Sustainable Development, Discourse, and Recommodification in Corporate Canada

Starting in the 1960s, there was increased public awareness of environmentalism and, later, anthropogenic climate change. Public and private interests began to focus on the 'issue' of the environment, and in 1987, the UN Our Common Future Report (later known as the Brundtland Report) introduced the concept of sustainable development (SD). Using this concept as my guide, my research question is: Is the model of SD, as presented in the 1987 Brundtland Report, effective? I argue that SD, with an inherent emphasis on development and (economic) growth, is not a useful tool to advance effective climate action. Through participant observation at a Canadian corporate/climate conference and interviews with young sustainability professionals with experience in the public and private sectors (n=8), I argue that the concepts of sustainability and SD have been co-opted (through discourse and action) by corporations looking to profit. As such, I observe a corporate culture which embraces and adheres to the model of SD, but which uses SD to justify business- and growth-first approaches to environmentalism. I then outline a model of 'recommodified SD,' informed by the need to 'sell' the idea of SD (in its corporate and commodified form) to and from staff and their organizations. Ultimately, I present an argument on the discursive functionality of SD in perpetuating the idea that There Is No Alternative (TINA) from status-quo approaches to climate action.

Sydney Whiting

BA (Honours) Student, Department of Political Science

University of Lethbridge

Rooted in Sustainability: Exploring Medical Plants for a Thriving Campus Ecosystem

Environmental conditions have a significant impact on a plant's ability to grow. We recognize that the environment is constantly evolving, and we have a responsibility to help conserve species increasingly endangered by factors such as pollution and climate change. Our focus is on identifying medicinal plants that can be cultivated and cared for at the University of Lethbridge campus.

Through this project, we will utilize map distributions, research plant habitat conditions, and analyze the factors affecting plant communities around campus to propose a potential initiative. Our goal is to propose a viable and sustainable green space initiative that enhances campus biodiversity, promotes awareness of water usage, and improves landscape sustainability by integrating drought-resistant native species into existing spaces.

We engaged Elders and Indigenous partners using principles of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) and will be shaped by traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). By restoring culturally significant plant life, this work contributes to ecological health and cultural regeneration.

This project promotes land-based learning, student-led research, and community outreach. Our goal is to raise awareness of social and environmental issues within the campus community and inspire meaningful action. We aim to participate in sustainability initiatives while also serving as a gateway for future student-led projects rooted in place and partnership.

Katerin Varela

BSc/BEd Biology

University of Lethbridge

Mai Eagle Speaker

B.A. Indigenous Health (student)

University of Lethbridge

Towards transformative climate change education: Questions and pedagogies for educators

Education has been identified as playing a key role in transforming the worldviews, behaviors, and values that drive our current unsustainable trajectory (UNESCO 2021a). At the same time, education is implicated in replicating and accelerating unsustainable practices (UNESCO, 2021b). With the impacts of climate change only accelerating, how can our slow-to-change education systems adequately respond? And how can education transform in ways that do not replicate the same unsustainable practices that lie at the very root of climate change? A growing number of scholars have called the purpose of formal education into question, arguing that the climate crisis and related social issues call for a complete transformation of our education systems (Kwauk and Casey, 2021; Laininen, 2019; Sterling, 2017).

Climate change education (CCE) is recognized as a pivotal mechanism for raising awareness of and inspiring action in the face of climate change. However, the way CCE has been actualized in formal school settings has often fallen short of inspiring and preparing students to take meaningful, transformative climate action. If CCE has the potential to inform, inspire, and equip learners to take action on climate change, then educators need to be well-prepared to enact it. But how would educators themselves need to be prepared in order to facilitate such learning? And how might CCE lead to transformative outcomes in learners? In pursuit of these questions, this presentation offers a conceptual and practical outline of what a transformative approach to CCE might look like, based on theoretical literature and empirical studies that connect transformative learning theory and CCE.

Stephanie Leite (she/her)

PhD candidate and Vanier Scholar, Integrated Studies in Education

McGill University

More Than Anxiety: Youth and the Moral Injury of Anthropogenic Climate Change

An important direction in climate ethics demands attention and philosophical engagement. There is a literature in psychology about climate anxiety, the rational anxieties that youth and young adults are experiencing regarding the uncertain future consequences of climate change, consequences that will disproportionately impact youth and future generations. However, framing this distress merely as a personal anxiety about the future climate overlooks the deeper moral issue regarding ongoing climate inaction. I offer an introductory argument that the rational distress youth and young adults experience from climate (in)action is better conceptualized as a moral injury—an egregious transgression of deeply held moral commitments. If I am right, ideas like moral sustainability may require development within the field of climate science and ethics.

