

The Goose



Issue 1 Fall 2005

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goose gus, *sb*: A general name for the large web-footed birds of the sub-family Anserinæ (family Anatidæ), usually larger than a duck, and smaller than a swan, including Anser and several allied genera. Without distinctive addition or context, the word is applied to the common tame goose (Anser domesticus), which is descended from the wild grey or greylag goose (A. ferus or cinereus). The other numerous species are distinguished by adjuncts expressing colour, appearance, or habits.

The name of this newsletter hatched out of thoughts of Northrop Frye and a late night rerun of SCTV. Ella had suggested we think up a name for the newsletter, so I had been mulling around ideas of Canadianess: a truly 49th parallel dilemma. While watching SCTV I kept gloomily glancing at some of the titles on my bookshelves (*The Bush Garden*, *Survival*, *A Country Not Considered*). I scabbled for a name that

conveyed a sense of the people I had met in Eugene, Oregon: energetic and supportive colleagues who embody and inspire a willingness to travel and transgress borders (oftentimes quite vocally), and their exigency to express the cultural distinctions that denote our uniquely Canadian traditions. A group of individuals not afraid to make noise, flap wings, and occasionally ruffle a few feathers.

As I contemplated these thoughts, *SCTV* aired a skit of Martin Short as Canadian Consul General Ken Taylor, promoting Moose Beer. Short enumerates the perks that come with being a Canadian working in the States—the money, the interesting work, and the dining out—but he admits one thing the U.S. lacks: good beer, particularly Moose Beer, “the one beer you can’t get in the States.” (The camera zooms in on a stubby of Moose Beer.) Now stopping short of immersing myself in deeper philosophical ponderings about Ken Taylor, *SCTV* and the wider implications of a cross-border comparison, I could ask only, “Why *did* they get rid of stubbies? Is there *really* a Moose Beer? Is this an Eastern Canadian beer? What is it with Canadians and their beer? Why choose Moose? *Why* did they get rid of the stubby? What is it with *SCTV* and their fixation on the moose?” Thoughts of moose led to beaver, beaver to polar bear, polar bear to loon, loon to Frye, and Frye to goose. Frye and goose. Canada goose.

Canada Goose, *Branta Canadensis*, *Bernache du Canada*, *waawaa* (Anishinabe), *Nisk* (Cree): a cosmopolitan species, the Canada goose ranges wide across North America from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and north of 60 to the Arctic and Subarctic, inhabits parts of Siberia, China, and Japan, and parts of North and Western Europe. *Bernache du Canada* is equally comfortable in both wild and urban environs, and their key contribution to ecosystems is the dispersal of seeds.

The goose is not as majestic a creature as the moose is; after all, we don’t see beer commercials with partygoers watching in awe as a Canada goose silently glides across a moonlit lake. No, the Canada goose is not always a romantic figure. Watch a Canada goose out of water: it waddles, hisses, drops copious amounts of scat, and its neck bobs. The goose can look, well, a tad silly, especially when shadowed by that regal raptor, the Bald Eagle. Yet, as the Canada goose migrates both south and north, its antiphonal medley of honks rings in the fall and spring seasons. Times of change, times of renewal. The Canada goose defies notions of territoriality, evades a permanent rootedness, and emphasizes a bi-directional movement, while

conveying simultaneously through its name a sense of distinct, physical place.

Similarly, *The Goose* is a forum for active and dynamic exchange that is distinctly Canadian. Maybe even goose-like. Or at least in sustaining that exchange, we can aspire to sing out in what Northrop Frye calls (in his inimitably ganderish way) that “monotone honk” that we have gleaned “. . . from the Canada goose”. Honk, honk.

-Lisa Szabo

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the first issue of *The Goose*! This inaugural issue is but the first step towards establishing ourselves as a chapter in our own right, and towards creating a strong, open forum in which to discuss and debate issues of literature and culture, and their relationship to our ever-growing concerns about the state of the global environment. This introduction is meant to serve not only as a welcome to this new forum, but also as an open invitation for your feedback, suggestions, and most of all, contributions.

Nature writing in Canada, though perhaps always a prominent Canadian form, seems to be enjoying a renaissance. Perhaps it is not so much that more of our writers and critics have become interested in global ecology—although such interest has undoubtedly fuelled the growth of ecocritical inquiry—rather, it is that we have at last begun to find each other and to establish the foundations of an interdisciplinary, national community.

Communities, by definition, are always linked to the concept of place. When we speak of communities, we speak of a group who share a common sense of place, even if that place is largely imagined. As Canadian academics, artists, and activists concerned about environmental issues, we have deep connections to the places in which we work and live. Yet, until now, we have lacked a forum for the open discussion of the ideas that make us what we are—a group of individuals with a common interest in pedagogy, the arts, cultural

studies, and the environment. Although many of us, as members of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), share a sense of community, the majority of us continue to feel marginalized within the broader discourse of American ecocriticism. Real or imagined, the 49th parallel impacts our identity: when we attend conferences in the U.S., and when we publish in American journals, we do so outside of what we can legitimately call a space of our own. We are perpetual visitors, representatives of the state of ecocritical inquiry “elsewhere,” but visitors nonetheless.

