Tilottama Rajan and Joel Faflak, eds., *William Blake: Modernity and Disaster.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020. Pp. xii + 328. $90.00. ISBN 9781487506568.

In their introduction, the editors, Tilottama Rajan and Joel Faflak, frame this collection as an attempt to explore Blake's complex and creative responses to modernity in the form of the alienating advances in the sciences and culture of his era. In setting out the methodology, the editors present a full-throated defence of a deconstructionist approach to Blake criticism that has largely fallen out of favour since the 1990s. The embrace of the complexity and pessimism facilitated by deconstruction is presented as a means of making space for more speculative arguments than are commonly found in contemporary Blake studies.

The collection thus sets out to explode the cosy myths of Blake studies surrounding concepts such as prophecy and apocalypse, and thereby recover the iconoclastic verve of the earlier deconstructionist analyses of his writings. The editors leave it to the contributors to 'unfold […] the multiplex disasters of Blake's corpus' (15), who then proffer competing definitions of disaster that exist in tension with ideas of prophecy and apocalypse. If these meanings do not fully cohere then this might be taken as a virtue of the Blanchotian methodological approach which does not force a redemptive synthesis upon contradiction. Nonetheless, Morton D. Paley's evocative description of an 'apocalypse without millennium', cited by more than one contributor, rather than the more nebulous ideas of disaster, seems to bind the essays together as a whole.

Noah Heringman opens the collection arguing that Blake 'extend[s] the myth of the Fall to bodies of knowledge' (31), making connections between Blake's embodiment in Albion of a prelapsarian corpus of knowledge with antiquarian speculation regarding positively connoted primitivist knowledge systems which Blake came into contact with as an apprentice engraver. Fittingly it is Rajan's essay that most closely exemplifies the introduction's vision for the collection, making use of Deleuze and Guattari's difficult-to-pin-down concept of a 'body without organs' to rethink Blake's representation of Urizen's bodily formation as one of a body '*with* organs that lacks organism' (55). Peter Otto then reads Blake's unfinished epic *The Four Zoas* as a Gothic fiction of ruination haunted by the reality of suffering in a post-Terror society.

In the contribution from the second editor of the volume, Joel Faflak reads *Milton* as a 'vast identity crisis' (112), in which the process of reading and interpretation is conceived as psychosomatic, driven by affective impulses related to developments in the early history of psychiatry. Lily Gurton-Wachter's chapter then finds something new to say about the well-worn ground of Blake's 'London' by considering Blake's representation of the contagion of shame in wartime London as a symptom of the shrinking of the imagination to the community of the nation, limiting the capacity for sympathy. In a wide-ranging essay, Christopher Bundock then reads the relation between Albion and Jerusalem in *Jerusalem* as a form of national hypochondria regarding the integration of the other that emerged in response to the Jewish Naturalisation Bill of 1753 and was revived by Richard Brothers' declaration of himself as the 'Prince of the Hebrews' in the 1790s.

In a stylishly framed essay, Elizabeth Effinger examines the conflicting impulses in Blake's work regarding the emergent sciences of his day which furnish him with some of his most potent images – the polypus, disembodied organs, hybridised bodies – but also seem to fill him with anxiety. In the following essay David Collings addresses the strangely anticlimactic apocalypse of *Jerusalem* which miraculously emerges from outside the self and seems therefore to negate the labours of Blake's artist-avatar Los. Steven Goldsmith then considers Blake's anti-materialist insistence that all loss is a disastrous fall into history against

the ‘New Materialists’ who embrace matter as productive and resilient even in decay, and for whom, as he puts it, ‘loss is more’.

The final section of the volume, the coda, includes two essays that focus more fully on Blake’s visual art. In an analysis of Blake’s painting *Pity*, illustrating a highly metaphoric speech from *Macbeth*, David L. Clark argues that the image reveals something about Blake’s ‘composite art’ as it is not a literal representation but rather a dreamlike ‘image of language’ (236). Finally, Jacques Khalip uses Derrida to take on the theme of the apocalypse in Blake’s *Behemoth and Leviathan* and *The Ghost of a Flea* as representations of the posthuman, or rather the posthumous, which leaves the humanist worldview behind, opening up space for the animal gaze.

This volume brings together both established Blake scholars and newer voices to form a provocative and often exciting collection which resists previous framings of the apocalyptic in Blake’s writings in religious or mythographic terms and instead considers how his works ‘disclose an imaginative attunement to disaster’ (3).

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