

## Writers and their World Seminar - Toxic Epiphanies: Dioxin, Power, and Gendered Bodies in Laura Conti's Narratives on Seveso

**Monash University Centre for Postcolonial Writing**

### **Professor Serenella Iovino**

What is a narrative agency and what are the political effects of a material narrative? This presentation addresses such issues by considering the case of Italy's first big ecological disaster, occurred in Seveso in 1976. A cloud of dioxin burst out from an industrial site, poisoning people and territory, killing livestock and domestic animals, causing miscarriages and fetal malformations, and producing strong political and ideological polemics over women, their body, and their right to self-determination. Laura Conti, scientist, writer, and environmental activist, witnessed and narrated the catastrophe in both its ecological and political dimensions. Analyzing her works, and focusing on dioxin as a posthuman narrative agency, namely, as a revealing "deviant agent" that interlaces both materiality and its discursive reverberations, I reflect about how feminist ecocriticism may act as an epistemological tool for an ethics and politics of liberation. This presentation situates itself in the broader horizon of a feminist theory of material ecocriticism, one that investigates the representations of the body, of inter- and trans-corporeality, multiple causality, complexity and agentic entanglements of matter and discourse.

Serenella Iovino is Professor of Ethics at the University of Turin, Research Fellow of the Alexander-von-Humboldt Stiftung, and past president of the European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and Environment (EASLCE). She introduced the study of ecocriticism in Italy with her books *Filosofie dell'ambiente: Natura, etica, società* (2004) and *Ecologia Letteraria: Una strategia di sopravvivenza* (2006). Her publications include articles and essays on ecocritical theory, environmental philosophy, bioregionalism, ecological humanism, landscape ethics, environmental justice, ecofeminism, Italian literature, and two books on the German philosophical literature in the Age of Goethe. With Serpil Oppermann she is co-editor of *Material Ecocriticism*, a collection of essays that address the "material turn" recently emerging in the ecocritical debate (University of Indiana Press, forthcoming).



**Monday 20 August 2012**  
**The Elizabeth Burchill Rooms,**  
**Building 68, Clayton Campus**  
**2pm – 4pm**

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