

Ecosustainable  
Narratives and  
Partnership  
Relationships in World  
Literatures in English



# Ecosustainable Narratives and Partnership Relationships in World Literatures in English

Edited by

Antonella Riem Natale  
and Tony Hughes-d'Aeth

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## PREFACE

# THE WORK OF PARTNERSHIP AND THE ART OF THE MORAL IMAGINATION

MARK S. CLADIS  
BROWN UNIVERSITY

Partnership. In the English language, “partnership” is often a legal or business term. Business partnerships are collective, economic agreements among two or more companies. Another common usage in English refers to intimate partnerships: a romantic partner, a life-long partner, or even a good friend. Yet too often we neglect – in language and in practice – a third kind of partnership: one that is both collective and intimate. The book in your hands is just that: an incarnation and expression of intimate, collective partnership. Partnership between its authors, surely, but there is also an invitation extended to you, the reader, should you wish to join this shared adventure.

There is something of a linguistic dance taking place within these pages. You may watch the movement from afar or participate in it. On the one hand, the authors are responding to the material, cultural, and spiritual state of the world, in particular to environmental and social justice crises and catastrophes. On the other hand, the authors have partnered with each other to pursue shared perspectives and approaches that place liberatory relationality and cooperation above oppressive egoism and domination. As if in a community dance, the authors move individually and together, responding to each other and to the world – to its sources of suffering and sources of life. And they invite you, the reader, to respond in kind, joining the dance – the movement – in relational partnership.

If you accept the invitation, you will be joining a community of internationally renowned scholars committed to something like a revolution: to overturn vicious hierarchies and dualisms with the arms of care, equity, and solidarity. *Patriarchy* (man over woman), *Colonialism* (white Euro-Americans over global people of color), *Androcentrism* (man – that is, the

privileged white man – over nature), and *Cartesian dualism* (mind over matter): these abstract terms, naming hierarchical relations, identify concrete sources of massive affliction. In different ways, these hierarchies render women, Black and brown men, and the more-than-human as passive, soulless, and ripe for exploitation. Against such exploitation, and armed with the weapons of partnering and the pen, the community of authors in this volume pursues the work of social and environmental justice. And that work is inspired by the vision of Riane Eisler, author of *The Chalice and The Blade: Our History, Our Future* and *The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economics*, among other groundbreaking books. Focusing on the interconnection between the economic and the cultural, the material and the spiritual, Eisler calls for the dismantling of the current oppressive economic and social systems that we have inherited from the past, and for the establishment of new institutions in their place that wisely and ethically support and care for the human and the more-than-human.

Domination, in various forms, has assaulted the vitality and health of marginalized peoples and the ecosystems on which they depend. Partnership – that is, ethical relationality – seeks to challenge the material, cultural, and spiritual structures of domination. While material forces such as global capitalism are taken seriously, material reductionism is eschewed. The economy is a socio-cultural affair as much as the socio-cultural is an economic affair. Partnership in these pages is not simply a social model but an ethical one. *Ecosustainable Narratives* is not an exercise in Weberian value neutrality or an attempt to sever the emotions from reason. First and foremost, the work in these pages is normative, naming sources of suffering but also avenues of flourishing for the human and more-than-human. It addresses the whole person – that is, the integration of our emotional life, bodily senses, moral judgment, and cognitive abilities.

The transgression of barriers is both a theme and method in this work. The academy, we all know, has become increasingly specialized in the last 100 years or so. Much good has come from the penetrating focus of diverse disciplines, but much has been lost as well. We have lost the ability to converse across disciplinary lines. Yet if we are to address such problems as gender and racial discrimination, economic injustice, and environmental catastrophe – problems that have both a personal and an institutional face – then we need to learn how to speak to each other and how to listen to each other. We need not only specialized information and critical arguments, but joint goals and a shared language that transgresses those barriers that would keep us apart. This is precisely what is found in the model of partnership set forth in these pages. Such virtues as receptivity and reciprocity as well as courage and wisdom are needed in order to join in solidarity and speak



honestly and forthrightly – revealing and protesting those violent, controlling forces that subjugate people and land alike.

The journey in *Ecosustainable Narratives* runs along different paths, and yet there is a shared destination. Partnership does not ask for sameness or homogeneity. It asks for a solidarity of diverse voices in a common conversation: different perspectives pursuing mutual aims. I would say partnership is “diverse voices in harmony”, but “harmony” suggests more coherence than is needed or even desired. The chapters in this volume do not form a homogenous compilation, as if *Ecosustainable Narratives* were penned by a single author. No, this volume contains too much diversity to fit between the covers of such uniformity. Rather, in different ways, the authors here explore diverse topics, various genres, and move within and across a range of disciplines. Expect a rich, varied journey as you encounter: the interconnected and interdependent webs of being; the everyday wonder and terror of water and its “fluidscapes”; Indigeneity and relationality; literature as sources of hope and solace; stories and storytelling (from news media to children’s picture books) that bring us together and that keep us apart, that open us up to the mystery and beauty of the world and that cut us off from the springs of life. These topics and others are explored via Indigenous, British, Canadian, Australian, and intercultural literature; novels, essays, and poetry; ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and postcolonialism; linguistics, media studies, and education. Each chapter is distinctive, and each pulls together with its partners to give witness to the precarity of life on a warming planet; the interdependent connections between and among humans and the more-than-human; and ways to move forward sustainably for the sake of all, but especially for the most vulnerable.