Jodi Newman (she/her)

PhD Student CSPT

University of Lethbridge

(Un)natural Brewing: An Industrialization of Environment

The process of brewing beer has connected humans with their environment for over 10,000 years. "(Un)natural Brewing: An Industrialization of Environment" examines how the business of beer in 20 th century North America was influenced by both its natural and unnatural environments. Through the 19 th and 20 th centuries, western nations were increasingly understanding how they could manipulate their environments, which proved to have massive effects on human habits in production and consumption. In particular, refrigeration and variable packaging were gamechangers for the brewing industry.

Up until the last 125 years or so, brewing processes were limited by largely static environmental factors, but this would shift with the want of man to manipulate the world around them to effectively create unnatural environments through the industrial age. Innovations like refrigeration, electricity, and the automobile would effectively standardize several aspects of the process with led to longer shelf life and increased profits. The wine term "terroir" also characterizes beer in that the specifics of place are reflected in the water, grains, yeast, and hops used as ingredients to make beer. The first part of "(Un)natural Brewing: An Industrialization of Environment" will consider the natural environments that brewing came up in, and that still exist in some craft breweries. The second part will juxtapose the natural environment of brewing against the unnatural brewing environments that increasingly came to dominate large scale brewing worldwide. Viewing both together provides the context for seeing how (un)natural brewing provided more ways for the business of brewing to industrialize their environments, shift consumer practices, and make more profits.

Stephanie Laine Hamilton

PhD Student, Department of History

University of Lethbridge

Crop and Crop Wild Relative Landesque Capital among Amazonian Runa in Ecuador

This study delves into the relationship between human cultures and plant genetic diversity, centering on the expanded concept of landesque capital. Traditionally, this term has encapsulated human-made environmental modifications, such as anthropogenic soils or terraces, that can yield long-term benefits. We extend this notion to embrace the genetic diversity and dynamics of crops and crop wild relative (CWR) gene pools. The investigation focuses on the Napo Runa of Ecuador and their cultural practices, including selection, seed saving, and transplantation, to highlight potential models of selection pressures affecting crop-CWR complexes and any cultural practices connected to either. In doing so, we aim to underscore the interconnected and multispecies nature of the relationships among genetic diversity and cultural diversity. Changes in the genetic makeup of one plant, induced by human interaction, can affect its cultivated counterparts through hybridization or future breeding programs, thereby influencing agricultural resilience, nutritional value, and the very cultural practices dependent on these crops or any related to them. Consequently, we argue for a focused examination of plant-based forms of landesque capital or any gene pool-based form, including animals or microbial life. This approach highlights the importance of interconnecting biocultural diversity between cultivated plants and their "wild" relatives and recognizing the intricate interdependencies between cultural practices and gene pools in the face of environmental challenges.

John Robert White, PhD

Postdoctoral Researcher

Prentice Institute for Global Population and Economy

University of Lethbridge

For whom does risk count?: Reframing Species at Risk as Social Indicators of Wellness

Westslope cutthroat trout have been designated as “threatened” both at the federal and the provincial levels in Canada, including under the Species at Risk Act (SARA). These labels operate to count or discount species, often following a dichotomous native versus invasive species rule (Celermajer & Wallach, 2021). Cumulative effects of various, compounding elements which cause harm to the westslope cutthroat trout (and other fishes) include a warming water temperature, habitat fragmentation (produced by logging, logging road development, and the development of dams), overfishing, hybridization with transplanted rainbow trout, entrainment, and the list goes on. Yet, the focus of conservation efforts in the region focuses primarily on breeding stock to repopulate native populations of westslope cutthroat trout and breeding alternative fish to reduce fishing pressure on rivers and streams and move those anglers to isolated lakes and ponds. The ‘nativeness’ of the westslope cutthroat trout demonstrably allows for socially acceptable genocidal fish fantasies, the making of an eco-tourism’s playground and deafeningly contradictory actions via fish farming practices, creating domesticated fish bodies who directly compete for resources with wild fish. This paper explores not only what risk is, but for whom “risk” counts, reframing the question to ask “who counts?” Ultimately this paper argues that for westslope cutthroat trout in the Eastern Slopes of Southern Alberta, discussions of risk are limited to ways in which westslope cutthroat trout are indicators of water quality, and that this framework should be challenged. Ultimately, this is a social indicator for human-non-human relational wellness, extending from an ecological indicator to a community wellness indicator.

