

***Utopian and Dystopian Explorations of Pandemics and Ecological Breakdown: Entangled Futurities*, edited by Heather Alberro, Emrah Atasoy, Nora Castle, Rhiannon Firth, and Conrad Scott, New York, Routledge, 2025, pp. 254, £104,00 (hardback), ISBN: 9781032385914.**

Başak AĞIN

TED University, Türkiye

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Utopian and Dystopian Explorations of Pandemics and Ecological Breakdown: Entangled Futurities draws on various theoretical frameworks ranging from discussions of the Anthropocene to the critique and deconstruction of the human-nonhuman divide by several schools of posthumanism in exploring the relationship between environmental degradation, collapse of the ecosystem, and pandemics. The editors of the volume collectively interrogate how pandemics reveal the deep interconnections between humans and the other-than-human world, prompting reflections on our relationships with nature and each other. They contend that pandemics serve as critical lenses through which to examine human interdependence with the nonhuman world, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging the interconnectedness of health, justice, and ecological sustainability, advocating for political, cultural, and infrastructural actions that promote equitable futures for all beings. The editors also note that from ancient to contemporary works, the narrative of pandemics has shaped cultural expressions and societal responses. The volume, which comprises four parts, highlights the need to engage with these narratives to better understand the implications of pandemics on our collective futures.

CONTACT: Başak Ağın, Assoc. Prof. Dr. (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4323-3686>)

TED University, Department of English Language and Literature,
Ankara, Türkiye, bashak@gmail.com



Part I, “Monsters and Monstrosity,” includes three chapters. Chapter 1 by Tânia Cerqueira argues that by embracing the complexities of the human/nonhuman dynamic, the ecoGothic framework, especially in young adult fiction like Rory Power’s *Wilder Girls*, offers pathways to rethink the challenges brought about by climate change to address them effectively. Chapter 2 by Ujjwal Khobra and Rashmi Gaur explores the complex relationship between humanity and monstrosity in Dibakar Banerjee’s short film “Monster,” part of the horror anthology *Ghost Stories* (2020). The chapter discusses how the narrative, situated within the context of global environmental crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, serves as a cautionary tale, urging viewers to cultivate empathy and ethical responsibility toward all forms of life. The closing chapter of this part, Chapter 3 by Timothy S. Murphy, draws parallels between the fate of the protagonist of Robert Matheson’s *I Am Legend*, Robert Neville, and contemporary political dynamics, emphasizing the need for empathy and understanding in a world marked by division and crisis.

Part II of the volume, “Intersectional Critique,” involves four chapters. In Chapter 4, Matthew Leggatt posits that the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a re-evaluation of the metaphor of the rhizome and argues that the narratives of *Severance* and *The Last of Us* reflect the struggle to find meaning and connection amid societal collapse. Chapter 5 by Benjamin Burt discusses Joca Reiners Terron’s *Death and the Meteor* by juxtaposing “environmentalism, Indigenous rights, and pandemic prevention” (91). “Even as the characters seemingly accept the immutability” of social problems, Burt argues, “readers may apprehend the ongoing possibility of constructive change” (91). In Chapter 6, Sara González Bernárdez focuses on Naomi Novik’s *Uprooted*, which offers a nuanced perspective on the nature/culture dichotomy, suggesting that coexistence and collaboration are possible. The novel, the author argues, ultimately advocates for an ethical relationship with the natural world, emphasizing the importance of empathy and understanding in overcoming historical divisions. Eleonora Rossi’s discussions on Sophie Mackintosh’s *The Water Cure* in Chapter 7 closes this part of the volume. The author situates her work within the wider scope of Blue Humanities and explores the novel as a case study to “examine instances of dynamic and incontrollable exchange between human and nonhuman worlds” (107).

Part III, titled “More-Than-Human Mutual Aid and Eco-Justice,” is composed of four chapters. Chapter 8 by Rylan Kafara explores the dynamic relations between settler time, gentrification, and pandemic in Edmonton, Canada. In Chapter 9, Claire P. Curtis focuses on three climate change novels, namely, Leigh Richards’ *Califia’s Daughters*, Emily St. John Mandel’s *Station Eleven*, and James Bradley’s *Clade*, and combines her analysis with Martha Nussbaum’s capability of affiliation. Chapter 10, penned collaboratively by Benjamin Horn, Jayde Martin, and Alice Seville, explores the posthuman complexities of viral and ecological encounters in Charles Burns’ graphic novel *Black Hole*. The authors examine “Burns’ aesthetic mode as one of defamiliarization, purposefully elucidating the graphic novel’s manifest themes of empathetic ecology, sociality, and mutualism” (147).

Chapter 11 marks the end of this part with Hanna Grześkiewicz and Marleen Boschen's discussions on the ancient Białowieża Forest in Poland as an example of border ecology. Home to a myriad of "mosses, lichens, fungi, and insects that depend on the deadwood of old trees as well as roaming mammals" (161), the authors claim that the forest became an instrument for segregation, due to the erection of a wall meant to prevent trespassing by shelter-seeking people driven by war.

Part IV, "Creative Resistance and Utopian Glimmers," opens with Jari Käkälä's discussion on Sarah Pinsker's *A Song for a New Day* in Chapter 12. The author explores the setting's invocation of "dystopian futures of surveillance capitalism," while putting "Do-It-Yourself (DIY) communities" in the novel into a dialogue with her own arguments (177). Alice Breemen's "Pandemic Dramaturgy" is Chapter 13. Breemen explains how the Dutch theater company Building Conversation performed *Dying Together/Futures* as an example of an unconventional dramaturgy that took place between lockdowns in the Frascati theater in Amsterdam. In Chapter 14, Hülya Yağcıoğlu explores three narratives of pandemics, Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*, Albert Camus' *The Plague*, and Orhan Pamuk's *Nights of Plague*. She does so through the lens of new materialist concepts of hyperobjects by Timothy Morton and vital materiality by Jane Bennett with the support of interactionist theories such as object-oriented ontology and Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory. The final chapter of this part and the entire volume is Chapter 15 by Heather McKnight. In this chapter, the author contends, "the youth climate movement, Fridays for Future (FFF), is a web of micro-utopias," which "combines anxiety, pessimism, horizons of hope, and disruptive action" (215).

Overall, this volume discusses the Anthropocene epoch, the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman entities, and the implications of pandemics on our understanding of ecological and social futures. It emphasizes the need for interdisciplinary approaches to address the complexities of pandemics and ecological crises, while advocating for a reimagining of utopian and dystopian narratives. Its importance lies in the fact that it explores the intricate relationship between utopian and dystopian narratives, emphasizing that these concepts are not mutually exclusive. The authors argue for a nuanced understanding of how ecological breakdown and pandemics challenge traditional notions of utopia and dystopia, thereby suggesting that hope can emerge from despair, and that the transformative potential of utopian thinking can inspire collective action toward more just and sustainable futures. Therefore, this timely response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which spans across times and genres in exploring utopian and dystopian narratives, is a valuable source for both scholars and the general audience.

Work Cited

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