

EASLCE NEWS LETTER

A Biannual Publication of the European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and Environment

Summertime, finally. And, besides the usual reports on the “hottest temperatures ever,” the new environmental *cahier de doléances*: burning forests, floods, meteorological events... But one sole item of news surpasses any other: the disaster of the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico—so far, the worst ecological catastrophe of the industrial era. As this disaster clearly shows, a change is required: a change in energy sources and production, and most of all a change of life-style, of habits, of culture. We need to develop an alternative paradigm, and in order to do this we need to promote critical discussions about the current scenario, and plan viable alternatives, both educational and cultural.

In this atmosphere the EASLCE-ASLE UK conference, which will be held at the University of Bath from September 1 to 4, finds another important *raison d'être*. In fact, the topic of our fourth biennial venue will be “Environmental Change/Cultural Change”: climate change, changing social attitudes, changing technologies, and changing critical approaches to the idea of nature will be topics for debate.

Besides the specific declinations and contributions, the conference focus is particularly significant to my eyes. In fact, it expresses the very rationale of EASLCE, namely, being a motor of change and exchange, of critical discussion and of encounter between disciplines and scholars. A crucial contribution to this project is *Ecozon@*, the electronic journal edited by Carmen Flys Junquera and her team on behalf of EASLCE and GIECO (www.ecozona.eu). After almost two years of incessant work, *Ecozon@* is now on line. Its first issue, entirely devoted to the future of ecocriticism (“New Ecocritical Perspectives: European and Transnational Ecocriticism”), lists scholarly essays and literary pieces from the most renowned international ecocritics, environmentally concerned intellectuals, and environmental writers. A second issue on “Greening across borders: the natural environment in a globalized world,” guest-edited by Christa Grewe-Volpp, is now advancing in its preparatory stages.

Taking a look at the future, another bit of news deserves to be announced here: after “visiting” UK, Spain, Austria and Germany, EASLCE heads northward: Norway will be the country where our conference of 2012 will take place. The Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim will be the hosting institution and Henning Fjørtoft, a young and very promising Norwegian ecocritic, will be responsible for the organization. As for our previous conferences, also this time we will be near a UNESCO World Heritage Site: the town of Røros. We will therefore continue EASLCE’s “tradition” of coupling scholarly activities and excursions to Europe’s most remarkable sites.

You will receive all information about this and other EASLCE’s initiatives via our listserv and our website: two important channels which will be soon respectively “reinforced” and re-designed. The listserv, in particular, will soon replace the mailing list as an instant-news service for our members. It is therefore important for those of you who have not yet subscribed to the listserv to do so quickly. All you need to do is sending an e-mail to LISTSERV@LISTSERV.REDIRIS.ES with the following text: “suscribe EASLCE Name Last Name.”

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Vol. 5.1 (Summer 2010)

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EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF
LITERATURE, CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

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<http://www.bath.ac.uk/esml/easlce>

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Please note the **editorial deadline** for
the next issue: **15 January, 2011**

Contact: Sylvia Mayer at

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(continued from page 1)

Another thing will change in Bath, namely, the Executive and the Advisory Boards. In the General Assembly elections will take place, to renew the Association's main organs. Also my charge as President will come to its end, and this last editorial I write as EASLCE's president gives me the chance to express some closing remarks. The last two years of EASLCE's life have been characterized by a great vitality. Even though not always easily, the Association is growing, defining its scope, and becoming more and more visible. Supported by my fellow executives Carmen Flys Junquera and Catrin Gersdorf, as well as by my predecessors, and by those of you who have been

actively working for our common cause at EASLCE's I have personally learnt a lot by this experience. It has been a lesson in cooperation and pragmatism, in shared creativity and energies; in a word, it was a lesson in ecology of ideas at work.

Maybe the things we do won't change the world. But this is not a good reason to stop hoping they will contribute to envision a better cultural framework for our being there.

