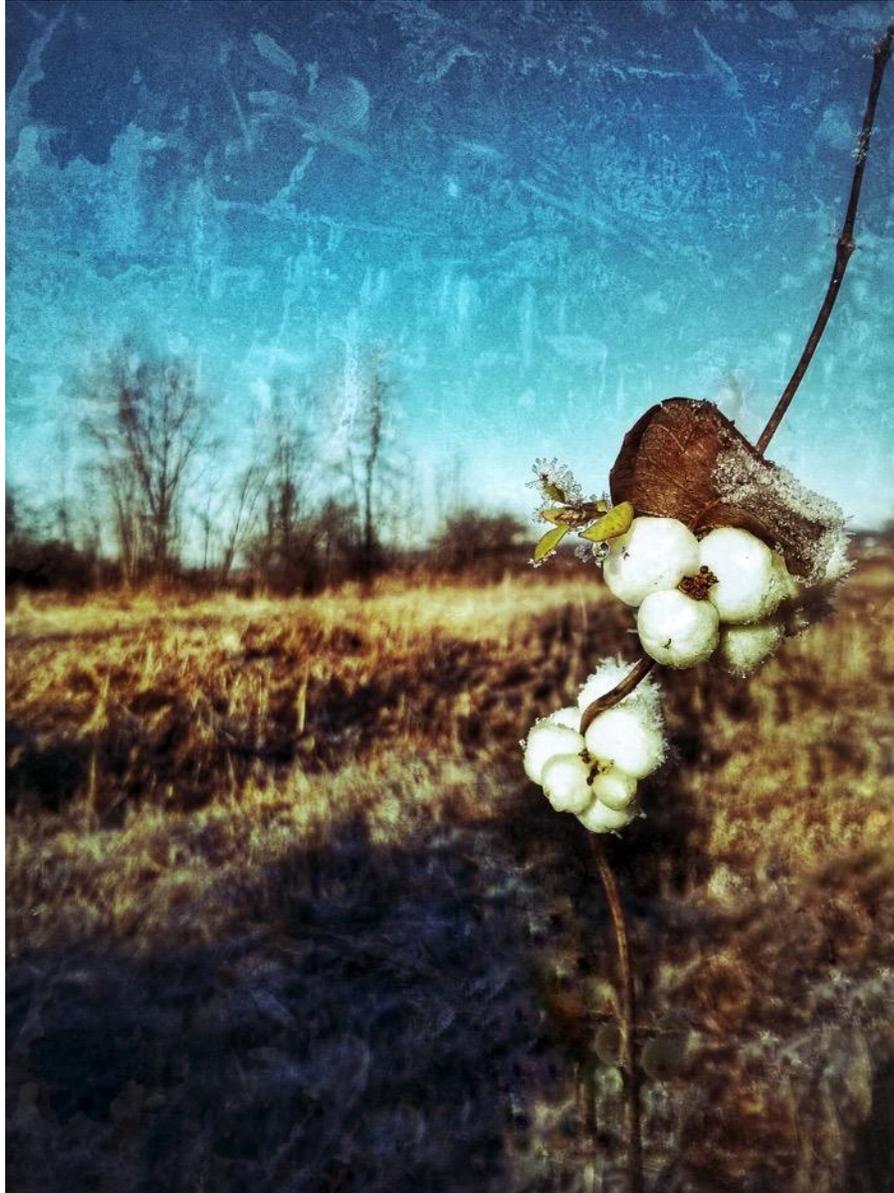


Photo: Lisa Szabo-Jones

To mark the tenth anniversary of *The Goose*, we asked prominent ecologically-minded scholars, writers, artists, and educators from across Canada to reflect on the relationship between the arts, culture, and the environment. Their comments illuminate a wide range of triumphs and tensions, from the politics and practices of environmentalist writing and art, to the connections between the environment and matters of diversity and justice, to the past and future of ALECC (Association for Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada), to the world of a single poem.

PAMELA BANTING

*Happy Camping:  
Reading by Flashlight 2005 – 2015*

**W**hen I became a member of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) circa 1994, a lot of the work then being done by the membership was on nature writing and nurturing the young field of ecocriticism seeded by Cheryll Glotfelty. Discussions of nature poetry, regionalism, women's and minority writings about the natural world, the theory and practice of ecocriticism, narrative scholarship, and ecocritical pedagogies (including field trips!) were the main preoccupations of our conference papers and lively listserv discussions. While we have by no means abandoned these areas, nor should we, it is shocking to witness the extent of the transformation of the field of ecocriticism since 1995, when I attended my first ASLE Conference in Missoula, MT.

That list of topics now seems very much that of a group of wide-eyed, earnest happy campers in light of the turn things have taken since on both the Canadian and international fronts as 2015 supplanted 2014 as the hottest year ever recorded and scientists revised their predictions ever closer in terms of the temporal window within which to make drastic changes on all fronts. In the domestic context, I think of the major floods that sloshed through Calgary and Toronto in 2013, crashing caribou populations, the delisting from environmental protection of most of Canada's lakes and rivers and the corresponding push for pipelines (pipelines as the new rivers – of bitumen, diluent, and money), the amped-up crisis among pollinators, and so much more. During nearly the same period as we were inventing and building ALECC – 2005 to 2015 – we were living under the dark cloud of a neoliberal agenda and official government denial of climate change. Living under Steve schooled Canadians in just how vulnerable and precarious our democratic institutions are and how badly we need them in order collectively to counter and mitigate the combined effects of living in the Anthropocene.

*We were living under the dark cloud of a neoliberal agenda and official government denial of climate change.*

Luckily, and in retrospect almost incredibly, most of the changes within our field over that same decade since ALECC came into being have been overwhelmingly positive and exciting. In 2005 I started our listserv and built a constituency for what became ALECC two years later when a committed group of us

formalized our Association with a constitution and elected our first Executive Council in the summer of 2007. In 2009 Richard Pickard at the University of Victoria hosted the first (and so far only) ASLE Conference outside the US. ALECC has now held three biennial conferences – Cape

Breton University (kayaking out into the ocean!), Okanagan College and the University of British Columbia (Okanagan) (lake swimming; an ingenious trio of interconnected hammocks suspended in the bush!), and Lakehead University in Thunder Bay (camaraderie and delicious food at that restaurant down on the water) – and our fourth will be at Queen’s University on Lake Ontario in June 2016 (see you there). Many people have worked and are working hard serving on our Executive Council, editing our glorious journal – which by the way is older than our formal association, thanks to the initiative and good faith of Lisa Szabo-Jones, Ella Soper, Michael Pereira, and Paul Huebener – and organizing our richly rewarding conferences. During the past ten years, we have also seen a swarm of new titles emerge. Ella Soper and Nicholas Bradley edited and published the first Canadian ecocriticism reader, *Greening the Maple: Canadian Ecocriticism in Context* (2013) with the University of Calgary Press (in book format and also open access – put it on your courses), and Wilfrid Laurier University Press has positioned itself as the most prominent publisher of ecocriticism in the country. See the list of titles – many by ALECC members – in their [Environmental Humanities Series](#), edited by ALECC member and conference co-organizer Cheryl Lousley.

There is still much to be done, especially in terms of diversity of membership (including building our membership in the holdout provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan) and getting members to [pay their modest dues](#), but since 2005 we have branched out, connected with, and added numerous emergent fields to our practice as ecocritics: indigenous poetics, animal studies, queer ecologies, petrocultural studies, environmental justice, infrastructure studies, risk and disaster studies, affect theory, new materialism, food studies, critical plant studies, and critical time studies, to name a few. Moreover, the field of regionalism, out of which ecocriticism emerged in the early 1990s, has been revived as bioregionalism.

While there is a palpable sense of relief in Canada with the election of a new federal government and many new provincial governments, the hard lessons learned on all fronts over the past decade will no doubt inform our theory and our practice in the coming years. Moreover, a pervasive sense of disquietude and urgency associated with witnessing and undergoing the effects of a changing climate may supplement or even supplant some of our former enthusiasm and sense of earnest endeavour as young hiking, canoeing, kayaking, and birding ecocritics to infuse new impetus into our practice. Journalist Mark Morford, whose summer vacation in Idaho was marred by smoke from the Washington State and Okanagan forest fires of 2015, describes his not very happy camping experience this way:

You can feel it in your very *cells*: this is all part of an increasingly vicious, mean-ass vortex of accelerating evidence that the planet and *all* its animals – of which we are merely one – are under a potentially fatal stress like no other time in modern history.

Put another way: It’s not merely about preparing for rough weather. It’s not about stocking up on extra water, flashlight batteries, a solar iPhone charger. Climate change doesn’t merely mean life is going to get much more difficult, much more quickly than most people – particularly the rich and oligarchic – can possibly imagine. It means it’s going to get much more *disquieting*.

Even the productive notion of “resilience” seems at times a little too jaunty, a little too neoliberal “don’t-worry-be-happy,” “keep-calm-and-carry-on,” a term to help anyone cope with the feelings of disquietude, unsettlement, worry, solastalgia, denial, melancholy, depression, anger, fury, and fear we are and will be experiencing over ALECC’s next decade. At this very moment, I suspect, some ecocritics are working on how to incorporate an introduction to permaculture or canning into their literature courses; co-teaching with biologists, ecologists, city planners, or social workers; or, as Noel Castree urges in his article on “The Anthropocene and the Environmental Humanities,” trying to get involved in policy making. That is, if the humanities even survive – as they must – a plunging petro-dollar. Most certainly, we are compelled both to incorporate into our teaching and research and to truly absorb – and take to heart – the teachings from indigenous literature, art, thought, and people: we need to decolonize the way we work and re-learn how to be and how to live. In short, creation (gardening, cooking, writing, art-making) and other manual skills (construction, restoration, bricolage) alongside the building of communities (open, embracing, collaborative, and transpecies communities) are going to play an important role in addressing both the climate change imaginary and the cascading effects of the phenomenon itself.

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**PAMELA BANTING** teaches environmental literature, ecocriticism, and eco-theory in the Department of English at the University of Calgary. Her article “Ecocriticism in Canada” in *The Oxford Handbook of Canadian Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2015) offers a more in-depth discussion of the subject of this reflection.

TERESA BEER  
and  
SARAH VAN BOREK

*Arts Bring Nature Connections to Life*



EcoMusicology 2014 students Meagan Staples and Marianne Rico recording soundscapes in Stanley Park.  
Photo: Sarah Van Borek

The David Suzuki Foundation is known across the country for engaging Canadians through science. The Emily Carr University of Art + Design in Vancouver is internationally recognized for leadership in arts, media, and design. The two organizations came together in a unique partnership over four years that challenged art students and other Metro Vancouver collaborators to foster environmental stewardship and understanding. Each year and semester had a different focus and artistic approach, and the collaboration grew to include city planners,

musicians, sound engineers, local experts, authors, museums, community centres, arts organizations, and Vancouver audiences.

The principle was simple. The David Suzuki Foundation's efforts to promote the concept of "natural capital" are grounded in ecological economics. We encourage people to consider all the services that ecosystems bring to their daily lives and health. These services, such as removing carbon from the atmosphere, and filtering and cleaning drinking water, happen quietly and seamlessly — and that's the problem. Because they're invisible, we don't account for them. In fact, we take nature's services for granted, leaving them vulnerable to degradation and destruction. When this happens and we have to artificially replace such services, the costs add up quickly. Retaining connected green spaces in urban areas is essential, especially in the context of mounting threats from climate change. Just ask Calgarians and Torontonians who cleaned up after devastating floods. Studies show that protecting natural areas is not only an effective response to climate change, but can save cash-strapped municipalities money. We need to start considering our natural systems in the same integrated way that we plan for built ones.

