



asle-anz



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

Issue #1 2005 ASLE-ANewZletter

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

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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT, *Kate Rigby*

Welcome to ASLE-ANZ!

The first Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment was founded in the US in 1992, and the following year began publishing its own journal, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment*. It now boasts a membership of over 1,000 from around the world. In the meantime, affiliated Associations have been established in Japan, Britain, Germany and South Korea.

Many of the founding members of ASLE had a particular interest in non-fiction nature writing, a genre that is well represented in North American literature, but hitherto relatively little studied by literary scholars. This genre retains an important place in the work of ASLE, and it is hoped that the formation of an affiliated Association in Australia and New Zealand will encourage new writing and criticism of this kind in our region. In this connection, it bodes well that our inaugural Vice President (Australia) is both a scholar and an adept of place-based environmental writing. Right from the start, though, the brief of

ASLE was considerably broader than this, encompassing a concern with the interrelationship of human culture and the and the more-than-human natural world as manifested especially in all forms of literature, from natural history to lyric poetry, the Bible to *Frankenstein*, but also to some extent in other media as well, including film, television, theatre, music and art.

At a time when inter- and cross-disciplinary research was being encouraged within Arts Faculties, moreover, ASLE called for an even more radical opening of the disciplinary divide: namely between the humanities and the natural sciences. Historically, this separation became more pronounced in the 19th century as the Industrial Revolution gathered pace and subsequently made it more difficult to address its adverse environmental consequences.

Giving concrete institutional form to the binary opposition of Man and Nature, Mind and Matter that had long plagued Western thought, the divorce of the humanities from the natural sciences masked the extent to which the global ecological crisis of the late 20th century was as much cultural as technological in origin, and stymied the cross-disciplinary conversations and collaborations that remain essential in seeking long-term solutions. Today, ASLE provides an important forum in which such conversations and collaborations are beginning to take place.

In recent years, ASLE has begun to move away from its earlier focus on 'wilderness' towards a greater concern

with urban and rural ecologies and with environmental justice issues. Meanwhile, the creation of affiliated Associations in several different parts of the world, including our own, promises to contribute to the further diversification of the many and varied perspectives and preoccupations characterising the Study of Literature and the Environment globally. Ecocriticism and environmental literature, as **Scott Slovic** has observed (citing Walt Whitman), is “large and contains multitudes.” (1)

While literature, broadly conceived, will comprise the core concern of ASLE in Australia and New Zealand, given our relatively small populations we believe that it is imperative that we also invite the participation of people working in other media and research areas, including cultural studies, critical theory, performance studies and visual art. In this way, we hope that ASLE will be able to make a distinctive contribution to the emergent field of the “ecological humanities” in our region. In her invitation to join the “Ecological Humanities in Action,” for which the *Australian Humanities Review* now has a dedicated “corner,” Deborah Bird Rose discusses an impressive array of recent Australian research in this field (2). Much of this work is concerned with, or arises from, the specificities of the Australian experience of colonisation, in which the cultural gulf between coloniser and colonised, as well as the environmental disparity between the climate, topography and biotic communities of the ‘old’ and ‘new’ worlds, were arguably greater than in most other settler societies.

It is to be anticipated that **ASLE-ANZ** will help to further such work on the dynamic interactions of culture, nature and (de)colonisation in Australia and

New Zealand. However, we are also keen to foster the development of a regional perspective on the study of other cultures and environments as well. In this connection, it is noteworthy that I am a Germanist by training, with a particular interest in European Romanticism, while our valiant Secretary-Treasurer, **Monica Moore**, who hails from Uruguay, is a Hispanist specialising in Latin American literature.

‘Be true to the earth...’

This breadth of scholarly and creative engagement was reflected in our inaugural conference, which took as its theme Friedrich Nietzsche’s exhortation in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* to “be true to the earth.” We are extremely grateful to the editors of the postgraduate student journal, *Colloquy*, at Monash University, who hosted the conference under the leadership of **Peter Coleman**, our inaugural Postgraduate Representative.

