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# Introduction

*Pauline Goul and Phillip John Usher*

‘What can early modern French literature do for ecocriticism?’ This was Louisa Mackenzie’s question during a roundtable discussion at a recent MLA convention. As she noted, it is a much better and more important question than ‘What can ecocriticism do for early modern French literature?’ and it caught the attention of the editors of the present volume.<sup>1</sup> Mackenzie’s point here is that we should be letting early modern French literature interrogate and shape contemporary theory and criticism, rather than *applying* existing ecocritical paradigms *onto* authors such as Rabelais or Ronsard. After many conversations and several follow-up panels (including one at the Renaissance Society of America’s annual conference in Boston, with Mackenzie as chair), this point not only seemed increasingly pertinent, but it had also clearly struck a chord with colleagues who detected a groundswell of interest in re-reading works of early modern French literature from a particular angle. The present volume is the concrete product of this groundswell. Its title (*Early Modern Écologtes*) is subtly bilingual, the acute accent (*é*) on the final word drawing attention to the fact that, in method and in conclusions, the chapters that follow are caught between languages and literary and critical traditions. Whether read from an Anglophone or a Francophone point of view, the book as a whole speaks, intentionally, with an accent.

As a whole, the present volume opens up a number of conversations around Mackenzie’s compelling question. It is not the first collection of writings about French literature and ecocriticism: it arrives *dans le sillage* of a 2012 *FLS* volume on ‘The Environment in French and Francophone Literature and Film’ edited by Jeff Persels, a 2015 special issue of *Dix Neuf* titled ‘Ecopoetics/L’Écopoétique’, edited by Daniel A. Finch-Race and Julien Weber, a 2017 issue of *L’Esprit créateur* titled ‘French Ecocriticism/L’écocritique

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<sup>1</sup> The vanishing point of Mackenzie’s MLA talk—and, arguably, of the present volume—is her article, ‘It’s a Queer Thing: Early Modern French Ecocriticism’, which makes a resounding and articulate call for putting early modern French literature into dialogue with questions of ecology.