Thank you all,
Serenella Iovino

HOW TO BECOME A MEMBER OF EASLCE

Please, visit our web site at:

<http://www.easlce.eu>

or

<http://www.bath.ac.uk/esml/easlce/membership.htm>

For further information contact:

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International Affiliates

ASLE (USA)

<http://www.asle.umn.edu/>

ASLE-ANZ (AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND)

<http://www.asle-anz.asn.au/>

ALECC-CANADA

<http://www.alecc.ca>

ASLE-INDIA

<http://www.geocities.com/asle-india/index.htm>

ASLE-JAPAN

[http://www.asle-japan.org/english/index.cgi/
/index.html](http://www.asle-japan.org/english/index.cgi/index.html)

ASLE-KOREA

<http://www.aslekorea.org>

ASLE-UK

<http://www.asle-anz.asn.au/>

OSLE-INDIA

<http://www.osle-india.tripod.com/id7.html>

EASLCE Listserv / Information

EASLCE LISTSERV - CALL FOR SUBSCRIPTION

We would like to ask all members of EASLCE to subscribe (or renew their subscription) to the EASLCE listserv.

The Listserv helps us to minimize the organisational effort that goes into distributing information to EASLCE members.

How to subscribe:

In order to subscribe, send an e-mail to the following address: listserv@listserv.rediris.es with the message: "subscribe Easlce" (if you are a new user), or "confirm Easlce" (if you want to renew your subscription).

In case you have problems with the listserv, please contact Diana Villanueva Romer at: dvillanv@unex.es.

International Conferences / Call for Papers

Conference: Zoosemiotics and Animal Representation Tartu, Estonia April 4 to 8, 2011

Zoosemiotics is an interdisciplinary research program introduced by an American semiotician Thomas A. Sebeok in the 1960s with the aim to merge semiotics and ethology and to launch semiotic studies of animal communication. The foundational idea in zoosemiotics is that relations between animals and their environment as well as between different individuals are not purely physical, but are to a large extent sign-mediated.

Now, almost 50 years after Sebeok's initiative, the Department of Semiotics at the University of Tartu organizes an international gathering aiming to look back at the history of zoosemiotics, but also to look ahead towards the future of semiotic studies of animals. At this event, the scope of zoosemiotics is defined broadly, so as to include specific studies in the history of science, philosophical accounts of animals, case studies on animal communication as well as animal representations in literature and other media. At the same time, the focus of the conference is explicitly twofold: "semiotic processes" and "animals" are the key concepts that are to guide the conference as well as the individual presentations.

Key Topics of the Conference

- Theory and methodology of zoosemiotics
- History of zoosemiotics, the legacy of Thomas A. Sebeok
- Practical applications of zoosemiotics (e.g. zoosemiotics and conservation)
- Zoosemiotics' relation to relevant fields such as cognitive ethology, biosemiotics, ecocriticism etc.
- Animal experience (semiotics and phenomenology)
- Semiotic perspectives on animals in literature, art, films etc. (e.g. seeing man in animals, and the animal in men).
- Semiotics of human-animal relationships: historical, social and communicative perspectives (e.g. the semiotics of zoos, of wildlife management, and of domesticated animals).

Plenary speakers

- Colin Allen, Professor of History and Philosophy of Science at Indiana University, USA.
- Jesper Hoffmeyer, Professor emeritus, Biological Institute, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.
- Graham Huggan, Professor of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Literatures at University of Leeds, UK.
- David Rothenberg, Professor of Philosophy and Music at the New Jersey Institute of Technology, USA.

Researchers from various backgrounds who have been inspired by zoosemiotics or who are interested in different aspects of semiotic studies of animals are invited to participate in the conference.

To submit a proposal, interested scholars should e-mail an abstract (300-600 words) and a bio-note (less than 100 words) to the address: zoosemiotics@semiootika.ee. Abstracts should be sent as separate single one-page files (.doc or .rtf). **The deadline for the abstracts is 15. September 2010.**

Additional information can be found at the website

www.ut.ee/SOSE/conference/2011_zoosemiotics/index.html.

