

“I said it’s a promise from the earth’s core” – The Ethics of Car[ing] for Country in Aboriginal Fiction

Dorothee Klein

Aboriginal Spirituality is said to have as its core the interrelationship between all elements of the universe – animate and inanimate. These rhizomatic relations include humans, ancestral beings, and the natural environment and it entails a moral responsibility to nurture life. Country – or the Earth, as a proper noun – constitutes the matrix for all relationships in this non-human-centred, living system and this interdependency calls for an ethic of caring for the land. Destroying this system of reciprocal relationships ultimately means destroying oneself.

In my paper, I will illustrate how this holistic view is reflected in and structures literary works by Aboriginal authors, not only in terms of content but also form. After briefly addressing the question of how the non-indigenous critic can engage with the topic of Aboriginal Spirituality in a non-appropriating and non-essentialising way, I will analyse Bruce Pascoe’s novel *Earth* (2001) as my key example. The text is written entirely in dialogue and the interlocutors include ancestral spirits and Earth itself. The formal setup therefore mirrors the importance of relations in Aboriginal Spirituality and the presence of non-human agents as equal participants. Understanding is here presented as premised on a form of dialogue that respects Aboriginal worldviews and emphasises the role of the Earth as the source of all life. This interdependency in turn entails an ethic of caring for Country and I argue that this requires that we not only speak about how to save the environment but that we also listen – to the voices of the living, the dead, and Earth itself.

Bio

Dorothee Klein is a research assistant in the English Department at the University of Stuttgart (Germany). Currently she is working on a PhD thesis on spirituality in contemporary Aboriginal literatures. She studied English, history and Catholic theology at the University of Freiburg and the University of Melbourne, graduating with a thesis on the possible and the impossible in experimental Aboriginal fiction. Her research interests include Australian Indigenous literatures, postcolonial theory, spirituality and narratology. Recently, she has published an article on Doris Pilkington’s *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* in *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*.