

these are transmitted to future generations. They also demonstrate the vital links between people and place, past, present and future, and how these serve as guiding principles in all aspects of their lives.

Despite the diversity of women's voices in attendance at the conference, the articles in this collection weigh heavily on the academic side. Blatantly missing are the voices of the many front-line community workers who represented the majority of conference participants. An invaluable contribution would have been critiques or summaries of the various "experiential and problem-solving" workshops — what kinds of dialogues ensued among women from such diverse backgrounds? What kinds of outcomes, solutions or recommendations emerged? The inclusion of workshop summaries would have also ensured a representational balance between academic and community concerns in the collection. Despite this weakness, which is common in published academic works, this collection is a useful contribution to Aboriginal Women's Studies and will appeal to lay readers and scholars alike.

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Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997. 247 pp., index.

Anyone who watched *Jones v. Clinton* unfold in the American news media early this year has witnessed the way in which the definition of femininity can be manipulated and mobilized to serve political ends. Despite its notorious contempt for sexual harassment as an issue for the courts, the political Right was nevertheless quick to assume the role of chivalrous champions of wronged American womanhood. As for the individual women involved, no one will ever know them, except as the most recent feminine place-markers in the patriarchal discourse that has shaped the U.S. since the *Mayflower* landed. In keeping with the media-constructed term "Clinton's women," they were the captives of their own narratives as manipulated by expensive lawyers and media pundits on both sides of the political war. Indeed, the women's disclosures were not about the way women are treated by the men in high places who regard unlimited sexual access to female underlings as just one of the perks of the job. Rather, reshaped through a series of politically orchestrated and electronically mediated leaks and counterleaks, their narratives were about positioning public opinion for the next presidential election, when once again voters get to choose which of the two patriarchal visions of America will prevail for the next eight years.

As Canadians, we needn't be too smug about the political sagas and soap operas of our flamboyant neighbours. Our own political history is woven from a similar kind of gender-inflected yarn, and historians of the last thirty years have demonstrated considerable skill in unravelling it. Sarah Carter's *Capturing Women* is a recent and, in my view, immensely fascinating contribution to that endeavour. Her study examines the position of women in the colonial discourse that reshaped the political landscape of the Canadian West during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Like the women in the *Jones v. Clinton* story circulating through the American media, women of the fledgling white communities on the Canadian Prairies were the sexualized signifiers of virtue and victimization in the circulating stories that influenced the fateful shift in white-Native power relations during and after the Second Riel Rebellion of 1885.

As the play of meaning generated by her title suggests, Carter is examining captivity narratives — stories about white women as “Indian captives.” Her primary focus is the story of the two women who, widowed and captured by the Cree during the Rebellion, published a highly imaginative account of their experiences entitled *Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear: The Life and Adventures of Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney* (1885). The experiences of these two women,

combined with the alarm raised a few years later over the supposed captivity of other young white women ... served to promote hysteria over the issue of the safety of white women in the West and to provide a rationalization for the repressive measures taken against the supposed perpetrators. Through the imagined experiences of Delaney and Gowanlock, hatred against the “enemy” was cultivated and the theme of white female victimization stressed in order to bolster military resolve and national accord. (xiv-xv)

Delaney and Gowanlock’s account and the proliferation of other tales it inspired invoked captivating images of virtuous white women suffering “a fate worse than death” at the hands of sexually aggressive “savages.” Thus, as signifiers of vulnerable white womanhood in need of the protection of heroic white men, Gowanlock and Delaney were the captives of their own narrative — a book less about their experiences than “about regulating race and gender relations in the West, about clarifying and maintaining boundaries between Native and newcomer” (xv).

If white women had little room to manoeuvre within the discourse of colonialism, dependent as it is upon patriarchal ideology, Native women had none:

They were cast as the complete opposite of white women, as agents of the destruction of the moral and cultural health of the new community.... It was useful to insist that Aboriginal women, some of whom had married prominent white men, were accustomed to many sexual partners. Their children were not, therefore, to be considered the legitimate heirs. Thus women in the Canadian West were defined differently according to their race, and the specific image of each was mobilized for particular purposes. (xvi)

Carter notes that these “representations of women in the West proved resilient and were pressed into service from time to time well into the present century.” Indeed, as my American analogy suggests, fabrications of femininity can still be used as discursive devices for mobilizing public opinion and influencing political change.

As a literary historian, I cannot do full justice to Carter’s book as a work of Canadian history proper, but I can recommend it highly to those in my own discipline who regard captivity narratives as an exclusively American genre that has no place in the literary history of Canada. Carter does a fine job of setting her study in the context of the history of the genre and its crucial role in the colonial project. In setting up her theoretical framework, she also makes excellent use of some of the most important work of feminist historians and literary analysts writing in the field of postcolonial studies — especially those who have theorized race and gender as culturally and historically constructed categories. I find it significant that of the four race-gender categories that govern colonial discourse — white masculinity, Native masculinity, white femininity, Native femininity — only white masculinity escapes construction in primarily sexual terms. In contrast to salacious savages, promiscuous squaws, and chaste white womanhood, men of unambiguous Anglo-Celtic ancestry have an identity that transcends the sexual: as pioneers and government agents, Mounties and military men, white males are the valiant bringers of “civilization” and the regulators of the sexuality of others. Thus the categories themselves function as four fabulous archetypes in the gender mythology of the Canadian West.

