

BOOK REVIEWS

The Half-Lives of Pat Lowther

Christine Wiesenthal

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005. 489 pp. \$65.00 cloth.

LINDA ROGERS

Victoria

THIRTY YEARS AGO, my husband and I were having dinner at the Da Tandoor restaurant in Victoria with the incomplete executive of the League of Canadian Poets. All eyes were on the door. Would Pat Lowther, co-chair, be arriving late? My youngest son slept fitfully in his Moses basket and, senseless, wedged between rocks at Furry Creek near Squamish, the missing guest never did arrive. Today Pat Lowther is an icon for spousal abuse, the fussing infant is an adult, and our world is very different.

We are all now aware that domestic violence is ubiquitous and reprehensible. Crimes of passion are no longer an acceptable legal defence. Pat Lowther's death at the hand of her deranged husband was a catalyst for that changing consciousness in our country. She was a poet and her voice was stilled. That was and still is a tragedy.

Explicating this crime as a societal and literary phenomenon is the mandate assumed by Christine Wiesenthal in *The Half-Lives of Pat Lowther*. The title and profile images of the poet on the cover are appropriate metaphors for what is still a mystery. In fact there are several mysteries, all of which Wiesenthal attempts to bring out of the shadows and into the more impartial light of hindsight.

The first mystery is why her death affected so many. It was a catalyst. Lowther was a significant impetus for the League of Poets's Feminist Caucus, which brought forward feminist issues, mainly as they pertained to women writers who had been sidelined in the emerging literary business. Women writers had difficulty in finding publishers, in getting reviews, readings, and academic positions. They had also been regarded as "meat," protein to feed the insatiable male artistic ego, which brings us to the second mystery.

That mystery is: why did she fall for a pretentious felon like Roy Lowther in the first place? The answer is simple. To a woman with low self-esteem and febrile ambitions, Roy Lowther was an apparent power figure in the tiny Vancouver literary pond of the 1960s. Pat

was doing what women are biologically programmed to do. That she didn't get out of the marriage when her husband revealed his vanity and violence is also statistically appropriate. Women don't. Instead of leaving the bully, she fell into the tender trap of a "same-time-next-year" relationship with a poet of slightly higher profile in the years when League of Canadian Poets AGMS provided romantic opportunities for fragile practitioners.

Wiesenthal chronicles Lowther's attachment to flawed but apparently connected men and her struggle to travel in the wake of Pablo Neruda's shooting star and Dorothy Livesay's listing mother ship. No one was going to help Pat Lowther. All she had were the words she squeezed out of her tormented life.

The third mystery is whether we would still be hearing of Pat Lowther as a poet had her husband not bashed her head in and left her broken and bleeding on a beach where he had once made love to her. The sad poignancy of her death has made Lowther a martyr for women who look, as she did, for a voice to lead them out of the wilderness. Carol Shields, herself a victim of prejudice against women writers, unconsciously borrowed one of Lowther's titles for her own *Stone Diary*. The annual Pat Lowther Award for the best book of poetry by a woman asserts the validity of women's writing. Predictably, there are writers who argue that poetry evaluation should transcend gender. Many fine writers, some of them friends of Lowther's, left the League of Poets because they were offended by the intrusion of gender politics in a craft organization. As she did in life, Lowther still stands in the crucible of conflict three decades hence.

Pat Lowther was anxious and ambitious. Attaching herself to the

mythological power of writers like Neruda, she wanted her own star in the firmament. To her inept husband this was incomprehensible; and he destroyed what he could not understand. Wiesenthal doesn't quite understand either. She is an academic, and, in this apparently intensely researched book (except for small but significant errors like her description of the courthouse, now the Vancouver Art Gallery, as being made of brick rather than stone – the kind of error that could cast doubt on the credibility of her scholarship) she vacillates between mysteries as Lowther did between her many functions as wife, mother, poet, politician, and arts bureaucrat. What begins as biography and detective story makes lateral moves into history and literary criticism; and we are still unenlightened. There is no end to the story. The book ends abruptly, as did the subject. For Lowther, there is no star. She is just a sad creature washed up on the beach, her bones now bleached and indistinguishable from all others. There are no marks on her and, because of her susceptibility to influences, her mark on our literature is still under debate.

Wiesenthal, encumbered by the biographer's vulnerability, equivocates in her judgments, but she does leave the dust balls alone. She may or may not have intuited that the Lowther marriage was a metaphor for that oxymoron "the literary community." Jealousy and competitiveness, the enemies of true art, which should guide us to enlightenment, are the microcosm and macrocosm of Lowther's half-lives. I wish Wiesenthal had been able to draw such conclusions, but she does at least leave the evidence. It is all a matter of housekeeping.

Wiesenthal documents Lowther's notoriously unkempt domesticity and

the legendary story of the Maritime reading tour she made in her final summer. The nervous poet's bags had been lost, and, in her attempt to recall and recite poems she had packed in her mother's suitcase, the real meaning of Wiesenthal's book comes clear. Pat Lowther attempted to navigate stars without a map. An ambivalent autodidact, she lived vicariously, through books and men. Unlike those grounded peoples who learn the meaning of themselves, their geography, and their culture from songlines, she was distracted from the West Coast environment she described in her best poems. Hers *was* only a half-life, even while she was still living. Perhaps a fragmented record of her life and work is an appropriate tribute.

*Corresponding Influence:
Selected Letters of Emily Carr
and Ira Dilworth*

Linda M. Morra, editor

Toronto: University of Toronto
Press, 2006. pp. 352. Illus.
\$60.00 cloth.

SANDRA DJWA
Vancouver

THIS WONDERFUL collection of letters describes a special friendship between Emily Carr and Ira Dilworth between 1940 and 1945. Carr was already recognized as a distinguished artist, but she had just begun to write prose, primarily because she was no longer able to get into the forest to paint. She was to become a forthright and spirited writer in the next few years, in large part through Dilworth's editorial support. Dilworth, a former professor of English who had taught at

the universities of Victoria and British Columbia, was then BC regional director for CBC radio and had excellent publishing contacts. Carr, then acutely ill, was largely confined to bed, but her artistic impulses found expression through recollections of her early life – a continuing autobiography of “Small,” her pet name for herself. During this period she wrote *Klee Wyck* (1941), *The Book of Small* (1942), and *The House of All Sorts* (1944) and began writing sections of *Growing Pains: The Autobiography of Emily Carr* (1946), which was published posthumously, as was *Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of Emily Carr* (1966). In effect, Carr rediscovered (or recreated) herself and her past life in the process of writing her stories – stories that her correspondence with Dilworth, and Dilworth himself as editor, helped shape.