In keeping with the spirit of other ASLE international affiliates, the Canadian caucus at the ASLE conference in Eugene agreed to form a chapter that would reflect our specifically Canadian interests and resources. Thanks to Pamela Banting’s enthusiasm and dedication, we now have an email listserv. The growth of the listserv denotes the growth of our chapter; as our membership expands, we witness the evolution of a uniquely Canadian organization.

This organization is still largely conceptual, and it will take communal effort to realize the goals that Pamela outlines in her editorial below. As yet, we have not arrived at a consensus regarding a name for our chapter. A number of members have weighed in on this issue: some suggest that we should go with the popular designation of ASLE-Canada; others believe that we should follow the example of the European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and Environment (EASLCE) and proclaim ourselves, as Stephanie Posthumus proposes, the Canadian Association for Environmental Arts and Literature (CAEAL). We would like to extend an invitation to continue this discussion within the editorial forum of *The Goose*. The issue of naming our organization represents the kind of polyphonic conversation with which we hope to populate the pages of our newsletter.

The Goose is broken down into a number of sections, which we hope will evolve to reflect the contributions and suggestions we receive. For this issue, we have focused on the following areas:

Editorials: Here we encourage comments and insights from our readership. Send us your thoughts on environmental issues and “hot topics” in the field, your remarks on literature and culture, recaps of conferences you’ve attended, your letters to the editors, and everything in between.

Calls for Submissions: If you have heard of a new publication or a conference that you feel we should know about, then please pass it along and we'll include it in *The Goose*. This section is broken down into three categories:

calls for submissions to international journals and collections

calls for submissions to upcoming Canadian conferences

calls for submissions to upcoming international conferences

Note: we have excluded CFSs for American conferences in order to avoid redundancy, since most of our members subscribe to the ASLE mailing list; instead, we have highlighted calls that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Reviews and Lists of New Publications: We seek original, unpublished reviews of books, articles, film, and art exhibits relevant to our readership. In addition, if you know of new publications that would be of interest, please submit them (in MLA format) and we'll include your citations in our next issue.

Edge Effects: Merging Literary and Artistic Boundaries: An exciting section that showcases the talents of our members. We strongly encourage you to submit your artwork and your previously unpublished poetry and prose. In this issue we are pleased to feature poet and ecocritic, Adam Dickinson.

Provincial Feature: A cross-country examination of Canada's rich literary, theoretical, and artistic offerings. Each issue will feature a different provincial profile in an effort to bridge the gap between local and national identities. In this issue we take a look at environmental writing from Newfoundland and Labrador, beginning with a critical introduction by Jennifer Delisle.

Other sections of *The Goose* include "The Graduate Network" and a listing of upcoming events from different regions across the country. Again, we welcome your suggestions.

In our next issue we plan to include a comprehensive members' directory. We ask anyone who would like to be listed to please submit your contact information (name, e-mail address, research / artistic

interests, academic affiliation, and location—city and province) to the editors.

The Goose is a place for all of us to flock together—read on and enjoy!

Sincerely,

Ella, Lisa, and Michael

“Imagining Community”

Pamela Banting

As most of you joined the listserv over the spring and summer, and as this is the inaugural issue of our newsletter, I thought some background on the impetus behind the listserv might be useful.

Many of us on the ASLE-Canada listserv are members of the founding branch of ASLE. I joined ASLE in about 1996 when I noticed a reference to the organization’s listserv and webpage in an issue of *Orion* magazine and then attended my first ASLE conference in Missoula, Montana, the following year. As a critical but passionate Canadian and Canadianist, most of my writerly and scholarly interests and allegiances are planted firmly in Canadian terrain, but I have to say that, for my work, ASLE has been the most interesting and supportive academic organization to which I have ever belonged. Belonging to ASLE, actively participating in its listserv discussions and the biennial conferences, and for the past two years serving on the executive council have all been great experiences. Participating in ASLE sustained my academic career during the sombre days of teaching on unpredictably doled-out sessional and then instructor contracts between 1996 and 2002. As of September 2005, there were fifty-five Canadian members of ASLE living in Canada.

While ASLE-US (I add the suffix -US here for purposes of clarity) has been and continues to be somewhat supportive of Canadian participation in the organization, ten years after the first ASLE-US conference, getting Canadian plenary speakers onto the program continues to be a problem, despite my lobbying and that of other Canadian members like Brian Bartlett. This year I managed to get one Canadian plenary speaker onto the conference program (out of fourteen), David Suzuki, but unfortunately he had to cancel a couple of

months in advance of the conference and I could neither persuade the organizers to invite another Canadian in his place nor to elevate a Canadian who was already planning to present a reading or paper at the conference at his or her own expense to plenary status. Arguing successfully for a replacement Canadian plenary speaker was unsuccessful in part because, in general, many of our American colleagues have read very little Canadian literature so our writers just don't show up on their radar, even when lists of their names and book titles are provided. One might think that just as Canada geese, wolves, grizzly bears, purple loosestrife, and the waters of Devil's Lake transgress national borders, so too might the reading and critical practices of ecocritics, whose practices are rooted in the natural world.

