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A Teton Country Anthology ed. by Robert W. Righter (review)

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This book is a primer, whose literary merit lies in the quality of its dialogue. For those of us who still hope for answers, here are conversations that suggest some.

ZITA INGHAM *University of Arizona*

A Teton Country Anthology. Edited by Robert W. Righter. (Niwot, Colorado: Roberts Rinehart, Inc., 1990. 196 pages, $12.50.)

For over a century, the Jackson Hole area of Wyoming has been written about as a uniquely beautiful and alluring portion of America. Its attractiveness has also, as Robert Righter points out in his introduction, created a "dramatic human history," involving Native Americans, trappers, explorers, mountaineers, stockmen, settlers, guides, sportsmen, scientists, dude ranchers, artists, writers, and—more recently—developers, winter-sports enthusiasts, oilmen, and the rich and famous seeking less-crowded, more-unspoiled country with unmatched scenery. Righter's editorial approach samples significant writing on the Teton area's natural features and wildlife, its history—issues of development, conservation, land use, and government protection versus private ownership in particular—and varied visitors and residents whose accounts taken from diaries, books, and periodicals form the fourteen anthology selections. The writings focus on explorations beginning in the 1870s, treks for sporting adventure between 1885 and 1898, extended visits and settlement, and controversial issues after the turn-of-the-century involving the elk herd, establishment of Jackson Hole National Monument in 1943, and the growing awareness of the irreplaceable aesthetic values of the area's natural environment.

Some selections are by well-known authors—Owen Wister, Theodore Roosevelt, George Bird Grinnell, and the long-time resident conservationists and writers, Olaus and Margaret Murie. There are also interesting and lively pieces by the Englishman William A. Baillie-Grohman, reacting to the region in 1880 with a sharp eye and considerable humor; Grace Gallatin Seton-Thompson, wife of the writer-naturalist, describing an imaginative tenderfoot's initial impressions of the country and its inhabitants in 1898; Fanny Kemble Wister, writing in 1911 as a young girl very much taken with Wyoming dude-ranch life; Frances Judge, portraying ranching as difficult but rewarding and colorfully characterizing her strong, life-loving grandmother; and by Fritiof Fryxell, a ranger-naturalist, whose verbal landscape painting emphasizes the region's appeal to the human sense of beauty and wonder.

This exploration of Teton country writing is an appropriate publication for Wyoming's centennial celebration of statehood. As a carefully selective anthology, it provides a sound framework for further reading, a valuable overview of an intriguing segment of western history and literature—and a casebook on

environmental concerns and conflicts that are still very much at issue in Wyoming and other parts of the American West.

ROBERT A. RORIPAUGH *University of Wyoming*

The Good Rain. By Timothy Egan. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990. 254 pages, $19.95.)

New words sign the literary landscape of the 1990s, words like "ecotourism" and "ecocriticism" and "ecoprose." Of books that follow all three, Timothy Egan's *The Good Rain* is the best example I have read.

Subtitled "Across Time and Terrain in the Pacific Northwest," Egan's prose pursues a trail through Washington and Oregon that first was followed by Theodore Winthrop more than a century earlier. Like Ivan Doig, in his *Winter Brothers'* tracking of James Swan, Egan juxtaposes contemporary issues, impressions, and comments against the descriptions of a nineteenth-century observer, in this case a Yankee visitor who wrote *The Canoe and The Saddle* about what he had seen on an 1853 trip north of the Columbia River. Unlike Doig, however, Egan's focus is on the land itself. Each chapter in *The Good Rain* takes the reader to some special Pacific Northwest terrain ("ecotourism"), compares Winthrop's description of it with an investigatory twentieth-century reality ("ecocriticism"), and does all this quite elegantly ("ecoprose").

Indeed, I might describe *The Good Rain* as a rather literary *High Country News.* Certainly Egan composes his polished diction and syntax from a very activist point of view. He is neither shy about assessing the ills he sees nor reticent about articulating his vision. "We edge up to a vast canyon," he writes in a chapter called "Salmon,"

> where the earth cracks in layers. I feel as if I'm watching a slow-motion earthquake. Streams of mud and clay and gravel slide down from all sides of the canyon, funneled into Deer Creek. The debris backs up, fills with water during storms such as today's downpour, then explodes, scooping out every steelhead and salmon spawning nest in its path. . . . I've never seen anything like this—a cancerous canyon five hundred feet across, two thousand feet long and eight hundred feet deep. More than a million cubic yards of debris have slid into the river. Five years ago, this was a gentle forest slope. Then, the Georgia Pacific Timber Company clearcut most of the trees in the watershed. Now, the land will not hold water. The logging company says it's nature's fault, not theirs.

I could say a great deal more about *The Good Rain,* but I think Egan's words