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## Environmental Humanities and Uncertain Times: Editors' Notebook

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AMANDA DI BATTISTA,  
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*Environmental Humanities and  
Uncertain Times: Editors' Notebook*



*When the Rubber Hits the Road, Gerald Beaulieu*

There is something about the beginning of a new year that compels us to reflect on the recent past and imagine what the future might bring. As we write this editorial in the first few months of a new decade and on the brink of spring, uncertainty about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the social and cultural landscape makes reflection and envisioning futures seem more fraught than usual. As people across Canada and around the globe engage in varying degrees of isolation, from state-mandated quarantine to *social distancing*—a term that entered popular vocabulary only weeks ago—in an attempt to “flatten the curve,” we can’t help but think about the role of culture and the arts in these troubling times. In the immediate term, pop culture, literature, films, social media, and art can help us stave off boredom and loneliness as we create physical distance between ourselves and our neighbours. Art may also help us imagine egalitarian ways of living that resist corporate opportunism as COVID-19 forces the restructuring of work and play. In the longer term, art, culture, and the humanities will help us

to process trauma and loss in the wake of the virus' toll, to gather and evaluate what we have learned, and to consider how our worlds have changed because of "Coronavirus Capitalism" or its alternatives (Klein).

For members of *The Goose's* editorial team, 2020 brings additional cause to reflect on the past and look toward the future: this fall will mark *The Goose's* fifteenth anniversary. The last fifteen years have seen a monumental shift in how the humanities approach environmental issues. At the turn of the century, uttering the term *climate change* beyond very specific artistic, activist, or academic circles often meant being met with skepticism or contempt. In 2005, *The Goose's* inaugural year, the term *ecocriticism* was only ten years old and the field was largely focused on American nature writing. The Association for Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada (ALECC) was formed in 2006 to encourage the study of Canadian environmental literature and, as past *Goose* editor Lisa Szabo-Jones puts it, "as a response to oversight, an apparent cultural myopia rooted too deeply in the bounds of place-based research" (532).

In 2020, the environmental humanities are now a major area of study, with several well-respected, long-standing academic journals and with scholars in postsecondary institutions around the world. Terms like *carbon footprint*, *Anthropocene*, *climate change*, *Cli-fi*, *decolonization*, and *greening* have now become commonplace—and at times outright co-opted—in popular culture. The environment, broadly imagined, is no longer relegated to "scenery" and instead often takes centre stage in art, literature, and our newsfeeds—from *Avatar* to *The Anthropocene Project* and from #FridaysForFuture to the Yintah being defended by the Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs and the Unist'ot'en Camp. There is a large and growing body of opinion pieces, popular articles, and academic arguments that extol the benefits of reading and teaching environmental literature as a remedy for environmental apathy, consumerism, and even climate change itself (see, for instance, Alexandre Melay's argument for the impact of contemporary photography in this issue, or Amitav Ghosh's compelling argument in *The Great Derangement* for genre fiction as a site for imagining and addressing the supposedly unthinkable.) Yet, as CanLit in Ruins, #MeToo, and vital assertions of Indigenous and Black Futurisms in the face of ongoing colonization demonstrate, we must also question our assumptions about the liberatory or revolutionary potential of arts and culture. This includes what Jennifer Wenzel calls "problematic assumptions that *seeing is knowing* and that *knowing is a catalyst for caring, acknowledging, or acting* to rectify suffering or injustice" (14). Even as it becomes more evident that work in the environmental humanities matters, it is also imperative that we consider *why, how, when, where, and for whom* it matters, as well as the potential for our work both to do good and to do harm.

