



# **International Conference on Ecocriticism and Environmental Studies**

**19 October 2019  
Birkbeck, University of London**

## **Abstracts**

**London Centre for Interdisciplinary Research**

## **Programme**

9:00-9:30 Registration

### **09:30 – 11:00 Parallel Sessions**

#### **Session 1A. Agents of Change: Applications of Linguistic Dynamism in the Ecosophical Sphere (Room 629)**

Chair: Barry Cole

**Dwayne Avery, Memorial University (Canada)**

Death by a Thousand Spills: Media as Disaster/Relief

**Isaac Ramírez Benavides, University of Costa Rica (Costa Rica)**

Environmental Stories in Costa Rica: An Ecolinguistic Analysis of the 2018 Environmental Agendas through a Frame Theory Approach

**Mariana Roccia, Jessica Iubini-Hampton, International Ecolinguistics Association**

*The Stories We Live By* and the Stories We Won't Stand By: Measuring the Impact of a Free Online Course in Ecolinguistics

#### **Session 1B. The Die Not Cast: Truth, Myth, and Mystery in the Historical Record (Room 632)**

Chair: Diana Dodson Lee

**Cynthia Rosenfeld, North Carolina State University (USA)**

Slithering Stories-We-Live-By: Animal Educators' Construction and Enactment of Positive Narratives About Snakes

**Rosa Moreno, University of the Balearic Islands (Spain)**

A New Era for Tentacles in Literature: Changes From Verne to Okorafor

**Roslyn Taplin, SOAS University of London (UK)**

Yollas | Whalebirds: Non-Human Others, Circum-Pacific Migrants

11:00 – 11:30 Tea/Coffee

### **11:30 – 13:00 Parallel Sessions**

#### **Session 2A. The Nature of Metaphor: Ecofeminist Themes and the Literary Arts (Room 629)**

Chair: Roisin Shannon

**Ana Penjak, University of Split (Croatia)**

(Re)Creating Female Identity in Miro Gavran's *Klara* Through an Ecofeminist Approach

**Chloé Wofford, The University of Southern Mississippi (USA)**

The Victorian Lady and The Wild Woman: An Ecofeminist Reading of Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott"

**Hilal Kaya, Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University (Turkey) / The University of Edinburgh (UK)**

Ecofeminism in Latife Tekin's *Muinār*

**Session 2B. Power and the Pen: Nature, Confrontation and Ecocritical Form**

**(Room 632)**

Chair: Cynthia Rosenfeld

**David Lombard, University of Liège (Belgium)**

The Toxic Sublime in US Literature: Self, Senses and Environment

**Diana Dodson Lee, University of North Carolina, Pembroke (USA)**

Biopolitics, Bananas, and Buendías: Sovereign Power and Nature in Gabriel García Márquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

**Gabriel Smith, University of Edinburgh (UK)**

Stephen and the Sensuous: Language, Text, and Environment in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

13:00 – 13:45 Lunch

**13:45 – 15:15 Parallel Sessions**

**Session 3A. The Tonic of Wildness: Symbiotic Worlds in Mytholinguistic Context**

**(Room 629)**

Chair: Isaac Ramírez Benavides

**Radosław Siewierski, University of Wrocław (Poland)**

The Relationship Between Animals and People in Aboriginal Mythology

**Amber Lehning, Pacifica Graduate Institute (USA)**

To See the Wild Country Again: Courage, Wilderness, and Environmental Ethics in J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth

**Kristin Ferebee, American University of Afghanistan (Afghanistan)**

*Lupus in Fabula*: Fantasies of Animal Re-Emergence in Narratives of Irradiated Chernobyl and Beyond

**Session 3B. Promised Lands: Power, Justice, and Legacy in Contemporary Culture**

**(Room 632)**

Chair: David Lombard

**Adrian Tait, Independent Scholar (UK)**

Agential Realism and Emergent Justice: Thinking with New Materialism

**Lucile Richard, Sciences Po Paris (France)**

“Why Should We Fight for a Livable Future?” — Environmentalism and the Forgotten Political Problem of Justifying *Human* Survival

**Krushna Dande, Independent Researcher (India)**

Reading Planetary History: Science Fiction and Narratives of Geopower

15:15 – 15:30 Tea/Coffee

**15:30 – 17:00 Session 4. Art and Consciousness: Ecocritical Views of a Postcolonial World (Room 629)**

Chair: Radosław Siewierski

**Jihan Zakarriya, Dhogar university (Oman)**

Borders, Security and Identity in Margaret Atwood's Novel: A Postcolonial Ecocritical Perspective

