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Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities, Volume 2, Number 2, Spring 2015, pp. 65-70 (Article)

Published by University of Nebraska Press



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European Editor's Introduction

MICHAELA CASTELLANOS

It is with great delight that I accept Stephanie LeMenager and Stephanie Foote's invitation to become *Resilience's* European editor! My aim in this position is to create a platform that increases the visibility of European scholarship and puts it in direct conversation with contributions to the environmental humanities from North America and beyond. With this purpose in mind, I am planning a series of features called COMPOSTINGS. Each of them will be centered on a single concept crucial to theorizing ecocriticism and the environmental humanities and will present responses from several scholars in the field.

This effort is motivated by persistent claims that these areas of academic activity lack a solid theoretical basis for their critical engagements. It is just as much a response to a very urgent sense that theory is a necessity, not a luxury, in this moment of ecological crises.¹

The emotions accompanying the prospect of "taking full ownership of the Anthropocene" have been equated with what one might feel upon "waking up on the first car on the first run of a new roller coaster that hasn't been examined fully by engineers."² One could imagine a peculiar thrill amplified by an *awareness* of the precariousness of the situation and the inability to control the outcome. For me, it is also a pretty fair description of what it feels like to engage in environmental humanities scholarship. As a PhD candidate still learning the craft of my own discipline, I find it challenging and often disorienting to navigate the interdisciplinarity of this consolidating field. Exploring research from a variety of disciplines is invigorating on a good day and paralyzing the next. While excursions into unaccustomed ways of thinking are con-

ducive to creative thinking, they can also make it difficult to reconcile the often contradictory concepts, approaches, and methodologies I encounter, let alone making them productive for my own scholarly work.

Engaging in environmental humanities scholarship with a theoretical framework that goes beyond the basic tenets of humanism is a particularly difficult task. How do I get around reinstating the dichotomies I intend to question? Things are getting complicated on a material level. With corals ingesting tiny bits of plastic, for example, nature and culture are blurring each other beyond recognition. But does such physical mixing render analytical distinctions between nature and society irrelevant?³ The strain that is put on concepts like nature, culture, and the human has the potential to throw even the self-understanding of individual humanities disciplines into question.⁴ A good dose of resilience is required of academics who face the unwieldiness of concepts and discourses and attempt to inhabit a place from which to think, speak, and write.

COMPOSTINGS, the series of features I am planning, is designed to be an exercise in scholarly resilience. It is motivated by several intricately connected goals: surveying the existing critical depth of the environmental humanities as an emerging field; exploring the potentials and limits of high-currency terms; and collaboratively cultivating new concepts, ideas, and ways of thinking. Scholars will be invited to share their own frustrations, misadventures, and ways of coming to terms with or overcoming the restraints of theoretical concepts and approaches in a spirit that celebrates, not condemns, paradoxes, impasses, and our ultimate inability to know. Communicating across disciplinary boundaries or with nonacademic audiences, a vitally important skill in this field, requires language to be more direct yet more adaptable. Often, this need appears to stand in direct contrast to the need for theoretical precision, particularization instead of generalization, and finer-grained concepts with which to analyze source materials. What we need are concepts that can be stretched without losing their specificity rather than “plastic words” that have “become so general that they can apply to anything, and so apply to nothing.”⁵ I am looking forward to discovering what the COMPOSTINGS will have to offer in this respect. It is my hope that they become part of a practice of loving our monsters in which we examine conflicted concepts closely as they break down and transform into a nourishing substance that helps new things grow.⁶

The choice of concepts to be explored in these COMPOSTINGS will in-

evitably be informed by the current research interests of junior scholars who are both shaped by and actively shaping the environmental humanities in Europe. One of the most exciting developments on a structural level is the increasing institutional support for the next generation of environmental humanities scholars. Doctoral students with research projects in ecocriticism have begun to organize themselves and are now becoming affiliated with several major professional organizations. The postgraduate forum Environment, Literature, Culture (ELC), founded in Germany in 2013, has held two workshops in Germany.⁷ Now that this forum is supported by the European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture, and the Environment (EASLCE), these workshops will take place annually at different locations across Europe, starting with 2015's meeting in Stockholm. The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, UK and Ireland (ASLE-UKI), hosted a postgraduate conference in Dublin in the summer of 2014.⁸ Moreover, the creation of structured research programs like the multidisciplinary PhD training program recently created by ENHANCE (Environmental Humanities for a Concerned Europe) shows that the basis for future environmental humanities research is solidifying.⁹

