



# ASLE News

A Biannual Publication of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment

Spring 1996

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## LETTER TO ASLE MEMBERS

Greetings, friends,

I hope this *Newsletter* finds you well and ready for the pleasures of the season. In keeping with the new, abbreviated format of the *Newsletter*, I've promised to keep my note brief, so let me quickly detail just a few of ASLE's ongoing and upcoming projects and activities.

### Welcome to New ASLE Officers

We are remarkably fortunate to have John Tallmadge joining us as vice-president. John is a senior scholar of literature and environment, is a nature writer himself (his book, *Meeting the Tree of Life*, is forthcoming from the University of Utah Press), has a great deal of experience with outdoor/experiential environmental education, has long been involved with related organizations such as the Orion Society, and even brings to us the savvy of a former dean (though we won't hold that against him). John is a generous, wise, and good humored person, and I'm certain that you will all enjoy working with him in the coming years. John will serve as vice-president until the end of 1996, at which time he will begin his one-year term as President.

We also wish to extend a warm welcome to our two new Executive Council members, Suzanne Ross (St. Cloud State University) and Melissa Walker (Emory University). Both Suzanne and Melissa are deeply engaged with environmental literature and women's studies, and each brings a unique set of experiences and ideas to ASLE's most important working committee. In recent months, ASLE Officers, Executive Council members, and Project Coordinators have been circulating a 10,000-word "working letter," a document intended to help us solicit ideas, monitor the progress of current activities, and plan effectively for upcoming conferences, publications, and projects. I also wish to thank the many dedicated, qualified candidates who participated in this year's elections. The impressive choices available on our ballot ensured that we would add outstanding personnel regardless of the outcome of the election.

### Announcing a New Editor and Format for the ASLE Newsletter

As you have no doubt noticed, our newsletter has now begun its transition from a mini-journal to a brief-format publication devoted to the exchange of letters, news, announcements, and information of interest to the membership. We are pleased to welcome as our new Newsletter editor Ralph Black, who takes over the position from founding ASLE President Scott Slovic. Ralph has been involved with ASLE since its inception, has already done work on ASLE's behalf, and was a contender in the recent election for ASLE Executive Council. He also possesses the three qualities most important for success in the position he is assuming: high standards, a sense of humor, and an understanding of the word "deadline." Among his numerous qualifications for the position, Ralph has until recently served as editor of *Wake*

*Robin*, the very fine newsletter of the John Burroughs Association. Again, our deep thanks to the many highly-qualified ASLE folks who offered to serve as Newsletter Editor.

### Hawai'i Symposium on Japanese and American Nature Writing Planned

ASLE holds its major conference biennially in odd-numbered years. In even-numbered years we hope to conduct regional symposia that are more specific in focus. The 1996 symposium, which focuses on "Japanese and American Environmental Literature," will be held August 13-17 at the University of Hawai'i, Manoa (the call for papers was published in the last issue of the Newsletter). Hosted by Frank Stewart of the University of Hawai'i and organized by Scott Slovic of the University of Nevada, Reno, the conference will involve roughly equal participation by members of ASLE-US and ASLE-JAPAN (which now has about 100 members). The confirmed participants include Linda Hogan, David Quammen, and W.S. Merwin.

Don't forget, of course, that our next biennial conference will be hosted by Hank Harrington, Director of the Environmental Writing Institute at the University of Montana, in Missoula during the summer of 1997. Further details on this event will be included in the fall issue of the Newsletter.

### Graduate Mentoring Program Up and Running

Thanks to Mentoring Program Coordinator Andrea Herrmann, ASLE has now fully initiated a service that we had long hoped to offer. The purpose of the Mentoring Program is to link ASLE faculty scholars with ASLE graduate students, creating a network of communication and mutual support that will be of special service to participants who find themselves working in relative isolation at their home institution. Although the actual "mentoring" will be as various as the preferences of the individuals participating, it is hoped that the faculty mentor may be able to offer practical advice about professional development, share ideas regarding the student's own scholarship, and perhaps read some of the student's work. Andrea has created a mentoring database, and participants have already been matched up and have begun communicating with one another. Of course, we welcome new participants to the program on an ongoing basis. If you are interested in being or in having an ASLE mentor, please contact: Andrea Herrmann, ASLE Mentoring Coordinator, Department of Rhetoric and Writing, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, 2801 S. University Ave., Little Rock, AR, 72204-1099.

### Other Projects in the Works

**Revised Edition of Graduate Handbook:** First published several years ago, the ASLE Handbook to Graduate Study in Literature and Environment was designed to offer practical ad-

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vice and program profiles to prospective graduate students of literature and environment. The 200 copies of the first edition of the Handbook, produced by former Graduate Liaisons Dan Philippon and George Hart, has done tremendous service and has been sold out for months. Dan has kindly prepared a second printing of the first edition, which is now available for \$5.00 (or 3 copies for \$12.00). To order, please send your check, made out to ASLE, to: Allison Wallace, ASLE Treasurer, Unity College of Maine, HC 78 Box 200, Unity, ME 04988. Because the Handbook has done such good service, and because programs around the country are moving quickly to develop or strengthen programs in literature and environment, ASLE is currently producing a revised edition of the Handbook which will be available later this fall. The Project Coordinator/Editor of the revised edition is Gioia Woods of the University of Nevada, Reno. To make inquiries, offer suggestions, or to request that you be sent an order form at the time of publication, please contact: Gioia Woods, ASLE Handbook Editor, Core Writing Program, Ross Hall, University of Nevada, Reno, Reno, NV 89557.

**ASLE Bibliography:** With the help of a team of annotators, friends, colleagues, and computer geniuses, ASLE Bibliographer Zita Ingham has succeeded in assembling the world's first annotated bibliographies of scholarship in literature and environment. Her first effort, which came out in 1994, covered materials published between 1990 and 1993; the sequel bibliography, published the following year, included materials published during 1994. Dan Philippon has put the first bibliography, which is now completely searchable, on the ASLE Web site (later bibliographies will eventually be put on-line as well). Zita is now at work on the 1995 Bibliography, which will come out later this year. Inquiries, suggestions, or requests to be notified at the time of publication should be sent to Zita Ingham, ASLE Bibliographer, RR 1, Box 3482, Coquille, OR 97423. Having given three years to the very successful bibliography project, Zita is ready to pass the torch after this year's publication. If you think you may be interested in serving as ASLE Bibliographer, please see the relevant announcement included later in this issue of the Newsletter.

**Syllabus Collection:** ASLE Graduate Liaisons Peter Blakemore and Laird Christensen are continuing their work on the ASLE Syllabus Collection, which will eventually be a well-organized, easy-to-use, book-length publication of syllabi in all areas of literature and environment. It is not too late to have your own environmentally-related syllabi published in the collection, so we invite (read: implore) you to take a moment to contribute a syllabus or two to this ongoing project. Please send materials to: Peter Blakemore & Laird Christensen, English Department, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97407.

