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**Review of *New Moon at Batoche: Reflections on the Urban Prairie*
By George Melnyk**

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New Moon at Batoche: Reflections on the Urban Prairie. By George Melnyk. Banff, Alberta: The Banff Centre Press, 1999. Illustrations, endnotes. 158 pp. \$17.95 paper.

In his latest book of cultural analysis, George Melnyk deplores the fact that although the great majority of Prairie Canadians live in urban areas, the dominant iconography of the region celebrates the land and denigrates the city. Melnyk asks how such a huge number of people (more than seven in ten) could be “excluded from the region’s imagination?” “This is only possible,” he says, answering his own question, “because city life has not been associated with the region’s identity in any major way.” Imagining the city is the role of artists and intellectuals, and in the nine essays that make up this book (only four of them directly on urban issues) Melnyk seeks to understand this gap and to present ways to bridge it.

In his preface, Melnyk describes *New Moon* as the third part in a trilogy begun with his *Radical Regionalism* (1981) and continued in *Beyond Alienation: Political Essays on the West* (1993). While there are important links among the books, this latest title is best approached as a gathering of essays that highlight the stresses Melnyk sees in his own life in the 1990s and in the life of his culture.

Melnyk struggles with his role as intellectual. He recognizes that like other writers he is displaced; yet he speaks also of a new culture arising only when the “people as a whole” effect the necessary social and economic changes. A similar tension between the popular and the artistic appears on the cover, which offers, despite Melnyk’s subtitle referring to the urban prairie, a trite image of big blue sky wedded to golden grass. The title proper is loaded with cultural assumptions the essays never quite unpack. What links Batoche, we might ask, with contemporary Prairie cities? Melnyk seems not to have worked out the connections.

In his final essay, “Rivers of the Mind,” Melnyk makes a personal argument, including in it his woodcut called *The People Are a River*

in the Land, an image that balances his compelling woodcut of poet Andrew Suknaski. He insists that rivers are the life-blood of Western Canadian urban life. But the essay's subtitle, "Praying to Water," seems to reflect the very attitude Melnyk criticizes in writers like Sharon Butala who celebrate rural life. Since Melnyk is one of Western Canada's leading thinkers, these essays and their discontents deserve our close attention, for they point to issues that will continue to distress and restrict our future development.

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