

Editorial 12.1

Heather I. Sullivan
Trinity University, USA
ecozone.associate.editor@gmail.com

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Our entanglements and ongoing exchanges with an array of living things all around us, whether the human, vegetal, animal, insect, or the quickly spreading semi-living viruses, have emerged ever more into the spotlight in this pandemic year. As we don our masks (or refuse to do so), we respond to the bodily immersion in the shared, oxygen-rich atmosphere provided by earthly photosynthesizers like plants and algae and that is then shared and shared again by those living things in our vicinity—for better or worse. Being entangled with air means, in brief, that we depend communally on shared air while also being at risk from its infectious contaminants. Just like most plants rely on symbiotic relations with fungi but can also die from fungal infections, we exist within an aery matrix supporting yet possibly infecting us. Indeed, we who breathe are fundamentally sharers of air, immersed in a gaseous realm that Johann Wolfgang Goethe calls the “air-ocean,” comparing it to how fish are immersed in a world of water. “We, too,” he claims in his lectures on physics, “are citizens of the air-ocean (*Luftmeer*).” The COVID19 pandemic has brought (re-) awakened and often rather uncomfortable awareness of our bodily entanglements with our fellow beings and the elements. Yet, in terms of air, it is not just our shared inhalation of oxygen, particulates, bacteria, and viruses that is at stake but also the enormous impact of petro-cultures’ fossil-fueled industrial practices that have altered the entire planet’s air flows—the jet streams—due to global warming and the ensuing climate destabilization. Energy, too, is a necessity and a threat simultaneously, particularly the fossil fuels. Additionally, human cultures are quite thoroughly entangled within themselves on a discursive level; that is, we partake of not only of shared air, weather patterns, and energy exchanges, but also of infectious narratives that have now taken on even more rapidly transmissible forms on social media. As per material ecocriticism, we cannot escape from any of these factors when alive on Earth even if we often fail to perceive them as relevant: shared air, the air currents connected to larger climate patterns, energy exchanges, and infectious memes. Due to cultural “blindspots,” as Val Plumwood calls them in *Environmental Culture* or, to coin a phrase in order to avoid ableism, due to “culturally selective perception,” many individuals and institutions in industrial petro-cultures fail to acknowledge, much less to perceive, human and nonhuman entanglements even as they spread the powerfully infectious narratives of power.

Hence, the themed section in this issue of *Ecozon@* on “Going Green in the EFL Classroom” takes on particularly weighty relevance as an effort to alter culturally selective perception at the fundamental level of international language education. Indeed,

this section offers innovative pedagogical strategies for teaching foreign language classes—English, specifically—with the environmental lens on globally sustainable (or unsustainable) practices both linguistic and material. In the interconnected world of globalism that is so heavily focused on accessing and controlling flows of materials, energy, and data (while often ignoring the environmental impacts), the knowledge of other areas of the planet and their languages would most productively include information on how different language traditions in different areas of the world engage with the physical environment. Studying languages can be, in other words, an engagement and participation in global entanglements. As Claudia Deetjen and Christian Ludwig note in their introduction to the themed section, international efforts seeking sustainable practices by such bodies as the United Nations have an increased focus on “teaching the future,” or teaching about the realities of climate change and the work we can do together to limit its impact. Deetjen and Ludwig define environmental literacies as “the ability to recognise and critically evaluate local as well as global environmental practices and problems from various perspectives and across multiple scales of space and time and to react accordingly both as an individual and collectively.” The five essays in this section presented by Deetjen and Ludwig (by Silke Braselmann, Katharina Glas, and Laurenz Volkmann; Theresa Summer; Stefanie Jung; Christian Ludwig; and Bärbel Turner-Hill, Christian Ludwig, and Lena Böttger) address how to teach multiple texts and voices together in the classroom for environmental justice, how to use ecomusicology for inspirational foreign language education, and how to explore the physical world of rivers together with poetry for a “participatory approach” in the classroom. The final two essays offer two additional immersive possibilities for gaining language and environmental insights simultaneously: by tracing illegal global electronic waste streams to English language studies in Nigeria and, finally, to teaching language in the garden. These pedagogical essays combine innovative classroom practices for teaching foreign languages with an eye towards purposeful integration of discourses depicting or evading environmental responsibility. Each offers educational alternatives to infectious cultural narratives of power ignoring entanglement.

In the general section of the issue, there are six rich essays attending to various kinds of ecological and cultural entanglements from an impressive array of language traditions. The first two essays highlight environmental perspectives in Nigerian and Chinese texts with particular attention to the culturally selective perception of environmental devastation. Felicity Hand’s essay on the petrocultures of the Niger Delta, “We are the Delta: Nature and Agency in Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water*” relates her study to the growing number of literary texts on Nigeria’s ecodrama of oil catastrophes. While describing the three types of conflicting human groups, or “agents” involved in *Oil on Water*—the government soldiers defending the oil companies, the rebels fighting to resist the power of oil or at least to receive a share in the profits, and the local villagers caught between both groups—Hand notes that Habila also allows the “devastated land” itself to have a voice. To this powerful ecological agency expressed in the impact of the damaged land and Delta waters, Hand contrasts the dominant and infectious narratives of petromodernity that reshape a rich ecological place into a seemingly passive toxic zone. With a

wonderful contrast, Jessica Imbach’s insightful essay, “Chinese Science Fiction in the Anthropocene,” presents the Chinese discourse of their “ecological civilization” as a techno-utopian vision. The well-known texts and films from Lui Cixin (the novel *The Three Body Problem* 2016 and the film *The Wandering Earth* 2019) contrast China’s vision of a green future to “western” environmental claims while also revealing very different cultural approaches. Imbach beautifully documents the culturally selective perceptions of both China and the west in this one essay.

