

Quacking in the Anthropocene: Ecocide and Climate Change in Kate Beaton's *Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands*

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Abstract

In recent years, the graphic narrative medium has emerged as a potent site for interrogating the complexities of human-nature relations in the context of the Anthropocene epoch. With its unique fusion of visual and textual elements, this medium, transcends the boundaries of traditional storytelling, seamlessly merging artistry with activism to illuminate the pressing societal concerns of our times. This research paper delves deep into the ecological dimensions of Kate Beaton's graphic memoir¹ *Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands* situated at the confluence of climate change discourse, eco-horror and the emerging discourse on ecocide, an intentional or systematic destruction of ecosystems driven by extractivist economies. Beaton's portrayal of the Alberta oil-sands as a grotesque, polluted wasteland epitomizes the genre's capacity to evoke a visceral response to the climate crisis. Her depiction of oil sands workers' precarious conditions and the pervasive environmental destruction they encounter again reminds us of the discourse on the Anthropocene, highlighting the intersectionality of labour, exploitation, and environmental harm. As Rob Nixon posits in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, the Anthropocene is characterized by "slow violence" and "...it is those people lacking resources who are the principal casualties..." (4). This paper argues that *Ducks* transcends mere documentation of environmental and human injustices by interrogating the systemic structures that sustain ecocide and ecological amnesia². The memoir situates individual and collective trauma within broader Anthropocene narratives, challenging readers to reckon with the ethical implications of extractivism and the commodification of nature. While celebrating the aesthetic and thematic innovations of Beaton's work, this research also interrogates potential limitations in its narrative strategies, addressing the interplay between personal testimony and structural critique. By critically analysing the ecological, ethical and political dimensions of *Ducks* within the framework of ecocide and eco-horror, this paper contributes to the growing body of scholarship on graphic narratives as potent tools for eco-critical inquiry into the Anthropocene.

Keywords: ecocide, eco-horror, climate change, Graphic Narrative, Graphic Memoir.

The Anthropocene is a geological epoch characterized by the unprecedented human impact on the Earth's geology and ecosystems. As a narrative, it further emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life forms and the imperative for sustainable co-existence of the human and non-human beings. The term 'Anthropocene', coming from the Greek words *Anthropos* (human) and *cene* (new), coined by atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and biologist Eugene F. Stoermer, has become an essential concept within the contemporary ecological and cultural discourses, capturing the profound transformations wrought by human activities on the planet's systems. Crutzen and Stoermer in their essay titled "*The Anthropocene*" articulate, "Considering these and many other major and still growing impacts of human activities on earth and atmosphere, and at all, including global, scales, it seems to us more than appropriate to emphasize the central role of mankind in geology and ecology by proposing to use the term 'anthropocene' for the current geological epoch" (17).

In the wake of such ecological upheavals, literature and art have increasingly turned their focus towards engaging with the crises and complexities inherent in the Anthropocene. These creative works endeavour to encapsulate the multifaceted dimensions of human impact on the environment, often employing narrative and aesthetic strategies to provoke critical reflection and inspire ecological consciousness. At this juncture, *Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands*, opens with a stark depiction of the Alberta oil sands; an expansive industrial landscape that epitomizes the Anthropocene's destructive capacity. In her graphic memoir, Kate Beaton uses several instances to highlight the impact of industrialization on both human and non-human lives. The title itself refers to a tragic event where a flock of migrating ducks lands in a toxic tailings pond, leading to their deaths. This moment is not just a literal illustration of non-human lives being affected by industrial activities but also serves as a metaphor for the broader environmental degradation caused by the oil sands. The visual and textual representation of this incident in the graphic novel draws attention to the helplessness of the ducks, paralleling the vulnerability of human workers to the dehumanizing effects of the industry. Beaton's *Ducks*, exemplifies her distinctive artistic style, initially developed in her early webcomic series *Hark! A Vagrant*. *Ducks* chronicles Beaton's experiences working in the oil sands from 2005 to 2008, encapsulating a journey familiar to many Atlantic Canadians. The memoir narrates Beaton's migration from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, to Fort McMurray as an economic migrant endeavouring to mitigate her student loan debt. Her travels metaphorically traverse the transition from a 'have-not' province to a 'have' one. Alberta oil sands, one of the largest industrial projects in the world, notorious for its environmental degradation and socio-economic impacts, is the backdrop of Beaton's graphic memoir. The narrative follows the protagonist's own experiences working in the oil sands, providing a firsthand account of the ecological and human toll of industrial activities. Beaton's work is distinguished by its ability to encapsulate the essence of the Anthropocene, foregrounding the interplay between