Linda M. Morra, who came across their correspondence while writing her doctoral dissertation, is to be congratulated for recognizing their literary value and editing them. What an irascible, impossible, wonderful woman Emily Carr was. These letters show her at her best – and worst. At her best, she is wonderful. She stoically endures pain: “I stayed in bed all day after Xmas & most of yesterday – heart pains – I let the girl have a good deal of time off & did too much” (81); she recognizes her own mortality without complaint and is always concerned for the welfare of the younger Dilworth, whom she views fondly as a dear friend, mentor, and literary expert. At her worst, she makes us quake, as for example when she takes a pot-shot at her younger male rivals when discussing some drawings done by high school students after reading *Klee Wyck*: “They were indeniably Maxey [Maynard] and Jacksie [Shadbolt] things[,] were all show off[,] no observation[,] no Indian

feeling” (209). Nonetheless, it is Carr’s wonderful honesty that is captivating. “Everyone,” she tells Dilworth, “is tremendously alone in this world when it comes right down to the core & there are so few cores that match – I often marvel *how* everybody comes to be so different when they see & hear, smell & eat the same things?” (89). Emily Carr died content that she, her alter ego “Small,” her manuscripts, and her paintings were in good hands. “Oh my dear *big trustor*[,] I am so glad & at peace that ‘Small’ & all my M.S. are yours[.] It would have hurt to leave my children in un[-]understanding hands. I’d rather but have burned them than that” (91).

Morra’s editorial selection of letters is excellent in that it represents each stage of the literary relationship. The editing and annotation of this text must have been a substantial task as Carr’s spelling was unique and her punctuation non-existent. Nonetheless, the letters as they are presented here read well, the editorial emendations are not obtrusive, and Carr’s personality rings loud and clear.

*Always Someone to Kill the
Doves: A Life of Sheila Watson*

F.T. Flahiff

Edmonton: NeWest Press, 2005.
352 pp. Illus. \$34.95 paper.

GINNY RATSOY

Thompson Rivers University

LIKE SHEILA WATSON’S SEMINAL *L*– and quintessentially British Columbian – novel, *The Double Hook*, F.T. Flahiff’s book takes both its title and its epigraph from a particularly dramatic and thematically relevant

moment in its text. Flahiff extracts the title proper from a specific entry in the writer’s mid-1950s “Paris diary,” which he has wisely included in his book: “Picasso had one of his caretakers jailed for destroying his doves ... Today when I thought how hard it is for an artist to live at all my heart was filled with compassion. There is always someone to kill the doves” (121).

Ever mindful of the challenges of the task Watson herself set for him (“I want my story told,” she said, although she did not appoint him the teller), Flahiff, in his preface and elsewhere, makes patent his awareness that his book can only be, as the subtitle suggests, fragmentary (here again, fittingly, in the style of Watson’s own prose) and that because of his lengthy friendship with her it can also only be biased in her favour. I found some of the sections in which Flahiff inserts himself into the story of his subject among the most compelling in the book. Furthermore, responsive to memory’s complexity and pitfalls, he contextualizes the recollections of others; notes discrepancies in accounts not only of the same events by different people but also by the same person at different times; and draws on a healthy mix of sources, including interviews (with family, friends, and colleagues), newspapers, books, records of publishers’ queries, and the papers of Sheila Watson’s husband, poet and playwright Wilfred Watson.

As Flahiff also notes, his work is as much about her marriage as it is about Watson’s work, and the reader is again privy to a variety of perspectives (including Sheila’s own) that converge on Wilfred’s difficult, domineering personality. If the outsider cannot resist the temptation to take sides, it is Sheila’s side that will likely be taken, and her husband’s infidelities, periodic lack of support for her writing,

and insistence that they abandon Edmonton upon their retirement might figure prominently in such an assessment.

Time has assessed Sheila as the more influential writer in the partnership, and Flahiff does justice to her extraordinarily influential, although conspicuously small (two novels and several short stories) body of fiction in myriad ways. First, he very much evokes the role of place on her writing, not only of her youth in New Westminster and Vancouver but, more important, of the two years she spent as a teacher in Dog Creek, British Columbia, which inform both *The Double Hook* and *Deep Hollow Creek*. In addition, he details the evolution of all her works. With respect to her masterwork in particular, we are afforded a sustained and vivid reminder of the business of publishing – the accommodations the writer must sometimes make in order for her creation to reach public distribution. Finally, Flahiff discusses the inspiration that the work provided for such writers as Michael Ondaatje, Daphne Marlatt, and, particularly, Angela and George Bowering.

One of the rewards of literary biography is that the backdrop on which it is set often affords the reader rich glimpses into the history of the subject's times through the prism of the artistic and literary scene. Flahiff's study does not disappoint: Watson's Paris diaries, replete with images of birds, flowers, music, and fine art, are further invigorated by incidents such as her attendance at the funeral of Maurice Utrillo, her visit to T.S. Eliot's office in England, and her fly-on-the-wall account of Jean Cocteau's behaviour in a shop ("His presence filled the whole room – and he knew that it did") (138). Closer to home, the growth of the Canadian scene

is well chronicled: Dorothy Livesay, Margaret Atwood, Northrop Frye, Jack Shadbolt, and, particularly, Marshall McLuhan are a few among the many whose relationship to Watson Flahiff chronicles. Furthermore, because Watson had a lengthy academic career (as both student and professor), the reader receives more than passing glimpses into the business and politics of Canadian universities during a crucial time in their growth (scenes set in and around the University of Alberta's Department of English in the 1960s and 1970s are particularly noteworthy).

Of interest to literary academics, historians, feminist scholars, British Columbia specialists, book historians, and students of these fields, *Always Someone to Kill the Doves: A Life of Sheila Watson*, with its thoughtful inclusion of some of Watson's sketches, photos (all too infrequent, alas), and a bibliography of her writing (fiction and non-fiction), makes a considerable contribution to various fields of study. Perhaps Flahiff succeeds in writing a compelling life story precisely because he does not purport to tell the whole, truthful story; instead, he delights in echoing Sheila Watson's style, and he shares his subject's belief in the importance of textual absences.



*Contact Zones:
Aboriginal and Settler Women
in Canada's Colonial Past*

Katie Pickles and
Myra Rutherford, editors

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005.
256 pp. Maps, illus.
\$85.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper.

MARY-ELLEN KELM
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THIS IS A GREAT TIME to be writing Aboriginal history. A decade of productive interplay between post-colonial studies, feminist analysis, and new methods of research has opened new interpretive pathways to historians of First Nations. This collection of essays exemplifies the promise of this interdisciplinary scholarship.