For reasons such as these and for the sheer pleasure of getting to know one another, approximately thirty Canadian members of ASLE-US (almost all of the Canadian members attending the conference) met for dinner and an informal, exhilarating, and at times comical roundtable discussion at the ASLE Conference in Eugene last June to discuss the idea of forming an ASLE-Canada organization. There are already similar organizations in Australia/New Zealand, India, Japan, Korea, the UK, and Europe as well as an ASLE caucus devoted to the teaching of composition and rhetoric and another devoted to diversity issues. Consensus at the meeting was that we need to raise the profile of nature writing and ecocriticism in Canada—to heighten awareness of, pique general interest in, and smooth the way for ecocritical projects at each of the undergraduate, graduate, post-graduate, and faculty levels in Canadian institutions; to create a perceived need for those of you who are currently doing graduate or creative work within the field and thereby help generate teaching, research and writer-in-residence positions; to reduce the battles (if any) to get course proposals in nature writing and environmental literature approved; to eventually create a journal in the field or, in the interim, to create more special issues of existing journals devoted to the topic; to draw attention to the fabulous writing that has been done and continues to be done in nature writing and environmental literature in Canada; and so on. These are some of the reasons why I set up the ASLE-Canada listserv as a forum for exchange of ideas, calls for papers, queries about suitable and intriguing texts for courses, notices and reviews of new books in the field, and avid discussion of topics and texts. I'm delighted to report that the listserv has grown very rapidly, from eight subscribers in April to almost one hundred as of October 1. So far most of the postings to the listserv have been notices and the

occasional query, and I wish to take this opportunity to encourage you to use it for open discussion of ideas, topics and texts as well.

I'm also working on two extensive and ongoing bibliographies, 1) Canadian ecocriticism and ecotheory and 2) Canadian nature writing and environmental literature. If, at any time, you have citations of your own published work or that of anyone else whose work should be included in either of these bibliographies, please send them to pbanting@ucalgary.ca in MLA format. (It is very time-consuming and hard on one's carpal tunnel syndrome to rearrange citations sent in a sort of random or incomplete format so if you pop them into MLA format before emailing them I will be very happy.)

Others—you know who you are—have very generously offered to get involved in the formation of an ASLE-Canada and work toward the goals I mentioned above. Lisa Szabo (UBC), Ella Soper-Jones (U of T), and Michael Pereira (Brock) volunteered to create this newsletter for us, and Anne Milne (McMaster) agreed to research a draft constitution for our consideration next year. We are hoping to arrange a formal meeting for next year, most likely during Congress (the annual gathering of scholars in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences) which takes place May 27 - June 4, 2006, at York University. Various members of the listserv plan to propose individual papers and/or panels at Congress in order to raise the profile of such work in Canada. Of course, there is some irony in our decision formally to launch an organization devoted to the practice and study of the environmental arts in the largest city in Canada at a conference with the theme "The City," but according to literary theorist Linda Hutcheon, irony is the Canadian condition.

Stephanie Posthumus (McMaster) and I are attempting, unofficially, to nurture and coordinate these initiatives until an executive council is elected, and Cate Mortimer-Sandilands (York), who is organizing her own Culture and the Environment conference for October 2006, has also contributed excellent suggestions and networked for us with the Environmental Studies Association of Canada (ESAC). Poet and critic Brian Bartlett (St. Mary's) has helped to stimulate discussion of ideas and issues on the listserv and provide useful context from his own long-term involvement with the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment. American ecocritic and ASLE-US co-founder Scott Slovic (University of Nevada, Reno), who has been present at the inception of several of the other associations for the study of

literature, culture, and the environment around the world, has supported our initiative.

The timing and conditions seem right for taking the next steps, as a group and individually, formally and informally, through Roberts' Rules and reckless daring, to increase the discussion about the relationship between the arts and the environment in Canada.

-Pamela Banting

Pamela Banting is a writer and associate professor in the English Department, University of Calgary, where she teaches courses in nature writing and ecocriticism.

EDGE EFFECTS: MERGING LITERARY AND ARTISTIC BOUNDARIES ARCHIVES

Adam Dickinson

Contributions to Geometry: The Snake

Not simply the garden, the machinations
of splitting such right angled rules.
Its body is line, but not railroad, or light,
not telephone wire or bridge.
It moves as wilful smoke, leaving the ash of a life
angular as wood, curling up, each curve
a science of forgiveness.
It thinks: forget those crosses and boxes
in the crystals of freezing, in the hardening of death.
To move through the world is to bend, is to give.

Before straightened rivers, there are oxbows.
Before the grid roads of quitting your job, moving to the city,
and trying to find her, there are
the intestinal ribbons of your brain,
the twisted chromatin of sex, the lives
whose scrawled arcs unwind before you
like the coiled spring of a clock.