human ambition and environmental destruction. Through a combination of intricate artwork and narrative depth, the graphic novel explores the complexities of human-environment interactions, offering a nuanced critique of the anthropocentric ideologies that underpin industrial exploitation. Framing Beaton's meticulous chronicles of her tenure in the Canadian oil fields, undertaken to alleviate her student loan burden, this narrative exposes the pervasive realities of a male-dominated, working-class sector, rendered with unflinching candour regarding incidents of sexual assault, intoxication, and psychological distress. In the opening pages of *Ducks*, Beaton contextualizes this within the longue durée of Canada's extractive economies, noting that Atlantic Canada, historically known for its exports of resources such as fish, coal and steel, is now recognized for exporting its people. This shift fundamentally disrupts entrenched ways of life, as Nova Scotians, according to Beaton, are imbued with "a deep love for home and the knowledge of how frequently [they] have to leave it to find work somewhere else" (13). This paper seeks to examine the graphic novel through the dual lenses of ecocide and eco-horror, two theoretical frameworks that provide rich analytical tools for understanding the graphic novel's engagement with environmental themes. Ecocide functions as a critical theoretical framework for analysing the pervasive and systemic destruction of ecosystems and its multifaceted implications. Within the context of the Anthropocene- a geological epoch characterized by the profound and often deleterious impact of human activity on planetary systems- ecocide emerges as a salient manifestation of extractivist practices that commodify natural resources while disregarding ecological thresholds. In Kate Beaton's *Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands*, the Alberta tar sands are emblematic of an ecocidal landscape- an industrialized zone where ecological devastation is normalized under the guise of economic productivity. The graphic memoir vividly portrays the juxtaposition of industrial machinery with polluted and degraded natural environments, encapsulating the transformation of a once-thriving ecosystem into a symbol of ecological collapse. This depiction serves not only as a critique of extractivist economies but also as a powerful visual and narrative engagement with the broader consequences of unchecked anthropogenic exploitation. Eco-horror, on the other hand, is a subgenre of horror fiction, underscores the terror and dread induced by ecological disruptions and environmental degradation. Stephen Rust and Carter Soles, in their essay, "Living in Fear, Living in Dread, Pretty Soon We'll All Be Dead" asserts, "Ecohorror, which assumes that environmental disruption is haunting humanity's relationship to the non-human world, is present in a broad set of texts grappling with ecocritical matters, and therefore this concentrated study is necessary to sketch out the boundaries of this important new area of ecocritical study" (510).

Art plays the most crucial role in shaping ecological consciousness and fostering a deeper understanding of environmental issues in *Ducks*. Beaton navigates the dissonance between the aspirational rhetoric and the austere realities of Canada's fossil fuel economy, providing a nuanced portrayal of the oil sands

that subverts prevalent narratives and stereotypes. Through her lens, the oil sands emerge as simultaneously exceeding and falling short of the expectations shaped by external discourses. Readers are thus invited to engage with a narrative filtered through the perspective of a young Beaton. Upon her initial arrival in Fort McMurray, Beaton offers an immersive orientation, which can be conceptualized as an ‘oil sands starter pack,’ encapsulating the multifaceted character of Fort McMurray. Over two pages, visual representations of bars, a raised pickup truck, a casino, a church, a mosque, and other elements are presented, culminating in a frame where Beaton affirms her arrival via telephone: “Yeah—I made it” (Beaton 37). Segmented into distinct portions based on locations and social interactions, *Ducks* leads readers from Cape Breton to the oil sands, where spatial identity is defined by the industrial endeavours undertaken by Beaton. These endeavours encompass Syncrude’s Mildred Lake mine, the Aurora mine, and Long Lake’s Opti-Nexen. After a brief, seemingly idyllic year at the Maritime Museum of BC in Victoria, Beaton returns to the industrial sphere at Shell’s Albion Sands project. The conceptualization of ‘place’ in Fort McMurray, as tied to specific industrial sites rather than broader regions or municipalities, contrasts sharply with the more traditional spatial identities of Cape Breton and Victoria. In her quest for economic stability within Alberta, Beaton navigates the camp life- ephemeral environments marked by seclusion and pronounced hyper-masculinity. Despite the isolation inherent to these camps, each section of the memoir introduces a detailed roster of individuals, identified by their names, roles and places of origin. This meticulous characterization highlights the development of cohesive communities within these transient environments, suggesting that strong social bonds can emerge despite the overarching sense of solitude and dislocation. In “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire”, Pierre Nora posits that “Memory attaches itself to sites, whereas history attaches itself to events” (22). *Ducks* exemplifies this concept by transforming the industrial sites of Fort McMurray into centres of collective memory for the labourers. Through her depiction of the oil sands as a network of isolated yet interconnected camps, Beaton illustrates the formation of shared memories in these temporary settings, thereby challenging conventional understandings of place and community. The text foregrounds the corporeal and psychological toll of working in the oil sands, where Beaton contends with the hazardous byproducts of industrial extraction. Manifestations of these conditions include chronic illness, such as persistent coughing and rashes, alongside exposure to the entrenched misogyny and sexual harassment endemic to male-dominated labour environments. Her narrative is punctuated by the human cost of this extractive economy, as evidenced by the frequent injuries and fatalities among workers operating heavy machinery or commuting to remote sites. As Beaton transitions between job sites, the narrative constructs a relational network of displaced labourers, each navigating their dislocation and precarious attachments to home and community. The episodic structure amplifies the fragmented nature of these connections, juxtaposing moments of solidarity with the alienation wrought

