



asle-anz



Association for the Study of Literature & Environment - Australia & New Zealand

Issue #3 2006 ASLE-A^{New}Zletter

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

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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT, **Kate Rigby**

Welcome to ASLE-ANZ!

Over the past six months a notable shift appears to have occurred in the public arena with regard to environmental issues. The visit of **Al Gore** to promote his film "An Inconvenient Truth," in tandem with the release of the Stern Report, has brought a growing recognition of the dire reality of global climate change, while the persistence of drought in much of Australia is fostering a belated realisation of the gravity of our enduring (probably endemic) water crisis in this part of the world. Other ecological problems, such as the contribution of habitat loss to the rising extinction rate, and of toxic pollutants to illness and mortality in vulnerable human and other-than-human populations, nonetheless remain largely in the background. The terms of the discussion, moreover, are generally shallow, with powerful voices, predictably enough, favouring a classic (and, in this case, clearly hazardous) technological fix: surely we can do better than seeking to avoid the Scylla of

Global Warming by surrendering to the Charybdis of nuclear energy! Limited though the mainstream framing of environmental issues might be, their dramatic rise to prominence in the public arena, as witnessed for example in the recent elections in Victoria, presents scholars working in the ecological humanities, along with environmental artists and writers, a valuable opportunity to promote a wider appreciation of the multi-faceted socio-cultural dimensions of our current ecosocial woes and how we might respond to them in the longer term.

If there is to be a longer term. We cannot discount the possibility that the preparedness to act on climate change that we are finally witnessing in high places is, tragically, too little, too late: severe disruption, and, locally at least, disaster, might well be inevitable. This, at any rate, is the conclusion drawn by **James Lovelock**, among others, who recommends that one of the major tasks that we now face is preparing ourselves and our children, mentally and emotionally, for a radically uncertain and potentially catastrophic future. Here, too, the ecological arts and humanities surely have much to offer.

This last point I took to be the main burden of **Richard Kerridge's** extraordinary concluding keynote lecture at this year's ASLE-UK conference in Lincoln, "Discordant Harmonies: Ecocriticism in the 21st Century" which I attended in September. Disappointingly, this was a rather under-attended gathering, but what the papers presented lacked in quantity they amply made up for in quality. The participation of a group of outstanding zoocritics was

particularly welcome, and there were also some excellent papers of an explicitly philosophical bent, including one by the prominent poet and ('postmodern') scholar of literature, philosophy and religion, **Kevin Hart** (University of Notre Dame, Indiana). Courageously, the organisers had invited two noted critics of (mainly North American) ecocriticism and environmental literature as keynote speakers, namely **Dana Phillips** and **Ursula Heise**, both of them sympathetic critics, I hasten to add, whose engaged participation contributed to some lively and productive conversations throughout the conference. They were joined from the US by **Karla Armbruster**, who got proceedings off to a promising start with a plenary that opened up some important theoretical questions through a reading of **Graham Swift's** fenland novel *Waterland*, while **John Simons** of the University of Lincoln subsequently treated us to a fascinating cultural historical perspective on the swans that we encountered daily between sessions on the nearby Brayford Pool.

Without doubt the formally most innovative aspect of the conference was the (government-funded) session on ecocritical pedagogy organised by **Greg Garrard**, which included an experiment with in-conference teaching: extremely anxiety-engendering for those of us who had agreed to front up to these classes of colleagues, but unquestionably interesting and worthwhile. For those few of us who stayed the course, the conference ended with a balmy summer's evening walk along the banks of the Foss for a welcome ale and a meal at a waterside pub, whence we eventually headed back to town at nightfall with much to ponder.

"Discordant Harmonies" was one of a number of ecocritical conferences held in Britain and, recalling the EASCLE conference in Klagenfurt, in continental

Europe this year. This very positive development might well have been one of the factors limiting attendance at Lincoln.

