

Paola Spinozzi

Greening the Genre

Fairy Tale, the Apocalypse, and Ecology Documentaries

Abstract

New perspectives are required to investigate forms of creative and critical writing that produce ecological knowledge and representation, to identify stylistic and structural features that strengthen or undermine environmental communication, and to appreciate narrative modes that may inspire a change in cultural mindsets and behaviours.

The relationships between modes of communication and intergenerational dynamics are essential to understanding the power of environmental news and stories. Fairy tales and fables, in which the joy of the happy ending still resonates with doubts and fears, and dystopian and apocalyptic stories, in which destruction can raise paligenetic hope, are essential to environmental communication. David Attenborough's ecology documentaries form a new green genre that blends the fairy tale and apocalyptic dystopia and uses entertainment to produce public understanding of the ecological crisis.

Who is the narrator and how is the narrative built and delivered to develop environmental advocacy? Can nature documentary TV series contribute to changing consumers' habits? Is the role played by celebrity conservationists and conservationist celebrities essential to promoting a cultural shift? These are intriguing questions raised by ecological narratives.

Keywords: *Ecological narrative, fairy tale, apocalypse, ecology documentary, David Attenborough*

The power of narrative stems from its ability to entertain, stimulate interpretations, and generate knowledge. The act of narrating defined as an amalgamation of aesthetics, hermeneutics, and epistemology is the theoretical foundation for an enquiry into ecology and genre. Understanding how environmental narratives work as stories, blending vision and communication, can highlight how they contribute to fostering ecological culture, awareness, and agency. Stories with a positive ending make us hope we can still avert the climate apocalypse but also raise doubts about believability. Stories that envision the end of the world as we know it have a sobering effect but also exacerbate our anxiety and sense of helplessness.

Stories told to instigate protest and rebellion run the risk of being weaponized. What are then the best plots and denouements? Can environmental narratives be defined as a genre? If so, do they qualify as a new genre or as a hybrid of existing genres? The assumption that environmental narratives generate appreciation, interpretation, and knowledge of ecosystems invites a focus on how ecological concerns can be addressed and public understanding of sustainability and interspecies wellbeing can be generated.

New critical perspectives are required to investigate forms of creative and critical writing that produce ecological knowledge and representation, to identify stylistic and structural features that strengthen or undermine environmental communication, and to appreciate narrative modes that may inspire a change in cultural mindsets and behaviours.

The impact and legacy of Rachael Carson's ground-breaking *Silent Spring: A Fable for Tomorrow* (1962) can only be understood by appreciating its unique blend of environmental science and nature writing. If the effects of pesticides had been examined only utilising biochemistry notions and adopting a specialized language, the book would have been one more scientific publication for a specific audience. Instead, after praising the natural splendour of an idyllic American town, she describes how plant and animal life are destroyed, humans start suffering from inexplicable illnesses, and finally DDT is found to be the cause of the disaster. By adopting the fable and the apocalypse to illustrate the lethal effect of the biocides, Carson inspired environmentalism.

The genres of fable and fairy tale share the expression of paradigmatic values and production of a cathartic effect. Fairy stories show children how to cope with and adapt to fear, anxiety, and trauma, in particular separation anxiety, oedipal conflict, and sibling rivalries. Archetypal fears are conveyed through violence, evil actions, and extreme emotions (Bettelheim 1976). Emblematic values are expressed through characters, plots, and settings that on the one hand transcend time and space and on the other are ordinary and relatable. A cathartic effect is achieved when the story generates a crescendo, reaches a climax and comes to completion through a happy ending.

Recovery, escape, and consolation, the three essential functions of a fairy story identified by J. R. R. Tolkien, create a believable Secondary World separate from the Primary World in which we live. "Recovery (which includes return and renewal of health) is a re-gaining—regaining of a clear view" (Tolkien 1964, 67); "Escape" refers to the relief such stories can offer from "our acute consciousness both of the ugliness of our works, and of their evil" (1964, 72) but also from "hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, sorrow, injustice, death" (1964, 73); "The Consolation of the Happy Ending" is the outcome of an event that generates unexpected joy. Tolkien calls it

eucatastrophe and defines the eucatastrophic tale as the true form and highest function of fairy tales.