Myra Rutherford and Katie Pickles have included some of the very best scholarship on the contact zone between Aboriginal and settler women in Canada; the table of contents reads like a who's who in feminist and Aboriginal history. The volume itself is organized into three parts around the central theme of the body as a site of colonial encounter, highlighting how dress and performance, sexuality and surveillance, and, finally, everyday encounters acted as potent points of contact, places of colonial imposition and subversion.

The articles on performance and dress are among the best in the collection. In *Contact Zones*, Veronica Strong-Boag and Carole Gerson extend their previous analyses of Pauline Johnson, arguing that Johnson's work repositioned Aboriginal women to the ethical and moral centres of their own societies, highlighted their economic contributions, and offered them as models for a new Canadian

consciousness. Johnson's vividly hybrid performance further served to undermine the colonial obsession with difference even as her writing suggested the superiority of Aboriginal women. Cecilia Morgan brings an analysis of Aboriginal women as public spokespeople into the middle of the twentieth century, focusing on the work of Bernice Loft and Ethel Brant Monture. Both Loft and Monture built on Johnson's successes but brought their own perspectives to the work of educating non-Aboriginals about Aboriginal peoples, using history and biography to counter "savage" stereotypes. Monture, in particular, stressed indigenous adaptive abilities while decrying forced assimilation. Morgan brings important insights from feminist theory to these two liminal characters, recovering with them a particular Aboriginal space in twentieth-century Canadian historiography.

Articles by Sherry Farrell Racette and, later in the volume, by Myra Rutherford, help us to see how dress itself was a field of contact. Racette's superb article on Métis women's artistic production of clothing makes clear the importance of the body, style, comportment, and fashion in marking and making western Canadian masculine ideals. Rutherford's article exposes the conundrum faced by northern women missionaries who, on one hand, sought to demonstrate the success of assimilation by the sartorial transformation of their Inuit and Dene charges while on the other hand missionaries themselves donned parkas and snowshoes for practical and publicity purposes.

Sexual conduct and conjugal relations have long preoccupied the state, certainly since the mid-19th century. Several of this volume's articles plot how the

sexual surveillance of colonial regimes differentially impacted Aboriginal women. While Jean Barman delineates the dizzying array of behaviours that could get Aboriginal women labelled “prostitute,” Robin Brownlie and Joan Sangster demonstrate the power of the state in punishing women whose behavior was somehow disruptive to patriarchal, capitalist and colonial regimes. Sarah Carter’s chapter on the outlawing of polygamy explains the problems of eradicating what was, for the missionaries a practice considered abhorrent on moral grounds, but that had a certain unarguable social pragmatic. Adele Perry situates the rise of residential schooling in the flailing attempts of missionaries on the North Coast to transform sexual and social arrangements.

This volume, as a whole, recuperates the place of colonial relations in the formation of the Canadian nation. It is logical then to hope for a greater examination of the extent to which colonial relations were unevenly reciprocal – influencing the colonizer as well as the colonized. There are glimpses of such questions in many of the chapters. How did the performances of Aboriginal women such as Johnson, Brant, and Monture define “authenticity” in ways that prompted settler women to mimic British figures in the parades that Pickles so vividly describes? Did the women missionaries of northern Canada find themselves changed by adopting the dress of Aboriginal people just as they hoped to change Native women by altering their appearances? How were definitions of “respectable” subject to revision as groups of colonial men reaped the benefits of sexualizing Aboriginal women? Articles in this volume lay the groundwork to move analyses of the contact zone deeper both in Aboriginal and settler communities.

Ironically, perhaps, it is incisive analyses of missionary and settler women that are underdeveloped in this volume. The discourse that places religious women into the realm of psychosexual dysfunction, as Jo-Anne Fiske shows, provides common ground for those who address the damage of residential schools and those who seek out healing and justice. It nonetheless sexualizes and homogenizes the women religious and residential school survivors, a result that Fiske might have historicized productively, situating rather than naturalizing this discourse in its contemporary context. In particular, we might ask how such discourses challenged women religious’ understandings of self, calling, and femininity. Similarly, Dianne Newell’s analysis of writing by and about three women travellers on the North Coast experiencing difference and danger in dramatically varying ways seems hesitant to take full account of the transformative effects of those encounters. Septima Collis and Emily Carr, according to Newell, were insulated from the coast, though it is hard to see how this conclusion applies to Carr. In the unfortunately titled “road kill” section on the murder of Loretta Chisholm, Newell cannot ignore the radical transformation of Chisholm’s body from schoolteacher to murder victim, but the effects of that event on living settler women of the north coast elude her. Rather, Newell dismisses Phylis Bowman’s local history of the events as “inevitably reproduc[ing] the dominant masculinist narratives of conquest.” Such conclusions indicate the clear need for more analysis on non-elite women’s writing of the contact zone.

It would be trite (and inaccurate) to suggest that settler women were subject to transformations of similar

intensity to those of Aboriginal women, but clearly settler women were changed by their encounters with First Nations. Understanding further how these transformations were incorporated into the lives and societies of those experiencing them will further integrate Aboriginal and women's history in meaningful ways. *Contact Zones* contributes to a general bringing together of the fragments of past intercultural encounters – fragments that by the beginning of the 21st century have been so torn asunder that we often have difficulty seeing how they were once part of a whole. This failure to realize the extent of the cross-cultural encounter in the past is a significant historical erasure that volumes such as Rutherford and Pickles' *Contact Zones* are importantly beginning to undo.

*The Pacific Muse:
Exotic Femininity and
the Colonial Pacific*

Patty O'Brien

Washington: University of
Washington Press, 2006.
347 pp. Illus. us\$50.00 cloth.

FRANCES STEEL

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IN THEIR RECENT edited collection, *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History* (2005), Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton call for a renewed focus on gender as a category of historical analysis, positioning "the body" at the centre of colonial governmentalities. In attempting to make women and gender more visible in world history, they emphasize that "the extent to which women's bodies (and to a lesser degree,

men's) have been a subject of concern, scrutiny, anxiety, and surveillance in a variety of times and places across the world [is striking]" (4). *The Pacific Muse* certainly extends these perspectives. As a "gender-focused world history" (14), Patty O'Brien foregrounds the female body in her exploration of the colonial South Pacific.