Research Seminar, “Sense of Place’ in a Changing World University of Alcalá, Spain September 30-October 1, 2010

This research seminar, organized jointly by the GIECO research group of the Franklin Institute and the Department of Modern Philology, both of the University of Alcalá, will take place on Sept. 30th and Oct. 1st and 2nd, 2010 at the University of Alcalá. The objective of the seminar is to debate the meanings of “sense of place” in the contemporary world, both from theoretical perspectives and its illustration in cultural expressions such as literature, film and art.

One aspect of the debate will be centered on the meanings and connotations of the term “sense of place” and how these shift in different cultural contexts or in their translation to other languages. Of particular interest is the contrast and comparison between the US interpretation, so frequent in ecocritical studies, and what a European “sense of place” might mean. Another important aspect is that of globalization which is profoundly changing our world, our cultures and our values. Lifestyles, cultures, migrations and diasporas, sense of identity and belonging are all being questioned and reshaped. Inevitably, the traditional sense of place is also in upheaval. Cultural studies have addressed this issue, with significant discussions of “non-places” (Augé), “abstract places” (Lefevbre), “nomadism” (Braidotti), or “eco-cosmopolitanism”

(Heise). In many cases, the feeling is that a sense of place is something disappearing, a nostalgic view of something no longer attainable. On the other hand, Val Plumwood argues for a place sensitive culture which need not be tied to one single place. She suggests making journeys (of any nature) as projects of dialogical encounters with multiple places.

The seminar, which is meant to be relatively small in order to foster ample debate, will be focussed on these issues with the objective of publishing a thematic volume. Dr. Scott Slovic (Univ. Nevada, Reno) and Dr. Axel Goodbody (Univ. Bath, UK) are the guest lecturers. Both English and Spanish are welcome, although much of the discussion will take place in English. Presentations are meant to be very short (10 min) with the objective of provoking discussion, rather than presenting finished work.

The CFP is for presentations on the following:

- Current theoretical discussions on sense of place.
- Comparative interpretations of sense of place.
- European vs American interpretations of sense of place.
- Changing interpretations of sense of place.

- Sense of place in a globalized world.
- Critical analysis of cultural texts that illustrate a sense of place.
- Are visual arts and film addressing the question of sense of place nowadays in the same terms

as literature or are they developing different avenues?

Please send 300 word abstracts to the following email: carmen.flys@uah.es by July 10, 2010.

International Conferences / Reports

Conference Report: “Ecology and Life Writing”

University of Mainz, June 24 to 27, 2010

Between June 24 and June 27, 2010, leading critics and young scholars in the fields of auto/biography studies and ecocriticism convened at the international Ecology and Life Writing Conference at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany, in order to explore, from a variety of theoretical and critical perspectives, the numerous intersections between ecology and culture in general and between life writing and environmental writing in particular. In many respects, this meeting was also a confluence of sorts: One of the results of a long and productive international cooperation between Alfred Hornung (American Studies, Mainz) and Zhao Baisheng (Institute of World Literature and World Auto/Biography Center, Peking University), it was a greatly anticipated follow-up to an earlier collaborative effort, “Ecological Literature and Environmental Education: Asian Forum for Cross-Cultural Dialogues,” an international conference at Peking University in August 2009 that marked the founding of the World Ecoculture Organization (WEO). The conference in Mainz, which was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), the State of Rhineland-Palatinate, and several academic programs in Mainz and organized by Alfred Hornung, Silvia Appeltrath, Yvonne Gutenberger, and several other faculty and staff members of the American Studies Division of the Department of English and Linguistics, doubled as the second WEO conference, and many of the presentations reflected the organization’s decidedly transcultural and transnational orientation, scope, and goals.