Rebeca Spencer

Anthropology Graduate Student

University of Lethbridge

The Epistemics of Loss: Absence as Medium in Ecological Design

In the Anthropocene era, species extinction and habitat loss challenge not only what we see but also how we think, design, and act towards the natural world. Yet most design practices rarely engage with the idea of what's missing or lost as a methodological concern. This paper proposes that absence itself — extinct species, destroyed landscapes, and lost ecologies — can serve as an active medium. It invites us to know, feel, and reimagine our connection to the more-than-human worlds.

This paper grounds its arguments through three approaches: Absence as "Aesthetic Practice," which explores how emptiness, silence, and erasure in design practices can help us acknowledge loss rather than cover it up; Absence as "Epistemic Practice," which treats lost species or memories not simply as gaps but as meaningful sources of knowledge; and Absence as "Speculative Practice," in which disappearance and recovery invite us to reimagine ethical and creative possibilities for more fragile futures.

Case studies include coastal retreat in regions vulnerable to climate change and the shifting distribution of plant species under altered environmental conditions. These situations illustrate that the absence of land, species, or habitat can actively reshape our relationships with the ecosystem. Using absence as both method and medium, it challenges dominant ecological design paradigms that emphasize restoration and technological replacement. It proposes that absence can serve as a generative ground for design, putting care and ethical attentiveness at the forefront. This opens a space to rethink ecological design not only as a practice of presence but also as a transformative potential for what is "missing."

Tushar Kant

Master of Science (M.Sc.) in Digital Humanities

UX Designer at ECHO India; Alumni, IIT Jodhpur

Re-imagining Climate Futures: Playful Simulations and the Power of Hope

Communication studies consistently demonstrate that positive simulations of climate response—visions of thriving ecosystems and sustainable technologies — are more effective in motivating collective action than apocalyptic or fear-driven narratives (American Academy of Arts & Sciences, 2025). This presentation brings together environmental humanities, political ecology, and digital media studies to explore how playful simulation can contribute to the re- imagining of climate futures.

Drawing on my Earthreel project, a reel of animated eco-solutions ranging from ocean cleanup to carbon-capturing agriculture, I will argue that the humanities are uniquely positioned to shape the affective and cultural dimensions of climate imagination. By situating hope as a critical practice, we can reframe ecological discourse away from despair and toward agency.

The presentation will include an interactive demonstration, where participants can "experiment" with energy models through simple mechanics in an ecological balancing game, and a short video featuring animated climate interventions. These are critical tools for thinking, feeling, and imagining climate justice in more equitable and inclusive ways.

Ultimately, I propose that re-imagining climate futures through hopeful, simulated play allows us to bridge the gap between abstract solutions and lived cultural meaning. It positions environmental humanities as both critical and creative: analyzing narratives of ecological risk while crafting new, compelling visions of survival and flourishing.

Shara Merrill

PhD Student, CSPT

Humanities Innovation Lab

University of Lethbridge

The Double-Edged Sword: Impact of Artificial Intelligence on the Environment

The paper explores the paradoxical relationship between Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the global environment and climate. This paper examines the dualistic impact of AI because it contributes to environmental degradation and simultaneously provides transformative tools for ecological sustainability. This paper argues that while AI systems and their operations pose considerable challenges to the environment and climate, their application also offers unprecedented opportunities to mitigate climate change and protect ecosystems. AI impacts environments in its development, deployment, and operation, as the lifecycle of AI models is intensely resource-intensive. This research utilized secondary data sources, including AI blogs, newspaper articles, academic writings, and YouTube videos, all of which are available online. It focused on two broad thematic approaches: harmful and beneficial impacts on the environment. However, this research aims to find the greater good through an unbiased approach, examining the impact of AI on the environment and climate.

Based on the findings, the paper presents the two opposite aspects of AI. The prominent finding is that training, operating, and running models in data centers consume a prodigious amount of energy and increase a substantial amount of carbon emissions. In addition, if the model utilizes a non-renewable energy source, the situation worsens, and this process entails a considerable water footprint for cooling servers, which can sometimes strain local water resources. Beyond operational and training energy, the hardware lifecycle adds a layer of environmental toll linked to resource depletion and pollution.

Conversely, AI is a powerful enabler of environmental solutions, has an enormous capacity to analyze vast, complex datasets, and provides solutions to climate science and ecological management. AI application supports and gives solutions to climate change mitigation, ecosystem conservation, such as tracking biodiversity and monitoring deforestation, as well as the circular economy and resilience, including waste management, and supporting the development of circular supply chains. Considering both perspectives, AI embodies a critical duality for the environment.

