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Louise M. Pryke’s *Wind: Nature and Culture* is the latest entry in Reaktion Books’ Earth Series, a collection of nearly thirty titles that each offer a broad, expert overview of the cultural and natural history of a particular subject, including everything from fire to glaciers to the moon. The task each of these books sets before its author must be a daunting one: to cover this subject in as much depth and breadth as possible while writing the kind of engaging prose that will draw a casual reader. Pryke certainly rises to the latter challenge with her *Wind* entry.

Half of the fun of a book like this is trying to see if you can come up with any examples of wind that the author left out. It’s an especially challenging game with this book because, although Pryke has surely not been able to pack every example of the historical and scientific impact of wind into one book, she has done her best. The other half of the fun is the number of I-didn’t-know-that moments the reader experiences, thanks to chapters packed with fascinating details and anecdotes. Such brief treatments of so many subjects might frustrate an expert on any one of these topics who wishes for more depth, but such an expert does not seem to be the book’s intended audience. What *Wind: Nature and Culture* (and likely other books in this series) lacks in depth it more than makes up for in breadth of coverage.

Readers looking for a wide range of ways of thinking about the wind will certainly find that here. Spending time with this book reminded me a bit of curling up with an encyclopedia as a child—an experience of serendipitous discovery experienced too rarely these days. Occasionally Pryke herself seems to get carried away with her own pleasures of discovery, and she lingers overlong on some areas while breezing past others (an inexplicably extended section on the film *Sharknado* (2013) is the most surprising example). But it’s…
hard to find too much fault with such an idiosyn‐
cratic approach, since this is also part of the pleas‐
ure of reading the book.

The chapters where *Wind: Nature and Culture* most shines are those on literature and mythology. This is not surprising, given Pryke’s expertise in ancient history and literature. Following a first chapter that features the staggeringly broad title “Wind: Natural History,” chapters 2 and 3 cover the role of wind in ancient literature and in myth‐
ology, folklore, and religion, respectively. These ac‐
counts range from the “array of savage winds” (p. 48) in a Babylonian creation story to the presence
of multiple wind deities in cosmologies across the
globe. Though I was glad for such wide repres‐
entation, I occasionally wondered about the origins of
some of these accounts; most of the secondary
sources that Pryke relies on for tales of North
American Indigenous wind legends, for example,
come from settler interlocutors.

From mythology and religion, Pryke turns her
attention in the next two chapters to the role of
wind in more concrete human affairs, including
conflict and trade. Distinctions between chapters
occasionally seem a bit arbitrary; chapter 4, “Warr‐
ing Winds,” covers both the role of wind in war‐
fare and the destructive force of storms, a categor‐
ation that seems to give wind a lot of metaphor‐
ical agency in staging war against humans. These
thematic distinctions also occasionally result in re‐
petition; discussions of wind farms, for example,
occur both in chapter 5, “Trade and Technology,”
and the final chapter. Chapter 6 turns to wind’s
presence in more recent art and literature before
the book closes with a chapter on the role of wind
in ecosystems and its variability—as well as its po‐
tential as a renewable source of energy—in the
face of climate change.

The book is peppered with full-color images.
These are an especially marvelous addition when
Pryke includes analysis of the images as part of
her narrative, as in the description of Mayan jade
“wind jewels” or the ways that visual artists have
attempted to depict wind across cultures. More of‐
ten, though, these images are illustrations largely
unconnected to the text, which felt like a missed
opportunity.

I struggle to understand the intended audi‐
ence for this book series. *Wind*’s unifying argu‐
ment seems to be that wind “plays a complex yet
critical environmental role” (p. 9), as well as an
ever-present part in human culture, a true if
somewhat bland assertion. Despite my uncer‐
tainty about the book’s objectives, I found it to be
an engaging reading experience, one that had me
eager to learn more about wind’s role in history.
As Pryke asserts at the book’s close, wind is “a
boundless topic with an almost infinite reach
through time and space,” and its cultural history
“is a continually evolving narrative as essential as
it is invisible” (p. 205). Perhaps it is time for the
birth of a wind studies field in the environmental
humanities? I’ll bring the anemometer.
If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at https://networks.h-net.org/h-environment


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