

***River of Contrasts: The Texas Colorado***

by Margie Crisp

College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012.

228 pp. \$29.95 flexbound.

The Colorado of Texas is one of the state's great rivers and the longest river entirely within Texas. It percolates up from the Ogallala Aquifer through a series of seeps and springs at the edge of the Caprock canyons in West Texas, flowing some 860 miles across the state until it empties into the Gulf of Mexico at Matagorda Bay.

Like most Texans, I've only seen small bits of this legendary stream, most often in the form of the Highland Lakes, or craning my neck to catch a quick glimpse from a car window at the occasional highway crossings. Now, however, I've become much better acquainted with the Colorado—and the difficult issues it currently faces—thanks to Margie Crisp and her elegant book, *River of Contrasts: The Texas Colorado*.

Crisp guides readers along an intimate, personal journey tracing the Colorado's entire length. She gets into her kayak or canoe whenever possible and takes us out onto the river, exploring its many moods. She also introduces us to the ranchers and landowners along the river's banks. The book includes nearly 100 of her beautiful illustrations—from drawings, linocuts, and lithographs to silkscreen prints, photographs, and seven splendid maps.

Crisp's careful, nuanced descriptions illuminate the subtle contrasts in the Colorado as it flows towards the coast. She describes the river's first impoundment, which creates the desolate Lake J.B. Thomas along the Colorado's upper stretches. The lake is heavily silted and its water levels average 15% capacity. The lake has been full only three times in its fifty-year history.

At the lower end of the river, Crisp describes the "Rice Belt" along the Gulf Coast, with its abundant wetlands that are attractive to many animals, making the area a prime destination for overwintering birds and migratory birds following the Central Flyway.

This coffee table-friendly book is gorgeous, and Crisp's lovely illustrations are occasionally whimsical, but the book's beauty should not detract from the author's brutal warning: the Colorado River is in deep trouble, and the crisis affects more than its riparian flora and fauna. Also at risk are the more than one million Texans who depend on the Colorado for drinking, irrigation, electricity, and industry.

Extended drought, over-pumping from aquifers, ill-conceived dams, and industrial pollution are all threatening the Colorado's existence. Crisp points out that only one percent of Texas' original grasslands and prairies remains today, even as the river-killing Saltcedar continues to spread. Stretches of the river are often dry. Human activity has done tremendous damage, and Crisp documents several examples of environmental abuse, including pollution so severe that an EPA Superfund site has been established near Colorado City.

Even the very concept of the Colorado as a river can be called into question. In the Hill Country, the "river" is nothing more than a series of linked lakes. Downstream of Austin, the Colorado's flow from November through March is composed entirely of discharges from sewage treatment plants. At the river's mouth at Matagorda Bay, the Colorado has been shackled into a series of canals, starving coastal estuaries of much-needed sediments.

Crisp explains the intense political battles over the Colorado's dwindling water supply, and she highlights the efforts of dedicated people who are trying to find ways to preserve or even restore the river in the face of what can often seem like overwhelming odds.

River of Contrasts: The Texas Colorado is more than a beautiful coffee table book—it is also a stirring defense of the river and a call to arms. As Crisp writes, "the river is a living entity with an inherent right to survival." Crisp echoes in many ways previous works on Texas rivers, such as John Graves' classic *Goodbye to a River*. Yet as Crisp makes clear, the sense of urgency facing the Colorado and other Texas rivers has increased substantially in the fifty-two years since Graves' book appeared.

— Steve Davis
Texas State University-San Marcos



Dwight Yoakam: A Thousand Miles from Nowhere
by Don McLeese. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012.
232 pp. \$19.95 paperback.

In *Dwight Yoakam: A Thousand Miles from Nowhere*, Don McLeese offers the first full-length biography of one of country music's more successful contrarians. A teetotaler steeped in the honky-tonks, an Ohio-raised