While it's true that "women are not always free to project their own images or identities, nor are they free to author their own texts fully" (xv), Gowanlock and Delaney at least had a hand in constructing the narrative that captured both them and the imagination of the reading public. Indeed, what initially inspired Carter's study was in part the huge dislocation between the story they apparently related immediately upon their emergence from the Cree camp and the one they wrote for publication a few months later. Early reports quoted the women as insisting that they had been well treated by both their Cree captors and their Métis co-hostages, had been given plenty of food, and had not been subjected to cruelty, indignity, or forced labour. However, *Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear* had a very different story to tell — a story of hardship, privation, and brutality. Carter is meticulous in her analysis of the multitude of pressures on Gowanlock and Delaney to produce this startling revision of their original account: the limits of literary convention; the assistance of ghostwriters; their need as impecunious widows to produce a best-seller. What Carter does not fully consider is the real possibility that by the time the women wrote down their reconstructed story, they believed it. After all, dominant discourses dominate because their explanatory power is experienced as irresistible by people of many levels of sophistication. Western culture is notorious for its belief that the best explanation of anything is the simplest one, and colonial discourse, with its four race-gender categories, is a marvel of simplicity: it's easily internalized as a framework for (over)simplifying complex experiences, and it's easily manipulated by those who benefit most from its ideology.

The most convincing evidence for captivity narratives as an insidious vehicle for colonialist propaganda is revealed in Carter's examination of the popular images of Native people, especially Native women. In the first place, "the experience of being captured and enclosed within an alien culture was typically an Aboriginal experience, whereas the white captive was always an anomaly" (26). Nowhere is this more evident than in the capture and enclosure of Native women in racist and sexist stereotypes:

From the earliest years of settlement on reserves in western Canada, Canadian government administrators and statesmen, as well as the national press, promoted a cluster of negative images of Aboriginal women. These images served those in power, who used them to explain the conditions of poverty and ill health on the reserves. (160)

The deliberate propagation of these negative stereotypes got many an official in the Department of Indian Affairs off the hook. Moreover, blaming the victim also made it possible to exonerate the white men who sexually exploited Native women. As one newspaper account claimed, "the character of the men of this country has been assailed." As another responded, "We deem it our duty to lift our voices in their defense" (183).

But it wasn't merely newspapers that promoted the captivity of Native women in colonialist constructions and vindicated the captors. The most notorious examples can be found in the legal discourse, especially where interracial marriage was concerned. For example,

If a woman was not of a "good moral character," she lost her one-third interest in her husband's estate — and a male government official was the sole and final judge of an Indian woman's moral character. As late as 1921 in the House of Commons, a Criminal Code amendment was debated that would have made it an offence for any white man to have "illicit connection" with an Indian woman... . The amendment was not passed, however, for it was argued that the measure could make unsuspecting white men the victims of blackmail by Indian women. (194)

These self-serving white male constructions of devious and dangerous Aboriginal femininity also served to keep in place at the opposing end of the spectrum the image of virtuous and vulnerable white femininity. Thus were all women entrapped at the polarized extremes of the *real* captivity narrative of the Canadian West, namely patriarchal colonialism.

*Capturing Women* is a significant contribution to the history of Canadian women. Sarah Carter's meticulous and compelling argument is complemented by many photographs and sketches from several Canadian archives. All in all, the book is a fascinating and informative read guaranteed to capture the interest of both academic and non-academic audiences — and I enthusiastically recommend it to both.

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*Forging the Prairie West*, by John Herd Thompson. Toronto, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. 212 pp., bibliographic references and index.

This book is one of a six-volume series entitled *The Illustrated History of Canada*. Its purpose is to examine the country's major regions. Each volume is to be written by a distinguished Canadian historian.

*Forging the Prairie West* begins with a description of the physical features of the prairie region, carries the account forward through the centuries with emphasis on the period since 1600, and ends with a discussion of the new West of the 1980s and 1990s. The story is told by historian John Herd Thompson who throughout the book sympathizes with western regionalism and with the social and political progressivism which developed in the West.

The introduction includes an interesting discussion of writing illustrated history. Thompson emphasizes that each picture is like any other historical source: it is someone's interpretation of the past, and the historian must understand this and comment on it. For example, three photographs (pp. 33-35) are included which were taken by Humphrey Lloyd Hime, the Toronto photographer who accompanied the Hind expedition to the West in 1858. At first glance the photographs of Natives, Métis guides, members of the expedition and an Indian skull on a treeless plain appear merely to illustrate the pre-settlement prairies. However, in the text under the photographs Thompson comments on how Native people were depicted and adds that Hime only featured Natives when they fitted the "noble savage" stereotype common in the nineteenth century among Canadians of European background. This approach is followed consistently, and consequently *Forging the Prairie West* is not a coffee-table book with nice pictures. Rather the illustrations are an important part of the evidence Thompson presents in support of his interpretation and conclusions. Those who only look at the pictures without considering carefully what the author has to say about them are missing a great deal of what this book is about.

The book is intended for a wide audience. It could serve as a text for university students as well as an introduction to the history of the West for the general reader. Thompson's writing style adds greatly to the book's versatility and appeal. It is a solid historical account but is also readable and filled with contemporary language. Thompson has a flair for the interesting phrase as well as a fine sense of humour. In discussing the decade of strife between the Hudson Bay Company and the North West Company, he states, in words reminiscent of Dean Rusk in 1962, that "the winterers