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VOICING ABSENCES/PRESENCES IN A DAMAGED WORLD

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With a piano recital by Simon Vaskou



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SCAN ME !



BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

KEYNOTE LECTURES

‘even the fish of the sea are perishing’: Eco-poetics for a Damaged World

Kate Rigby

Bath Spa University and Monash University

‘Together with the wild animals/and the birds of the air,/even the fish of the sea are perishing’: These words, written over seven thousand years ago by a grief-stricken Hebrew prophet, echo down the millennia, voicing absences, once local or regional, that have now acquired planetary dimensions. Jeremiah’s prophetic witness models one of three types of eco-poetic voicing of present absences and absent presences that will be addressed in this lecture with reference to the work of several contemporary Australian poets. Prophetic *lamentation* bespeaks present absences in the mode of social-ecological critique: rather than simply dwelling nostalgically on what has been lost, it issues a wake-up call, urging a change of course to avert the worst. This might be considered a mode of ‘negative eco-poetics’ that amplifies the absence of the referent that is always implicit in the work of words by bearing witness to disappearances taking place in the world beyond the page. Yet human work with words can also be turned, eco-poetically, towards the ‘presencing’ of lives and lifeways that persist in extra-textual more-than-human worlds. This is what I term here the eco-poetics of *invocation*. Translating the varied modes of expression of other creatures into strange new poetic forms, this type of eco-poetics recalls ritual practices of zoo-mimicry. In summoning up, mimetically, those at risk of extinction, it also calls out to them, as if to say, ‘come back, don’t go’. Inviting the reader to enter imaginatively into the lifeworlds of other creatures, eco-poetic invocation also embodies a praxis of inter- and multi-species alliance as a mode of resistance to ecological unravelling and dwindling of species: what Donna Haraway has termed ‘making kin’. Poetic practices that escape the covers of books and make their way into sites of ecological restoration I term *regenerative* eco-poetics: here, the present absences and absent presences invoked verbally are tied in with the co-creation of refugia, places of multispecies care and conviviality. In settler-colonial societies, such as

Australia, moreover, regenerative ecopoetics are interwoven with a decolonial ecopolitics, entailing the regeneration of Indigenous cultures and languages.

Bio: Professor Dr. Kate Rigby (Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities) is Director of the Research Centre for Environmental Humanities at Bath Spa University and Adjunct Professor of Literary Studies at Monash University (Melbourne). Her research lies at the intersection of environmental literary, philosophical, historical and religious studies, with a specialist interest in European Romanticism, ecopoetics, and eco-catastrophe. A founding co-editor of the journal *Philosophy Activism Nature*, she is currently co-editing the University Press of Virginia series, *Under the Sign of Nature*, and her books include *Topographies of the Sacred: The Poetics of Place in European Romanticism* (2004), *Dancing with Disaster: Environmental Histories, Narratives, and Ethics for Perilous Times* (2015) and *Reclaiming Romanticism: Towards an Ecopoetics of Decolonization* (2020). A key researcher with the Humanities for the Environment Mellon Australia-Pacific Observatory, she was the inaugural President of the Association for the Study of Literature, Environment and Culture (Australia-New Zealand), and the founding Director of the Australia-Pacific Forum on Religion and Ecology. She is currently a Senior Fellow at the Freiburg Institute of Advanced Studies on a Marie S. Curie FCFP Research Fellowship. She was recently awarded an Alexander von Humboldt Professorship in Environmental Humanities starting in 2022 at the University of Cologne.

Embodied Absence: Visceral Traces of the Present in Dystopian Climate Fiction

Alexa Weik von Mossner

University of Klagenfurt

Dystopian climate fiction often represents current environmental affordances through the traces of their future absence and/or the unwanted presence of other, more hostile ecological conditions. It is the catastrophic *lack* of clean water and food or the *excess* of heat, dust, and seawater that shapes ecological experience in these cognitively estranged future worlds. Genre novels such as Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* (2015) and Omar El Akkad's *American War* (2017) often combine this evocation of environmental lack and excess with a thriller plot; literary fiction such as James Bradley's *Clade* (2015) and Charlotte McConaghy's *Migrations* (2020), tend to focus on the disintegration of personal, familial, and love relationships under these extreme ecological conditions. Regardless of their mode, style, and genre, however, what unites the texts I will consider in my talk is that they narrate absences/presences in a way that cues readers to viscerally *share* the complex mix of sensations and affects that drives their characters' actions and forces them to literally embody the traces of what has been lost.

