

**Book Review: Roman Bartosch. EnvironMentality:
Ecocriticism and the Event of Postcolonial Fiction. Nature,
Culture and Literature 9. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi,
2013, 315 pp., € 78.00/\$ 104.00**

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Roman Bartosch. *EnvironMentality: Ecocriticism and the Event of Postcolonial Fiction*. Nature, Culture and Literature 9. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2013, 315 pp., € 78.00/\$ 104.00.

Roman Bartosch's *EnvironMentality: Ecocriticism and the Event of Postcolonial Fiction* is an impressive and thought provoking study that helps to re-situate the place of literary theory (especially of hermeneutics and of formalism) in ecocriticism and that offers innovative readings of contemporary post-colonial novels. As Bartosch observes, ecocritical analysis has often looked to the sciences (especially to ecology) in order to grapple with concepts of what we commonly refer to as 'nature' and has combined its exploration of the current environmental crisis with the formulation of moral and ethical beliefs that help to address political shortcomings. Therefore Bartosch's work argues for a thorough re-examination of the role of the 'literariness' of a fictional text and our engagement with it in order to bring the literary form to the fore as a way "of understanding how literature can help to effect a change in consciousness" (11). Against this background, Bartosch comes up with the concept of 'EnvironMentality' as a "reading praxis" that deals with "the role and potential of literature in the process of contesting, negotiating and re-evaluating the natural environment and human ethical duties behind it" (11).

Rather than drawing on Western epistemologies that make use of scientific notions and of binary thinking in explaining the world, the concept of 'EnvironMentality' "poses a fundamental challenge to any form of knowledge" (12). Accordingly, the study focuses on narrative deep structures and formal elements in order to examine the way in which one of the distinctive features of narrative literature, namely textuality, helps to engage with the world in a way that deforms common knowledge practices and opens up new ways of making meaning and of confronting 'otherness'. Instead of merely focusing on the plots and context-oriented themes of any literary work, 'EnvironMentality' emphasizes the importance of the textual form for staging the encounter with the 'alterity' of non-human nature. "It is the interplay of" a text's form and the "reader's interpretation" (16), Bartosch argues, that fosters environmental awareness and that inspires an engagement with the 'other'. Building on Derek Attridge's notion of the 'literary event' as well as Wolfgang Iser's reception aesthetics, 'EnvironMentality' convincingly manages to frame the dialogical encounter between narrative structure and extra-textual interpretation as an environmental practice that re-evaluates and challenges common notions of nature. In this context, Hubert Zapf's model of literature as a form of cultural ecology looms large in Bartosch's study in order to highlight "the imaginative quality" (58) of narrative literature for re-assessing humanity's place in the world and the relationship with other beings.

The main part of Bartosch's work is, against this theoretical background, concerned with ecocritical readings of contemporary postcolonial literature: Amitav Gosh's *The Hungry Tide*, Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* and *The Whale Caller*, Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* and *Beatrice and Virgil*, Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* as well as J. M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* and *Elizabeth Costello*. Although Bartosch is suspicious of the notion of a 'post-colonial ecocriticism', he takes postcolonial literature as a fruitful ground for a reading praxis that highlights alterity, ambivalence, and openness of meaning for bringing about new perspectives and takes on environmental issues. Instead of homogenizing and harmonizing tensions, the chosen texts revel in the discussion and negotiation of alterity and stage "a constant conflict between naturalizing tendencies of language and textualizing strategies of environmental representation" (13). A good example is Amitav Gosh's *The Hungry Tide* which, as Bartosch convincingly shows, problematizes epistemological divides and dichotomies through a structure that uses the guiding trope of the 'tide' in a constant shift of time levels and perspectives. In the same vein, the other readings manage to tackle issues that have come to the fore of ecocritical debates like animality and posthumanism in a way that addresses the alterity of non-human nature via the lens and the interpretation of imaginative literature.

All in all, *EnvironMentality* is an ambitious, aspiring study that makes an important contribution to contemporary ecocritical literary studies by bringing narrative form swiftly into focus. Bartosch makes use of an impressive and broad array of secondary literature and although his critical discussion of his sources sometimes runs the risk of obscuring his own argumentation and of unnecessarily complicating the structure of his work, he never loses sight of his initial project and sketches out an innovative approach to ecocritical and postcolonial literary studies. The greatest compliment for the author and his study can thus be summed up quite briefly: *EnvironMentality* is highly readable.

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