Human intention and policy can determine its path if they did not foresee the environmental impacts in the inception, and if they argue that the effect is not predetermined. The users employ the tools to harness their potential for good. Thus, the paper advocates that a multi-stakeholder

approach is imperative; as such, policymakers and researchers must directly channel AI capabilities towards the most pressing ecological challenges and help heal the planet.

A K M Iftekhar Khalid

PhD Student and Cultural, Social, and Political Thought Program

Department of English

University of Lethbridge

Blackfoot Language and the Poetics of Traditional Ecological Knowledge

The Kainai Ecosystem Protection Association (KEPA) is a research and educational organization committed to promoting ecological conservation and socioecological restoration throughout Blackfoot territory and beyond. KEPA pursues these goals through research initiatives on prairie restoration, the recuperation of Blackfoot knowledge of places of biocultural significance, programs of land-based learning, international Nation-to-Nation collaboration with other Indigenous organizations, and hosting the annual KEPA Summit, among others. This panel will focus on the importance of the Blackfoot language as a socio-linguistic context in which Traditional Ecological Knowledge is encoded and transmitted and the reasons why language is critical in a holistic and land-based approach to socioecological restoration.

Panel Organizer:

Patrick C. Wilson,

Associate Professor, Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics

University of Lethbridge

Panelists:

- Ninna Piiksii (Dr. Mike Bruised Head) — Native and Invasive Species as Seen through the Blackfoot Language.
- Api'soomaahka (William Singer III) — Kitáwahsinnooni ki I'pówahsin. Land and Language.
- A'poyaakii (Amanda Fox) and Mía'nístsínihkíaakii (Caroline Russell) — Aokakio'sato'p Ksaahkoyi: Land-based Environmental Education for Stewardship of the Land.

Narration through Nature: Game Environments as Subjects in Ghost of Tsushima

Building upon environments in game studies, this paper expands upon the role that nature occupies within these narratives. Often game environments are limited or simplified, used as a resource to be harvested or mere static settings for the game to exist within. Game environments constructed in this fashion reiterate notions of the anthropocene, condemning nonhuman life to object status. To contrast these notions, this paper utilizes Sucker Punch Productions Ghost of Tsushima (2021), which has developed the environment in central focus, acting as an active mechanical and narrative feature. The Ghost of Tsushima questions and destabilizes ideas of nature as an object, and establishes the capabilities of nature as a subject.

This paper takes an ecocritical approach with considerations of posthumanist thought to better understand representations of nonhuman entities throughout the game. In this paper I also consult ecocritical theory from Alenda Y. Chang's discussions of ecological game design and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing ideas of "noticing," to situate my analysis. I would suggest considering the environment of Ghost of Tsushima as an example of ecological narration, produced from visual guidance markers. Visual guidance markers take the form of animals, different species of trees, flowers and grasses, smoke and naturally occurring weather patterns. The narration process is structured through these environment entities, as their assigned meanings dictate and communicate information to the player. These entities force the player to 'notice' nature and develop a relationship, which strays from extractive attitudes and embraces awareness, sensitivity, and respect.

Through immersive qualities, games can be powerful forces in the considerations and attitudes towards environmental issues and nonhuman relationships. Ghost of Tsushima and games alike help aid in redefining subject object relationships, by establishing a baseline for how future games can model these issues

Dara-Lynn Boras

Undergraduate Student English

University of Lethbridge

Framing Predators: The Interconnection Between Film and Ecological Consequences

In the summer of 1975, Steven Spielberg's Jaws shook the world of film, but its most lasting impact was felt below the surface, by the so-called villains themselves. Artistic narratives of nature can dominate human perceptions, potentially leading to devastating environmental consequences. This case study explores ecocriticism and ecoculture, showing the influence of fine arts and literature on human perceptions of the natural world and emphasizing the interdependence between culture and the environment. The investigation examines how the film's portrayal of aggressive, powerful, and thoughtless predators of the ocean greatly manipulated societal fears and harmful attitudes held towards sharks. Additionally, this cultural impact is revealed through the declines in shark populations and through ecosystem disruption due to trophy hunting, bycatch in commercial fishing, and finning. The results of researching relationships between humans and the natural world prove the importance of developing an informed cultural understanding of wildlife for conserving its major roles in our environment.