Hopes abides in these pages. The question of hope and its relation to despair looms all around us, in private conversation and in public discourse. In various academic fields and in the general public, one senses a pervasive pessimism as the world grapples with such catastrophes as climate change, white nationalism, and economic disparity. Resilience and vulnerability, resistance and uncertainty, transformation and constraints – these aspects of the human drama are investigated variously in *Ecosustainable Narratives*. Taken together, the partnership offers hope – not sunny and Pollyannaish, but rather a hope rooted in suffering, trial, and grief. It offers a powerful resource for us today. It is, of course, tempting to resign to extractive and racist capitalism, lament it, and assume alternatives are impossible. But the more difficult, radical act is to imagine a desirable and just future while acknowledging our everyday reality – with all its suffering, and, yes, with all its beauty.

*Ecosustainable Narratives* allows us to imagine change, and that is a powerful gift. In *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, Amitav Ghosh claims that “the climate crisis is [...] a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination”<sup>1</sup>. *Ecosustainable Narratives* is dedicated to the idea that the work of partnership, in conjunction with the art of the moral imagination, is a powerful tool to transform the world.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Ghosh. 2016. *The Great Derangement*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 9.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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### *Birns*

Nicholas Birns teaches at New York University. He is author most recently of *The Hyperlocal in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Literary Space* (Lexington) and is co-editing the forthcoming *Cambridge Companion to the Australian Novel* (Cambridge University Press) and *A Companion to Anthony Trollope* (McFarland). His other books include *Theory After Theory* (Broadview, 2010), *Barbarian Memory* (Palgrave, 2013) and *Contemporary Australian Literature* (University of Sydney Press, 2015). He edited *Antipodes* from 2001 to 2018.

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Mark S. Cladis is the *Brooke Russell Astor Professor of the Humanities* and the Chair of the Department of Religious Studies at Brown University. His main fields of inquiry are philosophy of religion, religious ethics, and theory of religion (including the integration of these three subfields). He is a founding member of *Environmental Humanities at Brown* (EHAB) and is an active faculty member in *Native American and Indigenous Studies at Brown*. He is currently working on the book project, *Radical Romanticism: Religion, Democracy, and the Environmental Imagination*.

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### Hughes-d'Aeth

Tony Hughes-d'Aeth holds the Chair in Australian Literature at the University of Western Australia. His research focuses on literature and the environment. His book *Like Nothing on this Earth: A Literary History of the Wheatbelt* (UWA Publishing, 2017) won the Walter McRae Russell Prize for best work of Australian literary criticism in 2019. His first book *Paper Nation: The Story of the Picturesque Atlas of Australasia, 1886-1888* (Melbourne UP, 2001), won the Ernest Scott and WK Hancock prizes for Australia history. From 2010 to 2015, he was the co-editor of *Westerly Magazine*, and is now Director of the Westerly Research Group.

### Kane

Paul Kane is an American scholar and poet. He has published eighteen books, including five collections of poems, and two in Chinese translation. His work appears in *The Paris Review*, *The New Republic*, *Poetry*, *The New Criterion*, *Religion & Literature*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Verse*, *Wordsworth Circle*, *Raritan* and *Partisan Review*. He is the poetry editor of *Antipodes* and serves as Artistic Director of the Mildura Writers Festival and General Editor of the Braziller Series of Australian Poets. His awards include

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Antonella Riem, AM, is Full Professor of English Literature and Language at the University of Udine, President of the Italian Conference of Foreign Languages, founder of the Partnership Studies Group (PSG) and editor in chief of the series ALL Forum University Press and the online A-ranked journal on world literatures *Le Simplegadi*. She was Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice Chancellor International, Director of the Department of Languages and Literatures (DILL), Dean of the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures of the University of Udine, President of the Italian Deans of the Faculties of Foreign Languages and Literatures. She has more than one hundred international publications and nine monographic volumes on World Literatures in English.

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*Todd*

Janet Todd is an internationally renowned novelist and academic, best known for her non-fiction feminist works on women writers including Jane Austen, Aphra Behn and Mary Wollstonecraft. In recent years, she has turned her hand to writing novels, publishing *Lady Susan Plays the Game* in 2013, *A Man of Genius* in 2016 and *Don't You Know There's a War On?* in 2020. Her latest book is *Jane Austen and Shelley in the Garden: A Novel with Pictures* and was recently reviewed and recommended in Washington Post. She has published and edited more than 40 books including the complete works of Mary Wollstonecraft (with Marilyn Butler), of Aphra Behn, and, as General Editor, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*. She was a professor of English Literature at UEA, Glasgow and Aberdeen Universities, before becoming president of Lucy Cavendish College, University of Cambridge (2008-2015), Cambridge where she established the Lucy Cavendish Fiction Prize. She is now an Honorary Fellow of Newnham and Lucy Cavendish Colleges. In 2013, Janet was given an OBE for her services to higher education and literary scholarship.

# INTRODUCTION

ANTONELLA RIEM

UNIVERSITY OF UDINE

TONY HUGHES-D'AETH

UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

This book is part of a long-standing research project within the Partnership Studies Group (PSG)<sup>1</sup>, an international research centre, which sees the participation of many scholars, writers, PhD students, artists and poets, inspired by the seminal anthropological and socio-cultural work of Riane Eisler<sup>2</sup> and founded Antonella Riem and a group of researchers in 1998. It is an active community of scholars based at the University of Udine, with a series of interconnected partners all over the world. Eisler's partnership model propounds a *partnership* way of relating to others that is more equitable and caring and radically differs from a *dominator* (patriarchal) model in which rigid hierarchies, authoritarianism and violence tend to prevail.

