



TURKU Award Citation

By Verena Winiwarter, with contributions from Arielle Helmick and Jane Carruthers, based upon the discussions of the Turku Prize committee.

Since 2011—when the ESEH conference took place in the lovely city of Turku—ESEH, together with the Rachel Carson Center in Munich, has awarded a book prize at each biennial conference. This will now be the fourth time such a prize is awarded. The first TURKU prize went to Stefania Barca, for her book *Enclosing Water: Nature and Political Economy in a Mediterranean Valley, 1796–1916*. In 2013, the second was awarded to a book in German, *Wildnis schaffen: Eine transnationale Geschichte des Schweizerischen Nationalparks* by Patrick Kupper, and on a hot evening in Versailles 2015, Helmuth Trischler announced that Gregory Cushman’s transnational history, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World: A Global Ecological History* had been selected for the third TURKU Award.

This year the committee received a record number of nominations. What this meant, in terms of reading, I need not explain. Therefore, my heartfelt thanks go out to committee members Ellen Arnold, Jane Carruthers, Jan-Henrik Meyer, and particularly Arielle Helmick who deserves our special gratitude for acting not only as active member but also as the *de facto* secretary-general of the committee. Stefan Dorondel (Institute for Anthropology Francisc I. Rainer), who is listed on the website of ESEH, had to step out of the committee because his very own book was nominated by his publisher.

Before getting into details, I can assure you that the breadth and depth, the diversity of subjects, and the diligence of scholarship was overwhelming.

Just like previous committees, we first decided on a short list. And because it takes years to research and write any of these books and because they are all wonderful, I would like to tell you a few words about each of the books on the short list, in alphabetical order, before we get to the winner. In accordance with the criteria, the books were evaluated for style, depth, innovation, and the potential impact they would

have as *environmental histories*. Recognizing them for their contribution should encourage everyone to take the trouble to write engaging environmental histories!

- Bruce Campbell's *The Great Transition: Climate, Disease and Society in the Late-Medieval World* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

Campbell takes on a big thesis—showing how climate change and disease directly influenced life in the fourteenth century. His work includes an overwhelming depth of research and sources, and he synthesizes a tremendous amount of information to make provocative claims about the role of the environment in medieval times. A remarkable book, one that will have immense repercussions and stimulate debate for years to come. Magisterial is a word often over-used: in this case it is totally apt.

Much will be resonant to our own Age of Transition: instability, tipping points, political and ideological/religious divide, endemic warfare, climate change, unstable economics, the changing state and the changing role of the state, the question of food and agriculture. A dense, but very clearly written and well organised book dealing with the big issues of the period under discussion, it suggests many fruitful avenues for environmental historians of our time. Transformative events (of which we are currently part) are complex: this book unravels one of the most important. The book meshes the interplay between human agency, human behaviour, ecology, disease, microbes, stagnation, and growth in a sophisticated and wise synthesis.

- Kieko Matteson's *Forests in Revolutionary France: Conservation, Community, and Conflict, 1669–1848* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

A rich and detailed investigation into forest environmental history in the Franche-Comté, a region of France on the eastern boundary with Switzerland. The book picks up numerous strands around state intervention, the commons, private and communal rights, central government edicts, all interspersed with revolutions (1789, 1830, and 1848). The archival sources are voluminous and the book is extremely well written and clear, even to a reader ignorant of the basic general history of this region. Utterly fascinating in uncovering tensions between human communities over access to forest resources (and particularly timber) over a long period of time.

This book was truly a page-turner—and that is meant in the most flattering terms possible. It is rare to pick up an academic text and find such a well-written and gripping story. Considering that the story here is forest politics (hardly the topic of most thrillers), this makes this monograph even more impressive—Matteson really brings her French sources to life. Despite focusing on such a small region, her work transcends both its regional and temporal focus and provides new insights on deforestation and privatization of forests.

- Giacomo Parrinello's *Fault Lines: Earthquakes and Urbanism in Modern Italy* (Berghahn Books, 2015).

Parrinello truly brings earthquakes to life in his monograph—his earthquakes really do speak and act. Parrinello skillfully weaves his stories about two major disasters in Italy into a larger one about urbanization and the role that disasters play in society. His monograph transcends the regional focus and makes the reader question the impact of earthquakes on societies around the world. His book also deserves special mention for the beautiful language and story-telling, especially as English is not his mother tongue. Giving nature agency might be easier when nature very obviously takes over and becomes decisive, but showing how different the societal responses were for the two earthquakes, Giacomo's study means to weave a powerful narrative in-between, a truly *environmental* history.

- Peter Thorsheim's *Waste into Weapons: Recycling in Britain during the Second World War* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Thorsheim takes a new look at an old subject—World War II. He also brings a very balanced perspective to the issue of recycling. Normally lauded as an ideal behaviour, Thorsheim shows a new side to recycling by highlighting the loss to society that salvage brought to Britain in the 1940s. His work is fast-paced and engaging—he really causes the reader to think about recycling, salvaging, and even war-time causes in a new way. Finally, his book deserves special mention for the way that he seamlessly integrates women and children into the story.

