**‘Craceland’:[[1]](#endnote-1) An Introduction**

**Katy Shaw and Kate Aughterson**

Jim Crace is one of the most critically acclaimed British novelists writing today. Although he is sometimes thought of as a ‘cult’ figure, his oeuvre has an international reputation. Through an intense and visionary focus on specific times and contexts, the recurring themes of his novels are technologically-induced change, the consequences of social reorganization, new forms of governance and the evolution of faith. In his fictions, the force of these concerns are made manifest through characters who play out on the page what Crace calls ‘the verities of the human condition’ (Crace in Smiley 1989) in a series of increasingly complicated engagements with their society.

Crace was born in Hertfordshire, but grew up in London. As an undergraduate in Birmingham, England, Crace began early forays into professional writing, editing and authoring features for local Aston University newspaper the Birmingham Sun. Graduating with a BA (Hons) in English Literature in 1968, he joined the Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) programme, an international development charity that places volunteers in developing countries to live and work alongside populations in need. Crace was initially sent to Sudan but went on to travel extensively across Africa, before settling in Botswana to teach English. This experience in African schools meant that when Crace returned to Britain two years later, he was able to find employment with the BBC as a writer of educational programming.

Crace continued to write in his spare time and eventually moved to a new role as a freelance journalist in 1976. Despite writing for a range of international publications, Crace gradually became disillusioned with the increasing political and economic editorial pressures of journalism. He recalls that writing fiction became ‘a lot more rewarding and stimulating than I expected. It was a revelation, actually, and an unforeseen joy. My journalism had been an exercise in assembly and control. Fiction, though, required a looser and more thrilling grip’ (Crace 2017, 3). This realisation also coincided with news that his short story, ‘Annie, California Plate’, had been selected for publication in *The New Review* (1974). Crace’s first published fiction was republished by several other literary magazines, and won broad critical praise. It also captured the attention of some major literary agents and publishers, leading to a contract offer for his debut novel, *Continent* (1986). The novel went on to win the Whitbread First Novel of the Year Award, the David Higham Prize for Fiction, and the Guardian Fiction Prize and, by selling the rights for *Continent* to America, Crace secured the funding neccessary to become a fulltime author at the age of 40.

The literary output that followed has created a canon that is now of major literary critical interest to late twentieth and early twenty-first century culture. Crace’s writings are ambitious in terms of scale and scope, ranging across vast periods (from the Palaeolithic to the apocalyptic) and contexts. *Continent* comprises seven connected stories with shared locations and themes, a premise that attracted popular and critical praise. His second novel *The Gift of Stones* is located in a Neolithic village, while *Arcadia* (1992) takes in a narrative arc from the preindustrial to the postmodern period. Crace’s subsequent work focuses on faith as well as time; *Quarantine* (1997) retells the forty days and nights Jesus spent in the desert as part of the New Testament of The Bible; *Being Dead* (1999) considers the physical and spiritual conflicts of dying and death; *The Devil’s Larder* (2001) mediates on temptation and consumption; and *Six* (2003)—entitled *Genesis* in America—explores procreation and faithfulness. Crace’s most recent novels have developed a concern with tension and conflict in communities through a pronounced focus on the environment and the natural world. This thematic preoccupation is manifest in the post-apocalyptic devastated landscape of *The Pesthouse* (2007), the customs of a rainforest tribe in *On Heat* (2008), the suburban scenes of *All That Follows* (2010), the idyllic rural customs of pre-industrial life in *Harvest* (2013), and the contemporary new-European xenophobic nationalism of the village in *The Melody* (2018). Despite the commercial and critical success of Crace’s fictions—*Harvest* alone was shortlisted for the 2013 Man Booker Prize, shortlisted for the inaugural Goldsmiths Prize, shortlisted for the Walter Scott Prize, and won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize and the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award—Crace announced in 2013 ‘I’m not going to write any more novels, I don’t want to end up being one of these angry, bitter writers moaning that only three people are reading him. I don’t want that. I have had a very good life in publishing, but this is it’ (Crace in Battersby 2013). Instead, he suggested that any future literary output would focus on non-fiction topics including natural history, politics and the environment.