Thanks are due also to the Monash Graduate Research School, the Arts Faculty and the Schools of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics and Literary, Visual and Performance Studies for their generosity

Colloquy

text/theory/criticism:

<http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/others/colloquy>

with funding, which enabled us to invite two outstanding keynote speakers from abroad, both of whom are past Presidents of ASLE in the US and the UK, respectively: **Louise Westling** and **Richard Kerridge**. We were also very fortunate to have **Greg Garrard**, the current Chair of ASLE-UK, and ecophilosopher **David Abram** as plenary speakers.

However the call to ‘be true to the earth’ is understood and embodied, responding to it has almost certainly become more difficult in the century or so since the

wayward German philosopher first framed it: not only because we inhabit a social world that puts people at an ever greater remove from the earth; but also because the earth itself seems to be turning against us. The kind of environmental cataclysm that is represented so spectacularly in the film “The Day After Tomorrow” might still seem remote. It is nonetheless high time that we redoubled our efforts to render our inhabitation of the planet more ecologically sustainable and socially just. This work of ecosocial transformation and reconciliation calls for the full engagement of our hearts, minds and imaginations. To that end, then, let me welcome you warmly to the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment.

Kate Rigby
Monash University

(1) Scott Slovic, contribution to “Special Forum on Literatures of the Environment,” *PMLA* 114/5 (Oct. 1999), p.1102.

(2) Deborah Bird Rose, “The Ecological Humanities in Action: An Invitation,”
<http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/>

‘RIISING TO THE CHALLENGE? ‘MAKE ECOCRITICISM SEXY’:

ASLE-ANZ Vice-President (Australia),
Mark Tredinnick

At the opening plenary of the inaugural conference of ASLE-ANZ (Monash University, Melbourne, 31 March–2 April 2005) **Richard Kerridge** encouraged us to make ecocriticism sexy. In the two days that followed we did the best we could. If sex involves passionate engagement, something more than furious agreement, the odd energetic tussle, sustained attention, playfulness, generosity, seriousness, and — now and then — astonishment, I’d say we did pretty well.

Nietzsche’s phrase “Be true to the Earth” was our theme, and — from Levinas and Derrida to New Zealand dams and river dryads, from Tolkien to Pooh Sticks, from drought to Arctic ethnography, from Luke to singing stones, from the poetics of the beach to the consumption of the nation’s capital, from *Gilgamesh* to *Kangaroo*, from pan-psychism to eco-scepticism, from subjunctive apprehension of land to ordinary wilderness and the love of matter — there was a fair bit of truth and a whole lot of Earth about.

“Be true to the Earth” opened with a gentle but powerful welcome to country performed by Wirundjeri Elder **Vicky Nicholson-Brown** — the conference’s first and deepest enactment of its theme. Then we embarked on a mix of plenary sessions, panel discussions, papers presented in the traditional way, readings of poetry and prose and fieldtrips to the ash forests of the Dandenong and CERES, an inner-urban community environment park. And all this engendered an animated and ongoing conversation with and about the Earth.

Local and international eco-scholars from philosophy, cultural studies, literature, place studies, anthropology and the earth sciences joined writers, artists, and activists to make a brilliant local and global (and sometimes cacophonous) choir. There were many fine papers and a few innovative approaches. A generous and hopeful spirit and a fiercely engaged intelligence characterised our discussion and celebrations. And a hundred of us, give or take, were there to make this happen — a pretty good attendance for our first gig. ASLE-ANZ is now in the world — a force of nature, of *eros* and *ecos*. My colleague **Kate Rigby**, our founding president, deserves the credit for this achievement, for she sang up the

conference with very little help in a matter of six months.

Nothing would have happened, though, had the journal *Colloquy* not taken an interest in ecocriticism and put their support behind the conference. Thanks to **Peter Coleman** and the team. My thanks, also, to **Charles Dawson**, Vice-President New Zealand, who presented a beautiful paper, who brought with him a strong Kiwi contingent and who is working hard to grow the business in the land of the long white cloud!

