



**John Lane, *Coyote Settles the South*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016. 196 pp. Hardback 29.95.**

For Westerners, the coyote has long been derided and hunted as a pest, and nature writing has often come to the coyote's defense. Mary Austin was favorably disposed to the crafty canine, and Terry Tempest Williams mourned the slaughter of coyotes and linked the creature to the essence of wildness. John Lane's latest work follows the coyote into new geographic and intellectual territories, working to understand and accept the newcomer as part of an ecology constantly in flux. While we may not come to entirely know the animal – the heart of its wildness – through Lane's account, what is gained is something more significant, as Lane reminds us of the necessity of reconsidering what constitutes wild amidst a changing natural world.

Lane's voice is best, paradoxically, when it is most distant from its subject, when trailing the coyote or trying to place its nightly chorus gesture at the uncanny of the animal's presence. Despite the animal's centrality to the book, Lane manages to preserve its mystique as he comes to document the species' incursion into the southeastern United States and the cultural, ecological, and social ramifications of that move. Starting in his own backyard, Lane tracks the species through suburbs and urban peripheries, to the rural territories formerly populated by the red wolf, and to the coast, where the adaptable canine has come to intermingle with the remnants of vanishing species in North Carolina. These stories reveal the fragile sense of place in region, especially as we express it through ecological and biological labels. In this contentious territory, the coyote ranges through boundaries actual and imagined, and its presence helps us question our own sense of inhabitation. The coyote in this sense is the go-between, a visitor in all worlds, and Lane follows close behind.

More than his predecessors, Lane balances an insight into contemporary cultural connotations the animal lives under with his fascination with the coyote's adaptability and will to survive. He speaks out against extermination and urges coexistence, but is not blind to the needs of those already a part of the southeastern ecology, whether farmer, hunter, turtle, or wolf. His goal seems not to validate the canine unilaterally, but to argue for its place in the ecological and social context of the Southeast. He goes about this work honestly, such that we might join him in scoffing, in awe, and in fear. Lane manages such a feat despite some slow moments and enough talk of scat to challenge all but the most avid naturalist's attention – all done self-consciously. Part of the enjoyment of reading Lane's work is the privilege of witnessing a person genuinely in love with place, so that even if readers may roll their eyes at what seems eccentric, we can't help but be pulled along with him in his curiosity and humility. Through this process, Lane's story takes on the characteristics of its subject – wide ranging, patient, observant, playful at times, and always keenly aware of its surroundings.

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