

Abstracts

Leonor María Martínez Serrano, “All Nature Teems with Life”: Anthropogenic Wastelands in Robert Hass’s Ecopoetics

Drawing on Rosi Braidotti’s thinking on the need for “a downsizing of human arrogance” and solidarity with other (non)humans,” as well as on Rob Nixon’s and Saskia Sassen’s insights into the perverse logic of capitalism and the slow violence brought about by environmental degradation, this article examines the representation of anthropogenic wastelands in American poet Robert Hass’s acclaimed *Time and Materials: Poems 1997-2005*. The concept of wasteland as an image of decadence, crisis and a mindset marked by exhaustion is present in a significant set of poems in Hass’s collection, where two kinds of wastelands can be discerned. The first kind concerns the devastation of spaces, terraforming, overexploitation, species extinction and the depletion of natural resources in the Anthropocene, which is particularly palpable in the ten-part “State of the Planet,” an ambitious piece that condenses the story of the Earth from the Big Bang to the present. The second kind of wasteland concerns the massive corporeal waste brought about by the devastating wars punctuating the twentieth century. As a poet, Hass is called on to bear witness to his time, one that seems to be intent on destroying the biosphere as the *oikos* life has built for itself at the expense of relentless economic growth. Yet he is prompt to write other poems, not of denunciation but of exultation, that sing of the beauty and vulnerability of the physical world homo sapiens is *a part of*, not *apart from*.

Maria Cristina Iuli, “Wanderers in the Neighborhood of Being”: Katherine Larson’s Poetry of Bios

The article discusses Katherine Larson’s first collection of poems, *Radial Symmetry* (2013), as a work that interrogates the relation between poetics and knowledge of life-forms. First, it provides the background for reading Larson’s poetry in the context of aesthetics as a domain in which literary and philosophical discourse overlap, and then it situates Larson’s work

more specifically within philosophical the discourse of “nature” framed, on the one hand, by Ralph Waldo Emerson’s pluralistic, non-representational view of language in Nature and, on the other, by Martin Heidegger’s reflections on Being, language and beings in “The Question Concerning Technology”. Finally, the essay delivers a close reading of some of Larson’s poems in order to exemplify the difference they make in engaging “nature,” “life,” and “Being” by means of language: whether by taking care of those entities, or by reducing them to “standing reserve.” Larson’s poems provide an apt focus for a wider discussion about the viability of poetry as a means to approach the morphological diversity of life right at the time of its human-driven sixth mass extinction.

Jane Desmond, *Poetry, Animals and Imaginative Ethnographies of Creaturely Lives*

In conversation with recent work on post-humanism and theorizations of the “more-than-human” world, I explore the capacities of literature, and especially contemporary poetry, to function as a sort of imaginative ethnography. Considering selected poems by US authors as a mode of “multi-species ethnography,” I draw on anthropological debates about ways of knowing more-than-human worlds, and the challenges of articulating that (necessarily anthropocentric) speculative knowledge. I argue that poetry, with its emphasis on condensation and multi-layered semiotics, along with its affective dimensions built through craft tools of sound, image, rhythm and line breaks, can function as a form of transpecies imaginative translation. It may even cultivate empathy, ultimately building toward change in human-animal relations in the world, through acts of writing and interpretation that imaginatively translate across the species divides, articulating shared human and more-than-human worlds.

Owen Harry, *Daoism and Posthuman Subjectivity in Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Lathe of Heaven**

Posthumanists consistently challenge traditional notions of the human subject as bounded and autonomous. For these theorists, American environmental literature has proven to be a valuable source of more relational models of subjectivity in which humans are recognized as interconnected with nonhumans. However, the significant influence of the

religious imagination on this literary tradition has largely been disregarded by posthuman ecocritics, and so too has its potential contribution to combating anthropocentrism. Building on recent arguments for parallels between posthumanism and Daoist thought, this article analyzes the work of Ursula K. Le Guin, whose speculative fiction has been acclaimed by posthumanists for its experiments in post-anthropocentric subjectivity, but whose strong Daoist influence has not been recognized by these same critics for its role in such experiments. I argue that Le Guin's central character in her most explicitly Daoist novel *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971) embodies Daoist concepts in ways that align closely to Rosi Braidotti's model of posthuman subjectivity. Beyond this recognition of compatibility between the two perspectives, I argue that reading the novel in light of recent re-evaluations of the concept of *wuwei* (non-action) also suggests an alternative conception of human agency that may inform the posthumanist project.

