

## **EDITORIAL:**

### **Ec(h)oiing Tales**

*by Sophia Emmanouilidou*

Only by denying evolution and the genetic material of human conception can we imagine that we are not part of nature. Only by ignoring the varied rituals of mating and species continuation can we fantasize that culture does not arise from nature even as nature is shaped by culture. (311)

Patrick D. Murphy

“Rethinking the Relations of Nature, Culture, and Agency” (1992)

*Echoes* online literary magazine issue 13 embarks on a conversant exploration of fictive and ‘other-than-fictive’ literary spaces within which realism intersects with fantasy and the immediately palpable encounters its quaint or hyperbolic narration. Comprising two fairy tales and four fables, the issue is a creative reflection of the contributors’ concerns over humanity’s impulses and behavioral traits in the Anthropocene. The stories form an inter-artistic platform of communication since the contributions combine textual narration, *storyworld* building, and visual stimuli so as to encourage empathy and the reader’s sensory reactions. Complemented with colors and illustrations, the collection entitled *Ec(h)oiing Tales* expands on themes that problematize cemented attitudes to life, including ego-formation, individualism, consumerism, materialism, monism, ecocide and, eventually, coming-of-age. As such, all the creative texts in the issue impart instructive messages, which are either lucidly phrased in the maxim at the end of each fable or hinted at in the subtext of the fairy tales.

Fairy tales and fables are enduring literary forms that have circulated human communities through the centuries. Originally, the instruction in the storytelling process was delivered via oral transmission, while only relatively recently in our literary histories, the plethora of messages embedded in fables and fairy tales have been recorded in print. From Aesop’s legendary fables to Africa’s animated oral cultures, Native-American rich storytelling traditions, India’s folk stories with their mixed *dramatis personae* of humans and animals, to the Bible’s allegorical illustrations of universal truths, parables, fables, and fairy tales bespeak of humanity’s transcultural and diachronic need to compose metaphorical analogies of the real. Indeed, fictional writing signals

the cosmopolitan aspect of cultural production, a hard-wired skill we have honed over the centuries to counter, probe and, ultimately, narrativize the texture of everyday life.

The tales submitted to the current *Echoes* issue shed light on some of the evils and wrongdoings of contemporary Western societies, especially those associated with anthropocentrism and our consequent dissociation from the age-old legacies that bind us with the physical cosmos and the workings of nature. *Ec(h)oiing Tales* has sprung from two ecocritical and/or ecosophical terms: *natureculture* and multispecies loquacity. Donna Haraway's notion of *natureculture* challenges the authority of the Cartesian dual-concept or the mind-body dualism. Launched in the Age of Reason, the theory argues for an (almost) naturalized divide, according to which the mental and the physical are regarded as distinct ways of being-in-the-world.<sup>1</sup> The Cartesian mindset propounds that the mental is associated with men, logic, and science, while the body relates to nature, women, and physicality. To this separation, Haraway counter-proposes the compound *natureculture*, a synthesis that can curb ecological destruction. The ecofeminist thinker encourages contemporary Western societies to shed off the skin of human exceptionalism and opt for the symbiosis of humanity's cultures and nature's complex mechanisms (2003). Haraway pinpoints ecological equilibrium as evidence of nature's (terrestrial and aquatic) intelligence and highlights the inseparability in biophysical and social/cultural formations.

The tales in *Echoes* issue 13 attempt a similar interface. They chart a generic juncture, precisely because they merge the supernatural with the ordinary, the fantastical with the factual, the imaginary with the realities of the current environmental crisis. In short, the creative writings in *Ec(h)oiing Tales* offer readers a generic in-betweenness, a literary space where fabulism runs into the apprehensible aspects of life and vice versa. And in this light, the issue forms a literary 'ecotone'<sup>2</sup> whereby two distinct and largely separate(d) types of writing amalgamate to create a new cultural discourse. The interface (or 'ecotone,' if we are to think in terms of an ecological

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<sup>1</sup> Environmental criticism claims that the Western rationale reproduces the Enlightenment belief in 'the man of science' as the sole agency in world affairs. In this context, male-centric power generates a series of injustices and dissociations since "nature seems not to be the product of anything, but only the raw materials, the resources to be managed in the production of everything" (Murphy 312).