O'Brien takes an overlapping thematic and chronological approach, tracing the production of exotic femininity from its foundations in antiquity through to the present day. The first chapter examines the lenses through which late eighteenth-century explorers viewed femininity in the Pacific, heavily informed as they were by the revival of classical thought in the Renaissance and the imperial experience in the Americas, Africa, and the Orient. Chapter 2 addresses colonizing masculinities, charting the intertwined myths of "unfettered sexual freedoms" available to "uncontrollable" Occidental men in their Pacific exploits. In Chapter 3, O'Brien explores the divergent portrayal and treatment of indigenous women across multiple Pacific frontiers, characterized by extraction, plantation, and pastoral economies. The ways in which images of the "natural Pacific woman" mediated European debates about women's "proper" role in the body politic informs Chapter 4. Finally, O'Brien surveys the ongoing cultural power of the archetypal "smiling island girl" in twentieth-century art, literature, and film.

The Pacific Muse is a history of the West's "comfort" with the Pacific region (269). It addresses colonial representations of women in diverse island settings, which were, for the most part, *misrepresentations*. O'Brien is at her best in deconstructing the logics behind the mythmaking and the

cultures of the mythmakers themselves, tightly weaving her analysis into the fabric of everyday life. Given the dramatically uneven power relations in Pacific Island colonial contexts, these misrepresentations had very real outcomes for very real bodies. She shows how indigenous Australian women, once exoticized in ways akin to women in Polynesia, soon lost this status as settlers linked sexual violence with control over land and resources. The inclusion of these histories provides an important corrective to the undue emphasis on Tahiti in primary and secondary literature as “the” site of Oceanic desire. The image of exotic femininity circulated in metropolitan centres for other ends: to contain European women within the domestic sphere. By including Australia and, to a lesser extent, New Zealand within a broader regional imaginary, and by keeping Europe always in sight, O’Brien aligns herself with the growing body of historical scholarship concerned with tracking the circulation of people, commodities, and ideas across imperial sites.

O’Brien concludes: “This book has sought to restore Pacific women to a colonial history in which they are fuller historical entities than the vast majority of literature on the Pacific will allow” (268). Towards the end of the book, she briefly surveys postcolonial engagement with and resistance to colonial stereotypes but provides little evidence of engagement and resistance in the preceding centuries. I was left no further ahead in understanding why, for example, Tahitian women approached European sailors with bared breasts (what meanings did nakedness hold in indigenous cultures?) or what the “sex trade” may have meant for those on the other side of the beach. A caution that many island societies understood

exchange as a social rather than as an individual practice is buried in a footnote (286n69). This is, no doubt, a problem of source material, but without looking in more depth at the complex of meanings colliding in these cross-cultural encounters, “the indigenous body” often figures as little more than a static, blank surface upon which outsiders freely inscribed meanings.

O’Brien situates the contemporary Pacific as a “soft,” friendly, benign “other” to the “Islamic world” in the eyes of rim states like the United States and Australia (7, 268–69). Yet, as I write this review from Australia in mid-2006, recent riots in the Solomon Islands and East Timor have prompted Prime Minister John Howard, predicting further regional troubles in the coming decades, to commit ten billion dollars to an expanded defence force. Very different bodies and very different regional agendas, it seems, also define Pacific “hot spots.” Overall, *The Pacific Muse* is an engaging, wide-ranging, and insightful work, enhanced by the liberal inclusion of excellent images. It will appeal to scholars both in and beyond Pacific scholarship, including those interested in the history of ideas, colonial history, the history of gender and sexuality, anthropology, art history, and cultural studies.



*Contesting Rural Space:
Land Policy and Practices
of Resettlement on
Saltspring Island, 1859-1891*
R.W. Sandwell

Montreal and Kingston: McGill-
Queen's University Press, 2005.
384 pp. \$29.95 paper, \$75.00 cloth.

CHAD GAFFIELD
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ONE OF THE MOST unexpected consequences of the systematic social history undertaken in the 1960s and 1970s was a profound rethinking of its initial focus on industrialization and urbanization as the central features of modernity. By the 1980s, scholars had become less convinced that an understanding of cities and factories would be the key to interpreting the larger constellation of social, economic, cultural, and political characteristics considered to define so-called modern countries; rather, researchers began focusing on the economic engine of capitalism and the socio-cultural changes associated with rural as much as with urban mentalities and actions. One result has been a series of sophisticated and probing scholarly debates that have problematized concepts of individual and collective identity and behaviour through the intensive study of specific times and places. This granular approach has made microhistory a research strategy of choice among those attempting to enhance our understanding of the large-scale forces that transformed the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In innovative and stimulating ways, Ruth Sandwell has contributed significantly to this metaphysical and epistemological rethinking in

Contesting Rural Space: Land Policy and Practices of Resettlement on Saltspring Island, 1859-1891. In keeping with the spirit of current scholarly convictions, Sandwell embraces complexity, ambiguity, and contradiction rather than seeking to impose a coherent and linear interpretation on the multiple and uneven changes that she discovers in studying the people, policies, and practices on Saltspring Island during the second half of the nineteenth century. The book begins with a discussion of Sandwell's rural gaze, which comes from a "microhistorical eye" (3), and her decision to study a setting in the Gulf Islands between the British Columbia mainland and Vancouver Island. The following chapters then examine the land policies and ideals of rural (re)settlement before moving to a systematic study of how diverse residents actually came to grips with the social, economic, and cultural challenges of this environment.

Based on an impressively wide range of sources, Sandwell contributes to key scholarly debates, including those related to landholding, rural capitalism, household structure, and intercultural relations. Throughout the analysis of these and other topics, Sandwell emphasizes three central themes in the Saltspring Island experience of the later nineteenth century: (1) that this distinctive rural world cannot be understood in the interpretive terms made familiar in research on cities; (2) that official policies and the ideals of dominant cultures should not be mistaken for the actual histories of diverse individuals, families, and collectivities; and, specifically, (3) that "the process of learning land use" is "the key to understanding the social history of settlement. Nobody, in other words, should prejudice for the settlers how their relationship to the

environment and culture would evolve” (225). Taken together, these themes emphasize the importance of studying the complex interplay of local and global forces by systematically examining the ambitions and practices of specific people in specific places as well as of those in a position to promote dominant cultures and social formations. Sandwell concludes by suggesting that this microhistorical approach is the preferred strategy for developing appreciations of the “common pattern” (229) that characterized rural communities in the making of modernity.

In analyzing land records, census enumerations, court documents, family records, official registers, oral histories, and many other types of evidence, Sandwell quite successfully negotiates the constructivist-realist (false) debate while also avoiding the interpretive pitfalls of sentimental attachment to one of the present-day world’s most beautiful locations. Some readers may still be left unconvinced about the ways in which the history of Saltspring Island should revise current understandings of British Columbia or Canada or North America or other settler societies, while other readers may reject outright the claim that the microhistorical eye can see beyond limited contexts to perceive any macrohistorical phenomena. All readers, though, will enjoy this well-crafted and smoothly written study, which provides unmistakable evidence in favour of emphasizing land, families, and an integrated socio-cultural approach to the great transformations of settler societies.



