

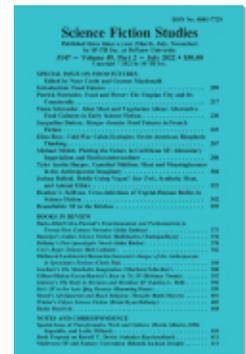


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*Images of the Anthropocene in Speculative Fictions:
Narrating the Future* ed. by Tereza Dìdinová et al.
(review)

Chris Pak

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striking early stories in that magazine: “The Keys to December,” “Love Is an Imaginary Number,” and “For a Breath I Tarry” (all 1966). Cox does, though, cleverly argue that the controversial 1969 novel *Creatures of Light and Darkness* deserves to be seen, in its delirious fragmentation, as a kind of New Wave parody, and he quotes tributes to Zelazny that appeared in personal letters from mandarins of the movement such as Moorcock and Ballard (the fruit of diligent research in archival collections of Zelazny’s manuscripts and correspondence).

Well-researched, well-organized, and well-written, this is an exemplary entry in the University of Illinois Press’s MODERN MASTERS OF SCIENCE FICTION series, and it deserves the attention of all fans and scholars of Zelazny’s work, and of modern sf generally.—**Rob Latham, Twentynine Palms**

Forging an Anthropocenic Awareness Through Literature. Tereza Dědinová, Weronika Łaskiewicz, and Sylwia Borowska-Szerszun, eds. *Images of the Anthropocene in Speculative Fictions: Narrating the Future*. Lexington, 2021. 276 pp. \$105 hc, \$45 ebk.

The challenges of the Anthropocene implicate numerous effects and concerns and call on readers, critics, and writers to respond in appropriately wide-ranging ways. The twelve chapters of *Images of the Anthropocene in Speculative Fiction: Narrating the Future* address the philosophical, formal, social, and political themes informing literary responses to the Anthropocene. This term is taken as an opportunity to engage in necessary boundary crossings among disciplines and fields of knowledge, given the wide-ranging and diverse impacts of the effects of climate change across societies. Central to this project is the power of speculative fictions for thinking through key Anthropocenic concerns: generational justice, dystopia, hope, and responsibility. This commitment to literature’s role in the Anthropocene is grounded in speculative fiction’s potential for exploring ideas about nature and its ability to portray the effects of climate catastrophe, its capacity to examine the social and political systems that exacerbate or ameliorate the destruction of non-human environments, and its ability to speculate on human and non-human relationships.

Literature’s role in speaking to the Anthropocene is convincingly outlined in the introductory chapter by the collection’s editors. It frames the concerns detailed above against readings of Emma Itäranta’s *Memory of Water* (2012, English trans. 2014), Paolo Bacigalupi’s “The People of Sand and Slag” (2004), and David Mitchell’s *The Bone Clocks* (2014). The Anthropocene itself, the editors argue, “can be conceptualized as a narrative, but it is not a universal narrative of humankind. It is a story woven from various voices and identities, with no omniscient narrator and no single protagonist” (11). The editors forcefully assert that storytelling and speculative fiction explore “the causes and consequences of the Anthropocene in ways inaccessible to other fields” (12). Of note is the editors’ suggestion that the popularity of YA fiction works as if “preparing the younger audiences for the global challenges and, at the same time, assuring them that they will prevail and recover from their traumatizing experiences” (14).

The twelve chapters by various authors are organized into three sections. The first, “Nature and Culture in the Anthropocene,” assembles four chapters that analyze works addressing storytelling and the nature-culture duality to show how they invite the expression of non-human agencies. These chapters investigate how the stories that have traditionally been told undergo revisions that contest humanist conceptions of human and non-human relationships. Part two, “(Post)Apocalyptic World and the Anthropocene,” gathers chapters that analyze apocalyptic visions of the Anthropocene, whether caused by plague, nuclear technologies, zombies, or ecological crisis. The final part, “Society and Politics in the Anthropocene,” explores the material, social, cultural, and narrative influences that have led to the Anthropocene. These three sections exhibit considerable crossover with one another, however, and also could have been configured in a variety of different ways.

In part one, Tereza Dědinová addresses literature’s role in the Anthropocene in “The Being that Can Be Told: *The Telling* by Ursula K. Le Guin as a Remedy for the Anthropocene.” Dědinová explores mimesis in fantastic literature—specifically science fiction—and seeks to connect such interpretive approaches to cognitive science, in particular Marco Caracciolo’s notion of embodied readings and Patrick Colm’s theorization of literature as simulation. Although the connections between cognitive science and theories of the fantastic and sf are not explicated, the chapter offers a useful bridge that could enrich understanding of such fiction’s aesthetic, social, and political engagement. The three levels of mimesis addressed here—allusion to historical events and locations, the presentation of future philosophies informed by contemporary ones, and what Le Guin describes as “the patterned intensity of language” (34)—offer connections to sf as an extrapolative literature. Appeal to cognitive science’s emphasis on embodied readings and these three levels of mimesis leads to an account of how fiction imitates a “rewiring” (42) of the human mind. Somewhat deterministically, the conclusion asserts that an acceptance of the positions and experiences offered by *The Telling* (2000) inevitably leads to a change of orientation toward care for nature and the “well-being of all other beings, the Earth” (42). Nonetheless, Dědinová argues persuasively for the potential of cognitive science in understanding how storytelling contributes to nurturing an ecocentric perspective.

