

**Event Title:** Queer Eye for the Natural World: Writing Our Bodies, Desire, and Nature

**Event Description:** This multi-genre panel features four authors employing queer ecology as a framework for their creative approaches. Through lively discussion, we'll look at queer ecology's role in contemporary literature as a site of interrogation: how do identity, desire, and social and environmental justice intersect to form a queer perspective on nature? We will explore connection and relational experience with a queer ecological sensibility shaping the expansiveness of a new kind of nature writing.

**Event Category:** Multiple Literary Genres Craft & Criticism

**Event Organizer & Moderator:**

**Melissa Matthewson:** Melissa Matthewson is the author of a memoir-in-essays, *Tracing the Desire Line* (Split/Lip Press, 2019). Her essays have appeared in *Literary Hub*, *Guernica*, *Oregon Humanities*, *AEON*, and *Catapult* among others. Her second book of nonfiction, *The Fire Trees*, is forthcoming from punctum books. She works as a Communications Director for Southern Oregon University Advancement and teaches in the Eastern Oregon University low-residency MFA program.

**Event Participants:**

**Marco Wilkinson:** Marco Wilkinson's first book is *Madder: A Memoir in Weeds* (Coffee House Press, 2021). He is a queer Uruguayan-American writer whose other identities include forager, permaculturist, Buddhist, do-nothing gardener, and cat-companion. His most recent publications include "After nothing is left, the leaves..." in *Ecotone* and "How Do I feel Today?" in the anthology *Solastalgia: An Anthology of Emotion in a Disappearing World* (UVA Press, 2023), both of which meditate and speculate on survival when making do is difficult. He is an Assistant Professor of Eco-Writing at UC San Diego.

**Amie Whittemore:** Amie Whittemore (she/her) is the author of the poetry collections *Glass Harvest* (Autumn House Press) and *Star-tent: A Triptych* (Tolsun Books, 2023). She was the 2020-2021 Poet Laureate of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and an Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellow. She teaches at Middle Tennessee State University, where she directs MTSU Write, a from-home creative writing mentorship program.

**Alicia Mountain:** Alicia Mountain is the author of *Four in Hand* (BOA Editions, 2023) and *High Ground Coward* (Iowa, 2018). She holds an MFA from the University of Montana and a PhD from the University of Denver. Mountain is an Assistant Teaching Professor in the Writer's Foundry MFA at St. Joseph's University in Brooklyn.

**Kemi Alabi:** Kemi Alabi is the author of *Against Heaven*, selected by Claudia Rankine as winner of the Academy of American Poets First Book Award, and coeditor of *The Echoing Ida Collection*. Their poems appear in the *Atlantic*, the *Nation*, *Poetry*, *Boston Review*, and elsewhere. They've received fellowships from Pink Door, MacDowell, Sewanee Writers' Conference, and Civitella

Ranieri. As a cultural strategist, Alabi creates narrative power projects with organizers and movement builders. Born in Wisconsin on a Sunday in July, they now live in Chicago, IL.

## **Opening Remarks and Housekeeping Announcements**

Welcome to Queer Eye for the Natural World: Writing Our Bodies, Desire, and Nature

A few reminders before we begin:

For those needing or wishing to follow along to a written text, please let me know and a printed copy will be delivered to you. Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers. Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them. Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone's use of an accommodation while at the conference, including for chairs reserved for those with disabilities.

Thank you all for being here. I'm going to give a few introductory remarks and then introduce the panelists and give them time to read from their work and provide commentary on this subject. We will have a Q & A at the end so please hold your questions until all panelists have spoken.

First, to give context, this panel came about after I taught an MFA graduate course on Queer Ecologies at Eastern Oregon University. At the time, I was also working on my second book, *The Fire Trees*, which explores intersections of nature, ecology, queerness, and bodies through autobiography and archival research. Between that course and the writing, I was deeply immersed in the questions that queer ecology poses and thought that AWP presented a perfect opportunity to engage with the ideas of this subject with writers I admire.

As a theory and practice, queer ecology demands of us that we re-orient ourselves to an alternative way of ecological thinking as we confront late-stage capitalism and climate collapse. Its commitments and foundations encourage us to examine an eco-sexual politics that merge both queer theory and ecological theory.

The origin of queer ecological thinking has its roots in ecofeminism and queer theory, first explored by feminist scholars Greta Gaard and Catriona Mortimer Sandilands, who have both written extensively in scholarly journals about queer ecological theory. The ideas of queer ecology were formalized in the 2001 book—*Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*—compiled by Sandilands and Bruce Erickson.

Since that time, the field of queer ecological thinking has emerged as a poignant and critical sub-genre of literature. In the Sandilands exploration, we find how queer ecology, particularly in nature writing and literature, is a reaction to the colonial and masculine energies that have dominated nature writing. Rethinking this tradition with a mind toward sensual engagement of the natural world, of multi-sexual identities, of queerness, will better inform our creative practices and environmental conversation.

Queer ecology writing provides to us an anticolonial, antiracist, and environmental justice lens that moves beyond the romantic and masculine vision of nature. It calls upon us, through work by adrienne maree brown, Camille Dungy, Tommy Pico, J Drew Lanham, Ocean Vuong, Aisha Sabatini Sloan, and others, to renew a relationship with nature that considers race, sexuality, gender, desire, pleasure, and bodies.

Nicole Seymour suggests that “The ongoing work of queer ecologies as a line of inquiry must include tackling white supremacy, anti-blackness, and environmental (in)justice.”

For me, I am interested in the eroticism of nature, its expansiveness, and how that desire and eroticism is found in the precepts of queer ecology. I am also interested in this substance of intimacy. What it contains. Its atmosphere, which includes presence, boundaries, the body, and transformation. My work revolves around these obsessions and warrants.

Finally, Sandilands insists that queer ecology disrupts the discourse around heterosexual articulation of nature and sexuality, that it insists that we create an “articulative practice” in which sex and nature are understood all while considering structural power dynamics and their limitations on freedom. What influence might an articulative practice of queer ecological writing have on dominant paradigms?

With that, as context, I’m going to introduce our panelists.

### **Participant Initial Remarks**

#### **Marco Wilkinson:**

- queerness as a resistance to taxonomic imperatives and its relation to how we see landscape (especially in relationship to agriculture v. foraging)
- erotics of decomposition/nutrient cycling

#### **Amie Whittemore:**

- First experiences of desire and nature intertwined with the rural Midwestern landscape
- Queer ecological perspectives as a form of utopian or idealistic thinking/dreaming
- Writing as a means toward collective action
- Less destruction, more dancing

#### **Alicia Mountain:**

- queerness, conservation, fallowness, and eco-catastrophe
- landscape as a site for queer solitude, loneliness, mirroring, and companionship
- queer ecologies and whiteness, colonization, dominion

#### **Kemi Alabi:**

- The written word's role in estranging humans from the natural world, and the reuniting power of the lyric/the sonic.
- The lyric/the sonic as embodied modes of making; how a queer Black eco-pleasure politic transforms poetic play.
- The alliance between Earth and all oppressed by racial capitalism and cisheteropatriarchy.

**Moderator Questions:**

- How does (queer) identity shape our relationship to writing, particularly writing about nature?
- How does a queer perspective inform your approach to social and environmental justice in your writing? In your reading? In your life?
- How is queer ecology a form of environmental/social justice?
- How can desire and queer nature writing be a catalyst for social and environmental change?