

EATON, Emily, and Valarie ZINK – *Fault Lines: Life and Landscape in Saskatchewan's Oil Economy*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2016. Pp. 128.

In twenty-first-century Saskatchewan, oil “looks like freedom, but feels like death” (p. 98). These lyrics from Leonard Cohen’s 1992 song “Closing Time,” sprawled across an oil tanker railcar in Stoughton, Saskatchewan, serve as both a fitting description of our society’s troubled relationship with oil and a rather succinct conclusion for Emily Eaton’s and Valerie Zink’s book, *Fault Lines: Life and Landscape in Saskatchewan's Oil Economy*. The image of the tanker is one of 77 photos by Zink that accompany 29 pages of text by Eaton, which together attempt to capture the contradictions and complexities of oil development in rural Saskatchewan between 2011 and 2015. Despite its short length, *Fault Lines* provides a compelling and insightful overview of the difficult choices, short- and long-term consequences, and myriad injustices that oil development has introduced to Saskatchewan.

Eaton and Zink are careful not to reduce the issue of oil development to simplistic arguments for or against, but rather weave together alternative, conflicting, and overlapping perspectives that serve to illustrate the complexities. The oil economy has brought jobs and prosperity, while at the same time introducing new health risks, causing environmental damage, and increasing social inequalities. Through interviews with oil workers, landowners, politicians, Indigenous protestors, temporary foreign workers, and social service providers, Eaton conveys the illusion of choice that permeates the oil economy. In the broadest sense, people living in rural Saskatchewan made (and continue to make) choices about oil development in their communities and on their land. But within the context of factors out of their control, such as unstable agricultural commodity prices and rural out-migration, people’s choices are largely constrained by a need “to make the most of their situation” (p. 35). The benefits of oil development—regardless of its potential negative consequences—therefore present themselves as opportunities that communities and individuals cannot afford to miss. In this more narrow sense, not developing oil resources is really no choice at all.

As Eaton’s text and Zink’s photos make clear, these choices almost always result in a tension between short-term and long-term consequences. Farmers are enticed by short-term royalties or lease incomes, but are confronted with long-term health or environmental costs; oil workers are vulnerable to short-term seasonal or economic cycles in the industry, but desire and behave as though they have the long-term stability necessary for expensive lifestyles or families; communities experience short-term economic growth and high employment, but are left with the long-term burdens of infrastructure and populations unable to support themselves when the wells run dry. Western Canada’s culture of “the self-made man” (p. 51) contributes to a pattern of consumption in which, as one faith leader told Eaton, “everybody’s got to drive a \$60,000 truck” (p. 65). When “It is either feast or famine in the oil industry,” long-term choices often lose out to short-term choices (p. 51).

Zink's photographs comprise nearly three-quarters of the book and beautifully illustrate the juxtaposition between the vulnerability and nostalgia felt for a "traditional" rural way of life and the disruptive material realities of rapid economic growth. While the photos provide a tangible sense of the places and people in this story, they do not always align with Eaton's narrative, and most of the images are not explained at all. Eaton refers to just 18 of the 77 photos, and the images referenced are often placed in a different section of the book. Instead of serving as a documentary companion to Eaton's text, Zink's photos function almost as a separate artistic testimony to the changes wrought by oil development.

Eaton does a nice job of articulating the injustices that oil development imposes on many different social groups who are largely powerless to oppose the industry. For example, approximately one-quarter of the province's mineral rights are privately owned. The remaining three-quarters are leased by the Crown to oil companies that are guaranteed access to resources in the ground regardless of who owns the surface rights. Under these legal conditions, farmers and ranchers who do not own the mineral rights have no way to prevent oil development on their land. Moreover, the provincially appointed Saskatchewan Surface Rights Arbitration Board has been accused of systematically deciding in favour of the oil industry. Eaton also considers the gendered and racialized aspects of the oil industry, as well as the impacts development has had on First Nations, but the most thoughtful and comprehensive of the book's five chapters explores the inequalities that emerged within communities between the high-paying oil jobs and the comparatively low-paying service sector employment. As Eaton makes clear, these legal and economic power structures frame the issue in such a way that there really are no choices.

Eaton offers an important approach to understanding the impact of oil development by moving beyond an assessment of production statistics, government royalties, and economic activity. Statistics provide quantitative indicators of oil production, but understanding the ways in which the industry shapes local communities requires qualitative analysis. Moreover, provincial statistics obscure the fact that stable, high, or growing oil production levels are achieved from enormous turnover of individual wells that are drilled intensively for only a few years before being exhausted. Yet more information about Saskatchewan's historic production trends and how they compare to those in neighbouring Alberta and North Dakota would have helped provide context to the changes Eaton describes. Indeed, the book is rather light on historical context. Interviews provide powerful anecdotal evidence about the impacts of oil development and carry the book, which otherwise lacks the kind of thorough research necessary to construct a methodologically consistent and convincing argument about the ways that oil development has shaped Saskatchewan over the last two decades. Eaton's references are few, citing only a handful of industry and policy reports, several news websites, a Master's thesis, and just a single scholarly peer-reviewed publication. Historians will find this a useful place to start reading on the topic, but should not expect a rigorous analysis.

According to Eaton, people from rural Saskatchewan perceive oil as “essential to notions of freedom” and “synonymous with reality itself.” Any “criticisms of fossil fuels ... are understood as threats to the present and future of life and livelihood” (p. 9) What is fascinating about these perspectives is the extent to which they can be extrapolated and reframed to reflect not just the popular sentiment across Canada, North America, and the West in general, but also the material realities of the twenty-first century: oil *is* closely associated with all sorts of freedoms, which *does* makes it synonymous with our society’s sense of reality, and *absolutely* entails serious and fundamental transformations to our lives if it disappeared. Eaton and Zink elucidate this sentiment well and offer a starting point for evaluating its limitations as a response to rural vulnerability.

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ELOFSON, Warren M. – *So Far and yet So Close: Frontier Cattle Ranching in Western Prairie Canada and the Northern Territory of Australia*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2015. Pp. 329.

So Far and yet So Close is an environmental history comparing the nineteenth-century cattle-ranching industry in Canada’s Prairie West with Australia’s Northern Territory. The two industries had a great deal in common: their foundation was the natural resource of tens of thousands of hectares of arid grassland supporting free-ranging cattle at low stocking densities; they relied on an equestrian labour force that was largely young and male; and both regions had to overcome the challenges of animal disease, climatic adversity, and remoteness. The narrative focuses on the impact of environmental conditions on human behaviour and observes the remarkable similarity in the ways that humans adapt to environmental constraints using similar cultural and technical practices in remote regions of the world. The story is dominated by the Texas system of beef cattle husbandry, distinctive because of its low grazing density on the open range, unregulated land tenure, and minimal animal husbandry. This system diffused contagiously from Texas to Canada in the 1870s and, in the same decade, made its way to Northern Australia, thanks largely to the nineteenth-century agricultural journals extolling its virtues. However, the Texas system was ultimately unsustainable and came to a ruinous end on the northern Great Plains as a result of uncontrolled overgrazing and due to the vulnerability of European cattle breeds to severe winter conditions, contagious diseases such as mange, and predation by both humans and wolves. All of these problems were complicated by the debilitating effects of shipping live cattle over long distances to market, a sad level of ignorance on the part of investors, and a sorry lack of accounting for cattle purchases and mortality.

The book’s most significant contribution to ranching history is its examination of the contrast in the early and long-term fortunes of Australian and Canadian ranchers. Australian ranches lost massive amounts of money and failed in the largest