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Review of Writing Saskatchewan: 20 Critical Essays

George E. Wolf

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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Arts held at Fort San in the Qu'Appelle Valley near Regina in June of 1987. Focusing on poetry (the long poem as well as the lyric), the novel, drama, and linked sequences of short stories, these essays collectively suggest the striking richness, range, and vitality of creative writing in the central prairie province—writing that is anything but provincial.

In his brief introduction, Kenneth Probert notes that “the question, or issue, of the vernacular in Saskatchewan writing” is the most conspicuous thread running through the essays. It dominates Fred Wah’s graceful reflections on the forms of “Contemporary Saskatchewan Poetry,” Susan Gingell’s “The Ways of Speech Made Plains: Saskatchewan Poetry Finds Its Voices,” and Dennis Cooley’s labored but ultimately useful “Placing the Vernacular: The Eye and the Ear in Saskatchewan Poetry.” Less obviously, though no less significantly, it weaves its way through the three pieces on drama in their emphasis on the collaborative genesis of much of what is most inventive and exuberant in Saskatchewan theatrical writing—*Jessica*, by Linda Griffiths and Maria Campbell, being a prime example.

Wayne Tefs’s and David Williams’s dialogue on “Voice and Vision” likewise affirms the importance of the vernacular in the Saskatchewan novel, though both writers, responsive to the allures of postmodernism, seem ill at ease with the realistic mode and what Tefs sees as an “indulgence in despair” that realism, rooted in the vernacular, tends to engender. Novelist and short story writer Sharon Butala’s rejoinder, given the post/modern de/con/structionist inclination of much of the volume’s *academic* criticism (Australian Russell McDougall and France’s Simone Vauthier being the most self/in/dul/gent of the word/slashers), is straightforward and bracing: “Speaking for not only myself, but for other ‘realists,’ this is our vision: the existence, the luminosity of the human soul, which is the true and the only meaning in our ‘lives of quiet desperation.’ Life is hard, all our experience tells us that, but what we realists want to show and to repeat over and over again

Writing Saskatchewan: 20 Critical Essays. Edited by Kenneth G. Probert. Regina: University of Regina Canadian Plains Research Center, 1989. xiv + 183 pp. \$12.50.

Writing Saskatchewan is the gleanings of a symposium celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the Saskatchewan Summer School of the

is how hardship serves to hone and educate the spirit. That is what realist novels are about." Butala's unapologetically realistic fiction, in being indeed about that, is one of the many glories of contemporary writing in Saskatchewan.

Readers interested in contemporary Canadian literature or in prairie writing will find this volume genuinely engaging and instructive.

GEORGE E. WOLF
Department of English
University of Nebraska-Lincoln