We hope to see all of you and many more—from all across the ASLE world — in two years' time for our second conference. Watch this spot for news.



WATERMARK LITERARY MUSTER
Tuesday October 4-Saturday October 9

Biennial celebration of the literature of nature and place. Tickets now on sale, email for a brochure or order on-line:

<http://www.watermarkliterarysociety.asn.au/>

TENA KOUTOU KATOA KI NGA MEMA O ASLE-ANZ!

ASLE-ANZ Vice-President (New Zealand), **Charles Dawson**

Kia ora mo to wa, me to whakaaro nui ki a tatou. Greetings to ASLE-ANZ members: thanks for your time and thoughts.

Shall we get [encyclopaedic](#) with a new site? How about with the NZ tradition in phatic communion, the [weather](#)? August was the warmest here since records

began ([water issues](#) abound, many are concerned with the poor state of our [rivers](#)). It was kowhai time in spring, then: yes, the kowhai trees are in bright-yellow bloom, much to the delight of local [tui](#) in my neighbourhood (and thus to local [ears!](#)). They are flourishing courtesy of the nearby [Otari Open Air Native Plant Museum](#), the [Karori Wildlife Sanctuary](#) (a predator-proofed former reservoir with a 500-year plan!) and concerted possum-eradication [please take back the 80 million of 'em dear Aussies: they eat 21,000 tonnes of native leaf per night! We can't make enough lovely jerseys with their fur!].

One night last month I walked past a street lamp and was transfixed by a ruru, or morepork: it sat right beneath the orange lamplight, on a wire, calmly eyeing me up. I froze, 10 feet from the bird, gazing at the precision of its swiveling head, its stocky body. Returning home to get a camera, to record to sight for my young sons, I ponder the gains of possum poisoning, the loss of birdsong and its fragile recovery. I wonder at the fences jewels of the Sanctuary, the asphalt leading to its gate and to mine. Over in the dark vast hills opposite my home more ruru sing, and when I return to the wire the bird has gone, home to its darkness, to wrench the head from mice, to battle with possum, to call out in its [ancient song](#). My sons sleep on while all around them the night creatures do their work.

As Al Morrison of DOC says, such restoration counts:

These are small beginnings. But they are deliberate and purposeful beginnings. The overflow from the bird corridors that flow to the Karori sanctuary, the results of an aggressive possum poisoning programme by local authorities in the green belt, feeding stations and native plantings

in tiny local gardens, the neighbour's installing of a bell-collar round the ginger moggy's neck to warn birds of his ill-intentions.

This is intrinsic worth. It is the community valuing its heritage for itself and for the future. We cannot help ourselves. The values of our land and seascape are deeply ingrained in us. They define who and what we are as a unique people. They bind us as a nation. They inspire our painters, our composers and songwriters, our film makers, our writers and poets.

Hone Tuwhare encapsulates the real, lasting worth of Conservation in his poem, Papa-tu-a-nuku, Earth mother.

We are stroking, caressing the spine of the land.

We are massaging the ricked back of the land

With our sore but ever loving feet: hell she loves it!

Squirming, the land wriggles in delight.

We love her.

More about restoration projects:

www.mtbruce.org.nz. Many round the country, including comments on the [general election](#) are at www.forestandbird.org.nz. There is a [site](#) grading political party environmental policies; I personally think a lot will hinge on the result.

Do please contact me with a message for any member you have read about, or if you would like to pass on your email.

Ka kite ano: see you later

Charles Dawson
cmj@actrix.co.nz

VISUAL ARTISTS PERSPECTIVE: CREATIVE TERRITORIES INAUGURAL CONFERENCE QUEENSLAND 2005

Mercia Morton

Most contemporary visual arts practice that reaches beyond mere illustration restricts itself to simply reflecting back society's own alienated constructions of itself. Much rarer is the practice of direct dialogic encounter with the natural world, where the rediscovery, decoding and reconstitution of unrevealed deeper narratives—whose unseen filaments bind together the stuff of the world—have the power to release a surge of collective meaning.