Dystopia and post/apocalyptic fiction are best suited to represent the human ability to extrapolate and envision the future (Claeys 2017). Dystopia works through hyperbole; it magnifies the flaws of the world and evokes their possible extreme consequences. Dystopia succeeds when the bleak scenarios it evokes are plausible representations of futures that will very likely come true if we humans continue doing what we have done so far. It is a cautionary tale and works as a powerful warning.

Climate fiction focuses on how the world as we know it could end, describing a natural disaster, a nuclear holocaust, or the degeneration of society, but also displaying the aftermath of catastrophe and the construction of a new world. Apocalyptic dystopia delves into the dynamics of the catastrophic event, showing how the protagonists are challenged by extreme circumstances. Post-apocalyptic dystopia raises questions as to whether risk and disaster can generate agency by strengthening capacity building in present-day societies (Spinozzi 2018).

Catastrophe is the pivot around which fairy story, fable and climate dystopia revolve. Consolation in fairy stories is the good catastrophe producing a sudden joyous turn, it is “evangelium, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief” (Tolkien 1964, 75). Doom in dystopia is the terminal catastrophe that annihilates the world, the unchangeable destiny that produces a *tabula rasa* and then reignites the will to live and rebuild. Fairy tales and fables, in which the joy of the happy ending still resonates with doubts and fears, and dystopian and apocalyptic stories, in which destruction can raise palingenetic hope, are essential to environmental communication.

1. The Spectacle of Nature

Spectacularisation and sensationalism are recurrent features of environmental communication. Spectacularising is “the process of producing a representation in the form of a major spectacle: for instance, television commercials with extravagant budgets and visual effects, as in many of those produced by established or aspiring film directors” (Chandler and Munday 2011, 403). The exploitation of climate disasters and environmental emergencies for the sake of spectacularisation, sensationalism, and profit has emerged in the media over the last decade. If the production of videos and programmes originating from the ecological crisis is tailored to capture the attention of the audience, the evocation of an impending doom is no guarantee of quality or efficacy. Viewers may feel an emotional response, gain environmental awareness, and even develop a willingness to act, but they can also experience a desensitising effect and become

apathic.

Science, photography, the media, virtual and augmented reality have been intertwined in the most recent representations of human influence on the Earth. The 2018 multimedia and multidisciplinary exhibition *The Anthropocene Project* by Nicholas de Pencier, Edward Burtynsky and Jennifer Baichwal, touring globally, displays large images of oil spills, landfills, mines, quarries, bleached coral reefs, inhabitable towns plagued by overpopulation and post-industrial decline.¹ The grey of murky waters, the reddish-brown rust of oxidation, the turbid green of polluted vegetation, looming large in the show of the ecological catastrophe, generate a new sense of apocalyptic sublime, in which aesthetic awe merges with a realisation of impending doom. Considering that an intense emotional response can be defined as a predictable part of the project's fruition, it is challenging to determine whether the multimedia contents are aimed at inspiring any concrete action.

The media convey environmental news and stories targeting specific audiences, selecting formats and contents that are supposed to appeal differently to different age groups. Thus, the relationships between modes of communication and intergenerational dynamics are essential to understanding what different generations are inclined to appreciate. While mature audiences tend to read printed newspapers and watch television, younger generations prefer to rely on social media networks (Kang 2014). Information delivered through more traditional formats such as news channels, documentaries, and talk shows still appeals to the elderly and the middle-aged who, however, over the last few years have spent increasingly more time using Facebook or messaging and video calling apps such as WhatsApp, Messenger, and Viber. On the other hand, teenagers and young adults consider Facebook outdated and binge-watch movies, series, and videos available on streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, HBO Max, Hulu, and social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok (Matrix 2014; Williams 2022).

The proliferation of media raises questions as to whether users being overloaded with information are able to retain and process it or whether, instead, they feel motivated to compare and contrast multiple sources to detect fake news. While the elderly may be less prone to accommodate to new formats, the young are attracted to experimentation and challenges.

2. David Attenborough, Naturalist and Narrator

Among the sources of environmental information, documentary series play a crucial role in

¹ theanthropocene.org. All websites last visited on 27/09/2022.

raising awareness. David Attenborough has written, sound-recorded, presented, narrated, and produced natural history series that stand out as models for the communication and popularisation of environmental knowledge. Understanding why he has gained such an enormous popularity and influence across generations involves delving into the power of narrative combining knowledge and representation. His status as a naturalist, spokesman for animal rights, and science populariser has thrived on his learning and experience as well as on his extraordinary performative and rhetorical skills. For more than forty years diverse audiences have been enticed by his way of narrating and broadcasting the beauty and hazards of nature.

