

The cyclical qualities of plant growth also subtly inform Bowden's characterization of physiological botany debates, which she sees as recurring throughout the long nineteenth century. Featuring the works of Erasmus Darwin, Maria Jacon, Thomas Andrew Knight, and other plant experimenters, the first chapter expertly limns how early physiological botanical writings framed plant agency as a question interpreted in diverse ways. Mapping out how writers fashioned plant agency through "apparent similarities and dissimilarities to other life forms," the chapter provides solid bedrock for the ensuing literary analyses that entwine plant and human agencies (67). The subsequent chapters then trace the various reverberations of physiological botany's animating questions through a cast of keenly rendered "plant people"—plant-like humans and human-like plants—that push us to recognize the possible agencies of Victorian society's marginalized populations. These range from the rose-identified eponym of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), who embodies "the extent and limits of plantlike women's agency," to Charles and Francis Darwin's "strong man" plants, who refuse constraint to exert agency despite environmental conditions, to the wonderfully weird worlds of H.G. Wells's science fiction novels, wherein plants and their alien cousins exert more agency than their human counterparts (77, 120). Across texts and time periods, Bowden cogently argues that recognizing the animacy of plants has the power to reshape our relationships with the more-than-human world.

Ann Garascia
California State University, San Bernardino, USA

ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment (Fall 2026), pp. 856–857

Advance Access publication July 2, 2026

<https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/isag037>

© The Author(s) 2026. Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment. All rights reserved.

For commercial re-use, please contact reprints@oup.com for reprints and translation rights for reprints. All other permissions can be obtained through our RightsLink service via the Permissions link on the article page on our site—for further information please contact journals.permissions@oup.com.

***Border Biomes: Ecological Imaginaries of Mexico's Edges.* By Emily Celeste Vázquez Enríquez. Vanderbilt UP, 2026. 242 pp. Hardcover \$99.95. Paperback \$34.95.**

Border Biomes is a combative book. Building on scholarship in the fields of Indigenous studies, border and migration studies, and the environmental humanities writ large, it makes the case that borders are "by their very nature, environmental crimes" (3). The book visits upon poetry and novels by Indigenous, Native American, Mexican, Chicana, and Latinx authors to argue that, over the past two decades,

literature has assumed a key role in “bearing witness” to the environmental degradation of Mexico’s border territories, “making the damage visible, and bringing it into sharper focus” (4). In addition, the book advances the claim that an ecological approach to the study of border regimes “cannot be decoupled from the imperative to advocate for migrant and Indigenous rights” (13). The term “border biomes” bridges the distance between these two arguments by naming “territories that are both Indigenous ancestral homelands and complex ecological systems traversed by colonial histories and geopolitical boundaries” (20). Studying literary representations of border rivers, deserts, and forests, Vázquez Enríquez traces how contemporary literature has contributed to the “disruption” of the geographies of settler colonialism.

The book’s varied emphases on disruption/interruption help to define its political intervention. Where borders “[break] apart habitats” (14) and forced migration “disrupts the lives of both human and nonhuman beings” (174), *Border Biomes* attends to the worldmaking potential of literature. Vázquez Enríquez argues, for example, that Natalie Diaz’s *Postcolonial Love Poem* “disrupts settler-colonial histories of conquest and success” by tracing the reciprocal bonds between the Mojave people and the Colorado River (52), and that the movements of the tumbleweeds and other more-than-human elements in Ofelia Zepeda’s *Ocean Power: Poems from the Desert* “antagonize the colonial logic of the border” (114). Attending to multispecies migration, Irma Pineda’s *Nostalgia Doesn’t Flow Away Like Riverwater* similarly “constructs the image of a promising future that, even if imaginary, challenges contemporary expressions of the colonial order” (188). *Border Biomes* esteems these environmentally oriented works in their capacity to advocate for migrant rights, uphold Indigenous forms of knowledge, and encourage readers “to reflect on their complicity with the anthropocentric structures of colonialism” (176). Emphasizing the pedagogical function of the work of art, Vázquez Enríquez contends that “literary works offer a wealth of arguments, claims, and strategies for striving toward a world without borders” (191).

While the book’s close attention to Indigeneity and the environment contributes to a broader conversation on the politics of representation and the legacies of colonialism, the underlying assumption that “the mere presence, and existence of the border is what engenders violence” (163), or that “[t]here cannot be borders without violence” (191), tends to minimize how borders operationalize the uneven geographies of late/too late capitalism. One could argue that it is precisely *not* the mere existence of the border that engenders violence, but the existence of a worldwide system of economic and racialized inequalities, in which borders have become a preeminent mechanism to enforce the hierarchical fragmentation of labor markets and the geographical distribution of social wealth. However, choosing to focus on the colonial legacies of border regimes, *Border Biomes* purposefully attests to the

interconnections between contemporary migration patterns and Indigenous struggles, cultivating a politics of refusal that encourages us to imagine what a world without borders might look like.

Pavel Andrade 

Texas Tech University, USA

ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment (Fall 2026), pp. 857–859

Advance Access publication July 8, 2026

<https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/isag043>

© The Author(s) 2026. Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment. All rights reserved.

For commercial re-use, please contact reprints@oup.com for reprints and translation rights for reprints. All other permissions can be obtained through our RightsLink service via the Permissions link on the article page on our site—for further information please contact journals.permissions@oup.com.

***Petroforms: Oil and the Shaping of Nigerian Aesthetics.* By Helen Kapstein. West Virginia UP, 2025. 181 pp. Paper \$23.99. Ebook \$23.99.**

Focusing on contemporary Nigerian cultural productions, Helen Kapstein's *Petroforms* attends to the ways Nigerian artists experiment with, combine, and remix artistic forms in order to capture and respond to the dynamic, complex, sometimes deadly realities of Nigeria's oil industry. A key premise of Kapstein's work is that oil extraction shapes Nigerian cultural production at the level of form, not just content. Kapstein maintains that "oil's nature, the fact that it is everywhere . . . means that it constantly spills over and out of our existing forms, genres, and systems, demanding accommodation" (3). Kapstein focuses on five such forms, including the romance novel, documentary film, and drama. She groups these under the label "petroform," which, she emphasizes, "is simultaneously reactionary (a necessary response to oil's pressures, a byproduct of the commodity itself) and resistant (an attempt at containment, at generating a retort to the very thing that shapes it)" (3).

Petroforms comprises an introduction, six chapters, and an intriguing final section in which Kapstein performs her own formal experiments with the academic conclusion. The opening chapter examines a series of what Kapstein terms "sabotaging fictions" (17), popular short works that take up oil encounters and seem to break with convention by slipping into news reports, disregarding a "unity of effect," and offering narratives that are frequently labeled as "flawed, imperfect, even failed" (29) because of their excessive realism. She argues for the importance of these works as tactical maneuvers that counter what she terms the "master narrative" of petroleum extraction.

Kapstein's analyses of sculpture and film offer perhaps the most straightforward accounts of the kind of play with form that concerns