Sonya Posmentier, *Cultivation and Catastrophe: The Lyric Ecology of Modern Black Literature*. Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017. xiv + 282 pp.
(Cloth US\$49.95)

In *Cultivation and Catastrophe*, Sonya Posmentier explores the nexus of nature and black diasporic culture, contending that the environment and its disasters played a central role in the development of black modernity in the twentieth century by mirroring the disruptive experience of plantation slavery and its aftermath. Through a broad literary analysis across six chapters that examines key figures in black poetry writ large—Claude McKay, Bessie Smith, Sterling Brown, Zora Neale Hurston, Lloyd Lovindeer, and M. NourbeSe Philip—Posmentier incisively describes what she calls the “lyric ecologies”—or environmental poetics—of the lived black experience. Rather than focusing solely on “nature” as the subject of lyrical poetry, Posmentier concerns herself with the way poetry approximated ecological processes and vice versa. She thus proposes the terms “cultivation” and “catastrophe” as metaphors to describe how black individuals were able to grow in the face of adversity, as well as a way to hark back to the devastating societal effects wrought by the slave plantation system.

The first half of the book examines the theme of cultivation, with Posmentier rooting her analysis in the soil, as it were, by exploring the transnational creation of black identity through its relationship to plantations and provision grounds. The second half explores the theme of catastrophe, most saliently looking at the effects of “the trade winds, the hurricane, and the flood” (p. 5) on the American South and the Greater Caribbean. Combined, the book’s two halves clearly demonstrate that “the intersection of race and nature has a long tradition in black diasporic writing that derives not only from catastrophic experience but from a persistent interest in the labor, processes, and spaces of cultivation” (p. 213).

Cultivation and Catastrophe writes the natural world into a field that has heretofore focused predominately on urban spaces and built environments. Many histories of the twentieth-century international black experience chronicle the role of cosmopolitan cities like New York and Paris where so many members of the Black Atlantic gathered; *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* by Brent Hayes Edwards (2003), *Paris, Capital of the Black Atlantic: Literature, Modernity, and Diaspora* by Jeremy Braddock and Jonathan Eburne (2013), and *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris* by Jennifer Boittin (2015) are but a few standout examples in this vein. While such transnational urban spaces served as essential points of contact and were no doubt

formative spaces in the black imaginary, as these works have thoroughly shown, Posmentier demonstrates that the environmental experience outside of large cities is an understudied but equally important factor in the development of twentieth-century black poetics.

Thus, her work sits at the forefront of cultural and literary analysis, whose interdisciplinarity continues to produce excellent treatments of the complexity and richness of black literature, from exploring how artists made use of historical archives, as Wendy Walters does in *Archives of the Black Atlantic: Reading Between Literature and History* (2010), to the relationship between romance and realism, which Yogita Goyal explores in *Romance, Diaspora, and Black Atlantic Literature* (2010). By breaking new ground, the field continues to recuperate what black narratives and artforms tell us about the experience of the African diaspora. To that end, Posmentier brings to bear the insights of the Caribbean on the North Atlantic experience; in full view of the repeated disasters of the Greater Caribbean Basin, as well as the influence of the region's ecology on Caribbean poets, it is apparent that the natural environment, alongside the manufactured ecology of the plantation, defined the Black Atlantic.

Posmentier's work thus engages with the latest trends in environmental history, disaster studies in particular, as scholars have increasingly attended to the role of the natural world in their narratives of human cultural experience. For instance, in *Disaster Writing: The Cultural Politics of Catastrophe in Latin America* (2011), Mark D. Anderson explains how disaster narratives intersect with cultural politics in processing trauma and loss, a topic taken up by Posmentier in the second half of her book. More recently, Susan Scott Parish's *The Flood Year 1927: A Cultural History* (2017) explores similar themes to Posmentier's fourth chapter, and reading the two in tandem provides a comprehensive account of black cultural production in the face of the widespread dislocation caused by the Great Mississippi Flood.

Cultivation and Catastrophe participates in the latest scholarly trends by blending literary analysis with environmental history. It is cogently written, persuasively argued, and insightful. Its detailed analysis of race, ecology, and art marks an important contribution to postcolonial and Caribbean studies, as well as cultural and environmental history.

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