The conference venue thus also represented a congenial, intellectually challenging, and international forum to reflect on the recent turn in ecocriticism, to use the subtitle of Ursula Heise’s 2008 monograph, to “the environmental imagination of the global,” especially as it has been negotiated in life writing past and present. Particularly noteworthy in this respect were the papers by OSLE president Nirmal Selvamony (Madras Christian College, Chennai/Central University of Tamil Nadu, Thiruvavur) and by Chinese scholars such as Yang Jincui (Nanjing University), whose contributions not only once again suggested the vibrancy and diversity of ecocritical scholarship in Asia, qualities also indicated by the various activities of national ASLE chapters and affiliates in this region, but also provided new and much-needed perspectives on ecology and culture that critics in Europe and in North America can only ignore at their own peril. In response, critics such as John Gamber, Deborah Madsen, Hubert Zapf, Scott Slovic, Ursula Heise, Catrin Gersdorf, Serpil Oppermann, Simon C. Estok, Greg Garrard, or Axel Goodbody offered additional and sometimes conflicting assessments from primarily Western positions. Heise’s nuanced analysis of contemporary global travel narratives and their representations of environmental crises provided, for instance, a counterweight to Slovic’s eloquent argument in favor of an ecologically inflected and primarily local, but never parochial, form of patriotism.

Many graduate students from North America, Europe, and China also offered their perspectives on the connection between life writing and environmental writing. Chen Guangchen (Peking University) revisited Shen Congwen's autobiography from an ecocritical perspective, Sabine Kim (Mainz) examined the ecopoetics of Canadian poet Don McKay, and Genie Giaimo

(Northeastern University, Boston) reconsidered the importance of wilderness in African-American life narratives in the Colonial Period and the Early Republic. These compelling readings as well as the promising papers by other graduate students indicated that there are numerous exciting

possibilities for future scholarship and a pressing need for further international conversations about ecology and life writing. It comes as no surprise, then, that Alfred Hornung and Zhao Baisheng are, at the time of writing, already planning the next conference for 2011.

For further information on this conference and links to related projects, for example the new doctoral college "Life Writing" in Mainz, please visit the following website: <http://www.eco-life.american-studies.uni-mainz.de/113.php>

Micha Edlich, University of Mainz

Conference Report:

"Green Cultures: Environmental Knowledge, Climate, and Catastrophe"

Bavarian American Academy and Rachel Carson Center, Munich

July 9 – 10, 2010

Based on the premise that environmental problems must be located in larger historical, societal and cultural settings, the conference "Green Cultures," co-organized and sponsored by the Bavarian American Academy and the Rachel Carson Center in Munich, focused on the contribution that the social sciences and the humanities – most importantly the disciplines of historiography, political sciences, geography and literary and cultural studies – provide to the field of environmental knowledge production. Against the widespread notion that it is largely, or even exclusively, the (natural) sciences that are responsible when it comes to coping with environmental problems, the panel presentations, the keynote address and the plenary discussion demonstrated the relevance of environmental knowledge developed in disciplines beyond the sciences. They showed that the social sciences and the humanities provide comprehensive and profound knowledge that complements scientific knowledge and can contribute significantly to processes of environmental decision making.

In five panels a multidisciplinary, international group of scholars presented their work on environmental knowledge production in the United

States. Particular emphasis was put on the impact of natural catastrophes and of public debates on climate change and environmental threats. Panel I, "Natural Hazards and the Making of America," and Panel II, "Ambivalent Legacies: Environmental Imperialism and Notions of Progress" focused on historical phenomena in U.S. environmental history and beyond. Sherry Johnson (University of Florida) spoke on the problematic issue of "as-yet neglected historical environmental events" and the need to explore the potentially instructive knowledge they can provide for devising protective measures in the future in "Foreign Interest and the Cuban Earthquake of 1880: Dis-remembering Disaster in the Age of Laissez-Faire." Lawrence Culver (Utah State University) analysed how American narratives of space must be re-read in terms of focusing on climate perception and ecological assumption in "Manifest Disaster: Climate and the Making of America." Andrew Isenberg (Temple University, Philadelphia) discussed the project of re-introducing the buffalo on the Great Plains and the instability of ecological narratives in "Buffalo Commons: The Past, Present, and the Future of an Idea." Finally, Gordon Winder (LMU Munich) explored the commercial factor of environmental knowledge production in his analyses of

advertisements for agricultural machines in “The Other Machine in the Garden: The Reaper, the Great West, Wilderness, and the American Mind.” In all four presentations it became obvious how central it is for current environmental thought and (political) measures of prevention to be able to trace the emergence of environmental problems historically, to analyse the various political, economic, and cultural factors that cause them and that are developed in response to them.

