

Environmental (Post-)Humanities: The View from ‘Down Under’

Kate Rigby

In a landmark address to the Australian Academy of the Humanities from 2003, environmental historian Tom Griffiths observed that Australia had “a real competitive edge in the ecological humanities.” In his analysis, this was related to “our history as a modern settler society with a long, strong indigenous history, our inheritance of a confrontingly different and unique ecology, our inhabitation of an island continent that is also a nation.” This paper proceeds from a reconsideration of how this troubled socio-environmental historical experience informed the emergence and development of the multi- and transdisciplinary project of the eco-humanities in Australia, and proceeds to address a contemporary case study: namely, the contribution of transdisciplinary Environmental Humanities research to addressing the challenge of living in Australia’s highly fire-prone, and fire-adapted, landscapes under the impact of anthropogenic global warming. While challenging the Eurocentric implications of the construction of Australia as a land “down under”, the paper argues that one of the hallmarks of the Australian eco-humanities has been its attention to the voices and agency of those who have historically been silenced, including marginalised human groups (especially Australia’s First Nations), but also nonhuman others and inhuman forces. In this way, Environmental Humanities perspectives from “down under” are unsettling the dualisms inherent in what Australian ecophilosopher Val Plumwood termed the “logic of colonisation”, opening a space for creative conversations and collaborations across the divides of disciplines, cultures, and even species.

Bio

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