

# NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2004

## Ecological tour to Chernobyl

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Visiting "Chernobyl" museum in Kiev (the day before).

Kiev - Chernobyl with passing "Dytyatky" (on the border of the 30-km "Zone of Estrangement").  
Change of transport.

Arrival to Chernobyl. Meeting with the leadership of "Chernobylinterinform" Agency.

Transfer to "Leliyov" village. Change of clothes and shoes (passing 10-km border).

Transfer to the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Station and sightseeing of reactor # 4 (from 100 m. distance).

Visit to Pripyat. Sightseeing of "Dead town".

Stop near the "Red forest".

Return to Chernobyl. Lunch.

Visit to the Scientific Centre (physical, radiochemical laboratories and others).

Calling in "Opachychi" village, meeting with "resettlers", people who have moved back to their villages after evacuation.

Passage to "Rossokha" village, cemetery of military machineries.

Passage through Control Point "Dytyatky". Measuring of radiation.

Change of transport. Return to Kiev.

Stephen Benz has written poems published in several journals. He is also the author of *Green Dreams: Travels in Central America* which discusses the paradox of ecotourism.

**"We won't have a society if we destroy the environment."**

**Margaret Mead**

### In This Issue

Benz's poem and Mead's quote introduce this "green" issue of the FCEA Newsletter. Nature writing, e.g., Emerson, Thoreau, Frost, and the sense of place in literary works are often studied

in a variety of literature classes. Works written in colonial America, as well as texts from 19<sup>th</sup> century British and American writers, also provide solid backgrounds for an interdisciplinary approach, i.e., ecocriticism. Ursula K. Heise in *The American Book Review* (July-August 1997), writes that "ecocriticism analyzes the role that the natural environment plays in the imagination of a cultural community at a specific historical moment ...". An ecocritic examines the use of nature in a specific genre to study how particular literary constructions of nature shape concepts of nature. Simon Estok's "A Report Card on Ecocriticism" (AUMLA: The Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association 96 Nov. 2001) is an excellent overview and discussion of the definitions of ecocriticism. Estok explains that although "a great variety of voices do not always speak about ecocriticism in complete harmony, there is substantial agreement on some key issues" (9), those of commitment to change and of making connections.

This "green" Newsletter presents a sampling of materials related to the environment. First, [Karen Callaghan](#) writes a sociological critique of environmental studies followed by [Jocelyn Bartkevicius](#)'s discussion of her course in ecocriticism, ecofeminism. [Kalenda Eaton-Donald](#) surveys the role of the physical environment in African American literature. [Lawrence Byrne](#) uses ecocriticism to analyze the classic western *The Searchers* followed by reviews of 1930's films which dramatize the struggle with, as well as abuses of, the natural world. [John Simmons](#) discusses three "classic" young adult novels focusing on the relationship between a teenage central figure and his or her relationship to the natural environment. Some [environmentally related organizations](#) are listed as sources for materials and information. The issue concludes with [calls for papers](#) and with CEA election news.

Thanks to my colleague Lawrence Byrne for assisting me in editing this Newsletter, and, as always, thanks to Jane Jones.

Helen Connell

### **Critical Environmental Studies: Sustainability and Justice**

Environmental studies programs have emerged as interdisciplinary attempts to understand the relationship between human action and decision-making and the natural world. Humanities and social science perspectives are employed to add depth and breadth to traditional scientific understandings of the environment. Specifically, non-scientific disciplines are purported to add aesthetic, political, historical, and social dimensions to any analysis and research. Critical studies that focus specifically on the environment, including ecofeminism and ecocriticism, have also developed. The question remains, however, as to whether these theoretical underpinnings allow environmental studies to supply the critique and praxis necessary to produce fundamental changes in the health and well-being of the planet.

What makes a discipline critical? Various theories, including Marxism, feminism, poststructuralism, and critical race studies, claim to offer more than explanation and analysis of social and political phenomena. Fundamental to these theories are the assumptions that social life can and should be changed and that everyday people have the agency to "make history" and enact transformative processes. A critical theory, then, creates discourse on a specific focus area

and on equity, liberation, agency, and justice as crucial aspects of the human condition. The role of theory is to elucidate conditions of inequality and injustice, to identify any barriers to liberation, and to develop methods for progressive change.