The question of how to strengthen ASLE-ANZ took centre-stage at our recent AGM at Trinity College in Melbourne, ably organised by our (sadly retiring) Secretary-Treasurer, Rebecca Lucas (or rather, as she now is, **Lucas Rose**). In this connection, one of the suggestions that we discussed at length was whether to follow the lead of the Canadians and Europeans in amending our name in order to signal more clearly our cross-disciplinary agenda. Although the attendees (which included **Charles Dawson**, by phone connection), and a number of other absent members who had written to me in advance, decided in favour of a change, some members of our advisory board are less enthusiastic, and until it has been properly discussed by all concerned, this question will remain undecided. The other major item of discussion at the meeting was the nature and location of our 2007 conference, which at this point looks set to be held in Canberra, to be followed, we hope, by a New Zealand conference in 2009.

The earnest discussions of the AGM were followed by a well-attended and very enjoyable poetry reading, about which one of our new recruits, **Andrew Johnson**, has kindly provided a report for this Newsletter. This was designed not only as a sweetener for those valiant souls who dutifully attended the AGM, but also as a modest fund-raiser and means of attracting new members. I can heartily recommend such small local events to any other ASLE-ANZ members who are in a position to organise them, especially in non-conference years. After the poetry forum, a toast was drunk to the long awaited special issue of *Colloquy*

containing proceedings from our inaugural conference, which was then still not quite on-line, but will be imminently. It is hoped that the special issue of *PAN* will follow soon after (although probably not until the new year). A further special issue of *PAN* is also planned for 2007, focussing on sustainability and the arts.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our outgoing Secretary Treasurer very much indeed for her dedicated work and many excellent initiatives this year, as well as to congratulate her on not only receiving her doctorate, but also getting married no less than a week after submitting her thesis. Well done, Rebecca!

Wishing you all much earthly pleasure this festive season!

December 2006
Monash University

Eco-humanities Corner, *Australian Humanities Review*, is now on-line at:

http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-September-2006/eco_index.html.

“Sustainability and the Arts”
A Special issue of *PAN*
No. 5, 2007.

ASLE-ANZ Vice-President,
New Zealand: **Charles Dawson**

Kia ora, greetings.

Given the substantial note from Kate and riches ahead in this newsletter I'll be brief. We in New Zealand have been watching the fires across the Tasman with concern and send our thoughts to you. We are just leaving a season or two of unprecedented rainfall, and a report

on the Trans-Tasman water conference appears later in this issue courtesy of the convenor, **Kate Hunter**.

The major new online encyclopedia Te Ara (www.teara.govt.nz) is now building its environment section: you may find it of interest for that and its sections on Māori and European settlement.

In 2007 I hope to run some small seminars or panels, or invite New Zealand members to gather and collaborate in readings geared round topical themes.

All the best for the festive season from me too!

ASLE-ANZ AGM
21 October 2006

Report on the Poetry Forum:

An audience of more than forty turned out to the inaugural Poetry Forum following the ASLE-ANZ AGM, at Trinity College, Melbourne in October. The six poets featured — Robert Gray, Kevin Hart, Martin Harrison, Peter Boyle, Anne Elvey and Mike Heald — read from published work, and also treated us to work soon to be in print.

Robert Gray, reading from his latest book, *Nameless Earth* (Carcanet Press, UK) as well as reading well known and loved poems including, “The Creek,” continues to astonish and inspire with his delicately poised verse. **Kevin Hart** also read poems from a new book, and some familiar favorites, such as “Master of Energy and Silence” and “Building a Rat.” Hart’s poems are rich in memory and connection to place. **Martin Harrison** read among other short pieces, an extended prose poem. In the manner of some of the best ecologically oriented writing, this blurred the lines between genres and discourses to open up fresh

perspectives on the relationship between the subject, the word and the environment. **Peter Boyle** is something of a fabulist, but one with a great deal to say about our contemporary social, and political situation. He read mainly from an ambitious new project which seems like it will more than live up to the wondrous challenge of his two most recent books, *Museum of Words* (UQP, 2004) and *What the Painter Saw in our Faces* (Five Islands, 2001). **Anne Elvey**'s poetry is contemplative and closely attuned to sense detail and spiritual nuance — her reading reminded us again of the connection between prayer and poetry. Three of Anne's poems can be found at:

<http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/default.aspx>
Last, but by no means least, **Mike Heald** read from his recent, thought provoking and finely crafted work, *Focusing Saturn* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2004) which touches on images and ideas of activism, ecology and natural history.