Bio: Alexa Weik von Mossner is Associate Professor of American Studies at the University of Klagenfurt. After working for several years in the German film and television industry as production manager and later scriptwriter, she received her PhD in Literature at the University of California, San Diego, and her Habilitation at the University of Klagenfurt. Her research explores the theoretical and empirical intersections of cognitive psychology, affective narratology, and environmental literature and film. She is the author of *Cosmopolitan Minds: Literature, Emotion, and the Transnational Imagination* (U of Texas P, 2014) and *Affective Ecologies: Empathy, Emotion, and Environmental Narrative* (Ohio State UP, 2017), the editor of *Moving Environments: Affect, Emotion, Ecology, and Film* (Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2014), and the co-editor of *The Anticipation of Catastrophe: Environmental Risk in North American Literature and Culture* (Winter 2014). She currently is principal investigator on the FWF project "Narrative Encounters with Ethnic American Literatures," a researcher on the project "Cinema and Environment: Affective Ecologies in the Anthropocene" (directed by Katarzyna Paszkiewicz at the University of the Balearic Islands), and an international partner for the research project "Literature and Reading in the Age of Environmental Crisis" (directed by Toni Lahtinen at the University of Helsinki), which focuses on *empirical ecocriticism*.

CONFERENCE PAPERS (in running order)

The Nuclear Sublime and Gerald Vizenor's Senses of Presence and Absence in *Hiroshima Bugi: Atomu 57* (2003)

David Lombard

Université de Liège & KU Leuven

By still suggesting fraught and distant experiences of overpowering phenomena, traditional theories of the sublime such as the “natural sublime” fail to deliver on the aesthetic and imaginative challenges brought about by the Anthropocene. The nuclear or atomic sublime builds on the natural sublime’s “terrible beauty” initiated by the likes of Burke and Kant to aestheticize objects and landscapes such as the mushroom cloud and nuclear test sites which still leave the human subject in a state of “petrified awe” (Shukin 2020) and devoid of any sense of responsibility (Ferguson 1984; Wilson 1989; Hales 1991). Most phenomena associated with the nuclear sublime are, however, often invisible (e.g., radiation and nuclear waste) and have led writers and (environmental) humanities scholars to seek imaginative ways of representing imperceptible or concealed forms of ecological disruption caused by atomic power. This presentation will consider Gerald Vizenor’s “kabuki” novel *Hiroshima Bugi: Atomu 57* (2003) as a case study for exploring the limits and affordances of (1) using the (nuclear) sublime as a strategy for figuring non/human materiality and (2) thinking in terms of presence and absence in the Anthropocene. Lastly, this presentation will undertake a narratological and rhetorical analysis of Vizenor’s experimental metaphors related to his senses of presence and absence in order to critically interrogate the potential of highly figurative language for countering the atomic sublime and for providing answers to the representational and ontological crises of the Anthropocene.

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Wilson, Rob. 1989. "Towards the Nuclear Sublime: Representations of Technological Vastness in Postmodern Poetry." *Prospects* 14 (October): 407–39. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0361233300005809>.

Bio: David Lombard is a research fellow at the Belgian National Fund for Scientific Research (F.R.S.-FNRS) and a PhD candidate in literary studies at the ULiège and KU Leuven (joint degree), where he is a researcher at the Interdisciplinary Center for Applied Poetics ([CIPA-Traverses](#)), [Intersections](#), and the [English Literature Research Group](#). His main fields of interests are American (literary) studies, environmental humanities, narratology, and rhetorical theory. He is the author of the book [Techno-Thoreau: Aesthetics, Ecology and the Capitalocene](#) (2019), which served as an extended pilot study for his broader PhD project on the rhetorics and narratologies of the contemporary literary sublime in Anthropocene non/fiction (2020-2024). Lastly, David is associate editor of the US studies academic association and research blog [PopMeC](#), and a member of [BASCE](#)'s events committee.

