

The **POETRY** and **ECOLOGY** Project

TURNING LIGHT INTO ENERGY

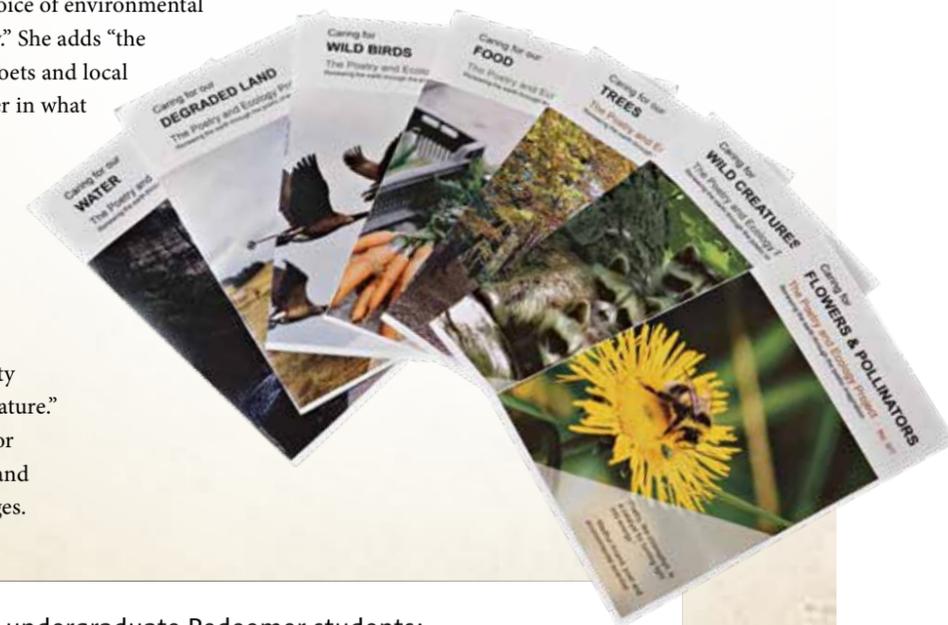
Like seedballs, free seed packets and wild-animal rabies vaccine drops, clear-plastic packages of leaflets were scattered around and freely available through the year, in locations not remembered. Opening the package released a world of images, words and information.

The Poetry and Ecology Project is a work of printed poetry and photographs created and distributed in 2018. It consists of packets of seven separate single-page leaflets with a focus on the themes of wild creatures, wild birds, water, food, trees, degraded land and flowers and pollinators. Each leaflet contains three poems, plus a list of relevant local environmental organizations, all illustrated by colour photographs. On every leaflet are the words of poet and scientist Madhur Anand: “Poetry, like chlorophyll, is a catalyst for turning light into energy.”

The project was directed by Deborah Bowen, an English professor at Redeemer University College in Ancaster who is examining, as she puts it, “the voice of environmental hope in contemporary Ontarian poetry.” She adds “the aim was simply to connect with local poets and local environmental agencies, and to discover in what ways they can speak to each other with hope for the future of our region.”

Another reason for Deborah to work on this project was to demonstrate that “the Christian story involves a call to *stewardship* of the creation, and to try to correct a little bit the false view that Christianity champions the human *domination* of nature.”

Many of the poems reflect the land or wildlife near the Niagara Escarpment, and these are reprinted in the following pages.



PROJECT ASSISTANTS: Senior undergraduate Redeemer students: Rebeka Borshevsky, Liane Miedema, Elise Arsenault, Joshua Voth, Jeff Vandergoot

THE HIGHWAY THAT BECAME A FOOTPATH

JOHN TERPSTRA

—after the other side won the civic election

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth,
for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,
and I saw the holy city, coming down out of heaven,
and the holy raving protester who climbed into a tree
to resist the building of the last highway
was still in among the leaves,
but the tree had grown much taller,
and the protester had been living up there for such a long time,
not alone, that several generations of protesters now populated the
canopy,
freely trafficking the branches of their swaying neighbourhoods,
as the six-lane highway
wound between the trunks below
as wide only as a footpath,
a red-dirt earthway busy with pedestrians.
And the highway-that-became-a-footpath
led past the longhouse raised
during the same resistance, down in the valley,
for it still existed (both longhouse and valley existed still)
and other longhouses,
which were standing at that location several centuries earlier,
had re-materialized, their hearth-fires
burning still; an entire village, thriving
beside the hallowed creek that ran through the east end of the city.
And I saw the trees that formed the longhouse walls
take root, and continue to grow,
forty-thousand times forty-thousand,
their canopy providing all the roof
that the people needed.
And from a privileged perch at the top of the escarpment,
watching as the new city came down out of heaven,
it was clear that the leaves of those trees
were for the healing of the community.

John Terpstra is a Hamilton writer and cabinetmaker. He has published 10 books of poetry, many chapbooks, and four prose projects. “The Highway that Became a Footpath” comes from *Brilliant Falls* (Gaspereau, 2013).

GIANTS

JOHN TERPSTRA

There used to be giants,
and they loved it here. They'd sit
their giant hinds in a row along the top edge
of the escarpment, and pick at the loose rock
with their hands or their feet, then throw or skip
the smoothest stones across the bay, to see who could land one
on the sandstrip, three miles away;

or they'd spring themselves off the scarp top
like you would off a low wall, and go running
all the way to the end of the sandbar,
and jump across the water to the other side,
or jump in, splashing and yelling up the ravines,
chasing each other's echoes.

This was only a few thousand years ago,
and the giants were still excited about the glaciers,
which were just leaving; about not having to wear
their coats all the time, and what
the ice and water had done, shaping and carving
this gentle, wild landscape!