Amelia Townsend

Bachelor of Science in Biological Sciences

University of Lethbridge

Greyscale Lemurs

The project presented is an ink drawing depicting four types of lemurs, a type of primate native to Madagascar, and is meant to invoke a sense of curiosity about them while also bringing awareness to their existence, as well as their collective plight. It is black and white due to its grim nature and to put more emphasis on the shapes of the subjects. The lemur in the centre of the work is a Verreaux's Sifaka, also known as the White Sifaka, the one on the right is a Ring-tailed lemur, the two on the left is a Madame Berthe's Mouse Lemur (above) and an Aye-aye (below). While all four species are endangered, they were mainly selected as subjects based on recognizability. Each of the four lemurs in the artwork were featured in popular culture. The sifaka lemur was the titular main character of the children's educational show, "Zoboomafoo", hosted by zoologists Chris and Martin Kratt. In the DreamWorks "Madagascar" film series created by Tom Magrath, the characters King Julian, Mort, and Maurice were a Ring-tailed lemur, a Mouse lemur, and an Aye-aye, respectively.

Despite their colorful portrayals in children's television programs, cartoons and movies, most lemur species are at risk. According to the red list, a system the IUCN (International Union for Conversation of Nature) uses to list, classify, measure and track at-risk species, 29.6% of lemur species are critically endangered, 40.7% are endangered, 22.2% are vulnerable, and 0.9% are near threatened, demonstrating that 93.4% of lemur species are at-risk and are experiencing decline in their populations. In addition to that information provided, the red list has also identified that much of the decline in lemur populations is attributed to shifting agriculture and poaching.

Mason Gatner

Undergraduate Student, English Program

University of Lethbridge

The Forms of Landscape

The term ‘more than human’ highlights and enhances the agency of all elements, beings and non-beings beyond anthropocentrism. In relation to landscapes, this point of view recognises the interconnected fabric of life and non-life that sustains and transforms them. In this sense, landscapes are understood as relational spaces of interdependence. “The Forms of Landscape” is a cinematic exploration of a landscape undergoing ecological restoration in the Nocella River bioregion in Sicily, Italy. Adopting an ethic of reciprocity, and inspired by more-than-human perspectives, “The Forms of Landscape” seeks to decentre and reposition the human designers as part of the larger landscape. Through the art of moving images, the film aspires to promote a more interdependent and ecocentric worldview.

Michal Krawczyk

Environmental Anthropologist and Multimedia Artist

Centre for Planetary Health and Food Security

School of Environment, Griffith University

Stories of Motherhood and Nature in Venezuelan Cinema

The connection between nature and motherhood is ancient and persistent across cultures. In recent years, ecological studies have merged with humanistic approaches to address these issues from new and provocative perspectives in cinema. Works such as Kressner, Mutis & Pettinaroli (2019) or Zazzarino (2022) explore how the exploitation and degradation of the world's natural resources and biomes is integrated into the social and cultural concerns that are represented in Latin American cinema. On the other hand, studies in ecofeminism, such as those by Bauhardt & Harcourt (2018), Bladow & Ladino, (2018), Mukherjee (2013) and Phillips & Rumens (2015), clearly establish how social conventions have reinforced the dominance that modern societies exert on nature, women, and other marginal groups. This paper explores different cinematographic strategies, both aesthetic and narrative, in four Venezuelan films, *Araya* (1959, dir. Margot Benacerraf), *El Pez Que Fuma* (1977, dir. Román Chalbaud), *Oriana* (1985, dir. Fina Torres) and *The Longest Distance* (2014, dir. Claudia Pinto Emperador), from which the specificities of the socioeconomic, ethnic, cultural or gender identity of the characters are constructed to reinforce, subvert, blur or fluidize the paradigms of femininities and masculinities proposed by the hegemonic power in relation to nature, or the lack of it. The broad historical spectrum covered by the four films under study seeks to reflect the meeting and disagreement points of the canonical proposals and the new trends of Venezuelan cinema.

Omar Rodríguez

Associate Professor, Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics

University of Lethbridge

Questioning Human Nature: Balzac's A Passion in the Desert (1830)

The nineteenth-century French novelist Honoré de Balzac is known primarily for long and lavishly-descriptive accounts or 'scenes' of life across the social spectrum. His intensive and exhaustive explorations of social interactions also reveal his primary concern: the success or, more often, failure of communication across normative barriers. These barriers extend from the more topical (class, binary gender) to the more surprising and imaginative (non-binary gender, spiritual beings), and in one particular instance extend to the communication barrier between species: a Napoleonic soldier stranded in the Egyptian desert, and a female panther.

