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Fire in the Belly (of the Beast): Doing Ecocriticism in Petrocultures

Ecocritics have had surprisingly little to say over the years about some of modern humanity's most important nonhuman others: petroleum, coal, and natural gas. With the intention of fostering greater dialogue between ecocriticism and the energy humanities, we have organized traditional-format panels on fossil fuels at each of the last four ASLE conferences. This time, we are proposing a Sunday workshop that would immerse participants in an emplaced, wide-ranging conversation about ecocriticism and energy transitions. The workshop would not just involve reading and discussing scholarly texts, but, via a bicycle tour, would approach sites on the University of California campus and in the city of Davis as texts in their own right—physical manifestations of pro-alternative-energy narratives and values. U.C. Davis and its city are known worldwide for their leadership in sustainability efforts, and would thus offer many insights to workshop participants about changes that could be implemented on their home campuses and in their home cities. However, the workshop would also involve useful discussions of controversies and failures associated with the University and city's energy transitions. And we would discuss how transition ideas that have gotten traction in Davis could be adapted to appeal to people outside Davis's green "bubble," particularly in light of the current state of deep political and cultural polarization in the United States and elsewhere.

The first part of the workshop would take place inside, with participants presenting short responses to a set of assigned readings (see below); the discussion would

center on how ecocritics can best contribute to energy transitions. The second part of the workshop would involve a bicycle tour of sites on campus (starting with the Bike Barn, where participants would have the option of renting bikes and helmets) and in nearby parts of town (such as Village Homes, a subdivision built with sustainability in mind) that embody what we consider meaningful approaches to energy transitions.

U.C. Davis faculty members who have expressed an interest in leading short discussions during the bike tour include the prominent bioregional theorist Rob Thayer, Professor Emeritus of Landscape Architecture, and Claire Napawan and Steve Wheeler, both of whom currently teach in UCD's Department of Human Ecology.

Assigned Readings: The Petrocultures Research Group's *After Oil*; selections from Rob Thayer's *LifePlace: Bioregional Thought and Practice* that focus on Davis; articles on narratives and rhetoric of energy transitions.

Heidi C. M. Scott is the author of *Chaos and Cosmos: Literary Roots of Modern Ecology in the British Nineteenth Century* (Penn State University Press, 2014) and *Fuel: An Ecocritical History* (Bloomsbury, 2018), along with numerous ecocritical articles.

Bart Welling, who began bike commuting as an undergraduate at U.C. Davis in the 1990s, is an associate professor of English at the University of North Florida. He is currently working on a book titled *No Blood for Hydrocarbons: Rethinking Energy, Reinhabiting the Living World*.