Material Absences and Human-Nonhuman Relations in the Contemporary Multimodal Novel

Marco Caracciolo

Ghent University

The concept of materiality is at the heart of New Materialism and other nonhuman-oriented philosophies. Unlike matter, which is widely seen as passive and inert in a Western context, materiality is active and transformative. While the field of “material ecocriticism” (spearheaded by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann) has started to explore the permutations of materiality in literary texts, much remains to be done to understand the formal devices through which literature (re)negotiates the divide between human subjectivity and nonhuman materiality. In this paper, I will bring material ecocriticism into a conversation with contemporary debates on the “multimodality” of literary texts—that is, the use of nonverbal strategies such as unconventional punctuation, typography, and illustrations to complicate and enrich literary style. Such nonverbal devices are cropping up more and more frequently in contemporary fiction, from W. G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz* to Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Tree of Codes*. Here I am particularly interested in how the inclusion of images may evoke a sense of *absence* that foregrounds the materiality of the text—and, in doing so, achieves two paradoxically opposed effects. On the one hand, such nonverbal counterpoint heightens the ethical questions raised by literature, particularly questions concerning the definition and boundaries of human responsibility vis-à-vis other humans. On the other hand, the nonvisual layer opens the text up to “thing-power,” in Jane Bennett’s phrase. The materiality of the book is thus decentered from the human, channeling how nonhuman realities may elude human understanding, just as absences come to the fore through the presence of these images in multimodal narratives. As an example of this complex interplay of human-oriented and nonhuman-oriented concerns, I will develop a reading of Valeria Luiselli’s multimodal novel *Lost Children Archive*.

Bio: Marco Caracciolo is an Associate Professor of English and Literary Theory at Ghent University in Belgium. Marco’s work explores the phenomenology of narrative, or the structure of the experiences afforded by literary fiction and other narrative media. He is the author of several books, including most recently *Narrating the Mesh: Form and Story in the Anthropocene* (University of Virginia Press, 2021) and *With Bodies: Narrative Theory and Embodied Cognition* (co-authored with Karin Kukkonen; Ohio State University Press, 2021).

Thomas King's *The Back of the Turtle*: Magic and the Multiple Scales of the Toxic Anthropocene

Jessica Maufort

Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB)

The issue of writing (in) the Anthropocene, today's man-made geological era, as exemplified by the rise of "climate change fiction", has sparked numerous debates about the novelistic genre and its representational capacities. Amitav Gosh and Timothy Clark in particular have voiced "pessimistic assessments" about the thematic, aesthetic, and "scalar" possibilities of the novel (Craps and Crownshaw 1). More than ever, this complex era represents a crisis of the imagination and human cognition, as it compels us to think simultaneously in terms of global and local scales (a species vs. the planet), and of the finitude of collective and individual earthy life (death). My analysis of Native writer Thomas King's recent novel, *The Back of the Turtle* (2014), argues that this rich narrative presents us with the multi-dimensional nature of this era: it offers us a depiction of "the world made by us and the world without us or beyond us" (Schuster 165). Through three intertwined plotlines, the reader follows characters variously involved in or affected by the devastating testing of a new herbicide nearby a North American coastal town, which killed all the animals and inhabitants of the local reserve. Connecting the toxic eco-disaster with the capitalist economy of First World countries, King's novel specifically deals with toxicity and its (post- or neo-)colonial ramifications in environmental, social justice, and political issues.

Furthermore, my analysis serves to test Clark's allusion to a "secularised magic realism" as part of the modes and techniques most capable of representing the complexities of climate change ("Some" 144). At first sight, in *The Back of the Turtle* the ambivalent magic realist mode – often attributed to King's fiction – seems to have morphed into a "secularised" one, perhaps in response to today's (pre- or post-)apocalyptic context. And yet, King does not completely forgo the magic realist dimension anchored in Indigenous and Christian spiritualities, through his use of multi-layered structures, plural characters, and ambivalent symbolisation. The novel emphasises how magic realism functions as a device of interconnection and fracture, thereby making present again what has been made (temporarily) absent or invisible through eco-catastrophe and economic globalisation.

By unveiling the discrete though enduring magic realist devices at work in King's novel, this paper takes issue with problematic tendencies in Anthropocene / climate change fiction

studies: first, the emerging polarity between utopian and dystopian narratives about this era, which echoes some scholars' binarism between realist (non-fiction) and "non-realist" (science fiction, fantasy) genres. Ghosh's own dismissal of the magical as "not real" and not "serious" enough to portray climate change events proves highly questionable (Ghosh 24-27). Such extreme generic/modal polarizations leave behind ambivalent and fluid modes, such as magic realism, whose unresolved in-betweenness may actually help tackle the various challenges of the Anthropocene. Second, my approach more widely takes issue with Clark's related "defeatism" toward ecocritical endeavours and the novel's capacities (Garrard np; Clark *Ecocriticism*), as well as with the restrictive potential of "climate change fiction" as a category regrouping only those narratives that explicitly depict climate change events, instead of other far-reaching implications of the Anthropocene.

