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Flys Junquera, Carmen, Irene Sanz Alonso, Montserrat López Mújica y Esther Laso y León, eds. *Cultural Landscapes: Heritage and Conservation* (Alcalá: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad, 2010). DVD.

In 2010, the University of Alcalá and the Benjamin Franklin Research Institute for North American Studies published the Proceedings of the 3rd EASLCE Conference, held in Alcalá de Henares, Spain, in October 2008. This DVD offers new perspectives on the field of ecocriticism and its relationship to landscape.

It is widely known that ecocriticism is based on the study and exploration of the relationships between human beings and the environment in all areas of culture. As such, it calls for a multidisciplinary approach. The importance of this DVD lies in the fact that it puts this methodological imperative into practice.

The Conference theme, “Cultural Landscapes: Heritage and Conservation”, responded to the fact that the European Landscape Convention came into effect in 2008 – eight years after its signing in Florence – and also to Alcalá’s status as a World Heritage City. The Proceedings consist of two plenary conferences and 75 papers in English, French and Spanish, delivered by authors and researchers from countries all over the world, such as Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Taiwan, Japan, Italy, Germany, the USA, Ireland, France and Spain. Given this degree of cultural diversity and the multidisciplinary character of the field, it is not hard to imagine the range of contributions. Among the latter are also two papers by Spanish government officials, explaining the need to conserve and protect landscapes and emphasizing the idea of cultural landscapes as part of our history and cultural heritage – a fact that indicates the degree of public recognition which the conference theme has found.

In one plenary session, the scientist John O. Keefe, coordinator of the Harvard Forest Fisher Museum of Forestry, described the dramatic changes of New England forests and their perception over the course of history. Transformation was also the guiding theme of the presentation by Linda Hogan. In “The Great Without”, the poet, novelist and essayist analyzed her understanding of poetry and nature in the world of transformations we are living in.

The papers provide a wide variety of research mixing social, political, cultural, artistic, and scientific points of views. Obviously, literature has always found a source of inspiration in landscape inasmuch as writers have described it not only in a realistic way, but also by drawing on the visions produced by their imagination. The poets, novelists and journalist studied here do not necessarily share the same conceptions about landscape, but they all acknowledge that

urban or rural landscapes is a part of the human being and determine his or her identity, as is illustrated by papers on the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood, U.S. authors such as Cummings and Annie Proulx, the South African-born Jew Dan Jacobson, or Marguerite Yourcenar, who is certain that landscape can not be separated from the human being. Whereas the foregoing group of writers emphasizes the restorative power of landscape, there are also those who hold a much more negative sense of the world we live in, a world of destruction and dehumanization. A trenchant example of such a view is the German novelist W. G. Sebald. However, all of these writers have made landscape a central part of their work.

While papers on literary texts account for the lion's share of contributions, there is also a significant number of papers focusing on forms of art, most notably cinema and painting. There are comparative studies on the relationship between writers and painters and their close connection to landscape, for example on Conrad and Turner or studies on female painters and contemporary Indian paintings that rebuild the landscape of this country. There is research on the influence on landscape in cinema which offers visions of the city of Caracas during the last five decades of the twentieth-century, the Mojave Desert and Death Valley in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point*, and the different concepts of sense of place in the work of Asian directors Wan Tun, Chen Kaige and Akira Kurosawa.

Architecture, as a constitutive element of urban landscape, also receives ample attention. Buildings or constructions made by people show how they have planned or organized nature. There are articles dealing with postal offices in Tunis, stone walls in Portugal, post-industrial space in Madrid, the Italian Tonnara, "Garden Cities" in the USA and the cultural heritage of Alcalá.

Natural landscapes figure also in a significant number of articles. There are essays on the pastoral landscape and the feared landscape. The concept of the sublime figures prominently in the studies on the Alps as a symbol of Swiss national identity, as well as on the Duero River and the Atlantic Ocean, which makes Porto a city surrounded by water. The pastoral plays an important role in the papers on myth and reality in the supposedly Edenic Canary Islands and the original landscape of Las Hurdas de la Mata near Segovia, Spain.

All these papers, as well as numerous others not mentioned here, include elements which conform our cultural landscape and, consequently, it is our duty to conserve them. Taken together, these studies confirm the importance of landscapes in our daily lives and of preserving them for future generations.

The DVD also contains a brief video clip of a performance by Linda Hogan and Julia Barella which conveys this message with more emotional force than academic papers could ever hope to muster. Combining a poetry reading with dance, music, and visual imagery, the performance showed how the intertwining of the different arts can dramatize the intertwining of human beings with the elements of nature. No less impressive is the photo gallery of

cultural landscapes, consisting of images donated by some of the participants, which beautifully illustrates the many different meanings which the term “landscape” can convey.

In its entirety, this DVD represents a significant contribution to ecocriticism, pushing it further towards a multidisciplinary and multicultural perspective. It demonstrates not only the tremendous scope for ecocritical scholarship in European studies, but also testifies to the lasting truth expressed in the simple words of the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan: “human beings feel at home on earth” (199).

Works Cited

Tuan, Yi- Fu, *Space and Place*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008. Print.