

*International Workshop: Ecocritical Life Writing in the Dystopic Present*

University of Augsburg, Germany

5. / 6. December 2019

The fields of Life Writing and Ecocriticism closely intertwine, as has already been proven during the first ecological movements that gradually transformed into a global endeavor in the 1960s, so much so that Alfred Hornung argued in *Ecology and Life Writing* that ‘nature writing equals life writing’ (2013, p. x). Arguably, the “introspective quality of reflecting upon nature and one’s place in relation to nature make the act of commenting on the environment and writing about one’s experience inseparable,” (Tanya K. Kam, in *Life Writing* 13.3, p. 351), and writings by John Muir, Rachel Carson, Mary Oliver, Annie Dillard, Leslie Marmon Silko, Terry Tempest Williams, or Karen Tei Yamashita have substantiated this observation, as they are characterized by autobiographical impulses as well as their sociopolitical reflections on the natural world. By processing such ecologically situated narratives, readers can gain an insight into the crucial role the environment plays in their lives. At the same time, these engagements always point to a certain ecological age and are intertwined with their ecological moment.

This workshop sets out to re-visit the relation between ecocriticism and life writing in what might be called the “dystopic present.” First and foremost, this designation aims to differentiate texts from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries from those of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, by arguing that the latter are part of an age where the relation between nature and the human is largely seen as a dystopian one: While late 19<sup>th</sup>-century and 20<sup>th</sup>-century ecocritical life writing focused primarily on an anthropocentric, benevolent understanding of nature, the environment, or wilderness, in connection to the human being exposed to it, late 20<sup>th</sup>-century and 21<sup>st</sup>-century texts instead increasingly react to and criticize humans’ destructive interventions into nature and the environment. Moreover, the latter certainly play a crucial role in critically reflecting the interdependencies between nature and the human in the context of the contemporary Americas, by understanding them as either reciprocal or even indistinguishable.

We invite the submission of individual abstracts (300 words) of current projects that explore all aspects of this theme; possible subthemes may include, but are not limited to:

- Econarratology
- Ecocritical and Biopolitics of Reproductive Technologies
- Ecocriticism and the Posthumanities
- Ecocritical Science Fiction / Speculative Fiction
- Ecocriticism and Social Activism

- Ecocriticism and Technological Innovation
- Climate Change Narratives
- Ecofeminism / Feminist Ecocriticism
- Performing Ecocriticism in Virtual Environments
- Technoscience and Ecocriticism
- Queer Ecocritical Life Writings
- Postcolonial Ecocritical Life Writings

We intend the workshop to be an intense discussion forum for the fields sketched above. Thus, the group of participants will be limited to a maximum of twenty scholars that represent all stages of the academic career. The workshop will furthermore be guided by several experts who have previous research experience in the fields of either Ecocriticism or Life Writing, and who will contribute to the workshop by not only giving feedback on individual projects but also by providing spotlight keynotes. The desired outcome of this format is the comprehensive discussion of individual proposals, in order to prepare these for a subsequent essay collection on the topic. Applicants should therefore be willing to prepare a 2000-word essay for distribution to all participants **prior** to the workshop.

For further questions about the workshop theme and organization, please contact Ina Batzke, one of the members of the organizing American Studies team at the University of Augsburg. Abstracts amounting to approx. 300 words and a short biographical sketch should be submitted to [ina.batzke@philhist.uni-augsburg.de](mailto:ina.batzke@philhist.uni-augsburg.de) by **May 20, 2019**. A limited amount of travel bursaries to support graduate students, independent scholars, and junior faculty members will be available; please indicate whether you would like to be considered for a travel bursary when submitting your abstract.