Such concerns inform the practice of members of AININ, Artists in Nature International Network, whose inaugural Australian annual conference, Creative Territories, was held at Noosa, Queensland, on 17 and 18 June. I was privileged to attend the conference which was sandwiched between two major local site-specific sculpture projects in nature involving artists from Europe, Canada, South Africa, South Korea and Australia: The Floating Land, a major art event convened by the Noosa Regional Gallery and Farming with Mary, an exchange of art and culture on farms in the hinterland Mary River valley.

AININ criteria that diverge from that of other land art movements include: (i) work should be 'site-specific', created in a spirit of respectful encounter with both natural and human habitats—art for the site, not the site for the work; (ii) materials primarily found on site are used to create often ephemeral works which resist commodification by the art market. (ASLE members who wish

to broaden their cultural focus may refer to the websites below).

Of particular interest were keynote speakers **Jean Bojko** of France and Ri Eung-Woo of Korea. For innovative arts activist Jean Bojko, people are the 'site' with which he works. He has created deeply subversive but irresistibly festive projects in rural French villages, including 'Project for a True Opening', homeless people hired to write poetry and drama; 32+32=2000, where 32 artists were 'married' with 32 small villages. In defiance of the customary pressure by arts funding bodies to maximize spectator numbers to encourage commercial viability, Bojko declares "we aim to reduce the spectators ... we want to have only *actors*, not spectators!" And yet clever publicity strategies have resulted in extraordinary media exposure, and consequently no shortage of sponsorship.

Ri Eung-Woo is the founding member and thinker behind Yatoo, the principle nature art event in South Korea since 1981. Yatoo is interesting in that it was conceived quite independently of fledging land art movements in the West, and evolved authentically within the context of Korean philosophical, religious and shamanic traditions of veneration of nature.

"each time,
a dialogue with a site, its memory,
its structure,
its imaginary potential, its function
and the community
it belongs to."

...**Francois Davin**, president and founding member of AININ

www.artinnature.org/ (go to Mission & Direction)
www.noosaregionalgallery.org/floating.html
www.farmingwithmary.com
www.francois-davin.net/ and
<http://www.francoisdavin.net/statement.htm>
www.theatreprouvette.com (for Jean Bojko) and
perso.wanadoo.fr/theatreprouvette/inenglish yatoo.or.kr (check Google for others)

MEMBERS' PUBLICATIONS

Watermarks Watermarks

Southerly 64:2, 2004

Co-editors Mark Tredinnick and Nicolette Stasko

Dedicated to nature writing and ecocriticism

CA. Cranston

— 'Quaker Writers in Tasmania', *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* Thoemmes:2005

— 'Narrative Streams', *Island* 101 2005

Ashley Hay and Robyn Stacy,

— *Herbarium*, Cambridge University Press. Herbarium is a collection of images, essays, and scientific notes drawing on the specimens held at the National Herbarium of New South Wales.

<http://www.cambridge.org/aus/catalogue/catalogue.asp?isbn=0521842778>><http://www.cambridge.org/aus/catalogue/catalogue.asp?isbn=0521842778>

Rosaleen Love

— *The Traveling Tide*, Seattle: Aqueduct Press. Short stories; ecological themes.

Kate Rigby

— *Topographies of the Sacred; the Poetics of Place in European Romanticism*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004.

Libby Robbin

— *A Change in the Weather: Climate and Culture in Australia*. Essay collection. Contributors Bill Bunbury, Daniel Connell, Tom Griffiths, Richard Grove, Clive Hamilton, R.W. Home, Ian Lowe, Janet McCalman, Tony McMichael, Neville Nicholls, Libby Robin, Deborah Rose, Janis Sheldrick, Tim Sherratt, Mike Smith, David Walker. Contact nmasales@nma.gov.au

Libby Robbin, Mandy Martin, and Mike Smith

— *Strata: Deserts, past, present and future*. mandy.martin@bigpond.com

Deborah Bird Rose

— *Reports from a Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonisation*, UNSW Press, 2004. Shortlisted NSW Premier's Award.

