

## Editorial *Ecozon@* Issue 9.1

Axel Goodbody



Welcome to the Spring 2018 Issue of *Ecozon@*. The themed section of this number is devoted to possibly the most sensitive but important issue we have yet approached: concern over the ecological implications of the seemingly inexorable growth of world population. In their introduction, “Population, Ecology, and the Malthusian Imagination,” guest editors Hannes Bergthaller and Margarita Carretero González write that the spectre of societal collapse as a result of the ‘population bomb’ and exhaustion of global natural resources was a key concern of the early environmental movement, before suspicions that the issue was being used by authoritarians to abrogate basic individual freedoms (and by neo-colonialists to cement the domination and exploitation of developing countries) rendered it unmentionable. Its proponents were vilified, like Thomas Malthus before them, the eighteenth-century author of the ‘Essay on the Principle of Population,’ which notoriously defended social inequality, while advocating population control. Over the last thirty years, expressing concern over exceeding the planet’s carrying capacity has evoked scorn and ridicule from both the political left and the right. However, reliance on the natural decline in human fertility as a result of improved health and education, and the ability of science and technology to feed and house ever greater numbers of human beings to solve the problem, would appear to be illusory—not least because the measures which have so far made possible the continuing growth of the human population have frequently led to the destruction of habitats and populations of other species, plant and animal. Anxieties about living in a world with “too many people” and the erosion of western living standards by being forced to share limited resources have not gone away. As Bergthaller and Carretero point out, demographic statistics and mathematical models tell us little about what it would mean to live in an “overpopulated” world: the gap is closed by the images, metaphors and narratives which constitute the “Malthusian imagination,” and lend plausibility to scenarios of the future and conceptions of our ethical responsibilities. Our guest editors argue that ecocritics have wrongly evaded the subject, and should now take up the question again. The challenge, as they say, is “to find ways of articulating how the surfeit of humanity is indeed the source of ecological problems—without falling into a dehumanizing logic of emergency.”

The five essays which they present open with an article in Spanish by Manuel Peinado Lorca which calls for reconceptualization of the problem of population growth in terms of its implications for climate change. In the second essay, Hannes Bergthaller considers the ecological implications of ‘biopolitics,’ whose aim it is to secure populations against famine and disease, and which has succeeded to such an

extent that it is (or soon will be) endangering the basic conditions of life on Earth. Alex McCauley subjects twentieth-century Marxist thinking on population and resource distribution to critical examination. In the last two essays, Keri Stevenson and Irene Sanz Alonso discuss representations of overpopulation in science fiction, thriller and film, and assess how they address the crucial question how many people the Earth can sustain while allowing the diversity of life to flourish.

The first of the two essays in the General Section, Kenneth Toah Nsah's "No Forest, No Water. No Forest, No Animals," is a contribution to postcolonial (African) ecocriticism. This ecocritical reading of the Cameroonian playwright Ekpe Inyang's *The Hill Barbers* (2010), a drama which thematises deforestation, exploitation, capitalism and the agency of nature, argues that the author advocates a reconciliation of the hitherto opposing ideologies and practices of Christianity, and African religions, western science and African traditions in order to promote sustainable behaviour. The second essay, Jada Ach's "Land Under the Ditch: Channeling Water through Owen Wister's *The Virginian*," combines envirotech history with ecocriticism in a discussion of the presence of water in what is regarded as the first work in the 'Western' genre. It explores the paradox that while developing water infrastructure in this arid part of the United States is shown as facilitating settlement, appropriation of the land, and domination of nature, it also places the 'manliness' celebrated in Westerns (defined as the ability to cope with thirst, aridity and mobility) at risk.

In the Art and Creative Writing Section, Serenella Iovino presents images and poems relating to the theme of this issue. Mario Amura's sequence of dramatic images, 'Napoli Explosion', illustrate the growth of the population around Mount Vesuvius and the extension of settlement on its slopes at the same time as the slumbering might of the elements. Although an eruption of this active volcano is overdue, 600,000 people live in the 18 towns at its base that comprise the "red zone," vividly demonstrating the reality of living in an increasingly crowded world, where people are forced to live more and more dangerously. The seven images in Andreco's "Climate Art Project" also bear striking witness to the enhanced risks of life in a densely populated, climate-changed world, as do the poems by Terry Trowbridge and Louise Boscacci.

The Reviews Section comprises some unusually detailed and thoughtful book reviews. In the first, Serpil Oppermann subjects to close critique the Swedish geographer Andreas Malm's polemic dismissal of cultural theory (Constructivism, Hybridism, New Materialism) in *The Progress of this Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World* and his counter-argument that in a warming world, it is more important than ever to distinguish between the natural and the social. Writing in German, in a piece which verges on being an essay in its own right, Bernhard Malkmus is prompted by the publication of a new bibliophile edition of Wilhelm Lehmann's 'bucolic diary,' *Bukolisches Tagebuch* (written 1927-32), to reflect on the literary qualities of this rare example of nature writing in German. He calls for greater recognition of the role played by the naturalist, philologist and teacher, as

well as novelist, poet and essayist Lehmann, in anticipating the aesthetic and ethical concerns of environmental thinkers such as Stanley Cavell and twenty-first-century nature writers. Bénédicte Meillon presents Paul Lindholdt's interdisciplinary ecocritical study, *Explorations in Ecocriticism: Advocacy, Bioregionalism, and Visual Design*, which combines literary/ aesthetic with scientific analysis of texts and images ranging from early travel writing to the present. Finally, Tatiana Prorokova reviews Antonia Mehnert's monograph, *Climate Change Fictions*, which examines twelve of the most important American climate change novels, and demonstrates persuasively their ability to reflect the socio-political complexity of climate change.

Finally, it is with great regret that we say goodbye with this issue to Serenella Iovino as Editor of the Art and Creative Writing Section. Many thanks, Serenella, for all the work you have put into developing relationships with artists and writers over the last four years, sourcing texts and images to go with the themed section of each issue, and writing such thoughtful section introductions! We wish you well with your new appointment in the United States.