

The Goose

Volume 18
Number 2 *Miscellany (An Extra-Open Issue) /*
méli-mélo (numéro très ouvert)

Article 30

6-30-2020

From Mill Creek Ravine Fieldwork: Voicing Prohibited Noxious and Noxious Weeds

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Recommended Citation / Citation recommandée

Nielsen, Emilia. "From Mill Creek Ravine Fieldwork: Voicing Prohibited Noxious and Noxious Weeds." *The Goose*, vol. 18 , no. 2 , article 30, 2020,

<https://scholars.wlu.ca/thegoose/vol18/iss2/30>.

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From *Mill Creek Ravine Fieldwork: Voicing Prohibited Noxious and Noxious Weeds*

Downy Brome (*Bromus tectorum*)

Because you understood no need for it, you never learned to tell us apart. As if we all look the same.

Once you renamed this clearing grazing land. And now proclaim you know all about leaf blades. About toothed panicles, spikelets and long awns. You call me names like *downy chess* and *cheatgrass* but you've learned nothing.

You irritate me. This is grassland. And I belong here every bit as much as you.

You sneeze and complain about pollen. Fret that I'll irritate the mouths of softheaded cows. Even your worries are pitiful.

I've been here a long-time now, heard stories.

I could take care of you like a problem dog. You wouldn't even notice what was mixed with your feed until you were holding your belly like a sick child.

You think I overestimate my powers until your fingernails drop off. Then a hand or a foot, an internal organ lost to gangrene. I have my poisonous ways. I always have.

I'm fodder for no one.

Yellow Clematis (*Clematis tangutica*)

All summer you gasped at the way I climbed, mistaking my yellow fringe for my feet. I was seeking sun. I was seeking with my whole green body. I was high on my own strength and never looking back.

Not for a moment did you pause to consider, *How did she get here?* It was you who thought I belonged. It was you that praised my sunny disposition. It was you that marvelled at my ingenuity, urged me to climb higher.

And now I'm cause for concern? Now I've grown too tall for my station?

I never proclaimed to be some common buttercup.

You once praised my long silky hair. Said I was beautiful even as I was dying. Then you noticed my leaves are coarsely toothed, I'm hairy all over. Is it no coincidence that when my golden brilliance became a bearded seed head you started calling me names? *Unsightly. Fire hazard. Perennially creeping.*

None of this is my problem. I can tolerate cold, drought, deprivation, shade. My seeds are scattershot and windblown. Now they are in the earth.

Tall Buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*)

I mean no offence. I have no idea how I got here. This bit of wet pasture has been my home for as long as I can remember. My rootstock is robust.

You coo at my loveliness, my pleasing round face. I nod. You tell me I brighten this field. I nod.

I know I can make your cattle sick. Your goats and sheep. Your horse. So I keep myself small, slouch to disguise my height. I put a shine on. Look how glossy I've become! I would smile if I could.

I bend with the breeze. I grow no thorns. I mean no offence.

Creeping Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*)

Of course I know where we came from.

But now I've got a tenacious hold on this parcel of land. My roots go not only horizontal, but also vertical. You say aggressive; I say resourceful.

I say lance-shaped, lobed, spine-tipped. I will tolerate no purple prose.

What are you going to do, send me back?

Emilia Nielsen is the author of two collections of poetry and a scholarly book. Most recently, *Body Work* (Signature Editions, 2018) was a finalist for a Lambda Literary Award in Lesbian Poetry, the League of Canadian Poets' Pat Lowther Memorial Award, and took third place in the Fred Cogswell Award for Excellence in Poetry. Her first book of poetry, *Surge Narrows* (Leaf Press, 2013), was a finalist for the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award. *Disrupting Breast Cancer Narratives: Stories of Rage and Repair* was published by the University of Toronto Press in 2019. Dr. Nielsen is an Assistant Professor of Arts, Medicine and Healing in the Health & Society Program, Department of Social Science at York University.