“SHARP EYES” VII: IS NATURE WRITING DEAD?

A SUMMER CONFERENCE AT
THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT ONEONTA
JUNE 4-8, 2012

Photo Courtesy American Museum of Natural History
PROGRAM

Monday, June 4:
Unless specified, all sessions will be held in the Craven Lounge at the Morris Conference Center.

10:30 am: First meeting with undergraduate seminar students: Professors Payne, Tallmadge, and Mercier, and Teaching Assistant Chelsea Quaranta.

10:00 am—Registration
Noon
Morris Conference Center Lobby

12:00 pm Welcome and Introductions
Otsego Grille, Morris Conference Center

12:15 pm Luncheon
Otsego Grille, Morris Conference Center
Opening Address, “John Burroughs: Life & Works”: Dr. Stephen Mercier (Marist College).

1:30 pm Session 1: Maura Toomey and Dr. Jeff Walker (Vassar College): “Transcribing the Journals of John Burroughs: A Project Update.”

2:00 pm Session 2: Dr. Charlotte Zoë Walker (Professor Emeritus, SUNY Oneonta): “John O’Birds on Fracking Our Nests.”

2:30 pm Session 3: Dr. Jeff Walker (Vassar College): “Our River: The Essay Art of John Burroughs.”

3:00 pm Break.


4:00 pm Session 5: Dr. Elyse Zucker and Dr. Julie Trachman (Hostos Community College, CUNY): “Making Connections Between Ecological Processes, Our Egos, and Our Oikos: Utilizing Environmental Science as the Basis for English Expository Writing.”

4:30 pm Session 6: Dr. Andrea Braunius Denekamp (Drew University): “‘It Grows like a Seed in the Dark:’ J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings as Environmental Literature.”

5:00 pm: Dinner Break (on your own).
7:00 pm  Planetarium Program hosted by Dr. Paul French, Professor of Physics and Engineering, SUNY Oneonta.

**Tuesday, June 5:**

8:30 am  Continental breakfast, Morris Conference Center.

9:00 am  **Session 7:** Dr. Robert Titus (Hartwick College): “Nature Writing as a Geologist.”

9:30 am  **Session 8:** Dr. David Spector (Central Connecticut State University): “Naturalists and Scientists: By Their Autobiographies You Shall Know Them.”

10:00 am **Session 9:** Dr. Sarah Weiger (University of Portland): “Nature Writing and the Art of Losing.”

10:30 am  Break.

10:45 am  **Session 10:** Dr. Richard Hunt (Potomac State College): “If Nature Writing is Really Dead, Who Killed It, and Where’s the Corpse?”

11:15 am  **Session 11:** Dr. Cindy White (Central Connecticut State University): “In Consumption is the Preservation of Wildness: Environmentalism and the Construction of the Patagonia Brand.”

11:45 am: **Session 12:** Dr. Elizabeth Lawson (Ithaca College): “Petrified Lightning: Darwin as an Inspiration for the Future of nature Writing.”

12:00 pm  Field trip to John Burroughs’s Woodchuck Lodge, Boyhood Rock, and Burroughs gravesite. Box lunch provided.

5:00 pm  Informal gathering for dinner at Brooks House of BBQ, Route 7, Oneonta.

7:00 pm  Movie Night: *John Burroughs: Naturalist in the Industrial Age* and *Frogs* (1972).

**Wednesday, June 6**

8:30 am  Continental breakfast

9:00 am  **Session 13:** Carrie Duke (Ball State University): “Re-Imagining Beautiful: Marilynne Robinson’s Ecocritical Discourse with a Transcendental Understanding of Nature.”
9:30 am  **Session 14**: Dr. Brendan T. Mahoney (Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, Binghamton University, SUNY): “A Poetry of Echoes: Thoreau and the Possibilities of Nature Writing.”

10:00 am  Break.

10:15 am  **Session 15**: Dr. James M. Pangborn (SUNY Oswego): “Being and Rain: Biopragmatics in Williams and Creeley.”

10:45 am  **Session 16**: Dr. Richard J. Schneider (Professor Emeritus, Wartburg College): “The Dark Side of Nature Writing: *Nature Noir* and *Wisconsin Death Trip*.

11:15 am  **Session 17**: Barbara George (Kent State University): A Proposal to Study Discourse: The Fracking Lease and the Fracking Ban.

