No Place Like Home: Notes from a Western Life (review)

Kerry Fine

Western American Literature, Volume 45, Number 1, Spring 2010,
pp. 104-105 (Article)

Published by The Western Literature Association
DOI: 10.1353/wal.0.0084

the subject of essays in the new book. So are their differences, in another pair of essays honoring rootlessness and rootedness. Still, one notes that the latter quality results in a much longer essay and one that is enhanced by its positioning near the book's conclusion. There are moments of brilliance in the book, like the opening piece, "Cuttings." (And "Cuttings" is a testament to the primacy of roots, not cuttings.)

I value the high quality and the range of Daniel's work in these eighteen essays, a welcoming good read throughout. I note especially his attention to new subjects, as in "The Mother of Beauty," a moving account of the death of his mother and others close to him, and the necessity of our eventual death to the beauty of life. I also welcome the strength of science, such as biology, hydrology, and geology that undergirds much of John Daniel's recent work.

***No Place Like Home: Notes from a Western Life*.**
By Linda M. Hasselstrom.
Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2009. 224 pages, $24.95.

Reviewed by Kerry Fine
Texas Tech University, Lubbock

Linda Hasselstrom is a rancher and an environmentally aware writer. Her most recent collection of essays, *No Place Like Home: Notes from a Western Life*, brings together essays that span various periods and locations of Hasselstrom's life, linking them with the theme of community. The twenty-six essays, with witty titles such as "A Rocket Launcher in the Closet" and "Making Pottery out of Sewage," cover topics from waste disposal to child neglect and remind us that we are all members of some type of community. Hasselstrom shows readers that whether it be an urban neighborhood in Cheyenne, an island off the coast of Alaska, a group of buckskinners at an annual rendezvous, or ranching neighbors on the plains of southwestern South Dakota, the sustainability of a community can be measured by the strength and vigor of the relationships between the place and the people who live in it. Hasselstrom notes that "only individuals can make a difference, no matter what the task. Each of us makes a stand where we can, and when we meet someone else who's doing the same thing, we've got a community" (97).

In typical new western fashion, Hasselstrom challenges assumptions that one must be either an environmentalist or a rancher as she reveals the many ways in which ranching ties families and communities to the land. With rye humor Hasselstrom explores paradoxes of the West. The prime

paradox she explores is the meeting of stubborn western independence with the reality that decisions made by individuals tend to impact the entire community, whether those neighbors are shipping you their sewage from Minnesota or their poorly planned subdivision floats to a stop in your prime grazing pasture after a flood. Sewage, crime, garbage all end up in someone's backyard. Awareness makes for a better community while ignorance tends to make Hasselstrom quite cranky.

Hasselstrom's evocative ranching-infused nature writing is an excellent read for current fans and for newcomers as well. The essays can be read straight through or in random order. They can also be used as stand-alone works in a classroom setting. They would work well in classes which include traditional "western" topics and in classes which challenge what it means to be a westerner, a woman, an environmentalist, or a community member. For example, Hasselstrom's essay "Tomato Cages Are Metaphors" asks the question, "what does it mean to be a neighbor in a city?" (55). Her answers involve many lessons she learned growing up on a ranch and include fine-tuning for an urban environment. Her work adds an important, and not often represented, voice to the conversation.

***The Lacuna*.**
By Barbara Kingsolver.
New York: HarperCollins, 2009. 507 pages, $26.99.

Reviewed by Pamela Pierce
Utah State University, Logan

Barbara Kingsolver's *The Lacuna*, her first novel in nine years, ambitiously covers a broad range of locations and time periods. The story begins in Isla Pixol, Mexico, in 1929 and ends in North Carolina during the 1950s. As readers of Kingsolver know, she emerged as a western writer in the 1990s with *The Bean Trees* (1988), *Animal Dreams* (1990), and *Pigs in Heaven* (1993)—all novels set in the desert Southwest. The depth of research and the creation of historical figures as vibrant characters will make Kingsolver fans excited to enter the new territory captured in *The Lacuna*.

Readers meet the novel's principal character, Harrison Shepherd, as a boy in Isla Pixol, where he searches for escape in literature: "He could reach in and touch the book's spines, exactly as Count Dantès in *The Count of Monte Cristo* had reached through the bars to touch his bride's face, when she came to see him in prison" (16). His life takes a crucial turn when Harrison encounters the legendary muralist Diego Rivera and starts to mix plaster and paint for his murals. The novel then follows Harrison