However, after Crace won the Windham Campbell Literature Prize for *Harvest* in 2014 (and the £90,000 prize money associated with the award) he announced a return to the novel form. Crace argues that this prize money enabled him to exercise a ‘rediscovered […] passion for fiction. Stories are crowding in, demanding their space on the page […] The Windham Campbell prize at Yale gives me the independence and the confidence to take on those stories, free from everyday pressures’ (Crace in Lea 2014). This new financial and creative context produced Crace’s latest novel, *The Melody* (2018), a story about grief and ageing, reputation and its loss, and love. Significantly, *The Melody* is also an explicitly political novel, offering a mediation on persecution, poverty and humanity in the twenty-first century world.

The writings of Jim Crace are notable for their stylistic precision and obsessive approach to language and structure. Crace reflects that, as an author, ‘I’m recognised—and I'm sorry if this sounds vain—for long metaphors and rhythmic prose that is poetic and very structured in nature, moralistic and not ironic in tone’ (Crace in Stanford 2010). Labelled a ‘stylistic fanatic’ (Vincent 2001), his prose style is unmistakable and lyrical. Academics even conducted a study that proved the prose style of *Quarantine* fulfilled a mathematical formula for poetry (Vincent 2001). The elaborate and convincing detail of these worlds are not the product of extensive research or fact-checking inherent to the author’s former journalism. Rather, the gaps between the fact and the fiction in Crace writings consciously draw attention to the poetic, fictional nature of his narratives. His own reluctance to drawn on biographical events develops this narrative disconnect further. Crace argues that while

it’s fascinating to make connections between the life and the writing. That is interesting. But what’s more interesting is the way in which the life and the writing don’t match, don’t mirror each other. It’s the lack of correspondence that’s really remarkable. It’s what makes me think that narrative’s much more deeply placed within us than just personal biography (Crace in Begley 2003).

The natural worlds created by Crace’s fictions are less concerned with geographical or historical realism than with bringing fictional worlds to life through the precise and exacting use of language. Crace’s narrative style is all the more powerful since he claims it is not the product of extensive historical research, relying instead on word-choice and story-telling to create credible fictions. Crace argues that ‘narrative is an immensely useful device and much older than the written word’ (Crace in Vincent 2001) and uses narrative as a structural tool with which to create worlds sculpted by material and contextualised language. Crace’s professional experience overseas, living in different landscapes and cultures, contributes to the broader representational strategies for space and place in his writings. Location is more than simply a backdrop; it is an articulating haunting trace of wider relationships, between the individual and the collective, the city and the countryside, or even life and death. Crace’s landscapes create provocative and complicated parallels with our own world, and inspire dynamic and problematizing questions that often remain unanswered at the conclusion of his narratives.

This collection grew from the Man Booker ‘Big Read’, a charitable programme that unites authors who have been nominated for, or who have won, the Man Booker Prize, with universities in the United Kingdom. Funded by the Booker Prize Foundation, first year students across academic disciplines are each given a free Booker-nominated novel by the author. As a mass-participation reading scheme, the ‘Big Read’ acts as a catalyst for interdisciplinary discussions about the novel and the author, and encourages the reading of contemporary fiction across a diverse body of young people. Jim Crace, nominated for the Man Booker Prize for his 2013 novel *Harvest*, joined the editors at the University of Brighton (UK) to work with staff and students for two days in October 2014. The visit enabled Crace to see the various ways in which the themes of Harvest had been understood and incorporated into the work of students across a diverse range of disciplines from Human Geography to Health Science, Sociology to Cultural Studies. The culmination of his visit was marked by a public interview with Kate Aughterson (Chapter 12) and a one day symposium for academics working on Crace’s writings. Crace attended part of the day-long event, and was supportive of and fascinated by the papers on offer. Some of the papers that day have developed into chapters in this collection, while others have been inspired by the event.

