

Readers' Room

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Justin D. Edwards, Rune Graulund, and Johan Höglund (eds.), *Dark Scenes from Damaged Earth: The Gothic Anthropocene* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022, \$29.95). Pp. 372. ISBN 978 1 5179 1123 2.

Uncanny by nature, the Anthropocene is a notion difficult to unambiguously classify and contextualize. As Amitav Ghosh claims, consequences of human-induced climate crisis are too powerful and too grotesque to be adequately represented and discussed in cultural texts. Hence gothic forms – expressing common fears and depicting supernatural events in a less conventional way – appear to be particularly useful in this respect, which is one of the main points of *Dark Scenes from Damaged Earth: The Gothic Anthropocene*, edited by Justin D. Edwards, Rune Graulund, and Johan Höglund. While the role of speculative fiction in addressing the issue of climate change has already been explored (by authors such as Donna Haraway, Amitav Ghosh, Timothy Morton, or Shelley S. Streeby), the particular focus on gothic offers a fresh perspective on the ongoing academic discourse.

Perceiving the Anthropocene “as a gothic geohistorical event” (x), the authors pursue a thorough investigation of the new geological era and its cultural impact through the lens of well-known aesthetics, which is a notable addition to the existing study. The volume, consisting of sixteen chapters, is divided into four parts named after the Anthropocene and three well-established alternatives to this term: Plantationocene, Capitalocene, and Chthulucene. As the name “Anthropocene” has been heavily critiqued for neglecting social inequalities and overtly concentrating on the ambiguous *anthropos* as the main geological agent (cf. Moore, Haraway, Yusoff, Tsing), the authors of *Dark Scenes from Damaged Earth* have adopted various perspectives on this problem, skillfully linking the concept of gothic with the most pressing issues that have negatively influenced the current state of the biosphere. The book, however, does not take any particular position in this debate, recognizing the importance of different approaches to climate change as a cultural category, and highlighting those that are most useful in the analysis of gothic.

Apart from an exhaustive yet approachable introduction, the first chapter opening the volume thoroughly explains the close relation between gothic and the Anthropocene. “The Anthropocene” by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock deems the era a “gothic metanarrative” (8), “uniquely haunted by the prospect of its own undoing” (7). Weinstock intentionally strikes through the term in the title of his work, arguing that the Anthropocene “insistently calls into question not just its own persistence but indeed its very existence” (7). By discussing Anthropocene anxiety as a prevailing structure of feeling of the discussed epoch, he underscores three gothic tropes – spectrality, monstrosity, and apocalypse – drawing parallels between the two main categories analyzed in the book. Interestingly, “The Anthropocene” is

not an analysis of any particular work of fiction or phenomenon, but a thorough examination of existing theories which helps to establish a coherent conceptual framework for the whole collection. In his work, Weinstock refers to a number of most influential texts in the theory of spectrality, monster theory, and theory of apocalypse (by key thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Mark Fisher, Anna Tsing, Graham Harman, Steven Shavero, Quentin Meillassoux, Timothy Morton, Jeff VanderMeer, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Donna Haraway, Susan Sontag, Ray Brassier, Claire Colebrook, Patricia MacCormack, Eugene Thacker, and Matthew J. Wolf-Meyer), briefly but effectively discussing each of them in the context of gothic and the Anthropocene. Concluding with unanswered questions about the roots of gothic in the Anthropocene as a cultural construct, he points out that the very speculations on this peculiar intersection make this phenomenon even more “gothic” per se, which strengthens the main argument of *Dark Scenes from Damaged Earth*.

