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Review of *The Wide Open: Prose, Poetry, and Photographs of the Prairie*. Edited by Annick Smith and Susan O'Connor

Jim Reese

Mount Marty College Yankton, South Dakota

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The Wide Open: Prose, Poetry, and Photographs of the Prairie. Edited by Annick Smith and Susan O'Connor. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008. 200 pp. Photographs. \$39.95.

There's a postcard you can buy at a lot of gas stations in Wyoming that shows a man holding onto a fence post for dear life as he's about to be blown into the great wide open. I believe it says, "Welcome to Wyoming. We grow a lot of wind here!" It's a funny postcard, but also a serious reminder of the climatic vagaries one experiences on the prairie. "It's this ache of the wind blowing over open land," as M. L. Smoker writes in *The Wide Open*, that continues to call us back or hold us here in the Great Plains and in the American West.

Annick Smith, an accomplished writer, and Susan O'Connor, philanthropist and arts advocate, have done an exceptional job compiling

an essential anthology that celebrates the voice and spirit of the prairie. Anthologies can be hit or miss—this collection of poetry, prose, and photographs is right on the mark. It includes a range of voices and visual interpretations by Rick Bass, Richard Ford, Barry Lopez, Mary Clearman Blew, Jim Harrison, Gretel Ehrlich, Lois Conner, Lee Friedlander, and Richard Hugo, to name a few.

Aesthetically, the collection is presented beautifully on museum quality card stock that's tough, but not too thick—a virtue that editors, book collectors, scholars, and writers interested in the genius of these prairie visions will value as they continue to revisit and appreciate the volume in all its abundance.

“The challenge of this anthology,” the editors write, “has been to explore what to some is a depleted and threatened landscape and to others is a repository of great natural and personal resources. Of course the prairies are large enough to encompass both destruction and hope, but as editors, we opt for hope Beyond education, we hope our collection of stories, poems, and photographs will stimulate a diverse audience into taking action to protect the lands that inspired these artists, so that our remote high plains will become a haven once more for people and animals, birds and fish, grasses and waters.”

JIM REESE
Department of English
Mount Marty College
Yankton, South Dakota