#### **THERESA:**

The natural capital concept is not widely understood, and the David Suzuki Foundation saw the partnership with Emily Carr as an opportunity to use art to make the subtle, often hidden benefits from nature visible in ways that resonate with wider audiences. The students were asked to interpret complex concepts grounded in ecological economics and create videos, installations, and musical compositions. The Foundation transitioned from releasing natural capital reports (of value mostly to planners and policy-makers), to reaching broader, urban audiences interested in engaging in sustainability through visual media and storytelling — shifting the public narrative about the value of nature in our regions, cities, and towns.

*The David Suzuki Foundation saw the partnership with Emily Carr as an opportunity to use art to make the subtle, often hidden benefits from nature visible in ways that resonate with wider audiences.*

#### **SARAH:**

Museums signed on as partners or collaborators to host student work through exhibitions and events: The Gulf of Georgia Cannery (2012-13), the Museum of Vancouver (2013-14), and the Vancouver Maritime Museum (2015). While galleries are often prioritized as presentation venues for artwork, museums create an important bridge between science and the arts, integrating facts and imagination. Museums attract broader audiences than galleries. As exemplified by artists such as Fred Wilson (*Mining the Museum*, 1992), museums also signal to the public information that is important and valuable.

In the 2012-13 *Natural Capital* pilot courses, students created a series of short [online documentaries](#) to illustrate the Foundation's report on the natural capital values of aquatic ecosystems in B.C.'s Lower Mainland.

In 2013-14, students produced media arts-based "virtual urban safaris" (see Andrew McKeachie's [Balance](#) as one example) as part of the Museum of Vancouver's 2014 *Rewilding Vancouver* exhibit.

The following year's EcoMusicology courses asked students to work with professional musicians and a sound engineer to create songs and music videos to show how connected regional green spaces benefit urban health.



EcoMusicology 2014 student Verena Wedde recording a soundscape in Stanley Park. Photo: Sarah Van Borek

### **THERESA:**

I collaborated on this project for three years and was surprised and delighted by the creativity of the student art projects in interpreting complex ideas that often get stuck at the desks of policy wonks. Students spoke with conviction about the value of connecting to nature, reaffirming the Foundation's work on the benefits of spending time outdoors. They reflected on the growth of their observational capacities the more time they spent in their chosen natural sites, describing heightened senses of sound, sight, and smell. Many recognized — for the first time — the intrusion of urban noises, even in areas far from the downtown core, as they attempted to

capture pure, unadulterated sounds from nature. Students who came from large, developed cities with little green space left, such as Taipei, found their time in nature especially poignant.

Interpretations and perspectives grew through the years. I was particularly impressed by the collaboration that went into the Museum of Vancouver's *Rewilding* exhibit with author J.B. MacKinnon. It was an ideal backdrop for the student videos.

#### **SARAH:**

The work with the Foundation provided rich sources for artistic inspiration and a kind of legitimacy and authority for student work. It expanded our classroom to parks, forests, and beaches, and enabled wide-ranging knowledge-sharing from biologists, architects, traditional knowledge keepers, scuba divers, and more.

I noticed students reflecting on the noisiness, busyness, and indoor focus of their lives as they were asked to spend time in nature. Some spoke of the benefits of slowing down and being present and disconnected from online media and devices. Others developed a heightened sense of advocacy for nature conservation.

Stacie Schatz, a student in the EcoMusicology: Howe SoundZ program, who co-produced the song and music video [Squamish Estuary Recovery](#) in the Spring 2015 session, wrote about insights she gained from interviewing Randall Lewis, a longtime resident of Squamish (50 kilometres north of Vancouver) and a member of the Squamish First Nation:

I had the chance to explore Squamish once with Randall Lewis and the other time completely on my own. The first time was overwhelming especially because Randall seemed as excited as I was to be out there. It was an amazing thing to see. He was born and raised there and it was like he was a little kid on Christmas day showing me all his brand new toys. I had the privilege of learning more about his history... It was such an eye-opening experience in so many ways. Culturally, environmentally, visually, audibly. He took me through reserve land which they were in negotiations to protect. The estuary was rusty orange. The trees were mossy and thick. It was remarkable and extremely special because I knew that many people don't see this every day and also because people of the Coast Salish community have worked so hard at preserving [it]. This excitement for the land is contagious.

#### **CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS:**

Arts, nature, science, and economics intersected in this project through the concepts of interdependence and interconnectedness – ideas that David Suzuki himself emphasizes.

At a time when our planet's environmental sustainability is a high priority, it's essential that we also recognize how economics, social values, and the arts interact with the environment. We live in a time when artists can no longer simply choose materials to meet their conceptual and

aesthetic goals. They also have a responsibility to consider where their materials come from and where their creations will end up.

Our society often overlooks nature's benefits and the values of artistic expression. This partnership allowed us to explore the value of art in furthering environmental, social, and economic sustainability. It encouraged student artists to become community leaders in all forms of sustainability, while epitomizing the best of interconnected collaborations. It was also a lot of fun for everyone involved.



Sarah Van Borek speaks at a Museum of Vancouver Rewilding event. Photo: Angelo Moroni

**THERESA BEER** is a communicator inspired by building engaged environmental and social movements. She has an MA in Journalism and has worked in communications in Canada and overseas with nonprofits, municipal governments, and unions. Theresa is the senior communications specialist for Western Canada at the David Suzuki Foundation.

**SARAH VAN BOREK** ([sarahvanborek.wordpress.com](http://sarahvanborek.wordpress.com)) is a filmmaker, musician, artist, and educator dedicated to global citizenship, collaboration, and responsiveness to contemporary issues. She has an MFA in Film & TV from the University of Cape Town, South Africa and teaches in Social Practice and Community Engagement at the Emily Carr University of Art + Design. See Sarah's talk "[Artists as Citizen Scientists.](#)"

## ROBERT BOSCHMAN

### *Wherever We Are*

*“Wherever we are: in a text where we already believe ourselves to be.”*  
—Jacques Derrida

The Association for Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada (ALECC) and its journal, *The Goose*, have changed the cultural, environmental, and literary landscapes of Canada in their first decade of existence. Together they have led, in Canada, the ongoing paradigm shift concerning humans, nonhumans, and our shared environment. This shift, as it continues to grow and intensify, is renovating yet other relationships.

In the academy, the spaces and connectors between disciplines are rapidly altering under the reality of accelerating climate change. Major educational institutions are engaging in divestment from coal and other environmentally destructive industries. Sustainability is a buzzword. Interdisciplinary fields such as the Environmental Humanities are becoming established globally, where a decade ago they hardly existed in higher education. Films, books, websites, and conferences concerned with environmental questions are growing in numbers. ALECC and *The Goose* constitute an integral part of this burgeoning scene in 2016.

*One of the things I point out to students in the Humanities is that the environmental crises we face in the twenty-first century provide openings for them to do good work.*

One of the things I point out to students in the Humanities — whether they identify as Majors in English or History or Anthropology or some other field — is that the environmental crises we face in the twenty-first century provide openings for them to do good work. Despite the usual insecurities in

and around post-secondary institutions, the days when a Humanities education was perceived as having dubious value are, I believe, going and gone. The demand for environmental education across the curriculum is growing — and given the issues at hand concerning climate, energy, food, justice, and water such demand will continue to grow. ALECC and *The Goose* have much important work to do in the years and decades ahead.

Five years ago, I started to say things in class that were, for me and for my students, entirely new. These statements coincided with my becoming involved with ALECC and with founding and establishing the *Under Western Skies* biennial conference series on the environment at my

university, Mount Royal. One such utterance I would repeat here is this: Everything needs to be reread and renegotiated in this discipline we have called *English*. ALECC, *The Goose*, and the emergence of the Environmental Humanities compel me to re-engage with my discipline, even as the actual coastlines that inform an epic poem such as *The Odyssey* flood, submerge, and radically alter the ancient relationships between land, sea, and human and nonhuman populations. I'll now have to reread *The Odyssey* with a painful new awareness; will bring this awareness into the classroom (can't help it); and will grieve the impending losses as I model new readings of texts that span millennia, from Homer to Elizabeth Bishop, Louise Erdrich, and Jacques Derrida. This is not just painful but also energizing, and so I do it with a sense of renewed purpose and commitment. Although I'll only ever scratch at this new door, I can and do invite English Majors and Honours students to see their lives and work in terms of the nature-culture complex we all now recognize as informing literary, critical, and cultural texts, including film and new media.

However, the disciplinary renewal I am experiencing and sharing in my typical English Department classroom can't be all there is to it. I can't hunker down here. English curriculum renewal for the twenty-first century, if it is informed genuinely by environmental concerns and questions, should liaise and entwine with other disciplines undergoing similar changes. This is about discourse in and through the halls of academia. The Environmental Humanities degree proposal that I am currently spearheading at Mount Royal University comes in to play, for me, at this point. This multi-year effort includes actually sitting at the table with colleagues from across the disciplines, including the so-called hard sciences, with some of whom longstanding epistemological differences exist regarding questions of education, testing, Nature, and technology, to name but a few. But these are the very issues students need to encounter as well. So while it'd be easier to confine my efforts to familiar colleagues who understand my language (which I love to do), I find myself conversing with folks whose positions aren't the same as mine. After all, we have to do this work together — there's so much at stake — and I am affected when more than a few colleagues, risking their reputations and cred within their own enclaves, nod their heads in agreement. We *must*, "wherever we are," as I believe ALECC and *The Goose* are doing and will do, grow networked like a rhizome into the future in multiple directions at once.

**ROBERT BOSCHMAN** is a past president of ALECC, serving on its executive from 2010 to 2015. He is a professor in the Department of English, Languages, and Cultures at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Alberta. His monograph, *In the Way of Nature: Ecology and Westward Movement in the Poetry of Anne Bradstreet, Elizabeth Bishop and Amy Clampitt*, was published by McFarland in 2009. *Found in Alberta: Environmental Themes for the Anthropocene* (co-edited with Mario Trono) was published in 2014 by Wilfrid Laurier University Press. Boschman is founder and co-convenor of the award-winning [Under Western Skies](#) biennial conference series on the environment held at Mount Royal since 2010. He is currently working on a new collection of essays co-edited with Dr. Trono forthcoming from WLUP, as well as a place memoir, *White Coal: My Prince Albert in a Place called Saskatchewan*, forthcoming from the University of Regina Press.