Moving from this partnership/dominator continuum, the Partnership Studies Group (PSG) has developed important multi- and inter-disciplinary research, investigating the presence and meaning of partnership/dominator configurations within World Literatures in English, Language, Education and Arts. The aim of investigating the relationship between “dominator” and “partnership” models within textual phenomena of different natures is based on the awareness that it is primarily in the texts that all ideologies are institutionalized and re-produced in more or less explicit ways. The text is thus studied not as a faithful reflection of reality but as a privileged con-text through which changes of the status quo can be envisaged. Texts belonging to different genres (fiction, drama, poetry, journalism, advertising, politics, etc.) are selected and analyzed in order to examine the different gender relations (‘traditional’ hierarchies of male/female), discriminations (institutionalized social violence), social structures (hierarchical and authoritarian social

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<sup>1</sup> <https://partnershipstudiesgroup.uniud.it/> (consulted on 3-5-2020).

<sup>2</sup> <https://centerforpartnership.org/> (consulted on 3-5-2020).

organizations) and those semiotic codes which reinforce and strengthen them. What is central is the study of myths, archetypes and symbols as instruments for creating and reinforcing a cultural paradigm. Initially, the research focused on the literatures of Australia, India and Canada, applied linguistics and education, and in recent years it has been expanded to include a more interdisciplinary range of intercultural studies, social, anthropological, ethnophilological and educational fields.

The PSG has been especially active with nationally and internationally funded research projects, the international online journals *Le Simplegadi*<sup>3</sup> and the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies* (IJPS)<sup>4</sup>, the ALL series Forum University Press<sup>5</sup>, international publications<sup>6</sup> and a number of Conferences and Seminar Series. In 2020-21 the PSG launched the first international Master of Partnership and Shamanism, now Master in Partnership Studies and Native Traditions. Literatures, Psychology, Ethno-anthropology and Society (MaPS, University of Udine)<sup>7</sup>.

The PSG approaches research within a broader intercultural and interdisciplinary frame, aiming at transcending the limiting, rigid and dated scientific specialisations, which, by focussing on a single and univocal perspective, lose sight of the importance of the whole, the interrelated web of life on our planet. In tune with the research goals of the PSG, the epistemological foundations of this volume lie in the biocultural partnership model developed by Riane Eisler, which promotes a viable poetics of relation<sup>8</sup> and strategically seeks to move beyond the scientific and technocratic attitudes stemming from domination<sup>9</sup> and globalised bio-imperialism<sup>10</sup>. Renowned international scholars focus on postcolonial, ecocritical, intercultural, mythical, and archetypal studies of literature, education and its partnership mediation, intercultural strategies in English literatures, applied linguistics and plurilingual education, also intersecting with contemporary systemic science and ecofeminism. As a model for thinking about language, culture and the environment, Eisler's partnership

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<sup>3</sup> <https://le-simplegadi.it/> (consulted on 3-5-2020).

<sup>4</sup> <https://pubs.lib.umn.edu/index.php/ijps> (consulted on 3-5-2020).

<sup>5</sup> <https://forumeditrice.it/percorsi/lingua-e-letteratura/all/?text=all-english> (consulted on 3-5-2020).

<sup>6</sup> [https://partnershipstudiesgroup.uniud.it/?page\\_id=151](https://partnershipstudiesgroup.uniud.it/?page_id=151) (consulted on 3-5-2020).

<sup>7</sup> [https://partnershipstudiesgroup.uniud.it/?page\\_id=905&lang=it](https://partnershipstudiesgroup.uniud.it/?page_id=905&lang=it) (consulted on 3-5-2020).

<sup>8</sup> Glissant, 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Eisler, 1997.

<sup>10</sup> Shiva, 2015.



theory works beyond gender binary systems<sup>11</sup> and traditional Western Manichean oppositions between coloniser/colonised, master/slave, ego/other, white European/indigenous, and male/female, and presents interesting interdisciplinary perspectives on nature/animal/cultural/human relationships. Her perspective is consonant with Raimon Panikkar's idea of ecosophy, which emphasises the wisdom-spirituality of Mother Earth.

The capacity to listen, relate and connect to human beings and the environment is at the core of this biocultural partnership approach, transcending the dominator paradigm, which is based on violence and control. The biocultural partnership-dominator model can be seen as a positive alternative to the violent, globalising, destructive dominator exploitation of the Mother Earth and all Her children, including us humans. Riane Eisler's system operates within a broader cultural and macro-historic frame, identifying what supports our human capacities for love, care, creativity, and awareness, or, on the other hand, for insensitivity, brutality, and violence. Eisler's research and critical method underlines the importance of systemic, macroscopic, socio-cultural and macro-historical views:

[Eisler's research] uses a new method of analysis: the study of Relational Dynamics. These dynamics are, first, what kind of relations – from intimate to international – a particular culture encourages or discourages; and second, how key elements of a culture interactively relate to shape and maintain its basic character<sup>12</sup>.

*Ecosustainable Narratives. Partnership Relationships in World Literatures in English, Applied Linguistics and Language Education* considers 'relations'<sup>13</sup> and the consequences they have on the forces which have seen the world's ecosystems come under sustained and increasing attack<sup>14</sup>, often marginalising peoples and cause the 'share' of global economic, political and personal suffering to fall with great unevenness<sup>15</sup>. The world financial

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<sup>11</sup> "Systems of oppression that require everyone to be rigidly raised either male or female and masculine or feminine according to stereotypes socially constructed for a domination society, thus eliminating the possibility for other gender expressions. Conversely, the partnership model aims at the creation of a society beyond the male-superior female-inferior, in-group versus out-group species systems, in which diversity – be it based on gender, religion, or ethnic origin – can be valued". Mercanti, 2015: 17.