Stella: Unrepentant Madam

Linda J. Eversole

Victoria: TouchWood Editions,
2005. 198 pp. Illus. \$19.95 paper.

JENÉA TALLENTIRE
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LINDA EVERSOLE’s biography of Victoria madam Stella Carroll (1872–1946) is listed on the book cover as fitting into two genres: “creative non-fiction” and “history.” It’s an interesting division for an interesting book. Having spent more than twenty years researching the life of one person through newspapers, correspondence, archives, and interviews in five states and one province, Eversole can certainly claim a greater academic credibility than the term “creative non-fiction” might suggest. Of course, the site where creative non-fiction and history divide, or merge, is biography. To my mind, this is the best way to characterize Eversole’s work because it partakes of the practices of creative non-fiction and history.

Eversole tracks Carroll’s life and career from her humble Missouri roots to the height of her career as one of Victoria’s high-class madams between 1899 and 1913. We follow Carroll through various legal, financial, and (ultimately ruinous) romantic ups and downs to her last twenty years as landlady, housewife, and penurious widow. Eversole sums up Carroll’s life as follows: “She was a survivor. In terms of material wealth, she achieved much more than would have been expected for a woman from a small, rural Missouri town, and despite the difficult years at the end, she lived the life she wanted” (177). It is quite

important to Eversole, I believe, that Carroll was an unrepentant madam. Along with scores of other women, Carroll took up the management of a house of prostitution, seeing this as a viable but difficult business venture (one of the few that were truly open to women during this period). Eversole has sought not just to enumerate the various events and characters that moved through Carroll's life but also to capture some of the subjectivity of a woman who lived – and lived grandly – on the margins of respectable society and gender prescriptions.

Eversole's use of the subject's perspective rather than that of the omniscient historian narrator is compelling and gives her work a wide popular appeal. But this does not mean that this work is not of use to historians. The embellishments of biography are, on the whole, anchored in solid sources. For example, the book begins with Carroll carefully dressing for another night as the madam of the finest brothel in Victoria, an intimate private moment that we think was surely not documented – until we see on the next page a picture of her in the outfit described in such detail. It is exactly this mix of the intimately biographical and the factual that makes Eversole's work appealing.

Certainly, the author does take liberties with the narrative, bringing in the necessarily fictional aspects of biography. Several passages about Carroll's attitudes, intentions, and actions seem to rely on thin threads of supposition, and many are apparently modelled only on Eversole's understanding of Carroll's likely reactions, based on correspondence and interviews. Yet, on the whole, most of the events and interactions between the various characters are grounded in research – Eversole's carefully

amassed collection of personal papers, interviews, and newspaper and police reports.

Eversole takes her narrative particulars from a variety of uncited sources; it is clear that many of the rich details that she includes, such as what a certain lady wore at a party, would have been culled from the society pages of Victoria's newspapers. In fact, although she is obviously using material that would normally be cited in a historical monograph, she tends to reserve her citations mostly for direct quotes – a practice that may make the academic historian frown but that does serve to make the narrative more smooth and readable for the non-academic reader.

Eversole's study does not claim to be, nor is it, a rigorous academic monograph on the history of the high-end sex trade in British Columbia before the Great War. Yet it does offer some important glimpses into the actual lives of women involved in the Victoria "parlour house" trade as well as insights into how that trade worked. She also seeks to tie Carroll's business of pleasure with the business of politics in Victoria (and later in San Francisco), noting the careers made and broken on the wheel of vice-suppression campaigns. This is a much-needed British Columbian complement to Ruth Rosen's discussions of madams in major American cities in her classic study *The Lost Sisterhood* (1982), and it is an urban counterpart to Charleen Smith's recent work on life in the "boomtown brothels" in the Kootenays (in Jonathan Swainger and Constance Backhouse, eds., *People and Place: Historical Influences on Legal Culture* [Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003]).

In the end, this book is a good read – as any biography (or history, for that matter) should be. Eversole has struck an effective balance that will appeal

to the general reading public while yielding useful material to academic historians.

Unsettled Pasts: Reconceiving the West through Women's History

Sarah Carter, Lesley Erickson,
Patricia Roome, and
Char Smith, editors

Calgary: University of Calgary
Press, 2005. pp. 442. Illus.
\$44.95 paper.

PATRICIA BARKASKAS
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A PRIMARY GOAL OF feminist scholarship and activism is to interrupt assumed notions about gender and to intervene in the naturalization of processes that perpetuate women's oppression and subordination in patriarchal societies. Contemporary feminist historical studies influenced by postcolonial and critical race theory, such as Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather: Race, Sexuality, and Gender in the Colonial Contest* (Routledge, 1995), have also sought to deconstruct discourses of racialization and the construction of hegemonic femininities and masculinities within colonial projects. Situated within a broader context of feminist historical literature, but taking a regional focus, *Unsettled Pasts: Reconceiving the West through Women's History* highlights the importance of using a micro-history approach to explore theoretical developments in the field. Of these, constructions of femininity and processes of racialization are the focus.

Unsettled Pasts is a selection of papers drawn from a June 2002 conference held at the University of Calgary. The

conference brought together a diverse group of feminists to explore "the connection between gender, place, and the processes that shaped the diversity of experiences in the Canadian west" (2). According to the editors, the collection seeks to illuminate how women negotiated the complicated spaces they occupied, particularly in the context of colonialism and nation building in the Prairie provinces and British Columbia (4). Contributors include academics, writers, and activists from many different walks of life and professional fields.

The breadth of the book is noteworthy: it spans the period from the late nineteenth century to 2002 and includes scholarly works, interviews, and personal reminiscences. While the inclusion of so many different women's stories through such a long period shows a commitment to diversity, it also makes the collection slightly less cohesive than are collected works that cover shorter, more specific time periods. Although at least two of the chapters deal specifically with British Columbia, the regional focus of the book is primarily Alberta. Thematically arranged, *Unsettled Pasts* moves back and forth chronologically; however, the book is divided into four distinct sections, and a synopsis of each chapter creates relevant links between the specific story being told and the subject of each section. The editors do an excellent job of introducing each chapter and linking it to the overarching themes (the organization of the book and the wide-ranging subject matter make this necessary).