Life on Earth: A Natural History by David Attenborough, made by the BBC in association with Warner Bros. Television and Reiner Moritz Productions, was transmitted in the United Kingdom from 16 January to 10 April 1979. BBC-produced *The Blue Planet: Seas of Life* aired in the United Kingdom from 12 September to 31 October 2001 and was presented on the DVD cover as “the first ever comprehensive series on the natural history of the world’s oceans.” Each of the eight 50-minute episodes examines a different aspect of marine life, including creatures and behaviours filmed for the first time. After being announced in 2013, filming of *Blue Planet II* took four years and more than 125 international trips in 39 countries. Broadcast on 29 October 2017 on BBC One, BBC One HD and BBC Earth, it was the first natural history series to debut on the same day in the United Kingdom, Nordic regions, Europe and in Asia.

Planet Earth, the most expensive nature documentary series ever commissioned by the BBC, the first to be filmed in high definition, and the recipient of multiple awards, was transmitted in the United Kingdom from 5 March to 10 December 2006. Each of the eleven fifty-minute episodes on a different biome or habitat on Earth is followed by a ten-minute behind-the-scenes featurette showing the challenges of filming the series, the making of which took five years. Attenborough narrated the original episodes, while alternative narrators featured in some international versions. Ten years later, from 6 November to 11 December 2016, he returned as narrator and presenter in the six-part sequel called *Planet Earth II*, the first television series produced by the BBC in 4K Ultra High Definition. Due for broadcast in 2022, *Planet Earth III* is yet to be released.

In 2019 Alastair Fothergill and Keith Scholey, the directors of Silverback Films who produced the BBC documentary series *The Blue Planet* in 2001, *Planet Earth* in 2006, and *Frozen Planet* in 2011, made the eight-part documentary series *Our Planet* for Netflix in collaboration with the conservation charity World Wildlife Fund (WWF). Filmed for three and a half thousand days in 50 different countries and employing over 600 crew members, it

explores the diversity of habitats around the world, highlighting their vastity, remoteness, and mystery, the ideal ingredients for an enticing story. On 4 April 2019, the day before the series was released, Princes Charles, William and Harry, Ellie Goulding, David and Brooklyn Beckham showed how their endorsement could be expressed with glamour by playing the role of celebrity ecologists at the gala hosted by David Attenborough at the Natural History Museum in London.

3. 'The Attenborough Effect'

Wide and diverse audiences have become acquainted with the ecological crisis thanks to acclaimed shows combining visual aesthetics, didactic purposes, and commercial value. While developing a specific kind of environmental advocacy, have nature documentary TV series contributed to changing consumers' habits? Is the role played by celebrity conservationists and conservationist celebrities essential to promoting a cultural shift? The numerous programmes featuring Attenborough, particularly *Planet Earth II* and *Our Planet*, released respectively in 2016 and 2019, provide ample research material for understanding goals, strategies, and effects of multimedia environmental narratives.

Evidence of his phenomenal impact is 'the Attenborough Effect,' brought about by the popularity of *Blue Planet II* and *Planet Earth II* and documented in numerous articles and studies (What Investment Team 2022; Sonwalker 2021; Starling 2020; Gleeson 2019; GWI 2019; Mahmood 2019; McCarthy and Sánchez 2019; Hayns-Worthington 2018). 'The Attenborough Effect' has been amplified by the market research company GWI, formerly GlobalWebIndex, founded in 2009 with the aim of providing audience insight to publishers, media agencies, and marketers around the world. In 2019 GWI published *Sustainable Packaging Unwrapped. An in-depth study of consumer perceptions and behaviors surrounding sustainable packaging in the UK and US*, based on a bespoke survey conducted in March of the same year among 2,244 internet users in the United Kingdom and 1,589 internet users in the United States aged between 16 and 64. The introduction, illustrating 'the Attenborough Effect,' highlights the connection between Attenborough's call to action to combat plastic waste in *Planet Earth II* and the uplift of 55% in the searches for "plastic recycling" in the UK, then extending far beyond the country and viewers of the show. According to the study, the choice of combining strong visual and verbal content generated an emotional response and sparked off action of various sorts:

Clutching at discarded plastic items retrieved from the ocean, his comments came after traumatic scenes showing the poisonous effects of plastic waste on marine wildlife. This was enough to set off what many have coined the *Attenborough effect*: a chain of events which

have resulted in the so-called War on Plastic Waste and the wider social movement surrounding it. Numerous environmental documentaries, government initiatives, corporate pledges, and shocking stories of plastic-induced wildlife tragedies later, and the War on Plastic Waste continues to reshape how companies must go to market. (GWI 2019, 3)

The initial focus on what has been done to contrast the overuse of plastic is followed by a thorough analysis of the data emerging from the questionnaire. The first question concerns the respondents' awareness of and interest in sustainable packaging:

43% say they do not take into consideration a product's packaging before ordering online.
72% say products that are affordable are important in their day-to-day shopping.
53% say they have reduced the amount of plastic they use in the past 12 months.
42% say products that use recycled/sustainable materials are important in their day-to-day shopping.
28% say they do not have sufficient information about which packaging can be recycled from the products they buy. (GWI 2019, 6)

Thought-provoking insights can be gained connecting percentages to age groups. Even though one is inclined to think that maturity should bring mindfulness, older generations are not necessarily attuned to embracing more sustainable habits. It transpires that a change of preferences and behaviours is more difficult for people with deeply rooted lifestyles than it is for younger consumers who tend to be more receptive and flexible. The contrast between the desire to use sustainable materials and the willingness to spend more or ability to afford spending more is a major difference among age groups. The gap between sustainability and affordability increases as the consumers grow older. For example, consumers aged 55-64 consider affordability more important than consumers aged 16-24. The historical period may explain why younger consumers are interested in sustainable materials: growing up during the height of the sustainability crisis has stimulated an eco-conscious attitude.

Younger audiences are also more engaged with social media and more easily influenced by other people's opinions; our data shows that 4 in 10 Gen Zers say they are easily swayed by other people's opinion. Their increased exposure to social media and impressionability has magnified the plastics revolution. Additionally, there are likely several other factors at play here, such as levels of disposable income and family situation. (GWI 2019, 15)

The data on the environmental impact of individual lifestyles offer clues to the ecological mindsets of the internet users surveyed. The question "Why is sustainable packaging important to you in your day-to-day purchases?" could be answered choosing among 6 options, characterised by collective and subjective motivations:

1. Caring about the future of the environment
2. Supporting companies that protect the environment
3. Not wanting to be wasteful
4. Wanting to set a good example for friends/family
5. Caring about one's own/others' health
6. Wanting to be part of a movement

A clear majority formed by 82% of respondents in the UK and 73% in the US linked the choice of “greener” packaging to a concern about the future of the environment. 68% respondents in the UK and 60% in the US claimed they did not want to be wasteful, 56% in the UK and 61% in the US declared they wanted to support companies that protect the environment (GWI 2019, 17). The preference for these three answers suggests that ecological awareness prevails over personal motivations.

The report shows how the popularity of *Blue Planet II* and *Planet Earth II* can give impulse to scientific studies and how ‘the Attenborough effect’ has been evoked to capture the attention of wide audiences. The narrative of an acclaimed celebrity conservationist who has prompted the reduction of disposable plastic through ecology documentaries is an extraordinary asset for the purpose of environmental communication. Sir Attenborough’s multiple identity as a broadcaster, author, and natural historian is the essence of a new green genre that blends the fairy tale and apocalyptic dystopia and uses entertainment to produce public understanding of the ecological crisis.

Relentlessly exposed to news and images of the sustainability crisis, younger generations are the most sought-after viewers. They can choose among an ever-growing range of high-profile, environmentalist documentaries available on the content platforms they prefer over conventional TV (Mahmood 2019, para 15). Predisposition to impressionability and hyperconnectivity makes them the ideal recipients of environmental advocacy conveyed by nature documentaries and boosted by celebrities who have become advocates for the cause in recent years. The gown made of recycled plastic water bottles, worn by actress Emma Watson to the 2016 Met Gala, the clothing line that uses plastic waste in the oceans, created by R&B singer SZA, the campaign for removing single-use plastic straws, led by actor Adrian Grenier, and Leonardo DiCaprio’s indefatigable activism are clear indicators of ecological mindedness. The question is how effective the league of celebrities, ideally led by Attenborough, is in shaping people’s ecological frames of mind and behaviours, and effecting change:

For more than a decade, Attenborough has shown people the splendor of the Earth and warned about its possible decline. It's no wonder that when he gave people a tangible thing they could do to help the planet — reduce plastic — they embraced it.