The essays in this collection bring together contemporary philosophical, critical and political debates to the encounter with Jim Crace as an author. Collectively, they share a focus on how contemporary literary studies and writing draw upon and feed a range of interdisciplinary foci, including environmentalism, biology, theology, linguistics and archival work, and the ways Crace’s own writing self-consciously both shares in and contributes to these debates. The chapters enable the reader to follow a journey through these debates, commencing with conceptualising Crace’s work through both traditional and post-post modern conceptions of how literary and visual pastoral enables the foregrounding of traditional story-telling and self-consciously draws our attention to genre and mode as interpretative prisms (Tew and Lilley). This theoretical frame is then extended in the debate about environmentalism, eco-criticism and post-humanism through close readings of Crace’s novels (Cristofaro and Bracke) and the innovative inter-disciplinary collaboration between biology and processes of writing/reading (Callus and Lanfranco). Ecocritical theories merge with historical considerations of the intersections between modern gender identities and economic and political change (Aughterson, Allen and Joelle), positing both a gender problematic in Crace’s work and an openness to more fluid notions of gender identity at moments of social crisis and transition. Such moments (of apocalypse, death, political change) are the subjects of the last three essays of the collection (Groes, Jasper and Tate) which combine narratology, theology and trauma theories to argue that Crace’s innovative plots simultaneously echo, address and deny the tropes of spiritual conventionality. Finally, the collection closes on Crace’s own voice in a public interview he gave in Brighton in October 2014. Its trajectory thus enables both critical and writerly views to emerge in synchronicity and dialogue as the reader progresses.

Tew’s chapter (‘Pastoral Negativities and the Dynamics of the Story-Teller in Jim Crace’s *Harvest*)’argues that Crace’s engagement with the pastoral mode enables him to both hark back to ancient models of story-telling and generate a new contemporary critical perspective. Focusing on *Harvest’*s(2013) agrarian and autumnal setting and its affinities to the bucolic and Arcadian literary tradition materially rooted in a lived existence, Tew shows that Crace’s literary mode simultaneously evokes and denies utopian possibilities. At the same time, he shows that the central figure of the story-teller is the agent through whom reader and narrative access human possibility. Combining Areti Dragas’s ‘crucial shift in narrative theory […] [toward] a new appreciation of oral traditions and storytelling methods,’ (Dragas 2014, 3) with Walter Benjamin’s model of story-telling as both orality and fantasy Tew offers a framework for discussing Crace’s aesthetic. Tew’s analysis shows that Crace typically starts with a world of immediacy, full of the adumbration of a crisis: many of his novels’ are post-lapsarian, offering a stark world, full of a curious instrumentality, establishing through anecdotal stories a set of social forces and individual actions which come together and gradually grow into a calamity. The oblique reporting of actions and events, condensed and refracted by not fully reliable narrators’ voices, create pastoral visions which have the flavor of nightmares. His novels thus dramatise humanity’s hubristic self-centring in a world of impersonal and imminent change: for Crace fragmentation, radical change and abandonment become key components of his painful bucolic vision in *Harvest*.

 Deborah Lilley’s ‘Pastoral Concerns in the Fictions of Jim Crace’ echoes many of Tew’s insights and shows how contemporary political engagement with environmental issues intersect with a contemporary revival of pastoral. Ettin argues that pastoral’s ‘real subject is something in addition to, or perhaps even instead of, its ostensible subject’ (Ettin 1984, 12): its critical ability to both represent and query the conditions it depicts lies in the divergent meanings beneath the surface of its idealised accounts of rural life, and between the contrasting spaces of the country and the city. In Jim Crace’s fictions, these hallmarks of pastoral at once help to make his imagined landscapes familiar and betray the ambiguities that complicate them. From *Continent* (1986) to *Harvest* (2013), Crace uses pastoral to uncover the narratives by which his characters make sense of the world around them, and how these environments shape their lives—in ways that they recognise, and in ways that they do not. Lilley shows how Crace’s self-conscious use of pastoral allows us to glimpse the frameworks by which his characters perceive themselves and their environments, and the limitations of these ways of looking as their consequences are played out. She shows that *Arcadia* (1992) and *The Pesthouse* (2007) demonstrate that the pressures of cultural and environmental change—from rising urbanism to a post-technological future—demand new ways of understanding the relationships between people and place. These novels both adopt and challenge the pastoral lens to represent and reflect critically upon the blind spots in their characters’ visions, and the imperative to account for what lies beyond their fields of view.