12:00 Lunch (on your own)

1:00 pm  **Session 18**: I. Trevisani Bach: “What Do You Mean by Nature Writing?”

1:30 pm  **Session 19**: Dr. John R. Harris, Director, The Monadnock Institute of Nature, Place and Culture Franklin Pierce University “Retracing Edwin Way Teale’s *North With the Spring*.”

2:00 pm  **Session 20**: Corinne H. Smith (Anna Maria College): “Rediscovery of the New Hampshire Cabin Musings of Walter Collins O’Kane.”

2:30 pm  Break.

2:45 pm  **Session 21**: Dr. Roger Hecht (SUNY Oneonta): “Spirits of the Forest: Myth and the Fate of Nature in the Films of Studio Ghibli.”

3:15 pm  **Session 22**: Brian Kamsoke (Wichita State University): “A Pond With No Name: Nomenclature in Nature and the Loss of Anonymity.”

3:45 pm  **Session 23**: Dr. Christopher Origer (Broome Community College): “Terra Non Grata” (short fiction).

4:30 pm  **Session 24**: Dr. John Tallmadge (The Natural History Network): Linked Through Nature: Natural Science, Nature Writing, and Traditional Ecological Knowledge.”

6:00 pm  Conference Banquet (Morris Conference Center or College Camp). Closing Remarks and a Preview of the 2014 Conference: Keynote Address by Dr. Daniel Brayton (Middlebury College, Middlebury, VT): “A Summer Cruise of the New England Coast.”
**Thursday, June 7**
9:30 am  Meeting with seminar students.

10:30 am  Kaaterskill Falls & Catskill Mountain House fieldtrip (box lunch provided), featuring a talk by the Catskill Geologist, Dr. Robert Titus.

**Friday, June 8**
9:30 am  Final meeting with seminar students.
          Craven Lounge. Morris Conference Center.

**Biographies**

**Dan Brayton** is an Associate Professor in the Department of English and American Literatures at Middlebury College, where he teaches courses on the literature of the sea, environmental literature, early modern drama (including Shakespeare), utopias and dystopias, and world literature. He earned his doctorate at Cornell in 2001 and has published in *English Literary History, Forum for Modern Language Studies, Shakespeare Quarterly*, Scribners’ *British Writers* series, and *WoodenBoat*. A lifelong sailor, he has also had visiting appointments at Sea Education Association of Wood’s Hole, Massachusetts and the Williams-Mystic Program in Maritime Studies in Mystic, Connecticut, and has taught courses on tall ships in the Atlantic, Pacific, and the Caribbean. He serves as the Literature, Art, and Music section editor of a new journal, *Coriolis: the Interdisciplinary Journal of Maritime Studies*. His book, *Shakespeare’s Hungry Ocean: Ecocriticism, Early Modern Culture, and the Marine Environment*, winner of the Northeast Modern Language Association First Book Prize, has recently been published by the University of Virginia Press (spring 2012), and his co-edited volume *Ecocritical Shakespeare* was published in the spring of 2011.

**Andrea Denekamp** earned her Ph.D. from Drew University in May. Oneonta is her alma mater; she earned her degree in English and Geography here in 2005. She lives in the Leatherstocking region of New York with her family, including a demanding one-year-old, an energetic dog, and a recalcitrant horse. Among her scholarly interests are British literature and ecocriticism and environmental literature. The following presentation is derived from her doctoral dissertation “The Praxis of Tolkienian Stewardship: Comprehensive Renewal of Authenticity through Regional Particularity,” where she argues that *The Lord of the Rings* can be read as a work which includes nature writing.

**Carrie A. Duke** is a doctoral candidate at Ball State University,

**Barbara George** is a doctoral candidate in the Rhetoric and Society program at Kent State University.
**Dr. John R. Harris** is Director of The Monadnock Institute of Nature, Place and Culture at Franklin Pierce University in New Hampshire. As a member of the Environmental Science and American Studies faculty at Franklin Pierce University, he regularly teaches courses that include reading assignments focused on American naturalists such as Henry David Thoreau, George Perkins Marsh, John Muir, John Burroughs, Rachel Carson, Aldo Leopold, Annie Dillard and Edwin Way Teale. In addition to teaching, his work with the Monadnock Institute has included NEH sponsored collaborations with regional high school faculty and students, a comprehensive planning project with the town of Rindge, and the production and publication of two regional anthologies and five documentary films. From 2008 to 2011, he served as principal editor for the most recent Institute anthology, *Beyond the Notches: Stories of Place in New Hampshire’s North Country*, which received the NH Writers’ Project award for outstanding work of nonfiction in 2011. The film documentary series entitled *Reflections: An Oral History of Keene*, for which he conducted interviews and wrote three of the five film scripts, received the Oral History Association’s Elizabeth Mason small project award in 2009.

