

accumulation; later, it became indispensable — particularly in the case of skilled labour — to the productive process itself. Indeed, the cost of hired labour was used by farm machine companies to persuade producers to replace hired labour with technology.

Danyusk works within the Marxian tradition of scholarship, a decision that some might find odd, given Marx's preoccupation with industrial capitalism and his less-than-charitable view concerning the political relevance and promise of farmers and farm workers (see the *18th Brumaire* of Louis Bonaparte). In fact, Danyusk skillfully demonstrates the relevance of the Marxian tradition to the study of farm labour, particularly its conceptual and theoretical capacity to get behind the appearance of things and make sense out of what non-Marxists would dismiss as paradoxes or contradictions.

Contradictions indeed! The very paradox of the hired hand being a member of the family, yet not a member of the family, working alongside his employer, often sharing his skills, yet one the owner and master, the other the labourer and subordinate. These contradictions deserve dialectical analysis and Danyusk offers one.

*Hired Hands* complements Tom Isern's *Bull Threshers and Bindle Stiffs: Harvesting and Threshing on the North American Plains* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1990). It offers a compelling guide and invitation to study female, domestic labour on the agrarian Prairies. It demonstrates the possibilities of developing Marxian theory in respect of agriculture and labour. This book is and will remain essential reading.

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*The Last Buffalo Hunter* by Mary Weekes (reprint). Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1994. Pp. 191.

It has been fifty years since the first edition of Mary Weekes' *The Last Buffalo Hunter* was published by Macmillan Canada in 1945. Originally released in article format under the title "The Waning Herds," the book consists of the recollections of an elderly Metis buffalo hunter Norbert Welsh, whom Weekes met while visiting an old folks' home in Lebret, Saskatchewan in the 1930s. Norbert Welsh was well into his eighties when he shared his experiences as a buffalo hunter, freighter and trader with Ms. Weekes. During his active life he encountered many of the personalities (and cultural archetypes) that figure so prominently in Metis history: the Plains hunter Gabriel Dumont, the trader Joseph Babbatyne, the Roman Catholic priests Lacombe and Hugonard, and, of course, the ubiquitous Louis Riel. Welsh also became an unwilling participant-observer in one of the more notorious events of the North-West Rebellion — the Frog Lake "Massacre."

Like many reminiscences adapted into narrative form, it is sometimes unclear where the "voice" of Norbert Welsh ends and the editorial comment of Mary Weekes begins. The difficulties in separating fact from fiction in this narrative were evident in its first incarnation in the 1930s, when reviewer John Andrew Kerr, a Perth, Ontario clerk and former buffalo-hunting companion of Gabriel Dumont, subjected "The Waning Herds" to a highly critical review in a letter to the *Perth Expositor*, noting, among other things, that the buffalo robe prices were highly inflated.

It is unfortunate that this most recent version of *The Last Buffalo Hunter* makes no attempt to address the historical errors identified by Kerr and a succession of other reviewers. Through the judicious use of footnotes to explicate inaccuracies and controversies in the narrative, and by directing the reader to additional sources of information, the book might have been raised from the level of historical curiosity to that of a scholarly volume in its own right.

And this book deserves to be given a serious look as a source of information on *hivernant* daily life in the nineteenth century. There are comparatively few primary sources that address aspects of Metis social life in any detail, in stark contrast to the glut of information dealing with Metis political culture. There are even fewer sources that are recounted by Metis people themselves (Guillaume Charrette's *Vanishing Spaces: Memoirs of Louis Goulet* is an example of another source that comes readily to mind). A wealth of vivid detail concerning trade, buffalo hunting and meat processing, relations between men and women, and other aspects of daily life are featured in this narrative. Norbert Walsh talks about chewing buffalo cartilage while butchering on a hot day, to make his saliva flow. What mainstream writer would invent something like that? Or is it possible that Ms. Weekes borrowed this interesting detail from Father Belcourt, who observed the same practice in 1845? Again, we are never exactly sure where Ms. Weekes gets her information.

Unfortunately, the publishers of this edition miss their opportunity to produce the definitive version of this book by settling for a mere reprint of the original. The only concession made to recent readers — the provision of an introduction which serves to provide some additional information on the background of the book — is little improvement over the prefaces provided by the late author in earlier editions of the book.

A final aspect of this publication which merits some comment is the illustration chosen for the book jacket. It is puzzling, and somewhat disconcerting, to find Paul Kane's painting "Assiniboines Hunting Buffalo" featured on the cover of a book devoted to the life of a Metis buffalo hunter. It is unfortunate that Paul Kane's "Half-Breeds Running Buffalo" already graces the cover of the English-language reissue of Marcel Giraud's *The Métis in the Canadian West*, as this painting would have been a more appropriate jacket for *The Last Buffalo Hunter*.

No doubt we will have to wait a further fifty years before another

attempt is made to produce a truly scholarly version of *The Last Buffalo Hunter*. Until then, however, Fifth House is to be commended for reprinting a compelling narrative which, despite its weaknesses, remains a useful source on the Plains Metis of the nineteenth century.

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