**Asmaa Meftah, University of Exeter (UK)**

Nature, Resistance and Eco-Steadfastness: A Postcolonial Ecocritical Analysis of Mahmoud Darwish's Works 1960-2008

**Barry Cole, The University of Alabama (USA)**

A Literary Perspective of Shunned Space and Ecological Violence in America's Marginalized Communities

**Khurshid Alam, University of the Punjab (Pakistan)**

Politics of Environmentalism: An Ecocritical Study of *Twilight in Delhi*

**09:30 – 11:00 Session 1A: Agents of Change: Applications of Linguistic Dynamism in the Ecosophical Sphere (Room 629)**

**Dwayne Avery**

Memorial University (Canada)

**Death by a Thousand Spills: Media as Disaster/Relief**

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On November 15th, 2018, Newfoundland experienced its largest-ever oil spill. The disaster, which occurred 350 km southeast of the Canadian province, saw the SeaRose platform disperse 250,000 litres of crude oil into the Atlantic. While the spill was classified as “minor,” the news media minimized its potential ecological risks by visualizing it as an everyday fact of life. Focusing on the mediated communication of the SeaRose spill, this paper provides an account of how the aesthetic representation of “small” offshore oil spills erase their impact as recurrent and cumulative environmental hazards. The regularity of “minor” oil spills, I argue, forms a category of chronic disasters obscured by an “emergency frame” that defines ecological catastrophes as acute, traumatic, and exceptional events. For instance, unlike the explosive violence of “major” oil spills, like the Deepwater disaster, the media visualized the SeaRose spill as a normal, hazard-free condition, which drew attention away from the ongoing and incremental nature of chronic oil pollution. In this way, the media’s representation of ecological disasters produces more relief than alarm. Moreover, I contend that the media’s ability to render small spills illegible is intensified by what I call an “aesthetic of disappearance,” a visual procedure that imagines the ocean as a vast and fecund space impervious to harm. Drawing attention to the global infrastructure of offshore oil pipelines and rigs, I expose the “slow violence” denied by oil companies, whose bureaucratic risk-management conceals the damage of everyday cumulative pollution.

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**Isaac Ramírez Benavides**

University of Costa Rica (Costa Rica)

**Environmental Stories in Costa Rica: An Ecolinguistic Analysis of the 2018 Environmental Agendas through a Frame Theory Approach**

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Costa Rica is usually portrayed as a tropical paradise characterized for its forests, beaches and opportunities for ecotourism. Notwithstanding, this Central American country is also associated with the image of a not-so-ecofriendly place which must actually address several environmental concerns such as river pollution (as in the case of Grande de Tárcoles river, the most polluted river in Central America) and the recent approval of the bill that allows the extraction of marine resources via trawling techniques. This environmental contrast is present in the discourses of the country’s political groups, and—during times of electoral campaign—these groups resort to several linguistic mechanisms in order to make their environmental proposals more appealing for the desired populations and voters even though they may not be as ecofriendly as they are shown. This paper explores the frames used in the environmental agendas presented by the two political parties that featured the second round during the 2018 political campaign: Partido Restauración Nacional (the rightist, ultra-conservative and religion-driven party) and Partido Acción Ciudadana (the right-center, more progressist political party). The specific objective of this paper is to perform an ecolinguistic analysis of the texts through a frame theory approach in order to determine the frames that both groups use, the differences and/or similarities that they may display, the relationship that these frames may have with each groups’ ideologies and the possible impact these frames could have in the Costa Rican environmental reality.

**Mariana Roccia, Jessica Iubini-Hampton**

International Ecolinguistics Association

**The Stories We Live By and the Stories We Won't Stand By: Measuring the Impact of a Free Online Course in Ecolinguistics**

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Current dominant narratives of economic growth, consumerism, and anthropocentric views on human existence, to name a few, are behind the driving forces responsible for the increasing destruction of the very own ecological systems that all life depends on. By utilising tools of Discourse Analysis whilst adopting an ecological perspective, the free online course *The Stories We Live By* offers a practical and accessible framework in which stories can be critically evaluated, questioned, and resisted. Crucially, students are encouraged to apply their newly acquired theoretical insights to search for alternative stories to live by. Such is the emphasis on the student's interpretation and evaluation of the course that in order to assess the effectiveness of the latter, the impacts would need to be assessed in terms of both behavioural and practical changes in the everyday life of the individual. While current approaches of impact assessment beyond academia can be measured more readily in the sciences, it is harder to assess whether, how, and to what extent humanities research produces change in society. In this presentation, the authors aim to draw attention on the inherent value of the dissemination of traditionally academic tools beyond academia while also contributing with original insights into the methodological aspects of impact assessment in the humanities. By combining both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, this study provides an innovative tool to effectively measure impact which renders itself suitable for a wider range of disciplines across both traditional and digital humanities.