**Roger Hecht** holds a Ph.D. in literature from Syracuse University and an M.F.A. from Arizona State University. He is now an assistant professor of English at SUNY Oneonta, where he directs the biannual conference on James Fenimore Cooper. He is an accomplished poet whose latest collection, *Talking Picture* was published by Cervena Barva Press in the Spring of 2012.

**Richard Hunt** taught in Minnesota, Iowa, and Pennsylvania before accepting a position as Assistant Professor of English at Potomac State College in West Virginia. His doctoral dissertation at the University of Nevada at Reno was entitled “Heaven and Earth: The Integration of Faith and Science in American Nature Writing.” An accomplished musician, his current work examines the confluence of music and environmental crisis in Appalachia.

**Brian Kamsoke** is a fiction writer, playwright, and sometimes poet. He has written three plays, one that was stage read at the Firehouse Theater in Syracuse, New York, and another currently under consideration at the Telluride Playwright Festival in Telluride, Colorado. His poetry has appeared in *Mikrokosmos* and recent fiction has appeared in *r.kv.r.y.*, *Reed Magazine*, *Foliate Oak Literary Magazine*, *Flint Hills Review*, and *Pearl*. His fiction was also featured on the Telling Tales radio show on NPR-affiliated station WUOW here in Oneonta. Brian currently holds the 2012-2013 MFA Creative Writing Fellowship at Wichita State University in Wichita, Kansas, and is working on his first novel.

**Elizabeth Lawson** is a truly interdisciplinary scholar who holds a degree in English from Bryn Mawr College, a Master's in Botany from UT-Austin, a PhD in Plant Biology from Cornell University, and, recently an MFA in Nonfiction from Southern New Hampshire
University. As a botanist turned writer/writing professor, she teaches a class on "Writing as a Naturalist" in the Department of Writing at Ithaca College.

**Dr. Brendan Mahoney** is Director of the Independent Undergraduate Research in the Humanities Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at Binghamton University, State University of New York.

**Christopher Origer** has been a carpenter, an aircraft mechanic, and a torso in a mediocre movie. More importantly, though, he’s the father of two adventurers – his daughter and son – who continually help him understand the connection between beauty and empathy. Despite the best advice to the contrary, his writing shows up occasionally in places like *Fourth Genre*, *The Father's Book*, *The Writer's Chronicle*, and other periodicals. Among other subjects, he teaches Environmental Literature and Creative Writing at Broome Community College, where he is the editor of *Breaking Ground*. The story “Terra Non Grata” emerged from an introduction he wrote for the “Green Issue” of that magazine.

**James Pangborn** holds his doctorate in English from the University at Buffalo (SUNY) and currently teaches at SUNY College at Oswego.

**Richard J. Schneider** is Professor Emeritus of English at Wartburg College, in Waverly, Iowa. He earned his Ph.D. in English from the University of California at Santa Barbara in 1973, where he wrote his doctoral dissertation on Henry Thoreau. He has written or edited several books including: *Henry David Thoreau: A Documentary Volume* in the Dictionary of Literary Biography series (2004); *Thoreau's Sense of Place: Essays in American Environmental Writing*. (2000); *Approaches to Teaching Thoreau's Walden and Other Works* (1996); and *Henry David Thoreau* (1987).

**Corinne H. Smith** holds an M.S. in Curriculum & Instruction (Outdoor Teacher Education), from Northern Illinois University; and an M.Ed. in Communications Media from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 1982. She is currently a Cataloging & Reference Librarian at Anna Maria College in Paxton, Massachusetts and recently served as a Special Project Librarian for The Thoreau Institute at Walden Woods in Lincoln, Massachusetts. She is the author of *Westward I Go Free: Tracing Thoreau's Last Journey*, to be published by Green Frigate Books in Spring 2012.

**David Spector** is Professor of Biology at Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, Connecticut. Among other works he is a co-editor of the *Bird Finding Guideto Western Massachusetts*.