As a critical perspective, environmental studies must examine the cultural and theoretical assumptions that underpin scientific and popular views of nature, technology, and human nature. Connections between specific cultural, economic, and political practices and environmental degradation must be revealed. In other words, environmental injustices must be contextualized and interrogated as intentional social products. Critical environmental studies must also be visionary. The current ecological crises call for innovative, creative, and unique solutions that give primacy to environmental and human integrity. A critical view of the human-environment link must illustrate that market values and technological concerns cannot drive decisions about development and growth. Environmental degradation is inextricably linked to human impoverishment. Sustainability requires that development is grounded on goals that foster justice, democratic grassroots participation, social and economic equity, and cooperation.

As part of university curricula, critical environmental studies courses must incorporate liberatory pedagogies. Teaching traditional critical thinking skills will not suffice. Typically, the market plays a central role in describing how education should be conceived. Education is understood in a very pragmatic way. In other words, the market issues demands that teachers are expected to incorporate into their courses. The main goal of education, accordingly, is to produce students who can adjust successfully to changes in the market.

This educational production is accomplished via specific pedagogical and epistemological maneuvers. In order to perform successfully students are required to make significant changes in how they know and understand themselves and the world. As Freire says, in this context “the educator’s role is to regulate the way the world ‘enters into’ students.”

Critical educators must create a democraticized space informed by the standpoint or perspective of environmental justice. Critical environmental education will encourage students to imagine a multi-dimensional world. All ideas will be studied, debated, criticized, and changed if necessary. Students will leave school equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in society, but also with the commitment and ability to see and be willing to help realize the myriad of possibilities in themselves and others. Fundamental social, political, and economic changes will not be seen as utopian dreams but as very possible alternative ways to deploy human energy and creativity.

Karen A. Callaghan, Professor of Sociology, Barry University

### **Ecofeminism, Ecotheory, and Nature Writing: Reading and Writing the Land**

When I was an undergraduate, there was no such thing as nature writing. At least that was the impression I took away from English classes where we discussed such writers as Whitman, Emerson, Thoreau, and Woolf without addressing place and environment. Our classes focused on literary periods, movements and styles, cultural awareness, feminism, and psychology.

Graduate school followed suit. If we thought of nature writing at all, we thought of a pastoral pursuit: a writer observing a pretty place, as a landscape painter might.

As Cheryl Glotfelty writes in *The Ecocriticism Reader*: “If your knowledge of the outside world were limited to what you could infer from the major publications of the literary profession, you would quickly discern that race, class, and gender were the hot topics of the late twentieth century, but you would never suspect that the earth’s life support systems were under stress. Indeed, you might never know that there was an earth at all.” The emergence of environmental literary studies (in the mid-eighties to nineties) has begun to change this situation.

In the twenty-first century, environmental literature—including ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and nature writing—is still evolving. In fact, some critics, like Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace in *Beyond Nature Writing*, view it as still emerging, still becoming known and gaining a foothold in academe.

My own course in the field evolved serendipitously. The first time I taught nature writing it was by accident. In 1995, for a course in literary nonfiction writing, I ordered books by writers whose craft I admired: Annie Dillard and Scott Russell Sanders. While I didn’t notice that both writers focused on environment, the students did. Their reaction echoed the early days of feminism, when a reading list of male writers was normative while one of women writers was perceived as politicized. My students perceived a list void of works about the natural world as the norm; a reading list focused on the natural world was a political statement. When I took the class to the campus arboretum for an exercise on sensory observation, several objected on the grounds that mosquito or snakebites were possible. One wrote a petulant piece about dump trucks he heard rumbling at a nearby construction site, a sound redolent of a civilized world more appealing than the hot Florida forest.