 In her ‘Ecocriticism and Jim Crace’s Early Novels’ Astrid Bracke uses contemporary ecocritical theory to situate Crace’s writing within a tradition of environmental writing and literary activism. While many of Jim Crace’s novels explore narratives that are dominant in the environmental imagination—such as a pre-lapsarian world, a post-apocalyptic one, fantasies of pastoral perfection, moments of change in land ownership and usage—ecocriticism itself has been slow to engage with Crace’s work. Bracke traces the depiction of nature in Crace’s novels, focusing especially on his early works. She presents a reading of *The Gift of Stones* (1988), *Signals of Distress*(1994) and *Being Dead* (1999) that uses them to explore two developments in ecocriticism: a concern with the global, and the development of eco-narratology. She shows that early ecocriticism tended to emphasise (non-fictional) realism and was heavily indebted to the pastoral and skeptical of the contemporary (British) novel. More recent ecocriticism has engaged with science fiction and depictions of terra forming (Johns-Putra 2017) as well as a broader awareness beyond both the local and the human-centred (Heise 2016), and begun to explore a wider variety of works, including contemporary British novels (Bracke 2017). Crace’s novels trace a similar development from the emphasis on pastoral in many of his works (discussed in this volume by Deborah Lilley and Philip Tew), to engagements with the global (*Signals of Distress* and *The Gift of Stones*) and a concern with new materialism and non-human narration in *Being Dead* (as debated by Callus and Gianfranco in this volume). Bracke’s work thus intersects, explains and interrogates not only Crace’s own work, but that of this volume’s contributors.

Jim Crace has helped create an archive of his research and writing materials in the Harry Ransom Center, at Texas University. Diletta De Cristofaro has used those archives in '”False patterns out of chaos”: Writing Beyond the Sense of an Ending in *Being Dead* and *The Pesthouse*’ to consider his account of death and apocalypse, in *Being Dead* (1999) and *The Pesthouse* (2007), through the prism of post-modern revisions of Kermode’s original thesis in *The Sense of an Ending* (Kermode 2000). She argues that Crace plays with narrative structures to expose that sense of an ending—our use of endings to make sense of time—as a construct that creates ’false patterns out of chaos’ (*Harvest*, 184). *Being Dead*, for example, underlines how no sense of an ending is available in human lives, foregrounding the tension between time as lived and time as narrated. *The Pesthouse,* by contrast, wittily undercuts the conventional sense-making function of a novel’s end through the felt absence of the apocalypse in the narrative and its aftermath. That ending negates the utopian renewal central to traditional apocalyptic logic, a typically Cracean-inversion of readerly expectations.

In ‘ADifferent Kind of Wilderness: Decomposition and Life in Jim Crace’s *Being Dead’* Ivan Callus and Sandro Lanfranco collaboratively discuss the intersection of biological and literary and aesthetic discourses in the representation and conceptualisation of death and life. Crace offers a partial vision of a post-human world through a conceptualization of wilderness. One of the most striking of those conceptualisations is the depiction of diseased or decomposing human bodies, which Crace portrays as environments caught between the tended and the untameable. Callus and Lanfranco show that Crace’s narratives understand that the wilderness within humanity is always too close for comfort, both in life and in death. Interdisciplinary perspectives from literary theory and biology inform their reading the figuring of decomposition in *Being Dead*. Through comparative discussion of representations of death and decomposition within Western literature and culture, Callus and Lanfranco argue that posthumanist paradigms of morbidity, decay, and regeneration might offer a counterpart to anthropocentrism, one in which—through death and decay—biological life is paradoxically affirmed. Crace thus offers a lyrically powerful and poetic fictive counterpart to apocalyptic versions of the non-human.

