



## BOOK REVIEW

### *Dark Scenes from Damaged Earth: The Gothic Anthropocene*

Edited by Justin D. Edwards, Rune Graulund,  
and Johan Höglund

University of Minnesota Press

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372 pp., \$29.95 USD (pbk.)

As evidence of the climate crisis becomes more apparent and immediate, a general interest in eco-horror seems to be on the rise. With a plethora of literary texts and television programs tackling everything from mass extinction to the horrors of late-stage capitalism, a Gothic studies scholar might be unsure of where to start when researching concepts that fall under the eco-horror umbrella. On the other end of the spectrum, a seasoned academic looking to take advantage of this rise in the popularity of eco-horror topics might be in search of fresh perspectives. *Dark Scenes from Damaged Earth: The Gothic Anthropocene*, published in 2022, remains an excellent place for such scholars to start.

The originality and insight of *Dark Scenes from Damaged Earth* comes as early as a quick glance at the table of contents. The collection is structured into four distinctive parts, titled “Anthropocene,” “Plantationocene,” “Capitalocene,” and “Cthulhuscene,” that telegraph the book’s concerns with the philosophy, economics, and socio-cultural politics of the climate crisis. Those interested in Marxist approaches might look to “Capitalocene” first, while those interested in, for example, H. P. Lovecraft, Donna Haraway, or China Miéville, among others, might search “Cthulhuscene.” In framing these categories, the collection’s Introduction follows the idea of the Gothic as a “disruptive” (x) critical discourse, one that the editors see incorporating or encompassing a number of forms of horror and the weird. This framing could be seen as essentializing from the perspective of scholars seeking to tease out the distinctness of a Gothic versus, for example, a weird approach to topics such as the Anthropocene and environmental crisis.

The volume’s structure and composition are not prescriptive, however, as the essays are interdisciplinary in nature and subject matter. The first article, Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock’s “The ~~Anthropocene~~,” defines “three master

tropes of Anthropocenic gothic discourse” (8) that might be applied to a wide range of studies. The first of these is “spectrality,” which Weinstock notes often reveals conflicts or dichotomies in who is haunting whom so that the scientist, for example, might be haunted by occult forces while logic might be haunted by emotion and so on. Weinstock’s exploration of spectrality includes discussions of these figurative spectres as well as literal spectres. This, along with Weinstock’s informed discussion of spectrality in the twenty-first century and object-oriented ontology, makes for an excellent source for those academics researching the climate crisis in concepts such as phantasms, the uncanny, and hyperobjects, which, Weinstock notes, play a unique role in speculative work grappling with the Anthropocene as “a special class of unknowable objects defined by their enormous spatial and temporal dimensions” (13). The two succeeding tropes that Weinstock outlines, “monstrosity” and “apocalypse,” are equally interdisciplinary in the author’s broad framing and widely applicable to disparate academic explorations.

Following Weinstock’s approach, other articles in *Dark Scenes from Damaged Earth* cover wide ground. While Fred Botting’s article, “Monstrocene,” also deals with the conception and presentation of monstrosity, the approach and analysis are notably distinct from those of Weinstock. Both articles deal with monsters and discuss some aspect of the radical reorienting effects of object-oriented ontology, yet Botting deals extensively with “human borders and systems of thinking” and how they may become apparent when attempts are made to acknowledge the supposed interconnectedness or unity of all life (322). Botting further explores how survival beyond the naïveté and self-centredness of the Anthropocene requires “interdeterminacy, vulnerability, unpredictability” (334). For scholars looking for specific theories, thinkers, or media in these contexts, it is worth mentioning that in his article Botting makes mention of theorists such as Kant and Lacan, ecology and history scholars including Rob Nixon and Dipesh Chakrabarty, and authors such as Mary Shelley and H. P. Lovecraft.