<sup>2</sup> An ecotone is a transitional area between adjacent ecosystems. Ecotonal environments are areas of coincidence, concurrence, and plurality. For more on literary ecotones, see: Natalie Eppelsheimer, et al (2014) and Sophia Emmanouilidou (2021).

trope) between nature and culture sparked the idea to record some of the nuanced messages that nature communicates to humanity. In short, the aim of *Ec(h)oiing Tales* is to mediate between established dualisms: nature/culture, mind/body, man/woman, human/more-than-human, spiritual/material, and more. And since the authors opt for the synthetic properties proposed in Haraway's *natureculture* framework, the fables in the issue use anthropomorphized narrative voices, whereas the fairy tales recast nature as a loquacious agent. Finally, to be in tune with the codependences in an ecological niche and in order to underscore the biocultural dimension of life, *Ec(h)oiing Tales* plays out one more literary synergy: most (not all though) of the creative compositions are the products of co-authoring. Contributors collaborated for a span of six months to produce the creative text, the illustrations and the reflective section of each submission in a synergetic, multi-vocal literary endeavor.

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“Cosmoland” investigates the negative impact that profit-driven enterprises have on nature. The storyline sketches out the human species as a solo ‘player’ in a neo-liberal setting, but it also hints at the hubris committed in the threefold context of capitalism, consumerism, and materialism. In “Cosmoland,” nature and well-being are afflicted by bioaccumulated toxicity. Despite the dystopian world-order that the story builds, the tale concludes with a hopeful note concerning the viable prospects of collective action for sustainability and healing. “Shop to Kill” unreels a similar futuristic world-order. The story devises a conflict (an *agon*) between avarice and resilience. The text questions the successes and promises of one more triad: technology, science, and monism. And as the analeptics to widespread ecocide, “Shop to Kill” offers the cojoined alternatives of spirituality, interspecies alliances and, ultimately, ecoawareness.

“The Blue Pirouettes” opens the section of fables in *Ec(h)oiing Tales*. The piece formulates an emotive comment on our struggles with the past and our tenacious obsessions with reminiscence. The central character in the storyline is a meerkat that struggles with nostalgia. The meerkat refuses to let go of the shoes she/it used to wear, and largely cannot relinquish a former state of being. The shoes signify metaphorical hindrances in the protagonist's rite to maturity; they signify a preoccupation that causes agony and may eventually lead to one's tragic downfall. “The Moth and the Light” thematizes the merits of perseverance and independent thinking. The moth

is a creature traditionally bound by the stereotype of its self-destructive conduct as per the fatal attraction it fosters for the light. However, the story points in the direction of unconventionality or nonconformity. It invites readers to break free from the shackles of socio-cultural restriction(s) and to leap for the impossible or the possibilities in one's co-existence with difference.

“The Little Swallow” depicts a social structure positioned on discrimination and marginalization. In this allegory, the little swallow's personal achievements are thwarted because of other bird species' arrogance and narcissism. The central character, the little swallow, navigates life with the weight of insignificance vis-à-vis the aesthetically admirable birds. Embodying the frail and the average in the realm of the skies, the swallow marvels at the fanciful beauty of the flamingo and the peacock. The story concludes with the triumphant message that the inconspicuous swallow achieves the solid connections with self-worth it seeks through communal belonging. “A Friendly Bait” is a tale of warning, a fable revolving around the theme of naïveté. Innocence, gullibility, victimization, and deformity are some of the predicaments the central character in the story experiences. Predation is the ecological relationship the tale acts out with the predator being a deceitful cat while the prey is a trusting butterfly. Although the tale ends with the butterfly's infirmity and its inability to fly, the story compensates for the trauma endured with a maxim that warns off steadfast reliance and unwavering conviction.

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Works Cited

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