

Call for Papers:

Scarcity and Environment in History and Literature

Rachel
Carson
Center

Date: 25–27 September 2014

Location: Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society (RCC), LMU Munich

Conveners: Frederike Felcht (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt), Katie Ritson (Rachel Carson Center), and Susanne Bär (Institut für Nordische Philologie, LMU Munich)

Confirmed Keynote Speaker: Fredrik Albritton Jonsson (University of Chicago)

What is scarcity and how has it been represented in historical and aesthetic contexts? Both environmental historians and ecocritics are frequently confronted with the concept of “scarcity” (and abundance): this workshop will attempt to take a cross-disciplinary approach in considering the nature of scarcity, and its significance in historical and modern-day debates.

According to Jonsson (2013, 8), “[t]he Scottish Enlightenment was the crucible for early scientific and economic forecasts about the physical limits to growth.” At the same time, the agricultural revolution was bringing about the possibility of an existence unthreatened by scarcity. The spectre of shortages thus arose at the same time as new abundance was being created. Jonsson embeds this observation in the context of environmental and scientific thought, and links it to the history of research into population and resources. On the other hand, Xenos (1989) emphasizes that the modern preoccupation with permanent scarcity (in contrast to periodically occurring shortages) started to appear with the birth of the modern consumer society, with its ever increasing needs and desires. Historical studies, such as those by Jonsson and Xenos, make it clear that scarcity is less an objective, measurable fact than the result of scientific, social, and cultural processes. Following on from current research in cultural studies (Möhring/Schüttpelz/Zillinger 2011), the time is ripe for a questioning of scarcity as a basic historical and anthropological presumption. Our approach to this questioning is through the disciplines of historical and literary studies, focusing on the relationship between concepts of scarcity and their historical contexts, the aesthetic strategies of its representations, and the potential of scarcity for the cultural imagination.

Our call for papers is aimed at scholars (in particular early career scholars) at LMU Munich and the Goethe University Frankfurt. The conference languages will be English and German, with English preferred to better facilitate international communication.

Possible questions for consideration are:

- How do economic and literary conceptions of scarcity relate to one another?
- Which forms and imaginaries of scarcity are there (in environment, nutrition, resources, poverty), and what historical or literary application do they have?
- How do concepts of scarcity and abundance relate to one another?

- How is scarcity presented in an aesthetic context? What forms does it take in literary texts or in other works of art?
- Does scarcity have a particular function in the (self-)perceptions of certain regions or countries (e.g. Scandinavia, the Scottish Highlands)?
- To what extent do the experience and the imagination of scarcity or shortages influence the political and cultural development of particular countries, regions, or landscapes?
- How are environmental protection and scarcity related (for example in the creation of conservation areas?)
- What examples are there for (environmental) scarcity and its reception, and to what extent are interdisciplinary approaches useful for a deeper understanding of them?

The workshop will take place from 25–27 September at the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society in Munich. There is no fee for attending and lunch will be provided. Participants attending from Frankfurt will be reimbursed travel expenses where possible.

Please send an abstract (max. 500 words) and a short biographical note by 15 March to scarcity@carsoncenter.lmu.de. We will inform participants by mid-April whether their contribution has been accepted.

Jonsson, Fredrik Albritton: *Enlightenment's Frontiers. The Scottish Highlands and the Origins of Environmentalism*, New Haven/London 2013.

Xenos, Nicholas: *Scarcity and Modernity*, London/New York 1989.

Möhring, Maren/Schüttpelz, Erhard/Zillinger, Martin (Hg.): Und nicht zu knapp – Zur Einführung. In: dies. (Hg.): *Knappheit*, Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaft, Heft 1/2011, S. 7-17.