**Watershed Conference:** We have recently worked with the Orion Society, the Library of Congress, and Poet Laureate Robert Hass to support *Watershed: Writers, Nature, and Community*,

an unprecedented Earth Week gathering of nature writers held in Washington, D.C., April 15-20. Writers participating in the event included Rick Bass, Wendell Berry, Joy Harjo, Linda Hogan, William Kittredge, Barry Lopez, Peter Matthiessen, Gary Paul Nabhan, Richard Nelson, Robert Michael Pyle, Pattiann Rogers, Scott Russell Sanders, Gary Snyder, and Terry Tempest Williams. In addition to supporting this important national program, ASLE members also hosted Watershed parallel events—bioregional and local readings and activities that were organized around the country.

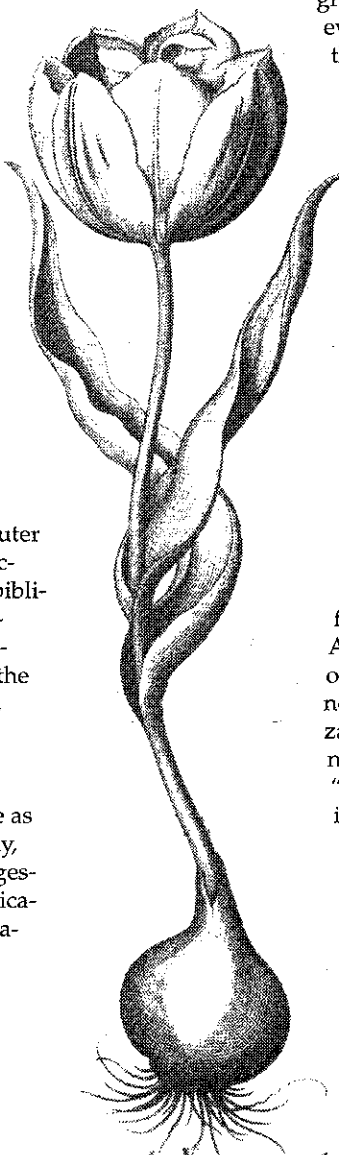
### Opportunities to Become More Involved with ASLE

In closing this brief note, let me remind you that ASLE's various projects, publications, programs, and conferences are run entirely by member volunteers. We are a member-funded organization with no paid staff, and we depend upon your help to sustain and expand our activities. Here is a suggestive rather than a comprehensive list of the sorts of contributions you might make to our ongoing projects: contribute your environmentally oriented syllabi to the Syllabus Collection currently in progress, volunteer to participate in the Mentoring Program, contribute information about programs in literature and environment for the revised edition of our Graduate Handbook, offer to do some annotating of entries for the ASLE Bibliography, organize an ASLE panel at an a conference you plan to attend, help us with organizational fundraising and grantseeking, consider serving as ASLE Secretary, Executive Council member, or Bibliographer (all positions that will be coming open in the next year), make a financial contribution to our organization (contributions are fully tax exempt) and/or renew your membership at a "sustaining member" or "patron" level, offer to host an ASLE symposium during the summer of an even-numbered year, submit a letter or announcement to the Newsletter, or simply contact us with your own good ideas about how you would like to serve (or talk with us about a new project that you would like to see us initiate). I am happy to serve as a clearinghouse for your suggestions, questions, and offers of help. If you will simply contact me, I'll be happy to put you in touch with the appropriate project coordinator, or to talk with you about how you might like to help.

My thanks, as always, to the many ASLE friends who help keep our work so productive and so vital. I look forward to talking (or writing, or meeting, or walking...) with many of you during the upcoming year.

Cheers,

Michael Branch  
President, ASLE  
Department of English/098  
University of Nevada, Reno  
Reno, NV 89557  
(702) 784-8016



*Tulipa ex luteo citrini coloris florum  
lineis dorsalibus variatibus.*

Basil Bessler (Nuremburg, 1613)

## A Message from John Tallmadge, New ASLE Vice-President:

To all who voted for me in the recent election, thanks. I hope to prove worthy of your trust and esteem. ASLE has grown phenomenally since its founding only a few short years ago. We'll need imagination, vigilance, and teamwork to keep our youthful exuberance and irreverence alive as we mature into a large, diversified, and sustainable community. How can we best serve all of our constituents, from graduate students to senior professors, from academicians to activists, editors, and independent scholars, from humanists to conservation biologists? How can we promote the environmental cause without spreading ourselves too thin? How can we reach out to other disciplines, other sectors of education and practice while maintaining our focus in literature? These are the sorts of questions I hope to be thinking about with your input over the next two years.

For those who may not know much about me, a bit of history: I did my graduate work in comparative literature at Yale in the mid-1970s, focusing on the literature of exploration. At Yale I developed a wilderness literature course with a five-day field trip to Mt. Katahdin, in northern Maine. My subsequent work involved the critical study of American nature writers, original nature and wilderness writing (published mainly in *Orion*), and ongoing development of field-oriented literature courses conducted in places like the canyonlands of Utah and the Boundary Waters of Minnesota. I held regular positions in English at the University of Utah and Carleton College. In 1987 I came to Cincinnati as Associate Dean of the Graduate School of the Union Institute, an innovative university for adult learners, and five years later I returned to the faculty where I now work with twenty Ph.D. candidates, a number of whom are pursuing degrees in literature and environmental studies. Union has also allowed me to continue my work in experiential wilderness education; I do seminars in the Boundary Waters, the Sierra Nevada, and the Utah desert.

During my term as an ASLE officer, I expect to be centrally involved in two big ventures: our 1997 conference in Missoula, and our application for affiliated organization status with the MLA. Groundwork for the conference has already been laid by our able director, Hank Harrington. We hope to develop a varied format that will provide for the greatest number of program slots along with ample opportunities to enjoy Montana. Affiliated organization status with the MLA will raise our profile in the scholarly world and allow us to host a session at the yearly MLA meeting, which will provide excellent career advancement opportunities for both junior and senior members of ASLE. Even though many of us would rather go camping, MLA is still the big event in our field and we ought to get ourselves a place at the table.

Beyond these two big ventures, we will want to do some serious long-range financial and program planning, guided by a wholesome and creative vision of the sort of organization we want to become. ASLE could, of course, mature into just one more parochial academic society. But who wants that? Why not think in terms of outreach to other sectors and disciplines, of collaborative ventures with environmental organizations, foundations, or government agencies like the National Parks? Send your ideas to us, your officers, and to your Executive Council members. Charged with your energy and insight, ASLE can grow into a wonderfully new kind of learned organization.

Warm regards,

John Tallmadge, Union Institute

## A Letter from the Editor

First, a story. It must have been five or six years ago I traveled from New York to Washington, D.C. to attend my first MLA Conference. As a graduate student at NYU, I was curious and not a little bit smug about such a gathering of stalwart academics. I had been living vicariously in the City, reading and writing about "books with trees in them," and my sense was that, excepting a requisite Thoreau or Wordsworth panel, I wouldn't find much of a community of like-minded scholars and writers in the Nation's Capital. But I was wrong. For there in the *Program*, wedged between theory-laden panels sporting jargon-riddled, multi-colored titles was something called a "CEA Nature Writing Roundtable." ASLE came into existence two or three years later, but I always think back to that afternoon as a kind of watershed event, a place where phone numbers, addresses and stories were swapped and where a community started to take shape. Even in a place that seems so antithetical to the concerns of an organization like ASLE as Washington, D.C., that first gathering was fortuitous indeed.

