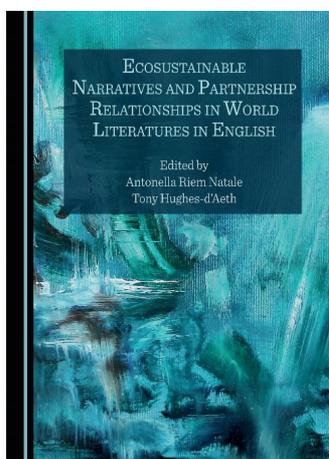


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John Thieme

**Ecosustainable Narratives and Partnership Relationships in World Literatures in English**

*Antonella Riem Natale & Tony Hughes d'Aeth (eds). 2022. Ecosustainable Narratives and Partnership Relationships in World Literatures in English. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 185 pp., £ 64.99, ISBN 1-5275-8228-0*



<https://www.cambridgescholars.com/product/978-1-5275-8228-6>

*Ecosustainable Narratives and Partnership Relationships in World Literatures in English* adds to the growing body of essay-collections curated by the Partnership Studies Group of the University of Udine, which, drawing on the work of Riane Eisler, proposes partnership models of culture and society to dismantle dominator paradigms founded on asymmetrical binaries. In the present volume, the extent to which the partnership paradigm is central varies and several of the essays extend the focus beyond world literatures in English, but overall *Ecosustainable Narratives* offers a series of stimulating case-studies of ways in which discourse can be re-envisioned in non-hierarchical ways.

The Introduction by the two editors outlines the main contours of the partnership approach and provides a summary of the volume's various contributions. It leads seamlessly into Antonella Riem's opening essay on Coleridge's organicism and ecosophy, which reinforces the Introduction, before moving on to a reading of Coleridge's poem "This

Lime-Tree Bower My Prison". The Coleridge discussion reworks material from Riem's 2005 book, *The One Life; Coleridge and Hinduism*, but in this new incarnation, it demonstrates the relevance of Coleridge's organicist thinking to the partnership paradigm, albeit while using the work of Eisler and Raimon Panikkar as a frame for the discussion of "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" rather than integrating it into the essay's close reading of the poem. The bringing together of these two strands of Riem's work should prove especially valuable for those who have not read *The One Life*.

Coral Howells' essay on Margaret Atwood's poetry and her *MaddAddam* trilogy and Mattia Mantellato's re-reading of J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* both take major world writers whose work readily lends itself to a partnership reading as their subjects and give nuanced accounts of how the texts discussed embody this. Howells shows how the dystopian aspects of Atwood's trilogy are countered by the ecosustainable sect of the God's Gardeners, especially in *The Year of the Flood*, the second part of the trilogy, and argues that it holds out the possibility of renewal through a non-anthropocentric approach. Mantellato traces how *Waiting for the Barbarians* breaks down dominator-dominated binaries through a careful examination of the Magistrate's developing encounter with alterity in the form of the nomad girl, showing how this erodes barriers between self and other, as he comes to internalise what it is to be 'An-Other'.

The discursive construction of culture is central to the partnership project and so it is refreshing to see a departure from conventional academic analysis in Paul Kane's meditative "Essay on Water". Written in poetic couplets and allowing itself to range across a spectrum of subjective emotions, this contribution focuses on the transformative fluidity of water. In so doing, it moves beyond the animist challenge to the Anthropocene, which is explicit or implicit in several of the volume's other essays, and takes the book into the realms of the hylozoist. If, initially its focus may seem slightly tangential to the volume's theme, for this reader at least, it came across as the piece most likely to promote ecosustainable activity.

In contrast, Janet Todd's fine essay on Jane Austen's Chawton novels and her own recent fiction seems less at home in this particular volume. It treads familiar ground by focusing on the pictorial framing that characterizes Austen's view of landscape, reinvigorating this approach by demonstrating how worlds are perceived through words. Thereafter, Todd provides excerpts from two of her own novels which bring her protagonists into dialogue with Austen. Both sections of the essay read well, but their connection with ecosustainable partnership remains tenuous.

Three of the essays move beyond literature to deal with linguistics and pedagogy in ways that contribute to the overall remit. Maria Bortoluzzi's "Environmental Crisis and Pandemic Emergency: News Stories of Erasure and Awareness" looks at media reporting at the height of the Covid pandemic and shows how the dominance of 'Coronaspeak' effectively erased coverage of the climate crisis. Bortoluzzi itemizes the various types of content that are believed to make stories particularly newsworthy, among them novelty and personalization, which it is suggested may have led to the pandemic's taking precedence over environmental issues. In a not dissimilar manner, Valentina Boschian Bailo explores the relationships between humans and ecosystems, focusing on migration and the ways

in which 'climate is represented as an active agent that causes environmental change' and environment 'as a passive recipient that is subject to such change', and suggesting that a change in outlook that values partnership is needed to better understand environmental migration. Elia Bertoldi quietly illustrates the use of partnership narratives in teaching English as a second language to children.

Two essays deal with major Australian writers. Nicholas Birns offers a probing reading of Judith Wright's relational poetics, which particularly focuses on the poetry of her middle period. The essay comes alive when Birns discusses poems such as "To Another Housewife", in which the partnership paradigm is writ small, with Wright foregrounding the titular character's co-optation into the 'male meat-eating economy', without exempting women from complicity in such activity. The essay is also especially interesting when it shows how Wright's friendship with Oodgeroo bridged the settler/Indigenous divide. Gillian Tan and Lyn McCredden's "The Postcolonial Sacred in the Fiction and Memoirs of Tim Winton" confronts the same issue, focusing on the 'deepening austerity' in Winton's representation of landscape. Their contribution wrestles with the discomfort that many 'non-Indigenous' Australians feel, when faced with their supposed unbelonging, and suggests that Winton's novels 'reveal the brokenness of non-Indigenous Australians' and their need to address their past arrogance in the hope of achieving transformation. This sentiment, familiar in recent years, is, of course, unexceptionable, but it leaves one feeling that there must come a point when the 'non-Indigenous', whether they are the descendants of Anglo-Celtic settlers or convicts or more recently arrived migrants, may also lay claim to a sense of belonging. This, though, is addressed here in passages that discuss Winton's 'sympathies for an Indigenous ontology of place'.

Deborah Saidero's essay "Heal the Earth" looks at writing from the opposite side of the settler/Indigene binary, considering work by two of Canada's finest Native writers, Lee Maracle and Jeanette Armstrong. It offers an approach that is a salutary foil to Tan and McCredden's contribution and works rather better in terms of the partnership paradigm. The focus is on ways in which age-old Native wisdom is instructive for contemporary society: Maracle has the traditional figure of Raven spreading a flu epidemic to shake people out of their spiritual paralysis; Armstrong demonstrates how the land and people's bodies are part of the same integral whole. Again this promotes a hylozoist vision that represents an extended version of the partnership approach.

From first to last, *Ecosustainable Narratives and Partnership Relationships in World Literatures in English* is a thought-provoking volume, which challenges anthropocentric perspectives and further disseminates the call for collaborative work at a time when the climate and environment are threatened as never before, and as Margaret Atwood has said, in an oft-repeated mantra, 'Everything change'.

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