Aughterson (’Absented Women’s Voices: Problematising Masculinity in Jim Crace’s Fiction’) argues that although Crace’s novels create a sense of universality, a mythopoeic world that stands outside context and history, critically referred to as ‘Craceland’ (Begley, 2003) this critical universalism seriously undervalues and flattens Crace’s writing, particularly in relation to gender. Crace’s reference to the Derridean deconstructive project (‘I am always looking to dislocate the subject’ Begley, 2003; Derrida 1976, 68) offers up a narratorial self-consciousness about his writing’s dislocation of place, space and time, and to the dislocation of subjecthood. Aughterson argues that Kristeva’s formulation of Semiotic (the silent rhythmic undercurrents and disruptions to the dominant symbolic order which dislocate narrative and subject, and therefore gender) act as a not-quite silent intertext to Crace’s narrative method (Kristeva 1984, 65). She shows that this narrative dislocation—a process of unravelling and unveiling—is central to Crace’s work, and that dislocating gender identities and voices de-universalises Craceland. Although Crace has claimed that as a man he cannot call himself a ‘feminist’ (Crace in Aughterson 2018, 259), Aughterson suggests that *Harvest*’s (2013) dislocations of voices and narratives both displace and question the discourses and epistemologies of western, modern masculinity. Aughterson suggests that Kristeva’s poetics offer a way of seeing how Crace’s narrative gaps and silences function as self-conscious rhetorical and narratorial strategies to offer up spaces for considering ‘other’ identities. Through narrative sleigh-of-hand, partial focalisations, lacunae, slippery semantics and destabilising narrative continuities through shifting grammatical tenses Crace disturbs the microcosmic worlds his narrators create. Such disturbances ask and invite the reader into the text to query the representative and causative world in the microcosm, and in particular the notions of causation and explanation which the unreliable narrator offers up. *Harvest* models a world where the end of feudalism both coincides with and creates a world of rapid competitiveness in which individualism is defined by the combination of an acquisitive masculinity with the loss of ancient communal connections to the land. This new world, fabularly constructed by Walter, is one in which women are both the desired ‘other’ and the cause of the fall from the pastoral edenic world of feudalism. The absence of female voices (the dead wives, the desired woman, the young girl violated) is key to Crace’s cumulatively semiotic rhetorical technique. They are a blank space—an ‘other’—a rich silence on which the reader writes alternative histories and stories. Although his narrator Thirsk uses conventionally patriarchal language about women, Crace offers the contemporary reader the space to critique the symbolic origins of modern masculinity (in its elimination of an equal subject identity to femininity) at its historical and imaginative source.

Nicola Allen (’Naked Ambition: Jim Crace’s Shaven-Headed Women’) examines the ways shaven-headed female protagonists in Jim Crace’s fiction serve to externalise trauma whilst simultaneously subverting hegemonic depictions of the feminine. Crace’s female characters often defy and subvert traditional constructs of femininity, and Allen shows that Crace's depiction of shaven-headed women is not simply an appeal to a more transgressive representation of femininity. Crace’s shaven-headed characters embody a rendering that imbues his heroines with a complex set of symbolic functions. Allen demonstrates that the shaven-headed woman occupies a dual symbolic position in late twentieth and early twenty-first century western culture. The image simultaneously represents both victimhood and a de-feminised strength: which Crace both exploits and questions in *The Pesthouse,* *Being Dead* and *Harvest*. Crace’s work thus both foregrounds and exploits the complexity of contemporary female identities within broader cultural iterations of forced and elective head shaving from the 20th and 21st centuries (from Auschwitz to Britney Spears) through this symbolically resonant abjection of conventional femininity.