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- Ghosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2016.
- Schuster, Joshua. "How to Write the Disaster." *Minnesota Review* 83 (2014): 163-71.

Bio: Jessica Maufort, PhD (2018, Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB)), specialises in postcolonial ecocriticism, ecopoetics, and magic realism examined in Indigenous and non-Indigenous fiction from Australasia and Canada. Related research interests include trauma studies, animal studies, ecospirituality, Pacific literature, and speculative fiction. Jessica is the Postgraduate Officer of the New Zealand Studies Association (NZSA), an editorial assistant of *Recherche littéraire/Literary Research*, and the book review editor of the *Journal of New Zealand and Pacific Studies*. Recent publications include two co-edited special issues on "New Scholarship" of the *Journal of New Zealand and Pacific Studies* (2021) and an article on a New Zealand novel about climate migration and the future of Antarctica. With support from the Belgian Fund for Scientific Research (F.R.S.-FNRS), Jessica is currently pursuing postdoctoral research at ULB, investigating the ecopoetics of trauma in the Anthropocene.

Characterizing ‘Coronaspeak’ in the English-speaking Press

Jennifer Thewissen

University of Antwerp & Université Saint-Louis

With the collaboration of her English linguistics students at the Université Saint-Louis, Brussels: Marie-Eliane Blaude, Sarah Christoyannis, Isadora De Grave, Suzanne De Wit, Anaïs Schramke, Noémie Valembois, Maëlle Vermant.

This paper is the result of a linguistic project carried out in the context of Jennifer Thewissen’s English linguistics course at the Université Saint-Louis in Brussels. The project ties in with the topic of the BAAHE2021 conference as it studies the *ubiquitous presence* of the coronavirus crisis in media headlines and the emotional impact this has on the public at large. Specifically, this paper deals with the following two research questions:

- RQ1: What is the **overall tone** of coronavirus headlines in English-speaking headlines?
- RQ2: Which **pragmatic & lexical devices** are used to report on coronavirus in the headlines?

The data was systematically collected from two newspapers, namely the Guardian (a centre-left quality newspaper) and the Daily Mail (a right-leaning conservative tabloid). We specifically targeted headlines from the very first coronavirus wave (March-April 2020) and a later wave spanning the January to February 2021 period. A total of c. 600 headlines were gathered from both newspapers and across coronavirus waves.

To answer RQ1 about the tone of coronavirus headlines, an automatic sentiment analysis of each headline was carried out with the [MonkeyLearn tool](#), with each result being manually checked to calculate the tool’s reliability. This step enabled us to identify the main tone (negative, neutral, positive) that readers are exposed to when reading about the pandemic and the psychological effect this has on the population.

RQ2 is a qualitative analysis of coronavirus press discourse which partly relies on an pragma-linguistic analysis framework developed by Molek-Kozakowska (2013): each headline was analysed in terms of the speech act it represents (e.g. warning, blaming, reassuring, etc.), the topic it specifically tackles (e.g. the economy, sanitary measures, etc.) and the emotionally-loaded lexical devices it uses to portray the covid crisis (e.g. *death toll*, *critically ill*, *we’re screwed*, *recovery plan*, *welcome news*, etc.). This pilot study thus contributes to characterizing ‘coronaspeak’ discourse which readers have been exposed to since March 2020.

Work Cited:

Molek-Kozakowska, Katarzyna. (2013). Towards a pragma-linguistic framework for the study of sensationalism in news headlines. *Discourse and Communication*. 7, 173-197. 10.1177/1750481312471668.

Bio: Jennifer Thewissen is a lecturer in English language and linguistics at the University of Antwerp and the Université Saint-Louis. She works in the field of learner corpus research, with a special focus on the development of accuracy and complexity among learners of English as a Foreign Language.

