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Review of Images of the West: Changing Perceptions of the Prairies, 1690-1960.

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Canadians (both prairie dwellers and those living elsewhere) toward their prairie as an evocative and formative landscape. Ronald Rees's *Land of Earth and Sky: Landscape Painting of Western Canada* (1984) and *New and Naked Land: Making the Prairies Home* (1988), from the same press, and now R. Douglas Francis's *Images of the West*, suggest that Western Producer is tapping a general interest in the Canadian prairie landscape as subject broader than the scholarly audience presupposed by such works as Edward A. McCourt's *The Canadian West in Fiction* (1947; revised 1970), Laurence Ricou's *Vertical Man/Horizontal World* (1973), Dick Harrison's *Unnamed Country* (1977), or my own *The Great Prairie Fact and Literary Imagination* (1989). Indeed, while drawing upon these and other antecedents, Francis—a Canadian intellectual historian teaching at the University of Calgary—aims primarily at “the general reader [rather] than for the specialist” in order to examine “the changing images of the West over the entire three centuries of exploration and settlement by the white man” (xvii, xvi).

For those discovering the imaginative reactions of Europeans to the Canadian prairie landscape for the first time, *Images of the West* is an essential and useful volume, particularly because of its breadth of coverage. In six succinct chapters—which actually make up slightly less than half the book's whole—Francis details and demonstrates the various ways in which the prairie was seen from first incursion until about 1960; this is accomplished by looking at “fur traders' journals, reports of scientific expeditions, travelogues, government immigration propaganda, booster literature of towns and cities, but also art, literature, songs, and poetry” (xvii). The balance of the volume is made up of what Francis calls “extracts,” a good bibliography, and an index; the extracts are generous quotations from the sources just discussed, as well as numerous illustrations (including a gorgeous center section, made up of images handsomely reproduced in stunning color). Together, these materials nicely complement Francis's discussion.

Images of the West: Changing Perceptions of the Prairies, 1690-1960. By R. Douglas Francis. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1989. xviii + 268 pp. \$27.50.

Over the past several years, Western Producer Prairie Books has published volumes that demonstrate—quite apart from the materials they offer and the arguments they advance—the enduring “lure of the land” felt by English-

As a work of scholarship, however, *Images of the West* does not really offer anything new; it is well-documented and covers the appropriate ground, but Francis's "images" approach is descriptive only, so his argument that the prevailing view of the prairie West changed as the region's significance vis-à-vis the larger culture (both national and otherwise) changed over time and, concurrently, as the region was settled, is in no way startling. At the same time, the extracts could have benefitted from introductory paragraphs designed to situate the reader in each successive text—even though I am generally familiar with Francis's sources, I found myself straining from time to time in order to take in the significance of a given quotation, both to its source and to Francis's argument.

Such comments do not ultimately detract from Francis's accomplishment in *Images of the West*: he has produced a fine single-volume introduction to imaginative reactions to the Canadian prairie West, one that will prove immensely useful for the general reader he supposes. What is more, his book confirms that, on the Canadian prairies at least, the landscape beckons us still.

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