
Kylie Crane. *Myths of Wilderness in Contemporary Narratives: Environmental Postcolonialism in Australia and Canada*. New York: Palgrave, 2012. Pp. 228. US\$90.00.

Kylie Crane's slim monograph, based on her dissertation at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany, focuses on approaches to wilderness in six contemporary Australian and Canadian books, ranging across realist and speculative fiction, memoir, travel and nature writing, and "geografiction"—Aritha van Herk's term for her own genre-crossing experimental feminist writing. Although the subtitle announces its "environmental postcolonialism," Crane's book more specifically examines "post-settler" narratives of wilderness and place (7). In this study, "post-settler," a term left undefined, describes narratives and perspectives based on settler-colony mythologies. Crane adopts a settler perspective, she argues, in order to distinguish contemporary Canadian and Australian wilderness writing from the dominant United States version of wilderness and to examine how contemporary settler wilderness writing engages with the legacy of settler colonialism for aboriginal people. Mythologies of wilderness as pristine land have played a role in erasing and over-writing historical traces in the physical environment of long-standing aboriginal inhabitation. Crane's primary methodological approach is a combination of thematic criticism and narratology, with most of the textual analysis focused on constructions of narrating persona, wilderness themes, and narratives of encounter with place and people.

Margaret Atwood's *Survival*, her now-classic thematic guide to Canadian literature, looms large in Crane's study, serving as the basis for positing a common Australian and Canadian distinctiveness from the US and from European notions of nature. It is the "deathly trope of nature as an active agent" that "captures imaginations," Crane argues, and all six of the texts she discusses share the trope of survival in the wilderness (6). Published within just over a decade of one another, from van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere* (1990) to Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), the six texts Crane selects exemplify the variety of genres, terrains, and concerns that now comprise the wilderness oeuvre. Atwood's dystopian novel is the most unconventional inclusion—and Crane strives to make the case for reading it as "post-wilderness" writing on account of its emphasis on survival, human absence, and contrast to civilized space (162)—since the others venture into the isolated island, desert, mountain, and arctic landscapes associated with wilderness survival since the beginning of colonial-era European explora-

tion. Crane juxtaposes three fictional texts—*Oryx and Crake*, Tim Winton's *Dirt Music* (2001), and Julia Leigh's *The Hunter* (1999)—with three non-fictional texts that foreground family history and personal memory. *Places Far From Ellesmere* and Kim Mahood's *Craft for a Dry Lake* (2000) present women's adventures, while Mark Hume's *River of the Angry Moon* (1998) addresses threats to the ecology of British Columbia's Bella Coola river.

Crane sorts these texts, regardless of genre, into a taxonomy of four types of wilderness writing, which align with prototypical US wilderness texts. These are "into the wilderness," "instrumentalizing the wilderness," "settling-the-wilderness," and "post-natural wilderness." Crane uses US frontier mythology and the US *Wilderness Act* of 1964 to define wilderness as concept, a framework that regrettably obscures the distinct histories and legislation that characterize the Australian and Canadian situations. Crane's conclusion is that settler-indigenous relations still manifest primarily through the absence of indigenous people. One example is Leigh's parallel of the extinction of the Tasmanian tiger and Aborigine in *The Hunter*. Another is Mahood's quest to reconcile herself and her settler family to the land in her Outback journey to spread her father's ashes. The trope of apology in *Dirt Music*, with its enigmatic scraps of paper with the word "SORRY," modifies but retains this theme of absence.

Crane's survey of contemporary settler wilderness writing is useful, but the taxonomic and narratological method presents limitations. The relationship between wilderness and settler approaches to indigeneity is under-discussed and under-theorized; it would have benefited from the inclusion of postcolonial frameworks such as Renato Rosaldo's "imperialist nostalgia" or Terry Goldie's notion of "indigenization." Crane's selection of texts and their discussion ironically ends up repeating the over-writing of aboriginal people by settler perspectives on wilderness because it prioritizes land, landscape, and animal over indigenous and multicultural presence, perspectives, and practices. On a final note, Crane's study is unique in emphasizing paratexts (especially cover images and blurbs). These might have been even more illuminating had they been recognized as commercial elements and thus placed within a discussion of the marketing and distribution of contemporary wilderness writing. Graham Huggan has proposed that contemporary postcolonial literature is often marketed as a form of "postcolonial exotic." Does a wilderness exotic figure in the marketing of settler and post-settler wilderness writing?

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Works Cited

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