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Laura Wright. *Wilderness into Civilized Shapes: Reading the Postcolonial Environment*. Athens, GA: U of Georgia Press, 2010. 220 pp. \$24.95 USD.

In *Wilderness into Civilized Shapes: Reading the Postcolonial Environment*, Laura Wright examines issues of postcolonial landscapes and environments represented in works of fiction. In her introduction, she notes the insufficiency of work linking the fields of ecocriticism and postcolonial studies. For example, scholars such as Lawrence Buell, Cheryll Glotfelty, and Harold Fromm often treat environmentalism as a response solely to industrialization and social constructions rather than colonization. Asking why environmentalism and postcolonialism seldom intersect, Rob Nixon argues that most postcolonial critics are concerned with colonized subjects rather than the environment, whereas environmentalists emphasize an ethics of place that is often hostile towards displaced peoples (5). A binary opposition between nature and culture (or humanity) is central to environmental studies, and a similarly binary opposition of one and the Other justifies Western colonization. According to Wright—along with William Slaymaker, Graham Huggan, and Barbara Gowdy—the ecocritical paradigm remains problematic because ecocriticism is predominantly a “white” and Western literary approach not fully engaged with multicultural concerns (Wright 12–13). Wright selects non-Western fiction not just to work against Nixon’s assertion but also to examine the complicity of environmental degradation and colonization; as she writes, “these texts [that I consider] engage with both the productive possibilities for and the essentializing dangers of suggesting that Western and non-Western environmental knowledge systems differ” (14). Her introduction maps out current debates about environmentalism and postcolonialism. Her analyses of non-Western narratives legitimately challenge the traditional dichotomy of nature and culture. Although she tries to flesh out the scope of postcolonial ecocriticism, her introduction would be more convincing if she more clearly defined the field in her own terms. As Huggan and Helen Tiffin point out, postcolonialism and ecocriticism are both notoriously difficult to define (2). How then can we easily combine such fundamentally contradictory disciplines into one? Wright does not fully address this contradiction in her introduction, and I hope she returns to it in the future.

Chapter one discusses invented traditions and the destruction of nature in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Petals of Blood* and Zakes Mda’s *Heart of Redness*. Wright argues that the characters’ search for a hybridized space as a solution to their Kenyan or South African national identity is thwarted by the devastating

effects of colonization and capitalist developments. The absence of hybrid plants suggests the impossibility of cultural hybridization and a return to an authentic national culture.

Chapter two discusses vegetarianism, extinction, and the place of animals in Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*, Joy Williams' *The Quick & the Dead*, and J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*. This chapter focuses on animal rights issues as well as the responsibility for the Other manifested in these cross-cultural and postcolonial narratives.

Chapter three studies the significance of water in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Aradhana Seth's film *Dam/Age*, which documents Roy's battle against a dam project in India. Wright offers an excellent analysis of Roy's effort to voice the concerns of the oppressed through her activism in both literary and performative production and by restaging her position from the private to the public. Wright's reading of the two narratives points to an inseparable link between fiction and nonfiction that makes this highly original chapter a pleasure to read.

Chapter four explores postcolonial ecofeminism. The author examines prophecy, motherhood, and the land in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, Keri Hulme's *the bone people*, and Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*. Wright argues that the maternal absence in these works occurs because colonized female subjects do not share the "celebrations' of a uniquely (and possibly essentializing) female interiority" (129) that Western women embrace, according to ecofeminist traditions.

In her conclusion, Wright considers the future of the discourse of postcolonial ecocriticism. She correctly points out both the lack of studies on environmental issues in postcolonial texts and the urgent need to renew theories of ecocriticism in the face of globalization. She also cautions that postcolonial ecocriticism "need[s] to maintain rigorous and sustained literary and social critique while simultaneously working to avoid speaking for the environmental needs of non-Western peoples and landscapes" (175). Although Wright's ambivalence about her position as a white Western scholar is evident in her conclusion and the absence of representative texts from the Caribbean is a major gap, her analyses of texts from New Zealand, South Africa, Kenya, India, Nigeria, and North America are worth applauding.

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#### Work Cited

Huggan, Graham and Helen Tiffin. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. NY: Routledge, 2010. Print.