**John Tallmadge** holds his B.A. from Dartmouth College and his Ph.D. from Yale University. In addition to thirty years of teaching experience, he is the author of three books and numerous essays on nature, culture, literature, and human values. He is an editor for the University of Virginia Press series, “Under the Sign of Nature: Explorations in Ecocriticism,” and as a past president of the Association for Literature and the Environment (ASLE), he has been instrumental in the growth of interest in nature writing and ecocriticism.
**Robert Titus** is a Professor of Geology at Hartwick College in Oneonta and writes weekly columns for the *Register Star* -Hudson Valley-Catskills Newspaper chain and monthly columns for the *Woodstock Times* along with *Kaatskill Life*. He is the author of three books on the geology of the Catskill Mountain region and his fourth book will be in editing soon.

**Maura Toomey** is a graduate student at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York, where she has been working with Professor Jeff Walker on an NEH-sponsored project to digitize John Burroughs’s journals. For the past several years we have been mounting copies of Burroughs’s journal pages along with transcriptions, on the webpage of Hudson River Valley Heritage, a site is accessible through Vassar College’s special collections.

**Julie Trachman** is an Assistant Professor in the Natural Sciences Department at Hostos Community College of The City University of New York. She received her B.S. in biological sciences from Cornell University, and her M.S. and Ph.D. in microbiology from the Sackler Institute of Graduate Biomedical Sciences of New York University. Besides her microbiology research, Dr. Trachman's academic interests extend to other biology-related topics such as environmental science concerns and women and gender studies issues. She is also interested in pedagogy strategies and research. Dr. Trachman has been a recipient of numerous grants to conduct her microbiology research, has published in peer reviewed journals, and has presented at local, national and international conferences.

**Christian Hummelsund Voie** is a doctoral student in English at Mid Sweden University, Sweden. He received his MA in English, at the University of Bergen, Norway, in June 2007.


**Jeff Walker** is Professor of Geology at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York, where for the past several years he has also directed an NEH-sponsored project to digitize John Burroughs’s journals. In 2008 he directed the “Sharp Eyes” conference at Vassar and published an annotated version of John Burroughs’s *Signs and Seasons* with Syracuse University Press. He is a member of the board of the John Burroughs Association and has given many public presentations on John Burroughs and his work.

Sarah Weiger is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Portland, where she just finished my first year teaching full time. At Portland Dr. Weiger teaches nineteenth-century British literature and environmental literature. Her dissertation, completed at Cornell University, was entitled “*The Bird is the Feeling*”: *Romantic Natural History and its Subjects*. She has also written on John Clare and has an article coming out in the European Romantic Review on Dorothy Wordsworth.
**Cindy White** is Professor of Communication at Central Connecticut State University, where she teaches courses in media studies including Advertising and Society, Images of Gender in the Media, and Media Literacy. She is also a faculty member in the Program in Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies and the Honor’s Program. Her most recent published work is on Space and Place in Children’s Television; Gendered Representations of Olympic Athletes in *Vogue*; and Representations of Gender in Nike Advertising.

**Elyse Zucker** is an Assistant Professor of English at Hostos Community College of The City University of New York. She received her M.A. and PhD in English and American Literature from New York University. Dr. Zucker's special interests include Modern Literature, Environmentalism, Ethnic Studies, relationships between literature and psychology, Jazz, composition, and pedagogy: topics on which she has been awarded grants, published in peer reviewed journals, and presented papers at national conferences.

**SPECIAL THANKS**

As always, the 2012 “Sharp Eyes” conference has been a collaborative effort, and special thanks go to our seminar instructors John Tallmadge and Steve Mercier, teaching assistant Chelsea Quaranta, Michelle Thibault in the Office of Continuing Education, Graig Eichler and Mary Moubray at the Morris Conference Center, Katherine Nelligan and Kimala Clark (catering), President Nancy Kleniewski and her staff, English Department chair Eileen Morgan-Zayachek, Beth Levine (MultiMedia productions), Dave Geasey, Ian Lascell, Lorin Levins in Graphics Design, Joan Burroughs and Jeff Walker (John Burroughs Association), Diane Galusha (Woodchuck Lodge), Paul French (Physics Department), Susan Clemons, Lisa Miller, Mark Ferrara, Roger Hecht, Richard Lee, Lisa Hoffman, and Chris Burgher. Finally, a very special thanks to our indispensable English Department Secretary Ruth Carr.