My talk will explore how Balzac's strange tale, A Passion in the Desert, both exploits the nineteenth-century fascination with Orientalist fantasies, and also extends beyond exoticizing the natural world to question the human place within that world. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Balzac was no Orientalist, as scholars such as Dorothy Kelly, Dorian Bell and Pierre Citron agree. In this tale of disorientation, exploring the failed Egypt campaign through the fantastical experience of an anonymous soldier lost in the desert, Balzac brings the narrator and the reader face to face with the tragic limitations of human perception and understanding of the natural world. The soldier's attempt to apprehend and domesticate nature in the form of the panther reveals the unidirectional nature of communication that imposes meaning on the other. At the same time, Balzac's text shows glimpses of how the natural world communicates in return, beyond the paradigms of what is domesticated and recognisable.

Beth Gerwin

Associate Professor, Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics

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Power struggles: Between Nature, nurture, and neglect

in Frappabord (Horsefly) by Mireille Gagné

Quebec author, Mireille Gagné's latest novel, Frappabord (2024), translated as Horsefly, tells the story of Thomas, an entomologist hired to work on a top-secret anthrax and insect-vector project during World War II on a small island in the middle of Quebec's Saint Lawrence River. As this story unfolds, so does another, that of Theodore who works in a factory and whose grandfather, Émeril was witness to this war-time project. The final actor in this intertwined story is a female horsefly who reflects on her relationship with humans and their hegemonic relationship to the land. The novel focuses on betrayal, the return of the repressed, and more precisely the idea that humans are destroying themselves via their mistreatment of nature. In her mind, Mother Nature will ultimately take back what is rightfully hers. While referring to Joan Tronto's ethics of Care, my talk will examine the representation of power struggles in the novel, how war – a strictly human activity – neglects the environment and the importance of fighting back against effacement. Used and abused, the horsefly becomes an increasing vengeful figure toward the end of the novel, as humans seem to never really modify their behaviour or attempt to repair the harm they have done. I argue that this attitude, which promotes taking action to deal with repetitive environmental problems, is becoming a more and more prevalent tendency in recent French-Canadian literature. Armed with this message, these works of fiction embody engaged acts of resistance (speech acts) and encourage change via the utterance of words (mots), which are homonymous to pains (maux) in French.

Steven Urquhart

Associate Professor, Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics

University of Lethbridge

Convulsive Nature: Théophile de Viau and the Poetics of Ecological Revolt

Mercurial poet and playwright, Théophile de Viau (1590-1626), defined the French Baroque aesthetic by rejecting poetic decorum and classical restraint in favour of metaphysical dissonance, violent thematic asymmetry and the conscious repudiation of the idyllic illusion of bucolic idealism. In one of his most evocative odes (Un corbeau devant moi croasse, XLIX) he posits a convulsive and contradictory conception of nature that is governed neither by the divine nor forces of humanity. Although it stands as an emblem of existential dread and angst, the poem lends itself to renewed scrutiny and a close rereading from an ultra contemporary ecocritical perspective as we find within it the suggestion of a destabilized world in ecological revolt. Stones bleed, asps couple with bears and rivers flow back to their source in acts of elemental defiance that disrupt the naturae ordo of the classical world and, as I will explore, perhaps anticipate the unsettling ecological anxieties of today.

Tabitha Spagnolo

Associate Professor, Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics

University of Lethbridge

Pommotsiiysinn Sapaatsima'pi

Pommotsiiysinn Sapaatsima'pi brings four Indigenous students together to present collaborative socioecological restoration work on Blackfoot Territory. The panel connects complementary strands of a summer project, land-based stewardship, international exchange, and multimedia documentation to show how humanities methods grounded in iterative consent, Indigenous epistemologies, and spatial storytelling reveal sociopolitical drivers of environmental change and produce community-led stewardship pathways.

The panelists reflect on their experiences with collaborative planning and facilitation across three of the five land-based workshops that occurred prior to the 11th Annual Kainai Ecosystem Protection Association (KEPA) Summit this past summer. Naapi's Garden guided participants through its work reviving culturally significant plants using a Two-Eyed Seeing approach, generating concrete stewardship strategies and teaching practices. At Áísínai'pi, Blackfoot decolonial methods, land-based learning, storytelling, and rock art interpretation were used to navigate cultural resource tensions and model intertribal research grounded in reciprocity, relationality, respect, and reverence. The Waterton workshop situated discussions in local history and landscape through field-based exploration and material culture.

These events, alongside exchanges with Quijos and Kaqchiquel partners, reinforced how ancestral knowledge and place-based practice sustain Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). The KEPA Summit documentary synthesizes these strands, weaving Elders', knowledge keepers', students', and researchers' voices to visualize land-based teachings and embodied stewardship that sustain people-place relationships.