Following the readings, the assembled poets were invited to consider with the audience a question the German poet, **Friedrich Holderlin** asked in his hymn, "Bread and Wine": "Wozu Dichter in duerftiger Zeit?" One translation of Holderlin's question has it thus: "What use are poets in lean years?" With good humour and humility, the assembled poets seemed to want to make only very modest claims for poets — as Kevin put it, "poets are for writing poems' (and drinking red wine)" — while maintaining a belief that poetry was essential. That said, it was also clear that all were somewhat uncomfortable with the idea that a poet, or poem might have single or simple objectives — or to put it the other way around, that a poem is the better for being left open to unpredictable and unknowable results. Those who attended will no doubt agree, so long as one result is that the poetry forum becomes a fixture of the ASLE—ANZ calendar!

Thanks are due to the organisers of this event, **Kate Rigby**, **Rebecca Lucas**, and **Peter Coleman**, and to Trinity College for providing a fantastic venue.

Andrew Johnson,
Monash University

ASLE-India **Inaugural International Conference:** Report

In September 2006 I travelled to Pondicherry, India, at the invitation of Professor **S. Murali** to attend the first International conference of ASLE-India. The theme was "Nature and Human Nature: Land, Landscape and Cultural Constructions of the Environment". Delegates came from Taiwan and the USA, as well as from many parts of India. Murali writes: "Environment as a concept, for obvious reasons, cannot be seen separate or segregated from the cultural and natural spheres, and literature by virtue of being what it is — creative, imaginative, emotive and expressive — could be seen as engaging with the human mind and the natural world." Over seventy papers were presented in fourteen workshops over three days.

I was impressed by the work our colleagues in India and Taiwan are doing, and thrilled to encounter the enthusiasm of large numbers of post-graduate students. Among the delegates from Taiwan was Professor **Yang Ming-tu** who organised an excellent conference in 2005 at his home university (Tamkang, in Dansue near Taipei) on the theme of "'Natural' Catastrophes: Power, Justice, Discourse." I met Murali and other Indian and Taiwanese scholars at that conference, and when we reconvened in Pondicherry we experienced a growing

awareness of an Australasian community, and of a regional eco-poetics that we hope to keep exploring in future gatherings.

Deborah Rose

Australian National University

Trans-Tasman ‘States of Mind’ series,

“Water” Conference Report

Each year since 2001, the Stout Research Centre at Victoria University, sponsored by the Australian High Commission, has hosted a one-day trans-Tasman conference. The theme for 2006 was Water, and the conference was opened by **Wayne Ngata** who laid out a theme that others were to return to during the day: that of relationships with and around water, the engagement with water rather than simply the use of it. The message that people care about the quality and quantity of water when they have a relationship with it was strengthened by the second session where both **David Young** (freelance historian) and **Paul Sinclair** (Environment Victoria) argued that the growing dislocation, particularly of urban populations from water was a contributing factor to its degradation. There are differences in the forms of degradation of rivers in Australia and New Zealand: the Victorians are now urgently concerned with quantity and management of flow in their rivers. The Murray has 70% of its flow removed for agriculture resulting now in vast swathes of degradation along its banks where once environmental flow sustained large floodplains and this has been exacerbated to crisis point by ten years of drought. In New Zealand, the key concern is water quality and indicator species such as the Whio (blue duck) and eels are signalling mounting crises in our

river systems. Both of these speakers, and the following session on water quality (**Marion Savill** is the Environmental Microbiology leader at ESR and **Melita Stevens** is the Drinking Water Quality Manager at Melbourne Water) emphasised the strong need for incentives for agriculture particularly to become more water efficient and to reduce water-polluting practices. Environment Victoria campaigns for ‘water efficiency ratings’ on labelling, Melbourne Water provides fencing materials, pipes and troughs to assist farmers to keep stock out of streams, and ESR are currently supporting the Sustainable Farming Fund, educating farmers on reducing microbial pollution.

