Coll Thrush
Wrecked: Unsettling Histories from the Graveyard of the Pacific
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In *Wrecked: Unsettling Histories from the Graveyard of the Pacific*, Coll Thrush brings together cultural, environmental and maritime history in an original way to offer a decolonised reading of colonialism along the Pacific Northwest coast. The author examines some of the most significant shipwrecks to have occurred along the coasts of Oregon, Washington and British Columbia from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. Drawing on what he terms critical wreckography – his own term for the interdisciplinary study of shipwrecks as a means of investigating the past –Thrush argues that 'accounts of wrecking often challenge dominant stories of colonial success' (p. 19). Shipwrecks, frequently reported in the local press, unsettled colonial society because they exposed the fragility of the imperial project, which was grounded in the rhetoric of dominion over nature and the presumed disappearance of Indigenous peoples. Many of the vessels charged with bringing civilisation and progress on the coast were destroyed by violent storms, and survivors were often rescued by Indigenous communities. Beyond its interdisciplinary scope, Thrush's work stands out for decolonising these histories and giving voice to the Makah, Nuu-chah-nulth and Quileute peoples, who are so often absent from official reports yet played a crucial role in rescue operations.

Chapter 1 examines colonial shipwrecks in the first half of the nineteenth century. Rather than arriving in a new world, shipwrecked settlers found themselves in a context already structured by Indigenous protocols and trade networks. Thrush observes that, although these individuals came from the imperial world, they rarely controlled events. Instead, they became subject to the principle 'everything that comes ashore is mine', by which coastal communities exercised their sovereignty (p. 37). An illustrative case is that of the *Sviantoi Nikolai*, a Russian vessel wrecked in 1808 on Washington Coast, whose crew was absorbed into the Quileute trade network and some of them never came back to Russia.

Chapter 2 discusses how some early colonial shipwreck narratives were used to justify later violence against Indigenous peoples. Books and newspapers helped to fuel fear in colonial society. An example is the story of John Jewitt, one of only two survivors of the massacre of the *Boston*'s crew in 1803, ordered by Chief Maquinna, who held Jewitt captive for two years. Jewitt's memoirs and other works contributed to a reversal of the narrative in which settlers appeared as victims and Indigenous peoples as enemies to be punished with force.

Chapters 3 and 4 analyse how, while highlighting the fragility of empire, shipwrecks paradoxically helped to strengthen colonial society. As Thrush

reminds us, place-naming played a crucial role, and dedicating places to shipwreck victims, remembered as pioneers of civilisation, symbolically asserted colonial presence. On a material level, salvaged timber and other materials from wrecks fuelled construction and infrastructure projects, while the appropriation of wreckage became a common practice among settlers, though motivated by different logics than those of Indigenous communities.

Chapter 5 focuses on environmental risks of the Pacific Graveyard in the contemporary world. While fatalities are now far fewer, the Northwest coast remains hazardous to the environment. In this sense, Thrush interprets the shipwreck as a metaphor for the Anthropocene. The capitalism system fuelled by oil and dependent on maritime navigation causes catastrophic effects on biodiversity. At times, however, environmental disasters, such as the wreck of the oil tanker *Nestucca* in 1988, have fostered environmental awareness and prompted the establishment of rescue networks. Nevertheless, shipwrecks continue, often quickly forgotten, along with tensions with Indigenous communities, who criticise authorities for inadequate responses and for underestimating the consequences. These tensions stem partly from a failure to recognise that Indigenous connections to the sea are not only material but also cultural, and that wrecks impact both marine ecosystems and the coastal communities that depend on them.

Chapter 6 explores the origins of wrecklore, i.e. shipwreck and ghost ship stories on the Northwest coast. Thrush focuses on the case of the *Santo Cristo de Burgos*, a Spanish galleon whose disappearance in 1693 on the Manila–Acapulco route inspired decades of storytelling. Here, unlike in the other chapters, he begins with a contemporary episode – the discovery of fragments of the galleon in Oregon in 2022 – to show that many of the stories about the *Santo Cristo de Burgos* have their roots in the historical traditions of the Clatsop, Nehalem-Tillamook and other Indigenous communities, which recall a shipwreck near the mouth of the Nehalem River. Indeed, the earliest reconstructions of the event, written in the late nineteenth century, relied exclusively on Indigenous testimonies passed down for generations.

To conclude, *Wrecked* is an innovative contribution to the historiography of Northwest colonialism, offering a perspective in which shipwrecks become a privileged lens through which to read the contradictions, vulnerabilities and long-term legacies of imperial expansion. The interdisciplinary approach, attentive both to the materiality of wreckage and to the narratives surrounding it, restores to shipwrecks their critical potential to challenge triumphalist accounts of the colonial past. Of particular note is the attention given to environment. The Northwest coast emerges not only as a site of conflict between settlers and Indigenous peoples, but also as a fragile ecosystem exposed to the risks of human activity. In this regard, the analogy between shipwreck and the Anthropocene proves highly effective, revealing how the same economic, technological and political forces that drove colonialism continue today to threaten

biodiversity and generate new forms of inequality and conflict. Yet, while Thrush succeeds in amplifying Indigenous voices, the book seems to overlook a significant point: on many of the vessels lost in the *Pacific Graveyard* from the mid-1850 there were also Indigenous men and women, not just European settlers. Examples are Nuu-chah-nulth hunters who constituted the main labour force in the pelagic sealing fleet in Victoria, in British Columbia, during the nineteenth century. The wreck of several schooners in those years had profound consequences for some Nuu-chah-nulth Nations – events whose social, economic and cultural effects remain still underexplored.

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