

Editorial, Vol 2, No. 2

Axel Goodbody
University of Bath, UK

Welcome to this fourth number of *Ecozon@*. Like the two preceding numbers, it opens with a guest-edited section which has a special thematic focus. This is followed by ecocritical essays of a general nature, and sections devoted to creative writing, visual art and book reviews.

For the Special Focus section, our Guest Editor, Franca Bellarsi, has assembled nine essays under the heading 'Ecospirit: Religion and the Environment'. Beginning with the questions why a spiritual relationship with nature matters, what beneficial effects it may have, and what dangers it may harbour (addressed by Whitney Bauman), these examine past and present forms of ecospirituality, looking at instances where it has been lost, reappeared, and changed in shape (Anthony Lioi, Stephen Brain, Peter Collins). They explore the spiritual dimension of ways of regaining a life of more elemental creatureliness, be it through spirituality as a reconnection with the body and the rhythms of nature (as opposed to machine rhythms and the technology-driven segmentation of time), critique of problematic positions within the Christian church with regard to animals, or engagement with religious thought and ecopoetry (Jonathan Butler, Éric Baratay, Hester Jones). The last two essays in the section show how an ecospiritual turn of mind in contexts as different as Buddhism and Roman Catholicism can play a valuable role in challenging entrenched anthropocentric hierarchies (Gillian Parrish, Christopher Hrynkow/ Dennis O'Hara).

The general section contains four further essays. Hsiao-Ching Li reads two recent Taiwanese films which challenge conventional human perceptions of the natural world: *Plant Wars* (directed by Asio Liu, 2007) questions the biological categorization of native and exotic plants, while *Bird Without Borders* (dir. Dean Johnson, 2009) pleads implicitly for a remapping of territories not dominated by political borders. Françoise Besson probes the ecological significance of two traditional motifs associated with premodern conceptions of nature which reappear in Thomas Wharton's Canadian novel, *Icefields* (1995): the quest for the holy grail, and the 'language' of plants. In a closely argued essay engaging with recent ecocritical writing which may have gone too far in contesting boundaries (Timothy Morton and others), Heather Sullivan proposes an 'ironic Werther' as a model for ecocriticism, i.e. a composite of Goethe's famous sentimental nature-lover (in *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 1774) and his satirically depicted counterpart in a subsequent, lesser-known work of Goethe's. Finally, Carmen Valero-Garces considers how teaching foreign languages, and translation in particular, can contribute to environmental awareness-raising.

Our Creative Writing and Visual Arts Editor, Isabel Hoving has selected images and texts related to the ‘Ecospirit’ theme. These include photographs of shamanic ceremonies by Ali Young (who also kindly provided the cover photograph for this number). Ali Young, who lives in Devon, UK, is a trained psychotherapist who studies and practises shamanic healing. Her photographs are accompanied by a collection of poems connected with spiritual healing. “Letters have spirit, sound, weight”, writes Arpine Konyalian Grenier. “With these poems, I am after a semblance to meaning, after an event that enables multiple frames of reality, that embraces the will of the times as it turns against language with language, in order to restore its incantatory quality. Spirit is empowered then, we and nature come together. We heal.” This intention is apparent in the sonnets of Diana Durham, who may be known to readers for her interpretations of Arthurian myth; the texts written by the award-winning poet and art therapist Rose Flint; Arpine Grenier’s poems reflecting a more urban and postmodern sensibility (Arpine lives in Arizona and is trained as a scientist, musician and financial analyst); and finally in the work of the eco-poet, children’s author and community artist Helen Moore.

The number closes with reviews of ground-breaking collections of ecocritical essays in Spanish and Portuguese, of studies of American popular music by David Ingram and queer ecologies by Catriona Sandilands, of an Italian anthology of American environmental writing edited by Anna Re, and a French review of Timothy Morton’s *Ecology Without Nature*.