by industrial temporality. Ultimately, Beaton's departure from the oil sands signifies not an escape but a transformation, as the embodied and affective residues of her experience underscore the persistence of industrial memory within personal and ecological frameworks. Ecocriticism, as a theory, examines the relationship between literature and the physical environment, advocating for an understanding of literature's role in shaping ecological consciousness. It seeks to elucidate how literary and artistic works contribute to the cultural discourse on environmental issues, promoting a more ecologically attuned worldview. In the "Introduction" of *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm define ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii). By juxtaposing these frameworks, *Ducks* navigates the ecological anxieties of the Anthropocene and articulates a narrative of interconnected vulnerability. The graphic novel's portrayal of the Alberta oil sands serves as a microcosm of the broader environmental crises facing the planet, offering a stark depiction of the consequences of industrial exploitation. Through its narrative structure and visual elements, the novel foregrounds the themes of environmental degradation, anthropocentric hubris, and the entanglement of human and non-human lives. *Ducks* not only critiques the environmental degradation wrought by the oil industry but also interrogates the socio-economic injustices perpetuated by industrial activities. By foregrounding the experiences of marginalized communities, including Indigenous populations and low-wage workers, Beaton underscores the ethical imperative of addressing these injustices and advocating for a more equitable distribution of environmental risks and benefits.

Beaton's meticulous artwork captures the vastness of the extraction sites, juxtaposing the colossal machinery against the fragile natural environment. This visual juxtaposition serves to amplify the sense of unease, foregrounding the ecological imbalance wrought by industrial exploitation. The portrayal of the oil sands in is not merely a backdrop but an active participant in the narrative, symbolizing the Anthropocene's transformative and often terrifying impact on the natural world. The scale of the industrial operations is depicted with a sense of grandeur that is simultaneously awe-inspiring and horrifying. This duality is central to the concept of the "hyperobjects" which Morton describes as an aesthetic experience in his *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* that evokes both admiration for human technological prowess and a profound disquiet at its ecological consequences. Beaton's artwork captures this duality through her detailed renderings of the machinery and landscapes, emphasizing the contrast between the natural beauty of the environment and the stark, mechanical intrusion of the oil industry. This is further accentuated by the graphic novel's narrative structure, which oscillates between moments of quiet reflection and the relentless activity of the oil sands. The protagonist's journey through the industrial landscape is marked by a sense of disorientation and alienation, as she grapples with the overwhelming scale of the operations. The graphic novel's depiction of the oil sands as a labyrinthine and inhospitable environment serves to underscore

the alienation and dislocation experienced by the protagonist, reflecting the broader disjunction between humanity and nature in the Anthropocene. The recurring images of colossal machinery, vast expanses of barren land, and polluted water bodies serve as powerful reminders of the ecological toll of industrial activities. These motifs are interwoven with the narrative to create a cohesive and impactful portrayal of the oil sands, highlighting the interconnectedness of human and environmental degradation. Beaton's attention to detail in her artwork, from the intricate renderings of the machinery to the subtle shifts in colour and tone in the already existing monochrome palette, enhances the graphic novel's ability to convey the profound sense of unease and disquiet.