Adam Dickinson is a postdoctoral fellow in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University. He completed his PhD in English at the University of Alberta. Current research interests include poetics, temporality and environmental ethics. His second book of poetry will be published by Brick Books in the fall of 2006.

This poem was previously published in *Breathing Fire 2: Canada's New Poets*. Ed. Lorna Crozier and Patrick Lane. Roberts Creek, BC: Nightwood Editions, 2004. 54-55.

List of Publications:

Articles:

"Lyric Ethics: Ecocriticism, Material Metaphoricity, and the Poetics of Don McKay and Jan Zwicky." *Canadian Poetry* 55 (2004): 34-52.

"The Rhythm of Happening: Antagonism and Community in Brenda Longfellow's *Our Marilyn* and *A Balkan Journey*." *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 12.1(2003): 38-56.

Book reviews:

"Jan Zwicky's *Robinson's Crossing*." *The Malahat Review*. (Forthcoming).

"The Temporal Translations of Rain: Russell Thornton's *House Built of Rain*." *The Fiddlehead* 218 (2003): 108-110.

"Love In The Time of Clear-cuts: *Thinking and Singing: Poetry and the Practice of Philosophy* (Ed. by Tim Lilburn)." *The Antigone Review* 135 (2003): 83-88.

"The Language around You." Rev. of *Where the Words Come From: Canadian Poets in Conversation*, ed. Tim Bowling; *The Moosehead Anthology 8: The Matrix Interviews*, eds. R.E.N. Allen and Angela Carr; *Vis à Vis*, by Don McKay. *Canadian Literature* 176 Spring (2003): 116-117.

"Lyrical Scrutiny." (Rev. of *Stream Under Flight*, by John Livingstone Clark; *Modigliani*, by Martin Gray; *Mind Over Mountains: Selected and Collected Poems*, by Jon Whyte. *Canadian Literature* 176 (Spring 2003): 129-131.

Books of poetry:

Kingdom, Phylum. London, ON: Brick Books, 2006 (forthcoming).

Cartography and Walking. London, ON: Brick Books, 2002.

PROVINCIAL FEATURE ARCHIVES

NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR

“Writing the Country of Newfoundland”

by

Jennifer Delisle

‘The land,’ he once told me, ‘is more important than the country. The land is there before you when you close your eyes at night and still there in the morning when you wake. No one can make off with the land the way they made off with the country in 1949.’

This passage from Wayne Johnston’s memoir *Baltimore’s Mansion* captures a salient quality of contemporary Newfoundland literature: a profound attachment to place, and a profound sense of loss over the demise of the Newfoundland nation. Newfoundland was the last province to join confederation – a mere fifty-six years ago – and it has a distinct culture formed over five centuries of settlement. The sea that surrounds it symbolizes both the distinctiveness of Newfoundland’s cultural identity, literally divided from the rest of Canada, and the strong influence of the environment on that identity. [1]

Newfoundland culture is profoundly attached to the natural environment – the sea, which has meant both a living and death for many, or the infamous label “the Rock,” which is a fond badge of honour to some and a slur to others. In his highly influential literary history of Newfoundland, *The Rock Observed* (1979), Patrick O’Flaherty predicts that “writers come and go; but whatever has changed, the elements of wind, tide, and crag remain; and the people may be already too irresistibly altered, the stamp of an old land too firmly implanted in them, to respond as readily as some think to new influences” (187). This romantic rhetoric suggests there is a Newfoundland culture intrinsic to the place; that writers don’t construct Newfoundland so much as Newfoundland constructs its writers.

Was O'Flaherty right? Have writers in the twenty-six years since his study continued to be "stamped" by this land? Landscape, and people's experiences of it, does continue to figure prominently in recent Newfoundland literature. Danielle Fuller calls Newfoundland's a "place-bound identity," an identity underwritten by the persistent place-myth that "upholds Newfoundland's heritage and folk culture as distinctive, shaped by the hardships of life on a wind-battered rock in the midst of the Atlantic ocean and resistant to outside cultural influences" ("Strange" 24). In literature, this "place-bound identity" often takes the form of an idealized fusion of people and land. In Patrick Kavanagh's 1996 novel *Gaff Topsails*, the settler Tomas Croft's experience of landscape is sexualized: "The land and he are as lovers, one together" (118). In Wayne Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, Fielding declares "we are a people in whose bodies old sea-seeking rivers roar with blood" (562). As Fuller writes, "the unknowable wilderness interior of the island (barrens, bogs, ponds, and hills) is invoked . . . as the primordial terrain that produces 'a people' – an ancient race whose very blood is mingled with the elements of the physical environment" (32).

