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Chris Baratta, editor, *Environmentalism in the Realm of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), vi+176 pp.

Even though science fiction and fantasy depict characters, places, and entire worlds that lie beyond our existence, they are nevertheless founded in and constructed out of elements of the real world. As editor Chris Baratta notes, even though this body of literature “wrenches us from our daily doldrums and propels us into unfamiliar lands, we really never leave our own reality” (3-4). The ideology of environmentalism is similarly connected to the world around us, and so the essays in this collection utilize an environmentally focused framework to bring new insights and understandings to the interconnected worlds of science fiction and fantasy. Because this literature is so fundamentally grounded in reality, Baratta and his contributors believe that the writing of J. R. R. Tolkien, Octavia Butler, Karen Tei Yamashita, Margaret Atwood, Cormac McCarthy, and others can describe some of the causes of our current environmental crisis and yield some “solutions to the many problems we face today” (2). Even a cursory glance at the literature analyzed in this volume reveals the place of importance that environmentalism has in fantasy and science fiction.

Part I of the essay collection, “Industrial Dilemmas,” focuses on the degradation and destruction of a world that lacks an environmental consciousness. Frederick Waage’s essay “The Secret Life of *The Death of Iron*” situates Serge-Simon Held’s little known 1931 novel within the context of the political, economic, and cultural tensions of contemporary France. Held’s story depicts the crumbling of all manmade structures on earth because of a fatal flaw in iron that causes it to disintegrate, and Waage uses the novel to craft an argument on how dilemma and disorder can exist among societal systems and within living beings (22). The usually inanimate metal becomes “a form of life, with the mutable traits of an organism” (21), and so Held’s writing has some connection to Tolkien’s Ring in Baratta’s essay “‘No name, no business, no Precious, nothing. Only empty. Only hungry’: Gollum as Industrial Casualty.” The Ring is a creation of industrial forces, represents an “inescapable (and imposed) lust for power” (41), and oppresses and corrupts Gollum’s natural state so that he is left as the “tortured soul torn between the worlds of nature and industry” (33). The Ring drives Gollum away from a “symbiotic relationship with the natural world” and towards a disintegrated and violent state of being (37). Baratta’s essay thus already prepares the reader for the theme of Part II of the collection, “The Natural World, Community, and the Self.” Annette M. Magid’s essay “Seeking Spaces: An Analysis of Environmental Solutions in Science

Fiction and Utopian Literature” argues for a historical and cultural link between the communal impulses and gender issues of the utopian writers and philosophers of the nineteenth-century and the space-centric concerns for survival of the twentieth and twenty-first-centuries. For example, writer William Morris’ conception of sexual equality has a strong thematic influence on the familial, “inter-racial [,] and inter-alien issues” present in the Gene Roddenberry spin-off television series *Deep Space 9*.

Magid concludes her essay by stating that, from rural communes to space stations, utopian communities can offer a strong chance of survival and an effective means of dealing with environmental issues (58). Susan Bernardo similarly stresses the necessity of community, but also comments on humanity’s symbiotic relationship with the natural world in her essay “Nature, Community and the Self in Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* and Nicola Griffith’s *Slow River*.” The two young female protagonists of these dystopian novels work to recreate society and learn from the natural world in the face of ecological crisis. Water is “more than a metaphor or a set of symbols” in these novels, because it shapes the individual girls, defines their communities, and acts as a powerful force in their respective evolutions (60). Melanie Dawson offers further insights on the importance of coexistence in science fiction and fantasy literature in “Sugared Violets and Conscious Wands: Deep Ecology in the *Harry Potter* Series.” In particular, Dawson argues that survival in Rowling’s novels requires an understanding of the interconnected nature of the sterile and technology-obsessed human world with the biologically diverse and democratic wizarding world. In this new world, where “magic continually intersects with nature” (69), Potter encounters a “biocentric egalitarianism” (73) among living creatures as well as “a landscape filled with conscious and, often, opinionated *things*” including hats, stones, books, and wands (80).

