“Shifting Borders”: America and the Middle East/North Africa
Conference Paper Proposal

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For this session I propose a poetry reading, of my own work and of other American poets. Landscapes figure prominently in contemporary American poetry: physical landscapes intersect with mental, emotional, spiritual, and political landscapes, becoming palimpsests of memory, history, and identity within individual poems and within poets’ historical and cultural contexts. In order to introduce a recently revived tradition of this new nature writing, I will prepare a curated reading lasting 30 minutes which will give an overview of work within the past generation from poets such as WS Merwin (the recently-appointed US Poet Laureate), Carl Sandberg, Diane Ackerman, Mary Oliver, and Hayden Carruth. For comparative purposes, I will briefly note the resurgence of nature writing in a British context as well, with new work by Rob Macfarlane, Richard Mabey, Kathleen Jamie, and Alice Oswald.

These works will be paired, however, with reading of my own work, which addresses the many forms of landscapes, borders, and real and imagined cartographies of the self. My work, which is primarily grounded in a lyric tradition, and whose influences range from writers as diverse as Elizabeth Bishop and Frank Stanford, has been awarded numerous grants and awards, most recently a fellowship from the Mississippi Arts Council (my home state) and a forthcoming major residency from A Studio in the Woods, an artist’s retreat outside New Orleans. The residency will have just ended (November 2011) by the advent of this conference; my work there, a book-length poetry collection on shifting geographic and ecological borders called *Ecotone*, will have just been published. I propose to present part of that collection at the conference, which will complement both the theme of the other poetry and the overarching theme of the entire conference.