Panel 3, “Understanding Disaster – Explaining Politics,” shifted attention to the fields of geography and political sciences. In “Natural Disasters and Cultures of Risk: A Radical Constructivist’s Perspective on Risk” Heike Egner (University of Mainz) discussed notions of risk and catastrophe from the perspective of system theory, while Andreas Falke (University of Erlangen-Nürnberg) critically addressed the complex issue of U.S. environmental policy making in “Why is the U.S. a Laggard in Climate Change Policy or is it?”. Panel 4, “Forgetting and Remembering Catastrophes”, drew attention to the political and cultural functions of remembering natural catastrophes. Uwe Lübken (LMU Munich) explored “The 1937 Ohio River Flood: A Forgotten Disaster?” and Craig Colton (Louisiana State University) addressed the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in “Forgetting the Unforgettable: Losing Social Memory and Resilience in New Orleans.” Panel 5, “Environmental Knowledge and the Imagination: Literature and Film”, again shifted attention to the contribution of yet another field of study, to the field of literary and cultural studies.

Stacy Alaimo (University of Texas, Arlington) talked about “Trans-corporal Knowledges: Science, Environment, and the Material Self”, and Alexa Weik (University of Fribourg, Switzerland) discussed “Facing The Day After Tomorrow: Filmed Disaster, Emotional Engagement, and Climate Risk Perception.” Both presentations demonstrated the relevance of language, narrative, and texts for processes of environmental knowledge production.

The panel presentations were complemented by a keynote address and by a panel discussion. In his lecture on “Sustainable Development – The New Name for Peace?” former Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Prof. Dr. Klaus Töpfer discussed the close links between environmental problems and issues of global political and social peace. The panel discussion, chaired by Jeanne Rubner (Süddeutsche Zeitung), addressed the question „Was können Deutschland und die USA in Sachen Umwelt voneinander lernen?“ The participants were Albert Göttle (President of the Bavarian Environmental Protection Agency), Karsten Smid (Greenpeace Germany), and Christoph Mauch (LMU Munich/ Rachel Carson Center). In the discussion the participants explored differences and parallels in American and German environmental history and in current issues of environmental policy making, and they discussed attitudinal differences, the role of consumerism and that of the impact of industrial lobbying on political decision making.

Sylvia Mayer, University of Bayreuth

Ecocriticism in Europe / Reports

Ecocriticism and Literatures in Spanish

Call for Co-operation

CREATING A NETWORK OF EUROPEAN SCHOLARS INTERESTED IN THE ECOCRITICAL APPROACH TO SPANISH AND SPANISH AMERICAN LITERATURES

In order to expand ecocriticism in Spanish and Spanish American Literary and Cultural Studies, I intend to create a network of European scholars belonging to these areas and interested in ecocriticism. The coming congress “Environmental Change, Cultural Change” (1-4 September, 2010,

University of Bath) is a good opportunity to arrange an informal meeting on this matter and to measure the possibility of having for the first time a specific Spanish-Spanish American session during the next EASLCE congress. If you are interested in this project --or if you know a colleague who might be willing to join it, please send an e-mail with your

name, your affiliation, and your area of study (1. Spanish or Spanish American Literature, 2. genre, and 3. historical period) to: jmarrero@dfc.ulpgc.es

José Manuel Marrero Henríquez
Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria
GIECO-Franklin Institute-Universidad de Alcalá

EASLCE and Sustainable Architecture

Contest: „Ecohousing“ – Milan, Italy

“Ecohousing Art: Works and Projects for Ecologically Living Spaces” is an architectural contest promoted by the Association “House Company” of Vedano al Lambro, near Milan.