A salient feature of the eco-horror in *Ducks* is the exploration of anthropocentric hubris- the presumption of human supremacy and control over the natural world. Beaton's narrative interrogates this hubris by exposing the oil industry's blatant disregard for both environmental integrity and human welfare. Within this portrayal, the oil sands workers, including our protagonist, are represented as mere components in the vast apparatus of capitalist exploitation, their existences deemed disposable in the relentless quest for profit. This dehumanization parallels the relentless exploitation of the natural environment, which is subjected to incessant degradation. The true horror emerges not only from the overt destruction but also from the insidious normalization of such exploitative practices, thereby underscoring the profound ethical and ecological deficiencies inherent in anthropocentric ideology. These environments are characterized by stark gender imbalances, with pervasive sexism infiltrating quotidian life. Concurrently, there exists an alluring promise of financial reward that compels workers to endure such adversities. This pervasive sexism manifests through persistent, unwelcome advances from male coworkers towards female employees. Beaton articulates her exasperation in one episode, confiding in a female colleague: "All you need here is to be a woman. You stick out, and that's all it takes..." (72). She further elaborates on the resultant discomfort and concludes with a resigned expression: "I just don't know, I don't know how to handle these guys" (72). Her colleague's response, "I think that's pretty cynical. What's the harm in giving him a chance?" (72), underscores the normalization of such behaviour. The depiction of the protagonist's experiences in the oil sands serves to foreground the ethical and existential dilemmas faced by the workers. Beaton's narrative emphasizes the physical and psychological toll of the labour, from the gruelling work conditions to the emotional burden of witnessing environmental destruction. The graphic novel's portrayal of the protagonist's internal conflict and moral ambiguity highlights the human cost of industrial exploitation, underscoring the interconnectedness of ecological and social justice. Beaton's attention to detail in her artwork, from the intricate renderings of the machinery to the subtle shifts in colour and tone, enhances the narrative's ability to convey the constant state of flux. The muted tone of the experience is further enhanced by the colour palette, consisting primarily of shades of grey and blue. Beaton's use of colour is not

limited to grey; she strategically employs solid black to underscore the profound emotional repercussions of life in the oil sands. A notable instance is the depiction of Katie's initial sexual assault, where black panels dominate the scene. This use of black, as opposed to grey, serves to visually articulate the detrimental impacts of residing in a liminal environment that undermines moral accountability. Despite the democratic nature of these panels, their vertical arrangement, substantial gutters, and absence of page numbers represent a stark departure from the usual format, mirroring the distressing content of the protagonist's getting physically assaulted. Additionally, the black panels hinder the reader's ability to attain straightforward closure.

Scott McCloud in *Understanding Comics* observes that "comics panels fracture both time and space, offering a jagged staccato rhythm of unconnected moments. But closure allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous unified reality" (67). Beaton's use of black panels leaves readers in a state of anxious suspense, trapped in the moments before and after Katie's assault. The man who first assaults Katie does so on the day his contract concludes: "contract's up. Finally leaving this dump" (Beaton 189). Reflecting on her assault, Katie remarks, "I could have yelled. But he was leaving" (Beaton 380). This liminal existence fosters a sense of impermanence that promotes immediate gratification and exploitative behaviour, as evidenced by Katie's experiences with sexual assault and drug use, while simultaneously undermining moral responsibility and resistance. Furthermore, Beaton's critique of anthropocentric hubris is underscored by the graphic novel's depiction of the broader societal attitudes towards nature. The narrative highlights the normalization of environmental exploitation and the pervasive belief in human superiority and dominion over nature. This critique is embodied in the portrayal of the oil industry's disregard for environmental and human well-being, as well as in the broader societal acceptance of such practices. Beaton's narrative strategy is particularly effective in creating a multifaceted portrayal of the oil industry that emphasizes the ethical and ecological bankruptcy of prioritizing economic gain over ecological and human health. The graphic novel's depiction of oil spills, deforestation, and contaminated water bodies serves as a visual archive of ecological memory, compelling readers to confront the tangible consequences of climate change. Beaton's use of visual motifs, such as recurring images of polluted water and damaged wildlife, reinforces the theme of environmental memory³, serving as a stark reminder of the persistent and pervasive nature of ecological damage.

