

Wild Spectacle: Seeking Wonders in a World beyond Humans

Janisse Ray

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Janisse Ray's memoir in essays, *Wild Spectacle*, centers the role of the wilderness in her life.

Throughout the years, Ray has turned to nature in the pursuit of self-discovery, clarity, and adventure. These essays focus on her experiences and reflections in natural spaces in several countries, showing what humans can learn from the wild. In "Snapshots of a Dark Angel," set in the American Southwest, Ray shares the story of a group of young adults who took a picture with a lizard and then threw it into a scrubby bush. There is a sense of grief in the essay, even before it becomes apparent that the lizard was killed by the act. Afterwards, she posits that people travel to the wilderness to "go back in time, back to the earth."

Linguistic sketches of flora and fauna abound. The book captures Ray's joy in nature through its enthusiastic focus on the features particular to the areas she's chronicling, from Indian paintbrush and silvery lupine in a Montana wilderness, to the black volcanic rock of Sitka, Alaska. The book makes each location tangible through such details.

By centering her personal experiences in the wilderness, Ray raises general questions about humanity's relationship with nature and itself. In an evocative, vibrant style, she also retreats before answering these questions fully. Still, the importance of preserving and caring for nature is infused in every sentence. She warns about the dangers of some approaches to nature, like ecotourism, noting the increasing damage that human travelling has done to natural spaces; she asserts that people forget that it is "not Nature's job to entertain." And her work ends with a lingering question mark—a strong starting point for forging a deeper connection to the wilderness.

Wild Spectacle is an enchanting essay collection about the wonders and lessons that nature provides.

CAROLINA CIUCCI (November / December 2021)

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