I didn’t set out to politicize academia or change my students. And yet, reading about place shifted their perception. The student who began by writing about dump trucks ended by sending me an e-mail about seeing deer standing alongside the road. He’d been traveling home from our last class, a route he’d driven hundreds of evenings without seeing a single deer. “They were so beautiful,” he wrote, “that they almost looked real.” Evidently, he hit the “send” button hastily; he sent another message immediately, apologizing for being ridiculous. But I found the slip revealing: The newly emergent deer reflected a subtle shift in his relationship to the natural world. What he’d ignored and rejected was just now becoming real.

Soon afterwards, I developed a course that examined these issues head-on: Ecofeminism, Ecotheory, and Nature Writing: Reading and Writing the Land. The course introduces students to environmental literature and also invites them to join the theoretical and pedagogical dialogue about the shape and meaning of this new field. The class strives to break down barriers between nature and city, humans and nonhumans, and creative and theoretical writing. Through reading, discussion, writing, and observation of Florida locations we explore such issues as definitions of nature writing; relationships between ourselves and place; and connections and separations between people and nature and between creative writing and theory. Students keep journals of observations (notes on field trips and reading) and work on a longer project (including “creative”

writing based on observation and memory and “theoretical” writing based on reflection and reading).

Course objectives include: becoming informed about and conversant in the recent proliferation of scholarship and interdisciplinary studies in literature and environment; exploring how observation and creativity can be a way of knowing and theorizing; examining whether theoretical writings can be exploratory and creative; and coming to terms with—and creating—“nature writing.” The reading is selected from among the following: Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm eds., *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*; Greta Gaard ed., *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*; Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*; Terry Tempest Williams, *Desert Quartet* and *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*; Annie Dillard, *The Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*; Lorraine Anderson, Scott Slovic, and John P. O’Grady, *Literature and the Environment: A Reader on Nature and Culture*; and Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace, eds, *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*. Students also read a variety of shorter works, either in a course pack or reserve reading. Such pieces include: Joyce Carol Oates, “Against Nature;” Virginia Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past”; E.M. Forster, “My Wood”; Terry Tempest Williams, “Testimony”; and Scott Russell Sanders, “A Paradise of Bombs.”

Jocelyn Bartkevicius, Assistant Professor English, University of Central Florida

**"...Annoyances that had to be reckoned with":{1}**

### **Rural and Urban Topology in African American Literature"**

In "The Greening of African-American Landscapes: Where Ecocriticism Meets Post-Colonial Theory," Christine Gerhardt notes, "Almost a decade after its emergence as a recognizable school of thought, ecocriticism...has started to turn to race as an important parameter for the study of literature and the environment" (515). While Gerhardt notes in the fall 2002 *Mississippi Quarterly* an important (and overdue) shift within the context of ecocriticism, black experience in America has always been irrevocably tied to the land, soil, and varied landscapes that comprise the nation.

During slavery, the classification of the black body as "beastly" and "animalistic" was directly correlated with the Africans' "uncanny" ability to withstand torturous field conditions, crop production, and euro-/ethnocentric beliefs about the inhuman attributes of the black slave. Likewise, in several 18<sup>th</sup> century narratives written by African Americans, a deep understanding of land, wilderness, heaven and earth translates into coded messages of escape ("Follow the North Star," and/or "Wade in the water"), as well as an ironic tool for evangelism. A prime example of the latter can be found in the autobiography of John Marrant titled, *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, A Black* (1785). After failed attempts at converting his family to Christianity, Marrant, a free man, "betook [himself] to the fields" with a tree as his only refuge from the wild savage animals of the forest. For Marrant, the wilderness becomes the temple where he communicates with the Lord and is eventually delivered from spiritual bondage. Because he is physically free, his biblically based wanderings in the

wilderness work to restore his fractured faith and ensure his place in heaven—and therefore, support his decision to preach the gospel to his family and friends.

By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the actual and imagined physical space of the African American community was no longer localized to the southern regions of the United States. Primarily, as a result of Western expansion, the boll weevil epidemic, and "The Great Migration" northward, the "natural" southern environment that once dictated African American life became a barrier to progress and revitalization as African American settlers expanded their territory. New environmental and psychological battles were fought against the harsh soil in Kansas, and the biting cold in the cities of Chicago and New York City.

