insists on "a direct correspondence ... between internal and external realities," a stance creating a more intimate relationship between "the human incapacity to love" and the "darkened vision of the natural environment" (159). Albion's division generates divisive "acts of anthropomorphic projection" that colonize "the natural realm" (162). When this approach is applied to the complex character of Vala (usually seen simply to symbolize Nature), she more accurately is described as "Western humanity's discursive conceptions of the natural world" (175). *Imagining Nature* carries much corrective force, a strength on display in the exemplary discussion of the much misunderstood Apolypus, which "symbolizes a kind of death-in-life" (180) associated by Blake with the lowest human state of nonentity. Hutchings' detailed reading of the concept connects Blakean cultural analysis to contemporary ecological thought and ethics: "ethics can be thought and practised only in the context of a relational interaction between *integral* entities" (197).

The "Coda" that concludes this fine work returns to the more personal voice with which it began, providing a relevant and necessary vector of connection to any motivated ecocritical endeavor. The observed tendency of Blake's works to question "their own human-centred textual biases" provides a pragmatic model for enhanced awareness of "how self-interested modes of discursive practice lead inevitably to the philosophical devaluation, physical domination, and ultimate desolation of the Earth, its ecosystems, and its living creatures, both human and nonhuman" (206). In his multivectored reassessment of the multitudinous functions of nature in Blake's work, Hutchings has, with intelligence and intensity, corrected the misprisions of past criticism, better integrated present ecocritical concerns with Blake Studies, and identified numerous paths of future inquiry.

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Reinhold Kramer and Tom Mitchell. *Walk Towards the Gallows: The Tragedy of Hilda Blake, Hanged 1899.* The Canadian Social History Series. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2002. 318 + viii pp. \$19.95 paper.

On 27 December 1899 twenty-one-year-old Emily Hilda Blake was hanged in the Brandon prison yard. The only woman to be executed in Manitoba, she was one of two female murderers who went to the gallows during the

half century from 1873 to 1922. Blake was largely forgotten, although she did occasionally receive token mention in stories about Canadian crime. Then, in 1993–1994, historian and archivist Tom Mitchell published an article in the *Journal of Canadian Studies*, and in 2002 produced this book with co-author Reinhold Kramer, an English professor. The work is a richly textured study, indeed, a happy marriage of two sets of multi-faceted skills and perspectives. They describe their effort as fraught with "epistemological challenges" (5), but meet them successfully—or as successfully as one can in today's prickly world of scholarship.

In the hands of Mitchell and Kramer the story of Hilda Blake (she never used Emily) becomes a riveting narrative that casts a wide net. The young woman, state the authors, "was—sometimes unintentionally—an outrageously indiscreet witness to her own life and times" (4). Mitchell and Kramer unearthed a plethora of original sources, and have judiciously used them in conjunction with recent scholarship. Detail piles upon detail, the result a meticulous study of female murder and late nineteenth-century Canada. The authors tell, intentionally, two stories: "a biographical study as well as an exploration of late Victorian culture, gender, and class in Canada" (5). In fact, they explore far more. Although the detailed accounts of context—cultural, political, economic, social—sometimes overshadow the tragic narrative of a murderer, the "read" is nonetheless worth it, for the authors have so much to tell us about the world of the late nineteenth century. As for Blake's story, it is fully told—or as fully as possible given the lacunae, the authors providing a fascinating account in which they interweave fact and conjecture, carefully distinguishing between the two.

The basic facts about Blake suggest a difficult life too soon ending in tragedy. She was English-born, and orphaned at age nine. Soon becoming a disposable burden to her eldest sister and the local gentry, she was shipped off in 1888 to distant Manitoba to start a new life as "an immigrant pauper" (31), placed with a farm family in need of labour. (Her older brother, who also came, soon went his separate way.) For eleven years she worked in other people's homes, urban and rural (Winnipeg and Brandon). Her last employment began in the summer of 1898 as a general servant in the household of the (newly) prominent and wealthy Lane family of Brandon. On 5 July 1899 she shot dead her mistress, Mary Lane, who was then expecting her fifth child. Initially blaming the murder upon a tramp with a foreign accent, Hilda soon confessed. The "trial" of 15 November lasted but a few moments, efforts to commute the sentence were unavailing, and two days after Christmas she went to the gallows.

In the hands of Kramer and Mitchell, that short life becomes a window opening onto the past, an entry point for readers of the early twenty-first century to feast upon a narrative interesting in its own right, and invaluable for the light it sheds upon another era. As the authors state, "her life as an orphan, as a domestic servant, as a woman, and, ultimately, as an emblem of victimized femininity, offers a rich field of inquiry" (5). Especially, one might add, when treated within the multi-faceted context constructed by the authors.

Blake emerges as a complex, difficult (and difficult-to-fathom) personality. The authors assiduously sort out fact from fiction, carefully presenting their (extensive) conjectures. They portray her as a young woman who ill fit the conventional niches and stereotypes of her late Victorian era, and too often lived in what was for her a more satisfactory world of her own making. As for her personality, she could be willful, indeed, rebellious, duplicitous, and sometimes a liar. She was also industrious, conscientious, kind, and had a religious bent. And Blake, at least sometimes, was aware of the sharp contrasts within her. "I seem to be possessed of two natures," she said. "I am either good or very bad" (70). She was, in fact, a troubled individual, perhaps "morally insane," to use a late nineteenth-century term.

