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Book Review

Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 208 pp., $24.00 (pbk), ISBN: 978-0-231-17753-5.

Richard J. Schneider (ed.), *Dark Nature: Anti-Pastoral Essays in American Literature and Culture* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), 290 pp., $100.00 (hbk), ISBN: 978-1-4985-2811-5.

In the era of climate change, humanity tends to ask questions about the environment and nature more often: How do we define nature? What is nature to *us*? To what extent are *we* part of nature? Is nature our friend, or is it our enemy? Nature offers humanity a lot; but it also poses a threat to us. Nature is both life-giving and life-taking. Both roles of nature are important to consider; yet while dealing with the 'positive' one only intensifies the necessity of preserving nature, the discussions of what we view as 'less positive' characteristics and manifestations of the natural world are crucial, too. Both Timothy Morton's *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* and Richard J. Schneider's edited collection *Dark Nature: Anti-Pastoral Essays in American Literature and Culture* invite their readers to explore what humanity tends to characterize as 'negative' sides of nature and see their importance to the current ecological and climate change debates.

Morton's *Dark Ecology* suggests considering the 'dark' side of nature, or, to use the term coined by the scholar, 'dark ecology', to understand the current state of ecological awareness (p. 5). In the opening section of the book, Morton explains what dark ecology is:

> It is ecological awareness, dark-depressing. Yet ecological awareness is also dark-uncanny. And strangely it is dark-sweet. Nihilism is always number one in the charts these days. We usually don't get past the first darkness, and that's if we even care. In this book we are going to try to get to the third darkness, the sweet one, through the second darkness, the uncanny one. Do not be afraid. (p. 5)

Morton provides a long philosophical discussion of 'dark ecology' and demonstrates how through this notion we can understand our own role and place in the biological world. The scholar carefully unveils the tight connection between humans, animals, and other biological organisms. He claims that ecological awareness is 'fundamentally depressing' as one 'think[s] [oneself] otherwise than this body and its phenomenological being surrounded and permeated with others, not to mention made up of them' (p. 125). Outlining the necessity of recognizing the others with whom humans coexist, Morton argues that 'nonhumans are installed at profound levels of the

human—not just biologically and socially but in the very structure of thought and logic. Coexisting with these nonhumans is ecological thought, art, ethics, and politics' (p. 159). For Morton, ecology thus both conditions the physicality of human existence as well as penetrates the intellectual domain. The human and the nonhuman hence become inseparable.

The darkness of ecology is the phenomenon that humanity simply has to accept: nature is not only beautiful, virgin, unarmed, and caring. It is fascinating to realize that this side of nature has been widely discussed in literature, film, and other media, which, to borrow from Richard J. Schneider, provide an 'anti-pastoral' view on nature (p. ix). Indeed, while a number of texts reveal the pastoral perspective on nature, 'privileg[ing] a past when humans were closer to nature, everything was better than today, and there were no problems of everyday living so that one had time to contemplate the meaning of life' (p. vii), there are also the ones that focus on the dark side of nature. The examination of such narratives, as *Dark Nature* demonstrates, is highly important. Largely relying on Morton's thinking regarding dark ecology, the essays in *Dark Nature* meticulously analyze literary and cultural portrayals of the uncanny side of nature. The collection is divided into three sections—'Dark Nature and the American Cannon', 'Dark Nature and New Voices', and 'Dark Nature and the Media'. It thus begins with the examination of various texts written by such Dark Romantics as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, and Herman Melville, then proceeds to discuss the more recent narratives on dark nature, including the novels of Jeff VanderMeer and the poems of Adele Ne Jame, as well as other texts created by a number of lesser-known American authors, and concludes with the analysis of film and television that explore nature's darkness. Investigating the darker side of ecology, *Dark Nature* shows that 'anti-pastoral impulse exists throughout American literature, even within the writing of pastoral "nature" writers' (p. ix).

Dark Ecology and *Dark Nature* are significant contributions to the existing scholarship on ecology and nature, for they both explore what we tend to characterize as the horrors of the natural world that, in turn, are impossible to neglect today, when the planet's climate is changing so drastically. These books prove the necessity of ecocriticism to concentrate on nature's *darkness*, and not just on its pastoralism. Only having fully understood nature as both light and dark, welcoming and abhorring, comforting and punishing, humanity will be able to conceive of its own role in the natural world and view the environment as a living and constantly changing organism. *Dark Ecology* and *Dark Nature* will thus be of interest to scholars and students in environmental humanities as well as to general audiences who want to understand the duality of nature and why it is so important to know about and accept nature's darkness.

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