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Winter 2005

Review of *Crazy Woman Creek: Women Rewrite the American West* Edited by Linda M. Hasselstrom

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Werden, Douglas, "Review of *Crazy Woman Creek: Women Rewrite the American West* Edited by Linda M. Hasselstrom" (2005). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1422.

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Crazy Woman Creek: Women Rewrite the American West. Edited by Linda M. Hasselstrom, Gaydell Collier, and Nancy Curtis. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. xxix + 306 pp. \$14.00 paper.

This wonderful collection of prose and poetry rewrites the West first by focusing on community, not on the individual, and second by using the works of one hundred and fifty-three women writers. These short pieces—all under five pages—are primarily positive snapshots with an emotional core and devotional quality demanding reflection, which makes them best read intermittently.

The diverse communities evoked are what will keep you reading: a group of Quaker women who make a quilt for a PhD student wrestling with her dissertation; Hutterite women and their cooperative life in a male-centered society; the sheriff who stapled notices for a farm foreclosure auction pointing away from the road; women who gather whenever one of their mares foals; women shearing sheep; church ladies. . . . Many communities are monthly or bi-monthly gatherings that become essential outings for the women, whether they be the Bingo Babes, a reading group, the hot tub group, “Tuesday Teas,” or “Electric Avenue Books.” Many of the pieces’

authors have a sense of humor, smiling affectionately at the communities as can be seen in the titles: “Women Driving Pickups,” “Hallelujah and a Show of Hands,” “Cowgirl Up, Cupcakes,” “Have Cattle, Will Travel,” and “Wednesdays at Walgreens.”

Most of the pieces are positive, no matter how isolated a writer may feel from the community or how unattractive or idiosyncratic a community. The most critical pieces include “What I Hate Most About You,” a letter to residents in a “suburban” development who have built their houses on a high ridge of ranch land where they can see, and be seen, for miles. The book explores difficult subjects like power-struggles of a small-town school board, a woman accused of teaching devil worship, the starting of a rape crisis hotline in the 70s, and being a Buddhist in Nebraska.

Like their two previous collections, *Leaning into the Wind: Women Write from the Heart of the West* (1998) and *Women on the Wind: Women Write About Friendship in the Sagebrush West* (2002), the editors have collected a superior anthology and created a community of western women, a veritable communion of women living in the West. Although a complete smorgasbord of western communities, including transients, ranch, town, and city, this is not a book to engorge on, but to savor like fine chocolates.

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