Part III of the collection, “Materialism, Capitalism, and Environmentalism,” looks at the destructive effects of a capitalist economy and ideology on the environment. Audrey Golden’s essay, “The Literary and Literal Dangers of a Flawed Valuation System: Reading Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Through the Arc of the Rainforest* through the Political Lens of Hannah Arendt,” reads the novel as a warning against commodification and the endless accumulation of consumer goods. Yamashita weaves four stories together that center on Brazil, and Golden argues that “if our capitalist and consumerist practices are not continued (or curtailed) in a thoughtful, conscious manner, the life of both humanity and the earth are at stake” (94). Just as Yamashita voices a warning about our misplaced economic ideals, author Margaret Atwood provides a similar critique of hypertrophic corporations and our “hyper-commercialized culture” (115). In “The Pedagogical Potential of Margaret Atwood’s Speculative Fiction: Exploring Ecofeminism in the Classroom,” Sean Murray examines how Atwood’s dystopian fiction engages students on the issues of “gender inequality and environmental degradation” (112). For example, the novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* provides a “sharp ecofeminist critique of patriarchal power” by describing the “deleterious implications” of toxic air and poisoned water “for the health of women’s reproductive systems” (112-113).

Murray states that he often evaluates fiction based on its potential impact in the classroom (111), and science fiction and fantasy are particularly relevant in this regard because they often use the power of allegory to glimpse the future and anticipate the results of “our current anthro-dominated commodification and destruction of the natural world” (5). The essay collection focuses on the realm of allegory in Part IV, “Dystopian Futures.” Keira Hambrick’s essay “Destroying Imagination to Save Reality: Environmental Apocalypse in Science Fiction” looks at environmental issues such as climate change and overpopulation, explains “the mechanics of using apocalyptic strategies in different textual forms,” and focuses on the positive real-world effects of these dire literary images of the future (131). Hambrick argues that “the speculative nature of apocalypticism becomes clearer in fictional texts” than in non-fiction, and “the imaginative space science fiction provides to readers creates opportunities for a more comfortable engagement with environmental issues and potential solutions” (135-136).

The near destruction of imagination and the human capacity for contemplation and problem solving are some of the many devastating results of the nuclear apocalypse that Dawn A. Saliba discusses in “Linguistic Disintegration in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*.” Saliba argues that the novel depicts both environmental destruction, such as ruined buildings and ash-choked air, as well as the “phenomenological consequences of cataclysm” through a narrative of parataxis and fragmented sentences that do not include any names, quotation marks, or unnecessary punctuation (143-144). While *The Road* revels in the depths of dystopia and “ecological cataclysm” (144-145), Chrissie Battista’s essay “Ecofantasy and Animal Dystopia in Richard Adams’ *Watership Down*” most clearly achieves Baratta’s goal that a successful ecocritical study must “establish a connection between the reader and the natural world” (3). Adams is an appropriate focus for the final piece of the collection because he disengages from humanity and shifts his narrative into a framework more closely aligned with nature. “By giving voice, agency and reason to a group of rabbit protagonists,” Battista argues, “Adams inalterably gives agency to *the earth* [and] urges us to identify with the nonhuman world so that we might begin to transform our anthropocentric orientation into a more ecocentric perspective” (159).

The biggest strength of this essay collection is the way that it elucidates a number of environmentally-influenced lines of inquiry within a diverse range of twentieth- and twenty-first-century British and American literary texts. The volume is strongest when dealing with popular fantasy, but a greater consideration of technologically-oriented science fiction, from authors like Isaac Asimov or Philip K. Dick, would have increased the overall scholarly value, as would an increased consideration of non-western literature. The book might also have profited from some reorganization, because the essays in Part III do not have the strong thematic and conceptual connection that characterizes the other sections. Golden’s essay would fit perfectly with the theme of Part I (industrial and economic interaction with the environment), and Murray’s piece dovetails nicely with the interrogation of gender roles in Part II. However, these are minor reservations. The fact that individual entries could logically fit into different

sections speaks to the overall cohesion and critical energy of the collection that Baratta has assembled, which stands as an important contribution to our understanding of environmental studies, ecocriticism, and literature.