Throughout these sessions, however, ran the thread of relationships: recreation created family and personal relationships with water; good working relationships between farmers and water utilities were essential to changing farming practices; those relationships were also important if water was to be valued, priced accordingly, and for farmers to be given fair prices for their produce without alienating urban consumers. In the final session **Tony McAvoy** (Aboriginal barrister and Land Council adviser) in a discussion of Native Title rights to water in Australia, reminded us that these relationships — or lack of them — are deeply historical and colonial, that in the juggle to allocate and extract water, cultural water has been totally ignored. When indigenous use of water was finally considered in legislation in the late twentieth century (most centrally in the Water Management Act 2000), there was no water to give indigenous people. Overall, the conference had less historical content than I was expecting, but it was a thought-provoking and at times slightly alarming day. Each break saw audiences approach the water jugs more thoughtfully.

Kate Hunter

Victoria University, Wellington

**ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY
NZ Newsletter**

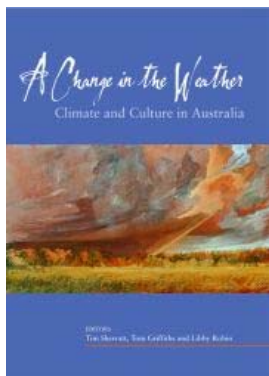
Established in order to link up people interested in topics relating to New Zealand and its environment. This website aims to provide information about people and upcoming events, including conferences, books, seminars: <http://cres.anu.edu.au/environhist/eh-nz.html>

**MEMBERS' ACTIVITIES &
PUBLICATIONS, AUSTRALIA**

Thomas M. Wilson *The Recurrent Green Universe of John Fowles* (Rodopi: Amsterdam, 2006) 283pp.

Chris Wallace-Crabbe *All Writing Still is to be Done* (L'Officina: Vicenza 2006) with two engravings by Gianluca Murasecchi.

Mark Tredinnick "A New Age Pastoral" short-listed, 2006 Broadway Poetry Prize; his poem suite "Lake St Clair Cycle" short-listed, the 2006 Newcastle Poetry Prize; 'The Child and Time' (the 2005 Gwen Harwood Poetry Prize winner) was published in *Island* 106, Spring 2006; and *The Little Red Writing Book* was published in October 2006 (UNSW Press).



A Change in the Weather (Tim Sherratt, Tom Griffiths, Libby Robbin, eds., National Museum of Australia Press, Canberra, 2005) is an interdisciplinary 'weather report'

that draws together perspectives from the social sciences, the humanities, science

and engineering to deepen understanding of the relationship between climate and culture in Australia. Includes essays by **Bill Bunbury, Daniel Connell, Tom Griffiths, Richard Grove, Clive Hamilton, R.W. Home, Ian Lowe, Janet McCalman, Tony McMichael, Neville Nicholls, Libby Robbin, Deborah Rose, Janis Sheldrick, Tim Sherratt, Mike Smith** and **David Walker**.

Details about the Human Elements project at <http://www.humanelements.info/> **Deborah Rose** (ed.) and **Libby Robbin**: Eco-humanities Corner, *Australian Humanities Review*, is now on-line. This issue is edited by Debbie and includes work by **MTC Cronin, Kate Rigby, Peter Boyle, Stephen Muecke, Nick Drayson, Miriel Lenore, George Main, Stephen Edgar, Eric Rolls** and **Mark Tredinnick**. It can be accessed at: http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-September-2006/eco_index.html.