## NICHOLAS BRADLEY

*Yellow Warbling in the Mojave*

... nature is never spent;  
 There lives the dearest freshness deep down things  
 —Hopkins

Anniversaries are occasions to circle round to the point of departure, to return and to pause before leaving again. On the tenth anniversary of *The Goose*, and in tribute to Lisa and Paul, our dutiful editors, I come back to a puzzling poem that has captured my imagination for more than a decade. “Homing,” by Don McKay, concerns migration, both the seasonal, hemispheric toing and froing of the yellow warbler and the slide of time present into time past. I thought of “Homing” last December while I was away from my home in the Pacific Northwest. The bright, arid spaces of inland southern California are unlike the dense, dark, and sodden landscapes of the Coast in winter, and far from the homey kitchen of McKay’s poem: “Pass me that plate, / the one with the hand-painted *habitant* / sitting on a log.” Is the plate kitsch or an heirloom? Its origin explains its value: “My parents bought it / on their honeymoon — see? Dated on the bottom, / 1937.” In this unspectacular setting, as soup “simmers on the stove,” nature seems to have been eclipsed by domestic comforts. Only a smudge on the dish hints of wilderness: “A bird, / or something (it is hard to tell), hangs overhead. / Now it’s covered by your grilled cheese sandwich.” The speaker’s musing — “Is he thinking where / to build his cabin or just idling his mind / while his pipe smoke mingles with the air?” — has been interrupted by the humble sandwich, and the poem’s first section ends not with a bang but a crunch.

Captivating poems, perpetually instructive, lead readers from place to place, while new places recall favourite poems. The Californian desert is an unlikely environment in which to contemplate Canadian poetry. I suspect that few of the rock climbers, fashion photographers, and RV drivers I saw in Joshua Tree National Park had read McKay’s poem, and I do not know if the poet himself has wandered the sandy trails; but unfamiliar locations lend themselves to meditations on homing, to making sense of things by association and juxtaposition. In “Homing” the speaker seeks to interpret the painted plate, to shift from the certainties of home to great imponderables: time, distance, instinct. In California, having exchanged winter for summer, I sought to decipher the land’s code. Joshua Tree, where the Mojave Desert and the Colorado Desert converge, is known for its distinctive vegetation and its eminently climbable geological formations; one section of the park is called “Wonderland of Rocks.” Newcomers may find the terrain alien, bewildering, almost illegible. The Joshua trees, though, like movie stars, are instantly recognizable. They arose in a great rush, it appears, and were frozen in surprise. Each skyward

branch is an arm wielding a pineapple, or a head with spiked hair. Somehow they are perfectly spaced, their branches never touching those of their neighbours. From the dry ground has sprung a forest imagined by a Martian with a green thumb, an alien with an odd idea of what a tree should be. (Wait — don't all Martians have green thumbs?)

I fetch the field guide to learn that *Yucca brevifolia* is “a picturesque or grotesque, narrow-leaf evergreen tree with short, stout trunk; open, broad crown of many, stout, widely forking, spreading, and sometimes drooping branches; and spiny, daggerlike leaves” (Little 328). “Picturesque or grotesque”: this agave is open to interpretation, and opinions may fork as widely as the branches. I am inclined to agree with *picturesque*, but in the etymology I hear something of the grotesque, the irregular, the uproarious: “The Mormon pioneers named this species Joshua, because its shape mimics a person praying with uplifted arms or gesturing wildly, referring to the Biblical leader pointing the way to a Promised Land” (329). Were they devoutly terrified or only joking? The story seems too good not to be apocryphal. My guide continues: “Red-shafted flickers drill holes in the branches to make nests, which are later occupied by other birds. The desert night-lizard lives in the dead leaves and branches, and woodrats gnaw off the spiny leaves for their nests. The foliage was the primary staple in the diet of the extinct giant sloth.” The book tells various stories; appearances trickle into history, and legend slithers into ecology. The past existence of the giant sloth stretches the mind, but the flickers, night-lizards, and woodrats lead away from the bizarre and toward a common impulse.

“Homing” begins with a proposition that announces the poem's theme: “That things should happen / twice, and place / share the burden of remembering.” The first time, in the event; the second, in memory. The plate's “leaning tree / points,” the speaker decides, to the *habitant's* notional home and to its inevitable fate: “real estate and its innumerable / Kodak moments.” That the plate shows an *habitant* is no accident. He is an inhabitant, a home-maker, a resident. The airborne speck, however, is a *voyageur*, a disruption of the clichés of home. The poem bursts into a flight of fancy:

And the smudged bird? I say it's  
a Yellow warbler who has flown  
from winter habitat in South America to nest here  
in the clearing. If we catch it, band it,  
let it go a thousand miles away it will be back  
within a week.

“Band it,” *bandit*: the bird, flying beyond the laws of comprehension and human scale, travelling distances for which we need the assistance of jet propulsion and miniature bottles of wine, is an outlaw. If “Home is what we know / and know we know, the intricately / feathered nest,” the warbler's mysterious migration raises the question: “How?” How does a bird the approximate colour of grilled cheese navigate the expanse? How do we know what we know? How do we escape being trapped by that very nest? As Travis Mason writes in *Ornithologies of Desire*, “that McKay thinks and writes an idea of home, including the desire to return, through migratory bird behaviour suggests a connection between the desire for home and the desire for flight” (51).

Homing, in other words, is an oscillation between the states represented by the warbler and the *habitant*. Any poet or cowboy knows that *home* rhymes with *roam*; one word summons its opposite. At home I long to travel. Away I think continually about heading back.

“I say it’s / a Yellow warbler.” According to the *Sibley Field Guide*, the yellow warbler, all nine and a half grams of it, is “usually unmistakable,” for it is “the only overall bright yellow bird and the only species with yellow spots on tail” (Sibley 371). “Usually unmistakable” — but the possibility of misreading remains. Perhaps the distant flash is not *Dendroica petechia* but a piece of flagging tape or, caught on a branch, a neon scrap of a backpacker’s jacket. Interpreting the world is no less taxing than reading a poem, and, as “Homing” affirms, even familiar specimens may surprise. The fourth volume of *The Birds of British Columbia* reports that the warbler is “a fairly common

*Interpreting the world is no less taxing than reading a poem, and even familiar specimens may surprise.*

to common migrant and summer visitant in the Georgia Depression Ecoprovince” (Campbell *et al.* 31). (I live in that Depression, which is less glum than it sounds.) Yet recognizing a well-known warbler, like rereading an old poem or waking up to a desert dawn, can idle the mind and cast everything in a new light. Not homesick in Joshua

Tree but mindful of home, I considered journeys and homecomings, what I know I know and what surprises. The unexpected intrudes with remarkable ease and impeccable timing. When you unpack the car in the dark at the windy campsite and — hey, who brought the tent? When the long hike back to the trailhead has no trailhead at its end. When the smooth, unclimbable face turns out, after some fretting on the part of weak-kneed observers, to be tacky and knurled. Then up you go, a sudden enthusiast of quartz monzonite.

How long does it take to understand a poem? Ten years is a good start. For a decade *The Goose* has fostered criticism and creative writing, forged scholarly bonds, and encouraged students. It has emboldened writers to discover unanticipated connections and to celebrate sustaining encounters with the wildness of birds and poems, rocks and flukes — the freshness of things, places, events. Joshua trees and poems about warblers will teach us as long as we are willing to listen. In the next years and even decades, as the ALECC community and its work are invigorated by new members and ideas, curiosity and openness to surprise will guide us well.

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NANCY HOLMES

## *The Admirable Arrangement: Eco Art, Emily Dickinson, and Bees*

**Bees.** Over four thousand species in North America – nearly all wild and native. As a terrific new book *The Bees in Your Backyard* notes, “there are 4 times more species of bees in [the US and Canada] than all the bird species in Mexico, 6 times more bees than butterflies, and about 10 times as many bee species as mammals” (Wilson and Carril 7). One out of every three bites of our food is thanks to bees. Nearly 90% of flowering plants need insect pollinators to bear fruit (Chamary 164). As scientist Christian Konrad Sprengel said in 1793, “That [bees] and other insects, while pursuing their food in the flowers, at the same time fertilize them ... appears to me to be one of the most admirable arrangements of nature” (qtd. in Chamary 165). However, this admirable arrangement is being disrupted by who else but human beings. Both our beloved farm animal, the honey bee, and the myriad and wonderful wild bees all around us are being seriously harmed by disease, habitat destruction, and pesticide use.

People are often inspired to conservation action for large, charismatic animals (whales, bears) or spaces (lakes, pristine rivers), and often this inspiration is sparked by art – stories or photography. Now that we must extend stewardship and care to the world of insects, a tougher sell, we can take advantage of the fact that bees are amongst the most charismatic insects. To help people become more passionate about caring for bees, a new eco art project is underway in British Columbia. I’m a team member on The Public Art Pollinator Project, a SSHRC-funded initiative that intends to create public and community-based eco art to raise awareness about the plight of pollinating insects. We want to get people and ourselves more aware of this crucial ecological issue and we want to make art to further our own and others’ understanding. Eco art is a particular niche of both environmental activism and of the creative arts. Eco art attempts to take awareness of environmental issues and move such awareness towards the envisioning of sustainable relationships with the natural world. Scientific perspectives often highlight system, technological, and process-based solutions or schematics. Artists create stories and make objects, procedures, images, and symbols that are charged, attractive, highly idiosyncratic, aesthetically patterned and often consisting of a mystery. Eco art practices aim to braid together these – and other – perspectives and methods. Eco art practice is especially useful to help people imagine and appreciate complex and sometimes invisible issues and processes. Ideally, eco art’s ability to bring into being the unseen dynamics of a particular place, issue, or process can contribute significantly to cultural shifts even in relation to non-charismatic beings and places. Helping people see and appreciate native bees, in particular, is our intention in the B.C. project. In the interests of educating ourselves in these diverse perspectives, my students and I have been

collecting both bee books for scientific knowledge and bee poems for cultural or artistic knowledge. It's clear we can learn a great deal from the natural history books, but what can we learn from the poetry? It turns out, a great deal.

There are hundreds of bee poems. The relationship between poets and bees seems to be another admirable arrangement. I am reminded about how fine a mechanism poetry is for complex ways of knowing, for that braid of scientific observations with vision-inflected imagination, especially when I re-read Emily Dickinson's "To make a prairie," one of the last poems she wrote. Here it is (#1755 in the Thomas H. Johnson edition):

To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,  
One clover, and a bee.  
And revery.  
The revery alone will do,  
If bees are few.

Dickinson is an ecopoet at heart. She begins the poem by noting that 1 clover + 1 bee = 1 prairie. Then she corrects herself: No, it's really 1 clover + 1 bee + revery = 1 prairie. Then she changes her mind again: "The revery alone will do." This is a stunningly accurate scientific poem and a marvellous application of the poetic imagination at the same time. The poem is uniquely ecological and science-sensitive. Observation of a vast expanse of prairie – swaying wild grass and arching sky and meadows of wildflowers – reveals this truth: that the evolution of angiosperms means that the natural world is so amazing that one clover and one bee could start the process whereby earth becomes full of meadows and blossoms. But what is this "revery" that seems to have even more power and potential? At first it seems that Dickinson is claiming a similar power for the human imagination, if that is how we read "revery." It's true that she is *imagining* the scope of a prairie – not only because she lived all her life in Massachusetts, but also because no matter where you stand on earth, you cannot possibly see a whole prairie. She reminds us that this experience of knowing what you can't see includes speculation, imagination, and a sense of wonder. But Dickinson is never a pastoral, calm, anthropocentric sort of poet. What a word "revery" is – although it has an etymological relationship with "dream" ("rêve") and seems to allude to "reverence" (and I think we can allow for this gesture) in fact "revery" is a quintessentially unruly Dickinson word. Its root is in the Old French word *resverie* – wildness, raving, wandering, delirium. Yes, she is celebrating the human imagination – imagining processes she cannot see and imagining how the world extends and surpasses understanding. And in true Dickinson fashion, she springs into this vision through a wild and intoxicating state of dream, awe, and chaos. In that state she understands a profound fact about nature: at the heart of nature's creation is a wild, trampling, sexual-raving energy. She gets us to ask a difficult question: what is at the heart of the admirable arrangement? How did it start? What is its bond? It's a wild, chancy, sexual, mad energy. The

*This is a stunningly accurate scientific poem and a marvellous application of the poetic imagination at the same time.*

wild-seeded word “revery” is a miniature process capturing the secret erotic power of nature. Through a dreaming human imagination Dickinson helps us understand this scientific fact: that biological revery – nature’s essential delirious, pollen-saturated engine – could start the world anew and lead to the admirable arrangement.