The Canadian "frontier" is not an uncontested masculine or white space in *Unsettled Pasts* (4). The stories in the book point out that many women were, in fact, negotiating the difficult terrain between the boundaries of gender and

“race” in what was, and in many ways remains, a shifting socio-cultural and political landscape. For example, Patricia A. Roome’s examination of Henrietta Muir Edwards’ (of Famous Five fame) life story does not read as a simple tale of success in the west. As Roome notes, Edwards dealt with contested categories of womanhood in her attempts to form relationships with indigenous women on the reserves where she lived. Further, Roome reframes Edwards through an intersectional feminist lens, reconceiving her as an individual struggling within complex systemic contexts that contributed to her unique strategy of resistance and compliance, even while she was unable to escape her location as a white, Christian woman.

One of the most important contributions this text makes is in documenting indigenous women’s histories. Indigenous women are highlighted as “cultural mediators.” Lesley A. Erickson’s comparative study of the lives of Sara and Louis Riel removes Sara from her brother’s shadow. Sara, who was the first Métis Grey Nun, challenges notions of indigenous actors in settlement and missionization work in Canada. Building on Sylvia Van Kirk’s ground-breaking *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670–1870* (Watson and Dwyer, 1980), Erickson’s chapter reveals that indigenous women continued to occupy vital roles as mediators, bridging cultural divides between indigenous and non-indigenous perspectives that were often amorphous and constantly changing. Cora J. Voyageur’s interviews with Senator Thelma Chalifoux and former chief of the Fort MacKay First Nation, Dorothy MacDonald, in both the first and final sections of the book, are further evidence of the diversity of indigenous women’s experiences and

work to make relevant links between the past and the present.

Images of indigenous women in history also emerge from reading colonial sources “against the grain” (101). Kristin Burnett deconstructs representations of indigenous women in the writings of three Methodist missionaries: John Maclean, Egerton Ryerson Young, and John McDougall. Drawing on Adele Perry’s argument in *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849–1871* (University of Toronto Press, 2001), Burnett argues that depicting indigenous women as unfeminine (III, 114) allowed white women to take a place, at least in the popular imagination of the nation, as the penultimate example of womanhood. This dovetails nicely with Muriel Stanley Venne’s piece on her personal struggle to take up the word “Esquao” as a challenge to the racist, colonial word “Squaw” and as a present-day reminder that indigenous women are strong members of their communities and that their presence will not be forgotten or ignored. Sarah Carter’s contribution explores the implications of the Department of Indian Affairs’ (DIA) attempts to change existing patterns of matrimony and divorce in indigenous communities. Carter’s analysis reveals that sexist and racist policies guided the implementation of marriage laws for indigenous peoples through the DIA and contributed to undermining women’s traditional roles and power in their communities.

Carter, Erickson, Roome, and Char have selected essays that reveal how the processes of gendering and racialization intertwine with embodied knowledge and systemic power relations. The resulting collection seeks to address the erasure of women in the past and, as Elaine Leslau Silverman states in her

conclusion, draw attention to them in the present, where women's experiences continue to be undervalued (370). With its postcolonial and intersectional feminist analyses of the past and its underlying commitment to social justice in the present, *Unsettled Pasts* is a meaningful contribution to the field of women's history in Canada.

*The Last Great West:
The Agricultural Settlement
of the Peace River Country to 1914*

David W. Leonard

Calgary: Detselig, 2005. 758 pp.
Illus., maps, \$65.95 paper.

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British Columbia*

DAVID LEONARD'S LATEST work on the Peace River country of northern British Columbia and Alberta is distinguished from its predecessors by an emphasis on the region's agricultural history. Drawn in part from documents profiling who homesteaded, their origins, and their achievements or failures, *The Last Great West* contrasts developers', promoters', and settlers' idealism with the record of what occurred in the struggle to transform dreams into working farms and communities. Centred on the era before rail connections were forged between the Peace and the great interior plain, Leonard argues that, on balance, the Peace homesteads had a statistically greater chance of success than did homesteads elsewhere on the Prairies.

Divided into sixteen chapters centred on chronologic and geographic themes,

The Last Great West is an encyclopaedic narrative of the Peace River Country prior to 1914. While the first half of the book concentrates on the region's development in relation to surveys, railways, boosters, and settlement schemes, the book's second half details the profile of development in specific areas within the Peace from 1910 to 1914. One drawback of Leonard's approach is that readers are reintroduced to the same developments within a given chronological period with each new theme or region and, thus, may feel that they are continually retracing steps already taken.

Still, Leonard's emphasis on the play of national railroad and settlement policies in the opening of the Peace reveals that rising expectations almost invariably outstripped results. Indeed, it is all but certain that, while the development of the Peace was a perennial subtheme in Canadian domestic politics for much of the two decades before the First World War, the region never truly occupied centre stage. Further, while the federal government and promoters were often enthusiastic, the heavy lifting of developing the region was shouldered by those who homesteaded and started communities in the absence of consistent governmental expectations or policies.

From a BC perspective, Leonard's work offers a number of intriguing points. Not least, *The Last Great West* is a reminder of British Columbia's geographic and demographic connection to the Canadian Prairies. Further, with the exception of homesteading records housed in the provincial archives in Victoria, almost all of Leonard's work is based on Albertan sources and perspectives. And, while Leonard has overlooked BC sources on the Peace, it is rather striking that the region can

be understood, in a compelling way, entirely from Albertan documents. Indeed, Edmonton newspapers and those in the Alberta Peace offered a constant stream of reporting and commentary on the BC Peace for almost two decades before a newspaper appeared in northeastern British Columbia. Although the case is apt to be overstated, Leonard's work supports the notion that the Prairies were more interested in the BC Peace than was British Columbia.

At its best, Leonard's book is an extraordinary documentation of the primary sources existing on Peace River Country history. Indeed, it can be argued that Leonard probably knows more about the primary records of the Peace than does any other living scholar. Yet it is this obvious depth of knowledge that raises one of the most frustrating aspects of *The Last Great West*. In describing the history of agricultural settlement in the Peace, Leonard has not offered readers a broadly conceived argument about what all of this means. For if it is true that Peace Country homesteaders had a greater chance of success than those who took up the challenge elsewhere on the Prairies, what might this suggest about the region's subsequent history and development? And, for BC historians, that the Fort St. John region saw the greatest number of abandoned homesteads in the entire Peace River Country certainly raises questions about how such a "fact" could have informed that region's sense of itself. Essentially, Leonard too often relies on the expectation that this impressive cross-section of evidence speaks for itself. Unfortunately, this is simply not the case.

