

Editorial Ecozon@ Issue 10.1

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Welcome to the Spring 2019 issue of *Ecozon@*. The special focus of this number is ‘Toward an Eco-poetics of Randomness and Design.’ The term ‘eco-poetics’ possesses particular importance in the French-speaking world, where it is sometimes used in the broadest of senses, in preference to ‘ecocriticism’, but it has also had wide currency in North America and Britain for the last twenty years. While it is most frequently used in the analysis and theorising of ‘ecological’ forms of poetry, it is equally applicable to prose fiction and nonfiction, drama, film and art. As Jonathan Skinner has written in a blog entitled “What is eco-poetics?”, for some, eco-poetics is simply thematically defined, as “the making and study of pastoral poetry, or poetry of wilderness and deep ecology [...] or poetry that explores the human capacity for becoming animal, as well as humanity’s ethically challenged relation to other animals,” or even “poetry that confronts disasters and environmental injustices, including the difficulties and opportunities of urban environments”. For others, however, eco-poetics is “not a matter of theme, but of how certain poetic methods model ecological processes like complexity, non-linearity, feedback loops, and recycling [...] or how poetic experimentation complements scientific methods in extending a more reciprocal relation to alterity—eco-poetics as a *poethics*”.

In their Introduction to the themed section of this issue, Guest Editors Franca Bellarsi and Judith Rauscher survey the debates surrounding eco-poetics, and discuss the role played by randomness and design in it. The seven articles which they present examine texts ranging from contemporary US and Canadian poetry to fourteenth-century vernacular pilgrimage poems in Italian, English and French, from Barbara Kingsolver’s *Prodigal Summer* to the German-language novels of Yoko Tawada, from a set of poems published in English and Spanish as part of a GPS computer programme intended to disrupt US immigration policy on the Mexican border to a Maori novel whose juxtaposed plotlines, narrative voices, and temporalities unfold in fern-like spirals, and finally photographs of alternative, ecologically sustainable interior design and architecture encountered in a fieldwork study. Despite the disparateness of this material, the essays by Harvey Hix, Susan Morrison, Bénédicte Meillon, Tara Beaney, Melissa Zeiger, Jessica Maufort and Clara Breteau (all but the last written in English) are, as Bellarsi and Rauscher explain, united in arguing that neither pure randomness nor pure design exists—either in the material world or in eco-poetics—and that the many forms of enmeshment of the two merit our attention as models of ‘ecological’ balance between chance and intent, perturbation and pattern, contingency and necessity.

In the first of the two essays in the General Section, ‘Kareema’s Ecological Self in Salwa Bakr’s *Thirty-one Beautiful Green Trees*’, the Lebanese academic Marianne

Marroum analyses a short story written in Arabic by the Egyptian critic, novelist and author Salwa Bakr. Marroum shows how Bakr's female protagonist comes to embody the 'ecological self' posited by deep ecology theorists, and tries to promote environmental ethics in her everyday life. Sadly, her concern for the quality of life, her love of nature, her attachment to the city of Cairo and her feelings of oneness with the ecosystem lead to her incarceration in an asylum. Her decline into mental instability symbolises the experience of women marginalized in a conservative patriarchal society.

The second essay, 'Shrieks from the Margins of the Human: Framing the Environmental Crisis in two Contemporary Latin American Movies', written by Leticia Gómez and Azucena Castro, explores the complex intra-action between the human and non-human worlds in the feature films *Beauty* (dir. Daniela Seggiaro, 2012) and *A Decent Woman* (dir. Lukas Valenta Rinner, 2016). Both films highlight the marginalization of the non-human world through the pursuit of progress and development. In *Beauty*, nature is threatened by deforestation of the dry forest landscape called the Gran Chaco; the plot of *A Decent Woman* unfolds dramatically as the barriers are broken down between a nudist community set in a natural jungle-like area on the outskirts of Buenos Aires and the adjacent gated community for wealthy residents.

In the Art and Creative Writing Section, Damiano Benvegnù presents images and writing embodying an ecopoetic of randomness and design. In his introduction, he writes of mushrooming as an aesthetic practice in which strategic planning is blended with irrational wandering. The goal-driven human perspective of gathering food as quickly and efficiently as possible is necessarily left behind as we enter into a natural world characterised by randomness as much as regular configuration: mushrooms evoke "both contemplation and distraction; progress and indeterminacy; biotechnological randomness, but also artistic design". The section opens with digital images of mushrooms and mould by the French artist Ophélie Queffurus exemplifying the porous boundary between art and biology, and continues with two separate collaborations between a poet and an artist from the north of England: Harriet Tarlo and Judith Tucker in the first instance, and Daniel Eltringham and David Walker Barker in the second, explore the elements of randomness and design in place writing and artistic evocation. These collaborative projects are followed by three poems by Frances Presley on waves and the will o' the wisp as examples of unpredictable natural phenomena interwoven with science and mathematics. The last two contributions are flower poems by Robin Murray in which botanical accuracy is combined with layers of metaphorical and personal meaning, and an excerpt from a long poem entitled 'Tree' by the Australian John Charles Ryan. Here as throughout, as Benvegnù notes, the natural objects represented are part of a world in which humans are part of larger life-projects where we neither have total control nor are simply neutral observers.

The issue concludes with reviews of two important recent volumes which seek to cross disciplinary boundaries, presenting contributions by groups of researchers in (mainly) Germany and France respectively. *Texts, Animals, Environments: Zoopoetics and Ecopoetics* (reviewed by Graham Huggan) explores the interface between ecocriticism and cultural animal studies. *Rethinking Nature: Challenging Disciplinary Boundaries*

offers, according to Bénédicte Meillon, an excellent introduction to the environmental humanities, tracing the greening of work in disciplines ranging from history and literary criticism to anthropology, sociology, psychology and urban planning.

With this issue we welcome a new team of Reviews Editors, Astrid Bracke (Book Reviews Editor) and María Isabel Pérez-Ramos (Assistant Book Reviews Editor), and we thank Hannes Bergthaller for his sterling work in this capacity over the past nine years.