In her ‘Searching for the gleaning fields’: Gleaners and Leaners in Jim Crace’s *Harvest*’ Natalie Joelle shows how Crace’s word play between lean/glean poetically replicates the novel’s political critique of the coming of capitalism to agricultural life. The rise of ‘Leanness’ (*Harvest*, p.5) entails loss for the gleaners. The word ‘gleaner’, as it is repeated, rhymed with and varied to evoke ‘leaner’ drives the narrative of *Harvest* in its exploration of enforced ‘lean thinking’ (typified in an influential business bestseller as striving to ‘do more and more with less and less’, Womack and Jones 1990, 5). Whilst *Harvest’s* gleaning practices replaced by leaner principles are themselves (almost self-consciously) archaic, the resonance, as Crace explains, is ‘contemporary, which is the way in which humankind and their relationship with the land is always being put under pressure’ and ‘can be changed just by the whim of industry’ (Crace 2013b). Joelle traces the origins of the novel in Crace’s response to reports in *The Guardian* about land being seized by soya corporations in South America, who grow soy to feed animals in European factory farms. Joelle argues that *Harvest* shares the ‘deep antipathy to trade and capitalism’ of Crace’s earlier works, particularly refracted through today’s ecological urgency to contest meat consumption. The novelis a timely critique of both those original enclosures, and their heritage in our contemporary global love affair with meat production at the expense of both human and animal welfare. Crace’s fascination with gleaners and their oppositional relationship to ‘Leanness’ writes against the threat of a lean, ungleanable, globalised world.

In ‘Cognition and Memory in the early work of Jim Crace’, Sebastian Groes shows the recent ‘neurological turn’ in the Humanities and Social Sciences, in which many phenomena, events and human characteristics are explained and contextualised within insights provided by neuroscience, can be usefully applied to Crace’s work. The euphoria and positivism surrounding the brain sciences have led to neuromania, the belief that human experiences and consciousness can be wholly explained through studies into the working of the human brain alone. Literary responses have tended to take a sceptical view, presenting either a wholesale rejection of neuroscience (McCarthy 2017) or a critical interest (writers such as Ian McEwan, Eimar McBride, Will Self). Jim Crace's early work offers the opportunity to investigate how humanist writers argue for a viewpoint that does not conflate experience solely with the brain, and that shares philosophical sympathies with writers such as Harraway (2016) and de Waal (2016) on ideas about companion species and consciousness. Novels such as *The Gift of Stones, Quarantine* and *Being Dead* argue that the material nature of human body itself and external influences beyond the subjective self are equally important as the brain in shaping human behaviour and perception. De Groes shows that Crace foregrounds culture and contexts as producing human consciousness, as much as the brain, and investigates the production and functioning of cognition and memory in Crace’s work.

David Jasper’s chapter (‘Jim Crace: Inventor of Worlds’) engages with the liminal presence of faith and religion in many of Crace’s works, asking provocatively, ‘Is Crace a Religious Writer?’ He argues that as an inventor of worlds and explorer of souls that are lost and found in those worlds, Crace both allies creativity to religious knowledge and practice, and reflects on the role of Christ as one similar to that of the creative artist. Giving particular attention to five novels, *The Gift of Stones* (1988), *Arcadia* (1992), *Signals of Distress* (1994), *Quarantine* (1997) and *Being Dead* (1999), he examines the meeting of worlds within and between which people survive and plumb the depths of their humanity. Though Crace might feel uncomfortable in being described as a religious writer, Jasper argues that he works within an ancient tradition of creative and spiritual thinking that includes the New Testament and the writings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers. In both original Biblical texts, subsequent intertexts and Crace’s novels, worlds meet and the sacred is everywhere present. The experience of such numinous sacred moments are experienced even (and perhaps especially) when 'religion' is abandoned or abandons us. Jasper argues that in Crace's fiction, it is in the harsh realities of the natural world and lives lived on the edge where something ancient and strangely familiar begins to emerge once again.