**09:30 – 11:00 Session 1B. The Die Not Cast: Truth, Myth, and Mystery in the Historical Record (Room 632)**

**Cynthia Rosenfeld**

North Carolina State University (USA)

**Slithering Stories-We-Live-By: Animal Educators' Construction and Enactment of Positive Narratives About Snakes**

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Representations of snakes abound in literature—from Greek mythology to the Bible to the Harry Potter series—in oral traditions, and the visual arts (e.g., 2006's *Snakes on a Plane*). Often constructed as sneaky or sinister, the cultural evaluation of snakes can perhaps best be stated by the adage, “The only good snake is a dead snake.” Such messages become the “stories we live by,” and although this evaluation is widespread, it is not universal. Animal educators (e.g., naturalists, docents, rehabilitators) are agents of alternative stories that exist in struggle with the dominant one. To examine the messages and the process of messaging used by animal educators, I conducted an ethnographic study situated in the setting of animal education, which included a natural science museum, botanical garden, ecological park, and a traveling education program. The setting, the audience, the storytellers, and the story being told all shape the experience of an animal encounter. The setting may either resist or perpetuate a negative cultural evaluation of snakes. Presuppositions, convictions, and available examples of modelling all influence whether an audience member chooses to adopt a new story or retain the old one. Through their discourse, enactments, and material displays, animal educators offer a story with touch, body-mapping

activities, an ecological narrative, deliberate word choices, and an emphasis on being able to identify snakes. With the audience and setting, educators work to (co)create an attractive new story with the central message, “The only good snake is a live snake.”

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**Rosa Moreno**

University of the Balearic Islands (Spain)

**A New Era for Tentacles in Literature: Changes From Verne to Okorafor**

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Tentacled creatures abound in popular culture from Lovecraftian monsters to Japanese erotica; the human aversion to the strangeness of cephalopods has commonly represented the uttermost alterity between species, reflecting our deepest fears and darkest fantasies. Far from the sexual imagery commonly associated with these creatures, this presentation intends to explore a new perspective from which 21<sup>st</sup> century science fiction literature “redeems” creatures with tentacles and even gives them voices to narrate their experience.

Aliens and marine creatures alike have been portrayed as irrational, violent and/or evil in many narratives from *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870) by Jules Verne to John Wyndham’s *The Kraken Wakes* (1953) to name but a few, although there are also examples of benevolent creatures in novels such as *Dawn* by Octavia Butler (1987) and Jane Rawson’s *From the Wreck* (2017). There is one particular author who depicts the relationship between humans and tentacled creatures without exerting judgment on their species: Nnedi Okorafor’s novel *Lagoon* (2014) and her trilogy *Binti* (2015-2018) present apparently hostile creatures that nonetheless manage to establish an understanding with humans. These creatures, as if holding a mirror, help us see the otherness in ourselves and reconsider our treatment of those with different realities. This communication intends to explore how alterity in Okorafor’s novels is used to convey humanity’s lack of empathy towards different species, giving readers a way to reconcile human nature with alterity and work towards mutual understanding.

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**Roslyn Taplin**

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**Yollas | Whalebirds: Non-Human Others, Circum-Pacific Migrants**

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In the face of Anthropocene-Capitalocene-Chthulucene and climate change impacts, remarkable avians, Short-tailed Shearwaters, *Puffinus tenuirostris*, continue to do their migrations - flying an Antarctic Arctic return journey every year as they track seasonal patterns. These birds are known ‘muttonbirds’, or as Yollas by Tasmanian Aboriginal people who source the chicks for food on Bass Strait islands between Tasmania and the Australian mainland. Yollas make their burrows on the foreshore sand dunes of these islands and nearby shores of Tasmania and south-eastern Australia. In Alaska, they are referred to as Whalebirds, as they forage in summer in giant flocks with whales in the waters of the Aleutian Islands and the Bering Sea between Russia and the Alaskan Peninsula. Scientific research indicates there are currently 16 to 20 million of these wild birds. Human impacts on their population have been marked over the last 150 years. They have eaten much plastic and they are carriers of PCBs and heavy metals. Researchers predict their migration routes may soon change and shorten due to climate change. However, there is so much more to understand scientifically about these birds, their relationships, their distribution, and how and why they migrate and navigate the Pacific from one end of the globe to the other. What might it mean to have empathy for the Yollas, and accountability for these wild bird neighbours? This is the motivation for my transdisciplinary environmental and visual art investigation of the story of these non-human others.