Accessibly written and well stocked with photographs, maps, and settlement-era images, *The Last Great*

West is a treasure trove for those drawn to Peace River Country history and the region's place in the settlement history of the Canadian Prairies. The table has been set for future scholars who are willing to explore these riches in pursuit of a broader understanding of what the particulars of this region's history says about the opening of western Canada prior to the First World War.

*Royal City:
A Photographic History
of New Westminster, 1858-1960*

Jim Wolf

Surrey: Heritage House, 2005.
191 pp. Illus. \$39.95 cloth.

PATRICIA E. ROY
University of Victoria

TODAY, MANY residents of the Lower Mainland know New Westminster only as the site of traffic jams as they wait to get on to the Pattullo, the Queensborough, and Alex Fraser bridges; Highway 401; or the Lougheed Highway. If they pass through on the SkyTrain, they see densely packed townhouses and high-rise apartments covering much of the waterfront where once stood docks and warehouses. Yet, as Jim Wolf's splendid illustrated history demonstrates, New Westminster has a proud history, and transportation played an important role in it. Settled by Sto'lo people who early on abandoned the site, it was briefly the capital of colonial British Columbia and, until the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway in Vancouver, the leading city of the mainland. It long remained the commercial centre for the Fraser Valley, with busy retail

stores and financial institutions lining the “Golden Mile” of its main street, Columbia. The economy was based on fishing, manufacturing (especially of forest products), and transferring goods from rail to ocean-going ships and vice versa. Government institutions, the British Columbia Penitentiary, and the Provincial Hospital for the Insane (later, Woodlands School) also provided employment.

Among its residents were a number of professional and gifted amateur photographers. Jim Wolf has delved into this treasure trove of images and includes biographical vignettes of nine of their creators. A few – Charles Stride, Paul Okamura, and the talented Norman Lidster and Horace G. Cox – spent their entire careers in the city; Charles Bloomfield, John Vanderpant, and Stephen Joseph Thompson moved to Vancouver; and David Judkins, an American who literally floated in from Seattle, and Francis George Claudet, a British colonial official, were birds of passage. Their work and that of a number of other photographers, some of them unknown, justify the book’s subtitle.

The photographs are the *raison d’être* of *Royal City* and may explain the bias of its focus. Thus, Wolf gives considerable attention to civic festivities, including the annual May Day, which has been running since 1870; the Royal Visit of 1939; the celebrations marking the end of the First World War in 1918 and V-E Day (but, curiously, not V-J Day); and the construction and opening of such structures as the Fraser River Railway/Road Bridge (1904) and the Pattullo Bridge (1937). Disasters are overrepresented. The Great Fire of 10–11 September 1898 and the start of rebuilding occupy twenty-two pages as several photographers saw the

destruction of most of the commercial area and some major residences as an attractive subject. There are also some nice shots of the fire that destroyed the Queen’s Park exhibition buildings in 1929 and of the 1948 Fraser River flood.

Wolf mourns the conscious demolition of several handsome homes, such as those that formed Columbian College. After the college closed, the city took it over for taxes and, in 1939, demolished it lest indigents take possession and, by establishing residence, qualify for municipal relief. Even major structures of the 1950s – St. Mary’s Hospital and the Woodward’s store – have fallen to the wrecker’s ball. Yet others survive, the best example being the Irving House (1865), now the home of the New Westminster Museum and Archives, repository of many of the photographs shown here.

The text goes some way towards filling a void in BC historiography – a history of New Westminster. Although a few theses, articles, and short books have been written on aspects of this city, this is the first serious attempt at an overview. Wolf offers only glimpses of the city’s diverse social composition; the great strengths of his well-informed text are his sketch of New Westminster’s economic history and his explanation of why Columbia Street, a frequently represented image, was once a “golden mile” and why it declined. That the handsome art moderne Mc & Mc Hardware Store built in 1939 is now a Salvation Army thrift store is symbolic of the city’s changed status.

Jim Wolf has made a wonderful start in telling New Westminster’s story; let us hope that it will inspire him or another historian to make a definitive study of the oldest city in British Columbia (incorporated 1860), whose

very full history is, in many ways, a microcosm of British Columbia and its ever-changing economy and society.

Canadian Aboriginal Art and Spirituality: A Vital Link

John W. Friesen
and Virginia Lyons Friesen,
Artwork by David J. Friesen

Calgary: Detselig, 2006. 242 pp.
Illus. \$49.95 paper.

WILLIAM G. LINDSAY
University Of British Columbia

CANADIAN ABORIGINAL *Art And Spirituality: A Vital Link* acknowledges right from the start that Aboriginal art forms in Canada have historically been misinterpreted as mere "craft" and that the all-important spiritual foundations of such art have been consistently "discounted or ignored" (i). This text does its part to reverse this trend, being part of the modern effort to dispel the above misconceptions and to force commentators to realize that Aboriginal art deserves a place in the pantheon of great art forms in the world. The Friesens contribute to this effort with their text, and their accompanying biographies make clear that they have worked with, written about, and respected Aboriginal peoples for many years (235-36). The respectful and informative tone of the text and the liberal use of Aboriginal references strengthen these assertions.

From a contemporary perspective, the Friesens examine Canadian Aboriginal art within the context of spirituality, history, and culture. To the Friesens, Aboriginal art is directly intertwined with indigenous cultures and thus

symbolizes these cultures in their time and place, as opposed to being mere "crafts." This fact, combined with the beauty of the art itself in its many forms, pushes Canadian Aboriginal art into the realm of artistic greatness, where it is able to stand on its own among the world's great art (ii). The numerous and helpful drawings and photographs, combined with the detailed and passionate explanations, reinforce these points.

Chapters 4 through 10 are the heart of the book, and they draw from historic and cultural sources to tell the stories of Canada's Aboriginal peoples. This is done by combining historical, cultural, spiritual, artistic, and contemporary perspectives of Canada's different geographic-cultural groups, and by presenting chapter-long summations for each. Aboriginal groups examined include the Maritime, Eastern Woodland, Plains, Plateau, Northwest Coast, Northern, and, interestingly, Métis cultures. Each chapter provides brief descriptions of local geography (important to the influence of local art forms), pre- and postcontact history, aspects of local culture, local spiritual concepts and beliefs, and local art forms. At the end of each chapter is an annotated list of modern Aboriginal artists who have been making a difference with regard to Aboriginal art in their local areas. This last section gives modern relevance and context to the overall discussion, showing that Aboriginal art forms are not mere relics of the past but, rather, that they live on and flourish. Hence, although brief in their respective descriptions, these chapters provide sketches of Aboriginal artistic, spiritual, historical, and cultural life that will enlighten novice readers. More informed readers will enjoy the discussion of art and spirituality

presented within a "big picture" story of Aboriginal history and culture.