<sup>12</sup> Eisler, 2019: 9.

<sup>13</sup> Eisler, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Nixon, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> On ecosustainable narratives and partnership studies see also: Riem & Mercanti, 2014, 2017, 2021, and Riem & Thieme, 2020.

elites stringently impose their goals, well represented by the ‘Great Reset’<sup>16</sup> announced by the World Economic Forum of Davos<sup>17</sup>. With the alibi of the ‘pandemics’ and beneath ostentatious “newspeak”<sup>18</sup> announcements such as: “the Great Reset initiative has a set of dimensions to build a new social contract that honours the dignity of every human being”, this group of financial elites, bankers and national political leaders pushes on the long cherished project of a global governance, which certainly does not have in mind the dignity, freedom and wellbeing of the world peoples and not even the ‘care’ for the planet.

Eisler’s theory and practice bring together findings from the natural and social sciences, often overlooked or not put into relationship, debunking the idea of humans as intrinsically selfish, warlike, rapists and greedy. Her approach abandons the traditional dichotomies of Western thought – right/left, religious/secular, and other similar categories, with the fundamental intent of including our social and familiar relationships, such as parent-child and partner to partner. On the one end of the ‘continuum’, the domination system ranks, often through menace and violence, man over man, man over woman, ‘race’ over ‘race’ and man over nature. On the other, we have a more peace-oriented, gender-balanced, equalitarian and sustainable system of inclusive familiar, social, cultural and economic partnership relations, which include our Planet.

Certainly, as an approach to literature, language and culture, the one on view in this book looks and feels quite different from conventional historicist and materialist attempts to locate cultural tension in underlying social and global financial over-structures, forces and trends. However, Eisler’s work as a very eloquent and pluridisciplinary scholar is very sophisticated and articulate, for it “unpends age-old assumptions about human nature and its supposed impossibility for improving the human condition showing how we can bring about fundamental change”<sup>19</sup>. Eisler’s interest in gender equality as a fundamental force of partnership, against the divisive patriarchal dominator approach, makes her also an interesting feminist scholar studied worldwide. Since the publication of her first book

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<sup>16</sup> Klaus & Malleret, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/great-reset/> (consulted on 3-5-2020).

<sup>18</sup> Newspeak, propagandistic language that is characterised by euphemism, circumlocution, and the inversion of customary meanings. The term was coined by George Orwell in his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Newspeak, “designed to diminish the range of thought”, was the language preferred by Big Brother’s pervasive enforcers”, <https://www.britannica.com/art/newspeak> (consulted on 3-5-2020).

<sup>19</sup> Eisler & Frye, 2019: 2.

*The Chalice and the Blade* (1987) she clearly expounds how a dominator society, characterized by rigid male dominance and ingrained violence is certainly much different from a gender-balanced and egalitarian partnership society<sup>20</sup>. Eisler re-examines fundamental human topics, such as sexual relationships, parenting, human rights, social justice, politics, economics, science and technology (also in its technocratic degenerations) from an integrative and dialogic perspective, which:

sheds new light on critical current issues, all the way from climate change, scapegoating, authoritarianism, racism, and other forms of in-group versus out-group thinking to contemporary disputes about biological and cultural evolution, economics, national and international politics, religious fundamentalism, and the uses and potential abuses of technological breakthroughs<sup>21</sup>.

One of the innovative powers of *Ecosustainable Narratives* lies in how it substantiates Eisler's concept of partnership in the domain of language, literature, and applied linguistics within the ecological domain, showing how creativity can and does condition our world-view, thus transforming it through a conscious and active choice. The literary essays tackle key world authors – Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Jane Austen, Margaret Atwood, J. M. Coetzee, Judith Wright, Tim Winton, and Indigenous women writers, seeing how they work within a partnership paradigm that can and does create a dialogic network across times and spaces. They become laboratories for the interplay of domination and partnership, workshops for the operational active ethics that the world needs to curb the Neo-Malthusian drive to reduce forcefully and eugenically human population in order to 'save' the Planet. This approach exemplifies how the so-called new geological epoch – the Anthropocene – is actually due to the greedy exploitative anti-sustainable and anti-ecological actions of the financial elites and multinationals even if in their constructions and 'narratives' humanity as a whole becomes the culprit. Just to mention a few of the most powerful cartels: The Seven Sisters (oil cartel), Monsanto/Bayer (genetically modified seeds and highly polluting pesticides), Big Tech (Facebook,

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<sup>20</sup> Eisler's seminal texts are: *The Chalice and the Blade* (1987); *Sacred Pleasure* (1995), which focus on the biological rewards for loving and caring behaviours, representing a more evolved way of living on this earth that is ingrained in our genetic system; *The Real Wealth of Nations* (2007), which proposes a 'caring' economics as a response to the world economic crisis. Her latest book is *Nurturing Our Humanity. How Domination and Partnership Shape our Brains, Lives, and Futures* (2019) written with Douglas P. Fry.

<sup>21</sup> Eisler & Fry, 2019: 2.

Windows, Amazon), Big Pharma (the pharmaceutical cartel), Wall Street, Black Rock (multinational investment management corporations), Media Corporations (Netflix, Walt Disney, Comcast Corp, AT&T, Charter Communications, Sony, Thomson Reuters, ViacomCBS), the World Economic Forum and so on.