**11:30 – 13:00 Session 2A. The Nature of Metaphor: Ecofeminist Themes  
and the Literary Arts (Room 629)**

**Ana Penjak**

University of Split (Croatia)

**(Re)Creating Female Identity in Miro Gavran's *Klara*  
Through an Ecofeminist Approach**

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Ecofeminism grounds its thinking on the principle of woman-nature similarities (reproduction, subordination, violation, possession) in contrast to man-culture similarities as their binary oppositions. This article, by applying ecofeminist readings, focuses on how Miro Gavran's female character Klara from the novel *Klara* (re)creates her identity through woman-man relationship, i.e. woman-space relation (cities being here spaces that are seen as culturally defined man's surrounding).

Kara's identity is initially determined by quite traditionally structured family relationships (private space) and by a very small rural town (public space) she grew up in. Through and by her body and in her interaction between space and people who surround her, Klara tells the story of a woman who sacrifices her desires and ideals for the benefit of men (husband, partner, son), becoming, at the same time, his porcelain dolls – all of it being basic beliefs of the ecofeminist critical thinking.

By changing positions and behaviours, Klara starts to refuse and reject the whole patriarchal-repressive concept; to challenge 'reality'. Doing so, she recreates her identity from being oppressed to being strong and active participant in the society pointing, at the same time, to the possibility of other reality in which woman and nature are active participants, equally valuable and, as such, equally respected. Although fictional texts do not necessarily mirror the practices prevalent in a society, this type of ecofeminist reading of the father/husband-daughter/wife relationship witnesses how the degradation and domination of women, as well as destruction of nature can be changed and stopped.

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**Chloé Wofford**

The University of Southern Mississippi (USA)

**The Victorian Lady and The Wild Woman: An Ecofeminist Reading of Tennyson's  
"The Lady of Shalott"**

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Despite numerous interpretations of "The Lady of Shalott," including gender- based, mythological, and biographical approaches, none have captured the important role of Nature in the poem and its relationship with the Lady. Indeed, Patrick Murphey, in his book *Literature, Nature, and Other: Ecofeminist Critiques*, states that, "...many theories ignore the 'places' in which women find themselves and the relation of environment to selfhood" (48). This relationship of the Lady to Nature and her ability to find transcendence into the wild woman is integral to a rich interpretation of the poem. First published in 1833 in Alfred Lord Tennyson's *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, and later revised and re-published in 1842, "The Lady of Shalott" serves as Tennyson's debut in writing Arthurian poetry, pre-dating his most famous *Idylls of the King* by approximately 25 years. And yet, it is in this poem that Tennyson grapples with the conflict between Victorianism and Romanticism, or rather, the refined Victorian lady and the Romantic wild woman. By the allusion of Arthurian legend, Tennyson is able to challenge the patriarchal ideals of his time and illustrate the autonomous wild woman that ultimately transcends societal norms and becomes at one with

Nature. In examining both versions of the poem through ecofeminism, I focus on a new interpretation of the relationship inherent between the Lady and Nature, the parallel and opposing relationship between Lancelot and Camelot, the full entailment of the Lady's curse, and the significance of the Lady's self-naming and transcendence into the wild woman.

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**Hilal Kaya**

Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University (Turkey) / The University of Edinburgh (UK)

**Ecofeminism in Latife Tekin's *Muinar***

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"We, women are the sisters of the Earth. It was not us who did tools to attack it. I do not think that women should be wholly accountable for the crimes committed against the world," states Latife Tekin. This paper will discuss ecofeminism and present Tekin's novel as a test case in order to show the applicability of ecofeminism in a novel from Turkish literature. Ecofeminism, to put simply, argues that there is a parallelism between the debasement of women and the debasement of the environment. The study interlocks the mistreatment of women and the mistreatment of environment, and interrogates patriarchal structures that create and reinforce such a condition. It aims to examine how the text imagines and responds to the ethical, political, and representational challenges of local and transnational ecological changes, and the key topics in the paper will include concepts of pollution, waste, environmental justice and feminism.