That said, it is with great pride that I take on the editorial responsibilities of *ASLE News*. With ASLE's official adoption of *ISLE*, the Newsletter has undergone, and will continue to undergo some changes. The new name: Though far more prosaic than the former, *The American Nature Writing Newsletter*, I hope that *ASLE News* reflects more clearly the primary functions of the newsletter—to disseminate information particular to the scholarly and creative interests of the ASLE community. The journal-in-miniature format from the past has for the most part been replaced with conference notes, calls for papers, and miscellaneous opinion pieces. This issue inaugurates two new features. *Musings*: A *Roundtable* is a forum where ASLE members are given the opportunity to respond briefly to some question, topic or current event of particular interest to the profession. We begin with what is perhaps only a minor, but at least a public debate about the role of environmental literature and ecocriticism in the academy, as played out in Jay Parini's *New York Times* article and Jonathan Yardley's response in the *Washington Post*.

As the title implies, *The View from Here* gives a scholar, writer or teacher working in the field of literature and the environment the opportunity to reflect informally on the state of the profession, whatever the vantage. Scott Slovic, without whom many of us would still be slaving away in the dark recesses of academic isolation, seems the natural choice to inaugurate such a column.

Additionally, I hope to include a kind of *vox populi* letters section where ASLE members can address issues that have appeared in previous numbers of *ASLE News*, or that might be of interest to the community at large. I also hope to showcase the work of members of the Executive Council, as well as ASLE members in other countries and on other continents. A forthcoming *Notes from the Field* column will enable us to keep track of ASLE's successes and celebrations: news of books and articles, grants and fellowships, accolades and baby pictures. After all, we are a diverse, engaged, and widely-flung lot—ganglionic through and through. As such, the Newsletter should be as much for ASLE members as from them. So don't be shy. Keep those cards and letters coming.

Please address missives (in addition to comments, quips and suggestions for future incarnations of the newsletter) to me at the Department of English, Wake Forest University, Box 7387 Reynolda Station, Winston-Salem, NC 27109.

Yours, from the Piedmont,

Ralph Black, Wake Forest University

## A Report from Watershed: Writers, Nature and Community

During the week before Earth Day, on a hill in the Anacostia watershed, two dozen of America's finest nature writers and poets, and hundreds of environmental educators, activists, publishers, and earthiest, gathered to discuss and celebrate "our life in nature," as Thoreau once put it.

Robert Hass, the first U. S. poet laureate from the West, organized this amazing gathering with the help of the Orion Society, the Library of Congress, ASLE and many other sponsors and volunteers. Participants included: David Abram, Rachel Bagby, Rick Bass, Wendell Berry, Spencer Beebe, Peter Berg, Alison Deming, John Elder, James Galvin, Joy Harjo, Linda Hogan, Wes Jackson, William Kittredge, Barry Lopez, Sandra Lopez, Peter Matthiessen, Bill McKibben, Stephanie Mills, Gary Nabhan, Richard Nelson, David Orr, Robert Pyle, Pattiann Rogers, Scott Sanders, Annick Smith, Gary Snyder, Terry Tempest Williams, Paul Winter, and even the spirit of William Bartram.

In addition to giving readings, most of these writers participated in daily dialogues and panel discussions, focusing on topics such as: place-based environmental education, nature literacy, writing in a time of environmental crisis, sustaining forests, conserving communities, the value of wilderness, community and the commons, rediscovering the watershed, restoring/restorying, animals and people, environmental publishing, using information, teaching, and the arts. Some folks also canoed on the Anacostia River or helped clean up the garbage clogging its banks.

Jack Hicks, organizer of the annual "Art of the Wild" conference in the Lake Tahoe watershed, asked one of the key questions for all of us attending from afar: "How can what you learn here be taken elsewhere?" Phil Williams, director of the International Rivers Network, answered the question with a translated slogan from Belgium Friends of the Earth: "There is always a river in your home." We all live in a watershed—a place in which the movement and health of water is linked to particular animal life, plant life, local history, weather, urban and rural settlement patterns, agricultural practices, geological formations and shifting, and a diverse community of human and non-human imaginations. "We don't begin to know our own story," said Hass. One place to begin—insisted writer after writer—is for us to learn our own ecological address, and to teach children theirs. How can any of us ever know who we are unless we begin to know where we are?

### Watershed Wisdom:

- "What if every school had a garden?"—Richard Nelson
- "What is emancipatory education?"—Terry Tempest Williams
- "What is the story we live by?"—Linda Hogan
- "Sometimes we need stories more than bread, food to survive."—Barry Lopez
- "In a dark time the eye begins to see."—Theodore Roethke
- "Writing about recovery is much harder than writing about loss."—Scott Sanders
- "There is more than one point of view, and more points of view than are possible to know."—James Galvin
- "There are no worlds but other worlds, and all other worlds are here."—Wendell Berry
- "No CD Rom will ever equal anything real."—Robert Pyle
- "Hope grows out of the power to imagine."—Barry Lopez
- "stay together / learn the flowers / go light"—Gary Snyder
- "Attention is prayer."—Simone Weil

### Ways of Teaching and Acting (gathered from the writers):

- Describe where you live without using streets or cities, using only natural features.
- Speak to the world (not just about it).
- If words on a page speak to us so readily—are animate!—why not stones or wind?
- The Japanese character for "crisis" combines "dangerous" with "opportunity."
- Make decisions based on how it will affect the next seven generations.
- Cultivate a local and daily practice of attentiveness.
- Recover a sense of the sacred in everyday life.
- The black bear knows more than you do.
- Imagination turns boundaries into horizons.
- Where were you touched by the wild? In fields? lots? hand-me-down habitats?
- Make a map of your watershed.
- Start your own Watershed Society.
- Draw a map of where you live and what happened there. Include both human and natural history.
- Recover the stories of your place, carry them inside you.
- List the ways animals and people relate to each other.
- Keep a family journal, a garden journal, a watershed journal.
- Study the tortoise. Learn the slow art of revolutionary patience.
- Teach a course in which you require reading, writing, and walking. Take binoculars.
- Teach literature courses environmentally—such as a course on Edward Taylor, Emily Dickinson, and Wallace Stevens, who each write from the same watershed, and exhibit a strikingly similar inwardness.
- Teach children local-, environmental-, and natural history.
- Listen. Cultivate patience.
- Consciously destroy the perspectives you bring to a landscape, break the ways you look at a place. Walk differently. Follow game trails. Climb a tree.
- Fill a day book with a natural object for each day of the year.
- Throw flowers at the darkness.
- Begin with love instead of power.