The complementary views of postcolonialism and ecocriticism illustrate the constitutive relations between literary, linguistic, cultural, social and environmental concerns. The book's innovative interaction of partnership, postcolonial studies, ecocriticism and discourse studies aims at contextualizing the transnational cultural and literary imagination and rethinking plurilingual education in terms of equal relationships among civilizations. It can promote the development of new researchers and professionals in transcultural mediation, and build cultural, linguistic, social and institutional expertise to operate at national and international levels.

The ecolinguistic essays study how different narrative choices inform and condition the worldview presented to us by mainstream media. They also take us into the classrooms of children learning second languages and into the virtualised pages of contemporary news services reporting the climate emergency alongside with sport and the lives of celebrities. This book is also distinctively pluralistic, for the authors work under an interdisciplinary lens crossing literary, cultural and linguistic boundaries. Such border zones often pose the possibilities offered by Eisler – domination and partnership – quite starkly. What happens at a border, when two aspects meet which are at odds with one another? A border organises difference as an interface, a contamination, a crossing. This can manifest through a militarised margin of mutual suspicion (domination) or as a place of instrumental exchange, of partnership dialogue. It is at these crossroads that one can decide to relinquish the drive to domination and partnership can be most fully expressed and manifested.

The various contributions of the volume address these topics in deep, creative and perceptive ways. Antonella Riem opens the collection with a close reading of Coleridge's enigmatic 'conversation' poem, "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison". Riem feels that "literature and the arts truly are one of the most ideal mediums to make us reflect on ourselves and the planet, especially in the light of the most recent scientific discoveries, which reveal a wealth of evidence concerning the unity of all life in an interconnected network". In her essay Riem provides a romantic lineage to both Eisler and contemporary discourses of sustainability; she considers Coleridge's Organicism to be proto-ecological, displaying an "anticipatory grasp on a dialogic, systemic and intertextual opening to knowledge". Moreover, in Coleridge's casting of nature in terms of "alive networks" and "not a

machine”, she shows how the poem clearly illustrates Eisler’s principle of partnership. Riem writes: “the way Coleridge chooses to focus on his human, natural and vegetal protagonists expresses the partnership-dominator modes of being and perceiving reality”. Riem’s essay demonstrates the partnership-domination continuum is an active dialectic in the romantic imagination and underlines how Coleridge’s poem and his original Organicist theories are in tune with a partnership, ecocritical or, according to Panikkar’s more comprehensive definition, ecosophical approach.

The elegiac, ecosophical and metaphysical quality of Coleridge’s poem finds an intriguing dialogic counterpoint in Coral Ann Howells’ essay on Margaret Atwood’s environmental writing. Howells shows how Atwood’s environmental writing has moved through three main phases, beginning with an early reverence for nature in her poems of the 1970s, before turning to more strident “ecological jeremiads” in the 1980s, and most recently to the post-apocalyptic *MaddAddam* trilogy – novels which are regarded as foundational texts of Anthropocene fiction. In the early period, Howells notes how “Atwood’s environmental poems cover a broad range of human-nature interaction and interdependency, encoded through images and metaphors framed by the speaking subject”. Howells also shows that this range of relationality can be made sensible in Eislerian terms. “Atwood’s environmental writing assumes a wider dimension”, Howells writes, “as she continues to explore the Partnership model with its implications for human and non-human relations”. The main focus of this original, insightful and intelligent essay is a re-reading of the *MaddAdam* trilogy through an Eislerian lens. In particular, Howells says that “Atwood’s form of storytelling in the trilogy is a deliberate act of transgression against the artificial order of the destructive Dominator paradigm”. In a careful reading of the trilogy, Howells finds that despite its apocalyptic scenario, the novels are not finally situated in despair, and that, in fact, “*MaddAddam* is Atwood’s Third Way, moving beyond narratives of apocalypse in this story of post-apocalyptic survival”. Within the frame of Atwood’s storytelling, Howell’s essay considers environmental themes, the destructive Dominator paradigm (perfectly emblematised in Crake’s Immortality project), and the Partnership model of God’s Gardeners, which provides the prototype for her speculative scenario of interspecies survival at the end of the third volume. Atwood’s environmental ethics filtered through her novelistic imagination offer the hope of cultural renewal, for “Art is how we express our humanity, in all of its dimensions”.

Paul Kane’s “Essay on Water” is written in blank couplets and is a piercing meditation on the vicissitudes of water, the substance that covers 71% of the earth’s surface and constitutes 60% of the human body. This

essay in verse (in the tradition of Lucretius, Pope, Auden and Ashbery) is a meditation on the element of water from shifting points of view, including environmental, ecological, mythological, historical, and phenomenological perspectives. While philosophically serious, the essay is also, at times, witty and ludic in tone, responding to the various forms that water itself can take (the only element that can be found in a solid, liquid or gaseous state). In crossing disciplinary and generic boundaries, the essay embodies a flexible approach to ecosustainable narratives and environmental educative strategies. Water presents an intriguing example of the need of dominator societies to control nature in order to exploit it thus asserting and showing human 'supremacy' over things and life. The human dominator approach towards control is seen most acutely in the case of this protean element, rivers are dammed and diverted, while lakes and wetlands are drained and even the oceans are assailed with projects of reclamation and dredging. In Eisler's paradigm, we see that the need to control water is ultimately a need to dominate our own substance, our own surface. With the alacrity of verse, Kane's poetic essay presents water in all its quotidian brilliance. The fact that we encounter water, not in some laboratory but in daily life, in its three material forms (liquid, solid, gas) is an "ordinary" miracle we continually forget but which Kane's essay helps us to remember. His poem perfectly renders our world in *aquacentric* terms – asking not what water is to us, but what are we to water? Kane's invocation of the mastery of water describes the energy of archetypal forces, a relationship established: it is only by accepting the powerful energy and mastery of water that we are able to sue meaningfully for peace. Kane's poem, in a way that is clearly reminiscent of the romantics, turns to the classical world for an image of a new and better dispensation, and for a way of renewing the basic sacraments of life. When he invokes gods, oracles and shamans, under the sign of pragmatism rather than theology, Kane is consonant with Eisler's ethics of partnership, and his essay offers an enunciation of these ethics in the lyric mode. In crossing disciplinary and generic boundaries, his essay embodies a flexible and creative approach to ecosustainable narratives and environmental educative strategies.

