

Ive Brissman. *Wild Enchantments in the Anthropocene: Exploring the Wild in Narratives, Practices and Place in Dark Green Spirituality*. Lund: Lund University. 2021. 334 s.

Wild Enchantments in the Anthropocene offers a distinctive view of the motivations that inspire and motivate people to engage with(in) the larger-than-human world in ecologically positive and climate-disaster challenging ways. (By “inspire”, I allude to what brings people to commit to environmentalism. By “motivate”, I allude to what keeps them going. The near-synonymity of the terms is, I hope, fruitful but need not be taken as programmatic.) *Wild Enchantments in the Anthropocene* presents Ive Brissman’s reflections and conclusions arising from fieldwork research conducted from 2009 to 2015 in the county of Devon, in the southwest of the United Kingdom. Participation in workshops and courses at Schumacher College (which offers degrees and “transformative” short courses focused on holistic ecology), and conversations with other participants and similarly committed people, provide a rich context for reflection on religiously-informed environmentalism.

The key proposal of the dissertation is that “enchantment” does not fully represent or explain the acts and ideas considered and discussed here. It is certainly clear from the rich description and careful reflection on study courses and guided walks on Dartmoor (an upland National Park) that feelings of awe, reverence, joy, wonder, and so on underpin the “love of nature”, which is “understood to be the basis of an ethical relation to nature” (p. 304). Nonetheless, *these* activists and concerned environmentalists are not romantics (in the sense of naive people wearing green tinted glasses). They are fully aware of the unfolding deadly drama of our obscene Anthropocene era. Thus, their wonder is allied with wounds. This collocation (“wonder and wounds”) is Brissman’s most compelling contribution

to the scholarship of green-spirituality and eco-activism. It does not merely describe the inspirations and motivations, experiences and ambitions of those whose ideas and lives are discussed here. It enhances previous views of the enchantment involved in environmentalism by applying and advancing critical understanding of the affects and strategies implicated in *some* people’s relationships with the larger-than-human world.

Brissman deploys the term “dark green spirituality” to bring previous scholars into dialogue. For example, she takes “dark green” from Bron Taylor – who uses it to refer to a “deep shade of green” in which “nature” has intrinsic value but can evoke perilous fear – and “spirituality” from Roger Gottlieb – for whom it refers to “a discovery of a sense of selfhood beyond the ego”. She agrees with Gottlieb and, probably, with many participants at Schumacher or Dartmoor that “religion” labels something dogmatic and institutionalized. This particular distinction between “religion” and “spirituality” is unlikely to persuade many of those involved in debating the terms – especially because self-transcendence seems so deeply embedded in many (Protestant Christian inflected) definitions of “religion”. Nonetheless, it does situate Brissman’s work as an engagement with the practitioners who interest her – for whom knowledge requires committed activism and personal transformation.

These are just some of the scholarly foundations on which *Wild Enchantments in the Anthropocene* builds. Brissman is similarly inspired by Jane Bennett’s insistence that enchantment and disenchantment are stories that can be told differently, opening conflicting understandings of the nature (and “Nature”) of Modernity. This dynamic understanding, Brissman concludes, has contributed to her ability to answer key questions related to her fieldwork: What is the attraction of spirituality? What motivates people to turn to spirituality? Her answer is that

a central motivation seems to be that spirituality offers a framework, a language, symbols and values that make it possible to address the uncertainty and challenges lying ahead. This is not to say that spirituality makes the difficulties disappear; instead, they are set within a context, and they become part of a narrative which offers hope and models for action, and that addresses the emotional, existential and ethical dimension of living in times of crisis (p. 272).

Spirituality, here, energizes a fusion of “narrative, practice and place [which] together offer ways to cultivate wild enchantments”, encapsulated in her “catchier formulation”: “*working with wonder and wounds*” (p. 272). It is, then, important that Brissman’s research engaged with people in a specific landscape, Dartmoor, a place severely damaged in the distant past and famed for its uncanny, eerie, and fearsome moods. Dartmoor is a “wild” place but not a pristine one. It is one of the many forerunners of the damaged lands which are now caused by the ongoing assault on the larger-than-human world. It is not always clear that the *wounded* “wildness” of Dartmoor is kept in sight by Brissman or those she presents. Sometimes a wistful enchantment seems to edge out darker responses and inspirations for eco-activism – especially as people pursue their own “rewilding”, conceived here as an increased “love of nature”, rather than the degrowth re-negotiation of human relations with the larger biotic community that “rewilding” sometimes labels. However, it is understandable that inspiration and motivation require hope – which can be crushed by pervasive disaster narratives. Indeed, Brissman’s discussion of the attractions of “spirituality” offers some profound contrasts with some other interpreters’ dismissal of the seeking of modes of putatively individualized selfhood. People who have been on the frontlines of radical eco-activism are, we see, attracted to experimental and experiential “spiritualities”

as one means of building resilience and one way of shaping a kinder human kinship in the larger world.

Although there are curious omissions in the scholarship cited – works as varied as those of Stephen Sutcliffe about spirituality and those of Isabelle Stengers about ontologies and the Anthropocene – *Wild Enchantments in the Anthropocene* rewards reading, especially by emphasizing the continuous interaction of woundedness and wonder. The many acts of resistance to the deadly machine of Modernity include: complexifying understandings of enchantment and disenchantment (especially when attributed to dichotomized social processes), re-composing human relatedness within our damaged world, and finding ways to express both anger and joy in threatening times. Brissman enables us to consider these and other important themes carefully and clearly. There are unresolved issues in *Wild Enchantments in the Anthropocene*, but this is largely the result of the raising of intriguing matters in interesting and insightful ways. This is, then, a fine foundation for further discussion and engagement.

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Lunds domkapitels och domkyrkoråds historia är en unik publikation i två band på över 600 sidor. Unik då vi för första gången får en sammanhållen analys och beskrivning av dessa institutioners organisation och verksamhet från medeltiden till slutet av 1900-talet. Unikt är det även att projektet kom till stånd och kunde genomföras, vilket skedde genom ett initiativ av boktryckaren Per-Håkan Ohlsson (1916–2014) och en stor donation från Thora Ohlssons