The consideration of Crace’s spiritual heritage and resonances is also the subject of the final chapter, by Andrew Tate (’An Atheist’s Spirituality: Jim Crace’s Post-Religious Fiction’). In supplement and partly in contrast to Jasper, Tate argues that Crace’s fiction has a highly complex relationship with the broad and unstable phenomenon of ‘religion’. The novelist has described himself, for example, as ‘a very hard-line post-Darwinist atheist’ (Crace 2003), an avowed rationalist, hostile to supernatural beliefs, a writer who is, in his own words, ‘impatient with the simple-mindedness of orthodox religion’ and its ‘bafflegarb’ (Crace 2015). Yet—as Jasper also shows—religious language and practices haunt many of his novels and his fiction abounds with moments of unreason. Crace is a realist informed by romance, a master of suspicion who occasionally tempts sceptical readers to trust fables. Tate shows us how religious acts – prayer, the language of miracle, prophecy and pilgrimage indeed a vast, idiosyncratic reservoir of God-seeking strangeness—punctuates a body of work that scrupulously resists the numinous. Crace’s re-writing of a story from the canonical scriptures in *Quarantine* (1997) operates like one of the biblical Jesus’ parables in its ambiguity, reversals and destabilizing outcomes.Although *Quarantine* is Crace’s most direct engagement with the Christian metanarrative, his wider body of work evokes and echoes ethical, aesthetic and political questions that connect with a broader theological tradition. Tate argues that Crace’s fiction is informed by an evolving interest in the tension between superstition and reason, the advent of modernity and the limits of progress. Furthermore, his repeated tropes of belief—including ritual, faith, exile, pilgrimage, apocalypse, sacrifice and scapegoating – throughout his fiction, produce a critique not only of orthodox belief but also of contemporary culture’s denial of the reality of death and suffering. These concerns place his work in a wider tradition of post-religious wrestling with finitude and ritualised mourning.

 The recurrence of themes across Crace’s thirty years as a novelist speaks to an urgent contemporaneity about both global and local politics: the place of the individual and their voice in a community; communities at moments of liminal historical, technological, economic or species crisis; the intersections between human, landscape, and ‘companion species’ (Harraway 2017, 9); the place of the imagination, the fiction-teller, the artist as one who might be able to speak—however momentarily—outside of and beyond those moments of change; the literary and rhetorical heritages which enrich and enliven literary fiction; and a consciousness of —in particular- the modalities of a revived post-modern (perhaps even post-human) pastoral. Crace’s latest novel *The Melody* (2018) has rhetorical echoes of many of the aesthetic and political modalities in other writers late work (Said 2016, 4): but typically Crace has used that rhetoric to signal a lateness to humanity itself. Proleptic echoes of a post-human, post-anthropocene world infiltrate the novel’s language: machines ‘bleed’ (*The Melody*, 14) and humans are robotic or animalistic (their food is ‘fodder’, 14); human ghosts haunt living spaces and physical objects change under the impact of hauntings. All things and all animals, all humans are porous; knowledge is transient. The novel’s finale sees the words of the anonymous narrator (we never know who he is) describe the humans waiting in the dark—their picnic laid out in the forest—waiting ‘for creatures to appear and dine’ (*The Melody*, 272). The following page reads:

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The non-existent sources cited here, juxtaposed with the grammatical and visual aporia of the final broken-off sentence, intellectually and linguistically models fiction as both always partial and always fantastic. Many of Crace’s novels use paratextual material as meta-textual reading frames for the assiduous interpreter: the open-ended framing of this latest novel suggest simultaneously post the possibilities of a post-human world and that aesthetic traces maybe outlast us all: as he stated in a recent interview: ‘My books dislocate the reader rather than locate them’ (Liu 2018). In Crace’s work, the Romantic Kantian promise of the moral imperative that is the realm of the human aesthetic, is simultaneously asserted and denied, and it is in this realm, perhaps, that Crace’s spirit can live on.

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1. A term invented by Begley (2003). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)