

Editorial: Creative Writing and Arts

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In his famous book *A Natural History of Nature Writing* (1995), Frank Stewart affirms that this genre conveys the effort to fathom the “lack of ease” that our culture carries in itself when facing the natural world—a world that we feel neither as entirely familiar, nor as entirely other from us. Nature writers, Stewart maintains, “struggle to resolve the deep issue of this in-betweenness, a resolution crucial to the physical and spiritual survival of our world” (xv). For a long part of its evolutionary history, ecocriticism—a typical form of critical “in-betweenness” of nature and culture—has been itself a mode of nature writing. As if united to one another by a subtle but porous membrane, the creative dimension and the critical practice have shared ideas of wilderness, pastoral and anti-pastoral visions, animal encounters, explorations of territories outside (or invisibly inside) synthetic urban landscapes, and more or less explicit forms of environmental activism. Recently this porosity has expanded to the *new* conceptualizations of “nature,” and once again ecocriticism and nature writing have met one another on a terrain “less spiritual and more concerned with natural history” (Stenning and Gifford, “Editorial” 1), one in which, as the guest-editors write in their Introduction, “the tensions of nature and place, [...] in a global environmental culture can [...] be addressed”.

Interlacing a dynamic conversation with the special focus unit on “European New Nature Writing,” this Creative Writing and Arts section has chosen to interpret its role not as a simple collector of the genre’s recent specimens. Inspired by the in-betweenness which characterizes both nature writing and ecocriticism, our selection is animated by a twofold goal: first, to provide contributions in which nature writing is hybridized with visual representations of natural creativities and living collectives; secondly, to expand the discourse on genre to the critical self-reflection of nature writers about their work. The closing part, a lyrical “coda,” is a further extension of the genre’s borders to the discourse of ecopoetry.

But let us examine our contributions more closely. In the visual unit, two photographers propose their visual narratives of “nature.” The first artist is the Estonian Remo Savisaar, one of the most renowned nature photographers in the Baltic countries and the recipient of many important awards, including the prize as “Estonia’s Best Wildlife Photographer” (2014), and the “GDT European Wildlife Photographer of the Year” (2013). Intersecting with the glorious tradition of his country in bio- and zoo-semiotics, Savisaar’s selection is titled “Animal Behavior.” As we read in the author’s statement, it takes research, technique, and “a lot of patience” to capture these moments of more-than-human life. In his photographs, all these human components co-emerge

with the cries of grey seals (*Halichoerus grypus*), “titans” clashing in a Nordic watershed; with the motherly journey of a water vole (*Arvicola terrestris*) that carefully carries her cub; with the attentiveness of a European beaver (*Castor fiber*) that chooses and cuts a fresh willow branch; with the majestic dance of white-tailed eagles (*Haliaeetus albicilla*); with the patient luck of a kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) that catches—ironies of the foodchain!—a “flying” fish whose trajectory falls in its beak. The beautifully poetic image of swallowtail butterflies (*Papilio machaon*) on the journal’s cover is also part of these visions. The dynamism expressed by these pictures let us think that photograph (literally a “light writing”)—when it takes natural forms and creatures as its subjects—is a basic form of nature writing: a nature writing mediated by a technical or technological apparatus, which produces representations of living matter in an instantaneous time and punctual space.

Very different in rhythm from Savisaar’s visual narratives, Peter Bergthaller’s photographs tell the silent stories of a terraqueous world where minerals, plants, and ancient life forms gather in slow co-habitation. The landscape here is the coast near Keiss, Caithness County, Scotland, at low tide, at a point where the red sandstone’s bed surfaces from the crystal seawaters. As the artist writes, there are in this place “no loud colours, no sublime mysteries—just organisms in their own world, solitary and perfectly undisturbed, some waiting to be engulfed in the next high tide, others moving around at incredibly slow rates.” A photographer and a chemist, Bergthaller narrates through his photographs the fascination of a multi-scaled world dominated by geological forces and elements, thus interpreting the alien *oikos* of algae, shells, and tidal waters—“inhuman” beings that “ultimately refuse domestication” (Cohen, “Ecostitial” iv).

Both Bergthaller’s and Savisaar’s works convey the sense that writing “nature” means to escape from domesticated landscapes. As the special focus issue also demonstrates, however, there is also a “urban” nature writing, one whose imagination flourishes in what Gilles Clément has called “third landscape.” As an “annex” of our section, Giovanni Pasinato’s pictures, included in Maria Pia Arpioni’s essay in the journal’s first section, can be considered as an interesting complement of this discourse.

The second part of our section includes two critical-narrative contributions: “Common Shore Crab” by Richard Kerridge and “Being Homo Radix” by Tiziano Fratus.

One of the major exponents of both ecocriticism and “European New Nature Writing,” Richard Kerridge does not need long introductions. His last creative effort, *Cold Blood* (2014), is a masterly example of how successfully autobiographical memoir and natural history can hybridize in this literary genre. For our *Ecozon@* issue, Kerridge contributes a “workshop-essay” in which he re-examines a piece of nature writing about crabs fished out of the water by children at a British seaside town. In his “workshop,” he revises a prose published twenty years ago according to the principles of the “New Nature Writing,” attempting to define those principles in the process.

Our second author, Tiziano Fratus, is an Italian nature writer, poet, “tree-seeker” and practitioner of “treeography,” a discipline which he developed in a number of books, including *Manuale del perfetto cercatore d’alberi* (*Manual of the Perfect Tree Seeker*, 2013) and *Il libro delle foreste scolpite* (*The Book of Sculpted Forests*, 2015). His piece,

halfway between memoir and manifesto, is the story of a vocation: that of a writer that, encountering the “voices” of the world’s great trees, decides to be a “root man,” explorer of a secretly dense vegetal life that is not only a bearer of ancestral tales, but also a vast web of arboreal mothers and fathers.

The section concludes with a bilingual eco-poem, “Trekking in the Wood” by Ivana Trevisani Bach. As stated by Trevisani Bach—herself a biologist, teacher, and author of *Manifesto of Italian Eco-poetry*— these verses aim to build a “poetic communication [...] intelligible to all cultures, and therefore easy to translate and to widely spread, as wished by the UNESCO message of the World Poetry Day.”

Nature writing, Frank Stewart wrote by concluding his famous book, “is another way for nature to understand itself, to articulate its unexpected configurations, its mysteries, and its requirements of us” (233). We hope that this Creative Writing and Art section, by exploring the pervious “natural” boundaries between literary practice and criticism, has also been a small fragment of the new ways taken by this creative understanding.¹

Works Cited

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