**11:30 – 13:00 Session 2B. Power and the Pen: Nature, Confrontation and Ecocritical Form (Room 632)**

**David Lombard**

University of Liège (Belgium)

**The Toxic Sublime in US Literature: Self, Senses and Environment**

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In this paper, the "toxic sublime" (which Jennifer Peeples describes as "the tensions that arise from recognizing the toxicity of a place, object or situation, while simultaneously appreciating its mystery, magnificence and ability to inspire awe" [Peeples 2011]), will be used as the lens through which I will analyse the material manifestations of how technology operates as a reframing device in conceptualizations and representations of nature in works of US (non)fiction (Heise 2016). Special attention will be given to Henry Thoreau's literary and philosophical legacy: *Walden* (1854) will be considered as a foundational matrix for a tradition of nonfiction writing with an interest in reframing the relationship between humans and their techno-natural environment by means of sensorial perception, a project which has been prolonged and extended by countless (non-)fiction works over the last half century, from Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) to Ken Ilgunas's *Walden on Wheels* (2013). Essential to this approach will be (1) the redefinition of the self as related to the environment in the paradigms studied (industrial revolution, nuclear era, mass production, the Anthropocene), (2) the focus on the human sensorium as a vector of identity and meaning in the Anthropocene, (3) the global nature of the problematic relationships between self and environment examined in the context of specific ecological, cultural, socio-economic or political issue

**Diana Dodson Lee**

University of North Carolina, Pembroke (USA)

**Biopolitics, Bananas, and Buendías: Sovereign Power and Nature in Gabriel García Márquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude***  
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*One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the celebrated novel by Nobel Prize winner Gabriel García Márquez, explores themes of violence, nature, and politics. The narrative centers on one hundred years in the life of the Buendía family. Towards the end of the narration, the author includes a fictional depiction of the real-life massacre of banana workers in Colombia during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This event provokes several reflections on the relationship between sovereign power, worker rights, and natural resources. In my presentation, I will utilize critical theories related to biopolitics and vulnerable bodies to discuss how García Márquez's novel envisions the relationship between state power, nature, and capitalistic fervor for making profit. I will postulate that the novel appropriates this historical carnage to culminate in a warning regarding biopolitics: the novel ends with this cautionary tale to highlight the dangers as people and nature become disposable in these types of modern biopolitical frameworks.

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**Gabriel Smith**

University of Edinburgh (UK)

**Stephen and the Sensuous: Language, Text, and Environment in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man***

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This paper argues that *A Portrait* presents Stephen Dedalus' fledgling engagement with forms of writing that serve as a bridge between language and the non-human, a bridge that I will call – following David Abram's cue – 'sensuous writing'. This manifests itself in three ways: as an engagement with older languages that supposedly possess pictographic qualities which blur the line between signifier and signified; as a synaesthetic form of reading that registers language through the bodily senses; and as a form of writing whose shape and material affects the semantic meaning of the word itself, and which therefore encompasses non-alphabetical markings like excrement. All three are characterized by a form of environmental perception posited across ecocriticism in different terms: 'the environmental unconscious'; 'linguistic reciprocity'; 'biosemiotics'. Joyce demonstrates these ideas in literary form – that the landscape and the environment are agential and can be read like a text with the right form of writerly perception. More than that, Joyce mirrors the ecological creativity posited by Hubert Zapf in suggesting that such 'cognitive biophilia' is an essential tool for the artist. This analysis will therefore seek to situate *A Portrait* within Joycean ecocriticism primarily according to a novel perspective of the *kunstlerroman* and the failures of Stephen-as-Icarus, comparing *A Portrait* with Joyce's fuller engagement with sensuous writing in later works. Such a position takes account of the recent resurgence in scholarly interest surrounding inscription and hieroglyphics (led by Hunter Dukes and Jesse Schotter), and addresses its implications for ecocriticism.

**13:45 – 15:15 Session 3A. The Tonic of Wildness: Symbiotic Worlds  
in Mytholinguistic Context (Room 629)**

**Radosław Siewierski**

University of Wrocław (Poland)

**The Relationship Between Animals and People in Aboriginal Mythology**

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“Is it moral to do experiments on animals?” and “Is it moral to eat animals?” are only two, out of several, questions from which Animal Studies originated – a new discipline whose main objective is to find and define a relationship between animals and people. Animals have always been of the utmost importance in mythologies of various peoples – Aboriginal myths are no exception.

Aboriginal mythology has not been widely analysed until very recently; one of the most significant works is *Mitologia australijska jako nośnik tożsamości* (2014) by Andrzej Szyjewski. Aboriginals call their mythology “the Dreaming” or “Dreamtime”. It refers to the time, as they believe, during which not only everything that exists appeared, but also to the period when all animals were still people. At the end of Dreamtime certain people were changed into animals, others were given the ability to take the form of an animal whenever they wanted. Depending on how people behaved, what traits they possessed or what they did, some animals were later given their own distinctive features, e.g. a man who was attacked with a spear which stayed at the bottom of his backbone became a kangaroo and the spear became the tail of the animal.