As I write these words to you from the second floor of our home, I can see a large patch of freshly turned soil (for our garden), the neighbor's trim lawn, the horse pasture beyond, then the tops of trees rising out of the river canyon, the hillside on the other side of the river, and at the furthest limits of my sight a line of mountain ridges rising above a river I cannot see but imagine swirling beneath the red rocks of its own canyon walls. Salmon used to swim through this landscape, up the river that carves the canyon below our home. But no more. The salmon are only one of many losses here in my own watershed. At "Watershed" something tremendous happened to me. I came home renewed and recommitted to learning the story of this place, as fully as possible, and to challenging and teaching others to do the same. How else can we ever hope to help prevent future losses and to restore (and restory) health to our places, our homes, our communities, our watersheds?

As I listened to people speak at "Watershed," I thought of many of you out there, of your stories, and of how much good work you are doing in your own places. All I've offered you here is a thin stream of my own experience at "Watershed." Perhaps something valuable will find its way into the eddies of your hearts, your words, your imaginations, your lives. If so, pass it on. That's what a river does.

Stan Tag, Albertson College  
Indian Creek-Boise-Snake-Columbia Watershed

## ASLE Members Attend 14th Annual Key West Seminar on American Nature Writing

For many weeks, Dan Gerber had difficulty persuading other members of the Board of Directors for the Key West Literary Seminar that the topic of nature writing would draw interested participants in large numbers. But by the time 350 had registered and more were clamoring to be let in, no one needed further convincing.

For those of us more accustomed to academic conferences, that weekend of January 11th seemed, by turns, campy (Jim Harrison and Tom McGuane leaning back in their chairs, ribbing each other with semi-private jokes between pitchers of ice water, apparently to compensate for their lack of preparation for the discussion at hand); contentious (Joy Williams and Richard Nelson duking it out over the relative vices and virtues of hunters and hunting); and occasionally long on celebrity star-gazing while short on substance (the panel on Spirit of Place portraying transience as the theme of American literary treatments of place, to the virtual exclusion of other themes). But the Seminar had its riveting moments as well: Nelson reciting and translating numerous Koyukon words and phrases, encouraging us to "imagine the whole of North America overlain with all these luminous webs" of spirituality rooted in the experiences of animals and plants; John Nichols packing into one long breath the story of a life devoted to both the author's craft and environmental justice; Joy Williams reading her essay on advocacy ("Nature writing is enjoying a renaissance. This seems to be in lieu of nature, which is not"); and Terry Tempest Williams describing Congressional reaction to her testimony on behalf of the Utah wilderness ("I'm sorry, Ms. Williams; there's something about your voice I cannot hear").

Besides the aforementioned, the Seminar panelists included Annie Dillard; Rick Bass; Gretel Ehrlich; Linda Hogan; Doug Peacock; Robert D. Richardson, Jr.; Frederick Turner; and James Welch. On the program but unable to attend were Gary Snyder and Peter Matthiessen. Along with Spirit of Place in American Literature, session topics included Thoreau and the American Nature Tradition, The American Indian Tradition, The Relationship of Literature and Advocacy, and the last-minute addition of The Loss of the Wild. Annie Dillard and Jim Harrison each gave evening readings from original work, spicing their presentations with anecdotes and the occasional surprise revelation—Dillard's admission, for example, that she'd never actually owned a tomcat, let alone one with bloody paws. Such moments provided rich food for re-thinking some of our notions about this curious, quasi-fictional genre we call nature writing.

For those willing to fork over an extra fee and to remain in Key West another day (an easy decision for some of us), the Seminar was followed by small-group writing workshops led by Nichols, Turner, writer Brenda Peterson, writer and editor John N. Cole, and poet Judith Minty. Even here, ASLE compatriots kept popping up, as the topic of ASLE itself so often did during the weekend's coffee-break conversations; meanwhile, 150 or so ASLE brochures deposited at the information table gradually disappeared into pocketbooks and briefcases.

Videotapes of the Seminar's panel discussions and readings are still available for purchase. For prices and ordering information, call the Key West Literary Seminar office at 305/293-9291.

Allison Bulsterbaum Wallace, Unity College of Maine

## Musings: A Roundtable

In October of last year, the *New York Times Magazine* featured an article by Jay Parini entitled, "The Greening of the Humanities" (10-29-95). Parini had traveled to the first ASLE Conference in Fort Collins, CO, with some questions about environmental studies, and the ways in which students and teachers of the humanities were working to address environmental concerns in their own work. Though clearly cast for a popular audience, Parini's piece does make public a field of inquiry that has long been relegated to the hermetic dens of the academy. The public light that he shone on the work of many ASLE members was intensified a month later when Jonathan Yardley, the editor of the *Washington Post Book World*, responded to Parini's article with one of his own: "Ecocriticism, 'Growing Like a Weed'" (11-13-95).

Yardley's take on Parini's take on ecocriticism and environmental studies is a journalistic wonder. It is hard to provide a thorough taste of his sardonic, even flippant tone, so a quote will have to suffice. After citing some of Parini's more stereotypical characterizations of his interviewees (both Parini and Yardley seem more interested in what ASLE members look like than in what they have to say), Yardley resorts to some jubilant academy bashing: "They [I suppose he means ASLE members] are just another passel of academics who've figured out how to turn the classroom into a political forum."

Four ASLE members engaged in ecocritical studies from a variety of perspectives and backgrounds responded to my call for this roundtable. I asked them to reflect briefly and informally on this debate, to gloss the controversy in whatever way seemed most useful to them. Their responses follow.

### "The Greening of the Humanities" and the Weed Theory of Ecocriticism

Newspaper journalism often aims for the slick and snappy response, the sensational quick take that has more in common with advertising than with thoughtful appraisal of cultural or political life. Jay Parini sought to introduce ecocriticism to readers of *The New York Times* last October with a bit of the glitzy tone expected in the Sunday magazine, but he wrote a longer and more serious discussion of environmental studies in literature than the *Times* editors were willing to print. The article was heavily cut, and what remained was so superficial that it deserved some of Jonathan Yardley's sassy criticism in the *Washington Post* a month later. In particular, Parini's portraits of Lawrence Buell and Cheryll Glotfelty looked embarrassingly adulatory. Little of the substance of ecocritical thinking was evident in Parini's article, though I feel certain that efforts in that direction were lost on the cutting-room floor. Parini did make serious arguments in support of ecocriticism, however. Environmental thinking is indisputably linked to social responsibility and the kind of activism that has resulted in cleaner air and water in the U.S., as well as a much increased public awareness of contemporary problems like overfishing and extinction of species. Environmental studies programs are burgeoning on campuses all over the country. Jay Parini was providing real information about new dimensions of literary study related to traditional areas such as the pastoral, American regionalism, and travel literature. Thoreau's *Walden* has long been considered a classic, and not only in the United States. It is not merely trendy to take seriously what Thoreau advocated there, and in fact that is one way of defining what ecocriticism is about.