They loved it here.

I'm telling you, they absolutely loved
every living minute here,

and they regretted ever having to leave.

“Giants” appears in John Terpstra’s *Falling into Place* (Gaspereau, 2002), a book about the geography of the Iroquois sandbar in Hamilton. This poem is also engraved on a plaque at one of Hamilton’s lookout spots, Sam Lawrence Park, on the edge of the Niagara Escarpment, as part of a literary series placed across the country by Project Bookmark Canada.

CITY WITH A VIEW

BERNADETTE RULE

We are a city on the edge
and beyond. On the escarpment
one becomes a small child
lifted onto her father’s shoulders
again, astonished at the sudden vistas.

Yet we dream of being
Toronto dreaming of being
New York. Erecting
brave new buildings
over derelict lots
we demolish old trees
and fountains.

We believe the lake
should be used and not seen.
Pool owners and cottagers,
we come to work every day
oblivious of the lake beside us,
the lake in our faucets.

This lake which we are
poisoning will poison us,
who so love being a city
that we have forgotten the earth,
except here and there:

here in the gardens
where memory sweetly lingers
to water our senses
and to pollinate light with colour,

and there on the edge
of the escarpment
where we are surprised again
every time
by where we are.

LOOKING FOR A FAST BUCK

BERNADETTE RULE

For four years and four months
I took the road through the woods
twice a day and more
and only saw the deer six times.
I still believe they were there
at least six hundred times,
but I wasn’t quick or lucky
enough to spot them.

Sometimes
I looked so hard each branch
became a rack. Whole hillsides
of deer raised their heads
with the wind and spent
some cool contempt on me
before fleeing on all sides,
leaving me only mundane meadows.

Bernadette Rule lives in Hamilton. “City With a View” and “Looking for a Fast Buck” come from *Full Light Falling* (Image, 1988); she has published six other volumes of poetry. In 2017 she won the Hamilton Arts Award for Writing.

THE ONE VIRTUOUS ACT OF THE DICTATOR

ADAM DICKINSON

The crow sat in the poplar like a black boot.
He was, at first glimpse, a prank,
the remnants of an unruly evening
beside the only rail lines in town.

One of the laces dangled from his beak,
a stick that he had clipped and untied.
When the crow stretched his neck,
he was a boot that reached to the knees.

From the wooden balustrade
he cast his decoration,
it hurried through the branches
in the slapping of its own applause.

When I caught the stick, the crow
quit the tower, his body an adamant march
beyond these houses, back to his bunker
having simply made the trains run on time.

Adam Dickinson teaches at Brock University in St Catharines. He has published four books of poetry: *Cartography and Walking* (Brick Books, 2002), from which these poems come; *Kingdom, Phylum* (Brick Books, 2006); *The Polymers* (Anansi, 2013), which was a finalist for the Trillium Book Award for Poetry and the Governor General's Award for Poetry, and most recently, *Anatomic* (Coach House Books, 2018).

DISAPPOINTMENT IN THE MASONRY

ADAM DICKINSON

There is little doubt
that bats are in the chimney.
At dusk, you can hear
the folded sheets
of their slender ascent,
a private appearance
over rooftops,
the steam from a bath
that has just been filled.

Their modesty confounds us.
They dart in the cover of tree tops
as though rushing from bathrooms to dress.
When we see them in the dark
we are half of the mind
they are leaves we've mistaken.

One evening, something
clung to the ceiling
above the fireplace,
cramped in its brown shiver,
the body of an old man
hunched before a tub.
We didn't think to get
the paddle or the broom,
but opened all of the windows,
turned out the lamps,
and felt for the railing to the street,
its cold abashment
working blindly in our hands.

A BARN OFF THE 401

DANIEL DAVID MOSES

Hurry past the weathered
Boards—for there are no words
In whitewash now, no names

Or questions stretched across
The ingrained red. The man
Who wanted an answer,

Who painted *Where will you
be in eternity?*
Is gone already, just like

His farm. Only the wind
Remains, wandering
In the fallow fields

Beyond, too despondent
To do more than sigh. Why
Is it we never know

Who they were, farmers and
Their sons? Wind, settle down,
Be a wreath for this barn.

Daniel David Moses is a Delaware playwright and poet who grew up on a farm on the Six Nations lands on the Grand River near Brantford. He has won numerous awards for his works. "A Barn off the 401" comes from *A Small Essay on the Largeness of Light and Other Poems* (Exile, 2012).



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I SAW YOUR MATE UP THE RIVER

ANNA BOWEN

I saw your mate up the river
her red crown like pine needles in the snow
soft gray body, a suggestion

You are downstream
with geese that pepper the frozen riverbank
standing slim-legged on the ice
burying their bills in their wings,
their tracks point backward --
arrows in retreat
tracing unworn paths in the snow

You are white-breasted
black-crowned, beak
a curved upholsterer's needle

The geese have been crossing
the path of commuters --
who stop on their afternoon rush home
to mates and frozen riverbanks
gingerly circumvent the geese
laying a new path

For a moment trespassing
the paths they are meant to follow,
watching feather-pressed breasts pass safely.

Anna Bowen is a Guelph writer and interviews authors at Bookishradio.ca. She is currently working on poetry about reciprocity, care, and trees.

WHERE TO GET THE LEAFLETS

- *Public libraries in Hamilton, St. Catharines, Guelph, Brantford
- *Hamilton Conservation Authority
- *Land Care Niagara
- *Royal Botanical Gardens
- *From dcbowen@redeemer.ca
- *Online: redeemer.ca/wp-content/uploads/Poetry-and-Ecology-Project.pdf

