

broad audience of readers who care about good books. It's a fine advertisement for the profession and it offers a model of scholarship that bridges general and specialist audiences. Written with a true generosity of spirit, *The Dream of the Great American Novel* demonstrates that the seemingly quaint notion of the GAN still merits serious investigation, and the book will surely be useful to teachers of high school or college-level surveys of American literature. That impressive reach equals the book's ambition, and is a measure of its achievement.

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**CANAVAN, GERRY, and KIM STANLEY ROBINSON, eds. *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2014. xii + 295 pp. \$27.95.**

*Green Planets* is immediately one of the decade's most significant contributions to ecocriticism and science fiction criticism. A product of an exemplary collaboration between a creative writer (Robinson) and a literary critic (Canavan), it brims with insightful treatments of both famous and relatively unknown authors. There is a very sobering urgency here; as Robinson observes in the concluding co-editorial conversation,

we use [climate change] now as a synecdoche to stand for the totality of our damage to the biosphere, which is much bigger than mere climate change, more like a potential mass extinction event.... We're thinking in terms of thermostats, and how we turn them up or down in a building. That image suggests 'climate change' has the possibility of a fix, maybe even a silver bullet of a fix. No such fix will be possible for a mass extinction event. (243)

At the same time, the volume's ultimate effect is to inspire hope, or at the least, to suggest that hope and realism are not necessarily incompatible.

Juxtaposing work from graduate students and senior scholars and featuring a diverse array of methodologies, the book provides a timely overview of the rapidly growing discussion around contemporary ecocriticism, both the sort that is obviously science fictional and that which wears the term more lightly. Organized by categories inherited from W. H. Auden and more recently Samuel R. Delany, Canavan and Robinson reach beyond simple oppositions of urban and rural ecologies to illuminate the positive and negative potential of each. The glorious city is the New Jerusalem, but its flipside is the Brave New World; the idyllic countryside is Arcadia, its inversion the Land of the Flies. And even these topoi subdivide with postmodernity into more nuanced possibilities: the New Jerusalem may fade into Junk City as maintenance schedules fail, or it can mature into "an ecstatic vision of improvisational recombinative urban chaos." Arcadia may of course become polluted, a ruined countryside, but it can also yield "an unexpectedly sublime vision of decadent beauty" (3), the Culture of the Afternoon.

Those who know Robinson's fiction will appreciate that this critical project is similarly attentive to texts not only as written forms, but as political, socioeconomically relevant actions. As Canavan notes, thinking especially of the films *Avatar* and

*Daybreakers*, the “active fantasy” of much ecological science fiction is “that the nightmare of exploitation, and our own complicity in these practices, might somehow be stopped, despite our inability to change” (14). Many of the included essays instead demonstrate that to care about the Earth is necessarily to wrestle personally with the forces of global capitalism, recognizing that the ideology of endless expansion is incompatible with an attractive long-term future for humanity. One of the most impressive chapters, for instance, is Gib Prettyman’s effort to reinvigorate discussion about Ursula K. Le Guin’s interests in ecology and Taoism. Featuring the best evocation of her novel *The Telling* that I’ve encountered, it challenges earlier readings by Fredric Jameson and Darko Suvin, arguing that “Le Guin’s world reduction is not just an effort to fantasize capitalism away, but a strategic response to the worldview of capitalism” (63).

I especially appreciate the collection’s willingness to engage less-known ecofictions. I’m much the richer for Melody Jue’s recommendation of Greg Egan’s 1999 short story “Oceanic,” for Andrew Milner’s introduction to Australian writer George Turner, and for Eric C. Otto sending me back to Paolo Bacigalupi’s short stories, through which I’d rushed in my eagerness to read *The Windup Girl*. Others will no doubt find similar inspiration in Christina Alt’s theory-rich but jargon-free opening chapter comparing the early and late H. G. Wells and in Rob Latham’s historical review of ecological science fiction’s engagement with colonial issues, which draws upon his broad expertise in New Wave science fiction and features close looks at Thomas Disch’s *The Genocides* and Le Guin’s somewhat better-known *The Word for World is Forest*.

This enthusiastic review should not suggest the book is entirely without weaknesses. A section of Christopher Palmer’s contribution that looks at Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* stands out as strangely vitriolic. I was so struck that I went back and counted four uses of the descriptor “angry,” two of “fierce,” and for good measure, two more of “loathing,” all in four pages. Of course Atwood is an unyielding critic of environmental injustice, one who is unafraid to confront perpetrators. But having twice taught this dystopian text (with rave reviews by students), I would contest assertions that “Atwood’s style is angrily offhand,” of “the novel’s fierce refusal of readerly pleasure,” and that “this is an adolescent, game-playing, immature culture that Atwood depicts and loathes” (167). Less objectionably, Brent Bellamy and Imre Szeman’s chapter makes intriguing claims about *The World Without Us* as “science faction,” but they may seem insufficient to readers who know the long history of attempts at defining science fiction. However, this does not overshadow the essay’s effective critique of how Weisman’s bestseller avoids politics and functions as a form of self-trickery, an attempt to convince ourselves that we care even as we regretfully decline to act.

Whether it is the promise of Timothy Morton describing *Avatar* as “naturalistic pastoral, but on acid” (220)—then exposing the film’s incapacity as megabudget superproduction to engage the film as ecological lament—or the chance to hear Robinson reflect on how “science is already the best eco-religion” (256), *Green Planets* is likely to attract and reward a wide range of readers. Complete with a well-selected appendix annotating key literary and filmic texts in ecological science fiction, the book itself confirms the appealing possibility about which Canavan speculates in the introduction: “perhaps even ecological critique as such can productively be thought of as a kind of science fiction, as it uses the same tools of cognition and extrapolation to project the conditions of a possible future—whether good or bad, ecotopian or apocalyptic—in hopes of transforming politics in the present” (17).