These far-reaching articles should not deter those looking for analyses that are nuanced, specific, and focused almost exclusively on a single period, genre, or medium as *Dark Scenes from Damaged Earth* includes a number of more narrowly focused articles. “Beyond the Slaughterhouse” by Justin D. Edwards, for example, may interest scholars writing on animal liberation, as Edwards ultimately concludes that “the domino effect of objectification” is a threatening factor in the consumption of animals since “we have reached a stage in the Anthropocene when the objectification of animals in corporate agriculture is indifferent to ecological decline,” amounting to little more than evidence of a

“cannibalistic capitalism” (156). Barry Murnane’s “Digging up Dirt: Reading the Anthropocene through German Romanticism” highlights the “dissolution of the human subject into nature” as a horrific and cataclysmic transition employed in the titular movement (228). “Got a Light? The Dark Currents of Energy in *Twin Peaks: The Return*” by Timothy Morton and Rune Graulund explores how the Lynch and Frost project exposes the horrors of capitalist energy—a hyper-specific but broad-reaching topic with philosophical implications. Additionally, “The Anthropocene Within: Love and Extinction in M. R. Carey’s *The Girl with All the Gifts* and *The Boy on the Bridge*” by Johan Höglund takes on a similarly acute focus but contains ponderings on wider issues such as microbiology and theories of evolution with colorful prose that, frankly, might put off scholars preferring a more straightforward academic style, but were attractive and evocative in the eyes of this reader.

All of the collection’s sixteen essays are equally insightful and intimate areas for further exploration despite being similarly focused. Perhaps the most compelling of the articles taking on a narrow focus is Dawn Keetley’s “*True Detective*’s Folk Gothic.” Keetley opens the article with an admission that many essays have already been written on the celebrated HBO show *True Detective* exploring the “ecological damage wrought by the petroleum industry” (130). Keetley’s take on the series explains how the limited criticism of other writers and an obsession with the comingling of human bodies and oil tend to “flatten both space and time” (130). Due to the series’ landscape and its present-focused storyline, she notes that this perceived flatness lends itself to “certain posthuman/ speculative realist/ ecological theories that insist on the enmeshment of human lives with the agential nonhuman—the elements, the weather, the land, and refineries” (131). Keetley goes on to explore how and why *True Detective* might be deemed folk gothic but specifically folk gothic that produces poignant images and arguments by illustrating how “the profoundly determining intervention of race” defines who will squabble about the injustices of capitalist agriculture and those who will be “doing the mowing” (143). The nuanced analysis of the interplay of race, class, agriculture, and setting is insightful, and I would highly recommend Keetley’s contribution for any scholars working on folk gothic, depictions of the South, or contemporary television. Her contribution also may be of interest not only to scholars but also to more casual fans of *True Detective* and readers/spectators who appreciate the Gothic, folk horror, and cosmic horror.

The collection at large should appeal to fans of horror, scholars writing on the Anthropocene, and academics studying the contemporary Gothic. With new and varied ways of looking at a wide array of eco-horror texts and topics,

I am certain that *Dark Scenes from Damaged Earth: The Gothic Anthropocene* will exceed the expectations of this broad audience. While scholarly discussions of the eco-Gothic are fairly plentiful, this collection offers two notable additions to the field. First, the essays collected here push interdisciplinary boundaries in their explorations of the Anthropocene, addressing film studies, psychoanalysis, literary studies, history, and more. Ultimately, this means that the text as a whole is a valuable resource for those scholars working in liminal humanities spaces or on projects that marry unusual methodologies. Second, there is something to be said for the collection as a whole in how it provides in-depth analyses of Gothic applications of the current geological era with a variety of foci, addressing many of the major thematic aspects and additional variables, from capitalism to racialization, that play a major role in such studies. To that end, *Dark Scenes from Damaged Earth: The Gothic Anthropocene* functions as an enduring resource for those looking to the Gothic, the Anthropocene, or both, in explorations of eco-crisis and eco-horror.

— Holly Eva Allen

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**Holly Eva Allen** is a PhD scholar and graduate teaching assistant at the University of Rhode Island. Holly has a master's degree in English from Claremont Graduate University and a BA in English and Linguistics from UC Davis. Her academic writing has previously appeared in a variety of journals, including *The Journal of American Culture*, *Intersections*, and *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*. Holly's areas of research interest include gender, the Gothic, Disability Studies, and queer theory.

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