Reclaiming the Climate Crisis Discourse in the Time of Coronavirus

Angela Kölling, Spencer Hawkins, and Melina Maria Lieb

Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz (JGU), Germersheim

The temporality of the coronavirus pandemic is one of uninterrupted attention to the present. With weekly updates in Covid-19 data and ensuing modifications and renegotiations of Covid-19 measures, we all live in a state of constant alert and short-term adjustments to how to live at 1,5 to 2,0 m distance to the world. This “hyperpresence” keeps us in a state of preoccupation that prohibits us from staying with the trouble of a damaged planet. At the brink of our psychological and physiological resilience, sustainability has become an absence/presence on hold. Or, as the writer Frank Schätzing has argued, the pandemic has limited our perceived radius of action.

To initiate a discussion on how climate action and reflection can positively complement the dystopian presentism of the pandemic, the contributors of this shared talk/panel embarked on an experiment. Drawing on their research and teaching expertise, they decided to construct an eco-translation project course based on the notion that translators, translation, and translation studies are crucial to the realization of the transition to a more sustainable relationship with our planet. Expanding Anna Tsing’s notion of the importance of translators, the course wants to foreground translating as the vital act of inserting concrete meanings into the otherwise highly abstract processes of ecology and capital flow that shape present environmental discourse. Their course seeks furthermore to emphasize the curative potential of appreciating nature within day-to-day life, which allows us to harness the mind’s preference to focus on the here-and-now in a way that opens the possibility of care for the habitability of the earth in the future.

Addressing the extent to which we can narrate life forms, cultures, or languages which are less or no longer visible, the presenters will talk about their different academic and pedagogical reflections that were integrated into the course, as well as present some of the student responses and outcomes of this course.

Bios:

Angela Kölling is professor for anglophone studies at the Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz. Her research focuses on translation as catalyst for societal transformation. Past projects include: creative non-fiction as *littérature engagée* (Literature on the Loose 2012), New Zealand literature as WorldLit (“NZ@Frankfurt”), Visibility and Translation (Imaginations 2020). Her current focus is the role non-verbal communication elements play in the transfer of

environmental knowledge between dominated and dominant cultures. In particular, she investigates how these relations of uneven power can enter into a state of unsettled-ness from where new learning and teaching relationships are imagined and realised.

Spencer Hawkins is a postdoctoral fellow in Translation Studies at the University Mainz. His doctorate is in Comparative Literature, and his publications deal with the translation of German philosophy into English. His collaborative project with Lavinia Heller, “Forced (Self)translation,” deals with the migration of academics during the twentieth century and the concurrent rise of English as academic lingua franca.

Melina Lieb is a PhD candidate and lecturer at the Faculty of Translation Studies, Linguistics and Cultural Studies at the Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz/Germersheim, Germany. Her research focus is on 21st-century British Nature Writing, ecocriticism and ecopoetry. In her dissertation she considers the role of the “common” in this field of literature, including aspects such as the everyday, the ordinary and the familiar as well as the shared and the political. She has published articles on *Arcadiana*, the postgraduate blog of the European Association for Literature, Culture and the Environment.

Grief in Indigenous Climate Fiction: Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book*

Lena Amberge

University of Potsdam

Human / non-human relationships in times of climate change are characterised by absences and the resulting grief for what has been lost, but also for what will be lost in the future. Climate fiction often features narrative strategies to explore the unique temporality of this affect as well as its causes and effects. However, not everyone grieves in the same way for the environment and our place in it. This becomes apparent in settler colonialist countries like Australia, where colonialism and climate change are usually inseparable in Indigenous climate fiction. In this context, grief and absence take on a different meaning: not just the looming loss of modern life as we know it but the spiritual connection to Country and the kinship with its plants and animals in a continuum of loss from first contact to today. Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book* is a novel that explores the repercussions of colonial violence for Indigenous people in a future Australia disfigured by climate change. The protagonist Oblivia as well as her community are subject to state violence and displacement in place (Rob Nixon) because of the pollution of their homeland. Oblivia, mute and ostracized due to her experience of sexual violence, is perpetually becoming-ghost, an absence in presence. The novel employs the Gothic mode and in particular Kristeva's concept of the abject to represent future Australia's ruined landscapes inscribed with the ghostly remnants of a pre-colonial world. Yet, grief and loss do not only lead to despair and paralysis in *The Swan Book* but open up opportunities for interspecies connections between Oblivia and the swans. They show how caring for and witnessing the suffering of others is still possible—and even imperative—in an entangled, damaged world.

Bio: Lena Amberge is currently completing an MA in Anglophone Studies at the University of Potsdam. She was a postgraduate exchange fellow to the University of Delhi and is currently researching her final dissertation on grief and absences in Australian climate fiction.

