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Editorial

Peggy Karpouzou, Nikoleta Zampaki
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

Living organisms conceive death as part of their mortal nature, experiencing feelings of uncanny, fear, grief, mourning, melancholy, and even depression for a loss. Cross-cultural approaches to life and death vary through time and space as death has been perceived as a 'transition' to other forms of existence (afterlife), various burial and preservation practices, and so forth, often obscured by mystery and superstition. Thanatology (the field that studies the death matter) delves into issues of death found in various frameworks, e.g., cultural, religious, philosophical, psychological, anthropological and so forth, focusing on how death affects human culture diachronically. Specifically, the indeterminacy in investing more in the phenomena of life and death shows that human interest and attention are oriented to human existence and its future and how humans can increase life expectancy. Life and death are situated in the context of Thanatology to interpret them in their interplay, often conceived as an 'immunity-building exercise' accompanied by various cultural imaginaries and affordances.

Death studies typically take a human subject as their object of study, often overlooking the broader networks and webs of

relationships involved in social and natural processes surrounding death. In the threshold of the Anthropocene, life and death are related to planetary crises, pandemics, ecocide, extinction, extreme violence and so forth, addressing that all life forms are vulnerable. For example, current environmental humanities scholarship explores how species extinction – caused by humans – transforms knowledge over death, time and generations (e.g., Heise 2016; Rose et al. 2017), while other scholars are working on the degradation of environments (e.g., Tsing et al. 2017), poisonous toxicities and waste that affect human and non-human bodies (e.g., Alaimo 2010; Armiero 2021) and social, political, cultural and so forth moves that make some lives "killable" (e.g., Haraway 2008, 77-82). Each of the above strands deals with death and dying, challenging death studies not only on human death but also non-human ones, seeking to investigate further the boundaries that construct and maintain categories of dead, dying, undead places, and so forth, the modes of existing between life and death, the implications of reconfiguring of our understanding of death to a more ecological frame that accommodates non-human lives and deaths, and also the challenges that alter ethical approaches and values attached to death.

Although human mourning is linked to the loss of another human, mourning for non-human deaths and ecological loss have somewhat different approaches. It is often described as "disenfranchised grief" (Doka 1989), not conceived or understood by humans. A sense of grief becomes tangible in a context where climate change and destruction 'transform' certain species' habitats into a non-livable space featuring non-human vulnerability. It is during the last decades that literary and cultural studies, philosophy, psychology, anthropology, among others, have started to discuss terms like "environmental grief", "ecological grief" or "eco-grief" (e.g., Kevorkian 2004; Rosenfield 2016; Cunsolo, Landman 2017; Cunsolo, Ellis 2018; Harris 2019; Barnett 2022; Pihkala 2024) that is a form of grief experiences about present losses of non-humans and the ecosystems, resulting from severe anthropogenic environmental change. According to Kriss A. Kevorkian (2004), "environmental grief" is a reaction stemming from the collapse of ecosystems caused by humans. The latter is driven by the meaning and significance of present ecological losses and our relation to non-humans and ecosystems, shedding light on our ethical approach to non-humans.

The study of eco-grief with environmentally based grief and other forms of grief and mourning related to different modes, e.g., "necropolitics" (Mbembe 2003), problematizes more about the non-human death that "do not fall directly into the category of 'environmental loss'" (Radomska 2023, 10). At the same time, it zooms through the critical lens of "Negathropocene" (Stiegler 2018), beyond the 'dead-end' trap of Anthropocene (Stiegler 2018, 52). Neganthropocene

describes the global systemic crises, calling for a reevaluation of the social, economic, and ecological structures, aiming to enhance 'negentropy' (or negative entropy) and, thus, counteract the 'entropy' of the current cultural paradigm, i.e. the acceleration of the natural tendency towards disorder, chaos and death. Using concepts transferred from the natural sciences, like 'entropy' and 'negentropy', facilitates environmental humanities in pointing out the fact that living organisms are striving through various mechanisms (e.g., adaptation) to maintain their internal order and complexity and thus preserve life. It also enhances our understanding of the complexity of organization and evolution of living systems and their entanglements with the environment (Karpouzou, Zampaki 2023, 22-4).

In Cultural Studies, Humanities and Arts, both entropy and negentropy are conceived in terms of complex interactions and processes between nature and culture. Under these premises, the conceptualisation of ecologies of life and death describes a complex arrangement of relationalities between entropies and negentropies, entities and their environments, including power formations such as social and political ones. Consequently, these enmeshed ecologies of life and death aim to raise awareness about the urge to implement global and local policies and practices that support the complex biological organization to mitigate the entropic effects of the catastrophic Anthropocene.

This special issue addresses such a multifaceted notion of ecology: life and death involve numerous entities, processes and relationalities that cannot be analysed separately. Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of literary and cultural studies, environmental humanities, blue humanities, continental philosophy, arts and film studies, this special issue explores life and death eco-imaginaries and entanglements of the human and non-human world, addressing an eco-ontology that exposes these entanglements where ethical territories of eco-grief and eco-mourning are unfolded. Moreover, this special issue sheds light on how humans and non-humans deal with the death matter in nature through the literary and artistic conceptualization of the ecologies of life and death in western and non-western discourses.