The gradual transition from southern rural landscape to northern metropolis is chronicled in Jean Toomer's literary masterpiece aptly titled, *Cane* (1923). In this work, Toomer captures the essence of a romanticized, yet troubled south that exists because of the black experience that is firmly planted in the red clay dirt—like stalks of sugarcane. Toomer writes in "Portrait in Georgia":

*Hair—braided chestnut/coiled like a lyncher's rope/Eyes—fagots/Lips—old scars,  
or the first red blisters/Breath—the last sweet scent of cane/And her slim body,  
white as the ash of black flesh after flame.*

Part II of *Cane* is set in several urban centers, (Washington D.C., Chicago, New York), and reflects the chaotic relationship between the black urban subject and the environment. An excerpt from "Beehive" reads:

*Within this black hive to-night/There swarm a million bees/Bees passing in and  
out the moon/ Bees escaping out the moon/Bees returning through the  
moon/Silver bees intently buzzing/Silver honey dripping from the swarm of  
bees/Earth is a waxen cell of the world comb...*

The "northern" characters in *Cane* and literary works that follow in the 1930s-1950s reflect the harsh and bitter environmental conditions of the industrial north by rejecting dependency and reacting violently to those around them. In similar literary texts written by African Americans during this period, individualistic desires to succeed supercede a sense of community and security. For example, the reader encounters characters like Bigger Thomas in Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940), *in media res*. He is a product of urban poverty as demonstrated by the kitchenette his mother, brother, and sister live in and the opening scene where Bigger violently annihilates a menacing rat that haunts the family. Other characters tortured by socioeconomic and environmental conditions include Lutie Johnson in Ann Petry's *The Street* (1946). As Lutie searches for an affordable apartment in Harlem, she is teased and tormented by the north wind that acts as a devilish foe sent to destroy the ambition and determination of those around her, including herself. Petry writes, "[The wind] did everything it could to discourage the people walking along the street. It found all the dirt and...lifted it up so that the dirt got into their noses, making it difficult to breathe...it wrapped newspaper in their feet entangling them until the people cursed deep in their throats." And then, "It smacked [Lutie] against her ears as though it

*were giving a final, exasperated blow as proof of its displeasure in not being able to make her move on."*

As urban centers became more populated in the years following the decades of "urban realism," many African American authors returned to the rural "beginning" in their own work. For example, the rise of the Neo-slave narrative in the 1970s and 1980s re-fashioned the rural black character and placed him/her in conflict with the antebellum environment, often importing modern day technology into the past (*Flight to Canada* (1976); *Kindred* (1988)). In contemporary African American literature, ecocriticism has taken many forms and expanded the parameters of nation and space to include other points of entry in the African Diaspora. The varied approaches make the physical environment not merely an "annoyance that has to be reckoned with," but a driving force behind a true understanding of African American lived experience.

[1] Brooks, Gwendolyn. *Maud Martha* (1953)

Kalenda Eaton-Donald, Assistant Professor English, Barry University

**"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."** Aldo Leopold, author of *Game Management* (1933) and *A Sand County Almanac* (1948).

## FILMS

### **The Old West as A Reel Place: Ecocriticism and *The Searchers***

Almost since its initial release in 1956, John Ford's *The Searchers* has occupied a privileged place in discussions of the Western genre. Many see it as the self-conscious self-destruction of the classic Western. After it no one could, or dared, make the kind of naïve Western that, ironically, Ford had helped popularize during his long career in Hollywood. Through a subtle but decided shift of emphasis the film's obsessive plot structure and ruthless protagonist, a quintessential mythic cowboy, expose and thus explore the vicious impulses and unsavory desires that had percolated for decades just beneath the surface of the genre, both as popular literature and film. Ethan Edwards, the stern, tight-lipped, self-righteous hero, as depicted unforgettably by John Wayne, reveals himself to be an egotistical, violent, cruel, and racist force that threatens the very civilization he supposedly wishes to protect. The cowboy hero is not only revealed as fundamentally contradictory and therefore dangerously flawed, but as ultimately and inevitably bent upon his own destruction. He must, as the famous final shot of a door closing on his excluded figure so obviously demonstrates, be cut out of the domestic bliss and peace his questionable methods and motives have made possible. The film shows that, at its core, the myth of the west thrived on pure voyeurism and pandered to the need for lawlessness and violence in a society increasingly urban and industrialized where routine, meaningless labor and servile subjection to public opinion and established law had made rebellion, individuality, and adventure impossible, even illegal.