This is a surprisingly gripping read. It deals with all sectors of recycling: paper and iron in particular, and it uncovers a complex untold story of class conflict, history, individual rights versus collective security, and US influence on British domestic policy (through Lend Lease for scrap purchases, etc.). It also highlights the role of children in war as well as to what extent the Empire was helpful with regards to recycling. The loss of historical documents is poignant, and the discussion of first volunteering and then requisitioning railings is interesting in its detail and its effect. The book ends with observations about how quickly Britain reverted to a wasteful society after the war, as soon as was possible, and how it was a new generation that introduced a different psychology and motivation for recycling.

To those of you who are still, at the end of this fantastic, rich, inspiring conference, paying meticulous attention and have remembered the short list by heart, announcing the winner will not be a surprise. But much about this book will be surprising...

The winner of the TURKU award 2017 is:

- William M. Cavert, for *The Smoke of London: Energy and Environment in the Early Modern City* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

Reading Roy Porters's account of the Great Smoke of 1592 in a studio apartment in Chicago—with the window open to an alley with a dumpster and within reach of the car exhaust fumes we have come to understand as an unavoidable ingredient to urban air—a slightly younger Will Cavert decided that air pollution could be an interesting subject to write about. What started from concerns triggered by the perception of the immediate environment—and became a Dissertation at Northwestern in 2011 (I should say, winning the Harold Perkin Prize for Best Dissertation at Northwestern as, "Producing Pollution: Coal, Smoke and Society in London, 1550–1750")—was turned into a book during a postdoctoral fellowship at Claire College, Cambridge, and is now the TURKU Award winner.

To me, Cavert's book does for European environmental history what the duo Don Worster and Geoff Cunfer did in the US: One writing a pioneering, if somewhat wanting work, and the younger one meticulously re-writing the narrative with more sophistication. The pioneer I refer to is, of course, Peter Brimblecombe and his book *The Big Smoke*. Will Cavert, in all due respect, takes a fresh look on Early Modern London, one that rather than dwarfing Peter Brimblecombe's work, actually highlights its significance.

Will examines how Londoners dealt with air pollution created by the burning of coal. As we know, supply of wood in Early Modern England was a problem, so Londoners in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries increasingly turned to coal. This created an unprecedented amount of smoke, which prompted a variety of responses: from crown-directed efforts to prevent it from contaminating royal space to its adoption in poems and plays as a symbol of modern urban life. Such reactions and attempts to deal with the problem of coal smoke predate the better-known responses to pollution throughout England during the Industrial Revolution and, in the process, frame many of these later issues in ways with which people are familiar today. After an excellent and thorough historiographical overview, the book takes us on a journey into chemistry, legal history, aesthetics, morality, medicine, politics, economics, war, and literature. Gender also finds a place here. All this within a readable, powerful, and beautifully-crafted narrative which never loses its thread, and shows the nuances of energy's entanglement with all elements of society and energy sources.

One of the committee members wrote about Will's book: "I was very impressed by this book and rate it highly. Although it began life as a dissertation, it is so beautifully

crafted as a book—its origins are not visible in any arcane academic jargon. This is environmental history of the highest order.”

Cavert provides exceptional historical background and insight into a modern-day environmental problem—air pollution. By examining the early modern problem of dirty air in London, Cavert uses an environmental problem to show how global energy systems developed. His work is impeccably researched and draws on a wide variety of sources, including many letters and anecdotal accounts from historical figures. I found this technique particularly effective, as it draws the reader into the story in a new and creative way, giving us a more personal connection with early modern Londoners while also bringing further awareness to the problem of air pollution. This book takes environmental history into a rich landscape of other topics and thus grounds its centrality in human life, in this case, urban life. This is a new study of energy, and in reading it, this book evoked what an environmental history of oil would look like. Is this form of energy a blessing or a curse? Does it underpin all modern life? What does urban smoke—at least in the case of London—actually denote?

It questions and amplifies the very issue of modernity itself through a sophisticated and interesting urban environmental history. This book also speaks to the modern world and to current concerns. Of smog and smoke in Beijing and elsewhere, climate change and global warming, and divisions between rich and poor and access to resources.

But, before we all break out in cheers, I would like to tell you a story that I got out of Will last night, a story that I want us to think about as we cheer him. He mentioned his teachers and supervisors Josef Barton, Joel Mokyr, Ethan Shagan, Ken Alder, and Edward Muir, and said about one of them that while this person did not publish much, he had read “about everything,” in many languages, and when approached would immediately produce and recommend relevant literature. While I would by no means want to belittle Will’s achievement, we should all remember how little outstanding supervision skills are valued and in a small correction of that, I would want us to acknowledge the role good supervision played in this book.

I am very glad that through the generosity of the Rachel Carson Center (whose codirectors Christof Mauch and Helmuth Trischler are here among us tonight) in cooperation with the European Society for Environmental History, we are able to award the 2017 TURKU book prize to Will Cavert.