



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

All is Deep. All is Shallow. The Ambivalence of Ecocritics and Nature Writers towards Deep Places

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Abstract:

After giving a brief history of ecocriticism, identifying and discussing the movement's successive 'waves', I will turn to two related preoccupations that have emerged recently in both ecocriticism and nature writing. These preoccupations are hydroculture or 'the blue humanities', and underground ecosystems, from the 'wood wide web' of mycorrhizal fungi underneath forests to deep caves, tunnels and aquifers. Clearly, these topics are related to the 'spa' theme of the conference – the tradition of blessings that come from below rather than above. I will introduce and examine critically the metaphorical and symbolic meanings that have traditionally been attached to these hidden worlds, and the new ecocritical meanings that are emerging now. This will lead me to two additional themes. The first is the importance for ecocriticism of the task of sorting out those traditional meanings of 'nature' that should be embraced and developed, and those that should be rejected, and the second is the ambivalence of ecocritics and nature writers towards the exploration and revelation of the deepest and most inaccessible places. Understanding these places – perhaps familiarising them – is necessary for the sake of the ecological systems-knowledge required by the crisis, but the resulting domestication and intimacy is a form of disenchantment that calls for new locations and occasions for the sublime. How can both of these impulses play a part in cultural responses to the environmental crisis?

My discussion of these questions will engage with the work of Stacy Alaimo, Astrida Neimanis, Anna Tsing, Robert Macfarlane, J.M. Ledgard and Sean Borodale. I will touch upon new materialism, multispecies ethnography and Timothy Clark's concern with derangements of scale. I will also give a brief reading of some of my own new nature writing.

Biography:

Richard Kerridge is a nature writer and ecocritic. *Cold Blood: Adventures with Reptiles and Amphibians* (2014), is a mixture of memoir and nature writing, described by *The Sunday Times* as a minor classic. It was adapted and broadcast as a Radio 4 Book of the Week. Other work has been published in *BBC Wildlife*, *Poetry Review* and *Granta*. Richard was awarded the 2012 Roger Deakin Prize by the Society of Authors, and has twice received the *BBC Wildlife* Award for Nature Writing. His most recent publication is a new annotated edition of J.H. Prynne's place-based poem-sequence *The Oval Window*, using previously unavailable archive material.

At Bath Spa University, Richard leads the MA in Creative Writing and co-ordinates research and postgraduate studies in Literature and Creative Writing. He has published essays on ecocritical topics ranging from Shakespeare and Thomas Hardy to present-day fiction, poetry, nature writing and film. In 1998, he co-edited *Writing the Environment*, the first collection of ecocritical essays to be published in the UK. He reviews nature writing for *The Guardian* and has appeared on arts programmes on BBC national radio. Richard was a leading member of the team led by SueEllen Campbell that wrote *The Face of the Earth: Natural Landscapes, Science and Culture*, (2011).

He was founding Chair of ASLE-UKI, and has been a member of the ASLE Executive Council. With Greg Garrard he is co-editor of the Bloomsbury Academic monograph series 'Environmental Cultures'. Richard has recently joined the steering committee of *New Networks for Nature*, an organization that brings together artists, writers, academics from the sciences and humanities, broadcasters, conservationists, NGOs, politicians and policy-makers, with the common aim of defending and celebrating the natural world.