Allen Ginsberg's Environmental Re-Invention of the Elegy

Franca Bellarsi

Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB)

Both as a poetic form and poetic process, the elegy develops a spectral strategy of “presence-in-absence”: on the one hand, the elegy mourns and laments what is gone, whilst on the other, it seeks to preserve what is no more or under threat for generations to come. When it comes to the paradox at the very heart of the elegiac, the opening of Shelley’s “Adonais” is a case in point: “[...] till the Future dares/Forget the Past, his [Keats’s] fate and fame shall be/An echo and a light unto eternity!”

Though insufficiently recognized as such, an elegiac streak that consists in playing on “presence-in-absence” actually pervades Beat production across genres: from poems like Ginsberg’s *Howl* (1956)¹ or Corso’s *Elegiac Feelings American* (1971) to Kerouac’s novels or Snyder’s environmental essays, the quest for a utopian, Blake-like reintegration of the Body/Emotions/Intellect/Imagination simultaneously summons what could and should be by intensely dwelling on what is lacking and has been lost. From the physical and ecological levels to the cognitive, social and spiritual ones, a shared *spectral dynamics and aesthetics* often allow major Beat texts to explore the overlapping wounds of the individual and planetary self as well as the possible pathways out of suffering for both.

This spectral writing strategy and elegiac streak should not come as a surprise when one remembers the foundational events that helped shape the Beat turn of mind. Amongst others, the Beat oscillation between the beaten-down and the beatific was moulded in the formative cradle of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, i.e. *eco-gothic* moments of History: on the one hand, any forms of the living and their productions were reduced to ghosts in an instant, whilst on the other, the spectre of nuclear destruction has never vanished since 1945, sometimes gaining more substance and presence than what it annihilated and thereby inviting us to update the very notion of the “Sublime.” As testified by Corso’s monumental “Bomb” (1958) or later, less well-known pieces like Ginsberg’s “Plutonian Ode” (1982) or “Nagasaki Days” (1982), the Beats never forgot the traumatic rupture entailed by humanity’s entry into the nuclear age and how it redefined both individual self-awareness and the relationship binding humans and their environment.

¹ All the dates in this abstract are dates of publication and not of composition (the wide gap between the actual writing and publication of material being a notorious problem affecting the history of Beat texts).

Because of his many poems in memory of the departed (“To Aunt Rose” and “At Apollinaire’s Grave,” 1961; *Elegies for Neal Cassidy*, 1972; “Don’t Grow Old”, 1978), Ginsberg has been seen as an elegiac poet, though the many ways in which he actually re-invents the form still remain rather under-explored. Amongst the aspects neglected, there is, for instance, the question of how the elegy for the human is made to extend and even overlap with the elegy for the more-than-human. For example, “Kaddish” (1961) has been understood as an elegy for

Ginsberg’s deceased mother, but has never been read in terms of an “environmental elegy,” which I contend it also is. In addition, “Kaddish” functions as an environmental elegy alongside other, vastly different pieces like “Siesta in Xbalba” (1963) or “Nagasaki Days” (1982), which have, likewise, never been read through an ecocritical lens. Decoding such poems in terms of “voicing absences/presences in a damaged world,” I will pursue a double goal in my presentation: 1) I will approach Ginsberg as a writer of “environmental elegies” and 2) on that basis, I will reflect more broadly on the environmental potential of the genre of the poetic elegy at large.

Bio: Franca Bellarsi’s research interests and publications are equally divided between the Beat Generation, ecocriticism and experimental ecopoetics, and English Romanticism. Within Beat Studies, she has especially been interested in the mysticism and ecospirituality of the Beats, as well as in their debts to European Romanticism, though she has explored the Beats from other, more eclectic angles too. On the Romantic front, her research particularly focuses on reception studies of William Blake’s work (both within and outside the Beat Generation). As an ecocritic, she has to date guest-edited 4 special issues (2009 twice, 2011, 2019), the most recent one, *Towards an Ecopoetics of Randomness and Design*, in co-edition with Judith Rauscher for the *Ecozon@* journal (<http://ecozona.eu/issue/view/164>).