Jonathan Yardley betrays a common misconception about the weed. Plants that are vigorous but not domesticated are much more hardy than their over-manipulated cousins. If Ecocriticism is growing like a weed, that may be a sign that it is a

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strong new species destined to survive and flourish. Yardley's article is a cheap form of satire that fails to engage in any genuine way with the arguments made by ecocritics, and it is full of sweeping claims about the sentimentalism of ecocritical writings, the lack of interest ecocritics have for actual literature about the environment, and faddish self-righteousness among adherents of the movement. It is not evident that he has actually read any ecocriticism or knows what literary works it might be focused on. His idea that ecocriticism joins race, gender, and class as mere fads is an interesting notion to think about. If he is right, then the American Revolution was caused by similarly trivial concerns, slavery and lynching were nothing to bother about, and women's desire for the vote was laughable. The Dust Bowl was no joke for the people who lived in it, and it's no joke for fishermen in the Pacific Northwest that the salmon are almost gone. Most Americans care deeply about the environment, it turns out, and my guess is that students are going to find ecocritical approaches to literature compelling.

Louise Westling, University of Oregon

#### *Letters I Might Have Written:*

Dear Mr. Parini,

In the *New York Times* article, you made charismatic "gurus" of a few ecocritics while failing to mention many others. I understand this journalistic convention, but I wish you hadn't portrayed ecocriticism as *opposed to* deconstruction and literary theory, for, ideally, these forms of cultural criticism can be mutually informing. Furthermore, your caricature of ecocritics as suntanned mountaineers trivializes the intellectual rigor of the field and falsely implies that all environmentalists are yuppie recreationalists.

Despite these reservations, I heartily applaud you. Your article has raised public awareness of environmental efforts in the humanities as no MLA session could hope to do.

Dear Mr. Yardley,

You parrot the clichés that academics are out of touch with the real world and that scholarly pursuits are passing fads. Hmmm. By the time I retire, I will have interacted with thousands of students. How is my life any more removed from "real people" than your own? Fads die when the cause of their emergence ceases to be compelling. Ecocriticism may pass away when environmental problems disappear, in which case, bon voyage.

I invite you to speak at the next ASLE conference, for your ideas are worth discussing. Why not embrace this opportunity to talk *with* ecocritics rather than just *about* them?

In November I sent Yardley a friendlier version of this letter. No reply yet.

Cheryll Glotfelty, University of Nevada, Reno

#### *Self-Meditation on Publicity*

So, Robertson, a group you are a part of, whose cause you believe in, whose cause you have been working to promote, finally gets some national attention. It's positive attention. Great! But before all of the sudden sun has warmed your skin real good, the satiric attack begins. How should you feel about this? You should be happier than you were before the satire began. For one thing, it means your stinger stings, at least a little. No satirist takes on the harmless. For another thing, it makes life more interesting. This is no small benefit. But, Robertson, what if you think, although you are not positive, that the satirist knows not a lot about your group and what it stands for and may be responding by political reflex? You should, of course, be filled with indignation, especially since you've never done that sort of thing yourself. But don't tell the satirist (or anyone else besides your friends) that your righteous cup runneth over. People who attack satirists, especially newspaper columnists who write satire, never win. Let history be unkind to the satirist. Unless he turns out to be right, that this academic movement too will find its final resting place on the garbage heap.

David Robertson, University of California, Davis

#### *A View From A Far, Wooded Region*

What would a person with no background in ecological thought, nature writing or the literature of place garner from reading these two brief articles? Out here in Oregon the stuff seems a little tame, a little unnecessary, a little behind the times. Folks out this-away already know that woods and critters are important. Ask a logger if he's heard of the spotted owl. Ask a computer saleswoman if she knows where the big trees are--that stuff has been in our literature since it started (with Kalapooya Coyote stories and Paiute Crater Lake origins, not to mention H. L. Davis, Ursula LeGuin, Gary Snyder, and Ken "Furthur" Kesey). Then I wondered, Is this notable? Should it surprise me that folks back east are still getting their fun on the weekends taking potshots and tossing grass cuttings over their suburban fences? Isn't that where Crossfire and the McLaughlin Group beams out of?

Okay, *mi casa es su casa*, I fess up--yes, I started out back east myself--even grew up in the widening gyre of New York, attended the Sorbonne of Washington Square and all. So as a former easterner, I tried to explain the tone of Parini's piece to my Oregon friends. People in Boston, New York, Providence and D.C. need characterizations--there are no comics in the *New York Times*; the writers have to figure out how to be humorous without funny pictures. But give Parini credit--there's a lot of information in that short piece, more than most New Yorkers can digest in a morning. And don't worry about the Yardley thing, I told them--even provincial Manhattanites and Beltway Nod-offs smell unexamined ideas when they get close enough. We backwater folks out here have done our darndest to escape that sort of jaded cosmopolitan bravado. None of our local papers picked it up. And anyway, we get our political opinions in the strangest places--places like the Warner Creek and Roman Dunn Salvage Cut. Out here, we have to write about trees, bears, wolverines, landscape and such -- it's all we've got. That, and each other.

Peter Blakemore, University of Oregon

## Conference Announcements

### Deadlines for Submission

- The 31st Annual Meeting of the Western Literature Association. October 2-5, 1996. Lincoln, Nebraska. WLA invites papers, readings, and other presentations on all aspects of Western American Literature. For this meeting, to be held jointly with the Western History Association, panels and papers that examine the interplay of the literary imagination and historical experience are especially welcome. **Due by June 15, 1996.** Submit manuscripts of no more than ten typed, double-spaced pages and a 125-word abstract. Susanne George, English Dept., Univ. of Nebraska, Kearney, Nebraska, 68849-1320. Or call (308) 865-8867.
- Literatures of the Great Plains. 21st Annual Interdisciplinary Symposium. April 3-5, 1997. University of Nebraska-Lincoln. **Due by July 1, 1996.** Submit proposals of 150-200 words plus a brief resume. Professor Frances W. Kaye, Center for Great Plains Studies, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1213 Oldfather Hall, P.O. Box 880314, Lincoln, NE 68588-0314
- Melville "Among the Nations." July 2-6, 1997. Volos, Greece. **Due by August 1, 1996.** Submit complete papers or proposals of 250-500 words to: Prof. Sanford E. Marovitz, Dept. of English, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio, 44242.
- ASEH Biennial Meeting, March 5-9, 1997. Baltimore, MD. **Due August 1, 1996.** Submit six copies of the following: 1) cover sheet with the full name and affiliation of each panel participant and the title of the session and/or of each paper; 2) a 100-word maximum abstract describing the purpose of the session; 3) a 250-word maximum abstract of each paper; and 4) a two-page maximum c.v. for each participant which includes telephone numbers and addresses. Jeffrey Stine, National Museum of American History, MRC 629, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 20560.
- "Robert Frost: An International Conference." Rock Hill, SC. September 24-27, 1997. Papers on individual poems or any aspect of Frost's life and poetry. Details and papers **due August 1, 1996.** Contact Earl Wilcox, Frost Conference Coordinator. Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC 29733. Phone: (803) 323-4633.
- Landscape and Technology Seminar in Denmark. January 10-12, 1997. Submit proposals relating landscape and technology to literature, painting, photography, etc. to David Nye, Humanities Research Center, Hollufgaard, Hestehaven 201, 5220 Odense SO, Denmark. E-mail: nye@hist.ou.dk. **Due by September 1, 1996.**
- The 4th International Steinbeck Congress. March 19-22, 1997. San Jose State Univ. "Beyond Boundaries: Steinbeck and the World." Why and in what ways does Steinbeck's work cross boundaries? Abstracts to Susan Shillinglaw, Steinbeck Research Center, San Jose State Univ., San Jose, CA 95192. **Due September 30, 1996.**
- The Fourth International Conference on the Short Story in English. June 7-11, 1996: The University of Northern Iowa (Cedar Falls), The University of Iowa (Iowa City).
- Earth Household: Community and the Natural Common Wealth. 13th Annual Sitka Symposium June 16-22, 1996. Sitka, Alaska.
- American Poetry in the 1950's. June 19 to 23, 1996. National Poetry Foundation. University of Maine, Orono, Maine.
- Onsite Insight: Humanity, Nature, and Time: A Symposium on Landscape History. June 22 to 25, 1996. The Penn State Scanticon Conference Center Hotel, State College, Pennsylvania.
- "Sharp Eyes": Multicultural Perspectives on Environmental Writing. Keynote Speaker, Joy Harjo. June 22-25, 1996. State University of New York College at Oneonta.
- Herman Melville and Robert Penn Warren Conference. North Adams State College, North Adams, Massachusetts. August 1-4, 1996.
- Nature Writing Festival. Nelson, British Columbia. August 2-4, 1996. Saturday night public reading.
- ASLE Hawai'i Symposium on Japanese and American Environmental Literature. Honolulu. August 13-17, 1996.
- 1996 Annual Meeting of the Society for Literature and Science. Sheraton Colony Square Hotel, Atlanta. October 10-13, 1996.