These days, we are having to rely on nature’s innate resilient wildness as more and more admirable arrangements are being damaged. Sadly, native bees are few and increasingly becoming extinct and honey bees are being worn out with the weight of pollinator demands as numbers of native bees dwindle. Neither science nor its corporate investment nor urban farming activists nor eco art practices nor one single way of doing anything will help all by themselves. Perhaps, though, artists and scientists can help ignite the imaginations of everyone – farmers in thrall to industrial science, consumers and developers who don’t know and can’t see, spiritualities that dismiss basic facts, eco warriors who want to induce guilt and rage. Maybe we can reimagine our relationships to that prairie, that clover, that bee through the creative engines of art, human ingenuity, deep spiritualities, joyful enjoyment of nature and food, and join our reveries with nature’s revery. Our community-based eco art projects will attempt to celebrate the glorious bee and mend the admirable arrangement between ourselves and the pollinating insects we depend upon. It is time for all of us to plant gardens for bees and for poets to write more bee poems. As Dickinson tells us: Be wild. Save the bees. All you need is a clover – plant some – and revery: it’s everywhere, waiting to be unleashed.

*The Public Art Pollinator Pastures Project is a SSHRC Partnership Development grant, with The University of British Columbia Okanagan, Emily Carr University of Art + Design, The City of Richmond, and the City of Kelowna. See the project website at [borderfreebees.com](http://borderfreebees.com).*

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**NANCY HOLMES** is an Associate Professor in Creative Writing in the Department of Creative Studies at UBC Okanagan. She has published five collections of poetry, most recently, *The Flicker Tree: Okanagan Poems* (Ronsdale Press, 2012). Currently, she is a co-investigator on a SSHRC Partnership Development Grant with Dr. Cameron Cartiere of Emily Carr University of Art + Design on a project called The Public Art Pollinator Project which is harnessing the power of art to raise awareness and to develop initiatives to protect native pollinators, especially bees, in both the lower mainland of British Columbia and the Okanagan.

FRANKE JAMES

## *Drawing Fire: Art on the Front Lines of Environmental Truth-Telling*

Whether it becomes a viral sensation now, or is honoured in museums decades later, art is a powerful tool for environmental truth-telling.

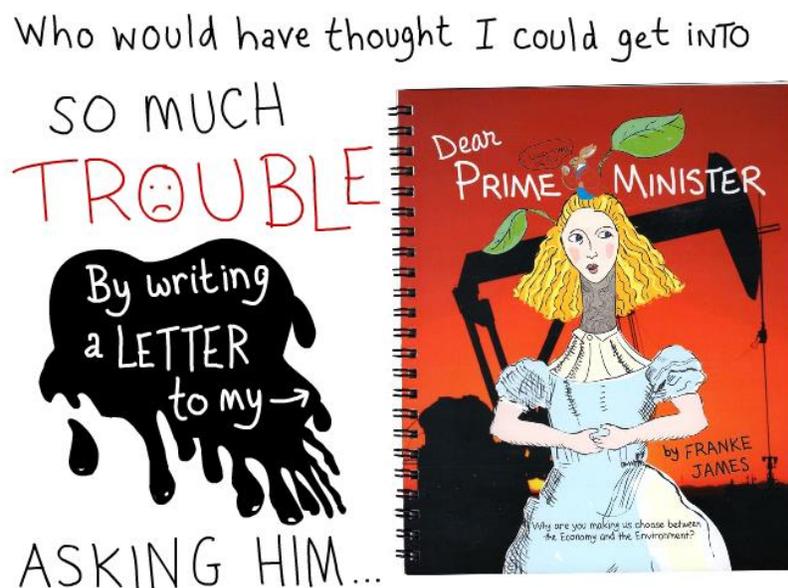
**Art lives on. It outlives a politician's reign.**

**Art is hard to silence. Censoring it only makes it more powerful.**

From irreverent cartoons to folk songs (remember Scientist Tony Turner's [Harperman?](#)), art can grab people's attention and bring dry scientific facts to life.

Art can get under the skin of our political leaders, and prod them to action in very unexpected ways. My own experience is an example.

I poked Stephen Harper in 2008 when I wrote to him asking him to make polluters pay. My visual letter asked a very basic question: ["Why are you making us choose between the economy and the environment?"](#)



# to MAKE POLLUTERS PAY...



The Guardian:

“CANADA IS THE DIRTY OLD MAN”



“In stark contrast to its cuddly international image, Canada is the dirty old man of the climate world – missing its Kyoto emissions reduction target by a country mile (by 2007, it was 34% above its target) and showing no signs of reigning in its profligacy.”

*The Guardian, 11/30/09*

Neither Harper nor Ottawa responded to my open letter. (In 2008, I gave copies of the spiral bound book to Stéphane Dion and Elizabeth May.)

One year later, as I was about to attend the UN Climate talks in Copenhagen, I wrote [“Fat Cat Canada’s Giant Litter Box”](#). I was ashamed of our “Colossal Fossil” status – and furious about the pollution that was poisoning downstream communities in the Alberta tar sands. I wanted people to know it. In the story, I drew a caricature of Harper as a trenchcoat-wearing oil barrel – it was inspired by *The Guardian* UK’s statement that “Canada is the dirty old man of the climate world.”

I never heard a peep from Harper or Ottawa. I assumed they didn’t care what I drew or what I thought. How could a tiny flea like me annoy the big Canadian government?

The official secretly WARNED  
NEKTARINA NOT to EXHIBIT MY ART



The PROOF given  
was my "DEAR  
PRIME MINISTER"  
essay about a  
CARBON TAX!

which is really SHOCKING...

But then, I discovered just how wrong I was. In 2011, Nektarina (an educational non-profit in Croatia), invited me to have a solo show in Europe. Their goal was to inspire youth to reduce their carbon footprint – and to create their own climate change art. Ottawa got wind of it when Nektarina applied to the Canadian embassy for a small UNFCCC climate education grant. The \$5,000 grant was approved – but then hastily cancelled by Jeremy Wallace, the Deputy Director of Canada’s Climate Change office. (The backdrop to this drama was that the European Union was debating whether to label Alberta bitumen “dirty oil.” The Canadian government appeared to fear that my art would somehow influence EU legislators or citizens.)

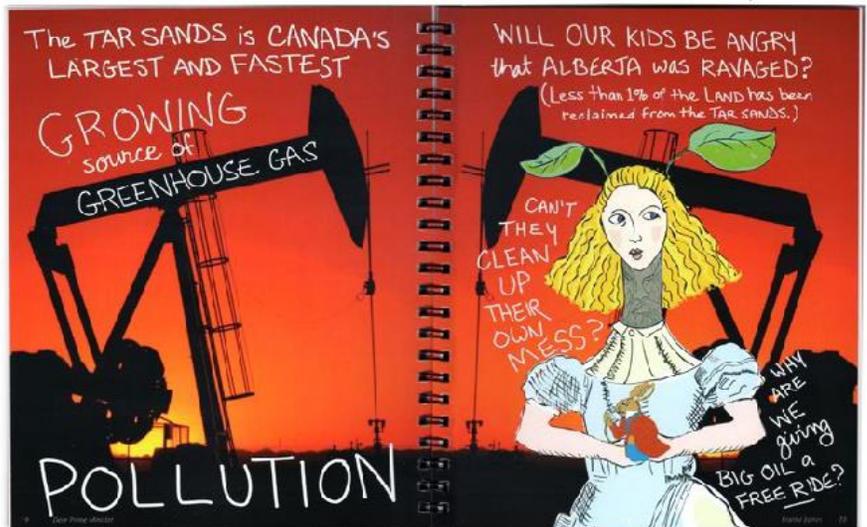
Behind the scenes, Canadian bureaucrats were secretly advising people not to exhibit my art or support me in any way. Nektarina’s director was warned explicitly, “Don’t you know this artist speaks against the Canadian government?”

When Nektarina’s director, Sandra Antonovic, told me, I was shocked. I asked her what reasons they could possibly have for making such an outlandish claim and I was told, “Oh, Ottawa is very unhappy with your visual essay to the Prime Minister.”

Fast forward two and half months, and my European art show was cancelled. Antonovic lost her job.

And I got busy fighting back – starting with filing Access to Information (ATI) requests to get the truth on the government’s secret censorship of my art.

“Oh, Ottawa is very **UNHAPPY** with your visual essay to the Prime Minister.”



(But I thought it was OK to disagree in a DEMOCRACY?)

2,172 Access to Information documents, from four different government departments, were released to me between August 2011 and Spring 2013.

The ATI documents provided me with the evidence and ammunition I was looking for. In an internal email, Foreign Affairs' Jean-Bruno Villeneuve wrote, "The artist's work dealt mostly with climate change and was advocating a message that was contrary to the government's policies on the subject."

In essence they were telling me "Do Not Talk about Climate Change. It is against government policy." I created a poster with the Parliament Buildings dropped into the tar sands.



OTTAWA May 29, 2013: *Do Not Talk about Climate Change* poster by artist/author Franke James. The street poster exhibition and online media campaign was crowd-funded at Indiegogo. Project: BANNED ON THE HILL | Photo © Fred Chartrand

Villeneuve's memorable quote is featured on it to support the fact that the Harper government really didn't want Canadians talking about climate change. In conjunction with the launch of my book, [Banned on the Hill](#), the posters appeared on bus shelters in Ottawa, Halifax, Calgary – and even Washington, DC.

**“The artist’s work dealt mostly with climate change, and was advocating a message that was contrary to the government’s policies on the subject.”** Jean-Bruno Villeneuve, Spokesperson, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada

Internal Canadian government document released under "Access to Information" laws

In the Spring of 2015, as a result of the efforts of the Office of the Information Commissioner, the Department of Foreign Affairs removed some of the redactions. Ian MacLeod at the *Ottawa Citizen* [wrote](#), “The new versions of the documents show that much of the official concern over funding James and promoting the European art tour was based on the polarizing politics of climate change. In one, a departmental trade official notes that a Canadian diplomat in Europe would not help promote the show because of ‘the artist’s views on the oilsands.’”

“Do Not Talk” had evolved into “Do Not Think about Climate Change.”



While the Canadian government under Harper did manage to stop my art from being hung on walls in Europe, they could not stop me from posting the censored art on bus shelters in major cities in North America – and sharing it worldwide in news articles, blog posts, and social media.

Their censorship only fueled interest in my art and environmental message. On September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2015 – four years after my art was censored, and just one month before the federal election – my solo show “My Dangerous Art: Free Expression in a Climate of Fear” took place. It was hosted by the BC Civil Liberties Association.

Josh Paterson, Executive Director of the BCCLA, [said](#),

We believe it is a critical time for free expression in this country. In just the last two years, cities have passed laws curtailing the right to demonstrate, scientists in employ of the government have had their voices muzzled, and “anti-terrorism” laws are being used to limit our rights to free speech.

