

SEA SESSION PROPOSAL

“Human, Nonhuman, Posthuman: Ecocriticism and the Literature of the Early Americas”

From its origins in the 1970s as a theoretical approach that focused on the relation of human beings to the environment, ecocriticism has moved considerably beyond treating the human self as a delimited subject existing within but also separate from the natural world. More recent ecocritical practice embraces what Stacy Alaimo in *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment and the Material Self* describes as “the interconnections, interchanges, and transits between human bodies and nonhuman natures.” This sense of the human “no longer as occupying a bounded, self-enclosed body, insulated from a world beyond” is more recently explored by Patricia Phillippy in “Anne Bradstreet’s Family Plots: Puritanism, Humanism, Posthumanism.” Informed by the work of Carolyn Merchant and Cary Wolfe, Phillippy “adopt[s] a new materialist view of corporeality as simultaneously material and discursive to explore Bradstreet’s sense of human and nonhuman bodies and places as continuous and co-produced. This idea, in turn, reimagines the individual subject no longer as occupying a bounded, self-enclosed body, insulated from a world beyond. Rather than residing in a stable corporeal rind, individuals, like environments, are permeable and intertwined.”

This panel will consider a wide range of literatures of the early Americas in terms of the issues and questions raised by Alaimo, Merchant, Wolfe, Phillippy, and others. For example:

What does it mean to think of early American literature as posthuman?

What does it mean to be human as opposed to nonhuman in early America, especially in environmental terms?

How do categories such as race, class, gender, and sexuality expand or limit our understanding of the binaries of human/nature, nonhuman/nature, and human/nonhuman?

How can related fields, such as animal studies, inform ecocritical readings of early texts?

How do the various cultures of early America influence and how are they influenced by attitudes about nature/the human/the nonhuman?

Comparative studies are especially welcome, as are submissions by graduate students, early career scholars, and contingent researchers.

Please send a 300-word abstract and brief bio to Mary Balkun mary.balkun@shu.edu by Oct. 20th.