Film critics have long noted these self-contradictory elements in *The Searchers* and even praised the way Ford, probably without ever intending to, anticipated America's fall from the idyllic faith in its mythic principles and mission into its present post-modern malaise. But one prominent aspect of the film that has not yet received its proper due is its representation of the western landscape, again a filmic trait that marks all of Ford's western films as cinematic masterpieces. And it is here, of course, that ecocriticism might offer its services. Defined as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Estok 1), it seems perfectly suited to a genre that came into being precisely because it offered a version of "the physical environment" that answered a desperate need for freedom and open space. The popular and pulp Western literature of the turn of the century grew directly out of the increasingly urbanized American landscape. The ideal West of these stories, a place of vast and wild space where individuals could set their own rules and test themselves through daring adventures, became even more appealing when it was transferred to the film screen and made to seem tantalizingly real through the "magic" of the camera. And it is out of this landscape, indeed embodying many of its noble and desirable qualities, that the cowboy emerges, as in the opening sequence of *The Searchers* where Ethan Edwards approaches a fragile homestead set down precariously in the midst of the wilderness. He is alone, rootless, fiercely independent, and absolutely self-sufficient. Yet, while he is most at home in the open, since he is also the only competent and effective defender of the advancing civilization represented by the ranchers, he finds himself necessarily pitted against the landscape, expected ultimately to tame it and make it fit for human habitation. Once again, therefore, the cowboy becomes not a carefree symbol of escape, but the focal point of the tensions that made Westerns so popular for decades. An urban audience longed to live free in a romanticized wildness that the Western as a genre helped to create. And films evoked such a non-place, not in order to offer them for enjoyment, but to treat their audiences to the vicarious thrills of taming this hostile environment as the first step that would make civilized life, lives such as the urban dwellers themselves chafed at enduring, possible. As both embodiment and creature of the Western landscape and its appointed destroyer, the cowboy was bound eventually to tear himself asunder.

This division finally surfaces in all its brutality in *The Searchers*, most notably in Edwards' pathological hatred of the Native Americans he compulsively pursues. The Comanches in this film are personifications of the land itself, and it is insofar as Edwards thinks, acts, and feels like them that he succeeds in surviving in the place that has always been theirs. But, of course, he must use this knowledge to destroy the Comanches precisely so he can restore the kidnapped white woman to her family and thus insure that future generations of whites will flourish in the wilderness, erasing it even as they populate it. It is little wonder, then, that Edwards ends up as savage at times as the Comanches he hates and that he comes close at last to killing the woman he has been sent to rescue. It is also completely fitting, from the ecocritical perspective, that the door of the ranchers' home finally closes out Edwards as he wanders back into the landscape from which he emerged. He would cease to exist were he lifted out of the West that affords him his breath itself. Yet it should be noted that this is no longer the "real" landscape of a historical West, but the mythic space created by Ford as a kind of refuge on the screen for all that remained in twentieth century America of the cowboy: the mythic, larger-than-life figure who, like the landscape he inhabited and ultimately betrayed, could never really have existed.

The final irony of Ford's masterful vivisection of the Western lies in the name of his most famous film backdrop, Monument Valley. The name, of course, was given by white men who meant to commemorate the place itself, specifically, the great rock formations that, in Ford's westerns, always serve to dwarf the human agents who live and fight in their shadow. But Ford transforms the once wild place into a monument to his own filmmaking and a representation of the way he imagines the West to be and what it did look like. As a result of his films, this physical piece of the real world has become a symbol, not of how the West was won, but of how it was made.

