

La Sapienza

Revisione esterna tesi ASIA BATTILORO (38° ciclo)

BATTILORO ASIA

Evaluation form for PhD dissertation

Evaluation form

Title of the thesis

Epistolary Embodiment(s) in Twenty-First-Century British Climate Change Novels

Affiliation of the reviewer

Ghent University, Belgium

Report

Asia Battiloro's PhD thesis is well researched and competently written. It combines formal analysis and ecocriticism in an effective way, offering a broad range of insights into a corpus of both well known and less widely studied climate fictions. Bringing together these readings is an interest in how the epistolary form (defined here rather broadly) negotiates various aspects of the climate crisis, including its historical (colonial) roots. This results in a convincing discussion that innovates both on the level of corpus selection and through its focus on epistolarity. The bibliography is up-to-date and extensive, and there are some stimulating conceptual contributions as well (for instance, through notions such as atmospheric phenomenology and epistolary illusion). I also appreciated the discussion of how climate change shapes everyday life and experiential atmospheres. In sum, this is an accomplished PhD dissertation in its current form, but I offer some suggestions below for future revision into a book.

The introduction feels a little hasty, reading almost like an extended abstract. It is completely

devoid of references in a way that I found unusual. I would take more time to explicate the significance of the epistolary form as well as its history. I find the link between epistolary writing and the distributed scales of the climate crisis fascinating, but I'm not sure this introduction manages to fully unpack that link. Some of that work is done in the first chapter, but in a published version of the dissertation I would shift some of that formal discussion (e.g., section 1.4) to the introduction. I also think it's important for the introduction to situate this work vis-à-vis contemporary econarratology and ecocriticism, articulating its contribution more explicitly.

Even in chapter 1, the exact econarratological significance of epistolary narrative doesn't come through very clearly. I think this is something that a revised version could discuss more openly by teasing out some of the themes that emerge in the individual chapters (for instance, the link between epistolarity and temporal interruptions, etc.).

Also, I will add that the connection between the epistolary form and the reader's embodiment, which is announced in the introduction (p. 3), isn't present to the same degree throughout the chapters. It may be worth teasing it out further in chapter 1, for example. There is also work on embodiment from an environmental humanities perspective (e.g., by Astrida Neimanis or Stacy Alaimo) that isn't referenced here and could have helped close the gap between readers and the textual representation of bodies experiencing climate change.

P. 32-33, "the term 'climate change fiction' is adopted here as a more inclusive and politically sensitive umbrella concept": it's a fairly minor point, but I'm not sure I find this move fully convincing. These texts would "acknowledge differentiated responsibilities and asymmetrical experiences of climate impact" even if we considered them Anthropocene (not climate change) fictions: the label doesn't really affect what the texts do. The advantage of the looser label "Anthropocene fiction," from my perspective, is that it allows scholars to address environmental fictions that don't stage climate change explicitly or explore large-scale environmental threats that are not causally linked to greenhouse gas emissions.

A related point: the claim that "Sackville's novel forms part of an early phase in twenty-first-century climate fiction: one in which ecological crisis is not yet thematically central" (p. 200) seems to imply that climate change has become more thematically central in recent literature. I'm not sure that's true. Actually, I think the trend is for every fiction to become, on some level, climate fiction over time, with the subtle references one finds in Sackville's novel becoming more pervasive. It's probably just a matter of rephrasing this sentence so it doesn't imply a linear literary-historical development (or, alternatively, Battiloro could offer more evidence for that development--but, again, it doesn't seem very likely). Put otherwise, it is hard to extrapolate an overarching literary-historical narrative from Battiloro's four data points.

I've found the discussion of *The Year Without Summer* insightful, but I think it could have been acknowledged more explicitly that the eruption of Mount Tambora is not an anthropogenic disaster. There is some tension here between the chapter's focus on climate disruption and the way its main case study actually foregrounds a completely natural event. The intersections of climate, colonial history, and social inequalities highlighted by the analysis are still present, of course, but to what extent is it possible to extrapolate from them to the 21st century climate crisis, which is anthropogenic in nature?

The final chapter on digital epistolarity is explicitly presented as a starting point for future

research, and it is undoubtedly very promising. I would recommend more engagement with recent scholarship on literature and digital (Virginia Pignagnoli's "digital paratext," Zara Dinner on the "digital banal," etc.). A comparison with Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future* might be good, too.

Confidential report (it will not be shown to the candidate)

Evaluation file (optional)

Presentation and clarity

☐ None ☐ Poor ☐ Average ☐ Good ☒ Excellent

The reviewer should be able to read the text without difficulty. This implies that the dissertation is clear and 'user friendly', without duplications or repetitions.

Integration and coherence

☐ None ☐ Poor ☐ Average ☐ Good ☒ Excellent

The manuscript should present logical and rational links between different parts of the thesis.

Introduction to scientific background

☐ None ☐ Poor ☐ Average ☒ Good ☐ Excellent

The text should contain a satisfactory introduction to the scientific background which is relevant to the research, preparing the reader to the exposition of the problem.

Review of relevant literature

☐ None ☐ Poor ☐ Average ☐ Good ☒ Excellent

The candidate must have a detailed knowledge of original sources, have a thorough knowledge of the field, and understand the main theoretical and methodological issues.

Statement of research problem

☐ None ☐ Poor ☐ Average ☐ Good ☒ Excellent

A clear statement of the research problem should be made, together with specific hypotheses, predictions, or questions which the research is designed to address.

Originality

☐ None ☐ Poor ☐ Average ☐ Good ☒ Excellent

The research must be the candidate's own work. The degree of independence may vary according to the research topic.

Contribution to knowledge and scientific relevance

☐ None ☐ Poor ☐ Average ☐ Good ☒ Excellent

The dissertation should be substantial enough to be able to form the basis of two articles on refereed journal, a book or research monograph.

Mastery of the English language

☐ None ☐ Poor ☐ Average ☐ Good ☒ Excellent

The candidate must be proficient in written English and show mastery of appropriate scientific/technical language.

The thesis can be considered for a 'cum laude' award

☒ Yes ☐ No

A major goal of the review process is to evaluate if the present version of the thesis is:

1) adequate as is

2) require minor revision

3) require major revision

for admission of the candidate to the defense of the work in front of a national evaluation board.

☒ Accept as is ☐ Minor revision ☐ Major revision

Date: 11/3/2025

Reviewer: Caracciolo Marco