
Crossing (Body-)Borders in Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*

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Abstract

The physical body defines our notion of self, and disruptions to our corporeal body trouble our understandings of self, as Julia Kristeva has theorized through her notion of the abject. As a result, nonconsensual transgressions to physical body boundaries, especially sexual transgressions, trouble our personhoods and sense of identity. *The Round House* (2012), by Louise Erdrich, features several instances of distressing nonconsensual crossings of bodily borders, including: scarring as evidence of sexual assault and bodily trauma; the gunshot wounds that kill antagonist Linden Lark; and most significantly the rapes of Geraldine Coutts and Mayla Wolfskin. These body-border crossings are not the only relevant border crossings in the narrative. Complications of jurisdiction and injustice based on land borders serve as a contemporary reminder that Native land border crossings continue to be a major source of contention. Andrea Smith, in *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (2015), links the colonial conquest of Native lands to the rape and mutilation of the Native body. Smith argues that Native women's bodies, and by extension Native lands, have become inherently violable in the colonial imagination. Erdrich's pairing of violent body-border crossings with Native land border crossings calls direct attention to issues of land/body border crossings in ways that her previous works had never accomplished. Furthermore, I argue that rapist Linden Lark's murder via gun shot is a violent body-border crossing which signifies a relevant turning of colonial violence back on the colonial body. However, even though this reciprocal violence seems to be the answer to Joe Coutts's desire for revenge, Joe finds that this fails to satiate his need for justice. The lack of closure and feelings of dissatisfaction at the end of the novel indicates the continuing need for social, environmental, and legal justice on Native lands and Native women.

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