Daniela Fargione, Breaking Bread and Sharing Dreams with the Other-than-human: Extinction and Multispecies Community in Lydia Millet's *How the Dead Dream*

Lydia Millet's novels have gained momentum within environmental discourses since they often prove how "looking outside the human is what gives human life its meaning" (Millet). In this article, I analyze *How the Dead Dream*, the first novel of a trilogy published almost ten years after J.M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* (2001), the novella written for the 1997-1998 Tanner Lectures at Princeton University. Millet's book, I argue, is a direct reply to Coetzee's invitation to reconsider the place of the human vis-à-vis the other-than-human within the complex framework of posthumanism. This implies a recession of the onto-epistemological and ethical divide among species that saturate popular discourses on extinction. Drawing on material ecocriticism and, especially, on Stacy Alaimo's research (*Exposed*, 2016), I investigate and critique different forms of epistemological impermeability, such as the assumed domestic safety, cleanness, and the sovereignty of the (male) Western subjectivity. By tracing the radical transformation of T., the main character in the book and rapacious speculator, I demonstrate how the aesthetic and the ethical intersect in the narration of this story of coevolution and cohabitation.

Valentina Romanzi, Love Is a Thing with Feathers: Posthuman Metamorphoses in *This Is How You Lose the Time War*

Amal El-Mohtar and Max Gladstone's *This Is How You Lose the Time War* (2019) follows agents Red and Blue as they move through space and time to fight a seemingly endless war between their respective factions. Written in epistolary form, it traces the evolution of their relationship from enmity to star-crossed love. A mix of poetic language and science fictional prose and tropes, the novella touches upon several issues pertaining to the contemporary reflection on the posthuman. The interpretive framework of this essay hinges on the concepts of metamorphosis and metaphor, deployed to explore how the novella continually updates the subjectivity of its protagonists through a series of contacts and interactions with various kinds of Otherness. The goal of this essay is to show that the ontological value of the protagonists' selves shapeshifts both through their interaction with each other's alterity and through their contact with the letters – that is, the metaphorical language of their epistolary exchange. As the missives take ever-different forms according to their chrono-spatial context, their message is absorbed through touch, taste, smell, sight, and other senses, resulting in an embodied assemblage of addresser, message, and addressee that well represents the posthuman pull towards a hybrid subject, in a text that equally eschews the boundaries of genre.

Alice Ciulla, Opening and Closing Gates in Cold War America: Foreign Policy and the Politics of Immigration Law

This essay examines the manifold impacts of Cold War imperatives on American immigration policy. In the bipolar era, and especially until the peak of détente in the mid-1970s, anticommunism provided the political prerequisite to the restriction of the visa system. There was widespread consensus around the need to exclude foreign radicals in order to preserve the integrity of the nation. At the same time, the willingness of the USA to present itself as a model superior to the Soviet Union was the pretext for opening borders and increasing the entry of refugees, especially from communist regimes. Both these approaches had to face long-existing matters of concern over the national identity, in which race, ethnicity, education, and economic conditions represented crucial factors to select incoming migrants. Focusing on the connections between the Cold War (a

multi-faceted era, whose periodization varies according to the perspective adopted) and American immigration policy (which rules the most evident of transnational phenomena), migration offers the chance to rethink both, and provides suggestions for further research on the subject.

Giuliano Santangeli Valenzani, Picturing Italy: Cold War Perspectives in American Travel Writing on Italy, 1948-1960

This essay proposes a qualitative analysis of a sample of American travel literature on Italy produced between 1948 and 1960. The objective is to unravel the complex interplay between the evolving post-World War II global scenario and the well-entrenched American perceptions of Italy developed over the 19th and 20th centuries. Therefore, the article scrutinizes the narratives' thematic and ideological shifts in relation to the backdrop of Cold War politics, the Marshall Plan, and Italy's own transformation into a republic. It investigates how these geopolitical factors influenced the portrayal of Italy in American travel literature and, conversely, how the traditional romanticized image of Italy persisted or evolved. In addition to highlighting to what extent the language and rhetoric of travel literature interacted with the dictates of contemporary contingencies relying deeply on past images and themes, the essay also attempts to offer some insights into the evolution of American self-perception toward Europe by observing travel writings. Sources for this research are travel articles in newspapers and especially American magazines (*Holiday* and *National Geographic*) and 4 travel guides published in the United States between 1949 and 1960.

Eva Pelayo Sañudo, The Urban Cowboy: Gender, the Frontier (Ethni) City and the Myth of the West in Mario Puzo's *The Fortunate Pilgrim*

The article addresses how the mythical Western imaginary goes beyond its geopolitical borders, examining its influence on other urban landscapes such as New York. The city that never sleeps also captured a paradigmatic fascination for the concept of the West. This has been shown in Italian American culture and literature since the times of this ethnic settlement, although as part of the US cultural imagination at large the notion of the West is rarely bound to a concrete physical space. The article analyzes not only Italian or Italian American positions within transnational Western literature, but also the crucial interplay of gender representation in

configuring old and new myths. To this end, the analysis concentrates on two central elements of the classical West(ern): the cowboy and the frontier, although reconceptualized in the context of US twentieth-century immigration and urbanization. These two elemental features serve to identify the impact of US Westerns on Italian American culture in general and literature in particular through Mario Puzo's novel *The Fortunate Pilgrim* (1965). As a result of shifting the critical attention about the West(ern) to the understudied space of the city, this article aims at providing an innovative insight to recover a figure which is both historical and legendary, that of the so-called urban cowboy.