Franke’s work calls on Canadians to engage in an important public policy conversation, and her own story of censorship is an important reminder of why we must work vigilantly to protect free expression. Not only that, but Franke is a fantastic example of how to shine a bright light on censorship, fight back, and come out of the experience stronger than ever.

At the “My Dangerous Art” show, I debuted “Six Easy Ways to Crush Free Expression,” which shares six tactics governments use to censor art.



Thankfully we have a sunny new prime minister who appears ready to talk about climate change. In 2015, he readily answered the question I asked Harper in 2008: “Why are you making us choose between the economy and the environment?”

[Justin Trudeau](#) said, “In 2015, pretending that we have to choose between the economy and the environment is as harmful as it is wrong.”

Good. And yet, there are powerful fossil fuel interests lobbying Trudeau behind the scenes.

In the fight to defend the most defenceless – our air, water, land, and animals who cannot speak up for themselves – art is a powerful weapon. But time is running out. If we don’t act fast, our children may inherit a Canada where polar bears can only be found on toonies.



**FRANKE JAMES** is the author of *Banned on the Hill* and the winner of the PEN Canada / Ken Filkow 2015 Prize and the BCCLA 2014 Liberty Award for Excellence in the Arts. Franke’s experience fighting government censorship is being used to teach grade school students about government censorship. She has contributed an illustrated chapter, “Games Bureaucrats Play,” to a new anthology entitled *Access to Information and Social Justice* edited by Kevin Walby, University of Winnipeg, and Jamie Brownlee from Carleton University.

JENNY KERBER

## *Finding a Place to Land*

When I first decided that I wanted to explore ecocritical approaches to Western Canadian literature in the late 1990s, the field was relatively sparse. There were a few people working in scattered pockets here and there, but little existed in the way of formal networks. Pamela Banting had published her edited book *Fresh Tracks: Writing the Western Landscape*, which I found inspiring, and Laurie Ricou was coming out with his *Arbutus / Madrone Files* (I remember Smaro Kamboureli generously introducing me to his work in manuscript form). I read these, and thought, hey, maybe I am not alone in thinking that connections among literature, environment, and culture are worth exploring! Mostly, though, I floundered about and read haphazardly, looking for a community of like-minded people. After hearing about an organization called ASLE, I attended my first ASLE-affiliated gathering at the University of East London. I remember being struck by two things: first, how welcoming this community of scholars was (the “big names” were as open and friendly as the new grad students), and second, how intellectually vibrant their ideas were. There was work to be done, and suddenly it felt like my efforts mattered. A highlight of that conference was listening to future ALECCer Greg Garrard interview Jonathan Bate about the latter’s new book, *The Song of the Earth*. A year later, I attended my first ASLE conference in Flagstaff, Arizona, where I met Anne Milne and Susie O’Brien while hiking around the perimeter of the Grand Canyon – little did we then know the extent to which our paths would cross for years to come. Another highlight from that gathering was listening to Pamela Banting and Davida Monk present their multimedia work on dance and Alberta landscapes – I would never look at coulees in the same way again! The world that gradually opened up to me through these early connections (and later via Cate Sandilands and the Environmental Studies program at York) has been filled with a kind of intellectual adventurousness that I had simply never expected while studying undergraduate English.

Over the years, I can recall many ASLE and ALECC highlights, most of which do not necessarily involve sitting in rooms listening to papers; instead, I have often learned the most while being out and about, among people gathered together to learn something new about our wonderful and frightening relationship to that set of phenomena so inadequately known in the popular imagination as “Nature.” Paddling alongside the cormorants near Sydney, NS with Nancy Holmes, Jon Gordon, and others, exploring the replica eighteenth-century gardens at the Fortress of Louisbourg with Richard Pickard and Anne Milne, cooling my heels in the pools by Kakabeka Falls near Thunder Bay with Norah Bowman, Dianne Chisholm, and others, exploring the strange and fascinating Museum of Natural History at Harvard with Cheryl Lousley, walking in the fire-bitten high country above Lake Okanagan with Cate Sandilands and Elspeth Tulloch, or learning about white pine and sumac in the scorching July heat at the Guelph Arboretum with Madhur Anand, Alec Follett, and Amanda Di Battista – these are the kinds of activities and relationships that are

deeply sustaining, and along with the wealth of creative and critical work in *The Goose*, they continue to fuel my optimism about ALECC and the work its members do.

*We need to continue working towards decolonization and greater diversity in everything from our hirings, to our publications, and to our organization of national and regional events.*

This is not to say that the future is without challenges: for one, we need more secure, meaningful jobs for those who have so much to contribute to our field. Even as we celebrate the vibrancy of our organization, I also cannot help but think of those very smart, gracious people who have

struggled to find a place in academia that will properly nurture their talents and compensate them fairly. For another, we need to continue working towards decolonization and greater diversity in everything from our hirings, to our publications, and to our organization of national and regional events. Finally, we need to figure out collective ways of holding a new federal government accountable when it comes to environmental regulation and the nurturing of our public institutions, especially our archives, museums, libraries, and arts organizations – places without which most of us would struggle to do our work. The last decade of federal politics gave us much to push against, but now it is time to remember what is worth fighting for, and that means placing a renewed sense of value on the arts and humanities, as well as the larger than human world upon which (and whom) our very lives depend. As climate change moves from future spectre to lived reality, it will take all of our collective imaginative energies to find a way through.

**JENNY KERBER** is the current ALECC President (2016), and teaches in the Department of English and Film Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University.

## SONNET L'ABBÉ

### *Brown Sound: A Ecolonization of Shakespeare's Sonnet 81*

**N**ot rising tides, not changing climate, nor soil pollutions vex me lately. Who could register pollutions of the particulate physical, or turn toward matters of lake acidification, while their psyche doubted its own survival? I feel, when I think of Earth, that my greenness is rotten, my feeling rotten. My heart is meanly disconnected from you, friend, whose memory doesn't foam with toxic agitation when another story of black life devalued pulses through our consciousness. In me each particle weathers the racial real. I bear it in my flow, in the underground of my attention. Your environmental alarm feels familiar, like someone's whisper of injustice, like a fact implored by mortal flesh. This flesh can't feel alarm that doesn't drive through the protective anodyne regulating my concern. My care is gone to the social, to tolerating the world as murderous atmosphere. What died in me is the earth; I can only yield so much to the oblivious culture. The petal of common feeling trampled over and over. Whiteness is a way of understanding the body that numbs when faced with its own melanin; its eyes are brainwashed; my petals struggle in that light. Lately my composure can't compose an unracial environment. Is it selfish, that the central love object of my gentle verse is the nerved within? I cherish a sensibility that questions the ownership of propriety and property. I create sounds in the behavioral wilds of terrified adults, and trust that song tunes territoriality toward being. Say your breathing shapes language into culture. Hear silence when all the breathers of the world are white or dead. My environment touches me; what kills the empathetic cellular kills resolve. Such virulent communications of race hatred must be filtered through my pen. I sound brown where breath most breathes; intervene in the green mouths of men.

**DR. SONNET L'ABBÉ** is a poet, essayist, and public speaker. The author of two collections of poetry, *A Strange Relief* and *Killarnoe*, L'Abbé was the editor of *Best Canadian Poetry 2014* and was the 2015 Edna Staebler Writer in Residence at Wilfrid Laurier University. She has taught creative writing at the University of British Columbia – Okanagan and at the University of Toronto's School of Continuing Studies. Dr. L'Abbé is also currently a creative writing and English instructor at Vancouver Island University.

LARISSA LAI

## ***Life/Fiction: Speculative Fiction and Environmental Emergence***

It's taking me forever, but I'm hard at work on a third novel, a speculative fiction piece in the tradition of the 1970s feminist speculative fiction of Marge Piercy, Monique Wittig, Ursula Le Guin, and Octavia Butler. Along the way, there's a conversation with other speculative fiction writers I admire who inherit the social turn of the 1970s and direct it towards other concerns – not just the heroic possibilities of technology but also the social and political consequences of its development and use. And, of course, the impacts of technology on the environment. Some of my favourite environmentally-focused novels of the recent past include Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars Trilogy, Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl*, and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*.

We currently inhabit a historical moment in which the logic of unlimited economic growth and the doctrine of human exceptionalism are showing profound and brutal consequences in relation to the life of the planet – animal, vegetable, and mineral. From climate change, to the destruction of water tables, to the ruining of animal habitats, to the killing of coral reefs, to the decimation of boreal forest, human beings have a lot to answer for. Recent critical recognition of the Anthropocene as a geological phenomenon by Bruno Latour and others has been important for recognizing the extent of human violence to the planet. It's important to remember, however, that such violence emerges from Western capitalism and the Western logic of the nature/culture divide. Though other cultures are not immune from taking up these forms, we also carry other ways of knowing and being.

Insofar as I am a Western subject then, there is much responsibility that I have been neglecting. As a Treaty Seven person and a longtime guest on unceded Coast Salish territory, I must begin with an acknowledgement of the Bearspaw, Chiniki, Wesley Nakoda, Blood, Pikani, Siksika, and Tsuu T'ina Nations in addition to the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. I make these acknowledgements as a matter of protocol and respect, but I also make them because I strongly believe that non-Indigenous people have a responsibility to recognize and think through Indigenous ways of knowing. Not only do we have a duty to do so, but our lives and the life of the planet may very well depend upon it. Cognizant of the perils of cultural appropriation and the fraught debates surrounding it, however, I feel it inappropriate of me to simply adopt the knowledge systems of traditional people wholesale. Rather, the task is to seek a balanced and harmonious way to live and write in relation to Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of being. For me, such an act is profoundly creative, in the best possible senses of the word. I can turn to my own cultural backgrounds: Western, Chinese, Asian, feminist, queer, and more. I understand these as always in flux and thus not to be taken up in any essential kind of way, but rather taken

up imaginatively, as emergent qualities, and lived through in ways that make sense to me in the contemporary moment. The Taoists speak of the “heartmind” as that place within us that can help us understand what is right in any given moment.

*What I’d like to argue for now is the need for new forms of utopianism.*

What I’d like to argue for now is the need for new forms of utopianism. In this, however, we need to be careful not to be naively idealistic. Utopianism cannot and must not be prescriptive. Rather, I think it is important that we imagine the future in the best, and most interesting, or most surprising ways we can,

while at the same time remaining open to eruptions of the unexpected that might be better or just different from anything we are able to imagine. I’m particularly interested in speculative fiction for these complicated reasons, and especially in that thing that Ursula Le Guin calls the “thought-experiment.”

Le Guin says, “The purpose of the thought-experiment ... is not to predict the future ... but to describe reality, the present world” (ii). She says, “the moral complexity proper to the modern novel need not be sacrificed, nor is there any built-in dead end; thought and intuition can move freely within the bounds set only by the terms of the experiment, which may be very large indeed” (ii). In other words, what we imagine as speculative fiction writers is unlikely to be predictive; it extrapolates only in the sense of allowing us to see and play out the logic of possibility, not the logic of any certain unfolding.

