

## Editorial, Vol 3, no. 1

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Welcome to this fifth number of *Ecozon@*. Like the preceding numbers, it is fronted by a guest-edited section with a special thematic focus: Writing Catastrophes. This is followed by ecocritical essays of a general nature, and the usual sections devoted to creative writing and book reviews.

Guest Editor Gabriele Dürbeck has assembled six essays on the topic 'Writing Catastrophes: Interdisciplinary perspectives on the semantics of natural and anthropogenic disasters' for the Special Focus section. The authors of these essays examine representations of disasters in German and English literary fiction (and, in one case, autobiography) over the past half century. Among the principal questions addressed in the introduction to the section, and in the essays by Peter Utz, Katharina Gerstenberger, Gabriele Dürbeck, Štěpán Zbytovský, Evi Zemanek and Roman Bartosch, are whether catastrophe narratives still fulfil the traditional function of giving meaning to traumatic experience and anxieties; how apocalyptic scenarios have changed since apocalypse became our 'way of life'; and how identification with the victims of disaster, ethical concern and learning to live differently on the one hand are reconciled with the consumption of literary disasters for aesthetic pleasure (or philosophical gain) on the other. They also broach broader questions such as how literature integrates events into cultural discourse, by framing them in tragic and comic modes of writing.

The general section contains three further essays. Francisco Saez de Adana examines the representation of genetic engineering in Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* science fiction trilogy. He shows how Butler extrapolates from knowledge of the science involved and her observation of human nature, using her imagined future world to explore contemporary ethical problems. He concludes that science fiction can further public discussion of the consequences of scientific advances by mapping out different perspectives on where they are leading us. Mac John Wilson writes (in Spanish) on Clara Sánchez's novel *Últimas noticias del paraíso*, which explores Western alienation from nature and the impact of globalisation through depiction of life in the suburbs of Madrid during the post-transition period. Sánchez describes the characters' leisure and consumer choices, in the context of a growing presence of foreign brand names and English words in everyday language. Through her protagonist, Fran, who is a paradigm

of middle-class youth, Sánchez reveals her contemporaries' failure to acknowledge their connection with nature.

In the third, theoretically oriented essay, Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann argue that the 'new materialisms' originating in social science and feminist studies, which reinstated the primacy of the material after the linguistic/ discursive/ postmodern turn of the 1960s and 1970s, challenging notions of mind/ body dualism and stressing the inseparability of the linguistic, social, political and biological, constitute a new theoretical paradigm for ecocritics. Drawing on theorists such as Stacey Alaimo and Karen Barad, they develop a Material Ecocriticism which focuses on bodily experiences and practices, and the interplay between the human and the non-human. Two ways of foregrounding and analysing the agency of matter are presented: examining textual representations of nature's agency, and studying how natural things configure meanings (as in biosemiotics). Iovino and Oppermann call for a posthumanist material ecocriticism which critically assesses literature's ability to serve as a discourse restoring lost forms of awareness and conceptualization, and enhancing our moral and environmental imagination.

The Creative Writing Section contains striking new work by four very different poets: Petrucci, Stuart Cooke, JD Smith, and Dan Thomas-Glass. The only art work in this number of *Ecozon@* is the cover image, 'The Great Day of His Wrath', painted 1851–3 by the English artist John Martin. Martin's dramatic canvas, which is chosen to illustrate the 'Writing Catastrophes' theme of this issue, was probably inspired by the Book of Revelations, and is regarded as a classic response to urbanisation and industrial development in Britain in the mid nineteenth century.

The issue is rounded off by a substantial review section. It starts with an extended review essay by Serenella Iovino surveying recent publications on 'new materialism', which complements her jointly authored article in the general essay section. Reviews of two books concerned with postcolonial ecocriticism follow. The remaining reviews present new collections of landscape poetry, Bertrand Westphal's *Geocriticism. Real and Fictional Spaces* (recently translated from the French), Timothy Clark's *Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, and Ashton Nichols' *Beyond Romantic Ecocriticism*.

The editorial team extend their thanks to the contributors to this issue and to reviewers. We hope readers will find the essays collected here instructive, and be encouraged to respond to them in their own work.