Ecocide, understood as the systematic destruction of ecosystems for economic profit, finds stark representation in *Ducks*. The oil sands emerge as an industrial wasteland, a paradigmatic 'sacrifice zone' where ecological systems are subordinated to the imperatives of neoliberal capitalism. Beaton's narrative encapsulates this degradation through her visual portrayal of the oil sands' stark,

desolate landscapes- sprawling tailing ponds, eroded earth, and polluted air. This destruction resonates with the Anthropocene discourse, which critiques the epoch of human dominance over natural systems. In *Ducks*, Beaton foregrounds the Anthropocene's inherent contradictions- the oil sands, a site of human technological prowess, are also the locus of humanity's ecological self-destruction. By documenting the slow, pervasive harm inflicted on the environment, the text functions as a form of ecocidal witnessing, demanding acknowledgment of humanity's complicity in the erasure of ecological memory and biodiversity. The text challenges simplistic binaries of victim and perpetrator, presenting workers as enmeshed in a system that offers economic survival at the cost of moral and ecological compromise. This ethical ambiguity aligns with Stacy Alaimo's theory of trans-corporeality, discussed in her seminal work *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*. It emphasizes the porous boundaries between human and environmental bodies. The toxicity of the oil sands extends beyond the environment, seeping into the physical and psychological well-being of the workers, demonstrating how human and nonhuman lives are co-implicated in ecocidal processes.

The protagonist's odyssey is symbolically delineated by three pivotal encounters, each imbued with profound and multifaceted significance. The first encounter is with the relocated buffalo. This scene subtly references the manifold displacements wrought by the oil industry, encompassing not only the workers who migrate from across Canada and beyond but also the Indigenous communities and wildlife whose existence is disrupted by the mining operations. This buffalo encounter signifies not merely the physical relocation of animals but also the cultural and ecological upheavals triggered by industrial encroachment. It underscores the invasive nature of industrial practices that uproot both human and non-human inhabitants from their native habitats, thereby disrupting the intricate web of life that sustains these ecosystems. The sight of buffalo on reclaimed mine land, ostensibly a gesture towards ecological restoration, ironically highlights the incongruity between corporate reclamation efforts and the deep-seated ecological and cultural dislocations they aim to rectify. The second encounter is with a fox, which, despite having lost a front leg, continues to prowl around the warehouse at night. Beaton's reaction—chasing the fox away by throwing snowballs at it- might initially seem startling. However, this act of aggression can be interpreted as an ominous foreshadowing of her own imminent injury, reflecting a deep-seated frustration and a sense of foreboding. The fox, a symbol of resilience and adaptation, mirrors Beaton's own struggle to navigate the harsh realities of the oil sands environment. The injury of the fox, juxtaposed with its persistent presence, serves as a metaphor for the wounded yet enduring spirit of the workers and the land alike. Beaton's aggressive response to the fox can be seen as an externalization of her internal conflict—a projection of her own vulnerability and a premonition of the physical and psychological toll that the oil sands work will exact on her. The third and most poignant encounter involves the tragic news that, in April 2008,

1,600 ducks perished after landing on a Syncrude tailings pond north of Fort McMurray, one of Beaton's work sites. This incident, coupled with a YouTube video featuring an elder Cree woman decrying the oil extraction industry, catalyses a profound shift in Beaton's awareness, elevating her understanding of the industry's impact from a personal grievance to a broader political consciousness. The mass death of the ducks starkly illustrates the environmental degradation and ecological hazards posed by the oil sands operations. The tailings pond, a byproduct of the extraction process, symbolizes the toxic legacy of industrial activities—manifesting not only in the immediate fatalities of the ducks but also in the long-term contamination of the land and water. This event becomes a catalyst for Beaton's awakening to the broader implications of her work environment, transforming her perception from individual suffering to a collective environmental and ethical crisis. The video of the Cree elder further amplifies this shift in perspective, connecting Beaton's personal narrative to the historical and ongoing struggles of Indigenous communities affected by the oil industry. The elder's testimony serves as a powerful reminder of the deep-rooted injustices and environmental racism that underpin the extractive economies of the region. It highlights the enduring resistance of indigenous peoples to the encroachments on their lands and livelihoods, and the profound interconnectedness between cultural survival and environmental stewardship. For Beaton, this moment of witnessing the elder's voice marks a turning point in her journey, compelling her to grapple with the broader socio-political dimensions of her experiences in the oil sands. As Beaton progresses through these encounters, her narrative becomes a profound critique of the anthropocentric hubris that underlies the oil industry's operations. This hubris- the belief in human superiority and dominion over nature- manifests in the industry's disregard for environmental and human well-being. The workers in the oil sands, including Beaton herself, are depicted as cogs in the machinery of capitalist extraction, their lives rendered expendable in the pursuit of profit. This dehumanization is mirrored in the treatment of the natural environment, which is subjected to relentless exploitation. The horror lies not only in the visible destruction but also in the insidious normalization of such practices, highlighting the ethical and ecological bankruptcy of anthropocentrism. Beaton's encounters with the buffalo, the fox, and the ducks serve as symbolic touchstones that illuminate the broader themes of displacement, resilience, and awakening in her narrative. The buffalo, emblematic of the displaced and the dislocated, reflect the multiple layers of disruption caused by the oil industry's encroachment on traditional lands and communities. The fox, with its visible injury and persistent presence, mirrors the tenacity and vulnerability of those who labour in the oil sands, navigating the physical and psychological challenges of this environment. The mass death of the ducks crystallizes the environmental crisis, serving as a poignant reminder of the ecological consequences of industrial activities and the urgent need for a re-evaluation of our relationship with the natural world. As the book concludes, it becomes clear that the title's "Ducks" serves a dual purpose: a

