Fall 2010

Review of *All Our Stories Are Here: Critical Perspectives on Montana Literature* edited by Brady Harrison

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Hart, Sue, "Review of *All Our Stories Are Here: Critical Perspectives on Montana Literature* edited by Brady Harrison" (2010). Great Plains Quarterly. 2621.
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All Our Stories Are Here: Critical Perspectives on Montana Literature. Edited by Brady Harrison. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009. xxiii + 271 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. $50.00

This remarkable collection of essays offers something for every reader interested in Montana literature, from the well read to newcomers to the field. All the contributors are literary scholars, but some of their subject matter might come as a surprise. For example, Nancy Cook examines romance writers’ use of Montana as a setting in her essay, pointing out in a footnote that despite the number of young, handsome ranch owners available in the pages of such books, “the average age of a farm/ranch operator in Montana [in 1997] was fifty-four, with the number of men under age thirty-four about 0.5 percent of that population.” Nonetheless, it’s hard to deny Montana’s popularity as a romantic setting, and, despite the downturn in movie, television, and mass market “westerns,” the Cowboy remains a romantic figure.

Karl Olson’s “West of Desire: Queer Ambivalence in Montana Literature” and O. Alan Weltzien’s “‘Just Regular Guys’: Homophobia, the Code of the West, and Constructions of Male Identity in Thomas Savage and Annie Proulx” offer commentaries on works by Savage and Proulx and a number of other writers, including Myron Brinig and Patricia Nell Warren. Both Olson and Weltzien “question whether any climate of greater sexual tolerance has emerged” (Weltzien, 128) in the twenty-first century. Readers of their essays will frame their own answers, although the question itself invites haunting images of Matthew Shepard.

On a lighter note, Gregory L. Morris’s essay on Peter Bowen’s Yellowstone Kelly novels skillfully
separates fact from the outrageous fictions that made Bowen's four novels—he never called them histories—so popular.

Although many readers of this volume will be familiar with the works of James Welch and D'Arcy McNickle, they will certainly want to read Jim Rains's fine essay on McNickle's *The Surrounded*, and Andrea Opitz's equally fine examination of James Welch's *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*.

In truth, there isn't an essay in this collection that doesn't deserve a careful reading. Three essayists tackle the tough question "Does Place Matter?" Tamas Dobozy examines Richard Ford's view on "place," Roger Dunsmore features four poets in his answer to that question, and Matthew L. Jockers explores "Butte's Irish Ethos."

William Bevis offers his always solid views on Montana writers in "Feminism and Postmodernism in the New West," and the two concluding essays, Steve Davenport's on Richard Hugo, which skillfully evokes memories of a transplant who wrote so well about the Montana he came to love, and Lois Welch's on the University of Montana's Creative Writing program, end this impressive collection on a high note.

Editor Brady Harrison deserves thanks and praise for a job very well done.

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