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Made in Manitoba: An Anthology of Short Fiction by Wayne Tefs, and: *Contemporary Manitoba Writers: New Critical Studies* ed. by Kenneth James Hughes (review)

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puerile sexual insecurities, contempt for women, and cranky anti-intellectualism rankle the reader; the final story, an incest fantasy, is downright repugnant. All the more unfortunate, because Locklin has some literary gifts, and if he could get beyond his preoccupation with the role of libidinous curmudgeon, he might produce more commendable work.

The collection opens with a rambling tribute to Charles Bukowski, whose image as crusty satyr the narrator clearly means to emulate. In "The Bukowski/*Barfly* Narrative," Locklin attempts to interweave several thematic strands—the narrator's disaffection for the academic profession, his lament for the Babylonish excesses of contemporary Los Angeles, and his identification with Bukowski as the mentor of his id. But whatever imaginative possibilities these themes might inspire, the story is marred by the narrator's shrill misogyny and his tendency to lapse into the language of academic criticism, interrupting the story's already weak momentum.

Other stories are more structurally coherent, but repeatedly feature the same male protagonist whose mawkish self-absorption and adolescent sexual ego undercut the reader's interest or affection. Moreover, there is little action or development in these narratives, robbing them of drama or conflict; most are musings about failed marriages, unsatisfactory relationships with parents and children, embarrassing affairs with coeds, and the pretensions of academia. An exception is the title story, where a wife and husband deceive each other in turn over the family's investments. Though cleverly plotted and a refreshing break from the tiresome sameness of the other narratives, the story is strangely lifeless.

On the whole, there is little to recommend this collection. Some readers may share the author's nostalgia for an earlier cultural age when the vicissitudes of male bravado were more compelling fictional subject matter, but I suspect that most will find his world view unpalatable.

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Made in Manitoba: An Anthology of Short Fiction. Compiled by Wayne Tefs, (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1990. 279 pages, \$6.95.)

Contemporary Manitoba Writers: New Critical Studies. Edited by Kenneth James Hughes. (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1990. 177 pages, \$12.95.)

It is still true that most Americans take Canada for granted, an invisible presence above the top of television weather maps. The twenty-two stories in *Made in Manitoba* remind us how much we impoverish ourselves by not seeing Canada. Manitoba, the eastern-most of the three Prairie Provinces, includes the far North of Hudson Bay, the rough lake and forest and blackfly country of the

granite Laurentian Shield, and the endless wheat and elevators of the prairies. And it has Winnipeg, a major city both economically and culturally akin to Minnesota's Twin Cities.

The writers included in *Made in Manitoba* are both those who were originally from Manitoba but now live elsewhere and those born elsewhere who now live in Manitoba. As Wayne Tefs, the compiler, notes, selecting stories for the anthology meant balancing "gender, geography, generation," and a number of other criteria. Thus we have stories by Manitoba's grandes dames—Margaret Laurence's often anthologized "The Loons" and Gabrielle Roy's "The Wheelchair." Robert Kroetsch, the dean of the living writers in the collection, is represented by the early "Earth Moving" (1960), written almost a decade before anything else in the collection. David Arnason, Sandra Birdsell, and W. D. Valgardson represent perhaps a middle generation of established and well-known writers, though almost none of those represented here are new or obscure.

These stories have both their epiphanies and the level narrative from which they must arise. I still love "The Loons" after many readings. More than any census, it marks the closing of a frontier. Wayne Tefs is also particularly moving. The self-conscious play with narration of Carol Shields' "Dying for Love" and the slightly affected "Story Like a Shovel" of Birk Sproxton break the mold of the essentially realistic stories that dominate. The variation in the stories and the overall high quality of the collection go to show why prairie writing is as central to Canadian literature as it is to Canadian geography, a statement one cannot make for the Great Plains in American literature.

Contemporary Manitoba Writers makes a good companion to the anthology because, not surprisingly, many of the writers in the first volume are critiqued in the second. Although the individual essays are for the most part excellent, I found the collection as a whole somewhat narrow. Each essay examines one or two works by one Manitoba writer. David Arnason's on Kroetsch and Herb Weil's on Shields are particularly elegant and insightful. Although the theoretical frameworks of the critics vary somewhat, I would have enjoyed even more variety. Perhaps what affects me as a sort of sameness results from the fact that almost all the critics have some connection with the University of Manitoba, which, like most Canadian universities, has a fairly traditional British-oriented English department, even though it also nurtures many powerful and experimental Canadian writers. Perhaps there is, at least for my American tastes, too much Shakespeare and not enough barbaric yawp. Yet *Canadian Literature* and other periodicals have certainly broken the hold of British literature on the Canadian literary imagination. I think I would have liked this volume better had it been more eclectic. Kenneth Probert's 1989 volume *Writing Saskatchewan* perhaps shows a better sense of the breadth of that province's writing than this volume shows of its sister province.

Turnstone Press, a consistently excellent regional press, has issued two books that introduce new readers to the magnificence of contemporary Manitoba writing and reconfirm the habituee in its appreciation.

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The Best Western Stories of John Jakes. Edited by Bill Pronzini and Martin H. Greenberg. (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1991. 273 pages, \$24.95/\$14.95.)

Even if one did not read Dale L. Walker's informative introductory essay to this collection, it would be easy to tell which stories John Jakes wrote in the 1950s and which were written in the last few years. Of the eleven tales (one excerpted from the 1987 novel *Heaven and Hell*) seven appeared in various Western pulp or other magazines in the 1950s. Although these are well crafted works, most use traditional Western plots and have clichéd endings: a lone man fights the bad guys and gets the gal in the end. Of these stories, "The Winning of Poker Alice" is among the best, for its portrait of the tough lady gambler who, exasperated at the hero's romantic reticence, finally proposes marriage—which he accepts.

The four more recent tales in the collection show how much Jakes has improved his writing skills. Less predictable in plot and characterization and more apt to contain irony and surprise endings, these stories are a pleasure. In "Shootout at White Pass," the middle-aged sheriff, dreaming of returning to his native Florida, is shot in the foot by a gunslinger—a wound that, ironically, gets the lawman moving. Another fine piece is "Little Phil and the Daughter of Joy," a humorous, poignant account of a prostitute seeking revenge against General Phil Sheridan for what she thinks are his Civil War crimes.

Be they Westerns from the 1950s or 1990s, however, Jakes does employ several themes throughout his work and these serve to unify the stories in this volume. As is often the case in Westerns, his heroes are alone, seeking to prove their courage and ability to do "what a man's gotta do." The heroes find this isolation very lonely, but only after they have proven themselves can they reap rewards—kudos from the townsfolk and, of course, the girl.

Also running through the stories is a sense of resignation; the characters often seem caught in lifestyles not of their own choosing—they just somehow ended up this way. It is this underlying discontent, as well as Jakes' nicely-honed sense of craftsmanship, that makes the Western stories of John Jakes better than average and certainly well worth reading.

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