Strata: Deserts past, present and future, an environmental art project edited by **Mandy Martin, Libby Robbin**, and **Mike Smith**, is now available digitally: <http://cres.anu.edu.au/strata/contents.html>

Pete Hay "The Radical Politics of Nature Poetry," *Five Bells*, 13 (2), 2006, 40-41; "The Moral Economy of the Bush," *Arena Magazine*, 83, 2006, 15-16; "A Phenomenology of Islands," *Island Studies Journal*, 1, 2006, 19-42; "Defending Island Ecologies: Environmental Campaigns in Tasmania and Taiwan," *Journal of Developing Societies*, 22, 303-326, 2006 (with Henry C.L. Chen); "Synergies and Tensions in the Application of Irreducible Communicative Paradigms to Issues of Marine Ecology", presented at *New Constellations: Perspectives on Art and*

Technology, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, March 2006 (with Jane Quon and Lindsay Broughton). Published in *Proceedings of New Constellations: Art, Science and Society*, 2006, 91-95; “‘Balding Nevis’: Reflections on an Unrecognised Constituency within Tasmania’s Forest Communities and the Articulation of a Moral Economy of Place”: invited Keynote presentation at “Senses of Place” conference, Hobart, Tasmania, April 2006.

Roslynn D. Haynes *Tasmanian Visions: Landscapes in Writing, Art and Photography* (Sandy Bay: Polymath Press, 2006) nfo@tasmanianvisions.com

Anne F. Elvey read her poetry at the ASLE-ANZ AGM in Melbourne; three of her poems can be found at:

<http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/default.aspx>
Anne is based at the Centre for Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies, Monash.

Liana Joy Christensen was an invited poet at *Close Encounters* the International Conference for the Society for Science, Literature and the Arts, held in Amsterdam in June 2006. Her chapbook of poetry *Wild Familiars* (May 2006) was launched at the conference. The poems explore a range of issues around the central theme of “animals and society.”

Publishing Opportunities

The Caribbean Chapter of the College English Association (CEA-CC) is seeking 5-7 additional papers to supplement the volume *Our Watery World: Humans and the Sea*.

We are interested in topics:

- The Sea in History
- The Life Aquatic: Amphibian and Aquatic Animals
- Monsters & Monstrosities of the Sea
- Ecocriticism: The Endangered Sea
- The Sea as Frontier
- Empire and the Sea

Papers (3000-10,000 words) should follow specified format:

<http://www.ece.uprm.edu/artssciences/ingles/CEA-CC-Instructions-to-authors.pdf>

Send by 6 January 2007 with “Our Watery World: Proceedings” as the subject line of the message to:

cea_caribbeanchapter@hotmail.com

The Journal for the Study of Radicalism (JSR)

This print academic journal published by Michigan State University Press is seeking articles and reviews for its third issue, on the subject of ecological or environmental radicalism. Possible subjects include deep ecology, primitivism, the history of ecological radicalism, the sociology of radical groups, contemporary radical groups or individuals, and the origins and possible futures of ecological radicalism. **JSR** accepts articles on global topics, and is interested in publishing articles and reviews on a wide range of related subjects and themes.

Submissions should be 20-30 pages and conform to the Chicago Manual of Style. Include a one-paragraph abstract. Images should be 300 dpi. Authors are responsible for receiving permission to reprint images for scholarly use.

Send proposed articles to the editors at: jsr@msu.edu by 31 January 2007.

For more info: <http://www.msu.edu/~jsr>

ASLE MLA PANEL
 “When Nature Strikes Back”

Proposals are invited that explore how literary texts (including film) depict or personify nature’s retribution for human attempts to control, change, or harm the land. For example, how does the environment create an inhospitable situation for humans that either appears natural (hurricanes, West Nile Virus, Avian Flu, Mad Cow disease) or supernatural (the flood in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*)? How does “nature” have agency in literature and film?