A few years ago, in a course I dubbed “Critical Utopias” after an essay by Tom Moylan of the same name, my students had a blast critiquing Ernest Callenbach’s admittedly outdated but once widely read and now still hugely interesting *Ecotopia*. That novel is compelling in spite of its shocking sexism. I think it was great for my students to register this, so that they could make sense of what the seemingly violent feminist speculative fiction texts of the 1970s were responding to. In an earlier iteration of this course, taught under the banner “Feminist Speculative Fiction,” without the inclusion of Callenbach, some students never forgave me including Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man*, not to mention Monique Wittig’s *Les Guérillères*, books I adore, though they are admittedly not for the faint of heart. All of these novels are novels of their time, taking up the utopian desires of specific communities – ecological, feminist, and/or lesbian separatist. Little of their content has come to pass, and yet they have had profound effects on the shape of the present.

The deeper problem with *Ecotopia*, like other utopian fictions (I think particularly of Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*, a novel written in 1888, in which the ills of the Industrial Revolution in Europe are cured by technology), is that it has no plot. A stranger goes to a utopian land where everything is environmentally perfect, and the reader witnesses one environmentally positive wonder after another until she thinks she will die of bombast clobber.

As a consequence of some of the progressively-minded cruelties I witnessed, experienced, and no doubt unwittingly perpetrated in the early 1990s, I have a deep allergy to those idealist practices that produce unhindered what Rey Chow has so usefully called “the fascist longings in

our midst.” And while it’s easy to laugh at such productions in earlier eco-fictions, the deeper problem, beyond the boredom or amusement it can produce (later), is that in the moment it can foreclose precisely the kinds of outcomes the well-intentioned idealist desires. Because, really, who wants to be so tediously righteous?

So how then, is a well-intentioned, if dyed-in-the-wool idealist to write? If the desire for a better world leads to policing behaviour plus boring fiction, how else to proceed?

The more cynically-minded response is to write the darkest apocalyptic fiction possible, as a sign and warning. I think in particular of Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*. The novel is brilliant as a novel, but its politics are limited. Those of us attending to the work of classical narrative structure know that narrative thrives on trauma. The old adage “hurt your protagonist” can be practiced to the full length of the sadistic imagination to great narrative effect. But the cynical limit of dark apocalypse as narrative strategy is that it panders precisely to those who believe that the Book of Revelation in the Bible is upon us. In other words, what if, to imagine and represent the most nightmarish of horrors is to bring us one step closer to them?

One might, as many of my peers do, turn to poetry. Some experimental poetry takes up language as its own form of materiality. I think of Steve Collis and Jordan Scott’s *Decomp*, as a particularly successful attempt at stitching language and the world back together. They left a copy of Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* in a remote, outdoor location for a year, then retrieved it and documented the action of “nature” on the text. *Decomp* is a work of erasure poetry, in which the hand of Mother Earth does the erasing. In a sense, it acknowledges the editorial agency of nature, and opens the door to nature’s nonhuman agency to actively intervene upon a text that treats nature as an object. In so doing, it queries the object status that Western culture has historically assigned to nature, thus reorienting the Western tradition’s nature/culture divide. Can such a recognition get at the problems that face our contemporary addiction to oil, economic growth, and the endless abstraction that we signifying monkeys seem to be so good at, to the detriment of our connection to the elemental, plant, and animal worlds? Perhaps partially. Much as though I love poetry and the people who write it, I do sometimes wonder whether it isn’t another form of preaching to the converted, in the sense that it speaks largely only to its own communities, educated and socially produced in culturally specific ways that are not available to the reading public more broadly.

So, it’s that old accessibility argument again, one that has circulated passionately through racialized writing communities at various moments in history – for me, the late 1980s and early 1990s. Is it better to follow a set of hegemonic conventions in order to get heard by a larger audience, even if those conventions blunt the real possibilities inherent in language? Or is it better to challenge those conventions and risk the alienation of the many, but get clearly heard by a beloved few? I want it both ways and more. The consequence is a practice that takes up multiple forms, moving sometimes in a more popular direction, sometimes in a more intellectual one, sometimes in an experimental one.

Speculative fiction, because it has both populist/commercial as well as experimental/avant-garde roots, offers a unique chance to get at both and more. Its communities identify across the full

range of the political spectrum, which means that its practitioners are not always speaking to those who already get it. I believe that speculative fictions can show us possibilities for the future that we might not otherwise have thought of. They can offer a thought-experiment, thinking forward from the conditions of the present to imagine not what's inevitable if we keep doing what we are doing, but rather the multiple possibilities that might erupt from the contingencies of the present, mixed, perhaps, with a little desire, a little heartmind. I've discussed this recently on the [TIA House blog](#). It's the surprises that catch us, and can show us where not only peril but also the possibility for ongoing life might arise.

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## DAPHNE MARLATT

### *Sites of Deep Immersion*

When I recently read Thomas Berry's *The Dream of the Earth*, published some 27 years ago, I was struck by how prescient his vision was and how little we have done with that gift. Berry's vision is very clear when he points out the gap between what he calls "absolute reality" and "our technological entrancement" that has isolated us from any deep awareness of how our lives are interconnected and interdependent with those of myriad other living species as well as on the earth itself as a transforming entity. When he speaks of "absolute reality" he is pointing to the reality of the water we drink, the air we breathe, the food we eat, how the reality of their polluted levels threatens our own survival as well as the survival of myriad other species.

Just last year, Jon O'Riordan and Robert Sandford in *The Climate Nexus: Water, Food, Energy and Biodiversity in a Changing World*, declared "There is very real fear among experts that we have blown the biogeochemical fuse that controls planetary land and sea-surface temperatures" (10). This would mean we have already entered "a new global hydro-climatic state," one to which we must rapidly adapt if we are to mitigate its devastating effects on all life on this planet. Their book urges adaption in many areas, from environmental education beginning in primary schools to diverse areas of government policy. What interests me as a poet is human consciousness, our stubborn refusal to recognize what is happening around us.

Berry locates the cause of this difficulty in a centuries-old Western belief that the natural world is merely a "resource" for a progressive economy that would ultimately assure material comfort for everyone. Such a belief refuses to consider the effects of our current economy on the biophysical world we live within. To counter this, he makes the radical assertion that human consciousness is the most recent evolutionary step in the planet's history, that the earth as a live entity has entrusted its life processes to us humans who are failing miserably to understand our responsibility or even our basic response ability. His ecological vision sees the earth as a responsive web of connected bioregions, each "a community of mutually supporting life systems within which the human must discover its proper role" (67-68). Such a role calls for developing openness to our mutual presence with what he calls the "numinous quality of every earthly reality" (2), including the life forms of the habitat we currently share in the context of earth's evolutionary history and its place in the cosmos. This is a very large vision, a vital "biocentric" one to supplant our destructively anthropocentric one.

His word "numinous" caught my attention. It suggests an approach that is based on an impress of presence as we detect it through our senses and something more, the phenomenal in that other sense of extraordinary, outside the ordinary opinions and judgements that dull our perception. It is response-based and entails open attention to the sheer phenomenality around

us, the phenomenal presence of a skunk, say, undulating through the slats of a neighbour's fence at dusk, or the presence of that bee brushing into the heart of an apple blossom. Such attention to immediate impress precedes our understanding of the causal connection between bee and eventual apple, or skunk and potato bugs in a veggie garden. It is attention to other and equal vitalities in that moment of shared presence.

Philosopher-poet Jan Zwicky speaks of such moments as an experience of "thisness" and suggests that "[w]e are pierced" in the experience. "In perceiving *thisness* we respond to having been addressed. (In fact we are addressed all the time, but we don't always notice this.)" She adds: "Often the experience also includes an awareness of not being able to give an account of the *this* – we can point, but not say" (52-53).

Berry asserts "Our challenge is to create a new language, even a new sense of what it is to be human" (42). The challenge is how to find new ways not only of seeing but of saying.

A poet in my own bioregion who is remarkably engaged in this challenge is Rita Wong who writes both poetically and pedagogically about water as she engages in numerous public activities to bring attention to how water and the ecosystems that lie at the heart of the water cycle are under threat. In her essay "Untapping Watershed Mind," Rita suggests that "A watery lexicon and syntax, a hydro logical approach could cultivate our capacity to scale down to the level of molecules and up to the level of oceans" (Christian and Wong 249). She calls this scale "the larger picture." Such a vision is logos-oriented in the sense of intelligently hearing the sensory, cultural, and historical implications of the terms we take for granted, their definitive and long-accepted meanings as well as newly perceived connections, even new words or phrases we coin for their radiance of signification.

How to word an awareness that is in that moment of experience unlanguageed is a challenge for anyone trying to write her way into the larger picture. Poetry at its best is an investigation into moment-by-moment possibility, into the openness of mind we associate with play. As the American poet Charles Olson wrote half a century ago, "So, is it not the PLAY of a mind we are after, is it not that that shows whether a mind is there at all?" (55) He was not speaking of the acquisition of information, although information, especially the vital information that geology, physics, chemistry can give us, may be a necessary basis for this play. He was addressing the interplay of mind and world, of poetic attention to the connective edge between what's out there and what's in here.

*Both language and ecosphere function as shared sites of deep immersion. To get beyond the limits of what we think we know, we need to immerse ourselves in both.*

It seems to me that both language and ecosphere function as shared sites of deep immersion. To get beyond the limits of what we think we know, we need to immerse ourselves in both, ditch our manipulation of them for our own particular ends. Language is a site of inter-relations that require listening. Listening not only in relation to culture (idiom) or person (emotion), but to

relations within the melodic and semantic play of language itself. This approach can open up ways in which language determines what and how we recognize our physiological inter-connections with, even our inter-dependency on, what exists both within and outside our habits of thinking. Listening to language in the context of Berry's earthly realities is what Rita Wong does when she begins a poem:

*water has a syntax     i am still learning*  
*a middle voice         pivots where it is porous (9)*

These are lines of deep immersion pointing their way toward the larger picture.

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Vancouver poet **DAPHNE MARLATT**'s novelistic long poem *The Given* received the 2009 Dorothy Livesay Award. She was awarded the 2012 George Woodcock Lifetime Achievement Award and a year later Talonbooks released her *Liquidities: Vancouver Poems Then and Now*. In 2014 Wilfrid Laurier University Press issued a selection from 40 years of her work, *Rivering: The Poetry of Daphne Marlatt*, edited by Susan Knutson.

## STEPHANIE POSTHUMUS

### *Écocritique en français au Canada / Ecocriticism in French in Canada*

In response to the invitation to reflect on ecocriticism in Canada for *The Goose's* tenth anniversary edition, I will outline more specifically my position as a bilingual Canadian working in an Anglophone university in a Francophone province in a bilingual (but largely Anglophone) country. Drawing on the tradition of a politics of location, I will describe my cultural, linguistic and intellectual encounters with ecocriticism in English in the written text below and in French in the audio recording that can be found at <http://scholars.wlu.ca/thegoose/vol14/iss2/41/>. I hope you will take the time to experience both texts as they are quite different in content and in form.

The following questions will guide my reflections both in the English written text and the French audio recording: How are issues of language and culture woven into ecocritical studies despite calls to embrace a global environmentalism? When do we need to “stay with the trouble” (to borrow Donna Haraway’s expression) caused by cultural and linguistic differences rather than work towards a unified environmental response? When do claims about culture and language homogenize difference and refuse the dynamic processes and exchanges that play out across time and space?

In short, what does it mean to do *écocritique en français au Canada*?

