

Ralph Crane and Lisa Fletcher (2017) *Island genres, genre islands: Conceptualisation and representation in popular fiction*, London and New York, Rowman and Littlefield International. 202pp, ISBN: 978-1-78348-205-4. US\$120.

As readers of *Island Studies Journal* will know only too well, today island studies is very much an active and dynamically growing field of research. There cannot be many other fields of study that have matched the growth of island studies over the past couple of decades. From the recent relational and archipelagic turns championed by Stratford, Hayward, DeLoughrey, and myself, to the oceanic engagements of Steinberg and Peters, to the breadth of contributions to *ISJ* under Baldacchino and now Grydehoj, island studies are moving on apace. Yet, even as a diverse range of critical tools are emerging, the relationship between islands and popular fiction has so far not been subjected to any detailed or systematic analysis. This was a notable gap in the field and something in need of being addressed. I am pleased to say that the authors of *Island genres, genre islands* are more than up to the task.

Published in Rowman & Littlefield's innovative 'Rethinking the Island' series (edited by Stratford, Baldacchino, and McMahon, the book's key argument is that island studies cannot be separated from a concern with the "textual life of islands," and that there is a need to further expand our understanding of this textual life beyond the confines of high culture (Agatha Christie as well as Shakespeare, Ian Fleming as well as Édouard Glissant). Crane and Fletcher define popular fiction as a "commercial and cultural division of the larger field of literature, the outer boundaries of which are typically plotted in relation to high literature, while the internal divisions are made along the lines of genre." Although rarely taken up in any systematic way in island studies, a central premise of *Island genres, genre islands* is that genres of popular fiction are important performative structures that profoundly shape how we think about and with islands.

The argument more generally, then, is that geography and literature shape each other, but the specific contention is that "thinking about islands can help us better understand popular genres and reading genre novels can help us rethink islands." As the authors say:

The image of an island on the cover of any popular genre novel draws on prevailing and powerful associations between place and story, and signals the type of narrative and concomitant emotional experience that awaits the reader. The ritual representations of islands in the marketing and telling of genre stories have undeniable appeal to writers, publishers, and readers alike. [...] If one of the goals of the Rethinking the Island series in which this book appears is to interrogate how prevailing ideas about 'islandness' are produced and circulated, then the islands depicted in genre fiction merit very close attention.

Structurally, *Island Genres, Genre Islands* considers four key popular genres—crime fiction, thrillers, popular romance fiction, and fantasy fiction—from the perspective of island (literary) studies. Organised in these four parts, the highly readable text, made up of 12 short chapters of around 10 pages each, plus an epilogue, will be a seminal contribution to the field of island studies. Each part has an opening chapter that foregrounds how islands function in a particular genre, followed by two chapters offering detailed analysis of books from within that genre of popular fiction.

Part I, 'Island Crime, Crime Islands', examines how in crime fiction the island tends to function as isolated and bounded, sites for murder and investigation (such as Agatha Christie and G.W. Kent). Part II, 'Island Thrillers, Thriller Islands', explores the question of real and imagined island geographies (Ian Fleming's James Bond and Clive Cussler's Dirk Pitt Adventures). Part III, 'Island Romance, Romance Islands', examines the positive romance of

islands, and Part IV, 'Island Fantasy, Fantasy Islands', interestingly unpacks the literary cartography of islands where it is revealed that no island is isolated and entire to itself, but is rather associated with relational, archipelagic, and oceanic forces (in, for example, Ursula K. Le Guin's fascinating archipelago fantasy *Earthsea*).

Perhaps it is inevitable that I was naturally drawn to this last part, because the authors saliently note that whilst island geographers (and they include me in this) have only recently begun to unpack the relational and archipelagic nature of island life, "fantasy fiction has been thinking with the archipelago for decades." This really got me thinking, and after reading *Island genres, genre islands* I wholeheartedly agree. Like other geographers keen to chart new island geographies, I will surely return again to these latter parts of the book. Indeed, as I was reflecting, I was reminded of another seminal influence upon relational thinking in island studies, DeLoughrey's influential *Routes and roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific island literatures*. Although DeLoughrey's book explores diasporic and postcolonial island geographies, it could not have been written without a really serious engagement with island poets like Walcott, Brathwaite, and Glissant, and shows how these offer us extremely sophisticated understandings of island life. But whereas DeLoughrey and many others, including myself, have tended to engage these kinds of island literatures, *Island genres, genre islands* makes the systematically convincing case for a much more serious engagement with popular fiction. After reading it, I feel the need to clear some extra space on my bookshelf for popular genres of islands as well.

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