Paul Chafe argues that these "mystical" fusions "overlook the fact that Newfoundlanders are not *of* the island but in fact have worked *against* it for generations" (98). Idealization, however, does not necessarily entail a pastoral depiction of landscape; portrayals (like Chafe's) of the harshness of the land and of the people's struggle to work on sea and live on rock are also romanticizations of Newfoundland life. Donna Morrissey's *Downhill Chance* (2002), for example, opens with a spring storm "transfiguring the desolate rock-island of Newfoundland into a great whale soaring out of the Atlantic, shaking and writhing as if to rid itself of the shacks, wharves and boats clinging to its granite shores like barnacles" (1). In her critical book *Acts of Brief Authority* (1994), Joan Strong writes that "while I believe there is no one definition for the term 'Newfoundland novel,' certainly the geography of the place demands from each writer native to the island a constant awareness of the violence and destruction which the environment deals out every day to those who live there" (12). While this emphasis on the harshness of landscape is somewhat justified, it also contributes to a touristic commodification of the Newfoundland environment (Overton) and risks exoticizing and essentializing Newfoundland culture.

But landscape can also be a site for resisting these romanticizations. In Johnston's *Colony*, the idea of an affinity between the people and the

land is upset by the loss of Newfoundland as an independent colony: the “river” Fielding speaks of is not just a river, but “the river of what might have been” (560). In Michael Crummey’s *River Thieves* (2001), which dramatizes “settler” contact with the Beothuk, “it is as if these Newfoundlanders do not fit within the country they have decided to call home” (Chafe 100). Colonial violence problematizes any romantic affinity between the settler and the land. [2]

But in other contexts the demise of the Beothuk has often enabled the indigenization of the settler population. As Terry Goldie writes, “the argument might be interpreted as ‘We had natives. We killed them off. Now we are natives’” (157). Writers like G.C. Blackmore contend that hundreds of years of struggle with the land have led to a sense of belonging that is part of Newfoundlanders’ “collective DNA,” “forged over thousands of years through our First Peoples and engendered over 300 years of European settlement” (369). Aboriginality has been reinvented through a relationship to the land, and genealogical ancestry is replaced by geographical ancestry. This complex process of indigenization is evident in many literary texts, including Bernice Morgan’s *Random Passage* (1992) and Kavanagh’s *Gaff Topsails*. Certainly Newfoundlanders’ relationship to the land is long and emotionally charged. But writers must beware of allowing narratives of their heritage to lead to the erasure of colonial history.

It seems then that while O’Flaherty may have been right to highlight the continuing influence of physical landscape on Newfoundland writers, the relationship that writers have to these historical and romantic ideas of nature and place is often ambivalent, satirical, subversive, and certainly complex. [3] While a “place-bound identity” may be powerful for Newfoundland writers and critics, evoking as it does the historical drama of survival, political upheaval, and ongoing feelings of marginalization in Canada, it is important to ask whether it is useful to think of identity as being “bound” by a place, or whether it is in fact the identity itself that transforms a space into a place.

Jennifer Delisle is a PhD candidate at the University of British Columbia. Her research examines the literature of Newfoundland nationalism and out-migration.

Notes

1. The literature of Labrador composes a much smaller body of work that has not garnered much critical attention and that represents a very separate literary tradition. While Newfoundlanders have traditionally regarded Labrador as their fishing ground, Labradorians have an identity that is distinct from Newfoundland. As Moses and Goldie write, "there has been intermarriage and a general intermingling between Inuit, white, and Innu and Naskapi for a long time. Although the identities of the cultures have remained separate, and although there has been significant racial tension at times, there has also been an acceptance of the rights of tenure of all these populations, often stated in opposition to newcomers, and specifically to Newfoundlanders and Québécois" (511).
2. See Mary Dalton for a discussion of the various depictions of the Beothuk in Newfoundland literature, including the common treatment of the Beothuk as an "emblem" of nature.
3. These observations are of course patterns, not essences. Many up-and-coming Newfoundland writers are more "cosmopolitan" or "universal" in their subject matter. But while some critics have attempted to delineate a Smithian dichotomy between the "native" and the "cosmopolitan" in Newfoundland literature (Mathews, Fuller), these categories are never rigid, and the contention that a novel set in twenty-first century St. John's is somehow less connected to place seems to me to be a dangerous fallacy.

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RESOURCES AND LINKS

VISUAL ARTS

The Rooms Art Gallery

9 Bonaventure Avenue
P.O. Box 1800, Station C
St. John's, NL, Canada A1C 5P9
Telephone: (709) 757-8000
Fax: (709) 757-8017

The Limestone Barrens Project

September 17, 2005 – January 8, 2006.

Charlotte Jones, curator

"A collaborative exchange between artists from Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario and Ireland. Artists create work in response to rare formations of Limestone Barrens, common to each region".

Marlene Creates: Land Use

October 7, 2005 – January 8, 2006

Robin Metcalfe, curator

"Survey of "land-use" installations created over the past decade by this Newfoundland and Labrador artist":

<http://www.therooms.ca/artgallery/>

Visual Artists of Newfoundland & Labrador - An Exhibition in Print

Editor Brenda McClellan

ISBN 097309420-6

Full Color

96 pages

http://www.tidespoint.com/books/visual_art.shtml

Eastern Edge Gallery

72 Harbour Dr.
P.O. Box 2641, Station 'C'
St. John's, NL
A1C 6K1
Telephone: (709)-739-1882
Fax: (709)-739-1866
Submission Deadlines for exhibition work: March 31 annually
<http://www.easternedge.ca/index.php> or contact egallery@nfld.net

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White, Marian, ed. *The Finest Kind: Voices of Newfoundland and Labrador Women*. St. John's: Creative, 1992.