#### Work Cited

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(Nov. 2001): 220-38.

Lawrence J. Byrne, Associate Professor English, Barry University

**The following 1930's films dramatize the interaction between humans and the natural world. Often used in film classes, particularly to examine the ethics of the documentary maker, as well as the visual and verbal rhetoric, the films complement discussions of the physical environment.**

#### ***The Silent Enemy (1930)***

W. Douglas Burden, a grandson of Commodore Vanderbilt, was an American outdoor adventurer who identified himself as a naturalist. Probably best remembered for his 1926 expedition where he filmed and captured the Komodo Dragon Lizard, Burden's knowledge of the northern forests of Ontario and Quebec made him increasingly aware of the dire consequences resulting from contact between the indigenous inhabitants and encroachment by white settlers. Burden believed that a film could demonstrate the native's experience with the natural environment and thus ensure that future generations could understand this experience. With his friend William Chanler, Burden obtained financing from Jesse Laske and Paramount Pictures. H. P. Carver was signed on as director with Carver's son Richard as writer. The script was based on parts of a 72-volume account of Jesuit missionaries who lived with the Ojibwes in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Chief Chauncey Yellow Robe, a grand-nephew of Sitting Bull and hereditary chief of the Sioux, delivers a moving prologue to the otherwise silent film and plays the character Chetoga. Molly Spotted Elk (Molly Dillis Nelson), a famous performer of Native American dances, is cast as Neewa, Chetoga's daughter. Buffalo Child Long Lance (born Sylvester Clark Long) plays Baluk. Long's heritage included white, African American, Catawba, and Cherokee. The entire cast, in fact, represents a variety of Native American tribes, unlike Hollywood films of that time where Native Americans were played by white actors in make-up.

*The Silent Enemy* was a box office failure in 1930, partly because it included little sound, and partly because the distribution practice of block booking worked against this special kind of film, today probably classified as a docudrama. In the early 1970's, the film was "discovered" by British film historian Kevin Brownlow who, with David Shepard, restored and played the film to a Washington AFI audience in 1973. A DVD is available from Milestone Films and Videos, and information about the film is available at their web site. *The Silent Enemy* is also available on video.

Photographed on location in Canada, the story focuses on the problem of hunger as a consequence of an often hostile natural world. The band of Ojibwes must decide whether to travel north in search of caribou or to follow the medicine man's advice to stay and wait for the Great Spirit to provide. Traveling north, the group encounters a violent snowstorm and wild animals eating what little food is available. *The Silent Enemy* is a compelling depiction of living in and with the natural world and is an important addition to readings about the environment and about nature. Note: Canada today recognizes over 600 First Nations. More than 130 are Ojibwe or part Ojibwe who are located in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. More recent films by and about the Ojibwes include *With Reservations* (Jim Northrop), *Ikwe* (National Film Board of Canada), and *Rice Harvest* (National Film Board of Canada).

### ***Land Without Bread (1932)***

Luis Bunuel's 30-minute documentary is, like *The Silent Enemy*, about hunger. Often packaged with Bunuel's classic *Un Chien Andalou*, *Land Without Bread* dramatizes the harsh life of the Hurdanos who live in a remote mountain region in Spain in the early 1930's and who are largely ignored by the Spanish government. Bunuel's horrific images of a goat plunging to its death from a cliff, of a dying girl on the roadside, and of a mule devoured alive by a huge swarm of bees graphically convey the struggle between these people and the physical environment. Often studied in film classes, particularly those dealing with the documentary, the film's powerful images may serve as a basis for discussion of environmental issues. Note: Las Hurdes is listed in tourist blurbs today as "an area of picturesque hamlets and waterfalls" where people still live in traditional stone houses

### **Pare Lorentz**

#### ***The Plow that Broke the Plains (1936)***

#### ***The River (1938)***

During the 1930's, the United States Government developed a campaign to inform the American people about the necessity of New Deal programs. As part of the Resettlement Administration, *Films of Merit* were produced for commercial release and public viewing. Pare Lorentz completed *The Plow that Broke the Plains* in 1936 which officially opened May 10, 1936 during a Museum of Modern Art event also featuring several international documentaries. Filmed on location in Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, and Texas, the intense images and Whitmanesque script accompanied by a dramatic musical score dramatize the United States as a land of once abundant resources now facing increasing environmental disasters. Two years later

