

# Plant Agriculture

## 2015 SEMINAR SERIES

- TITLE:** Embarrassing plant-feelings: A story of plants in literature
- SPEAKER:** Dr Sonnet L'Abbé, 2015 Edna Staebler Writer In Residence, Wilfrid Laurier University
- LOCATION:** Room 1307 – Thornbrough
- TIME:** 3:45 pm
- DATE:** Wednesday, April 8, 2015

**ABSTRACT:** In his famous poem, "Lines Written in Early Spring," William Wordsworth looks upon "the budding twigs [that] spread out their fan, / To catch the breezy air," and declares, "I must think, do all I can, / That there was pleasure there." In this talk I will discuss late 18th- and early 19th-century writing that hypothesized a degree of sentience in plants. Some critics saw such claims as a sign of a writer's genius, others, as proof of a poet's weak and effeminate mind. Wordsworth's sensibility and that of the poets whose plant-poetry anchors the Romantic literary tradition, however, were shaped by active conversation amongst natural philosophers and theologians who wondered if "sensation might spread through all of animate creation," including plants (Nichols 7). I will trace how the era's cultural and aesthetic forces worked to make questions about plant agency eventually seem ridiculous, how that cultural taboo influenced the world of plant science until very recently, and suggest why ours is a crucial moment to recuperate a cultural appreciation of plants as sensing decision-makers.

**Biography:** Sonnet L'Abbé, Ph.D. is the author of two collections of poetry, *A Strange Relief* and *Killarnoe*, both published by McClelland and Stewart. She was the *2017StartsNow!* Artist-in-Motion in 2013 and is the 2014 guest editor of *Best Canadian Poetry*. She has a keen interest in ecocritical writing and botany, and is now at work on *Sentient Mental Flower Book* and *Sonnet's Shakespeare*, her third and fourth collections of poems, and on a book about the plant-mind metaphors in the work of American poet Ronald Johnson. L'Abbé has reviewed fiction and poetry for the *Globe and Mail*, and has taught writing at the University of Toronto School of Continuing Studies and at the University of British Columbia. She is the 2015 Edna Staebler Writer-In-Residence at Wilfrid Laurier University.