### Opportunities for Publication

- Culture and Environment in the Pacific West. Oregon State University Press seeks manuscripts that explore for a general reader human interactions with the natural world west of the Rockies. Brief manuscripts (approx. 55,000 words) written in language accessible to the lay reader should be sent to William L. Lang, Dept. of History, Portland State University, P.O. Box 751, Portland, OR 97207-0751.
- Terra Nova: Nature and Culture*. Submissions written for generalist rather than specialist. Few footnotes as possible. Send 3.5" computer disk, in MS-DOS WordPerfect 5.1 or Macintosh Microsoft Word 5.0 along with 2 printed copies of your work. Manuscripts not returned. David Rothenberg, editor, *Terra Nova*, Dept. of Social Science and Policy Studies, New Jersey Institute of Technology, University Heights, Newark, NJ, 07102. (201) 596-3289 fax (201) 565-0586
- Call for Writing. In its fall 1996 issue, *North Dakota Quarterly* will publish responses and reactions to, and extensions of the Buffalo Commons proposals. Deadline July 1, 1996. Guest Editor: John Ettling, Dean of the College of Arts and Science, University of North Dakota. Send to *North Dakota Quarterly*, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, ND 58256-7209. Phone: (701) 777-3322. Fax: (701) 777-3650.

### Conferences of Interest

- 2nd International Interdisciplinary Conference on the Environment. Hotel Viking, Newport, Rhode Island, June 15-20, 1996.
- 19th-Century American Women Writers in the 21st Century. Trinity College May 30-June 2, 1996. Harriet Beecher Stowe Center, Hartford, Connecticut.

Compiled by David Taylor, Converse College



## Special Announcements

### WANTED: NEW ASLE SECRETARY

David Teague's very successful two-year term as ASLE Secretary concludes at the end of 1996, so we will be choosing a new Secretary in our elections this coming fall (the ballot will be folded into the fall issue of the Newsletter). Because the position is so vital to the efficient functioning of the organization, we want to begin searching for David's replacement immediately. The Secretary maintains the ASLE membership database, fields requests for information, mails out membership renewals, produces the annual Membership Directory, and works closely with the Treasurer to ensure that incoming funds are properly handled. The Secretary should have some familiarity with computer software necessary for database management, and it will help tremendously if s/he has available (or can negotiate for) some student support. David and the other officers are happy to provide extra help to the new Secretary during the transition period. If you think you might have an interest in serving as ASLE Secretary, please contact: Michael Branch, ASLE President, Department of English/098, University of Nevada, Reno, Reno, NV 89557 (or call 702-784-8016).

### WANTED: NEW ASLE BIBLIOGRAPHER

After three years of service as ASLE Bibliographer, Zita Ingham is now ready to hand the project off to a successor. Zita will produce the 1995 Bibliography, to be published later this year, before accepting her gold watch and heading for the lawn chair. If you think you might be interested in taking over as ASLE Bibliographer, we would like very much to hear from you. The job entails coordinating the efforts of a team of annotators, and editing and producing an annual Bibliography covering relevant scholarship published during the previous year. Our infrastructure of volunteers and contributing editors/annotators is largely in place, and Zita is happy to train the new Bibliographer, so the transition of the project should be relatively smooth. The ongoing ASLE Bibliography Project is an extremely valuable contribution to the field, and we are anxious to commit our full support to Zita's successor. To learn more about the project or to simply leap recklessly into directing it, please contact: Michael Branch, ASLE President, Department of English/098, University of Nevada, Reno, Reno, NV 89557 (or call 702-784-8016).

### UPDATE ON THE ASLE-JAPAN SYMPOSIUM

The 1996 ASLE Symposium on Japanese and American Environmental Literature is ASLE's first international symposium, and it will take place in Honolulu, August 13-17. Co-organizers are Frank Stewart of the University of Hawaii and *Manoa: A Pacific Journal of International Writing* and Scott Slovic of the University of Nevada, Reno. Sponsors for the event include *Manoa*, the Center for Environmental Arts and Humanities at UNR, the Toyota Corporation, and the *Yomiuri Newspaper*. The symposium will consist of an assortment of lectures, readings, discussion sessions, and field trips. Participants will have the opportunity to take part in sessions on such topics as the literature of natural hazards, islands and literature, the Buddhist influence on American environmental thinking, the influence of the American environmental movement on Japan, the literature of farming, and the literature of urban environments. There will be at least one session devoted to the issue of future translation projects: American environmental writing

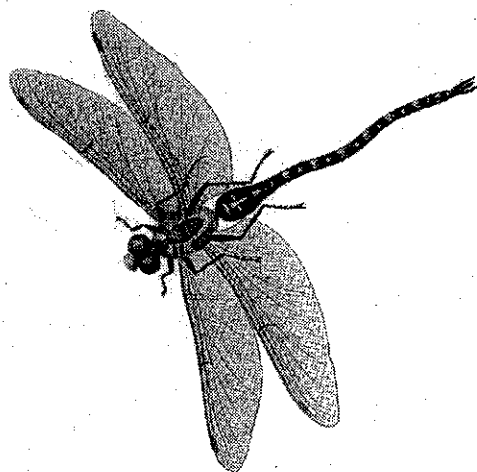
that ought to be available in Japanese and Japanese writing that deserves an American audience. Keynote speakers include W.S. Merwin, James Houston, David Quammen, Linda Hogan and Keizo Hino.