FURTHER RESOURCES

For a comprehensive list of and abstracts of Newfoundland and Labrador publications (fiction, non-fiction, and poetry):
http://www.tidespoint.com/books/alphabetical_booklist.shtml

Thanks to Marilyn Rose from Brock for these references:

Newfoundland History: Literature of Newfoundland and Labrador (to 1949). Ed. Claude Bélanger. 2004. 7 October 2005

<http://www2.marianopolis.edu/nfldhistory/LiteratureNewfoundlandLabrador.htm>

Memorial University Libraries: Newfoundland and Labrador Websites by Subject. Ed. Colleen Field. The Centre for Newfoundland Studies. 2005. 7 October 2005 <http://www.library.mun.ca/qeii/cns/links.php>.

We realize that this bibliography is far from comprehensive. In addition to the writers, resources, and texts listed above, Jennifer Delisle has submitted the following list of women writers from Newfoundland and Labrador who thematize nature:

Donna Morrissey

Agnes Walsh

Ramona Dearing

Claire Wilkshire

Mary Dalton

Joan Clark

Margaret Duley (wrote in the 1930s)

Cassie Brown

Graduate Network

McMaster University

Paul Huebener has a BA in Honours English from the University of British Columbia and an MA in English from McMaster University. He will be starting a PhD in 2006.

Paul investigates the ways in which we can understand ourselves in relation to our surroundings through a critical examination of human-nature relationships as they operate in contemporary fiction and poetry. To what extent are our identities and subjectivities formed by place and the presence of nonhuman elements? How do our changing conceptualizations of nature affect the way we understand ourselves? What are the implications of these relationships in a time of environmental crisis? In particular, Paul will examine the literature of Dionne Brand and Don McKay, two Canadian writers who approach literature from very different angles.

As a less-than-comfortable member of the African-Caribbean diaspora, Brand has grappled with the problems of identity-making for people with connections to multiple places; indeed, much of her work deals with the ways in which self-knowledge and well-being are inextricably tied up with the relationships that people form between themselves and their human and nonhuman surroundings, and with the difficulties that arise when people are cut off from their homelands or come to know a new place. Brand's novels contain characters who undergo extreme changes in health, temperament, and even physical form as a result of disconnection from place. Because the loss of a part of our world can mean the loss of a part of ourselves, Brand invites us to consider the possibility of accessing the world through our senses and feelings as a means of coming to know ourselves.

Don McKay, a poet who has lived in Ontario, New Brunswick, and British Columbia, often seeks to describe or create an understanding of himself, the poet, through reflection on his interactions with the nonhuman world. McKay grasps truths about himself by contemplating a lizard or listening to a coyote, making observations that allow us to consider the extent to which our conceptualizations of ourselves, "our powers, our limitations, even our physical forms" are functions of our relationships with things that are not us.

Under the surface of these types of issues is the question of whether or not it is possible for us to investigate and understand the nonhuman on its own terms. If we understand ourselves in relation to our surroundings, how exactly do we come to understand our surroundings? What are the limitations of human language in dealing with forces that exist outside of language? Just as we come to know ourselves through our interactions with the world, we know the world only as it can be experienced by human perceptions and expressed through human communications. The ecological premise of the interrelatedness of all things takes on a new level of significance if we accept the apparent paradox that we are products of a world that exists only because we do.

Michael Mikulak is a first-year PhD student working with Susie O'Brien at McMaster University.

Michael's thesis, "Toxic Homelands: Toxic Hauntology and Environmental Justice," examines the discursive construction of cataclysmic environmental change within literature and film, policy documents and news media, and environmentalist discourse, in order to understand how cultural forces construct and structure environmental subjectivities within what Ulrich Beck labels as the risk society.

He asks how can individuals or groups develop the emotional and material ties to nature necessary for sustainable patterns of dwelling, when home becomes a toxic riskscape? Michael approaches the issue of pollution from a number of angles, beginning with a semiotic analysis investigating the ways that environmental destruction is portrayed in various cultural forms. Government and Industry sets officially determined tolerance levels and therefore manages the perceived threat and responses to it. Thus, it is important to understand the deployment of what Buell calls "toxic discourse," both in the case of environmentalists and their detractors. Ranging from issues such as toxic waste sites, to global climate change, news and popular media are often complicit in playing into the professional risk management of bureaucratic environmental discourse designed to manipulate public opinion.

Michael's project deconstructs toxic discourse on both sides, looking at high-profile groups like Pollution Probe, the Worldwatch Institute, and

Greenpeace, and governmental and industry responses to toxicity, popular disaster films, books, and news media, in order to come up with a genealogy of the development of toxic discourse. Starting with Rachel Carson's groundbreaking work *Silent Spring*, which outlined the dangers of the pesticide industry, to the current debates surrounding global warming, nuclear waste, and chemical contamination, discourse shapes the way we understand our relationship to global pollution, and the kind of actions we can take to address it. Especially with complicated environmental feedback loops that defy conventional causality and thus accountability, the representation of crisis is almost as important as the event itself. The way we perceive environmental damage dictates how we will react to it, who we blame, and the actions we take.

