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Honk if you love book reviews! Looking Back at 10 Years of Book Reviews in *The Goose*

by

Amanda Di Battista



The Goose doesn't really conform to the typical publication format of an academic association's official journal. As reflected upon elsewhere in this issue by some of *The Goose's* past contributors, each release of *The Goose* has offered readers an aesthetically and intellectually rich collage of poetry, creative writing, visual art, and scholarly work, most often favouring experimentation and a deep, unapologetic love of the natural world over the conventions of academic publishing. The work featured in *The Goose* has furthered ecocritical conversations in Canada and helped map the varied landscape(s) of Canadian environmental writing. The pages of *The Goose* have been a space in which a wide variety of environmental writers—among them activists, scholars, critics, poets, and others—have enacted an environmental politics centred on the power of literary and artistic engagement to affect and redefine our relationships with the natural world.

In a publication that so intentionally pokes holes in the boundaries between scholarship, poetics, and politics and that takes such delight in messing with the conventions of academic publishing, what is the place of book reviews? Eminently recognizable, book reviews tend to have relatively impermeable boundaries, conforming to set formatting guidelines and requiring that certain conventions be followed to the letter. But *The Goose's* book reviews section has been, and will likely continue to be, one of the most beloved parts of the journal. In fact, when I asked long-time editors of *The Goose*, Lisa Szabo-Jones and Paul Huebener, to tell me how they think book reviews contribute to the journal, Lisa told me that they come together to create "the spine of *The Goose*; without the reviews, we'd be a lumpy blob of flesh and feathers. They hold us together." So what makes our book reviews so strong that they have helped to support *The Goose* as it has taken flight?

The importance of book reviews to *The Goose's* basic make-up is, in part, due to the central role that they have played in *The Goose* and the Association for Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada / L'Association pour la littérature, l'environnement et la culture au Canada (ALECC)'s budding identities from the outset. *The Goose's* book reviews section—which grew steadily from 2 reviews per issue to over 20 within the first five years—has always provided readers with the opportunity to encounter a wide range of new environmental poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and scholarly texts in short, critical, and semi-formal pieces of criticism. The top notch writing of our reviewers and the easily digestible format of the book reviews have created a way for readers to dip their toes into the expanding pool of new Canadian environmental writing, much of which has been written by ALECC members and may be outside of the purview of other mainstream academic publications. In their thoughtful engagement with a wide range of environmental texts, *The Goose's* book reviews simultaneously chime into an ecocritical conversation that is uniquely centred on Canadian environmental imaginations and showcase the work of Canadian ecocritics and environmental writers to the journal's international readership. Book reviews demonstrate the importance of public discussions of scholarly and literary texts in creating and maintaining critical communities like ALECC by engaging publically and accessibly in the ecocritical practices of close reading, criticism, and attentiveness to the relationship between literature and the environment. Without book reviews, many new ecocritical and environmental publications would enter into our libraries largely unnoticed, and readers wouldn't have access to the critical insights offered by reviewers. In each issue of *The Goose*, reviewers collectively construct a picture of the texts that

ALECC members are, or should be reading, a picture that is guided by the editorial team's attention to the changing nature of environmental and ecocritical thought both in Canada and abroad, strong and lasting relationships with small publishers such as *Brick Books*, and our reviewers' own scholarly interests. This biannual snapshot of ecocritical thought in Canada, while always incomplete, offers readers an intriguing view of what Canadian ecocriticism might look like.

The strength of the book reviews section also stems from its vibrancy, which I think is unparalleled among similar environmental and ecocritical publications. From the outset, *The Goose* has actively solicited reviews from individuals who are writing from a wide range of professional experience, both within and outside of the academy. The generosity, varied experience, and critical capacity that our reviewers bring to each review they contribute makes the book reviews section read like a series of patch-work love letters to the practices of reading, thinking, and engaging in public discussions about books. Our reviewers, many of whom have been long-term contributors, recognize the importance of texts that engage in literary and/or academic environmental consideration for the development of environmental thought and of approaching texts from an ecocritical position. Most of the ALECC presidents and many current and past ALECC executive members have published reviews in *The Goose*, a testament to the valued place that book reviews hold in the institutional culture of ALECC. Book reviewing also provides new scholars and writers with an entry into the very intimidating world of academic publishing and many have found a welcoming home for their first public foray into writing in the pages of *The Goose*. Together, new and seasoned writers bring a wide variety of approaches to reviewing, making the book reviews section a lively and dynamic space that contributes to ongoing conversations about environmental writing, ecocriticism, and creative practice.

The tenth anniversary of *The Goose* is an obvious moment in which to reflect on the publication's past and to speculate about its future, and to consider the role of book reviews in both. During the first 5 years of *The Goose*, the express purpose of the book reviews section was to highlight Canadian publications with the aim of strengthening the profile of Canadian environmental and ecocritical writers. While we remain committed to showcasing Canadian environmental and ecocritical writing first and foremost, we have been moving toward an increasingly interdisciplinary and international understanding of what texts fit within *The Goose's* reviewing purview; our choices of review texts reflect the changing landscape of the Canadian and global ecocritical communities as we collectively grapple with increasingly dire environmental and imaginative issues in the Anthropocene. Additionally, the movement of *The Goose* into Wilfrid Laurier University Press' open access online portal in 2014 has helped increase the journal's readership and allowed us to track the international reach of our book reviews. This information makes it clear that *The Goose's* book reviews are relevant to environmental and ecocritical thinking beyond national borders and that they contribute to global ecocritical dialogue by introducing and engaging with new environmental writing.

It is with great pride that we present the 27 book reviews that make up the spine of the tenth anniversary edition of *The Goose*. In addition to 24 reviews of a stellar array of recently published environmental and ecocritical texts, this issue includes three reviews that engage with previously published works from the current vantage point of the reviewers, Matthew Zantingh, Joshua Schuster, and Elise J. Mitchell. These retrospective reviews focus on texts

selected by the reviewers themselves for their original and lasting contributions to the development of ecocriticism and environmental writing. As contributors to *The Goose* so often do, these reviewers peck away at the conventions of form, content, and function to suggest new ways of understanding the conversations that book reviews can initiate.

Of course, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the unbelievable amount of time, effort, and loving care that *The Goose's* editorial team, past and present, has put into nurturing the publication from egg, to hatchling, to the full-grown honking and feathered force before you. The work of our past and current book review copyeditors, Jenna Gersie, Tempest Emery, Hayley Evans, and Naomi Smedbol, has allowed us to expand the book reviews section over the last five years to an impressive 20 to 30 reviews per issue, while maintaining the high editorial standards of *The Goose*. The careful attention that current editors, Lisa Szabo-Jones and Paul Huebener, and past editors Ella Soper and Michael Pereira, have paid to reviewing as critical practice has enabled *The Goose's* book reviews section to become a recognized and integral part of ecocritical conversations in Canada. I have no doubt that the lasting influence of these editors and the continued generosity of our reviewers will ensure that the book reviews section remains the backbone of *The Goose* as it enters its second decade.

AMANDA DI BATTISTA has been the book reviews editor for *The Goose* since 2013. She is also completing her doctoral studies at York University's Faculty of Environmental Studies, where she investigates the role of literary engagement in postsecondary environmental teaching.

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