### UPDATE ON GARLAND HANDBOOK PROJECT

The table of contents for *Garland Nature Literature: An International Handbook* has been set, consisting of 70 chapters, each between 2,500 and 6,000 words. Approximately one third of the volume will be devoted to the United States and Canada, one fourth to Europe including the United Kingdom, one sixth to Asia and the Pacific, and one fourth to Africa, Latin America, and international topics and theory. Completed chapters are due to the editor, Patrick D. Murphy, in September. If the volume stays on schedule it will be in print in the fall of 1997.

### NEW BOOK SERIES

Garland Publishing is launching a new trade book series on Nature, Literature, Culture to be edited by Patrick D. Murphy. The series will be oriented toward a nonspecialist audience interested in the ways in which literature and other cultural formations depict, represent, and interpret nature and human interaction with the rest of nature. The vitality of the broad field of environmental literature and nature/culture dialogue is demonstrated through its dynamic and tentative character. Titles in the series will enrich the study of such aesthetic works and the larger cultural-environmental issues they address through probing analyses that need not assume adversarial stances, but that recognize that such creative and critical work comprises part of a profound contemporary transition that may lead to a more natured culture. It is expected that the ideas, texts, and cultural experiences engaged by volumes in the series will carry readers beyond traditional disciplinary formations and limitations. The intention is to publish 3-5 books per year, commencing in the fall of 1997. Please send queries and project proposals to Patrick D. Murphy, English Department, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA 15705-1094; e-mail: pdmurphy@grove.iup.edu. Murphy will be out of the country during the month of May.



George Edwards (1743)



## Additional Announcements & Notes

### ISLE Update

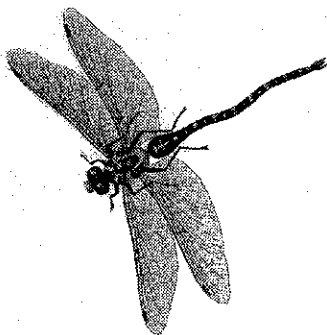
If you have not yet received the latest issue of *ISLE* (2.2), it should be on your doorstep in a matter of days. Issues 3.1 and 3.2 are scheduled to appear (either as a double issue or in a two-issue mailing) by Thanksgiving of this year. The disk for 4.1 has recently been delivered to the press at UNR and is due out in February, 1997. As always, the *ISLE* editors eagerly await the submission of scholarly articles and creative work. Address queries to Scott Slovic, *ISLE* Editor, University of Nevada, Reno.

### ASLE Conference Update

The second biennial ASLE conference will be held at the University of Montana in Missoula, July 17-19, 1997. Conference Director Hank Harrington and ASLE VP John Tallmadge are working on an innovative format to make this 3-day event a great combination of academics, networking, and outdoor adventure.

Mornings will be devoted to plenary keynote and visioning sessions, special topic panels (in which papers will be briefly summarized rather than read, in order to facilitate conversation and discussion), roundtables on themes of general interest, and poster sessions to showcase curricular and teaching ventures. Afternoons will be open for networking, excursions, and planned recreation activities. Evenings will feature readings by prominent nature writers.

A formal call for papers and presentations will appear later this summer. Watch for full details in the Fall issue of *ASLE News*. Ideas or questions should be directed either to Hank or John.



### Interpreting Bioregions & National Parks

With funding from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the Orion Society has been developing an approach to environmental education called "Stories in the Land." The written literature and the oral traditions of a bioregion are integrated with its natural history in this attempt to cultivate a more personal and engaged sense of place. Up until now, the program has emphasized collaborations between colleges and universities and their local public schools. But we would also like to explore the possibility for cooperation between ASLE's scholars and teachers of environmental literature and the Park Service's Interpreters.

Every National Park already carries out an extensive educational and publishing program. Our hope is that scholars who have been working on the literature associated with a given Park could be helpful to its interpretive staff. They could identify closely associated texts, place them in the larger context of American literature, offer perspectives on indigenous cultural traditions, and help choose and organize excerpts for bioregional anthologies. The Naturalist-Interpreters have already developed their own rich historical and ecological frameworks within which to include these materials. The resulting dialogue could lead to programs of great value to thousands of Park visitors.

This mailing is going out to both literary scholars and National Park Interpreters. Our intention is not to design a large-scale program, but rather to facilitate connections between interested parties. If you would like to pursue such a venture, please write to John Tallmadge at 6538 Teakwood Ct., Cincinnati, OH 45224 or contact him through e-mail: [jtallmadge@mecn.mass.edu](mailto:jtallmadge@mecn.mass.edu). We are excited about this possible collaboration, and look forward to hearing from you.

*ASLE News* is the biannual newsletter of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, reporting ASLE's business and publishing letters from its membership. Items of interest, including news about conferences, forthcoming publications, and work in progress, should be sent to the editor's attention: Ralph Black, Dept. of English, Wake Forest Univ., Winston-Salem, NC 27109.

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## The View from Here

It's always useful to put things in perspective, to step back and take stock before plunging back into the fray.

A month ago, looking to put academic environmentalism into a broader perspective, I drove four-hundred miles south from Reno to attend the Healing Global Wounds gathering near the main entrance of the Nevada Test Site. My pony-tailed Japanese student, Hirofumi Ohue, had urged me to come to the Test Site with him, and I acceded despite the mid-semester piles of student papers back in my office.

We raced down Highway 95 toward Las Vegas for eight hours, guided by a full moon, arriving just after midnight. The next morning we awoke in our sleeping bags to the sound of drums and chanting: a Sunrise Ceremony around a sacred fire with Western Shoshone spiritual leader Corbin Harney and a circle of seventy-

odd anti-nuclear folks from Santa Cruz, Eugene, Austin, Prescott, and elsewhere. Some people wept at the morning ceremony as they threw healing herbs on the sacred fire, uttering prayers for "native people" and "Mother Earth"; others chanted in Japanese, Arabic, and assorted Native American languages. Passions ran high, and then everyone went to the big, army-green tent for coffee and whole-wheat pancakes.

Later, Hiro and I walked a quarter-mile to inspect the Test Site gate house and "the Cage," where Terry Tempest Williams, Rebecca Solnit, and other writers and artists have done time. The Cage was empty, a small patch of sand surrounded by barbed wire with a portable toilet in the middle.

Still later, while most of the global healers participated in a soul-baring "communication workshop," I opted to hike by myself up an anonymous hill overlooking the protest site, the Test Site (what's visible west of Mercury), and the vast, patterned browns and blues of the southern Nevada desert. The obvious occurred. My eyes gravitated toward sagebrush and greasewood as I walked; I gingerly skirted spiny Joshua Tree my fingers could not resist touching the strange, razorsharp rocks and sunbaked earth, scored and intensely solid. Eventually, from the hilltop, all things human—hippie-painted protest buses, meeting tents, the Test Site gate, the military town of Mercury, Highway 95—shrunk in size and significance, dwarfed by the mountainous landscape.

This view, more than the anti-nuke event itself, gave me what I had sought in the irradiated desert.