The environmental humanities in Europe is by no means a uniform entity; the respective weight of individual disciplines in the field, research foci, and even access to institutional support vary greatly. The many new web-based activities that are now available are therefore especially important tools. Online courses like *The Anthropocene: A History of the World*, offered by the University of Umeå, Sweden, or the webinars offered to the EASLCE members—most recently hosted by Hubert Zapf, Stephanie LeMenager, and Stacy Alaimo—are just some examples of opportunities for lively debate among junior researchers and established scholars.¹⁰ European-based journals such as *Ecozon@*, an ecocritical journal that accepts papers in five languages to increase the visibility of nonanglophone contributions; *Green Letters*; or *Antennae*, whose year-long project *Beyond Animal Studies* focuses on emerging theories like multispecies intra-action, attest to the variety of theoretical and methodological underpinnings of current European environmental humanities scholarship. These underpinnings are, furthermore, reflected in conference proceedings, such as those from larger conferences like that of the Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts Europe (SLSAEU), “Life, in Theory” (Turin, Italy, June 3–6, 2014); that of

the German Association of American Studies (GAAS), “America after Nature” (Würzburg, Germany, June 12–15, 2014); and that of the EASLCE and the Nordic Network of Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies (NIES), “Framing Nature: Signs, Stories, and Ecologies of Meaning” (Tartu, Estonia, April 29–May 3, 2014). Other publications—like the upcoming publications associated with the symposium for the NIES and ECOHUM, “Rethinking Environmental Consciousness” (Sundsvall, Sweden, December 5–8, 2014), or *The Anticipation of Catastrophe: Environmental Risk in North American Literature and Culture*, edited by Sylvia Mayer and Alexandra von Mossner, which resulted from smaller but no less important events—likewise reflect an ongoing engagement with the need for new forms of theory-informed scholarly practice engendered by environmental crises.

The aim of making risk productive as a category of analysis for literary and other texts is one that I also pursue in my own research and that originated during my studies at the University of Bayreuth, Germany, where this focus is pursued in the context of American studies. As my interest in large-scale metaphors and narrative deep structure combined with curiosity about how the notion of the human is negotiated in relation to the physical environment and nonhuman animals, I began to wonder how notions like human and animal might be changing under the influence of environmental crises. These areas of inquiry come together in my dissertation, a study of North American popular-culture texts that prominently feature cetaceans (whales, dolphins, and porpoises). Retracing scientific and other cultural imaginaries of this group of nonhuman animals, I draw on sociological research on risk and uncertainty as well as theories and methods from animal studies and the environmental humanities to analyze how cetaceans figure in the staging of risk. This PhD research project is based at Mid Sweden University in Sundsvall, Sweden, where an interdisciplinary environmental humanities hub (ECOHUM) has recently been established.

I look forward to creating a platform for critical engagements with the range and depth of European environmental humanities scholarship, of which the selections above are just samples that reflect my personal experience. *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities* dares us to respond to crisis with creative reimagining, and I am thrilled to be on board.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michaela Castellanos is a PhD candidate at Mid Sweden University in Sundsvall, Sweden, and is affiliated with its environmental humanities hub ECOHUM. In her doctoral thesis, she assesses how cetaceans (whales, dolphins, and porpoises) figure in risk staging in popular-culture texts. Her research interests include areas of intersection between animal studies and the environmental humanities, sociological theories of risk and uncertainty, and irony in relation to narrative ethics. Michaela is the current webinar coordinator for EASLCE and is the European editor of *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities*.

NOTES

1. I am riffing on Audrey Lorde's "Poetry Is Not a Luxury" here.
2. Revkin, "Embracing the Anthropocene."
3. Malm and Hornborg, "Geology of Mankind," 62–63.
4. Chakrabarty, "Climate of History."
5. Laan, "Plastic Words," 350.
6. Latour, "Love Your Monsters."
7. The themes of the postgraduate workshops were "Ecocriticism and Globalization" (forum, Frankfurt, June 21–22, 2013), <https://docforumelc.wordpress.com/postgraduate-forum-2013/>; and "Ecological Othering and Biopolitics in the Environmental Humanities" (forum, Munich, October 10–11, 2014), <https://docforumelc.wordpress.com/postgraduate-workshop-2014/>.
8. The theme of the postgraduate conference was "Locating Ecocriticism: Systems, Methodologies, Contexts" (conference forum, University College Dublin, July 30–31, 2014), <http://www.easlce.eu/news/other/asle-uki-postgraduate-conference-30-31-july-2014/>.
9. The research group ENHANCE has created a Marie Curie training group for PhD candidates with twelve positions spread out among four European institutions, "Environmental Humanities for a Concerned Europe, Marie Curie ITN," *Environmental Humanities for a Concerned Europe, Marie Curie ITN* (blog), accessed August 13, 2015, <https://enhanceeu.wordpress.com/>.
10. These recent EASLCE webinar topics were "Literature and/as Cultural Ecology," "The Cultures of Energy," and "Bodily Natures, Anthropocene Subjects," hosted by Hubert Zapf (Universität Augsburg, Germany, January 31, 2014), Stephanie LeMenager (University of Oregon, December 13, 2014), and Stacy Alaimo (University of Texas, Arlington, February 11, 2015), respectively. Past webinar descriptions are linked to the EASLCE website, at <http://www.easlce.eu/category/news/conferences/webinars/> (accessed August 13, 2015).

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