

Ve-Yin Tee, ed., *Romantic Environmental Sensibility: Nature, Class and Empire*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022. Pp. 296. £90. ISBN 9781474456470.

On 5 March 2024, a *New York Times* article announced that, after a 15-year period of consideration, the Anthropocene had been rejected as a geological epoch. This decision, made by the International Union of Geological Sciences, has reduced the Anthropocene to an ‘event’. ‘The declaration [of the Anthropocene] would shape terminology in textbooks, research articles and museums worldwide. It would guide scientists in their understanding of our still-unfolding present for generations, perhaps even millennia, to come’, the *New York Times* article claims (‘Are We in The Anthropocene, the Human Age? Nope, Scientists Say’). Epoch or not, the idea of the Anthropos as a force of nature with the potential to alter geological time has made an indelible mark on 21st-century thought. This much is evident in David Higgins’ compelling chapter, ‘Climate Change, Inequality and Romantic Catastrophe’, in the collection under review. As Higgins affirms, ‘[t]he idea of the Anthropocene has been enormously generative and largely beneficial for academic discourse on human interactions with the environment. But, as is increasingly well understood, it also has significant problems’ (78). These problems may now, in 2024, include decisions over what to do with the geological turn in the terminology of the Anthropocene. But for the focus of this edited collection, published in 2022 in the immediacy of the covid-19 pandemic and the climate emergency, the problems of the Anthropocene are entangled with a complex range of socioeconomic, political, and colonial inequalities relating to gender, race, and species. ‘The climate emergency is of course unprecedented’, Higgins writes, following his 2017 monograph, *British Romanticism, Climate Change and the Anthropocene*, ‘but it is also the product of a long history of global inequality and therefore should be understood genealogically’ (79). The genealogy of the Anthropocene, Higgins notes, is Romantic: ‘When Paul Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer outlined their newly coined term “Anthropocene” two decades ago, they proposed a start date for the new geological epoch of the “latter part of the 18th century”, in part because it “coincides with James Watt’s invention of the steam engine in 1784”’ (79). The Anthropocene’s eighteenth-century origins were not set in stone. The proposed start of the Anthropocene was recently set as 1952, ‘when plutonium from hydrogen-bomb tests showed up in the sediment of Crawford Lake near Toronto, Canada’, before its rejection as an epoch (‘Geologists Reject the Anthropocene as Earth’s New Epoch—After 15 Years of Debate’, *Nature*). But the marks of the Anthropocene—of a natural world impacted by human activity—are ever-present in global Romantic writings, as this collection demonstrates.

Romantic Environmental Sensibility gathers, under Ve-Yin Tee’s editorship, 13 diverse chapters addressing environmentalism, landscape, and ecology through intersectional lenses and a wide range of writers: from ‘Green Romantic’ familiars Blake, Clare, and Cowper, to lesser-studied figures including the natural historian and poet, Alexander Wilson, the milkmaid-poet Ann Yearsley, and the shoemaker-poet, James Woodhouse, to name but a few. Tee’s editorship includes three guiding strategies to which each contributor’s essay responds, with attention to class and environment. These strategies have prompted the contributors to ‘Consider the environmental implications of Romantic period land aesthetics and land management practices’; ‘Recover an alternative, or marginal, or suppressed land ethics from the Romantic period’; and ‘Engage with residual and emergent strands in environmental discourse of the present day’ (7). Such presentism exceeds the bounds of environmental discourse, in numerous chapters, to also take account of past waves and strands of ecocriticism, such as Jonathan Bate’s pivotal 1991 monograph, *Romantic Ecology*. As Adam Bridgen emphasises, the convergence of labouring-class writing with Romantic ecocriticism provides

fertile ground to, quoting Jeremy Davies, ‘resituate Romanticism within the real process of historical change’ (172). The collection is divided into two parts; part first, ‘Green Imperialism’, includes chapters considering the eighteenth-century class anxieties and aesthetics of transplanted Chinese gardens and the ‘ecogothic’ environs of nineteenth-century Californian Chinatowns, to the country houses and tea plantations of eighteenth and nineteenth-century colonial India. Part second, ‘Land and Creature Ethics’, continues considerations of landscape aesthetics in relation to the more-than-human. Class and ecology converge in the British landscapes of enclosure, and gender, race, and class intersect in global Romantic contexts, such as representations of the milkmaid in British Romantic poetry and in Tōson Shimazaki’s *Chikuma River Sketches*, as considered by Yuko Otagaki. An afterword by Bridget Keegan closes the collection, noting that ‘[c]ollectively, the essays suggest how the diverse cultural and environmental interactions and interventions continue to shape current conversations about humanity’s responsibility for that environment’ (273). The fine meshing of historicism and presentism in *Romantic Environmental Sensibility* is encouraging for the future of Romantic ecocriticism, and for the critical future of the Anthropocene: epoch, or not.

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