tribute to the birds that perished in the tailings pond disaster and to Beaton herself. The nickname “ducky”, given to her by older coworkers, symbolizes her journey and eventual escape from the oppressive confines of the bitumen fields. This dual symbolism underscores both the environmental tragedy and Beaton’s personal triumph, highlighting her ability to transcend the harsh realities of her surroundings and metaphorically take flight, much like the ducks she commemorates. *Ducks* portrays the Alberta oil sands as a realm where individuals suspend their lives and values for the sake of profit. Beaton deftly captures both the luminous and shadowy facets of humanity through her intricate visual and textual details. This representation reveals the indelible impact of the liminal world forged by capitalism on her characters. Within the oil sands, Beaton blurs conventional moral boundaries, highlighting how the transitory nature of this world facilitates rampant exploitation, leading to detrimental long-term consequences. In this environment, the lives of workers, like environmental resources, are viewed as consumable and economically replaceable. The only enduring element in this transient world is the emotional damage inflicted upon those within it.

In conclusion, Beaton’s graphic memoir, *Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands*, offers a multi-layered exploration of the intersections between personal experience and broader socio-environmental issues. The fragmented narrative structure of *Ducks* also serves to highlight the interconnectedness of past and present, emphasizing the cumulative impact of industrial activities on the environment. By oscillating between different time periods, Beaton creates a sense of historical continuity that underscores the long-term consequences of environmental degradation. This temporal disjunction mirrors the disintegration of the environment, where the past’s pristine landscapes give way to the present’s desolation. The use of visual flashbacks and memories serves to highlight the contrast between the natural beauty of the past and the industrial wasteland of the present, creating a poignant commentary on the irreversible nature of ecological degradation. Beaton’s choice of the graphic memoir form amplifies the text’s ecocritical potency. The visual medium enables a dual representation of ecological and human harm, capturing both the vast, abstract scale of environmental destruction and the intimate, embodied experiences of its victims. This bifocal perspective resonates with ecocriticism’s emphasis on the interconnectedness of the global and the local, the human and the nonhuman. The titular *Ducks*, symbolizing the waterfowl poisoned by the oil sands’ tailing ponds, function as a potent ecological metaphor. The ducks, like the workers and the land itself, become silent witnesses to the slow violence of ecocide. *Ducks* serves as a powerful ecocidal text that interrogates the environmental and ethical costs of industrial resource extraction. By weaving together personal narrative, ecological critique, and social commentary, Beaton compels readers to confront the slow violence of the Anthropocene and consider the profound interdependencies between human and ecological health. As a work of art and activism, *Ducks* not only critiques

ecocide but also calls for a reimagining of humanity's relationship with the natural world.

Notes

1. Graphic memoir is a genre of autobiographical writing that intertwines visual art, typically in the form of comic-style illustrations, with textual narrative. This form of memoir leverages the interplay between images and text to convey personal stories, memories, and reflections, offering a multimodal approach to autobiography that can provide a more immersive and nuanced experience for the reader.
2. Ecological amnesia refers to the phenomenon where individuals or societies lose awareness of their historical and cultural connections to the natural environment. This term encapsulates a collective forgetting of ecological knowledge, practices and the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature, often exacerbated by urbanization, industrialization, and the increasing alienation of human beings from natural ecosystems.
3. Environmental memory refers to the collective recollection and narrative construction of ecological experiences and changes within a community or culture. It encapsulates the ways in which environmental transformations, whether through natural processes or human intervention, are recorded, remembered, and transmitted across generations. This concept underscores the intersection of ecological consciousness and cultural identity, highlighting how landscapes, flora, fauna, and climate shifts are not merely physical phenomena but are deeply intertwined with human memory, shaping collective understanding and influencing future environmental actions.

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