For several years the “House Company” has been supporting strategies of communication about green and sustainable living, also by way of the interdisciplinary “ecoweb-magazine” *House—Living and Business* (<http://www.immobiliare.eu/category/web-magazine/>). The contest “Ecohousing Art,” open to junior and senior architects, engineers, designers, is intended to promote a “new culture of living,” which considers the house as a “techno-biological” ecosystem.

The evaluating committee is highly qualified and interdisciplinary: its members are architects, biologists, psychologists, artists, philosophers, urbanists, ecologists, experts of new technologies. EASLCE, represented in the jury by Serenella Iovino, is among the sponsors of this initiative which will be accessible to the public through conferences and numerous side-events. The deadline for submissions will be November 30, 2010.

For further information and for a detailed programme, please visit the website: <http://www.ecohousing-art.it>

Finnish Ecocriticism:

A Sober Glance from a Distance

Äänekäs kevät. Ekokriittinen kirjallisuudentutkimus [Spring full of sounds. Ecocritical literary studies]. Eds. Toni Lahtinen, Markku Lehtimäki. Helsinki: SKS, 2008, 263 pp.

Finland is a country where virtually any inhabitant has access to what could be termed wilderness. Lived, daily contact with lakes, forests, streams and tundra has left definitive traces in Finnish culture, politics, literature – and, indeed, in Finnish literary scholarship. Now that ecocritical theory is available for pinpointing and analysing this (environ)mental position, researchers from four Finnish universities have assembled a collection of articles titled “Äänekäs kevät” to introduce the theory and

practical application of ecocritical thought to the Finnish-speaking public.

The collection is divided into three parts. The introductory article by the editors of the collection gives a critical overview of the development and the state-of-art of anglophone ecocritical theory, and it indicates application possibilities for studying Finnish literature by means of the tools provided by this approach. The opening articles deal more with theoretical issues, such as exploration of irony in environmentally conscious writings, and the expression of *topophilia* and the construction of place in poetry. The core part of the collection is focused on ecocritical re-interpretations of 20th

century Finnish literature. Several pieces of poetry containing bird motives are re-read, comparing the contemporary analysis with the ideas expressed during the intense critical discussion concerning nature poetry in Finland in the 1970's. Ecofeminist interpretation of a short story of the Finnish-Estonian writer Aino Kallas is given, as well as eloquent and exact treatments of the fishing essays of the Finnish national classic Juhani Aho and the writings of Timo K. Mukka, a controversial writer from Northern Finland. The last part of the book focuses on the Anglo-American tradition, dealing with ecocritical interpretations of American literature, movies and environmental activism, but cross-fertilising the theoretical approach with the ideas from seminal philosophers like Martin Heidegger.

Of the contributors to the collection, Toni Lahtinen and Cheryl Fish are members of ASLE. Several of the researchers have published ecocritical work before, but for many others, the articles published in *Äänekäs kevät* seem to be only the first ventures

into the terrain of ecocriticism. The interest towards this area seems to be keen among the contributors, and most probably it will create further interest among Finnish scholars.

The book has been published as no. 222 in the Tietolipas [Casket of knowledge] series by the Finnish Literature Society (SKS), and it bears the statement, "This publication has been approved by the specialists appointed by SKS". It would be great if an analogous statement on behalf of the "specialists from EASLCE" could be made. The Finnish style of academic writing is admirable in its sober approach and down-to-earth conclusions. However, as the publication has been intended for domestic readers, no abstracts in other languages have been provided for this collection. Hopefully the results of the interesting work carried out in Finland soon start to appear also in Indo-European languages. The upcoming EASLCE biennial conference should provide an opportunity for that.

Kadri Tüür, University of Tartu