Mark Tredinnick

— *The Land's Wild Music*. San Antonio: Trinity Press (tbp November). Described as a writer's road trip through the home terrains, prose and poetry of Barry Lopez, Peter Matthiessen, Terry Tempest Williams, and James Galvin.

Chris Wallace-Crabbe

— *Imagining Australia: Literature and Culture in the New World*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Committee on Australian Studies. (Edited with **Judith Ryan**)

— *Read it Again*. Cambridge: Salt Publishing

— *The Universe Looks Down*. Sydney: Brandl & Schlesing (tbp 10/05)

— *Dante: The Flowery Meadow*. Melbourne: Electio Editions (tbp 2005) (co-authored with **Bruno Leti**)

MEMBERS ACTIVITIES (AUSTRALIA)

Chris Wallace-Crabbe will be Visiting Fellow at the University of Venice, Ca'Foscari, through the Palladio Foundation, during October 2005.

CA. Cranston, Kate Rigby, and Mark Tredinnick presented papers at the ASLE conference, Eugene, Oregon (June 21-25).

NEW ZEALAND PUBLICATIONS AND ACTIVITIES—An Overview
Compiled by **Charles Dawson**

I hope what I mention below offers you some insight in to the calibre and diversity of some current NZ members. They're a small bunch of very high quality!

Where possible I have mentioned members' books or other information on the internet via embedded links. This is one way to meet and find out a little about NZ members and the burgeoning range of literatures, art, restoration projects, [biodiversity](#), [Maori and Treaty of Waitangi issues](#) that touch on environmental elements.

Where to begin?

- Perhaps you could begin with two poets, members who work with words within the land and are attuned to the ways people and language nestle or travel across space, [Dinah Hawken](#) ["Imagine behind these lines dozens and dozens /of tiny seed heads whispering"] and [Anna Jackson](#) ["We kept driving for two days till we got to Ninety Mile Beach // where we got out of the car but kept running till we hit the sea."]. I love the way they attend to people land and politics, how they make space in their work for the image to

unfold.

- Perhaps you could begin with the first singers of this land, [nga manu, the birds](#), and hear a haunting imitation of the [huia](#), now extinct.
- Perhaps you could read about two neat artists-in-residence awards in very different places: [Antarctica](#) and [NZ Conservation lands](#), run by agencies that try to stem extinction.

There are too many recent books/[awards](#) to cover in one newsletter. Given this is the first ASLE-ANZ one, I'd like to point our Australian members to The Oxford [Environmental Histories of New Zealand](#). One contributor is ASLE member [Geoff Park](#); his work on Maori and colonial stories and mythologies (and their interwoven dissonances) in Aotearoa New Zealand's lowland forests and the conservation ethic attracts wide interest.

[David Young](#) paddled the Whanganui River with Geoff, and has written on the [Maori of that storied current](#). David's work [Our Islands, Ourselves: A History of Conservation in New Zealand](#) was launched last year. David has, like many members (such as **Trish Sarr** and **Keith Johnston**, founders of Friends of the Earth NZ in the 1970s) a long pedigree in environmental issues. He lectured on the Treaty of Waitangi and conservation (ask me for a copy) and is now working on a book on the whio, or rare blue duck.

Neville Peat is another member with a distinguished record of writing, advocacy and the hard graft of regional bylaws, development and policy development. A specialist in the Otago region and its history and land, [one of his many books](#) is about the areas many braided rivers.

Living near and writing about the tuna [eels] in the Otaki River is **Pataka Moore** (of Ngati Raukawa). Pataka

teaches at [Te Wananga O Raukawa](#) with a focus on Maoritanga, the blossoming of tino [rangatiratanga, resource management](#) and environmental planning/law and there are many links on the TWOR site, e.g. on [Maori and I.T.](#)

Peter Gibbons is one of our top historians of non-fiction in NZ, and recently gave a fascinating talk at the [Stout Centre](#) on the iconography of tourism, state control of tourism and the domination and marginalisation of Maori from that [branded](#) landscape.