In my case, it means:

1) accepting the fact that the word you use to describe what you do – *écocritique* – may never appear in any French dictionary of literary terms (there is still no Wikipedia entry for this word in French). Colleagues in French literary studies may find the word difficult to swallow (literally and metaphorically) because of the idea of reading cultural texts from an ecologically informed position. *Écocritique* does not yet have the same grounding or intellectual community as ecocriticism. There is no flagship journal or association, and top ranked literary journals such as *Recherches sémiotiques*, *Critique*, *Voix et images*, and *Lettres québécoises* have yet to publish more than a handful of articles on the question of literature and environment. In addition, no major or minor programs in literature and environment are offered in French in Quebec or elsewhere in Canada.

2) being relegated to the “European literatures” panel at ALSE conferences alongside colleagues working not on French contemporary texts like myself but on Norwegian children’s literature, seventeenth-century Spanish poets, or German eighteenth-century natural philosophers. It

means insisting on language differences in discussions with monolingual Anglophone colleagues at these conferences even when this runs the risk of generalizing (no, not all French literary texts reject wilderness spaces and promote the aesthetics of the carefully sculptured gardens of Versailles).

3) questioning my position on French cultural differences given that I am a bilingual Canadian living in Montreal. As Gayatri Spivak clearly articulates, the position of social observer requires a “responsible comparativism” that carefully negotiates cultural differences. Literary texts need to be compared in terms of how they use language to subvert *des idées toutes faites* about nation and culture and not in order to promote nationalistic ideas about belonging or territory.

4) avoiding the pitfalls of “playing the knowledge broker” who seeks to inform a French public about Anglophone ecocriticism or an Anglophone readership about French eco-thinking without calling into question the ways in which such exchanges are framed. French literary studies do not “lag” behind Anglophone approaches.

Instead, they have their own traditions of reading landscape, space, and place that may or may not translate into an ecocritical practice. My role is not to “import” Anglophone ecocriticism into French literary studies, but instead to unearth elements of eco-theory already present in French philosophy, politics, etc.

*French literary studies do not “lag” behind Anglophone approaches. Instead, they have their own traditions of reading landscape, space, and place.*

5) writing, speaking, and publishing in two languages, so that I am always aware of the space between language and thought, the difficulties of saying what you mean, the need to paraphrase, reword, rethink. Whereas the English language’s plasticity allows for the creation of new noun combinations, the French language requires finding the *mot juste*. In French, there is the worry that English is “infiltrating” or “contaminating” one’s writing style, so that hyper-vigilance becomes the *mot d’ordre* for the bilingual scholar.

6) inhabiting not only a bilingual intellectual space but also a bilingual urban space. Even though I moved to Montreal in 2011, I speak less French now than I did when teaching in a French literature department in Ontario. As a member of McGill’s Department of Literatures, Languages, and Cultures, I work almost exclusively in English now, teaching European texts in translation. While French is still the main language used in my home, I have seen an important shift in my use of Canada’s two official languages. Moreover, I have become more sensitive about my own use of French because attitudes towards language are on the one hand more polarized in Quebec and on the other more flexible (multiple accents and expressions).

7) integrating the politics of place into my research, so that the focus is no longer solely on a French *écocritique* but also more generally on *écocritique en français*. Being involved in ALECC as a bilingual association has given me the opportunity to promote *écocritique en français au Canada* even though my research is in French contemporary literature. There is growing interest

in ecocriticism in Québec and elsewhere in Canada. Mariève Isabel, a McGill graduate student who I co-supervise, has been essential in creating a network of ecocritical scholars. She has edited Francophone content for *The Goose* as well as co-organized a graduate student conference on *Écocritique québécoise et canadienne-française* (October 2015). Bilingualism has been one of ALECC's objectives from its inception but things happen slowly. Back in 2003, it was a question of choosing a bilingual name for ALECC. Thirteen years later, we are applying for a translation grant for the ALECC 2016 conference from the Canadian Heritage program. I hope that thirteen years from now, every ALECC conference and every issue of *The Goose* will have content in French, English, and other indigenous languages.

8) cultivating collaborations with literary scholars working on *géopoétique* (Rachel Bouvet, *La Traversée*, UQAM) and Francophone *écocritique* (Étienne-Marie Lassi, University of Manitoba), and with media artists at labs like *Hexagram* (Gisèle Trudel, UQAM) so that *écocritique en français au Canada* becomes a hub for exchanging ecocritical ideas and practices. In many respects, there is then not an *écocritique* but *des écocritiques* working to develop a strong sense of culture and environment in French in Canada.

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## CATRIONA SANDILANDS

### *Environmental Humanities and Publics*

In June, 2006, a small but enthusiastic group of faculty members and students sat down in a classroom at York University to work out the details of a new organization to study and promote ecocriticism and environmental writing in Canada. We met under the auspices of the Environmental Studies Association of Canada (ESAC) which was, that year, holding its meetings at York as part of Congress. We met one year after a similar group of people, at the University of Oregon under the auspices of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), convened a discussion about the need for a distinct Canadian forum on literature and environment. Despite the (vocal) protests of some leading ASLE members, who considered the larger organization more than capable of representing Canadian literatures and environments under the ASLE umbrella, and despite the (less vocal) protests of some ESAC members, who considered that the interdisciplinary Environmental Studies banner clearly included the humanities, we felt the need for something oriented to our more specific needs. I remember the insistence on including the term “culture” in our title and mandate, gesturing to ecocritical studies beyond written literature. I remember how pleased we were to arrive at an acronym that is the same in English and French: ALECC. And I remember how enthusiastic we were about the implication that ALECC would thus be an organization *for*, and not just *about*, literature, environment, and culture – L’association *pour* la littérature, l’environnement et la culture au Canada – an interdisciplinary and activist commitment that remains our mandate now. We were, and are, “an organization *for* the creation, appreciation, discussion, analysis, and dissemination of knowledge about the work of nature writers, environmental writers and journalists, eco-artists of all disciplines, ecocritics, and ecotheorists in Canada.”

Ten years later, the term “Environmental Humanities” (EH) has become a Thing. There are (some few) academic jobs in the field, grants and fellowships, and book series such as the excellent one with Wilfrid Laurier University Press; there is even a (bad) Wikipedia entry. There are also several journals explicitly oriented to EH, each mostly beginning in a specific disciplinary configuration – environmental philosophy, history, cultural studies, literature – but oriented to the need for a larger, more expansive understanding of what the humanities specifically contribute to interdisciplinary environmental thinking and acting. *Environmental Humanities*, out of Australia, was originally largely the work of philosophers such as Deborah Bird Rose and Thom van Dooren, who wrote in their inaugural editorial that “the environmental humanities positions us as participants in lively ecologies of meaning and value, entangled within rich patterns of cultural and historical diversity that shape who we are and the ways in which we are able to ‘become with’ others” (Rose et al 2). *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities*, out of the US, was founded by literary scholars Stephanie LeMenager and Stephanie Foote: with a slightly different orientation than Rose and van Dooren’s, they insist that the environmental humanities

“represents a not-quite-achieved present within academic circles and in the broader realm of the public humanities, where scholarly research opens up to public art projects, educational apps, curatorial ventures, public television and Internet communities” (n. pag.).

ALECC’s specificity within this proliferating field is, obviously, partly about our orientation to Canadian literatures, ecologies, and politics. Within this general orientation, however, is what I perceive to be a stronger commitment than in (say) ASLE and the two journals mentioned above to the *integration* of ecocriticism, environmental thought, and creative writing, and especially to an intellectual practice in which literary writing (and art practice more generally) is valued as a *theoretical* form in its own right. Don’t get me wrong: ASLE has a strong creative writing caucus and its flagship journal *ISLE* always includes sections devoted to literary nonfiction and poetry. But just as the history of Canadian literary environmentalism has been very different from that of the US,<sup>1</sup> the *form* ecocriticism has taken in Canada extends

*I perceive a stronger commitment to an intellectual practice in which literary writing (and art practice more generally) is valued as a theoretical form in its own right.*

from a tradition in which literary writers are much more likely to be considered public intellectuals, and in which the *conceptual and political* work of the environmental humanities is thus also understood to proceed through literary texts themselves. I don’t mean to overstate national differences, but it is very much my experience that ALECC simply does not attend to the US-generated debate that pits nature writing against conceptual sophistication, real dirt against sharp thinking. Just to give one example: in the most recent issue of *The Goose* (14.1), of the three works listed as “articles,” one is *about* poetry and the other two really *are* poetry in their collectively exquisite attention to language in its relations to ecological thought and politics (this in addition to an extensive “poetry” section).

Ten years in, then, ALECC and *The Goose* clearly attend to the mandate to be *for* literature, environment, and culture. In practice, this mandate has complicated the relations among criticism, creativity, and politics, both reflecting and strengthening Canadian traditions of public intellectualism and environmental thought. This trajectory intensifies our work at both intellectual and institutional levels (about which I wish I had more space to write: academia is a difficult place for ALECC members across the board), not least because it demands attention to the creative practice of critical writing. And we still have lots of work left to do, especially in terms of creating a more *public* ecocritical conversation in this vein. Still, within the proliferating sites of engagement in the environmental humanities, ALECC and *The Goose* are cultivating something unique, and I am very pleased to have been a part of their emergence.

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<sup>1</sup> See Ella Soper and Nicholas Bradley’s excellent collection *Greening the Maple: Canadian Ecocriticism in Context* (Calgary: U of Calgary P, 2013) for a powerful demonstration of this point.

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**CATRIONA (CATE) SANDILANDS** is a former ASLE President (2015), ALECC President (2011), and ESAC President (1996-7). She is a Professor in the Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University, where she teaches and writes at the intersections of environmental literature, social and political theory, and sexuality/gender studies. She is currently working on a manuscript on Jane Rule’s (queer, feminist, literary, environmental, community) public intellectual legacy.

## JOHN TERPSTRA

### *Taking Nature Personally*

**A** number of years ago, I was involved in a performance event we called “Live Art/Naked Trees.” There were four of us. The pianist, Jim Walsh, improvised on the keyboard while Ingrid Remkins, a dancer, improvised her moves over our stage area, Colin Macdonald, stage right, painted a large canvas from blank beginning to brushed completion, and, stage left, I read entries from the manuscript of an as-yet-unpublished book called *Naked Trees*. The performance was, as one audience member described it, a *happening*. The book was, as the title suggests, all about trees. At some point during our artistic adventure together, Colin said to me, “I hope the next piece you write has some people in it.”

“Aren’t trees people?” I asked, only half-kidding.

I had started writing about trees because they were large and mysterious and when I began to enter their mystery, and the *mysterium* of their presence among us, especially in the city where they can be as big as houses but are *living*, a co-populace, the pencil began to move across the page. Also, I felt that I owed the trees a debt. I was at the time working for a small furniture-making shop. The trees were literally providing me with a living. I was feeling guilty, too, however, because we produced so much scrap wood. All those years they put into growing, only to be burned. It didn’t seem right. Even though, I knew in my bones, it was entirely the way of the world.

Nature and the environment as creative inspiration that also vibrates with the tension of our human presence, habitation, and activity on the earth: this has always been my writing territory. It’s a tension that, like the string of a musical instrument, makes the song possible.

In the 1990s, as one poet after the other wrote first novels that shot them into public recognition and fame, I thought that I should write me a novel too. To write a novel, I thought, you need people and you need a place. I knew that writing about people would still be a problem, but the place came to me instantly: a bird, a seagull I believe, circled slowly in my mind and landed at a specific location in my home geography of Hamilton. On a particular feature of that geography, in fact: a glacial sandbar I had already developed an interest in and subsequently began to investigate more closely. The sandbar became the subject and main character in my first work of nonfiction, *Falling into Place*. It lies within the city itself, and so I entered into a territory where the natural and the built geography interweave.