Dědinová’s treatment of Le Guin’s *The Telling* as fantastic literature highlights an ambiguity throughout the collection about the distinctions used between modes of speculative fictions. This ambiguity has implications for some of the chapters’ arguments, though not Dědinová’s. The different senses of the terms “fantasy,” “science fiction,” and “speculative fictions” encountered throughout the collection mean that it can be difficult to understand how different modes relate to one another. Although the term “fantasy” appears in relation to diverse works of sf throughout this collection, only two chapters deal exclusively with fantasy as distinct from sf: Carrie Spencer’s chapter in part one, “Young Adult Fantasy to Save the World? Retelling the Quest in Maggie Stiefvater’s RAVEN Cycle” and Dariya Khokhel’s chapter in part three, “Mythological Aspect of Immigration in

Fantasy: Case Study of Mercy Thompson and ALPHA AND OMEGA series by Patricia Briggs.”

Chapter six in part two illustrates this generic ambiguity. “Fantasy, Myth, and the End of Humanity in M.R. Carey’s *The Girl with All the Gifts*” analyzes this work of sf as a fantasy of human survival that is subverted by the recognition of the priority posthuman subjects have over humankind in the future. Maria Quigley usefully frames the novel as a response to the popular post-apocalyptic zombie narrative, which is more concerned with human survival post-catastrophe. Quigley writes, with the digital game *The Last of Us* (2013) also in mind, that “Presenting an infection that already exists in nature as the cause of the apocalypse pushes both texts past the boundary of science fiction, and further into the realm of possibility” (127). This characterization misunderstands Carey’s reworking of the zombie narrative and limits understanding of sf’s engagement with possibility.

A similar issue attends the analysis of Keygan Sands’s otherwise strong chapter in part three, “Apocalyptic Visions: N.K. Jemisin’s *The Stone Sky* and the Socio-Cultural Origins of the Anthropocene.” This chapter takes a geological perspective informed by deep time, an acknowledgment of non-human agency, and the entangled webs of energy and human life. Sands rightly considers THE BROKEN EARTH series (2015-2017) as fantasy and sf, or science-fantasy, but asserts that “Fantasy like Jemisin’s is uniquely situated beyond speculative fiction: by moving parallel rather than forward or backward in time, we can speculate at a greater remove” (184). Although Sands offers as contrast authors Kim Stanley Robinson and Dale Pendell to help us situate Jemisin’s novel in this framework (the labels attached to these two writers are “speculative fiction and science fiction,” in that order [184]), the example confuses more than it clarifies the context. It is not clear how Jemisin’s texts move in parallel rather than being positioned in the far future, and thus it is not clear whether the implications of Sands’s argument apply to all far-future fictions or where the threshold lies. A more careful unpacking of modes can be found in Dwight Tanner’s “The Development of Realist Speculative Narratives to Represent and Confront the Anthropocene,” also in part three. Tanner analyzes Barbara Kingsolver’s *Flight Behavior* (2012) and Ian McEwan’s *Solar* (2010) to consider how the fantastic emerges in unremarkable settings to draw attention to “the fantastic nature of quotidian life” (235).

While most of the chapters offer analyses of a selection of works, two chapters offer surveys that usefully situate their respective foci in relation to the Anthropocene. In part one, Britta Maria Colligs, in “The Forest as a Voice for Nature: Ecocriticism in Fantasy Literature” (which, despite its title, also addresses sf), engages with the socially relevant literature outlined in its introduction (67) to show how forests are positioned as a heterotopian space, a symbolic voice for nature, a vital component of Earth’s ecosystems, and a metonymy for the Earth as a whole (70). In part two, Jirí Jelínek’s “Anthropocene vs. Plague: Disastrous Diseases and Their Impact on Society as Seen in Literature from Thucydides to Modern Speculative Fictions” takes

a historical approach to investigate how modern speculative fictions introduce inversions to the plague narrative that shift the locus of terror from the supernatural to nature in ways that align with Bakhtinian carnivalesque inversions.

In another chapter in part one of the collection, “The Fantasy of Wilderness: Reconfiguring Heroism in the Anthropocene, Facing the Age of Ecocentrism,” Lykka Guanio-Uluru reads Greg Garrard’s notion of wilderness in relation to Stephanie Meyers’s *Twilight* (2005) and Scott Westfield’s sf YA novel, *Uglies* (2005). Guanio-Uluru argues that Meyer inadvertently achieves what Adam Trexler describes as the difficult task of creating an Anthropocene villain in her portrayal of the vampires’ affluence. Likewise, the move toward ecocentrism is, as Guanio-Uluru argues, undermined by an anthropocentric privileging of a human subject, though this reading depends on an acceptance of preservationism and an erasure of the interconnectivities between the urban and wilderness, which Guanio-Uluru notes is not addressed in *Uglies*. This model supports a split between the human and non-human, thus shoring up a humanist exceptionalism that could be non-ecocentric in itself.