Submit 300-word abstracts:
 by 1 March 2007 to Sarah McFarland at:
mcfarlands@nsula.edu

**UPCOMING CONFERENCES,
 SYMPOSIA and CALL FOR
 PAPERS**

UNIVERSITY OF MADRAS
 CHENNAI, INDIA
 4-7 January, 2007
 Environmental, Cultural, Economic
 and Social Sustainability

This conference aims to develop an holistic view of sustainability in which environmental, cultural and economic issues are inseparably interlinked. It will work in a multidisciplinary way, across diverse fields and taking varied perspectives in order to address the fundamentals of sustainability.

Papers submitted for the conference proceedings will be peer-refereed and published in print and electronic formats in the *International Journal of Environmental, Cultural, Economic and Social Sustainability*. If you are unable to attend the conference in person, virtual registrations are also available

which allow you to submit a paper for refereeing and possible publication as well as allowing access to the electronic version of the conference proceedings. Full details of the conference are at: <http://www.SustainabilityConference.com>

Contact Professor **John Fien**
 Innovation Professor of Sustainability
 RMIT University, Melbourne
john.fien@rmit.edu.au

UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND
 ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
 5-7 October 2007

The 4th Literature & Ecology Colloquium
 Twinstreams Environmental Education
 Centre, Mtunzini
 “Forest Paths”

Simon Schama places the forest in opposition to the city in early German and Roman history: “On the one hand, it was a place which, by definition, was ‘outside’ (foris) the writ of their law and the governance of their state. On the other hand, their own founding myths were sylvan” (*Landscape and Memory*, 83). In *The Aesthetics of Natural Environments*, **Holmes Rolston** writes about “The Aesthetic experience of Forests.” The first 5 subthemes mentioned below are taken from this essay:

Subthemes: The Forest as an Archetype; Scientific Appreciation of Forests; Pre-colonial, Colonial and Post-colonial forests; Forests in children’s literature; in Fairy tale; Planted forests; The Forest and the Sublime; and the Sacred; as ethical symbols; The phenomenology of forests; Forests and the philosophers.

300 word abstracts should be submitted to Pat Louw or Catherine Addison, English Department, University of Zululand by the 30 May 2007.

Contact: plouw@pan.uzulu.ac.za or
caddison@pan.uzulu.ac.za

THE 21ST ANNUAL CONFERENCE
 OF THE SOCIETY FOR
 LITERATURE, SCIENCE AND THE
 ARTS (SLSA)
 1-4 November 2007
 Portland, Maine (USA)
 "Code"

We welcome paper and panel submissions that explore any type/aspect/nature/culture of code in any period of history. Plenary Speakers: **N. Katherine Hayles**, UCLA; **Brian Massumi**, Université de Montréal

Biological and algorithmic, protector of secrets and porthole to mysteries, universal and singular, code is an invitation to thought. Code can be "wet" (genetic, organic, human), "dry" (digital, mathematical, logical), something in-between, neither, or both (linguistic, symbolic, religious, moral, legal). Code is the meeting ground of strange bedfellows, the cipherer and decipherer, the domain of law and its subversion, communication and privacy. Code is about patterns, sequences, systems, translations, substitutions. It can bind, trick, and free. Modern technologies are affording us more and more keys to unlock nature's code and more opportunities to manipulate it.

Also welcome are submissions on any aspect of science's relationship with literature and the arts, including ones presented in non-traditional formats (such as film/video, performance, music, or visual art).

Deadline for paper and panel submissions: 15 March 2007
 More info: <http://www.slsa07.com/>



Altitude 7,
Culture and Climate Change
 Edited by **Emily Potter** and **Paul Starr**
www.altitude21c.com

ASLE-ANZ Membership fees for 2006/07 are now due.

A grown-up version of the Membership Form can be downloaded from <http://www.asle-anz.asn.au/>

To submit items to ASLE-ANZ *ANewZletter* email CA.Cranston@utas.edu.au (Australia) or Charles.Dawson@justice.govt.nz (NZ)