I tell this story of my recent visit to the Nevada Test Site because it helps me keep in perspective the recent explosion of attention that ecocriticism and environmental literature have received: Jay Parini's New York Times article on ASLE and ecocriticism last October, the Watershed event at the Library of Congress in April under the direction of Robert Hass and the Orion Society, and the appearance of Hass, Barry Lopez, Gary Snyder, and Terry Tempest Williams on the Jim Lehrer News Hour on Earth Day. Flickers of attention, the glitz of celebrity, a sense of our discipline having "arrived." There were even one or two college teaching jobs advertised this past year with references to "literature and environment."

As I take a few minutes today, in early June, to survey the dozens of paper piles and bookshelves atumble with nature writing in my office at Nevada's new Center for Environmental Arts and Humanities, to reflect upon ASLE's first three-and-a-half years and upon the recent public interest in our field, and to consider where we might all go from here, I find myself thinking

about Gary Snyder's comment on the Lehrer Show six weeks ago that he is trying to become a native of North America and to start thinking as if he will live here for the next 10,000 years.

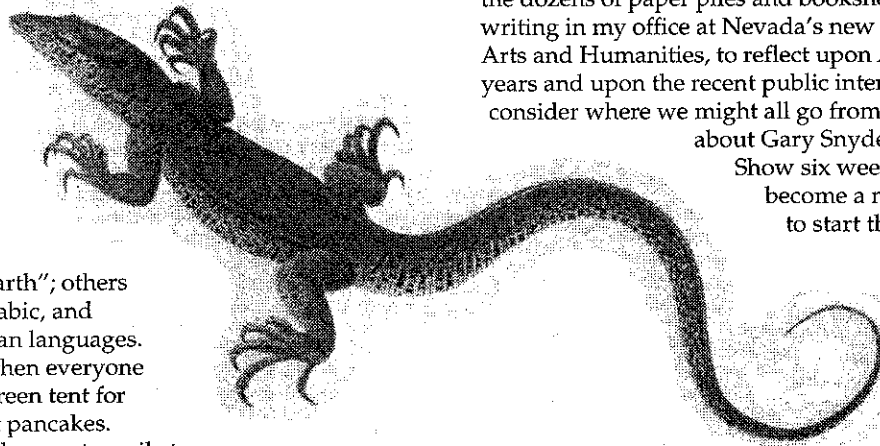
I am trying to imagine for myself these days what it might be like to become a longterm resident of one place—say, Reno, Nevada, and the western Great Basin—

after a decade of academic itineracy. I'm also trying to conceptualize the trajectory of my teaching and research in literature and environment, not to mention the evolution of the field in general, on into the new millennium, if not for the next 10,000 years.

Literature and environment has earned—and received—considerable attention in recent years, particularly this past year. Yet I believe our collective goal, as critics and writers, should be to imagine the long-term development of this work and avoid being a mere "flash in the pan." At the same time, lest our sense of self-importance carry us away, we'd be wise to find the nearest rise of land, take a hike, and look down on the smallness of all things human.

Enough musing. I see Peavine Mountain in the distance and cannot resist. That's the view from here.

Scott Slovic, University of Nevada, Reno



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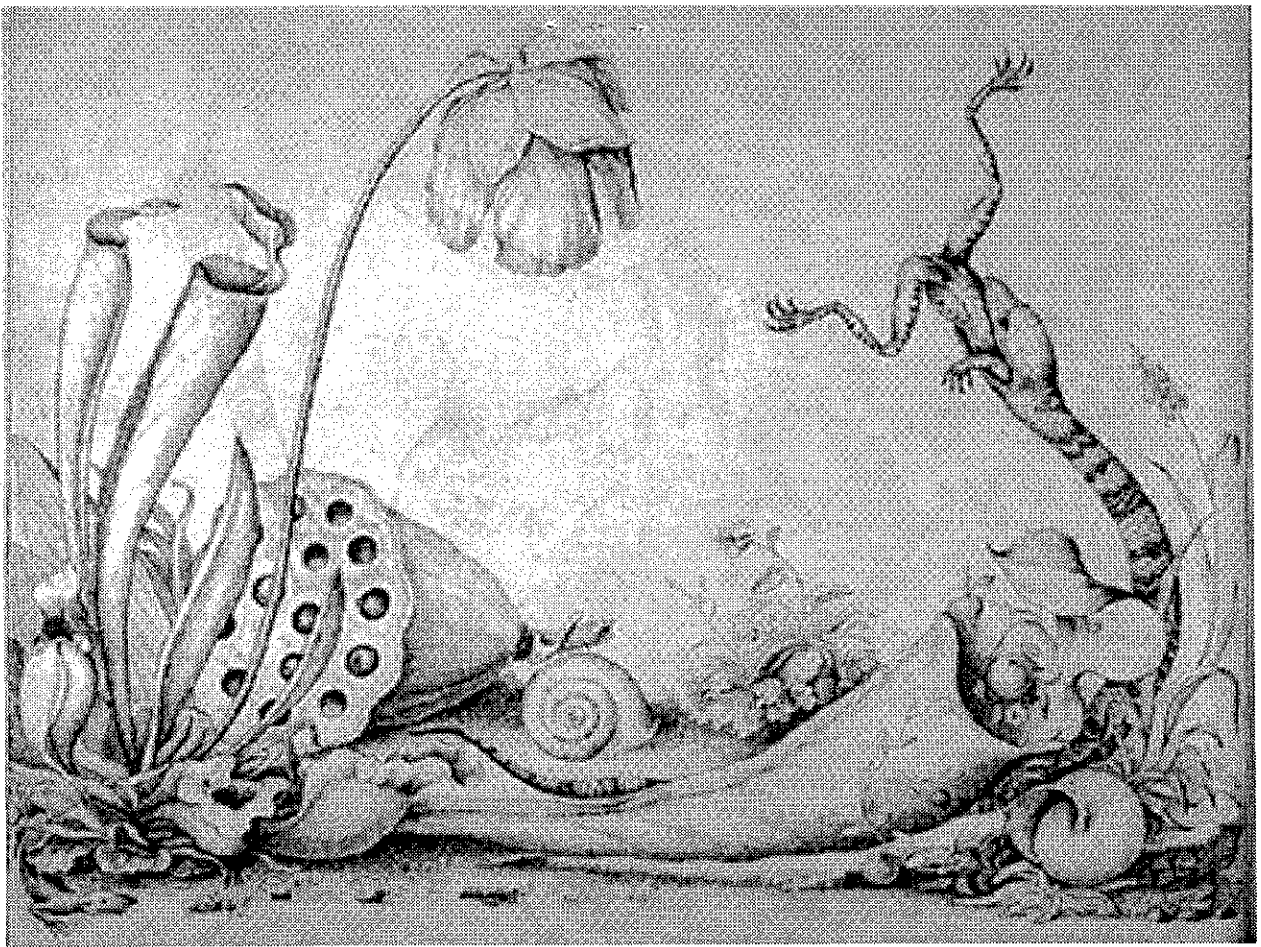
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William Bartram, late 18th century



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