

Christina Stead and the erasure of antipodean nature

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One of the least examined aspects of Stead's life and work is her attitude towards, and fictional treatment of, antipodean nature. The daughter of a precursor of the ecological movement in Australia, David Stead, Christina, from an early age, was encouraged to share her father's outdoor pursuits, and in later life claimed she had been inculcated with the habits of a naturalist. Stead as informant, however, was notoriously unreliable, and her treatment of antipodean nature far more complex than she acknowledged. This paper examines its diverse appearance in her novels, tracing initial approaches used in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* to their imaginative development in *For Love Alone*. In the former, depictions oscillate between apparently objective accounts and those deeply colored by the psychological and emotional states of individual protagonists. "The eye altering," as William Blake commented, "alters all." In addition, nature is required to bear a considerable symbolic and narrative burden. Examining how these diverse approaches are focused through a single protagonist in *For Love Alone* is the subject of the second part of the paper, and how it leads to the virtual erasure of objectively depicted settings. Finally, the putative relationship of these depictions to Stead's Marxist orientation is discussed, together with the extent to which her emphasis on subjective perception could arguably contribute to an objective analysis of existing social conditions and afford potential grounds for their long-overdue amelioration.

Bio

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