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Andrew Smith and William Hughes, (eds.), *EcoGothic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 198 pp.



There is an interesting new development in the evolution of ecocriticism that is not entirely being driven by ecocritics themselves. This is evidenced by the book *Eco-Joyce*, edited by Irish Studies scholars Robert Brazeau and Derek Gladwin, and by this book edited by the founder of *Gothic Studies* and a past president of the International Gothic Association. It would be easy to be cynical about finding a new line of research for a long-established narrow field by adding the prefix “eco” to it. But that would be a serious mistake. These scholars have read beyond Buell and Garrard. Some of them are established ecocritics such as Tom J. Hillard and Sharae Deckard in the present volume, together with ecofeminist Emily Carr who has lived most of her life in the twenty-first century (163). And the ecocritical possibilities flagged up by these books should attract further ecocritical interest.

Such books also call for a reconsideration of some ecocritical concepts. In *ISLE* 16.4 Tom J. Hillard had argued that Simon Estok’s notion of ecophobia might be most usefully broadened from hatred of nature to fear of nature in all its dimensions, and that Gothic considered not as a genre but as a mode would provide neglected material for ecocritical consideration. *EcoGothic* is the first fruit of this argument and an indication of the range of material that might be considered. This book opens with the British tradition before considering Canadian and then US contexts and concludes with Sharae Deckard’s brilliant proposal for a global geopolitics of the ecogothic. Because nature in the Gothic is a source of trauma and what the editors call “a space of crisis,” there is a temptation to assume, as they do, that this “conceptually creates a point of contact with the ecological” that provides subtle insights into ecological relationships. There is a danger in the word “conceptually” that allows for the ticking of boxes on both sides—the “Gothic” and the “ecological”—and reduces critical analysis to an application of frames of recognition. This is evident in the opening essay by Lisa Kröger which moves from the environment “as a kind of conduit of emotions” (19) for Ann Radcliffe’s characters, to female characters’ identification with a feminized nature, to the conclusion that “the Gothic ecology, then, seems to be one that suggests it is best for humanity and nature to live harmoniously with one another” although apparently “nature [...] will always be victorious in the end” (26).

For all its fascinating detail, Catherine Lanone’s essay on the Gothic literature of ice monsters and the lost Franklin expedition of 1845 struggles to find ecocritical conclusions beyond “the paradigm of colonial misappropriation” (41) of Arctic ice in the capitalist hubris of trade in the light of current global warming. Algernon Blackwood’s strange work should deliver more in the hands of David Punter and it does in the

conclusion that Blackwood “offers no glib answers as to how we might accommodate ourselves to these ‘other lives’” in nature (55). The book now begins to gain an incisiveness of analysis. William Hughes’ critique of the film *The Wicker Man* looks at how various encounters with nature are framed by “perspectives which broker power and knowledge within the film” (58). Hughes unpacks the deceptions that underpin the utopian vision of the film, showing how some alternative Green societies “may carry, occluded within them, traces of the repressive orthodoxies they claim to resist” (68).

The distinctiveness of a Canadian ecogothic seems to have emerged from national tensions between wilderness and a “garrison mentality,” between indigenous cultures and postcolonial identity in relation to land, and, although this is not made explicit by the contributors to this book, a deeply ambivalent view of the USA’s technology, materialism and influence. Perhaps the Canadian “melting North” (100) adds urgency. Using the essential Gothic notion of liminality, Alanna F. Bondar provides a striking overview of a national literature renegotiating “beliefs concerning otherness, multiculturalism and nature” through ecogothic literary modes. Of course, at the centre of this work is Margaret Atwood whose monsters Shoshannah Ganz identifies as products of the “sub-genre of Southern Ontario Gothic” (87), read through the perspective of climate change. “Atwood’s uncanny ability to predict the future” (101) is noted without irony.

Bringing an historicist perspective to the film *The Blair Witch Project* provides a platform for Tom J. Hillard to sharply define aspects of the fear of nature in American culture in “From Salem witch to *Blair Witch*: the Puritan influence on American Gothic.” This is really a companion piece to Kevin Corstorphine’s essay “‘The blank darkness outside’: Ambrose Bierce and wilderness Gothic at the end of the frontier.” which takes its starting point in Emerson’s *Nature* of 1837 and shows how the wilderness and the Indian were used to replace decaying abbeys and decadent aristocracy in making a non-European Gothic in frontier America. Corstorphine’s essay really does not get very much further in elucidating what “an ecocritical analysis would focus on” (131), as his last paragraph has it. Much more revealing are the connections and disconnections between *On the Road*, *The Road* and Jim Crace’s novel *The Pesthouse* in Andrew Smith’s astute comparison of these post-apocalyptic novels. Smith ends with an admission that “the Gothic alignment with an environmental disaster” here is really a vehicle for what is, in effect, a post-pastoral position “in which the way forward seems, politically speaking, to reformulate the way back” (145).

In “Uncanny states”: global ecogothic and the world-ecology in Rana Dasgupta’s *Tokyo Cancelled* Sharae Deckard makes an ecocritical response to Fredric Jameson’s challenge to find new aesthetic forms to map “the world space of multinational capital” (182) in a discussion of this innovative novel by the British-born Indian, Rana Dasgupta, who lives in New Delhi. The form itself of this story cycle, Deckard argues, mirrors “the systemic structures which connect peripheries and cores” (192-193). The sophistication of theoretical framing, textual discussion and carefully concluded argument offer a corrective to the self-obsessed ranting of Emily Carr’s “Towards an American ecofeminist Gothic” (“I said it before and I will say it again: don’t expect answers” [172-

3]). The final essay of this book surely advances both ecocriticism and Gothic studies, and is one vindication of the many here for the adoption of the prefix. Ecogothic has arrived; ecocriticism has expanded into new shades of potential discussion.

## Works Cited

- Brazeau, Robert, and Derek Gladwin, eds. *Eco-Joyce: The Environmental Imagination of James Joyce*. Cork: Cork University Press, 2014. Print.
- Hillard, Tom J. "Deep Into That Darkness Peering: An Essay on Gothic Nature." *ISLE* 16.4 (2009): 685-695. Print.