Exploring the existential aspects of death in the Anthropocene, Rahul Pillai's article "Existentialism and the Anthropocene: An Appraisal of Two Humanisms" examines death as 'philosophical humanism', retaining the possibility of creating grounded, subjective politics in the seemingly intractable Anthropocene. Moreover, Rachel Holmes, in her article titled "Bataille's Laughter: Comedy, Irony, or Wonder? Examining Ecstasy as an Anthropocentric Limit" applies a reading of Georges Bataille's laughter of death to explore humanism (wonderful), postmodernism (comedic) and posthumanism (ironic), identifying an ecology of death in which we are situated. By

investigating environmental approaches concerning the intricate relationship between death and life in water narratives, Simon Estok's article titled "Slimy Fertility: Lagoons and Climate Change" explores literary lagoons, represented often as spaces of horror and death, to showcase their complexities in understanding how human behaviour and representations impact them. Jesse D. Peterson, Sarah Bezan and Kate Falconer's article titled "Blue Death Studies: Theorising the Water-Corpse Interface" explores how water impacts the ir/retrievability of the dead by analysing liquid and frozen deaths and indicates future directions for blue death studies approaches. Moss Berke, in the article titled "The Ongoing Grief of Boglands: Re-Interpreting Ecological Grief with Lessons in Sympoiesis and Wetland Ecology", studies the boglands as spaces to reimagine ecological grief, proving that death can be recognized as an agential participant in crafting alternative futures.

The notion of eco-grief is examined in the following articles concerning literary and inter-medial discourses. María Torres Romero's article titled "The Price of Extinction and the Epic Journey to Mourn Beyond the Human in Ned Beauman's *Venomous Lumpsucker*" explores how contemporary speculative fiction contributes to the current debates about the extinction crisis and death by examining ecological grief beyond the human in Ned Beauman's novel *Venomous Lumpsucker* (2022). Rosy-Triantafyllia Angelaki, in her article titled "Loss, Grief and Planetary Literacy in Informational Picturebooks for Children", explores how informational picturebooks for children approach life, loss, mourning and death beyond human supremacy, aiming to make young readers aware of how humans and non-humans are fundamentally enmeshed and interdependent with one another. Human and non-human relationship in films is also elucidated in Kevin Anzzolin's article titled ""I Can't Control It": Lila Avilés's Feature Films as Environmental Mourning" where it is argued that Lila Avilés' films (*La camarista* [*The Chambermaid*] (2018)) and (*Tótem* [*Totem*] (2024)) are representative of showing the boundaries between humans, non-humans and nature by reading also Avilés's films as instances of eco-mourning. The latter is also studied by arts and specifically, Robin Jiskoot in the article "Mourning the Mounted: An Analysis of the Taxidermy Exhibition *Dead Animals with a Story*" examines a taxidermy exhibition named *Dead Animals with a Story* to discover the subversive potentiality of taxidermy by highlighting features of human and non-human relationship such as extinction and loss while considering animals grievable. "Slow violence", (Nixon 2013) thus, can be read as a form of late-modern necropolitics, where communities are exposed to the power of death-in-life. Resisting eco-grief through activism, Holly Nelson, in her article titled "Slow Violence, Sacrifice, and Survival: Environmental Catastrophe as (Eco)Feminist Freedom in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their*

Eyes Were Watching God", explores issues of environmental racism and, specifically, the intersectional battles of Black women who are victims of both environmental and patriarchal violence.

Further exploring alternative ecologies of life and death beyond the Anthropocene, Michael Kane, in his article "Seeing beyond the Anthropocene with Joyce and Beckett", suggests that James Joyce and Samuel Beckett's insights about life and death could offer a means of 'seeing beyond the Anthropocene' and its discontents by reconsidering a posthuman approach to humans and non-humans' relationship. The ethics of reciprocal care for humans and more-than-humans in a future world of ecological disaster examines Andrea Ruthven's article "Narrative Agency and Storied Becomings in Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*". At the same time, the enactment of a 'communal being with' in the narration exposes the structure and content of a necropolitical colonial narrative of indigeneity. Revealing the processes of colonial violence and dispossession that have culminated in the eruptive event of eco-catastrophe, Indigenous literature conceptualizes and reimagines the Anthropocene. Sayan Mazumder's article "Life, Death and Sustainability through Indigenous Literature. An Ecocritical Study of Selected Works from Northeast India" analyzes Indigenous literature using myth, religion and conceptual categories such as 'ecopsychology' and 'topophilia' in search of sustainable ecologies which would reformulate the ideas of life, death and the cycle of continuity. Lastly, non-western artistic discourses view ecologies of life and death in terms of unity and co-existence of life forms. In the article "Beyond Life and Death: Humanistic Care of Eco-Arts in China", Xiantian Liu studies Chinese eco-aesthetics, seeking to explore ecologies of life and death in Chinese eco-art.

In this special issue, ecologies of life and death move across boundaries, considering that all research fields involve forms of expression that somehow 'disrupt' entrenched patterns while at the same time 'revealing' their contingency and opening the discussion about life and death, '(un)settling' dominant grief imaginaries and 'mobilizing' different sensibilities for the humans and non-humans. We would like to give special thanks to our special issue contributors, reviewers and *Lagoonscapes. The Venice Journal of Environmental Humanities*' editors for their collaboration to make this special issue a 'zone' for accommodating various ecologies of life and death.

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