Building upon Derrida's theory of hauntology, Michael theorizes the relationship between real environmental damage and the discourse surrounding it as a haunting. Toxic hauntology is the past coming alive—the haunting of past transgressions to the point of pathology. It is a resurgence of the real that reveals the irreducibility of nature to cultural artifact, yet also acknowledges that cultural representation actively shapes the environment. Toxic hauntology is a mode of revealing the regime of amnesia imposed by industrial capitalism: the body of nature is inscribed by the "externalities" of corporations who seek to bury the effluvia of the affluent. The coming of the ghost of toxicity demands an accounting of ecological debt—the noxious inheritance of past attempts at denying the presence of the ghost. Toxic hauntology reveals pollution as a trace of the real, and thus foregrounds the way in which representations cannot escape the world. In the process, a more complicated account of the relationship between nature and culture begins to emerge.

Ultimately, Michael's project probes and explores different forms of toxic discourse in order to evaluate the limits and possibilities of toxicity in constructing environmental subjects capable of addressing catastrophic environmental change.

A selection of Faculty at McMaster University that research scientific discourse and environmental issues (this list is not exhaustive, and we welcome any other recommendations for the next issue):

English Department

Susie O'Brien: [obriensu\[at\]mcmaster.ca](mailto:obriensu@mcmaster.ca)

Research: postcolonialism, ecocriticism, cultural studies

<http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~obriensu/>

<http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~english/faculty.html>

Peter Walmsley: [walmsley\[at\]mcmaster.ca](mailto:walmsley@mcmaster.ca)

Research: Restoration and 18th-Century British Writing, Women's Writing, Enlightenment Imperialism, Science and Philosophy

<http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~english/faculty.html>

Department of Kinesiology

Bob Henderson: [bhender\[at\]mcmaster.ca](mailto:bhender@mcmaster.ca)

Research: Canadian travel literature linked to outdoor experiential education; Ecophilosophy/environmental perspectives; and Pedagogical practice for classroom and wilderness travel guiding.

<http://www.mcmaster.ca/kinesiology/faculty/henderson.cfm>

Department of Philosophy

Elisabeth Gedge: [gedge\[at\]mcmaster.ca](mailto:gedge@mcmaster.ca)

Research: Feminist Bioethics, Philosophy of Law, Philosophy of Religion, Environmental Philosophy.

<http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~philos/faculty.html>

Jill LeBlanc: [leblancj\[at\]mcmaster.ca](mailto:leblancj@mcmaster.ca)

Research: History of Philosophy, Environmental Philosophy

<http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~philos/faculty.html>

French Department

Stephanie Posthumus: [posthum\[at\]mcmaster.ca](mailto:posthum[at]mcmaster.ca)

Research interests: Roman français du XXe siècle. Théorie du roman. Discours sur la nature et l'environnement dans la France contemporaine. Écocritique (20th C. French Novel; Theory of the Novel; Nature and Environmental discourse in contemporary France; Ecocriticism)

<http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~french/facultystaff.html>

Department of History

H. V. Nelles, Wilson Professor of Canadian History:
[nellesh\[at\]mcmaster.ca](mailto:nellesh[at]mcmaster.ca)

Research: Canadian History; Environmental History

<http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/%7Ehistory/facultystaff.html>

Department of Anthropology

Harvey Feit: [feit\[at\]mcmaster.ca](mailto:feit[at]mcmaster.ca)

Research: conservation; First Nations; "post"-colonialism

<http://www.socsci.mcmaster.ca/anthro/faculty/feit.cfm>

Book and Film Reviews

Nicholas Bradley

A review of *Habitat*, by Sue Wheeler

London, ON: Brick, 2005

The title of Sue Wheeler's pleasant third collection, *Habitat*, announces the central subject of the book, and the epigraph to the last poem, "Winter Solstice," reveals the philosophical current that runs throughout: "*To carry yourself forward and experience myriad things is an illusion. But myriad things coming forth and experiencing themselves is awakening.*" This assertion, attributed to the Zen philosopher Dogen, signals the reverence with which Wheeler's poems regard a world in which all creatures — people, birds, butterflies, and sheep alike — are searching for home.

The poems are primarily reflections and observations about life on the West Coast. Wheeler lives on a farm on Lasqueti Island, B.C., and her poetic world is likewise a place "where there is no dead of winter" ("Wintergreen"). The speaker-observer in the poems watches birds, trees, and flowers that exist in close proximity to her home. The poems do not depict wilderness per se, but instead portray a life in which the line between wild and domestic is blurred. Descriptions of weeding, filling the bird-feeder, hauling firewood, planting seeds, and picking "a few leaves for a salad" ("Darkening") create the impression of an idyllic life in which the natural world provides sustenance and comfort for those humans who attend to it. Wheeler's poems demonstrate a generosity of spirit that extends towards all things. They gaze appreciatively at the landscape and its inhabitants and listen closely for the "shades of meaning" they might contain ("Understory").