A More Perfect Dissolution: Mining Nostalgia in Samuel D. Hunter's *Greater Clements*

Laura Michiels

Erasmushogeschool Brussel

Samuel D. Hunter's 2019 play *Greater Clements* takes its title from a fictional town in northern Idaho which exists somewhere in between presence and absence. In the wake of a dispute over garbage disposal involving locals and the posh Californians flocking to the area for leisure purposes, Clements residents decided that the best way to overcome these unwanted newcomers was to unincorporate as a town. It is, in fact, hard to find anything in the play which is not haunted by absence or ruined. Clements is a former mining town whose main industry is defunct, leaving the miners purposeless, wasting away their days at a bar. The history of one of the mines and a major accident which took place there is preserved by means of a museum, but even that is coming to an end now that the town is dissolving. The play's main character is the museum's owner Maggie Bunker, who needs to come to terms with the fact that her once abundant family faces extinction and finds herself forced to confront the ghost of a relationship past. In an interview with fellow-playwright Tony Kushner published in *American Theatre* magazine, Hunter explained that the play "is so much about the toxicity of nostalgia, and how we desperately try to relive things without admitting what they really are". In order to write his "state-of-the-nation kind of play", Hunter took inspiration from the "nostalgic structure" of US thinking during the first half of the 20th century, which I would like to explore in my paper.

Bio: Laura Michiels works as an English lecturer at Erasmushogeschool Brussel. She obtained a PhD degree in Literary Studies from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel in 2015. Her current research focuses on contemporary American political theatre, with a special interest in plays that deal with labour relations. She is the author of the *The Metatheater of Tennessee Williams* (McFarland, 2021).

Ghosts and Endangered Landscapes in Italian Contemporary Films *Lost and Beautiful* and *Happy as Lazzaro*

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Global climate change brings to the foreground « the unthinkable » of western societies. Undermining the representative canons we were used to, the ecological crisis questions our cultural narratives and urges (us) to imagine new creative stories, to listen to other voices. In this sense, art has a commitment: it opens the path towards new ways of experiencing and telling about the world. As Isabelle Stengers wrote, “it is up to us to create a manner of responding, for ourselves but also for the innumerable living species that we are dragging into the catastrophe”. This paper aims at elucidating how, starting from 2010s, in order to deal with anthropogenic climate change and ecological disruption, Italian contemporary writers and filmmakers depart from realist aesthetics to embrace estranging devices like fantasy, science-fiction and fairy tale. While *Lost and Beautiful* (2015) by Pietro Marcello is a modern fairytale where the voice is given to a young buffalo living in the Land of Fires under the control of Camorra, *Happy as Lazzaro* (2018) by Alice Rohrwacher stages a young peasant who, after resurrecting from death, is projected from timeless countryside to a fast-changing urban Italy. Both survey the contradictions of modern Italian society, from rural flight to illegal building, from garbage racket to environmental degradation. Overcoming the binary separations in which our imagination was trapped, the ancient fairy tale disrupts the master narratives about a linear, progress-oriented space-time. Throughout the suspension of disbelief, spectators travel between past and present Italy and grasp the price of modernity. In this perspective, ghosts are the residuals of modern societies, a “third landscape” we tried to repress and that, as Lazzaro, came back strengthened from the death, asking for a metamorphosis.

Bio: Lucia della Fontana is an agrégé teacher and a PhD researcher in Italian studies at the Sorbonne university. After being awarded a PhD scholarship, she is preparing a thesis titled *Défi climatique et urgence de l'engagement. Débat critique et création romanesque dans la culture italienne des années 2000*. She received a Bachelor degree in European literatures and cultures from the University of Bologna and a Master degree in Comparative literature from the Sorbonne university. Her primary research interests are in the field of Environmental humanities, Ecology and literature, Ecocriticism, Anthropocene, Posthumanism, Science studies.

Re-negotiating Absences: Voicing the Narratives of Forced Migration

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The knowledge of the past is never fixed, it is always subject to reconstruction and renegotiation (Benjamin 460). Maurice Halbwachs argues that people's recollection and narration of the past is directly influenced by how the events from their past can serve their present objectives. The society and power relations influence how people "recall, recognize, and localize their memories" (Halbwachs 38). This paper will analyse the how the narratives of marginalised communities are erased to present a seemingly uniform culture, which is often devised by the powerful groups by excluding "counter-memories". My focus will be on the *Internally Displaced Kashmiri* communities, who were forced to leave their homeland following the Insurgency of 1989 in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Despite violence and forced dispersion, the communities were silenced to maintain the nationalistic yearning towards the state and achieve political motives. I will analyse the representations of the Valley of Kashmir in national museums, state-sponsored exhibitions and cinematic productions to highlight the 'selective gaze of the camera' that leads to complete erasure of the communities and their trauma. Further, the paper will attempt to understand how the IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) present their counter-narratives through cyber-memory portals and alternative sources to preserve their endangered culture and experiential memories in this damaged world. This study will not only expose the lapses of conventional history and the position of "minority groups" in today's damaged world, but will simultaneously dismantle the institutional representations to let the 'history from below' ooze out of cracks and crevices to re-present the minority groups and challenge their peripheral position.