What made her who she was? Kramer and Mitchell emphasize her orphanhood—and her removal to an alien environment where she was limited to low-status toil. Their discussion of the Victorians' preoccupation with the orphan is but one of their fascinating and instructive excursions into the late Victorian world. That exploration includes the world of print, in particular, analyses of novels—Scott's, Dickens's, and, especially, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Better educated than most domestic servants, Blake not only read "high class novels," but also lived, partially, in their worlds. Kramer and Mitchell provocatively contend that literature "played a crucial role in shaping Blake's subjectivity" (5). Novels shaped, in part, her sense of possibilities as she struggled to find a place in the Anglo-British culture of Manitoba that had little space for an orphan girl and domestic servant who did not always accept her difficult, demeaning, and vulnerable lot.

Ultimately, Blake murdered her mistress. Why? The authors' conclusions are embedded in an illuminating exploration of Victorian views about female criminals, gendered notions of criminality, and related matters. When assessing possible motives, they reject the interpretation, apparently first offered (with no evidence) by Alan Hustak, that she was a lesbian who killed Mary in a fit of murderous rage. Although discussing her occasional

suicidal feelings, they also dismiss an intriguing possible motive suggested by author Frank W. Anderson (and contemporary observers): she wanted to die, and opted for state suicide. Kramer and Mitchell conclude that Blake, perhaps fantasizing about rising above her station and becoming a proper wife and mother, set out to be the new Mrs Lane. Mary, they write, "in the role of wife and mother ... stood between Hilda Blake and her hopes" (59). Likely correct, they conclude, was the suspicion that servant and master were having an affair, but they do not believe that Lane was privy to the murder or that Blake was pregnant.

Blake herself said little publicly. At the brief "trial" of 15 November, she pled guilty, stated her remorse, refused legal counsel, and asked for the death penalty. She did publish a poem, "My Downfall," which is open to several interpretations, only one of them being confession of an affair with Robert Lane. While in prison she also wrote an autobiography that became part of the capital case file that went astray. (The authors consider this a coincidence. This reviewer is less certain.)

The case became briefly a *cause célèbre*, and, as the authors note, "Blake generated a great deal of sympathy ... as a self-confessed and remorseful murderess who demanded the gallows" (151). Many had ambivalent feelings about her but to send a woman to the gallows was rare. Conflicting views and sentiments are discussed at length, but perhaps most helpful in gaining insight into the late nineteenth-century mindset is the authors' discussion of the meeting (25 November) between Blake and Amelia Yeomans, physician, suffragist, wctuer. The prominent Manitoba feminist was disappointed by the prisoner's cool reception, and ultimately concluded that although she was an intelligent woman, she was "abnormal," a woman who lacked "moral responsibility" (177). Yeomans, for several reasons, framed a petition asking for a stay of execution. So did others, a not uncommon response when a woman stood accused of murder and faced the gallows. Perhaps political considerations, above all, explain why Blake was executed despite petitions and the (required) federal cabinet review (conducted with unseemly haste). As Kramer and Mitchell conclude: "The federal cabinet may also have allowed Blake's execution to proceed so as not to expose Sifton [Clifford Sifton, a Manitoban and Minister of the Interior in the Laurier government, the cabinet minister responsible for immigration] and the Liberals to political danger by rescuing someone who could at best be portrayed as a congenital deviant and at worst be associated ... with a too-permissive immigration system" (228).

Blake was duly hanged in the yard of Brandon prison, and the authors reconstruct the scene in an engrossing narrative. The interest and publicity

Walk Towards the Gallows should attract a wide readership among the diverse audience that is interested in Canadian crime, women's/ gender history, the world of late Victorian Canada, and the West.

her trial had aroused soon dissipated, and she fell victim to the shadows of history. Now, a century plus later, this major study provides a richly detailed analysis that is rewarding reading. *Walk Towards the Gallows* is an indispensable source for anyone who wants to learn about a female murderer who was *sui generis* even in the small category of female murderers within her late Victorian world. It should attract a wide readership among the diverse audience that is interested in Canadian crime, women's/gender history, the world of late Victorian Canada, and the West. Let us hope it is not confined to academic libraries.

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Jan Gorak, ed. *Northrop Frye on Modern Culture* ("The Collected Works of Northrop Frye" volume 11). University of Toronto Press, 2003. 409 pp. + xlix.

The reception of Northrop Frye's writings, by both his supporters and critics, is curious. In the present context, Frye is perceived by some as one of the last great ivory tower thinkers—living inside his own mind, having something to say only about the theoretical world of literature and art, and nothing to say about the daily events that make up our historical context. Readers of this latest volume of the *Collected Works of Northrop Frye* will surely find such claims unjustified. Here is a Frye engaged with questions involving technology, democracy, war, and even Charlie Chaplin and Disney. There is, however, a difference between Frye's writings on aspects of modern life and what we find all-too-often in what is now called "cultural criticism." In Frye there is a vision of the possibilities of deliverance that mythology affords to awakened citizens. Through the products of its creations (art and literature, as well as war and television), the educated mind finds a narrative of loss and possible recovery, while others become slaves to their ideologies.

This volume, edited by Jan Gorak, includes almost all of Frye's writings on twentieth-century art, politics, and culture, and is divided into three parts. The first section contains the entirety of Frye's seminal statement on the modern situation, published originally in 1967 as *The Modern Century*. Delivered as the Whidden Lectures at McMaster University, the first of its three essays involves a somewhat uncharacteristically pessimistic portrayal