BOOKS IN REVIEW

Drawn by a Tropism. Katherine E. Bishop, David Higgins, and Jerry Määttä, eds. *Plants in Science Fiction: Speculative Vegetation*. U of Wales P, NEW DIMENSIONS IN SCIENCE FICTION, 2020. xiii+254 pp. £60 hc/ebk.

The invisibility of plants in scholarship, fiction, and wider culture is a curious problem for how we view the world and our place in it. Our scientific and folk taxonomies and our conception of plant lives and plant being homogenize and strip them of characteristics that promise to refigure our definitions of life, death, and the human. We need new ways of conceiving of our relationship to plants that would call for a reorientation of our perspectives on beings with which we share our world. Inspired by recent work in critical plant studies, Katherine E. Bishop, David Higgins, and Jerry Määttä's edited collection, *Plants in Science Fiction: Speculative Vegetation*, begins the task of addressing plants in sf. This project is fundamental to how sf can help us to orient ourselves toward the challenges of the Anthropocene.

The book's ten chapters are divided into three sections that move from "Abjection" to "Affinity" to "Accord." The book's key organizing scheme lies in plants' capacity to break down the boundaries of classificatory systems. As such, plant studies shares with human-animal studies many conceptual concerns. In a compelling chapter in section three by Graham J. Murphy, "The Question of the Vegetal, the Animal, the Archive in Kathleen Ann Goonan's *Queen City Jazz*," this shared concern is acknowledged and applied to a reading of the genetically engineered bees and plant-cities of Goonan's 1994 novel. Murphy draws on Sherryl Vint's *Animal Alterity* (2010) to show that there is an endemic "plant blindness" that makes plants unaccountably invisible (176-77).

A number of writers and modes are highlighted throughout the book's ten chapters, not least those belonging to the classic- and new-weird traditions. The weird and its theme of the disruption to classificatory systems justifies this emphasis, particularly because of the essential otherness of plants and the weird scales and dislocations of the Anthropocene, notably addressed in the *Paradoxa* issue on Global Weirding (2016). The opening chapters, "Weird Flora: Plant Life in the Classic Weird Tale" by Jessica George and "Botanical Tentacles and the Chthulucene" by Shelley Saguaro, explore the beginning of a trajectory from horror in classic works of weird fiction by H.P. Lovecraft, Algernon Blackwood, and Arthur Machen. This trajectory ends with an ambivalent hope for a posthuman existence exemplified by Jeff Vandermeer's work, addressed in section three in the chapters "Queer Ingestions: Weird and Sporous Bodies in Jeff VanderMeer's Fiction" by Alison Sperling and "The Botanical Ekphrastic and Ecological Relocation" by Bishop. This structure also serves as a metonymy for the wider shifts in orientation toward otherness in sf broadly speaking, and anticipated when George suggests that a reading of plants in weird fiction informed by Jane Bennet's notion of "thing power" in *Vibrant Matter* (2009) and Karen Houle's discussion of kinship and enmeshment in "Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics as Extension or

Becoming" (2011) might re-focus on the potential for a "radical collectivity, of complex being-together in the world" (26). George shows how plants' inaccessible otherness manifests as an attitude of horror in the classic weird tale by appealing to Val Plumwood's discussion in "Being Prey" (1999) of radical separation, establishing a basis for conceiving otherness not only for the argument proposed in this chapter, but for the chapters that follow (15).

One of the most iconic sf stories about plants, John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* (1951), receives treatment in two chapters, "'Bloody Unnatural Brutes': Anthropomorphism, Colonialism and the Return of the Repressed in John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids*" by Jerry Määttä and Saguaro's chapter mentioned above. Määttä notes the lack of critical attention paid to *The Day of the Triffids* despite its enduring popularity and identifies a complex case of metonymic transfer that informs the representation of the eponymous plants. This strategy aligns plant blindness and exploitation to the colonial exploitation of peoples that makes the triffids a symbol for "a political fear masked as an evolutionary one" (48). Määttä unpacks the colonial texture of Wyndham's novel by referring to an earlier iteration of the story, "Revolt of the Triffids" (1951), and to a potential precursor by Wyndham, "Spheres of Hell" (1933; "The Puff-Ball Menace" in the UK [1938]). This narrative is distinctive from other stories of reverse colonization, such as H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1898), because its depiction of "plants hunting and eating humans" disrupts our categories, "thus, threatening hierarchies on almost all possible levels—evolutionarily, biologically, racially, and politically" (49).

Saguaro examines *The Day of the Triffids* alongside Lovecraft's "At the Mountains of Madness" (1936) and John Boyd's *The Pollinators of Eden* (1969) in relation to tentacularity and the Chthulucene. This chapter ties together the analysis of the classic weird tale, Wyndham's sf, and the sf in T.S. Miller's chapter in section two, thus providing a unifying thread for the two sections. Saguaro suggests that the figure of the tentacle can be productively (re)positioned as emblematic of a "bridge or a conjoiner" that "signifies instead the non-teleological and sympoietic features that are anathema to the power plays of the Capitalocene" (73). Resonating with the discussions about the weird throughout the collection, Saguaro suggests that "these tales of botanical tentacular polymorphism may now be seen to be, like tentacles, feeling their way beyond catastrophe but to a more sympoietic, co-creative, reciprocal relation to the other(s)" (73).

Section two begins with a fascinating chapter that focuses on non-literary examples of speculative engagement with plants. Brittany Roberts's "Between the Living and the Dead: Vegetal Afterlives in Evgenii Iufit and Vladimir Maslov's *Silver Heads*" analyzes Russian film inspired by the Necrorealist arts movement Iufit founded. Death and the corpse are key figures through which the human, non-human, and posthuman are threaded, and Roberts makes a persuasive argument for re-positioning death to foreground how it re-aligns our attitudes to life. Death, Roberts argues, is a kind of entryway to a kinship that extends beyond the human in non-instrumental, non-appropriative ways.