In many ways, *The Goose*, which began as "a newsletter to address and open up ecocritical discursive practices in Canada and the United States, as well as to establish a Canadian ecocritical community" (Szabo-Jones 534), looks quite different than it did fifteen years ago. From 2005 to 2013, our issues were labours of love distributed as PDFs through ALECC. Now, you're reading *The Goose* through our online portal, generously supported by the Scholars Commons at Wilfrid Laurier University. But in many ways, *The Goose* remains the same. The journal is still a labour of love, created by a larger but still quite small group of dedicated

volunteers, most of whom are early in their academic careers or are environmental writers themselves. Each issue still features new environmental writing, art, poetry, articles, and reviews. Because the environmental humanities, our readership, and our submissions are all growing, we've begun to create more clusters, special forums, and themed issues to help us curate focused, sustained, and innovative conversations in *The Goose*. We are still committed to anti-oppressive publishing practices and take seriously our citational, scholarly, and pedagogical responsibilities. We are, and have always been, privileged to be part of envisioning and embodying ecocritical and environmental humanities communities in Canada and beyond.

With such a rich landscape of environmental writing and scholarship at your fingertips, we are delighted that you continue to read *The Goose*. And we are proud to offer another excellent issue filled with contributions that span the traditions of eco-poetics, installation art, historical criticism, posthumanism, Anthropocene geology, animal studies, nature writing, and speculative criticism, among others. In this issue, a plein-air writer counts living birds while a visual artist installs massive effigies to road-killed crows. Meanwhile, a literary scholar speculates that early colonizers may have been trying to act like beavers; and scholars, artists, and poets contemplate current and future worlds through the lenses of solarpunk, plastic rocks, and the lifespan of a "Brilliant Dam."

In the first article in this issue, "Imagining Action in/Against the Anthropocene: Narrative Impasse and the Necessity of Alternatives to Effect Resistance," Ariel Kroon argues that current cultural conversations about the mitigation of environmental harm are insufficient. Rather than accepting the status quo, Kroon argues we must turn to alternative stories that reveal the connection between environmental harm and other forms of oppression and that imagine socially and environmentally just modes of existence. Kroon argues that solarpunk "think[s] across multifarious issues of disempowerment" and imagines different, just modes of existence (8).

In "Rockhounding, Seafaring, and Other Material Tales for the End of the World," Noémie Fortin considers the new Anthropocenic geological material known as *plastiglomerate*—and in particular three recent series of plastiglomerate artworks—as querying what we mean when we talk about waste, rocks, nature, and culture in an era of rapid ecological change.

Brian Bartlett's excerpt from *Daystart Songflight: A Morning Journal*, a manuscript in process, is an extended journal entry—a piece of plein-air, site-specific nature writing. Bartlett's purview includes birdwatching, nature-watching, peoplewatching, and a kind of self-watching that considers the role of the artist, the writer, and the human on disrupted and threatened land that still offers gifts and lessons to the attentive.

Wanda Baxter's interview with artist Gerald Beaulieu circles around his admiration of crows and how his enormous public art installations bring awareness to how often crows and other wildlife become roadkill. Baxter's own work preventing collisions between wildlife and vehicles brings a further personal dimension to their discussion about the roles of advocacy and art in

public life. An image of one of Beaulieu's rubber-tire corvid installations serves as the cover photo for this editorial.

We are pleased to feature two articles and one poem in French in this issue, including Alexandre Melay's article on contemporary eco-photography, Éric Debaq's article on the significance of the beaver as model entrepreneur in the seventeenth-century writings of Nicolas Denys, and Marie-Claude Hubert's poetry and photography from a visit to Canada. Thanks, as always, to French Editor Julien Defraeye for his work on this issue. Here is Julien's introduction to the French content *en français*:

La revue *The Goose* innove dans ce numéro printanier avec un premier poème en langue française signé de la plume de Marie-Claude Hubert. « À la recherche du Wilderness », accompagné de quelques photographies, témoigne, comme le précise l'autrice, de la découverte du Canada en confrontant ses métropoles (Toronto, Montréal, Vancouver) à ses espaces naturels. L'article d'Alexandre Melay s'interroge sur l'impact sur les consciences des représentations photographiques de trois artistes contemporains : Henry J. Fair, dont les travaux sur le sublime rappellent ceux de son homologue canadien Burtynsky ; Walter Niedermayr, qui saisit l'empreinte de l'humain sur les glaciers d'Argentières, en France ; ainsi qu'Erwin Olaf, revisitant un Palm Springs dévasté par la sécheresse et les feux de forêts. Le troisième article francophone de ce numéro nous fait faire un bond dans le temps en explorant les écrits de Nicolas Denys, explorateur et marchand de la Nouvelle-France du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, et son visible intérêt pour le bestiaire acadien de l'époque, particulièrement les castors. Le comité éditorial de la revue vous souhaite une agréable lecture de ce nouveau numéro, en attendant les beaux jours du printemps et un nouvel appel à contributions de *The Goose*.

Poetry Editor Emily McGiffin has curated a selection of poems on themes of nature, natureculture, and the human and nonhuman. The poems cluster around bodies of water, solemn and silly encounters with animals, and the effects and timescales of human-made structures like dams, walls, tombstones, rail lines, and plastiglomerate.

The book reviews section of issue 18.1 includes a robust selection of reviews of creative and scholarly writing. Thanks to our new Book Reviews Editor, Anita Girvan, for joining us mid-issue and seeing these reviews through to publication.

Please join us for the launch of this issue on June 18 at a two-session panel at the Association for Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada (ALECC) conference. Panelists include contributors Carol Alexander, Noémie Fortin, Renée Jackson-Harper, Ariel Kroon, Aylin Malcolm, Sid Marty, and Monty Reid, as well as *Goose* Editors Amanda Di Battista, Alec Follett, Anita Girvan, and Melanie Dennis Unrau. Former *Goose* Editors Lisa Szabo-Jones and Paul Huebener will act as respondents. For more information on the upcoming conference, which will be shifting to an online format in light of COVID-19, please visit <https://artsandscience.usask.ca/english/alecc/>.

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As always, we would like to thank our contributors and our editorial team—*The Goose* would not take flight each issue without you. Our editorial team has grown in recent months to include Book Reviews Editor Anita Girvan and Copy Editors Stephanie Eccles, Jordan B. Kinder, and Emma Morgan-Thorp. We are happy to welcome Anita, Stephanie, Jordan, and Emma to *The Goose* and thank them for their work on this issue. Thanks also to our longstanding Copy Editors Jenna Gersie and David Anderson for their continued service.

After three years of service and six issues, our Poetry Editor, Emily McGiffin, will be migrating to other projects following this issue. Emily is an accomplished poet, an insightful and skilled editor, and a wonderful colleague. Thanks for your service, Emily. We wish you all the very best!

Co-Editor Amanda Di Battista will also be leaving *The Goose* after completing this issue. Amanda began as Book Reviews Editor in 2013 and became a Co-Editor in 2016. Amanda has clocked an impressive seven years of service and eleven issues at *The Goose*. We would like to thank Amanda for her commitment to environmental writing and scholarship, and for the care she brought to the writing that came across her desk. We also thank her for being such a kind and engaged colleague who has capably led the *Goose* team with affirmation, generosity, and respect.

*The Goose* will be hiring new Co-Editors and a new Poetry Editor shortly. Watch for news on social media and in our next editorial.

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**ALEC FOLLETT** is Co-Editor of *The Goose* and a PhD candidate in English at the University of Guelph. His dissertation addresses contemporary environmental justice writing. His recent publications include an article on Rita Wong's *undercurrent*, and he has a forthcoming essay that takes a bioregional approach to Alice Munro's stories.

**MELANIE DENNIS UNRAU** is Co-Editor of *The Goose* and a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow at Columbia University. Her work is on the poetics of oil work and petroculture in Canada. Melanie is the author of *Happiness Threads: The Unborn Poems* (The Muses' Company, 2013) and a co-editor of *Seriality and Texts for Young People: The Compulsion to Repeat* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). She is a former Editor/Co-Publisher and current Poetry Editor at *Geez* magazine.