Lamont, Victoria. *Westerns: A Women's History*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016. Paperback, 2024. 194 pgs.

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Victoria Lamont is a professor of English at the University of Waterloo. She has previously published *The Bower Atmosphere: A Biography of B.M. Bower* (2024) and is co-author of *Judith Merril: A Critical Study* (2012). She received her Ph.D. from the University of Alberta in 1998, and her research and teaching focuses include critical theory, literary criticism, and American literature. *Westerns: A Women's History* is situated well within these broad categories. The book is a reexamination—or perhaps a resurrection—of notable female western authors who have been largely forgotten in popular conceptions of Western literature and popular culture. It is both a women's history and a critical look at a selection of women western writers, such as B.M. Bower and Mourning Dove, that used their craft to challenge social mores of their times in creative and often effective ways.

Lamont's overarching argument is that "the popular western, widely considered a male-authored tradition, was founded as much by women writers as by men and played a significant role in American women's literary history at the turn of the twentieth century" (1). She also makes discrete, supporting arguments within each chapter that further refine and expand her recovery of female western authors. Lamont employs a critical feminist lens, responding to Janet Dean's call for a revisionist approach to both recover "marginal writers and texts" and "the relations that canonize some texts while excluding others" (4). Throughout, she distinguishes between "quality" and dime novels, limiting the scope of her study to the former.

The books consists of six chapters. Chapter 1, "Western Violence and the Limits of Sentimental Power," challenges the "canonization" of Owen Wister's *The Virginian* as the "foundational" western novel by examining 1889's *The Administratrix* by Colorado suffragist Emma Ghent Curtis (12). Chapter 2, "Domestic Politics and Cattle Rustling," compares Wister's *The Virginian* and Francis McElrath's *The Rustler*, both published in 1902 and sharing similar plot lines but with differing emphases—Wister on (good) cowboys versus (evil) rustlers, and McElrath on class difference and social inequality (34). Chapter 3, "Women's Westerns and the Myth of the Pseudonym," further complicates the dichotomy between male versus female western writers, but situates the gender divide within regional, racial, and class factors, "debunking" the myth that women used masculine pen names to publish (53). Chapter 4, "Why Mourning Dove Wrote a Western" recovers Mourning Dove's (Okanagan) passion for western fictional narrative, using her novel *Cogewea* as a "radical, Indigenist alternative to the dominant, ethnographic discourses" of the time (76).

The final two chapters diverge from the structure of the first four. In Chapter 5, "Cattle Branding and the Traffic in Women," Lamont employs a critical analysis comparing the physical branding of cattle to women's lesser status under patriarchal systems. Similarly, in Chapter 6, "The Masculinization of the Western," Lamont associates the "ghettoization" of women's westerns with the growth of the pulp publishing industry in the post-1915 period where "quality" pulp magazines, as she terms them, sub-divided into "romantic westerns" that catered increasingly to women, compared to general-reader publications that were implicitly catering to a male readership.

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Lamont relies on a representative sample of western pulp magazines and novels as her primary source base. She approaches this topic not as a historian, but rather from the standpoint of literary criticism, and in that respect, there is only limited engagement with relevant historical scholarship. Nonetheless, Lamont succeeds with her reevaluation of so-called foundational western literature, such as *The Virginian,* by situating B.M. Bower, Frances McElrath, Mourning Dove, Emma Ghent Curtis, and others as women worthy of recognition and elevation to the same status as notable male western authors. Lamont's *Westerns* is a testament to the quiet resolve of many western women that have fought to critique and change the limiting social mores of their time.

Some limitations of the book, while minor, are worthy of note. While Lamont includes a historiography of sorts in the introduction, she cites books such as Jane Tompkins' *West of Everything* (1992) and Norris Yates' *Gender and Genre* (1995), which are quite dated, but does not connect these classic texts to more contemporary scholarship with which her work is in conversation. At times, Lamont makes sweeping inferences that lack evidentiary support. For instance, in Chapter 1, she writes that "*The Administratrix* was published in 1889, on the cusp of this emergence of the cowboy hero in Colorado print . . . Curtis saw in this emerging hero a vehicle for popularizing woman suffrage in a state that had resoundingly defeated it in 1877" (19). Without Curtis's words captured in a diary, letters, or other documentation, it is plausible—but not certain—that she "saw" these portents. While in literary criticism, the author's interpretation matters more than copious citation, this was a missed opportunity to engage in the breadth of historical scholarship that addresses these themes.

Overall, the book's strengths far outweigh any limitations. Lamont's use of biography introduces readers not only to these women's novels, but also to the broader context of their daily lives, highlighting parallels between many of them, though they lived separately, spread across the West. Like male authors of the time, establishing the western credentials of these authors proved critical to their success in the genre. Living in the West and having insider knowledge of the realities of this alluring geographical space gave them admission into the so-called "club" and lent their writing a sense of authenticity—despite their lesser social status.

Westerns: A Women's History would be an excellent addition to graduate or upper-division courses on the history of the American West, American Studies courses, or a women and gender studies course. Individual chapters or excerpts from the book would also serve well in lower-division U.S. history courses, particularly those focusing on literature, gender, or the West. While the writing is clear and accessible to a general audience, its most obvious audience is academic.