In that book I claimed the sandbar as my own personal land feature. Echoing Georgia O’Keeffe, who laid claim to the mountains of New Mexico that inspired her painting, I said that God told

me if I wrote about the sandbar, I could have it, it was mine. Actually, the quote from Georgia O'Keeffe is not in the book. I couldn't track it down in time for publication. But I use it now when I give presentations based on *Falling into Place*, and invariably get the laugh I want when I add, *but I'm willing to share*.

*We're all in this together, after all.  
And in my cosmology, unless we take  
this nature thing personally we can't  
hope to develop the kind of  
relationship toward it that will last.*

Sharing is the reason, finally, why the book was written — or any story is told. We're all in this together, after all. And in my cosmology, unless we take this nature thing personally we can't hope to develop the kind of relationship toward it that will last.

The kind of relationship that will *last forever till the end of time*, as those romance songs go. This brings me to another quotable quote that I also didn't use, from the book of Isaiah in Hebrew scripture: *and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My-Delight-Is-In-Her, and your land Married*. Putting aside all the baggage, gender and otherwise, that the text carries, in current usage the word *married* denotes a relationship between equals. Personal. One-to-one. A relationship of love and respect, that also happens to make possible, literally, the continuation of life on the planet.

We *are* the landscape, or nature, or geography, or whatever you want to call our physical environment. There is no separation. Nor is there in our art.

**JOHN TERPSTRA** is the author of nine books of poetry and four books of nonfiction. His work has won the CBC Radio Literary Prize for Poetry and several Hamilton Literary Awards, and has been short-listed for both the Governor-General's Award and the RBC Taylor Prize. He lives in Hamilton.

## HARRY THURSTON

### *“Between the World of Words and the World of Things”*

I began to write poetry when I was 19, a relatively late starter as a writer according to many. At the time, I was a biology student with no aspirations for a literary career, but that was more than four decades and twenty-six books ago.

I wavered in my commitment to this new vocation, at one point turning down an acceptance to medical school, which had been my original goal. And I have been asked, and often asked myself, why I set aside a promising career in science for a very uncertain future, first as a poet, and later as a freelance environmental journalist and nature writer.

I'm not sure that I can ever adequately answer this query. In part, writing answered to an emotional need that, until I began writing, I simply did not know was there. Why, otherwise, continue to write as I have done uninterrupted for nearly a half century?

I do know that my apparent conversion from the field of the sciences to the arts had nothing at all to do with a disinterest in, or aversion to, the subjects of science, in particular the natural sciences. I remain as interested in the methods and findings of scientific inquiry now as I did as a fresh-faced, aspiring science student, and for this reason, it was a natural evolution in my writing career to write about environmental issues and natural history as I continued to practice as a poet.

*I have been asked, and often asked myself, why I set aside a promising career in science for a very uncertain future.*

I have never embraced the physiological explanation of the seeming divide within individuals, as being either left or right brained, or, at the societal level, between cultures of the sciences and arts. Such divisions are largely, I believe, artificial or self-imposed.

Timing, however, had something to do with my radical change of course, as it occurred at a tumultuous period of social history, in the late 1960s, with the birth of the environmental movement; though, as I have written elsewhere, I was an environmentalist before I ever heard the word.

The explanation that I have given in the past, and which still seems closest to the truth, is that I took up writing because the language of science did not accord with my feelings about the world,

especially the natural world. I needed a language that was more lyrical, more expressive, yet in some ways retained the “hardness” of a scientific mindset.

I found it first in my freshman English course when I was introduced to the Imagist poets (who, of course, had found their inspiration in the highly visual ideograms of the Chinese language, in which the scholar Ernest Fenollosa said we seem “to be watching *things* work out their own fate”) (qtd. in Ayers 10). This approach to the world and to language was brought together in the now famous statement by American poet and physician William Carlos Williams, “No ideas but in things” (6).

It may seem ironic, or contradictory somehow, that this more “objective” language and my yearning for a more lyrical approach to the world, in language, were joined – yet I think not.

I am now reading Primo Levi’s highly original memoir, *The Periodic Table*, which takes the names of the elements as its chapter titles: “Argon, Hydrogen ... Carbon,” and so on. Levi, a chemist by training, is best known for his account of his time in Auschwitz, *If This is a Man*, which I have not yet read. The present book is introduced by an admiring Philip Roth, the American novelist, in which he protests that Levi is not two souls in one body: “I’d say that not only the survivor and the scientist are inseparable but so are the writer and scientist” (xiii).

“Rather than a question, this is a diagnosis, which I accept with thanks,” says Levi in response. In the text itself, in the chapter “Iron,” Levi, as a young chemistry student, compares Mendeleev’s Periodic Table to “poetry ... the bridge, the missing link, between the world of words and the world of things” (34-35).

I am more sympathetic to the language of science today than I was as a young student, and can now remember some of the joy Levi felt in equating it to a fundamental understanding of the world – and of ourselves. I even have a wish to incorporate some of that empirical, hard-as-iron language into the body of an eco-poem that I am now working on.

But I think that the essential point here relates to the inseparable nature of our natures as human beings. We are, at the same time, rational and intuitive and analytical and poetic. Our language aspires to this unity.

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RITA WONG

## *Decolonization is an Environmental Necessity*

As I reflect on the past ten years, a key moment for me that connected art, culture, and the environment is the spontaneous eruption of the Indigenous-led movement Idle No More in 2012 and 2013. In rejecting the evisceration of environmental protection laws in omnibus Bill C45, Indigenous people both asserted their sovereignty, and gathered in public to protect water, land, and life.

Idle No More was started and led primarily by Indigenous women, but it is open to anyone who cares about the health of land, water, and society. The organizers understand that we need mass movements to work together to address the climate crisis that we are in. Idle No More was also sparked by the hunger strike of Chief Theresa Spence, calling for respectful treatment of First Nations and a meeting with the governor general and the prime minister to discuss Canada's treaty relationship with First Nations leaders.

Idle No More was oversimplified by the corporate media. I would suggest it is a cultural movement as well as a political one, and continues today in a variety of forms, weaving together concerns about women, water, Indigenous sovereignty, spiritual practices, our non-human relatives, and more. For example, in December 2015, people who are trying to protect the Peace River from the Site C dam started a camp to obstruct the dam. Clear cutting had started in August 2015 in northern BC, despite several legal challenges against the BC government for imposing the dam against First Nations objections. Both Treaty 8 First Nations and many settlers living in the Peace consider the proposed dam to be an egregious violation of the treaty. When this camp in freezing cold weather began, it [called forth Idle No More](#) on the Facebook page that accompanied this action. In this sense, Idle No More lives on in the Treaty 8 land defenders, who welcome [more support and donations](#). One of the campers, Helen Knott, has shared [poetry](#) and [writing from the camp](#). The land defenders anticipate legal action against them, as the BC government has filed for an injunction. Their actions benefit all of us, as we need the forests and the rich agricultural lands of the Peace much more urgently than another mega-dam that even BC Hydro admits [isn't currently needed](#), even while it has targeted and cut down trees housing eagles' nests with vicious disregard for the wildlife and the people in the region.

Idle No More is a complex phenomenon, generating art, literature, dialogues, actions, and discourse revealing the tensions in the lived experiences of Indigenous people, pressured and oppressed by a colonial state apparatus that has been resisted for more than 500 years, and continues to be resisted. Literature, stories, poetry, and culture have an important role to play, in conjunction with other actions on and with the land. Re-storying land, relationships, and ourselves is part of the paradigm shift that needs to happen for peace and freedom to be

materialized substantially, not just in rhetoric, but in the actual structures that shape our lives and our imaginations.

During the early days of Idle No More, people gathered and round danced in surprising places. There were also road blockades and interruption of business as usual in many different places. The anthology *The Winter We Danced* collects much of the writing that emerged during the start of the Idle No More movement – articles, poems, images, stories, letters, interviews, songs. It is an archive of decolonial renewal, a brilliant reminder of what grassroots intelligence can do. It enacts and offers structures of feeling through which to connect to land, water, animals, plants, and each other, much needed in a time of accelerating climate change.

Many of the contributors in the anthology raise the importance of water, from authors like Richard Van Camp and Lee Maracle, to Chickadee Richard, who states, “In Idle No More, the focus is the protection of water, land, and the future generations, the unborn” (137). Relationships with water and land are emphasized by many Indigenous writers, thinkers, speakers, and organizers. Settlers (or unsettlers) also have the responsibility to learn from and work with Indigenous peoples as allies or accomplices, and to contribute our own gifts as well. Working together, we have an important role to play in a cultural shift that values intrinsic respect for and coexistence with the land and water.

This is seen, for example, on the west coast of Canada where there is a strong and vibrant movement to protect the coast from pipelines. For example, in *The Enpipe Line* anthology, the editors offered to measure each line of text sent in in order to create a pipeline made of poetry. This poetry pipeline became longer than the pipeline proposed for transporting toxic diluted bitumen to the Pacific Ocean, over 70,000 km. In the cultural interface where settlers (or unsettlers) have a responsibility to build better relationships than the violent inequities handed down to us through colonization, I look to projects like *The Enpipe Line* for creative grassroots interventions that seek to support Indigenous land defenders.

*Settlers (or unsettlers) have a responsibility to build better relationships than the violent inequities handed down to us through colonization.*

Many artists, writers, and cultural workers are active in Idle No More. One of them, Leanne Simpson, articulates an Anishinaabe worldview in her book *Islands of Decolonial Love*. Her perspective is wonderfully conveyed in the story “nogojiwanong” (place at the end of the rapids, the Anishinaabe name for Peterborough), where she writes:

It is with great regret we are writing on behalf of the michi saagiig anishinaabeg to inform you that you will not be permitted to build your lift locks, canals and hydro dams here because this is the place where we give birth and breastfeed, and we like to drink the water while doing so. The clean water in our wombs and breasts is the same clean water in the rivers and lakes. (113-14)

In short, women are water, as one Dene elder has said. What we do to the world, we do to ourselves as well, eventually. Simpson's writing is noteworthy in how it so beautifully and firmly animates the principle of interrelatedness with the animals, the plants, the water, and the land, conveyed by the saying "all my relations."

To be in touch with the needs of the current times as a writer and a scholar, as a human being living in dangerous times, it is necessary to address real, ongoing threats to water and land, and to work toward better alternatives. In response to the climate crisis, I turn to the Anishinaabe [eighth fire prophecy](#) that says now is the time for people from all four directions to come together for peace. I also see the Leap Manifesto as part of this work, and I hope leap year 2016 helps our societies to transform and mature in the ways we need and want. May love for this earth and for one another, both human and non-human, help guide us in the years to come.

**RITA WONG** lives on unceded Coast Salish territories, also known as Vancouver. She has written a few books: *monkeypuzzle* (for which she received the Asian Canadian Emerging Writers Award), *forage* (awarded the Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize and Canada Reads Poetry 2011), *sybil unrest* (with Larissa Lai), *undercurrent*, and *perpetual* (with Cindy Mochizuki). With Dorothy Christian, she is co-editing an anthology called *Downstream: Reimagining Water* (forthcoming). She wishes you a Happy Year of the Monkey.