These experiences informed a replicable, ethically grounded template for participatory humanities research that centers Indigenous knowledge, iterative consent, and co-governance, and that translates narrative and spatial knowledge into policy-relevant planning tools for conservation and community resilience.

Panelists:

- Kimmy Eckert — Repatriation of Keystone Plant Species (Naapi's Garden)
- Blair Many Fingers (Sisiksi/Mixed Coins) — Receiving Guidance from Áísínai'pi with Our Relatives
- Jordan David — KEPA 11th Annual Summit Documentary
- Iinakay Mountain Horse — Repatriation of Keystone Plant Species (Waterton)

"Cognition, Ecology, and Tok Pisin Folktales

From its early development catalyzed by mass displacement and forced relocation of Melanesian people, Tok Pisin has flourished into a thriving language of mixed origins. English acts as its main superstratum with elements from German and Patpatar-Tolai being significant contributors to its lexicon. For the last half a century, this diversity and complex genealogy have made Tok Pisin a subject of interest for linguistics, leading to multiple dictionaries, detailed grammar descriptions, and most importantly for this study, the documentation of traditional folktales. This study proposes that Tok Pisin folktales are not just carriers of traditional knowledge but cognitive-ecological cultural models (Shore 1996). This means they encapsulate a worldview in which mind, language, and environment are interwoven. Using concepts from cognitive linguistics and ecolinguistics, this paper sets out to analyze how Tok Pisin narratives model ecological understanding through their language. It will use a corpus of over 1000 traditional folktales which were originally recorded in the Wantok Newspaper from 1972-1997 (Slone 2001).

There is a growing body of literature on the topic of cognitive-ecolinguistics for Tok Pisin, with significant developments coming from Rajdeep Singh's 2022 paper on cognitive schemata in Tok Pisin. Singh's paper indicates that the cognitive conceptualization of Tok Pisin in the ecological sense is that of the Oceanic languages, instead of the main substratum language(Singh 2022: 4-5). Additionally, Krzysztof Kosecki builds upon this research in his upcoming paper and further solidifies the argument that nature related vocabulary reflects the Oceanic cognitive model which indicates that humans are conceptually integrated with nature, but not only this, that nature terms are also used to understand a multitude of other concepts that might seem unrelated from a Western perspective (Kosecki 2025: 52). This paper expands on these two pieces of recent scholarship by incorporating the corpus of traditional folktales. Both Singh and Kosecki have primarily focused on isolated lexical items and constructions rather than on extended discourse and narratives. This then leaves the idea of how ecological cognition operates within the narrative context and how the folktales linguistically model the cognitive environmental relationship.

Jocelyn McKnight

BA Student in English

University of Lethbridge

The Peace of Wild Things": A Case For Environmental Poetry in the Anthropocene

Reflection and contemplation of nature has long been an essential facet of the poetic canon. In perhaps its most famous era of influence, environmental poetry became popular during the Romantic period, where pastoral depictions of nature such as those popularized by William Wordsworth allowed for the poet (and reader) to reflect on their own identities as well as their connections to the wider world. As humanity adjusts to rapid industrialization, social alienation, and urbanization in the Anthropocene, the answers to our questions of identity, role, and duty lie in the process of self-recognition through contemplation of nature.

In this paper, I hope to argue in favour of the distinctive power of the genre of poetry I will refer to as Environmental Poetry, as well as establishing its historical roots and the necessity of a modern resurgence in the form. I aim to draw attention to the unique ability of Environmental Poetry to not only bring environmental issues to the forefront of the culture, but also to allow for personal and social reflection on the human condition and personal troubles. Through examination of a variety of Environmental Poetry throughout the literary canon, I hope to make a case for not only the necessity of Environmental Poetry through an ecological and conservationist lens, but also advocate for the capacity of Environmental Poetry to aid in self-reflection and recognition. Through the examination of poets such as William Wordsworth and Mary Oliver, I plan to explore how these different perspectives reflect individual outlooks on both nature and the poet's own identity. As I examine the capacity of Environmental Poetry for both self-reflection and ecological motivation, I will also emphasize the necessity of a resurgence in Environmental Poetry themes and techniques in this unique era of human history as a powerful tool for enacting change.