Lorentz completed what is considered his masterpiece, *The River*. This film won the Venice Film Festival prize in 1938 over, among others, Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympiad*. Lorentz's free-verse script was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry in 1938. An example follows:

Black spruce and Norway pine,

Douglas fir and Red cedar,

Scarlet oak and Shagbark hickory.

We built a hundred cities and a thousand towns-

But at what a cost!

We cut the top off Wisconsin and sent it down the

River.

We left the mountains and the hills slashed and

Burned.

And moved on.

Lorentz argues that the overuse and abuse of the Mississippi River have resulted in devastating floods. He includes footage of the 1937 flood in the film. As part of the federal conservation program, the film dramatizes the necessity for dams to be built on the river, specifically by the Tennessee Valley Authority.

**“Everything in nature constantly invites us to be what we are.” Gretel Ehrlich**

### ***Young Adult Fiction***

I asked John S. Simmons, Professor Emeritus, English Education and Reading, Florida State University to discuss two or three outstanding young adult novels that address concerns about the natural world. His response is printed below.

In her 1961 landmark study on Young Adult fiction, Dorothy J. Petitt identifies 25 well-written novels for young readers published between 1938 and 1960. A number of these works focus on the relationship between a teenage central figure and his/her natural environment. In fact, more than 1/3 of that listing represents that Nature theme. Of these, clearly the best known is Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's *The Yearling* (1938).

In this award-winning text, Rawlings writes about a geographic area to which she migrated in her early 20's and which became her spiritual home until her death in 1953. The theme of the novel, a teenage boy's struggle for survival in the North Florida wilderness, is quite representative of

the titles included in Pettitt's study. Young Jody, an early adolescent growing up in that region, is an only child of a dirt-poor, rural family. His parents lack material resources and education and thus depend on the land for their survival. What they raise, grow, hunt, and fish represent what they are able to live on. Jody has neither education nor promise of one; he does have, however, the deep-seated love and support of his father and mother. It is his father who teaches him the ways of survival in the North Florida scrub country. When his father is the victim of a rattlesnake bite, Jody kills a deer whose entrails save his father's life. The fawn born of the deer then becomes Jody's pet and another object of his affection.

It is this love of pet and family that reflect the major facets of Jody's happiness in an otherwise impoverished existence. Despite this harsh existence, Jody comes to love the environment in which he lives, and it is this relationship that provides one of the major interests in the novel. Set in the late 1800's, *The Yearling* gives the reader a picture of a crude, undeveloped, natural habitat for struggling, largely destitute, rural Southern people. Some 70 years after its publication, it remains a Young Adult classic.

Unlike the author of *The Yearling*, Robert Newton Peck was poorly educated and received his most memorable teenage experience as a foot soldier in World War II. He grew up in the impoverished surroundings of rural Vermont. For most of his adult life, Peck lived in that harsh environment, farming the family tract as best he could. Thus his most notable work, *A Day No Pigs Would Die* (1972) is distinctly autobiographical. Rob, the protagonist, lives with his family on a small, largely unproductive farm in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He is an occasional student in a one-room, rural school, which he attends sporadically and reluctantly. His basic education comes from his strong, illiterate, deeply religious father, who is intensely proud of his role as family head and provider. As he learns the chores demanded by farm life, Rob emulates his father's commitment to the soil and its cultivation. He receives his reward in the acquisition of a piglet which is, unfortunately, unable to reproduce and, in the final phase of the narrative, must be slaughtered for food. The loss endured by Rob in watching the brutal death of his pet is similar to that which Jody felt in *The Yearling* when the matured fawn--which he deeply loves--is freed into the wilderness. Thus both Rob and Jody symbolize another important theme in Young Adult fiction: the closeness of an adolescent to his/her pet.

