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Responding to a Racist Climate: An Editorial

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PAUL HUEBENER
AND
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Responding to a Racist Climate

Not rising tides, not changing climate, nor soil pollutions
vex me lately. . . . 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.

—Sonnet L'Abbé

The rise in hate-fuelled ideology and the recent white supremacist attacks in the United States and Canada must be seen as critically relevant not only within the spheres of anti-racism, public safety, and liberal democratic values, but also within the environmental humanities. One reason for this is the intersectional nature of social injustices that target minorities, an effect that compounds, among other things, the damages caused by systemic racism with the harms associated with poverty, often in ways that make environmental devastation more likely and more damaging for people of colour. The horrific hurricane season that is now unfolding painfully recalls Laurel Blatchford's comment from 2016, that "from Hurricane Katrina in the Gulf Coast to Superstorm Sandy in the northeast, time and again people of color in low-income communities are the first victims of extreme weather and the last to recover from its devastation."

Another reason that those of us in the environmental humanities must concern ourselves with racist violence is the one that is so heartbreakingly expressed in the epigraph above from Sonnet L'Abbé's poem "Brown Sound: A Ecolonization of Shakespeare's Sonnet 81." These lines, of course, do not dismiss outright the importance of climate change and other environmental disasters; after all, the poem explicitly calls these problems to mind and disturbs us with the threat that they might fade from view. Instead, the poem asks us to face the difficult truth that when the everyday realities of racial injustice become a dominating force, focusing on the environment can seem an impossible luxury—a situation that is made even more fraught, more contradictory, by the inevitability of facing the raging storms and fires that

we have now locked into the earth's climate. For ecocritics—especially the great many of us whose whiteness exempts us from the need to survive racist violence—this means that we must learn about, and speak out against, the threats of white supremacy just as much as we do with carbon emissions.

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Not surprisingly, a political agenda enabled by, and fuelling, white supremacist ideals includes the dismissal of empirical evidence alongside an active erasure of the lived experience of vast communities of people. It is no coincidence that the loudest voices calling for the construction of walls—both physical and systemic—are also the most enthusiastic deniers of climate change science and the principles of environmental justice. In this issue of *The Goose*, we feature position papers by seven authors who responded to our call for work that addresses the role of the environmental humanities in a “post-truth” world. These papers are wide ranging. Mél Hogan examines the metaphor of the cloud to challenge dominant technological imaginaries through the writing of Rachel Carson; Rachel Webb Jekanowski offers literary examples of speculative futures as bridge-building, theoretical, and pedagogical tools; Christy Call looks at the role of empathy and imagination in fostering environmental thought in the classroom; Harriet and Rob Fraser present their photographic installation in the UK's Lake District National Park as a way to question which voices most often float to the top of the deluge of information on environmental issues; Bart Welling questions the very notion of a “post-truth world” and urges us to employ the gentler energies of persuasion, lest we stoke the fires of resistance but fail at the revolutionary efforts required for the energy and economic transitions necessary to avert widescale environmental disaster; Richard Pickard challenges us to rethink the question entirely and suggests that the mission of the environmental humanities is much more radical than preserving a pre-post-truth world. Together, these papers offer a compelling but necessarily incomplete picture of the way(s) forward for the environmental humanities in these troubling times. As ever, there is more work to be done.

Also in this issue we have the privilege of including John Steffler's “Wilderness on the Page,” a wide-ranging investigation of the ways in which literature serves as a critical participant in shaping Western culture's relationship with the environment; Karen Miranda Abel's “Desert Pool,” a visual art essay on her recent installation in southern Spain which considers the epochal transformation of seas to deserts; and a cluster of French-language articles from Kyveli Mavrokordopoulou, who considers the reconceptualization of nature in Julian Charrière's photographic series *The Blue Fossil Entropic Stories*; Jonathan Hope, who responds to the controversial decision of the Government of Quebec to capture, and transfer to a zoo, the last members of a woodland caribou herd; and Kathryn St. Ours, who reads Julien Gravelle's story *Musher* as a study of narrative empathy in the context of human-animal relations and industrialized breeding methods.

Our poetry section includes new work from Robie Liscomb, Maureen Scott Harris, Madison Jones, Simon Orpana, Andrea Nicki, and Edie Steiner. Featured amongst our book reviews are

Pamela Banting's remarks—"both ode and elegy"—on the late Jon Gordon and his book *Unsustainable Oil: Facts, Counterfacts and Fictions*.



Photo: Lisa Szabo-Jones

The Goose has always been an open-access and we are committed to publishing critical, experimental, and creative ecocritical and environmental work. The journal is also created entirely by volunteers—all of our contributors, reviewers, copyeditors, editors, and advisors generously volunteer content, knowledge, expertise, and time to make each issue of *The Goose* an important contribution to ecocritical thought in Canada and beyond. The existence of *The Goose* speaks volumes about the strong community of scholars and practitioners supporting the journal, and which the journal proudly reflects. We thank you for your continued support—whatever form it takes.

On that note, we are delighted to welcome several new members to our editorial team. Alec Follett and Melanie Dennis Unrau have joined *The Goose* as our new co-editors. Julien Defraeye has dived into his role as *Directeur du contenu francophone* following the departure of Mariève Isabel, and he has already expanded the French-language section of the journal. David Carruthers has taken on the role of reviews editor, and Nathan TeBokkel and David Anderson have joined as copyeditors. We also offer a special congratulations to our poetry editor Emily McGiffin, who recently defended her doctoral dissertation. Well done, Dr. McGiffin!

A Note from Amanda

It is with mixed feelings that we inform you that Paul Huebener, who has served as co-editor of *The Goose* for ten years, is stepping down from his post. Alongside past co-editor Lisa Szabo-Jones, Paul's leadership and editorial vision have shaped ALECC's online publication in its most formative years and helped establish *The Goose* as a well-respected ecocritical publication in Canadian and international communities. His collegial spirit has enabled *The Goose* to expand its community of contributors and readers considerably, and allowed the editorial team to grow and flourish across vast geographical distances. While he will be missed, we wish Paul the very best in his new adventures.

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PAUL HUEBENER is an assistant professor of English in the Centre for Humanities at Athabasca University. His book *Timing Canada: The Shifting Politics of Time in Canadian Literary Culture* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015) was a finalist for the Gabrielle Roy Prize. He is also a co-editor of *Time, Globalization and Human Experience* (Routledge, 2017) and *Time and Globalization: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* (Routledge, 2017).

AMANDA DI BATTISTA is a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University. Her research focuses on the use of literary works to foster environmental imagination by critical environmental educators at the postsecondary level. She is also a project coordinator with the Centre for Sustainable Food Systems at Wilfrid Laurier University, where she works with academics and community members to build research networks centered on sustainable food.