Being alive to the sacred is also the theme of Gillian Tan and Lyn McCredden, who focus on literary expressions of settler-colonial relationships to 'place' in Australia, giving particular attention to the fiction and memoirs of contemporary novelist Tim Winton. In Australia, the largest island in the world, 'place' includes water: sea, rivers, swamps, and other fluid-scapes that school how Winton understands his particular place-based relationships. Revered by the Australian reading public, Winton is a giant in Australian writing and a notable novelist in world literary terms. He has

won the Booker Prize twice and Australia's premier literary prize, the Miles Franklin Literary Award four times. For all of this, in critical circles in Australia, he enjoys a mixed reputation which is difficult to explain. Perhaps the main problem has been the extent to which his writing documents the uncertainties of writer with a "settler" background belonging at a time when criticism has been rightly eager to celebrate emerging Indigenous voices. Similarly, his concern with detailing the travails of masculinity has often led to the charge that he does not focus enough on the 'feminine'. Another element that has worked against Winton is the mystical moments (sometimes gothic, sometimes magical realist, sometimes a purely personal transcendence) of his writing. Gillian Tan and Lyn McCredden's essay helps correct this critical bias by nominating the "postcolonial sacred" as a site of exploration in Winton's work, rather than writing it off as ideological mystification: "Winton's relationship with Australia as place is, we argue, accretive, relational, and potentially transformatory". Tan and McCredden lay hold of a dimension in Winton's writing that is all too often missed, which is that the novels proceed by deconstituting their protagonists. This process of dismantling is a key step in Eisler's transformative agenda, and Tan and McCredden help show how "radical undoing" is at the centre of Winton's writing: "in Winton's fiction, this set of relationships between non-Indigenous humans, Indigenous, and the different-to-human, is often represented as a radical 'undoing' of human certainties". They note how, for instance, in his most recent novel, *The Shepherd's Hut*, Winton presents an "earthed and sacred ontology" that reinscribes the efficiency of rituals which might help boys become men in ways that are safe to them and to others. Their essay successfully explores the ways in which the category of "the sacred" informs and problematises Winton's oeuvre; and how diverse understandings of sacredness are arising in relationship to land and belonging in (post)-colonial Australia.

Nicholas Birns also considers the work of a canonical Australian writer, in his case Judith Wright, as Australia's leading landscape poet and founding figure in Australian ecopoetics and in the discourse of reconciliation between Australia's settler and Indigenous populations. This essay focuses on the middle poetry such as "Five Senses" and its avowal of the human formulation of nature as "pure design" to see how Wright forged a relational ecopoetics that negotiates with and recognizes all these different subject positions. Like others in this collection, Birns sees Eisler as a theorist of relationality, and he also makes a compelling case for regarding Wright in this light too. He notes that at the point at which Wright began writing in the 1940s and 50s, the cultural sensibility of the antipodean settler colonies (Australia and New Zealand) was dominated by masculinist

individualism, “a hard, unbending masculinity” characterised by the “monadic refusal to acknowledge or relate to anything”. In making his case, Birns consciously eschews the iconic landscape poetry of Wright’s early period, and concentrates on the poetry that appeared in the middle phase of her writing (1960s and 70s). There is indeed a form of organicism visible in the poems of this period, in which, as Birns contends, “Wright forged a relational ecopoetics”. Birns cites Wright’s poems on birds as exemplary in this regard, and reads her poem “The Peacock”, first published in the *Sydney Bulletin* in 1960, as a masterpiece of ecological defiance. Birns also credits Eisler (and Wright) with offering a strenuous and unblinking concept of what real partnership must be. He insists that Wright’s work decisively refuses to make itself available for nationalist and exclusionary claims. It is for this reason, argues Birns, that “Judith Wright is not a local-color, regional, or even national poet. She is writing about processes of domination that have occurred worldwide, and calling for healing processes of partnership that can also be situated and emulated worldwide”.