The first objective of this project is to analyse Aboriginal myths and present how people are described in the context of animals, and, secondly, how animals are described in the context of people. The last aim is to show the relationship between people and animals in the chosen myths.

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**Amber Lehning**

Pacifica Graduate Institute (USA)

**To See the Wild Country Again: Courage, Wilderness, and Environmental Ethics in**

**J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth**

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Today's serious environmental crises have many causes, but at the root of nearly all of them lie bad stories about the human relationship to the natural world. These destructive modern myths create a kind of intellectual separation between people and their environment which can logically end up justifying the worst of environmental excesses, and – unlike concrete, scientific problems with empirical ecological solutions – this separation cannot be ‘fixed’ in any physical way. The only way to counter these bad stories is to shift some of the deep belief they command into new, positive, good stories. One of those good stories is arguably the popular mythopoetic masterpiece of J.R.R. Tolkien, brought to life in the twentieth-century books of his Middle-earth legendarium and then spread more broadly through the modern consciousness by the twenty-first century films of Peter Jackson.

It is hard to overestimate the impact of today's wide-reaching Tolkien phenomenon, but the mountains, forests, and Shires of Middle-earth are not modern creations; they are as deeply rooted in the intellectual and mythological sources of Western culture as the bad stories are. From an ecocritical perspective, it is an attractive possibility indeed to contemplate harnessing in an environmental context that phenomenon's undeniable ability to change people's behavior. This paper will consider the mythic sources of three distinct concepts of wilderness in Middle-earth, explore how those concepts survived the transition from twentieth-century text to twenty-first century screen, and propose a few mythological lessons to be learned from the environmental ethics of Middle-earth.

**Kristin Ferebee**

American University of Afghanistan (Afghanistan)

**Lupus in Fabula: Fantasies of Animal Re-Emergence in Narratives of Irradiated Chernobyl and Beyond**  
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The 2011 episode of the PBS documentary series *Nature* that chronicles life in the thirty-kilometer Chernobyl Exclusion Zone has an attention-grabbing title: “Radioactive Wolves.” Yet the episode prompted discussion not for its depiction of alarming monstrosities, but rather for the hypothesis it was early in advancing— that the 1986 disaster at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant had, in its devastating effects on the area’s human citizens and their consequent, banishment, created what later media termed a “paradise” for animals, allowing previously scarce populations of birds, boar, and, yes, even wolves to return and thrive. The narrative of the post-human wilderness as animal “refuge” took root and began to dominate discussions of contemporary Chernobyl, muting concerns about the health of animal and plant life in “the zone.” Here, examining depictions of Chernobyl and its Exclusion Zone across fiction and documentary, I trace this narrative’s relationship to fantasies about the durable and boundless fruitfulness of nonhuman nature, drawing on the foundational work of William Cronon, Lawrence Buell, and Timothy Morton to critique this image of a wilderness supremely capable of surviving— and, in fact, indifferent to— man. The function of post-radiation paradise fantasies, I argue, turning also to narratives surrounding the Fukushima Exclusion Zone, is to reinscribe humanity’s separation from nature at a time (the Anthropocene) when the absence of this separation is not only undeniable, but the dominant threat in modern life.

**13:45 – 15:15 Session 3B. Promised Lands: Power, Justice, and Legacy in Contemporary Culture (Room 632)**

**Adrian Tait**

Independent Scholar (UK)

**Agential Realism and Emergent Justice: Thinking with New Materialism**  
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Theories of new materialism have played a quietly influential role in the emergence of the environmental humanities, and of those theories, Karen Barad’s posthumanist concept of agential realism (see *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 2007) is one of the most distinctive and innovative. In spite of critical interest in her work, however, Barad’s work has not so far escaped the confines of the academic community. Is this, perhaps, because of the self-evident difficulties associated with thinking through the implications of a theory as radical as Barad’s? The aim of this paper is to explore this question by drawing on and elaborating Barad’s insights and seeking to relate them to the arguments of the environmental justice (EJ) movement.