The second set of essays both relate to entanglements and agency of the non-human, and both posit poetry’s potential to allow other kinds of voices such as those of birds and dogs to be heard or seen. Ellen Taylor’s essay, “Ornithological Passions of American Poet Celia Thaxter,” offers a powerful indictment of female feather-fashions that contributed to the decimation of many bird species. She contrasts such frivolous fads with the detailed bird stories in Thaxter’s poetry. Living on an island in New England, Thaxter created ecofeminist poems with pedagogical intent encouraging an ecological sensibility for bird lives. Taylor compellingly maps out both Thaxter’s life and these ornithological poems as forms of poetic activism. Similarly, Paola Loreto’s “Audial and Visual Conversation in Mary Oliver’s Dog Songs: Language as a Trans-Species Faculty,” documents how Mary Oliver’s dog poems create the possibility of dog voices as a trans-species articulation. Oliver’s poems inspire with an effort to capture the canine gaze in the dogs’ expressions even if it must be indirectly in human language. Canine agency appears in the capacity to emote through their eyes; Loreto here fully and with good reason embraces the so-called pathetic fallacy and claims that Oliver successfully creates a poetic “space for equality.” Loreto’s essay, like Taylor’s, provides creative possibilities for re-thinking the kinds of “voice” that get counted as having value.

The final two essays each address specific narrative strategies presented by the rapidly expanding category of international climate fiction. Jens Kramshøj Flinker broadens the potential of climate change fiction’s impact with his innovative narratological study of existentialism focusing on a Swedish novel, “Climate Fiction and the Ethics of Existentialism: An Econarratological Analysis of Lyra Koli’s *Allting Växer*.” Considering the ethics of storytelling itself as a practice as well as the values presented within the text, Flinker’s study connects Anthropocene anxiety to the possibility of reading to attain an “epistemological state of mind.” With their essay, “Del ‘calentamiento global’ al ‘cambio climático’: Encubrimientos y desencubrimientos ético-políticos,” Marta Inés Palacio and María José Buteler evaluate the typical strategies and analysis of environmental writing and suggest that climate change is itself a problematic concept. The authors apply a critical-hermeneutic method to assess ecological vocabulary and expressions that may seem to highlight human responsibility but actually serve to minimize or even write over the anthropogenic changes to environmental systems. As we experience ever more disastrous weather events across the planet, such essays offer new insights into countering culturally selective perception.

This issue’s Creative Writing and Arts section complements such an educational effort with luminous poems, stories, and images that re-inscribe human entanglements in the world and so offer artistic antidotes to culturally selective perception. Damiano

Benvegnù opens his comments on the section with a material ecocritical vision of the Italian political philosopher Antonio Gramsci's use of stones to help correct his spinal deformity which connect him to "Sardinia's stony landscape." In other words, Benvegnù's introduction engages the issue's other sections with his thoughts on the human and nonhuman engagements that create and shape worlds and, when undertaken with "trans-lingual and trans-cultural contacts," can become an immersive educational process. Indeed, the creative and artistic works here offer ecopedagogical insights with their exploration of a various ecomedia that challenge "cognitive and existential boundaries and thus promote environmental awareness." Trans-cultural, trans-lingual, trans-media, and trans-species components enrich these exciting artistic works which include two incredible, plant-focused images by Kit Turner, one on the Cover. Janet Botes's "Art Expressing Human Dialogue with the Land" enacts through her evocative images the shared origins, grounded connections, and bodily participation of land-animals-humans in our earthly realm. James Kelly's stunning photos and granular haikus in both Spanish and English embody the structure of crystallized geological formations in a wonderful bilingual entanglement of artistic media. The final two contributions are by author/poets whose words paint human and nonhuman actants immersed together: Petra Kupperts's *13 Tides* writes a not-to-be-missed story poem about creating a tiny reef whose oyster filters but then fails, whereas Stuart Flynn's magnificent "Boarding the Iceberg" narrates how "I" follow "a bunch of chattering penguins" jumping off of the continent onto an iceberg that breaks free as they embark on a provocatively brief journey that covers eons. The issue concludes with this strangely entangled nonhuman-human-ice group that becomes "we," venturing out together with birds, whales, seals.

The issue's book reviews include a longer review essay by Caitlin McIntyre on three significant books, "Toward an Affective Ecocriticism," and six individual book reviews: Carmen García Navarro on the edited volume by Grace Moore and Michelle J. Smith, *Victorian Environments: Acclimatizing to Change in British Domestic and Colonial Culture*; Ana M. López-Aguilera on Charlotte Ann Melin's edited volume, *Foreign Language Teaching and the Environment. Theory, Curricula, Institutional Structures* that relates directly to our themed section in this issue; Bénédicte Meillon on Françoise Besson's *Ecology and Literatures in English: Writing to Save the Planet*; Maria Moss on the edited volume by Margarita Carretero González and José Marchena Domínguez, *Cultural Representations of Other-Than-Human Nature*; Solvejg Nitzke on Timothy Clark's *The Value of Ecocriticism*; and David Tagnani on Stephen J. Pyne's second edition of *Fire: A Brief History*.

Works Cited

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