Janet Todd’s essay takes us back to the enduring novels of Jane Austen, also in relation to Todd’s own creative work. Austen, a direct contemporary of Coleridge (she was three years younger), is not typically thought of in ecological terms and her novels did not directly treat the natural world in the way that the romantic poets did. Indeed, in some respects, her novels offer a kind of paradise of domination, in which everyone and everything knows its place – or must bitterly learn it. In the contemporary context, Austen’s work – so brilliantly incisive and alive to contradiction – has suffered the indignity of appearing as the naïve embodiment of a world whose absurdity she knew all too well. This irony would not have been lost on Austen, and it is not lost on Todd, who writes: “Partly because [Austen] portrays what is lost through technological modernity, she is now often seen as delivering a kind of well-being or salve to the post-industrial Anthropocene, her novels and filmic spinoffs becoming a refuge from powerlessness in the real urban and social environment”. Todd notes how Austen’s main lens for the natural world was the proto-romantic concept of the picturesque. With the eruption of romantic philosophies, the picturesque came to be regarded as a rather trite and domesticated (in other words, feminine) indulgence, but Todd works against this basic prejudice in this essay in which she also presents a reading of her own fiction, the historical novels *Don’t You Know There’s A War On?* and *Jane Austen and Shelley in the Garden*, where solitude is typical of a modern cultural loneliness, but it also allows a quiet awareness of self within the nurturing context of the natural world. Todd shows the interconnections between her own fiction and Jane Austen’s work, who



described her most solitary heroines, Fanny Price and Anne Elliot, finding solace and escape in nature and nature poetry.

As a counterpoint to the focus given to fiction and poetry, Maria Bortoluzzi's essay examines the discursive space of contemporary news media. In particular, she considers the reporting of two contemporary global crises – the planetary ecological crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic. The essay contrasts the news treatments of the environmental crisis and the Covid pandemic – and discusses how the urgency of the latter, its call to action, is not replicated in the former. Bortoluzzi's theoretical framework and methodology draws from the field of ecolinguistics, which analyses 'the relationship between humans and the environment they belong to in terms of discourse representation'; and from the work of Eisler, in particular the development of the partnership/domination framework investigated with Douglas Fry: "the Biocultural Partnership-Domination Lens". Bortoluzzi's essay makes use of these theoretical perspectives to question the backgrounding and erasure in media representations of the planetary ecological crisis during the pandemic emergency.

The ecolinguistics framework also informs other essays of this volume. Valentina Baschian Bailo adopts the approach of ecolinguistics in her analysis of the way that stories in news and official media "set boundaries for understanding and action". Bailo's essay looks particularly at the representation of environmental migration, focusing on news media and intergovernmental organisations. The essay combines eco-critical discourse and corpus analysis of two specialized corpora of organization white papers and news articles. The aim is to offer new insights into stories about the need to embrace a partnership perspective on our dealings with the environment, valuing inclusivity and mutual care within members of the ecosystems.

The pedagogical component of Eisler's project is illustrated in Elisa Bertoldi's case-study of using ecological narratives to teach children English as a second language. Narratives are powerful means through which our framing of the world is instantiated and storytelling is the most immediate means by which those narratives are communicated to children. Stories offered to children are influent tools to explore complex aspects of life and to de-code and interact with the world. In particular, her essay "focuses on how storytelling sessions based on picturebooks in English can promote partnership education and eco-sustainable ways of living, empowering children to become sensitive towards nature, and custodians of their land". The concept of partnership is not something that simply resides in the narratives themselves – which often exemplify this quality in their stories and situations – but in the space of learning where they are presented.

This essay also broadens out the space of language beyond the written word, noting the imagistic, iconographic and oral elements that emerge in the act of reading to and reading with children. The “oral narration of picturebooks for children”, writes Bertoldi, creates a space for “dynamic interaction”, in which “[p]icturebooks are icons to be contemplated, narrated and explicated by the reader and listener/viewer”. In this space, partnerships and interactions emerge “between text, illustrations, peri-textual characteristics of the book and [the] narrator’s voice’ and gestures”.

Mattia Mantellato draws on literature written in the conditions of settler colonialism as a way of articulating the contrasting modalities of partnership and domination, and works within Riane Eisler’s biocultural partnership-dominator and decolonial theories. His essay puts forward J. M. Coetzee’s classic novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, as “the story of uncanny encounters and unpredictable partnerships.” His original analysis demonstrates how narrative, linguistic, cultural and historical boundaries are suspended in an unmarked territory in which the cycles of nature re-establish the sacred meaning of life, human consciousness and its relationship with all creations. Mantellato’s analysis innovatively reads the novel as a partnership quest that reveals profound spiritual truths and dissolves the constraints of Western dominator outposts and their borders.

Deborah Saidero’s interesting and inspiring essay turns to the work of Indigenous female writers from North America, including Jeannette Armstrong and Lee Manacle, for alternative more partnership approaches to value within ‘native’ indigenous traditions. As a consequence of imperialism, industrialisation, and globalisation, humanity has been progressively detached and alienated from nature. Precious in this crucial battle to heal the Earth are the teachings of those peoples who still preserve their ancestral ties with the land and value their earth-centered mythologies. This essay examines the narratives of Indigenous women of North America who teach us how to restore a renewed respect for Mother Earth and its creatures. In particular, Deborah Saidero focuses on the interdependency between women and the Earth and on how the shift away from the dominator model hinges on a re-evaluation of feminine principles which entails a relinquishing of violent behaviours against women and the Earth. Given that the will to domination has been such a strong feature of imperialist hegemonies, it is understandable that sources of wisdom might be found in forms of human society that lived by ecological and partnership principles. As Saidero writes:

The devastating consequences of dominator attitudes over Nature that ecofeminists have warned us against are now more tangible than ever and it has become obvious that greedy capitalist interests need to be replaced

by a more eco-sustainable economy based on caring, solidarity, respect, altruism and partnership, if humanity wants to save the planet and itself.