The EJ movement focuses on the unjust and disproportionate imposition of environmental harms (such as toxic waste) on the disempowered and disenfranchised, and it is explicitly political and pragmatic. However, its purview is typically limited to specific instances of environmental injustice as they affect human communities. Might a new materialist rereading of the movement’s concerns offer an alternative, more expansive definition of environmental justice, without thereby compromising its political efficacy? Or does a theory like agential realism instead suggest a

redefinition of justice that is simply too all-encompassing? As this paper sets out to show, it may be possible to extrapolate from Barad's remarkable concept a redefinition of justice as always emergent – always becoming – without thereby losing its critical edge, or its ability to command public assent and political interest.

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**Lucile Richard**

Sciences Po Paris (France)

**“Why Should We Fight for a Livable Future?” – Environmentalism and the Forgotten Political Problem of Justifying Human Survival**

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The life-threats that our modes of production and consumption have weighted on human lives and the ecosystems they are part of have opened a political era characterized by an increasing concern for survival. Interestingly enough however, theorizing survival occupies little room in environmental studies. Its definition is taken for granted.

As a result, the problem of surviving the “collapse” of our system is reduced to that of the preservation of the *milieux* in which living beings can reproduce themselves. The political question of “world-making” in the Anthropocene is replaced whether by an ethical call for the transformation of our relationships to nature and its non-human entities or by a series of technical issues that can be resolved by experts. In both cases, an understanding of how “life” works is substituted by a political and possibly criticizable standpoint on what matters to us. In other words, the lack of conceptualisation of survival problematically forecloses the questioning of the normative axioms on which most reflections on climate change are based. In particular, the answer to the following question is obscured : Why do we want to survive and what exactly is *it* that we want to survive?

Taking seriously Arendt's warning that putting life at the centre of politics leads to the privileging of a conservative logic of efficiency over a progressive logic of potentiality, this paper argues for the necessity not only to conceptualize survival (in order to clarify the normative stakes of ecological struggles), but to define it in its link to a conception of what living in the world means rather than in its relationship to life processes.

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**Krushna Dande**

Independent Researcher (India)

**Reading Planetary History: Science Fiction and Narratives of Geopower**

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The webs of the invasive species *homo economicus* grow ever denser. Having circumscribed the limits of the earth, planetary capitalism has responded to the climate mutation by imagining all natural processes as incorporated into itself. With geoengineering and de-extinction, the continuation of life as we know it becomes a matter for science-fictional and economic speculation, depending on integration into coercive technoscientific structures.

The Anthropocene is a result of the mobilisation of narratives and symbolic structures as much as of the movements of molecules. The task of a materialist critique is therefore to resituate the violent practices of bio- and geopolitics in a natural history that does not rely solely on the empirical trace. While radionuclides and chicken bone fossils will announce themselves in the geological record, the massively dispersed violence against collectives may not be as legible.

Its accommodation of nonhuman perspectives and the commingling of the scales of human and geological time make science fiction uniquely attuned to our moment in geohistory. From the seemingly benign eco-imperialism in Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy to the arch-capitalist conversion of the earth to a plantation in Thomas Disch's *Genocides*, we can find in science fiction

narratives that imagine the earth as a limited store of geological and biological capital, open to instrumentalisation and exploitation. This paper shall read works of Anglophone, Indian, and Chinese science fiction to give a *topos* to the critique of planetary regimes, while responding to the theoretical interventions of writers such as Achille Mbembe, Bruno Latour, and Peter Sloterdijk.

**15:30 – 17:00 Session 4. Art and Consciousness:  
Ecocritical Views of a Postcolonial World (Room 629)**

**Jihan Zakarriya**

Dhogar university (Oman)

**Borders, Security and Identity in Margaret Atwood's Novel:  
A Postcolonial Ecocritical Perspective**

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The aim of this paper is to examine the concepts of borders, security and identity in three novels by Margaret Atwood from a postcolonial ecocritical perspective. The three novels are *Surfacing* (1972), *Cat's Eye* (1988), and *Oryx and Crake* (2003). In *Postcolonial Ecologies*, Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley, define postcolonial ecocriticism as “a complex epistemology that recuperates the alterity of both history and nature, without reducing either to the other”(4). For Loughrey and Handley, violent environmental-human effects and discriminatory processes of colonialism are not relegated to the periphery of Europe and the United States, but rather also occurred within and that radically changed the metropolitan center. Thus, both the colonizer and the colonized are still affected, though at varying degrees, of colonialism and imperialism that inform modern processes of the globalization of issues of the environment, (inter) national security and border policies and identity and difference issues. Taking a cue from Loughrey's and Handley's definition of postcolonial ecocriticism, this paper argues that Margaret Atwood's selected three novels are concerned with the problematic issue of Canadian identity in relation to Canada's unique, double position as both a previous white colony and a current subordinate to the British political system on the one side and as a colonizing nation actively engaged in the colonial project on the other. The three novels represent different stages of political change in postcolonial Canada and the effects of these changes on human-environmental interrelations and identity formation for different Canadian characters.