A text of a very different nature, Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977), provides another look at young people and their natural environment. This time, there are two 10-year-old children involved, and the setting is rural Northern Virginia in modern times. The male co-protagonist is named Jess and comes from a poor family. As his 5<sup>th</sup> grade year begins, he meets a new classmate/neighbor, Leslie, who is the only child of a well-to-do Washington, D.C. couple who, in reconsidering their priorities, have left their upscale life. Sophisticated, highly literate, and aggressive, Leslie alienates most of her classmates. Jess, however, becomes her close friend, and together they search the surrounding landscape for a place they can call their own. Eventually, they discover a small cave in the woodland where they set up what they refer to as their "kingdom" and name it Terabithia. They create a kind of world of imagination in which they lead an adventurous life as king and queen. This magical, secret life in the cave tragically ends when Leslie falls to her death while attempting to cross a chasm on a rope. As the novel ends, Jess is trying to cope with the loss of his friend and "co-ruler".

The environment which Paterson creates in this novel stands in sharp contrast with those found in the texts by Rawlings and Peck. In her work, nature is kind and even effusive, and once they made their discovery, the two pre-teen characters find their salvation from the hum-drum world. It is interesting that a number of contemporary censors have placed this novel high on their hit list, citing its inclusion of the magical, mysterious, and extra-terrestrial as reasons for its unacceptability as a text to be studied by young adults. Ironically, it is the author's imaginative use of that mystery and enchantment which has been both the source of its popularity and its critical acclaim. It certainly gives young readers a different perspective on the Nature theme.

John S. Simmons, Professor Emeritus, Florida State University

### **Of Interest**

**American Memory Online (The Library of Congress)** includes two collections of interest. "American Environmental Photographs 1891-1936" include images showing the results of human and natural changes to the environment. "Taking the Long View: Panoramic Photographs 1851-1991" is a collection which includes both images of the natural world, as well as urban settings.

**ASLE** (The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment) has a home page with links to publications, programs, conferences, resources, and archived articles dealing with ecocriticism.

**CAP: About Us** is the website of Center for American Places whose mission is "to enhance the public's understanding of, and appreciation for, the natural and built environment." The Center's book program includes four categories of geographical and environmental topics.

**Environmental Writing Institute** sponsored by Teller Wildlife Refuge, Inc. and The University of Montana Environmental Studies Program, focuses on environmental issues. EWI 2004 takes place May 20-25.

**Egotistics** is the online journal of EGO, the English Graduate Organization at the University of Alabama. A special issue will deal with environmental literature and writing.

**Green Teacher**, a magazine devoted to articles and resources for environmental education, includes online articles and teaching activities as well as links to other useful sources. Much of the material is geared for children and young adults, but there are some articles and activities useful for first year composition courses.

**Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society's** 17<sup>th</sup> annual meeting will be held in Apalachicola, Florida, April 15-17. The society was formed in 1987 to encourage critical examination of Rawlings.  
<http://web.english.ufl.edu/rawlings>

**National Outdoor Book Awards** are sponsored by NOBA, Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education, and Idaho University. The site includes lists of winners with information about the books and their authors.

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's** home page provides links to laws and regulations, educational resources, and programs.

### **Reminders**

**CEA Critic** is the journal of the College English Association and publishes scholarly articles on literature and film taught in the literature or composition classroom, as well as articles applying critical theory to a variety of genres.

**Florida English** is the literary journal of the Florida College English Association. Submissions in short stories, poetry, and critical essays are due by May 1, 2004.

### **FCEA CONFERENCE**

The Florida College English Association will be holding its annual conference October 14-15 in Palm Beach. A call for papers and more detailed information about the conference will be posted on the FCEA website <http://www.flacea.org> soon.

### **CEA ELECTIONS**

Maurice O'Sullivan (Rollins College) was elected Second Vice-President for 2004-2005. The following individuals were elected to three-year terms on the Board of Directors (2004-2007): Robert Madison, U.S. Naval Academy; Nina Tassi, Fordham U.; Barbara Wiedemann, Auburn U.-Montgomery.