



Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (UK and Ireland)
Biennial Conference, University of Surrey, 29-31 August 2013

Ecological Encounters: Agency, Identity, Interactions

Confirmed keynotes:

Mike Hulme (University of East Anglia)

Sheila Jasanoff (Harvard University)

Catriona Sandilands (York University, Canada)

Call for Papers

As Timothy Morton reminds us in *The Ecological Thought* (2010), to acknowledge the countless co-habitants of the ‘mesh’ that is our environment is to recognise them as different from us. But the notion of separateness and difference in the moment of encounter is crucial to thinking not just about the inter-connectedness of human and nonhuman beings, but about our very co-existence as humans with the many discursive and material units that make up our so-called reality. These include the ‘facts’ of ‘science’, the ‘inspiration’ of ‘poetry’, and the ‘beauty’ of ‘nature’. To clarify Karen Barad’s terms, the many co-habitants and constituents of our material and discursive worlds have agential separability rather than agency: they are known to us, and, indeed, we are known to ourselves, in moments of coming together. It is only within these encounters that we can know or recognise the (human or nonhuman, material or discursive) other; their agency (and ours too) only exists in—and is a product of—that moment, along with the knowing or the recognition that occurs within it.

It is for such reasons that, in his analyses of scientific discourse and practice, Bruno Latour recommends that we think of quasi-objects, quasi-subjects, and discourses as actants, as agents that are constantly translating, mediating, playing roles. It is in such a vein, too, that one reads Catriona Sandilands’s theorisation of identity as only ever existing in ‘agonal’ performance, underlining the importance of confrontation in producing identity. Thus, we propose that it is in such a spirit that we should consider the many discourses—literary,

poetic, rhetorical, scientific—that circulate around and through environmentalism, ecology, and ecocriticism: these make themselves known to us as the encounters of so many discursive and material units and identities.

We invite papers that consider questions of agency, identity and interaction (or intra-action) in ecological thought and ecocriticism, as well as in adjoining studies of the sociology of science and of cultural geographies. We are keen also to encourage the spirit of encounter and interaction with disciplines and discourses beyond literary and cultural criticism, such as human geography, environmental history, and science and technology studies (S&TS).

Topics to be covered may include (but need not be restricted to):

- New materialism and intra-actions
- Science and technology studies (S&TS) and ecocriticism
- Human/cultural geographies and ecocriticism
- Histories of the discourses of science and/or environmentalism
- New directions in ecofeminism, e.g. material feminism
- Emergent ideas in ecocriticism
- The nature/culture boundary in literary and other discourses
- Discourses of ecological crisis, including climate change, species extinction, and biodiversity loss
- The new nature writing
- The deconstructive turn in environmentalism
- Eco-poetics and identity

Please send abstracts of up to 250 words for 20-minute presentations to the conference organisers at asle2013@surrey.ac.uk by 31st March 2013. Conference updates will be accessible via the ASLE-UKI website: www.asle.org.uk.

We may seek to publish a selection of conference proceedings in our journal *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*, now relaunched and published in association with Routledge.

The University of Surrey is in the county town of Guildford, about 30 miles outside London. Its beautifully landscaped campus is well situated in view of the rolling hills of the Surrey countryside. The natural environment is an important part of university life: the campus's

focal point is its lake, Terry's Pond, with its many breeds of waterfowl, while the campus as a whole boasts an outstanding collection of tree varieties from around the world. The University of Surrey holds sustainability at the heart of its agenda, from a long-standing Corporate Sustainability Group through to setting itself an agenda to contribute to the 'triple bottom line', i.e., the point where economic, social and environmental objectives integrate.

Please note: ASLE-UKI biennial conferences will now run in odd-numbered years, which is why this 2013 conference follows immediately from our 2012 conference at the University of Worcester.