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**Asmaa Meftah**

University of Exeter (UK)

**Nature, Resistance and Eco-Steadfastness: A Postcolonial Ecocritical Analysis  
of Mahmoud Darwish's Works 1960-2008**

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For decades, Palestinians have been engaged in a wide variety of strategies to challenge the Israeli occupation. Although considerable research has been devoted to different forms of the Palestinian resistance such as demonstrations, military struggles, and BDS campaigns, less attention has been paid to green resistance.

Therefore, the ultimate purpose of this research is giving voice to nature by examining the natural environment as a central form of resistance in the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish's

writings from 1960 till his death in 2008. My aim is to inspire further discussion on how Darwish engages nature as a force shaping resistance through the lens of postcolonial ecocriticism.

One of the main goals of ecocriticism is to use literature as a tool to provide an understanding of man as an inseparable part of the natural environment and to show that this inseparability is based on a symbiotic relationship between humans and nature.

The second aim of this investigation will be a proposition of new insights to the interconnectedness between Palestinian's identity and the natural environment throughout the three Phases of Darwish's life.

The research will also examine Darwish's use of trees, stones, lands, and cacti... as means of exhibiting the Palestinian's 'eco-resistance' and 'eco-steadfastness' to the occupation of the land.

The incorporation of Arab voices such as the one of Mahmoud Darwish will provide evidence that the greening of Arabic literature is a valid project that is worthy of further consideration and examination into the study of ecocriticism in the world.

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**Barry Cole**

The University of Alabama (USA)

**A Literary Perspective of Shunned Space and Ecological Violence in America's Marginalized Communities**

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My research explores the pivotal role of contemporary shunned space in selected writings by Jesmyn Ward, Richard Wright, and William Faulkner. By definition, a *shunned space* consists of land and resources considered unfit or undesirable by the larger, mostly white society, and therefore reserved for marginalized communities. Such venues are subject to periodic invasion by the dominant society, higher crime rates, increased poverty, scarcity, and political exclusion. The label "shunned" is necessary to invoke the process by which the larger, white society creates such spaces and then sequesters them to the periphery. This makes it possible to inflict environmental racism out of view for most of the privileged venues occupied by whites.

Nevertheless, shunned spaces are also portals of cultural productivity enacted by residents to stave off both individual and collective fragmentation by creating enduring communities. Shunned spaces are visceral, perennial reminders of the historical trauma visited on millions of Americans. Ward anchors her memoir to the spaces in and around DeLisle to expose her contrapuntal relationship with them. She therefore intimately portrays the ability of shunned space both to create and destroy the livelihood of its marginalized residents. Subsequently, Ward weaves Bois Sauvage, the fictional equivalent of DeLisle, into her novels. African Americans comprise the largest segment of the population in each town's shunned space, while whites are usually found in more privileged communities that either border each shunned space or are located nearby. Ward's memoir and novels are replete with shunned space and beg further examination into their prominent role in both African American history and beyond.

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**Khurshid Alam**

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**Politics of Environmentalism: An Ecocritical Study of *Twilight in Delhi***

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In this paper, I intend to argue that the representation of plants, animals and buildings in a literary text not only serves the purpose of providing a natural background to human drama but they also contribute to developing a political statement by the author. Thus, the mentioning of indigenous plants and animals, serves the purpose of highlighting the features of indigenous

identity. In *Twilight in Delhi*, Mir Nihal feels grieved over the loss of political power in the public sphere. He devises different strategies to counter the existential vacuity created by the colonial intrusion in the public sphere. Amongst the various strategies that he adopts, the love for indigenous fauna and flora serves the purpose of negotiating with the colonizer in aesthetic terms. My argument is that his love for the indigenous ecology becomes a site of resistance that helps shaping/articulating his anticolonial identity. The local plants, animals and buildings are dear to him because he feels spiritually attached to them. Hence, he reacts strongly to the colonial endeavour of building a New Delhi because the cityscape would be changed. The “neem trees” will be cut down. A new boulevard will be built replacing the old which had an oriental appeal for Mir Nihal. Thus, deforestation becomes a metaphor for dehistoricization. . I conclude my argument by positing that literary narratives provide counter narratives to colonial epistemic violence by celebrating indigenous aesthetics which draws its strength from the native ecology.