And now the movement he helped to grow is driving fundamental change at the legislative level. The UK government is currently consulting with plastic experts to develop policies to improve recycling rates and reduce plastic production, according to Geoff Brighty, the technical director of *Plastic Oceans*.

'It has really crystallized in the government's mind that the public consciousness has moved to a place where we don't want this to happen anymore, it's affecting our lives, we don't want it to affect our ecosystems,' Brighty said. (McCarthy and Sánchez 2019, para 13-16)

The article published in 2019 boasts confidence in the power of influencers and describes a resonance effect so vast as to produce a change in the legislation and the introduction of policies curbing plastic pollution. In 2022 it is evident that these actions have not prevented the environmental crisis from reaching the proportion of a collapse. In fact, because huge corporations and individual consumers are responsible to different extents for the collapse and respond to ecological narratives in different ways, it is fundamental to define the parameters for assessing how VIPs who deliver speeches or make provoking statements about the planetary boundaries, green energy, and sustainable living practices, can really initiate change. Being a conservationist celebrity has become a widespread phenomenon (Huggan 2013; 2010) that raises ecological awareness but also feeds on public acclaim, consensus, and publicity.

Who is the narrator and how is the narrative built and delivered? Hollywood actors Leonardo DiCaprio and Zac Efron exemplify two types of environmental champions. DiCaprio has been a long-time activist: designated as the United Nations Messenger of Peace for Climate Change in 2014, he has served on the board of WWF, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the International Fund for Animal Welfare, Pristine Seas launched in 2008 by National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence Enric Sala, and Oceans 5 founded in 2019 by philanthropists to protect the world's five oceans. On 31 October 2021 he tweeted "The climate crisis is here. #COP26 must be a turning point to protect people and the planet. Leaders, the world is watching and urging you to rise to this moment. There's no time to lose. #ActNow" and on 2 November 2021 a post on Instagram appeared, documenting his presence at a COP26 fringe event at *The Engine Works* in Maryhill (Parsons 2021, para 9-12). Bringing together serious institutional commitment and effective environmental skills, his narrative is conveyed with the gravitas of a prophet who launches a terminal apocalyptic warning.

Zac Efron stars alongside self-proclaimed 'wellness expert' and superfoods promoter Darin Olien in the web documentary series *Down to Earth with Zac Efron* that premiered on Netflix on 10 July 2020. While travelling to Iceland, France, Costa Rica, Sardinia, Lima, Puerto Rico, London,

and Iquitos in the Amazon Forest, Efron shares his views on journeys, life, nature, ecology, and sustainability, receiving praise for the light tone and criticism for debatable health advice and pseudoscience. The on-the-road narrative suits his adventurous, energetic personality and athletic physique, creating a form of environmental communication that appeals to younger generations.

It is difficult to draw lines that distinguish between the authority that comes from qualified knowledge and competence, the sensationalism that feeds on popularity and followers, and the effectiveness of a storytelling that uses rhetorical strategies and evidence to raise awareness.

4. Walruses of *Our Planet* (2019)

Attenborough's series *Our Planet* on Netflix features verbal and visual narratives that draw upon the tale of wonder and apocalyptic dystopia. Showing graphic images of walruses falling to their death in north-east Russia, *Frozen Worlds*, the second episode of Season 1, and *Our Planet. Behind the Scenes* convey the message that the dramatic phenomenon happens because climate change has shrunk sea ice in the Arctic. From an aesthetic, hermeneutic and epistemological point of view, should that form of representation and narrative be considered positively because it elicits a strong effect, or negatively because it is unbearable to watch? In terms of environmental communication, the value of the episode derives from the use of unprecedented images, never shown before in documentaries, and the value of the behind-the-scenes footage originates from the emotional response of the crew.

Cameraman Jamie McPherson's words reveal a sense of discomfort and frustration caused by the unfathomable behaviour of the walruses. Filming proved hard because they were eye-witnessing how animals not designed to climb cliffs adopted the least evolutionary stable strategy. Watching them calmly walk off a cliff to their death, without being pushed or forced by a stampede, was as terrible as it was incomprehensible. Director Sophie Lanfear, visibly emotional, connects the death of the walruses to the environmental crisis and climate change: "They'd be on the ice right now if they could be. But there's no option but to come to land. And they are just a danger to themselves. It's really hard to watch and witness this. [...] It's really heart-breaking. Really, really sad." (*Our Planet. Behind the Scenes*, 2019). The episode is carefully staged to position the viewers in a condition of graphic voyeurism that shifts from the ghastly fall of the walruses to the upset cameraman and tearful director who are filming the scene. Its narrative power originates from a mixture of empathy and estrangement. On the one hand, the dying walruses touch our sensitivity, shake our conscience, and make us feel we should do something. On the other hand, their mass death produces a destabilising and

ultimately alienating effect.