Wheeler typically translates the processes of nature into the language of familiar human experience, so that bees go "ga-ga at the apple blossom's / come-hither look" ("October") and April is "a teenager

slamming doors" ("Sing a Song of Blackbirds"). But this familiarity creates what I consider *Habitat's* principal limitation — its flatness of tone and diction. Too many of the poems are too plain-spoken; there is not enough of the wild in their language. Intriguing words, mostly drawn from the field guide, are scattered throughout the collection — "junco, towhee and finch," "sorrel and cress," "hemlock, arbutus, pine, salal," "sepals," "siskins and chickadees." But Wheeler does not create arresting images often enough, and the directness of some poems leads at times to easy sentimentality and pseudo-profundity:

And what if there is, after all,
a god? What if it walks among us
touching each one lightly
on the shoulder? Asking,
Where is your life? ("God")

At her best, however, Wheeler captures a tension between the routine of daily life and the continual strangeness of the non-human world. The poems are best, in my opinion, when they are most boisterous. The energetic beginning of "Weeds," for example, reflects the relentlessness of the natural processes the poem describes:

Let's hear it for the Glaucous-winged Gull,
pale philosopher of *eat-what-falls*,
common as dirt, our mothers would say.

Let's hear it for the alders
who uncleared the clearing
the minute our backs were turned.

The succession of consonants creates in these lines the quick rhythm that characterizes the book's most successful poems. Similarly, the pace of the opening lines of "December" suits the description of a hummingbird's outlandish instinct:

What dream pulled this hummingbird
over rock and sea and weather
to the one Mahonia japonica in a 5-mile radius
just coming into bloom?

“To walk out of the field guide / and listen” is Wheeler’s stated task (“Understory”). When she listens most carefully, she reveals herself to have a fine ear. Her eye for observing the world beyond the guidebook is equally fine.

Nicholas Bradley is a doctoral candidate at the University of Toronto. He has recently published articles on Dennis Lee and Robert Bringhurst.

Travis Mason

A review of *The Herd*

Dir. Peter Lynch. 1998.

With *The Herd*, director Peter Lynch offers a compelling follow-up to his popularly received documentary *Project Grizzly* (1996). While the earlier film used the documentary genre in a fairly straightforward way to shed some light on a single man with a singular obsession (to build a bear-proof suit), the later film draws together documentary and fictional footage to illuminate an ecology of obsessive, often mysterious behaviour. The title refers to a herd of 3 000 reindeer purchased by the Canadian government to be brought from Alaska to the Mackenzie Delta in response to an epidemic of starvation among the Inuit.

The film opens on vast stretches of the arctic tundra, white-grey with snow and ice, windswept, barren, before offering glimpses of

movement: a solid dark line of reindeer cutting a swath across the horizon; a tiny solitary figure bracing against the wind. The figure is 62-year-old Andrew Bahr (here portrayed by Doug Lennox and voiced by Graham Greene in voice-over narration), a Saami (aka Laplander; reindeer herding people of northern Scandinavia). Bahr was hired by Carl Lomen (David Hemblen), the Alaskan Reindeer King, to move the herd across the border into Canada and deliver them to the government of Canada. The expedition, which began on 26 December 1929, was supposed to take 18 months; the reindeer were finally delivered on 6 March 1935. Amazingly, only one-fifth of the 2 370 deer that arrived at Reindeer Station, Yukon, were from the original stock from Naboktoolik, Alaska. The rest were born en route, and many of the originals were lost to wolves, cold, and starvation.

If the documentary part of Lynch's film shows how the arctic weather and landscape made the task of herding 3 000 reindeer practically impossible, the filmed reenactments provide glimpses of the myriad human forces at work against the difficult task: the endless strategising and interference of Dr. Erling Porsilt (Colm Feore); the endless memo-writing of Inter-Departmental Reindeer Sub-Committee bureaucrats (Don McKellar and Jim Allodi); and the infighting and despair of Bahr's companions on the trek, namely between Inuit Peter Wood (Dennis Allen) and Saamis sent to help midway through by Dr. Porsilt.

There is an ecology at work in this film and in the stories it tells; or rather, there are ecologies at play just waiting to be explored in further detail. One of these is the relation between human and nonhuman animals best expressed by an epithet repeated four times by different characters but credited to Bahr: "You don't lead the herd, the herd leads you." The film shows, if only at a glance, how colonialism, weather, money (the expedition takes place during the Great Depression), and human and nonhuman nature, among other things, interconnect to participate actively in – if not to make – history as it happens. But, as the film reminds us, history doesn't just happen; nor does it happen solely because of humans. Sometimes the herd leads us.

Related films of potential interest: *Project Grizzly*, *Cyberman*, *Animal Nightmares*, *A Whale of a Tale* (dir. Peter Lynch); *Being Caribou* (dir. Leanne Allison and Diana Wilson).

Travis V. Mason is a PhD candidate at the University of British Columbia. He is studying the relations between Don McKay's poetry and the sciences of ecology and ornithology.

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