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Parham, John, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Anthropocene* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 313 pp.

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*The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Anthropocene*, edited by John Parham, presents the latest edited collection in what seems to be an abundance of publications of the past seven years or so on literary and cultural perspectives on the Anthropocene. The 2010s witnessed the emergence of this theme mainly through essays and monographs that grappled with the meaning of the term, often contesting it by creatively coining alternative names.[1] As time passes, more collected volumes provide overviews and entry points into this rich new field, firmly enshrining the Anthropocene as a key concept for Ecocriticism. Examples for recent collections on this topic include Tobias and Taylor's *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times* (2017), and the special edition of *C21* edited by De Cristofaro and Cordle, "Literature of the Anthropocene" (2018). In fact, ecocritical publications with various foci such as climate, environmental humanities, affect, posthumanism, material ecocriticism, and transculturality, are appearing at such a fast pace, it is hard to keep up.[2] These collections also suggest, however, that ecocritical overviews of these relatively new fields are much needed.

Another aspect that stands out in recent volumes concerns the term 'environment:' the proliferation of specific foci, such as the Anthropocene or materiality, seems to suggest that we are entering a period of greater differentiation of the term 'environment,' that the ever more complex phenomena we are experiencing require an ever more expanding or differentiating vocabulary. Perhaps, then, 'environment' has become a tired concept in need of renewal, refinement, and rearticulation. Paul Warde, Libby Robin and Sverker Sörlin have argued this very point in *The Environment: A History of the Idea* (2018): although the popularity of this "crisis-concept" is a trans-disciplinary achievement that came to outdo terms such as conservation, preservation, or biosphere, they suggest it may

[1] An important example is Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016).
[2] See for example, Johns-Putra's *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Climate,* 2022; Cohen and Foote's *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Environmental Humanities*, 2021; Bladow and Ladino's *Affective Ecocriticism: Emotion, Embodiment, Environment*, 2018; Bruce and Rossini's *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Posthumanism*, 2018; Iovino and Oppermann's *Material Ecocriticism*, 2014; and Cooke and Denney's *Transcultural Ecocriticism: Global, Romantic, and Decolonial Perspectives*, 2021.



 

by now be "politically exhausted" (23-24; 173). Of course, it is also important to note that while said volumes have specific foci, such as climate and Anthropocene, they necessarily overlap, as the Anthropocene can be understood as an umbrella term for various socio-ecological issues. This broad use, however, is where many publications falter (or at least dilute the specific uses and merits, of the term Anthropocene). Not so in this case.

The *Companion* under review does indeed present, as the cover promises, "the most comprehensive survey yet" of the intersections of literature and the Anthropocene, and includes global contexts and literatures. In the "Introduction," Parham defines the Anthropocene through its futurity, arguing that "the Anthropocene presages an altered future" and that "literature might help us live in that future" (1). With the exception of the two 'keynote' essays under the rubric "Prologue," Laura Dassow Walls' "Earth" and Sean Cubitt's "Data/Anecdote," (which I address in a moment), most chapters are written in a highly accessible style, serving the purpose of a first introduction into the various enquiries. The *Companion* is divided into two main domains: "Anthropocene Forms" and "Anthropocene Themes." This structure reflects that next to perhaps more obvious themes such as "Fossil Fuel" (Sam Solnick), "Humans" (Hannes Bergthaller) and "Warming" (Andreas Malm), literary scholarship on the Anthropocene has brought about highly significant reflections on new fields, such as Ecomedia, as well as old preoccupations, such as genre, narrative, and scale. As the volume points out so well, the Anthropocene has inspired new forms, such as climate fiction, but, as Astrid Bracke notes, it has also been productive for a review of older forms and periods (89).

What is notable is the *Companion's* front- and backmatter: not only does it include a helpful "Further Reading" section, but it also starts with an inspiring Chronology, a timeline which shows relevant geological dates and events associated with the Anthropocene, such as "1880-1900: Sea levels begin to rise" alongside relevant literary works of that era: "1895: H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine.*" This juxtaposition of cultural consciousness and planetary changes can be traced back earlier than intuition would have us sometimes do. The literary works presented in this timeline are not meant to be representative, but largely consist of works discussed in the volume—an idea that was helpful as an entry point.

The two front-line essays of the volume are complex but rewarding: Walls argues that the "nineteenth century is the nearest way to discover the roots of both our insight and our blindness" (50), showing the role that writers and geologists played for a sense of planetarity and a revival of the notion of 'cosmos.' Walls thus proposes that the consciousness of a warming climate was very much present in intellectual cultures of the nineteenth century. Cubitt's essay presents a much-needed consideration of the convergence of literary studies and new media-technologies in relation to the Anthropocene, arguing that the other-than-human environment "now includes the informational equivalent of the factory environment, technologies that chatter among themselves at speeds beyond our comprehension, as well as a world increasingly hostile to the survival of our species" (56). Using the power of anecdote as an example that "an appeal to common sense can trump data," Cubitt proposes that the Anthropocene quest is "to become human in a different relation to natural and technical environments in rapid



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evolution" (56). His contribution is one of the most interesting of the volume, perhaps because it presents the most neglected dimension of cultural Anthropocene scholarship. However, the essay could have been written more accessibly. I wondered, too, why the *Companion's* title excludes the terms 'culture' and 'media,' given that Cubitt's essay is front and centre, and given the volume's helpful breadth, which includes gaming (Alenda Y. Chang's "Digital Games"), design (Stanislav Roudavski's "Interspecies Design"), and activism (Zainor Izat Zainal's "Ethics").

Altogether, the highly worthwhile essays collected in this volume avoid falling into the trap of many recent publications that use the Anthropocene as backdrop, or as synonymous with 'environmental crisis,' as can be found in the schema 'XX in the Anthropocene.' The *Companion* thus successfully conveys what sets Anthropocene scholarship apart from 'just' an environmental lens: an engagement with materiality of the Earth, media-technologies, historicity and futurity, scale and narrative, activism, and a wider pool of disciplines used to bring these knowledges together. Most importantly, the volume avoids perpetuating a universalist decline-narrative so often criticised in the Anthropocene debate: by including perspectives on ethics, activism, and productive solutions, it serves, as is stated to be its aim in the Acknowledgements, "a more pleasurable purpose as well" (xii).

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