Since 2020, the world has been facing a declared ‘pandemic’, which, politicians world-wide, particularly in ‘developed’ countries, have been using to limit civil and democratic liberties, thus affecting our lives far beyond the ‘virus’, also thanks to the despicable conditioning and misinformation of mainstream media. Local and small economies are crumbling, to the detriment of common people, families, small businesses, and to the benefit of big globalised multinationals as previewed and described in the G30 document<sup>22</sup>. This document was signed by Mario Draghi, the Goldman Sachs banker, ‘nominated’ Italian Prime Minister (2021) in order to carry on a “creative destruction” of useless “Zombie firms” or “walking dead” (see box 2, p. 22). The areas of policy focus are for example:

**3. Adapt new business realities, rather than trying to preserve the status quo.** [...] This may require a certain amount of “creative destruction” as some firms shrink or close and new ones open, as some workers need to move between companies and sectors [...] (p. 3).

This quotation perfectly shows how the cold insensitiveness of multinationals, big financial elites and international powers heavily affect and condition the ecology of our everyday lives, which includes our work and our family social, cultural and political relations. It is ever more urgent to rethink radically the ideological and cultural tenets on which our societies and economies are based. It has become obvious that greedy capitalist interests need to be replaced by a more eco-sustainable economy based on caring, well-being, solidarity, respect, altruism and partnership, if humanity wants to save the planet and itself<sup>23</sup>.

This volume aims at moving beyond the Cartesian dualism separating humans from nature both in the sense of our human/animal nature and of the natural world, while fostering more dialogical interactions and inspiring the reader towards a deeper environmental awareness. All authors thus share a partnership vision and aim to show how the power of narrative, literature, poetry, applied linguistics and education, across ages and genres creatively highlight the fundamental interconnections between human beings and their environment and remind us how to live in

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<sup>22</sup> *Reviving and Restructuring the Corporate Sector Post-Covid. Designing Public Policy Interventions* (2020).

<sup>23</sup> Eisler, 2007.

sustainable harmony for the benefit of our planet. They also provide new and vital transdisciplinary perspectives on the ongoing debate in the field.

Out of the ashes of traditional philology as an art which has become “discipline”, with its fixed methods and its surgical “nonchalance in front of mystery”, the poet, traditional Celtic harpist and philologist Francesco Benozzo proposes a new approach, an “indiscipline”, ethnophilology, which still maintains the “emotion of meeting with texts and words”<sup>24</sup>. Ethnophilology can be defined as the “philology of the people with their multiple forms of cultural expressions”<sup>25</sup>. Like Eisler’s idea of partnership, ethnophilology “aims at extending the opportunities for free thought for generations to come, hoping they can welcome and disseminate them, refusing any resurgence of authoritarian thrusts”<sup>26</sup>. According to Benozzo, philology can find again its passion for liberty, freeing itself from critical rules, ‘discipline’ and dogmatism; it can lead the way towards a new “continuous becoming of tradition, that is of the ‘traditioning’ of tradition”<sup>27</sup>. Ethnophilology thus is an invitation to manifest the capacity not to ‘fix’ or imprison living traditions within a ‘canon’, established by an ‘authority’, within defined margins and crystallised static interpretative schemes. It is a poetic call to be open to challenges, to explore the different lyrical dimensions of words and texts and the emotional vibrations they create in us. It is a solicitation to embrace alternative, mobile critical stances, to be on the move, as it were, ready to revise and contradict our previous assertions, if needed, while we read, speak, think, feel, explore words and texts, meet with peoples and flow with life:

The idea of a (philological) revolution can be defined in terms of dissemination and social metamorphosis, in opposition to the appropriation and substitution method (of authority). Philological practice, understood in terms of an original drive towards liberty, can give us a glimpse of a series of consequences [...] ‘we can (and must) engage in tackling problems which have a human significance’<sup>28</sup>.

This approach will make “evident and available the beneficial effect of opening to the unknown, becoming a mouthpiece, among other sciences, of

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<sup>24</sup> Benozzo, 2010: 1, Riem’s translation.

<sup>25</sup> Benozzo, 2012: 206, Riem’s translation.

<sup>26</sup> Benozzo, 2021: 108, Riem’s translation.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>28</sup> Chomsky quoted by Benozzo, 2021: 107, Riem’s translation.

the concrete experiences (cartographic, *en plein air*, anti-hierarchical) of uprootedness”<sup>29</sup>.

In the relational and participative desire to transform our lives for the better of all, partnership studies, in their palpable affinity with ethnophilology, talk to our emotions as human beings, readers, writers and scholars; they speak to our minds, hearts and souls as temporary visitors walking on this beautiful planet Earth. Indeed, *Ecosustainable Narratives. Partnership Relationships in World Literatures in English, Applied Linguistics and Language Education* does not intend to be neutral; actually, it is active, vigorously participative and engaged, dissolving the myth of the neutrality of the scholar who vivisection his topics of study with absolute detachment<sup>30</sup>. The strength of this book lies in this dynamic and passionate participation, in its *multicommunitarianism*<sup>31</sup>, in the engaged and engaging meeting with texts and words of different genres, geographical areas and cultures, in the “inter-indisciplinarity” and pluralistic diversity of the themes explored and the range of ecological concerns that are originally investigated through the Riane Eisler’s biocultural partnership paradigm, also in its fundamental and creative relations with ecosophy, ethnophilology, ecofeminism, system theory and ecolinguistics.

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<sup>29</sup> Benozzo, 2021: 109, Riem’s translation.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>31</sup> Benozzo, 2012: 195-196. This term was coined by Touraine (1997) to show the difference between the idea of multiculturalism, which underlines the need for respecting other cultures and traditions, while *multicommunitarianism* focuses on the concrete everyday relationships within a shared ‘community’. See also: Momin, 2004.

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