

Great Plains Literature

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determination of Waterloo's community and basketball leaders more notable in hindsight. They concocted scheme after scheme to maintain a toehold in pro basketball that outlasted franchises in larger cities, such as Chicago or St. Louis.

To be sure, the Hawks were not a routine sell-out, but Harwood ably demonstrates that financial destitution did not cause their demise, as it did so many other clubs (and leagues) of the era. Instead, the NBA commissioner in 1950 bluntly declared cities like Waterloo undesirable and summarily ousted the Hawks. That hostile maneuver tipped the scales against Waterloo, despite its relative financial stability, and still stings Danny Steiber. One of the few people left who witnessed the Hawks play, the elderly Steiber ruefully believes that "Waterloo could have been the Green Bay of basketball, if they had been able to play a second and third year in the NBA" (181). Without a permanent league to call their own, the Hawks folded in the fall of 1951.

Ball Hawks crisply captures Waterloo's resolve to assert itself in the postwar era via professional basketball. Current and future sports writers should look upon Harwood's text as an excellent template chronicling the role that smaller communities play in the development of professional sports—past and present. That Harwood ably imbues this sports story with all the humanity it is due makes reading it all the more enjoyable.

Great Plains Literature, by Linda Ray Pratt. Discover the Great Plains Series. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018. xi, 168 pp. Illustrations, map, appendix, bibliography, index. \$14.95 paperback.

Reviewer Molly P. Rozum is Ronald R. Nelson Chair of Great Plains and South Dakota History and associate professor at the University of South Dakota. She is the author of *Grasslands Grown: Sense of Place and Regional Identity on North America's Canadian Prairies and American Plains, 1870–1950* (forthcoming).

In *Great Plains Literature* Linda Ray Pratt surveys historical and contemporary regional authors with depth and complexity. A joy to read, Pratt's study offers scholarly insight while maintaining popular accessibility. The study is one in a series of thematic introductions to the region as conceptualized by the Center for Great Plains Studies, joining volumes focused on geology, bison, Indians, and politics. Pratt selected literary works driven by the history and culture of, not merely set on, the Great Plains. Each chapter focuses on several thoughtfully selected authors who explore particular topics: First People, the Great

Depression, city living, and home. Nebraskan Willa Cather and Norwegian immigrant Ole Edvart Rølvaag receive chapters of their own.

Emerging after 200 years of American literary tradition, plains authors, Pratt argues, wrote “free from the thematic inheritance that had preoccupied much nineteenth-century literature” (9), that is, the U.S. Revolution, slavery, and the Civil War. The region’s literary tradition is especially important for understanding the nation’s westward expansion and the new wave of European immigrants destined to “redefine national identity” (42). Pratt succeeds, remarkably for such a slim volume, both at the task of regional interpretation and at placing the value of this literature nationally.

Generational experience weaves through the entire study. Rølvaag’s *Giants in the Earth* trilogy (1927) explores the plains environment through multigenerational Irish Catholic and Norwegian Lutheran immigrants to South Dakota and “illustrates *how* the immigrant becomes an American” (45). Ojibwe author Louis Erdrich’s *The Plague of Doves* (2008), set in North Dakota, shows the existence down the generations of a historical “burden” among “interlacing bloodlines” (139) of settler society and Native Americans “that makes forgiveness difficult and forgetting impossible” (137). Lois Phillips Hudson’s *The Bones of Plenty* (1962) suggests the generational tension emerging in the 1930s out of the timing of land acquisition as two related North Dakota families confront drought, depression, and the nation’s trade and financial services infrastructure. Pratt argues that, with the Great Plains economy “wholly reliant on agriculture,” the Great Depression had a singular effect on the Great Plains “that separates it from the rest of the nation” (101); yet the region does literary service expressing in a visual metaphor the devastation felt across the nation. The inclusion of Mari Sandoz’s *Capital City* (1939) demonstrates Pratt’s care in selection. In the book, set in the 1930s, Sandoz depicts a “dark anger” (101) in the culture of intolerance (anti-Semitism, red-baiting, nativism, racism, and Fascist sentiments) and class divisions evident in post-pioneer generations.

Historians and literary critics have a long tradition of defining the Great Plains region environmentally, disregarding national borders. Pratt sprinkles references to Canadian literature throughout the study, but, with the exception of Margaret Laurence’s novels set in Manitoba, such observations remain only reminders of a contributory Canadian tradition. Pratt accepts too readily the idea that Canadians forged more peaceful, “less destructive” relations with indigenous peoples than the United States did (3, 32). Shifting to political boundaries to define the U.S. section of the plains, Pratt declares that “Minnesota, Iowa, and

Missouri are not the Great Plains" (5). Strict environmental definitions (and a map from the *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*) might be causes to exclude Minnesota and Iowa. The inclusion of Meridel Le Sueur's *The Girl* (1978), set in Minneapolis-St. Paul, however, suggests the integral cultural connections between the plains and Minnesota that belie political boundaries. Indeed, the larger grasslands of North America connect western Minnesota and Iowa to Great Plains states and most of the themes discussed. Iowans will find that many of Pratt's interpretations resonate with their state's history and well-known Iowa authors.

Great Plains Politics, by Peter J. Longo. Discover the Great Plains Series. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018. xvii, 127 pp. Illustrations, map, bibliography, notes, index. \$14.95 paperback.

Reviewer Karl Brooks, now deputy director of the New Mexico Administrative Office of the Courts, is former associate professor of history at the University of Kansas and former Heartland Regional Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Peter J. Longo views political action on the Great Plains as a praiseworthy form of local activism. His six brief biographies portray political actors: three represented their states in Congress; one served in a legislature; one held elective office in a tribal government; and one dedicated his activities to his community. The subjects remind us that the Great Plains, though today predominantly white, have since the mid-nineteenth century been home to African Americans and were always home to Native peoples. As many plains communities become increasingly Hispanic in the first quarter of the twenty-first century, Longo's book helps situate racial and ethnic tensions within the region's political culture.

Iowans will look in vain for discussion of its state politics or history. The map charting the Great Plains traces its eastern boundary along the Missouri River (xiv). Longo's biographies remain firmly situated west of Iowa, although longtime Nebraska Republican Representative Virginia Smith grew up a Hawkeye before crossing the river for college in Lincoln. Despite this frame, Longo's analysis of plains political culture offers suggestions for understanding Iowa's durable issues of rural depopulation and commodity agriculture's pervasive effects on political thought and action.

Longo argues that plains political culture offers a basically healthy structure for political action. Its thousands of smaller communities are really the places where political conflict and action enable people to