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## Book Review of *Watershed: Reflections on Water* by Grant MacEwan

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**Watershed: Reflections on Water.** Grant MacEwan. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 2000. xiv+193pp. Introduction. \$16.95 paper.

*Watershed*, the last of forty-eight books by Grant MacEwan, was completed in the year of his death and published posthumously. This work integrates his ninety-seven years as a keenly informed student of western Canadian water issues. Three attributes make it noteworthy. First, *The Source*: MacEwan was an excellent observer and student of water-related development, personal struggles, politics, and environmentalism in western Canada. Second, *Voice*: poetic yet spare prose embodies a voice of western scholarship free from romantic pandering. Third, *Temporal Scope*: Grant MacEwan renders a first-person account and commentary across a century of change.

The author begins with a basic layperson's overview of hydrology: how water enters, exists within, and exits western Canada, particularly the prairie region. He follows this with descriptions of the social meaning of water to the patterns of western settlement, including stories of land values, water witching, well digging, the pioneers' subsistence water needs, as well as the interrelationships among settlement, crops, and water. The core of the book is about water development,

embracing the origins of irrigation schemes, Red River flood protection works, early considerations of inter-basin water transfers, and the International Joint Commission's role in arbitrating water conflicts. MacEwan includes numerous engaging asides such as stories of Dutch windmills in Alberta, iceberg towing schemes for the West Coast potable water supply, and the century-old struggle between Edmonton and Calgary for influence.

MacEwan provides colorful vignettes, extended quotes, archival photographs, and personality sketches of the people who developed the West's water policy. In many cases he is speaking from direct experience gained as mayor of Calgary, lieutenant governor of Alberta, college dean, and businessman. I remained vigilant for any environmental or pro-consumption proselytizing, but MacEwan is forthright about the need for balance in water use and protection. He conveys a strong sense of conservation and respect for the resource, but advances a thoughtfully balanced view by giving multiple perspectives throughout—messages of growth-oriented utilitarian George Spence, for example, juxtaposed with the growth-moderating conservationist approach of environmental economist Barbara Ward. If liberties are taken anywhere it is in the second to last chapter where he attempts to segue from pollution and species extinction lessons learned in Polynesia, South Africa, and the Galapagos Islands into US-Canadian water relations.

*Watershed* is an uncommon piece of literature, occupying a special category for ecologists, agronomists, sociologists, economists, and historians. In an easy-to-read 194 pages one acquires an idea of what a college course or a long series of conversations with this great orator and raconteur must have been like. Grant MacEwan was fond of saying, "Nothing is simple." The final narrative from this historian, agriculturist, vegetarian, politico, Christian, conservationist, humanitarian sage informs, entertains, and reinforces that message. **Lee Foote**, *Department of Renewable Resources, University of Alberta*.