BC Aboriginal groups are treated generously. Chapter 7 deals with the Aboriginal groups and art forms of the Plateau region. Chapter 8 deals exclusively with the Northwest Coast and Aboriginal art, spirituality, history, and culture. Some art forms discussed here include the potlatch celebration, painting, totem pole construction, bone and horn tools, wooden masks and boxes, blankets, canoes, longhouse art, basketry, and crests. Readers will enjoy the descriptions and histories of this great and diverse art. The Friesens point out that so many different regional artistic styles abounded in the Northwest Coast region that certain art forms can be directly traced to specific villages (141). This text thus dispels any stereotypical notion of Aboriginal artistic "sameness" and exposes the great diversity of Aboriginal art.

There are a few drawbacks to this book. The inclusion of maps that clearly outline areas under discussion would have been helpful. As well, the accompanying drawings and illustrations are done by the authors' son, a talented artist to be sure but not an Aboriginal (1). It would have been appropriate to have exhibited the work of Aboriginal artists in such an Aboriginal-oriented text.

Overall, this book is an entertaining and holistic depiction of Canadian Aboriginal art discussed in spiritual, cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts. Aboriginal art has never been a mere "arts-and-crafts" sideshow in the story of Canada's Aboriginal peoples; rather, Aboriginal art forms were and continue to be an important pillar, "a vital link" in Aboriginal life in general, as this interesting "big picture" examination highlights. It thus compares favourably with

other recent academic texts that deal with Aboriginal peoples in Canada, including the recent *An Introduction to Native North America* (2nd ed., 2004) by Mark Q. Sutton. The Friesens' text builds on this story by focusing on the artistic/spiritual components of Canadian Aboriginal cultures, and it does so in an engaging and informative way.

Winging Home: A Palette of Birds

Harold Rhenisch,

Illustrated by Tom Godin

Edmonton: Brindle and Glass,
2006. 256 pp. \$24.95 paper.

TRAVIS V. MASON

University of British Columbia

AT THE RISK OF categorizing an uncategorizable book, I feel compelled to acknowledge a trend among "nature poets" in Canada that sees many of them exploring in non-fiction prose what they typically reserve for poetry. Neither exclusively Canadian nor particularly recent, this trend – a few poets shy of a tradition – has nevertheless become increasingly conspicuous during the past decade. Given the prominence of birds in Harold Rhenisch's *Winging Home: A Palette of Birds*, I can be forgiven, I hope, for thinking about Don McKay, Canada's best-known birder-poet, who has also begun examining the natural world in non-fiction prose.

With this trend in mind, and recalling McKay's claim in *Vis-à-Vis: Field Notes on Poetry and Wilderness* (2001) that nature writing "should not be taken to be avoiding anthropocentrism, but to be enacting it thoughtfully" (29), I was nonetheless

put off initially by Rhenisch's unabashed anthropomorphic tendencies (which are visually echoed in Tom Grodin's accompanying illustrations, or what he calls extrusions). Though he admits early on that careless anthropocentrism has been used to colonize continents and "can be addictive" (108), Rhenisch, an accomplished poet, novelist, essayist, and editor, has no compunction about showing off his linguistic dexterity. With a seeming overabundance of metaphors, similes, and analogies, he combines literary prose with pop-cultural references and reflections on his home in British Columbia's Interior, to often humorous and occasionally poignant effect.

At approximately the midway mark, though, something struck me about the craftily systematic way Rhenisch overuses rote linguistic strategies, especially when considering the keen observations he continually makes regarding the behaviour of such birds as robins, loons, and bald eagles. In this book at least, Rhenisch's thoughtfulness about his anthropocentrism manifests less obviously than does the anthropocentrism in recent works by McKay and Tim Lilburn, for example. *Winging Home* offers an extension of Rhenisch's poetic and essayistic attempts to write the Cariboo Plateau. Like Tim Lilburn's philosophical and poetical ruminations on Prairie landscapes and questions of belonging in *Living in the World as If It Were Home* (1999), but with less deference to a Western monastic tradition, *Winging Home* represents a continuing attempt to feel at home in relatively new surroundings.

On his website, Rhenisch shares some notes on thinking and writing from his particular historical and geographical perspective: "The Interior of British Columbia is a country

with few if any historical, literary, philosophical, or aesthetic traditions, other than the stories we tell each other over coffee. To avoid repeating the colonial trap of importing the tools and metaphors of a foreign life and never moving into this corner of the earth, I have worked towards the organic development of these traditions, out of the strong oral culture which pervades this place" (haroldrhenisch.com/philosophy.html). In *Winging Home*, Rhenisch attends less to a human oral culture and more to the evolutionary, ecological stories cultivated by successive generations of flora and fauna.

If the style of *Winging Home* is at times restrained – short sentences punctuate the fleeting nature of Rhenisch's observations (often from behind the kitchen window or while performing a necessary yet menial bit of upkeep on the property) – it is in order to highlight the often florid, luscious, and over-ripe passages elsewhere in the book. Such overabundance, coupled with Rhenisch's rapid-fire allusions to myriad pop-cultural phenomena, makes his anthropomorphic gestures uncomfortably apparent. The result is an ironically subtle commentary on humans' relation to the physical world. How else to explain Rhenisch's depiction of robins as "break-dancing, bee-hopping, [and] hip-hopping in imitation of the sound of pattering rain" in an effort – proven successful on evolutionary grounds – to lure earthworms to the surface (23)? How else to explain his comparison of crows to German subalterns "milling around in the background" of military photographs, five-star restaurant maitre d's, and the Nez Percé "yelling and whooping it up" in a John Wayne movie (89) – all in the same paragraph?

When, nearly three-quarters into the book, Rhenisch makes his most overt appeal to readers' environmental sensibilities by admitting that, because of urban development, "the Okanagan is not a haven for birds" (189), the shift in tone from hyperactive pop-cultural ramblings to humble contemplation demands attention. Similarly, once the din of allusions dissipates, one can observe with fresh perspective the potential poetry in the non-human world Rhenisch observes. He could easily have prevented a pileated

woodpecker from destroying the wooden frames around his windows (217-24) or purple martins from perennially nesting in his attic (156-59) by baiting them with poison and thus enacting a tradition – far too many instances beyond a trend, sadly – of human colonization of the natural world. But that would be too easy. That would merely complete the sentence anthropocentric language begins. The preposition in the book's title, after all, allows the palette to belong both to the author and to the birds.