

Laura J. Getty (2021). *Islands and captivity in popular culture: A critical study of film, television and literature*. Jefferson NC: McFarland. ISBN: 978-1-4766-8024-8 (pbk), US\$55. 978-1-4766-4286-4 (e-book).

Each year, I begin my Island Studies introductory graduate course with John Donne's famous meditation "No man is an island" and Paul Simon's song "I am a rock". The idea is to introduce through these pop culture examples the many binaries that exist in Island Studies: in this case, boundedness and connectedness. Students then seek out examples of islands from their own spheres of knowledge and experience. Examples have included *Gilligan's island*, *Isle of Dogs*, *The Scorpio races*, Hong Kong's Kowloon Walled City, "Margaritaville", ice-fishing, and knitting. Over the semester, their presentations capture beautifully the roles islands play in the creative imagination and just how ubiquitous the island metaphor is in our society.

Similarly, we explore the role of islands in literature, such as castaways or Robinsonades; paradise, romance, utopias; prisons, horror, dystopias; journeys, ex(is)les, coming home; liminality, places out of time, magic. Underpinning many of these themes is that of transformation, where the island has affected the individual to the extent that he or she emerges changed: often, though not always, for the better.

Laura J. Getty's book *Islands and captivity in popular culture: A critical study of film, television and literature* focuses on the theme of captivity, either as castaway or prisoner (physical and/or psychological) through two lenses: liminality and Internal/External Locus of Control theory. Islands are classic liminal spaces: they are limens or thresholds, on the edge between one thing and another, such as the interstice of land/water/air/the cosmos; the thin place between this world and the next. Islands are thus ideal sites of transformation. Often, this transformation involves going from thinking that nothing is ever one's fault – an external Locus of Control – to believing in one's ability to change things, taking charge of one's destiny – an internal Locus of Control. It is generally believed that people are healthier, physically and psychologically, if they have some semblance of control over their lives.

Laura Getty is Professor of English at the University of North Georgia, USA. She provides dozens of examples of books, films, and television shows that showcase the island as a setting for transformation. With research interests that span medieval literature, mythology, and cultural studies, she is well-placed to write about islands in literature, both historic and present-day. Chapter One presents fictional islands "as both literal and metaphorical prisons" (p.9), places where rescue and/or transformation may or may not happen depending on the characters' adopting Internal or External Locus of Control. Real and metaphoric islands run the gamut from Purgatory in Dante's *Inferno* to Azkaban in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*. The islands provide a crucial setting – i.e. "if the characters were not trapped in such a potentially fruitful environment, the changes may not – most like would not – take place" (p. 55) – but they lack agency. Getty describes these islands as "heterotopias of deviation and crisis [and] mirrors that reflect society and disparate locations that test the castaways ... nearly everyone could benefit from the island experience" (p. 55).

Chapter Two focuses on Kousun Takami's novel *Battle royale* (1999) and film (2001) which have been compared to *The hunger games* series (2008-2010). As Getty admits at the outset: "it will take a bit longer to reach this island" (p. 59), as she analyses the factors that result in children killing other children in the book and movie. She finally returns to the island, positing that it is a mirror of society that "is meant to represent absolute control of the state" (p. 71) and "a place of multiple liminal symbols" (p. 72). Again, the island is backdrop.

In Chapter Three, we travel to real and metaphoric islands – such as a hotel in the middle of an Iranian desert and a chalet in the mountains – serving as prisons in Agatha Christie’s novel *And then there were none* (1939) and its many spin-offs. Island isolation “lends itself to the feeling of being on the margins, of civilization” (p. 99) becoming a substitute for “the locked room (p. 97) to which guests are sent to be punished, or a “waiting room” (p. 99) where they are sent to be killed. They arrive on ““islands of imagined security’ only to find themselves on an island that is deadly” (p. 119).

Chapter Four, my favourite, is about TV series *Lost* (2004-2010). Here, the island plays a starring role through various plots and themes that run through the six seasons. Starting as a simple castaway narrative, and morphing into fantasy that pushes the belief systems of the most ardent of supporters, *Lost* follows the survivors of Oceanic flight 815 as they overcome trials, including the elusive “Others” and a “smoke monster” who terrorizes them. The 40-page chapter provides thorough analysis while exploring themes such as predestination versus free will. Is it the island that is evil, or the island’s ‘protector’ and his rival twin brother? Or are they one and the same? Or does it come down to the island being a key node in a global network of “pockets of electromagnetism” (p. 175): if the island’s light (‘goodness’) goes out, it would mean “the death of everyone in the world” (p. 175), making the island space more than just a site for transformation.

In Chapter Five, we go to *The island of Dr. Moreau* by H.G. Wells (1896). The book and subsequent movies focus on madness, “boundary crossing and occupation of liminal space” (p. 178). Here the island is the stereotypical laboratory for the mad scientist to create untold horrors away from the public eye. Getty compares it to *Jurassic Park* where scientific experiments go awry, wreaking planetary havoc.

The last chapter is given the place of honor – or “dishonor” (p. 206) – as *Lord of the flies* is perhaps the most studied novel in high-school English classes on the planet. In this dystopian novel, the island is a microcosm, where castaway boarding school boys plumb their hearts of darkness. As Getty notes, “The island in *Lord of the flies* has almost no redemptive purpose; in fact, redemption is arguably the opposite of what happens in the novel” (p. 207). She likens the novel to a “fun-house mirror that distorts reality” (p. 225). Here is one instance where I am glad Getty does not give the island agency; in it the island gets a bad rap.

The book draws valuable lessons about transformation and Locus of Control theory; it is more about the value of studying popular or public culture than it is about the role of the island in shaping characters’ life choices. The island serves as a tool; Getty “does not require an island to have productive results, although the results may be less focused when used with a space outside of and dissimilar to an island’s natural and metaphorical boundaries” (p. 226). The book does a superb job of analyzing classics from the island literature and pop culture canons; but, as an Island Studies scholar, I see a missed opportunity in engaging more with the nuanced representations of islands from the island studies canon.

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