This analysis aligns *Silver Heads* (1998) with many of the concerns addressed by the new weird's exploration of vegetal lives and draws attention to broader cultural shifts in conceptions of human-plant relations.

T.S. Miller's chapter, "Vegetable Love: Desire, Feeling and Sexuality in Botanical Fiction," extends his interest in a transhistorical genre that he calls botanical fiction through analyses of Boyd's *The Pollinators of Eden*, Pat Murphy's "His Vegetable Wife" (1986), and Ronald Fraser's *Flower Phantoms* (1926). This analysis centers on issues of plant-feeling or "plant-desire" and begins with an expansive historical overview of plants in fiction throughout history and on Erasmus Darwin's *Loves of the Plants* (1791) in particular. Miller offers a critique of the misogyny of Boyd's novel, which he perceptively compares to the troubled relationship between the Oankali and humans of Octavia E. Butler's XENOGENESIS trilogy (1987-89). In contrast, Murphy's story "signals that a teeming site of resistance to the subordination of plants lies in recent feminist discourses" (116) while Fraser's novel, "With its efforts to imagine and inhabit a shared space of plant and human desiring … represents a rare flower in the history of botanical fiction" (120). Miller's work is cited in several chapters of the book, while Bishop draws attention to the Botanical Fiction Database that Miller maintains online, thus positioning botanical fiction and these invaluable digital resources as key to further plant studies in sf.

The second section concludes with Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook's examination of Robert Holdstock's *Lavondyss* (1988) and Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* (2007) in "Alternative Reproduction: Plant-Time and Human/Arboreal Assemblages in Holdstock and Han." Cook, like many of the book's contributors, builds on Michael Marder's "plant-thinking" to explore how modes of temporality linked to sexual reproduction are disrupted by encounters with the vegetal, resulting in "an arboreal metamorphosis" that transforms our conception of temporality and human identity (128). Cook examines Han's novel in relation to her earlier short story, "The Fruit of My Woman" (1997, trans. 2016)—a work of magic realism that draws attention to the speculative aspects informing *The Vegetarian*—to argue that "The experience of other-than-human sexualised temporality made possible by the conventions of magical realism in the short story is rewritten in the novel as a woman's alienation through insanity from her fellow human beings" (137). The third section of Han's novel, with its "temporal disjunctions, strange synchronicities and ambiguous attributions," aligns *The Vegetarian* to *Lavondyss*'s experimentation with temporality (138).

The first chapter of section three, Yogi Hale Hendlin's "Sunlight as a Photosynthetic Information Technology: Becoming Plant in Tom Robbins's *Jitterbug Perfume*," alights on the oft-disregarded sense of scent, which historically has been slighted in relation to sight. By appealing to neurobiological accounts of how scent bypasses what is referred to as the "computing and conceptual gatekeeping of the mind" (163), Hendlin argues that scent offers avenues for recognizing and connecting with "The plant–human chimera that we already always have been, according to Robbins,

[and] permits bypassing in many instances the reptilian part of our brain that holds onto ideologies and fears precipitating violent conflict and overreactions" (166).

Murphy's chapter has already been addressed above, while Sperling's investigation of fungal themes and what she calls "weird embodiment" in VanderMeer's oeuvre (195) and Bishop's examination of ekphrasis also situate the place of the new weird in plant studies. Bishop's interest in ekphrasis, or the linguistic description of art or the image, is a fascinating trope to examine speculative fiction's construction of the visual and holds much potential for further research within and beyond plant studies. Bishop contends that the linguistic expansion of the image via interpretation draws attention to the previously overlooked: "When paired with speculative fiction, the interpretative operations of ekphrasis are powerfully political, particularly when tuned to a vegetal key, reanimating that which we take for granted as safe, sessile, if not controlled then controllable' (229).

Plants in Science Fiction establishes key theoretical concepts and offers approaches that point the way for further studies addressing the dearth of critical studies on plants in sf. Perhaps reflective of the novelty of this emerging discipline, and providing a coherent thematic thread for the collection, multiple chapters cite several academic and popular scientific works, including journalist Michael Pollan's *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World* (2001), T.S. Miller's "Lives of the Monster Plants: The Revenge of the Vegetable in the Age of Animal Studies" (2012), and those by Stefano Mancuso (for example, *Brilliant Green: The Surprising History and Science of Plant Intelligence*, co-authored with Alessandra Viola [2015], and *Communication in Plants: Neuronal Aspects of Plant Life*, co-edited with František Baluška and Dieter Volkmann [2006]). This book rightly acknowledges that plants have been neglected in sf studies and in wider literary and cultural criticism, despite—as Bishop shows in the introduction—how frequently they appear in sf and how important they are to those narratives. The book demonstrates a complementarity among different approaches to the representation and meaning of plants in sf. *Plants in Science Fiction* is a much-needed study of plants in sf that offers potential for synthesis with human-animal studies and broader ecological and environmental criticism.**—Chris Pak, University of Swansea**

Middle Ground Between Light and Shadow. Barry Keith Grant. *The Twilight Zone*. Wayne State UP, TV MILESTONE SERIES, 2019. v+121 pp. $19.99 pbk.

Each study in Wayne State UP's TV MILESTONE SERIES is designed to offer a close examination of an individual television series, placing it within its industrial, historical, and cultural contexts while also offering space for more detailed analysis of the qualities that make it stand out against other shows. The series titles are diverse, encompassing comparatively recent programs alongside classics of television history, as well as representing a wide selection of television genres. The inclusion of Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone* (1959-