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Bio: Prateeksha Pathak is a graduate student in the Department of Geography at York University, Canada. She works on examining the role of objects in narrating untold stories and preserving the identity of victims of involuntary displacement from the region of Jammu and Kashmir. Her interests include material memory, migration studies, diasporic literature, and political geography.

Indigenous Epistemology, Sacred Landscape, and Archaeology: Attempts to Voice the Absents in a (Damaged) Academic World

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As decolonizing studies have pointed out over the past three decades, Indigenous Peoples and communities are experiencing worldwide long-term structural oppression and silencing, which affect the self, knowledge, and power. Academic structures have been built in resonance with this oppression, which started in Mexico about five centuries ago, leading to archaeology and anthropology's disengagement from Indigenous Peoples and communities, both disciplines participating in this epistemological colonialism. Since then, Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars have been appealing more and more to reconsider paradigms and epistemological approaches starting from the community to reach academic results for the community.

This paper is designed in the line of this reflection, seeking new means, and trying to give voice to the Zapotec and the Mixtec People of Oaxaca, Mexico, with the purpose of interpreting their heritage from their language, their ontological paradigms, and epistemological approach to their heritage. It is about endangered languages and heritages, and how they teach the academic world about different paradigms, and different forms of considering the endangered world we live in, different forms of considering science and human history.

Both authors' investigations found their complementarity in being a departure from archaeology on the one hand, and from ethnography on the other. Their meeting point has been the sacred landscape as heritage in its broadest sense: the intangible and the tangible, the built and the natural, or rather the meaning of heritage and how it persisted across centuries. What is telling the sacred landscape to the archaeologist? What are today's voices explaining to the ethnographer? And what are they teaching? This paper will thus present the results of this encounter as well as the challenges and questions for further research with the aim to empower today's inhabitants' voices of both regions, and to confront the "illness" of a damaged academic world, following Fanon's terminology.

Bios:

Caroll Davila holds a first Master's in Art History and Archaeology from the Université libre de Bruxelles, and then an MPhil in Latin American and Amerindian Studies from the University of Leiden. She did her Ph.D. at both universities in the Heritage and Rights of Indigenous Peoples section, thanks to an FNRS fellowship. In the framework of this project, she was also a guest scholar at CIESAS (Mexico). Her Ph.D. thesis, published at Leiden University Press, concerns ritual language, memory, sacred landscape, and their entanglement with the tangible heritage of the Zapotec people in the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca, Mexico. Her work involves close collaboration with several professors from bilingual education in Oaxaca, local authorities, and inhabitants from indigenous communities. She is now a postdoctoral BAEF fellow at the Department of Anthropology at the University of California Berkeley, where she continues her emphasis on the ritual discourses and cultural memory of the Bene Sa, the Zapotecs of the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca.

Ángel Iván Rivera Guzmán is an indigenous Mixtec archaeologist, graduated from the National School of Anthropology and History (Mexico). Since 2001, he is a professor-researcher assigned to the Executive Public Registry of Monuments, Archaeological and Historical Zones of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH). He received the Alfonso Caso Award from INAH in 2000 for the best undergraduate thesis in archaeology. His academic production is reflected in three edited books and in numerous scientific articles published in national and international academic journals. He is a member of the editorial committee of the series *The Early Americas: History and Culture*. He has been an academic coordinator of the Monte Alban Round Tables of the National Institute of Anthropology and History, as well as editor of the Memoirs of this event. He is an advisor to the Union of Community Museums of Oaxaca, collaborating in the assembly and exhibition of a dozen local archaeological museums. He specializes in the archaeology, iconography, epigraphy and ethnohistory of the Oaxaca region. He is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Leiden, The Netherlands, where he is conducting research on pre-Hispanic writing and narratives in western Oaxaca.