The episode has been criticised for being a form of bad science and WWF advertisement. It has aroused doubts about the authenticity of the location and coherence of the shooting, elicited strong reactions, and triggered debates between supporters and detractors. News articles either express uncertainty about the cause of the walruses' death (Dyer and MacDonald 2019; Montford 2019) or ask the crew to explain the story more thoroughly (Abbot 2019; Bender 2019). Attracting viewers and eliciting comments, the episode advertises and promotes the show. The question arises as to whether the show influenced the viewer's discovery of and access to online content by utilising SEO—search engine optimisation strategies designed to improve the appearance and positioning of web pages in organic search results. The use of these strategies might mark the difference between traditional BBC programmes and global Netflix shows.

Attenborough's reason for producing such content deserves to be investigated: being pessimistic about the future of wildlife, he believes that exposing all groups of audience to the sight of disasters is as important as showing them the beauty of nature. Brian Resnick's 2019 interview delves into the rhetorical strategies adopted for telling stories about wildlife loss. Attenborough stresses that it is fundamental to show what animals do, how they fight, interact, court, because understanding the complexity of the interconnections allows us to understand that we can cause irreparable damage without being aware of this. His understanding of the audience and rules of communication emerges from his focus on clarity, conciseness, and accuracy:

Brian Resnick

When you're narrating this series, do you have a particular audience member in mind?

David Attenborough

No. I think the criteria used are: One, don't say too many words. Two, use words that are comprehensible. Don't use unnecessary words. But don't skimp the facts. That's all I'm trying to do. (Resnick 2019, para. 25-26)

With that goal, Attenborough presents distressing images through a hyper-realistic lens. Combining narrative immediacy and graphic intensity, he hopes to see action “within the next 10 years” (para. 24). To mitigate the graphic impact of *Our Planet*, Netflix “issued a warning with the timecode of scene that viewers may find distressing” but insisted on keeping them to emphasize the seriousness of climate change (Moran 2019, para. 8). However, the danger that the content and the aim are lost to the sensational effect remains.

A voyeuristic focus on the death of the walruses generates sadness, awareness, and perhaps the urge to act. Disturbing narratives may solicit a response from viewers inclined to interpret a dystopian vision as a wake-up call while a focus on wonder is likely to appeal to viewers who

appreciate a fairy tale for conveying a sense of hope and identifying an ideal goal to pursue and fulfil.

Attenborough as a raconteur excels in establishing an aesthetic, hermeneutic and epistemological dialogue with the viewers. His many interviews and speeches should have persuaded us that the environmental crisis has become too serious to ignore and we can no longer wait for someone to come and rescue us. However, effective as Attenborough's voice can be in showing that we are running out of time, the media have treated the crisis as some exogenous phenomenon:

The media, with a few exceptions, is actively hostile. Even when broadcasters cover these issues, they carefully avoid any mention of power, talking about environmental collapse as if it is driven by mysterious, passive forces, and proposing microscopic fixes for vast structural problems. (Monbiot 2019, para. 5)

The only way out is understanding that no one is safe, “none of us can justifiably avoid the call to come together to save ourselves” (para. 6). Possessing a screen presence that almost transcends human nature, having achieved a highly successful anti-plastic media campaign, and inspired a contemporary trend of committed celebrities, Attenborough has united ecological thought and action. Thinking and acting feed the environmental narratives in his documentaries, forming a new genre able to spark off care for the environment and the pursuit of sustainable wellbeing more audibly and convincingly than guidelines and protocols.

Paola Spinozzi is Professor of English Literature at the University of Ferrara. Her research focuses on theories of the ecological humanities and ecocriticism, sustainability studies, and utopian studies; post/apocalyptic and climate fiction, nature poetry and eco-theatre (*Cultures of Sustainability and Wellbeing: Theories, Histories, Policies*, ed. with M. Mazzanti, 2018). She is the founder and coordinator of the international and interdisciplinary PhD programme in *Environmental Sustainability*.

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