Indie Verona MacGarva

Bachelor of Arts in English

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Backyard Wilderness

A century ago, nature was seen as unpredictable, dangerous, and chaotic, and the goal was to tame it, map it, and exploit it for its resources. Increasingly, this campaign was replaced by the need to protect and preserve. Nature is now often seen as a pristine retreat, a virgin wilderness in need of our stewardship. Both views share the perception that we exist outside of nature and act upon it (Jardine and Spary, 1996). In this paper I will address this dichotomy while advancing Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's work on collaborative survival. Tsing asks, what if the very things we think of as trivial are at the centre of the systematicity we humans seek (Tsing, 2015, p. 20)? I use Tsing to frame my own question: what if urban wildlife is more than trivial? Conceiving of urban wildlife as nothing more than pests and nuisances reduces our interactions with such wildlife to that of removing irritations rather than coming to terms with more complex relationships involving mutual respect. Through an overview of the art component of my PhD dissertation, *Backyard Wilderness: An Interdisciplinary Investigation of the Urban Ecology of Lethbridge,* I will examine the narratives we construct around our relationships with urban wildlife with the goal of advocating for coexistence. Coexistence doesn't have to be a simple celebration of the creatures that rummage through our trash cans or spray our dogs. Instead, cohabitation can be a realization that urban wildlife enhances our experiences of our yards and gardens and helps us to embrace more sustainable practices.

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Wilderness and Madness: The Habitat of the Feral Man

Unlike modern ideals of nature as a refuge, the medieval forest was often seen as unavoidable, dangerous, and hostile. It stood in stark contrast to the town, a liminal zone where law and custom no longer held. The woodland is therefore not only a geographical setting but also a conceptual frontier, where the abandonment of civilisation and the onset of madness coincide. From the twelfth century onward, the wild man and the madman were conceptually bound to the woodland. Entry into the forest meant risking the loss of social order and regression into ferality. This semantic overlap framed the forest as the natural dwelling place of outlaws, lunatics, and exiles. Unlike the outlaw, driven into exile, he chooses to abandon community, seeking survival beyond the bounds of civilisation. Philological evidence underscores this shift: the convergence of Old English *wudu* ("wood, forest") and *wōd* ("madness") in Middle English associates wilderness with folly. By the twelfth century, the madman was imagined as a woodland creature, surviving only by embracing animality.

This paper asks how mediaeval culture imagined the forest as the natural home of madness and ferality, and what this discloses about its understanding of civilisation's borders. The focus is on the archetype of the wild man and its representation in medieval romances, where the forest functions as a symbolic space. This entanglement of habitat and psyche reveals the forest as more than landscape. The feral man embodies this condition. Unlike the bandit, who is cast out, he shuns society by choice, inhabiting the forest as a space of disorder. The forest thus becomes the privileged habitat of madness: a site where the human detaches from communal norms and descends into disorder. Also, it becomes the correlative of primordial disorder, echoing the Platonic *hyle* as unformed matter. Figures such as Robin Hood, suspended between *hood* (penitence, outlawry) and *wood* (wilderness, madness), crystallise this ambiguity. The mediaeval forest thus functions as a symbolic matrix where the escape from civilisation coincides with a descent into wildness, raising questions about the boundaries between human and beast, civilisation and lack thereof.

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Mushrooms at the End of the World: Infecting the Anthropocene with Fungal Eco-Horror

Fungus has formed an infectious and engaging 'thread that runs, mycelium-like' throughout eco-horror narratives, depicting the simultaneous 'wonders' and 'terrors'i of ecological entanglements and more-than-human sentience. Once abhorred as pathogens and vilified for their associations with death, decay, pestilence, and ruin, fungi have become prised models for symbiotic relationships, bringing about connection along with infection as they shape environments for themselves and other creatures. Fungi are ancient and resilient, likely to survive long after other forms of life have ceased to find Earth liveable. That fungi emerge from ruin is perhaps why they so frequently crop up in tales of a collapsing Anthropocene and populate our imagination of what Eugene Thacker refers to as the world 'without us'.ii

It is perhaps no wonder that fungi have become popular symbols denoting the rise and fall of eons, taking on layered symbolism as productive parasites and prolific worldbuilders capable of 'burst[ing] categories and upend[ing] identities'.iii This paper examines recent eco-horror films depicting fungus as the catalyst for the demise of the Anthropocene and the rise of post-anthropocentric alternatives. I focus on McCarthy's The Girl with all the Gifts (2016), Jaco Bouwer's Gaia (2021), and Ben Wheatley's In the Earth (2021), which depict apocalyptic fungal infections exterminating most of humanity while new hybrid species of fungal-humans emerge. Despite their horror, these narratives highlight the value and necessity of transformational ecological encounters as they underscore the importance of our communion with the Earth. I conclude with a discussion of the posthuman, post-anthropocentric appeal of fungus in narratives depicting a world beyond and without Man.

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