Chapters seven and eight in part two address issues related to posthumanism. Anna Bugajska in “Beyond the Anthropocene: Human Enhancement, Mythology, and Utopia in James Patterson’s MAXIMUM RIDE Cycle” considers chimerical animal-human hybrids against evantropia—a utopia of Human enhancement—and Christian apocalypse, to argue that the cycle offers a vision of the bridging of humans and animals: “the hybridization of humanity and the humanization of animals” (152) moves us toward a post-Anthropocene future.

In one of the collection’s strongest chapters, Joanna Krystyna Radosz considers a key work of Russian transmedia in “At the Crossroads of Ideas: The Russian View on the Anthropocene in METRO Series by Dmitry Glukhovsky.” Radosz situates the reading of the METRO series (2002-2015) against trends in Russian speculative fiction and provides an overview of the significance of the metro trope in Russian literature. The nuclear apocalypticism of the METRO series positions the metro as both a shelter and an enclosure that precludes solitude and freedom. Only by accepting the mutants who have emerged in this nuclear future can a bond with nature be restored (171).

Aleksandr Kolesnikov’s chapter in part three, “The Politics of Language and Culture in China Miéville’s Novel *Embassytown*,” demonstrates how Miéville’s novel, while a successful examination of postcolonial politics, fails as a work of Anthropocenic literature. Language as a tool of politics and struggle, and its foundation in an originary split between the mute animal and the rational speaking human, introduces an unavoidable anthropocentrism that prevents Miéville from engaging sufficiently with a non-anthropocenic vision. While acknowledging that Miéville is primarily concerned with issues of social stratification, Kolesnikov maintains that by comparing the Ariekei to animals prior to their acquisition of metaphorical speech, *Embassytown* (2011) reduces otherness to sameness and fails to move beyond anthropocentrism.

This collection is best positioned for students and those interested in understanding speculative fiction's diverse approaches to thinking through key challenges of the Anthropocene. The twelve chapters demonstrate how various speculative fictions explore possibilities for moving beyond the current moment to imagine futures capable of grappling with the Anthropocene. While the sections themselves could be reorganized to foreground their dialogism, the three sections do provide useful ways to frame the contributions. Apart from the confusions attendant on the diverse uses of genre terms throughout the collection, perhaps one aspect of the text that could be addressed is the repetitiveness resultant in the overviews of the Anthropocene in each chapter. While different chapters emphasize different aspects of the Anthropocene, there is considerable overlap that could be ameliorated by placing this information in the introduction. The chapters can nevertheless be profitably read against one another to extend the debate about the various dimensions related to storytelling, apocalypse, and posthumanism.—Chris Pak, Swansea University

A Generation of Charred Ruins. William O. Gardner. *The Metabolist Imagination: Visions of the City in Postwar Japanese Architecture and Science Fiction*. U of Minnesota P, 2020. viii+223 pp. \$108 hc, \$27 pbk.

Architect Tange Kenzō's Yoyogi National Gymnasium, a dramatically balanced masterpiece of massive concrete and tensile steel, appeared as a minor venue during the 2021 Tokyo Olympics. Completed in 1964 for that year's Summer Games, it is a local landmark and an icon of Japan's rapid postwar climb. Nearly 60 years later, it remains formally creative, structurally innovative, and perhaps most surprisingly, functionally useful. In William O. Gardner's *The Metabolist Imagination*, a photograph of the gymnasium is given a spread in the first chapter (30-31), where we learn of Tange and his place in the midst of Japan's exploding development through the 1960s. Tange served as a sort of orbiting mentor to his younger architectural peers Kikutake Kiyonori, Maki Fumihiko, Kurokawa Kisho, and the critic Kawazoe Noboru, who all came together as the Metabolist group of architects with the publication of their manifesto, *Metabolism 1960: The Proposals for New Urbanism* (1960). Similar to other radical "paper architecture" groups of the era, such as England's Archigram and Italy's Superstudio, the Metabolists rendered futuristic urbanscapes populated with structures staggering in scale. Like their counterparts, their visions were self-aware reactions to the devastation of the recent war, and so a morbid undercurrent runs through their work.

What set the Metabolists apart was that, shockingly, they saw some of their concepts realized in the built world, culminating in the Osaka Expo of 1970. Gardner's text explores the themes behind their work and its far-reaching influence, ultimately demonstrating how relevant and grimly useful it feels today, as we consider the scale and urgency of our ongoing global challenges, including environmental collapse, pandemic, and war. While the Metabolist group's members envisioned and executed science-fictional concepts, they also enjoyed a hard connection to sf literature, as the great Japanese author