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The Salt Lake Papers: From the Years in the Earthscapes of Utah by Edward Lueders (review)

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by Chris Kraus. *Giant* is perhaps one of the main reasons why many people know that Marfa is a town in West Texas at all.

For fans of *Giant*, Graham's book compiles anecdotes from the raft of memoirs written by and about the film's stars, as well as detailed accounts of the film's production and Stevens's directorial attention to detail. The book is not academic or scholarly in its approach so much as it is a historically grounded narrative about the production of an iconic American film. Toward the end of the book Graham provides a unique way of thinking about the film. Based on a George Stevens interview where the director differentiates between his film and the kinds of stories that can be told on television, Graham asserts that in *Giant*, "Stevens wanted to overcome the pernicious effects of the little black box that threatened, or so it was widely felt, Hollywood's very existence. He wanted to give moviegoers an entertainment and an experience that television couldn't give them, one that they wouldn't forget" (238). This idea alone justifies the focused attention Graham brings to the production of *Giant* as a film that attempted to push its own medium as far as possible. Graham's *Giant* does justice to the ambition of this work of classic Hollywood cinema and its legacy as a Western on the grandest scale.

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Edward Lueders, *The Salt Lake Papers: From the Years in the Earthscapes of Utah*. Salt Lake City: U of Utah P, 2018. 110 pp. Paper, \$14.95; e-book, \$12.

In *The Salt Lake Papers*, Edward Lueders captures the simple beauty and effortless force of the liquid landscape he calls home. *The Salt Lake Papers* is a collection of brief meditations on place in the rugged Utah desert that is divided into two parts distinct in time and place: "Salt Lake City and the Great Salt Lake" and "Torrey, the Colorado Plateau, and the Colorado River." In both the north and south-central regions of Utah, Lueders is captivated by the hydrogeological systems that destroy to create, working outside human

notions of time, progress, and property by continuously carving new landscapes out of the earth to which we lay claim. As a collection of reflections on place, *The Salt Lake Papers* is a sequel to Lueders's premier creative nonfiction classic *The Clam Lake Papers* (1977). Where *The Clam Lake Papers* is a book of meditations on the perseverance of the natural world during the harsh Midwest winter at Clam Lake in Wisconsin, *The Salt Lake Papers* reflects on the landscape Lueders inhabits during his years as a professor at the University of Utah and eventual retirement in the area surrounding Torrey, Utah. Having moved from a freshwater lake in the North Woods to the saline sea of Utah, Lueders is a self-proclaimed "transplanted aquarian" (6) who remains awed by the power of water and its complex relationship with the surrounding landscape and human civilization.

The Salt Lake Papers draws attention to the legal fallacy of American land ownership as it contrasts with natural geomorphic provinces. In "Salt Lake City and the Great Salt Lake," he reflects on the inhospitable landscape of the arid American West; between the towering mountains and desolate deserts lies the Great Salt Lake, an inland sea that is, on average, "six times saltier than the oceans" (38) and capable of choking unsuspecting swimmers with its brine. Although we draw the perimeter of this lake into our plat maps and concern ourselves with our own claim to the land, the Great Salt Lake's water pays no mind to the human conception of property. It is active, steadily carving new landforms out of rock. Salt Lake naturally undermines human attempts to own it as its water level fluctuates and geomorphic processes alter the landscape and distort property lines. In considering who owns the Great Salt Lake, Lueders acknowledges the ever-changing nature of the physical landscape: "I can't help thinking it owns itself" (20). In one form or another the lake has existed before us and will continue to change and exist after we're gone.

To demarcate his experiences teaching in Salt Lake City from those he had following his retirement observing the river systems in Torrey, "Torrey, the Colorado Plateau, and the Colorado River" begins with a reflection on Lueders's personal relationship to the land: "At Salt Lake City I am in the world. At Torrey I am on the

planet” (69). While the book’s first part emphasizes the dominion of nature over human notions of progress, the second draws connections between the natural and human worlds, claiming that “humankind . . . is instinct with language” (103). Lueders ultimately argues that abstraction through language causes humans to ignore their instinct and assert their dominance through human law that seeks to regulate and control the natural world. The human drive to use language to name landscapes and draw property lines is incompatible with natural law, but we can adopt Lueders’s mindset by reflecting upon the grandeur of these natural spaces.

While readers interested in extensive explanations of the geological processes or environmental concerns unique to the Salt Lake and Torrey regions may find Lueders’s reflections rambling and disorganized, those seeking personal insights on place will find his text intentionally conversational, flowing naturally from one topic to the next. *The Salt Lake Papers* is replete with reflections on the human world and its relationship to the natural landscape. Lueders’s meditations respond to the belief that the American West has been tamed in the century following westward expansion, a belief that often surfaces in popular western literature and film. He ultimately argues that nature still holds dominion over human life and progress. Blending Lueders’s personal experiences exploring Utah with his observations about the nuances of human communication, *The Salt Lake Papers* succeeds in reinforcing the value of the humanities in environmental studies.

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Kimberly G. Wieser, *Texas . . . To Get Horses*. Harrah, OK: That Painted Horse Press, 2019. 120 pp. Paper, \$20.

Kimberly G. Wieser is a representative (expatriate? survivor? captive? escapee? diplomat?) of literally millions of people of multiple cultural, racial, and tribal backgrounds from the world of Texas, a world continually influenced by the neighboring regions of Tamaulipas, Sonora, Chiapas, Coahuila, and Nuevo Leon, and vice