[Jenny Lawn](#) has wide-ranging interests (like all ASLE-ANZ members!) including the gothic in literature, NZ literature (especially [Janet Frame](#)), the branding of NZ with **Lord of the Rings**, and cultural policy and national identity. She was guest editor (with **Mark Williams** and **Michael Hall**) of "The Idea of Place: New Zealand Issue" a special issue of *Australian-Canadian Studies* 18.1-2 (2000).

[Lydia Wevers](#) pays particular attention to the short story form in New Zealand and Australia, and publishes extensively on Australian and NZ literature and NZ travel writing. She joins me in planning an interdisciplinary conference on river issues set for October 2006.

[Keith Lyons](#) is currently researching and writing on the search for Shangri-la, looking at physical locations in China and Tibet claiming to be the real Shangri-la, contrasting this with the realities for the inhabitants and the environment, and examining the perceptions of paradise on earth of Western writers who travelled in south west China. The last I heard from him he was trying to enter Tibet.

Betsan Martin continues her work in philosophy of education, **Nietzsche**,

Luce Irigaray and **Emmanuel Levinas**. The conference topic in Australia provided Martin with an opening to re-engage philosophically and weave in current work in ecology such as that of **Arne Naess** and **Calum Coats**. Working with Te Tiriti and in collaboration with tangata whenua has been an enduring theme for her, currently expressed in her role as facilitator of environmental wananga with a hapu in Tuwharetoa. This is a kaitiakitanga project to involve people in enhancement of the land and waterways.

Martin is also on the steering committee for A Charter of Human Responsibility, with 14 representatives world wide. This is an international initiative of a Foundation in France, working with themes of responsibility, ethical governance and alternatives to development. The purpose is to integrate societies and diverse cultural values with environmental responsibility. In this region of Aotearoa-New Zealand, the Pacific and Australia, the Charter for Responsibility is being carried out with tangata whenua and indigenous peoples along with tauwi/late settlers.

<http://www.alliance21.org/forums/info/chart-resp>

Jocelyn Rennie is writing her PhD thesis (English Department, University of Auckland) on the Herbert Guthrie-Smith's treatment of the geography and geology of his sheep station, Tutira. Jocelyn's work on *Tutira* has contemporary resonance: in Crosby's **The Ecological Imagination** **Richard White** cites *Tutira* as the crucial reason he entered the field of environmental history; it was recently reprinted and was cited in a [Waitangi Tribunal report](#) on land confiscations from Maori in the area.

[Juliana Tait](#) paints NZ native birds, and

gave a well-received talk on Maori art at the inaugural ASLE-ANZ conference and continues her art and art history/research work, including [contact](#) with [Joanna Braithwaite](#) Juliana is the Canterbury Council secretary for the Royal Society of NZ; RSNZ runs a neat [river resource for teachers](#)

Chip Rawlins is a Wyoming poet and writer, our most far-flung 'Aslean': Kia ora, Charles and ASLE-ANZ! *Current work*: Trying to finish a book on mountain streams for Henry Holt & Co. (NY). Also collecting field data for a paleoflood chronology of the North Platte River, Wyoming, USA.

Research interests: NZ literature and history (especially Canterbury 1890-1915), and Ngai Tahu land issues.

Thoughts? Three wonderful whitewater trips this season: Escalante, North Platte, and Desolation Canyon. Next year at this time, I hope to be in NZ.

CONFERENCE CALL

University of Queensland Faculty of Arts

presents

environment, culture & community 2:
celebrating the role of creativity in the
formation of environmental values
creating productive dialogues across
practices and disciplines

23 & 24 November, 2005

Enquiries Ruth Blair, English, Media
Studies & Art History 07-3365-2590
r.blair@uq.edu.au

Kumi Kato, Languages &
Comparative Cultural Studies 07-
3365-6810 k.kato@uq.edu.au
www.emsah.uq.edu.au/conferences/ec2/index.htm

To submit comments, publications, activities
to ASLE-ANZ AnewZletter: email
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