

## GROUNDTRUTHING: CANADA AND THE ENVIRONMENT

AS KERMIT THE FROG SO OFTEN SAID, “It’s not easy being green.” It would appear, though, that it is easy to buy green. Increasingly, companies selling everything from cars to clothes are harnessing the language of sustainability to convince consumers to spend their way to a greener planet. Though wary of seeming cynical, we begin by noting the prevalence of corporate greenwashing because it speaks to the very pervasive perception of ours as an era of ecological crisis. Equally important, it reminds us to take stock of the ways in which the pressing realities of environmental degradation are understood and represented. As humanists, we are very aware of language’s power to shape, demonstrate, and disguise the “inconvenient truth” of an environmental situation, and that awareness is reflected in the essays selected for this special issue of *The Dalhousie Review*. To reflect the vibrant and multifaceted nature of Canadian Studies, a number of the essays are also rigorously and self-consciously interdisciplinary; for example, one offers a history of Bruce Peninsula National Park that foregrounds the “web of commodity relations” in which its many varieties of orchids are enmeshed (Sandilands); another carefully draws on ornithology so as to read bird poems in a manner that “measures the distance” between poetic and scientific languages and the things they describe (Mason); and a third uses literary representations of sugar beet production to address “the transnational flows—of geography, capital, technology, and human and nonhuman life—that will need to be better understood if future environmental challenges are to be met equitably and sustainably” (Kerber).

In an attempt to speak to both the interdisciplinary range and the very disciplined attention to detail that characterizes the essays collected here, we have borrowed the idea of “groundtruthing,” a scientific term for a method of verifying or measuring location coordinates that places particular emphasis on site visits. In essence, it is about verifying the abstract conclusions in scientific analysis by surveying actual terrain. For us, groundtruthing also signals the distances between observed environmental realities and popular Canadian

myths about those realities. Equally, the metaphor (if not the practice) of groundtruthing allows us to register that there are many ways of addressing Northrop Frye's question, "Where is here?" As our contributors note, "here" has been measured and recorded in many ways, ways which speak to the meanings of citizenship as much as the specifics of place. Against simple and canonical images of boreal forest or northern tundra, these writers find our experience with the land to be complicated by a host of factors, including racial identities (Thorpe and Rutherford), regional locations (Bocking, Marshall, and MacDonald), and corporate interests (Shukin).

Groundtruthing, we hope, conveys the layering of places—local, regional, national, and global—in which we live and move. This is, perhaps, particularly important in Canada, where the relatively recent global language of environmental concern exists alongside a deeply rooted tradition that insists upon a special relationship between our national identity and the geographical space we inhabit. Since before Confederation we have cultivated not only the land, but also a rhetoric of ourselves as a northern people and an image of a wilderness nation. But if the current campaign for sustainability asks us to reevaluate our uses of the land, it should also include scrutinizing its use in our imagination, examining how this nation has been built, literally and symbolically, on certain beliefs about nature. With these things in mind, this special issue of *The Dalhousie Review* reflects on the ways in which Canadians find, make, and sustain meaning in the natural world.

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