Each group of chapters starts with a concise and informative overview of a given term proposed for the new era, making the book intelligible to those less familiar with the ongoing, nuanced discussion on the Anthropocene and its problematic name. One of the greatest strengths of this collection is how the editors have skillfully balanced the analysis of diverse cultural texts with that of important social phenomena and cultural categories, making the volume a truly comprehensive study on gothic in the Anthropocene. Thus *Dark Scenes from Damaged Earth* offers an investigation of a wide range of primary texts – both literary works (by authors such as H. P. Lovecraft, Jeff VanderMeer, Mohale Mashigo, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Charles Brockden Brown, M. R. Carey, and Caitlin Rebekah Kiernan) and popular-culture texts (*True Detective* (2014–), *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017), *Jaws* (1975)) – as well as of particular concepts and issues entangled with the notion of the Anthropocene, such as overpopulation (in Timothy Clark’s “Overpopulation: The Human as Inhuman”), animal agriculture and food production (in Justin D. Edwards’s “Beyond the Slaughterhouse: Anthropocene, Animals, and Gothic”), burial rituals (in Laura R. Kimmel’s “Rot and Recycle: Gothic Eco-burial”), de-extinction projects (in Michael Fuchs’s “De-extinction: A Gothic Masternarrative for the Anthropocene”), the theory of “monstrocene” (in Fred Botting’s “Monstrocene”), or climate injustice (in Esthie Hugo’s “A Violence ‘Just below the Skin’: Atmospheric Terror and Racial Ecologies from the African Anthropocene”). A particularly compelling chapter, “Got a Light? The Dark Currents of Energy in *Twin Peaks: The Return*” by Timothy Morton and Rune Graulund, substantially contributes to the aims of the collection by applying the notion of gothic to other, Anthropocene-related motifs and categories. Morton and Graulund’s text offers a detailed exploration of David Lynch’s *oeuvre*, with a particular focus on the last season of his famous series. By using the concepts of petro-nostalgia and petro-modernity (LeMenager) combined with theories of gothic, the authors discuss how the uncanniness in *Twin Peaks: The Return* is different from that of the previous seasons due to the recent acknowledgment of climate change and its threats. Rather than manifested in particular places, the uncanny in the season analyzed is represented in “a sense ... that it is the world as such that is broken ... not to be put together again” (247), so that there is “no more pretending not to be aware that the fossil fuel dream was in fact a nightmare” (248). With a variety of different subjects viewed from the perspective of gothic in particular chapters, this collection underlines its main argument by showing the universality of the category in question in turbulent times of the ongoing climate crisis.

Dark Scenes from Damaged Earth is a brilliant, thought-provoking book, as it not only thoroughly investigates gothic in the age of the climate crisis, but also allows

its readers to better understand the complex feelings that accompany the acknowledgment of the Anthropocene. The authors succeed in using the long-existing category as a key to understanding our current predicament, making the volume compelling and important reading, essential for anyone interested in social and cultural effects of the emergence of the Anthropocene.

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Kristin Waters, *Maria Stewart and the Roots of Black Political Thought* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2021, \$35.00 paperback, \$110.00 hardback). Pp. 338. ISBN 978 1 4968 3675 5, 978 1 4968 3674 8.

Kristin Waters's *Maria Stewart and the Roots of Black Political Thought* is the latest monograph dedicated to the severely understudied life and work of Maria Stewart. The work joins only two previous book-length discussions of Stewart: Marilyn Richardson's seminal *Maria W. Stewart, America's First Black Woman Political Writer* (1987) and Valerie C. Cooper's *Word, Like Fire* (2012). Waters's welcome intervention includes a new, meticulously researched, biography of Stewart's early years, which features imaginative microhistorical reconstructions of key moments in her life. That biography is firmly situated within a cultural history of African American life, with a particular focus upon community events and celebrations, and is combined with a close analysis of a selection of Stewart's texts and Black radical political and social philosophy. The book is complemented by Waters's engagement with an impressive array of secondary material from the rich, yet inchoate, field of Stewart studies, much of which was published after Richardson and Cooper's monographs. That far-reaching engagement establishes Waters's work as a vital update to those earlier books, and places it as a waypoint in the current landscape of research on Stewart for those new to the subject, though it does not displace Richardson's text as the essential introduction to Stewart's life and work.

Like anyone researching Stewart, Waters was clearly faced with the combined difficulties of the paucity of primary sources relating to her life and the deep complexity of her writing and speeches; for the biographer, there is very little to work with; for the analyst, there is almost too much. Waters's diligent archival research sees her partially overcome the former difficulty and uncover some new and fascinating details – some certain and some still speculative – about Stewart's early life and parentage. Those archival successes are augmented by the aforementioned discussions of nineteenth-century African American cultural history, which can be divided into two main strands. The first strand is the analysis of Black community events that Stewart would probably have participated in, such as Election Day and Training Day in Hartford, Connecticut and Bunker Hill Day and African Day in Boston, Massachusetts. The second strand is the examination of Stewart's biographical, political, and philosophical predecessors and contemporaries in the Black community and their connections with her. In the case of her contemporaries, it will be no surprise for students of Stewart that David Walker is given substantial room, but Waters also discusses Jarena Lee, Sojourner Truth, and Anna Julia Cooper as she establishes Stewart's place in the Black radical tradition. The discussions of the Black culture that surrounded Stewart are joined by Waters's imaginative microhistorical reconstructions.