

narratives that construct Muslim women as “oppressed” due to their “Islamic identity.”

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WAR BRIDES

Melynda Jarratt
Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2010

REVIEWED BY CLARA THOMAS

“I have wanted to write a history of Canadian War Brides for twenty years now, since I first started working on my Masters thesis in History at the University of New Brunswick in 1987.” This book is the valuable result of Jarratt’s enthusiasm, a collection of excerpts from letters, well chosen and well edited. She takes us across Canada, with chapters on the Maritimes and Newfoundland, Quebec, Ontario, Western Canada, Military Service (The WRENS, WDS, and CWACs), War Fiancées, Children of War Brides, and Canadian War Brides of the First World War. Her collection is comprehensive and unfailingly engrossing.

As was inevitable, the stories relate every imaginable tale; though the vast majority of marriages weathered adjustments and inevitable strains and their brides became satisfied, gradually enthusiastic, Canadians, it was not easy for any of them or their families back home. In those thousands of marriages, there were some who should not have married and inevitably others who encountered conditions that were inescapably and irremediably bad. I wonder, for instance, about those women who found their new home to be an Indian reservation—we have nothing to be proud of in our treatment of our aboriginals, particularly the

forcing of their children into residential schools and the alienating of them from their own culture. The finding of an outdoor privy was a minor shock, one which many of the brides faced and weathered. Also in a considerable number of cases the conditions they found in Canada were better than they had been in their homes and, correspondingly, the hope for better things for themselves and their children was an ever-present beacon. Many of these young women faced a prejudice against them from their new relatives. I remember it well myself. There was a feeling that good Canadian boys were being snatched by British women who were out to get themselves all the advantages of living in Canada, to say nothing of the soldier’s pay.

Jarratt believes that all these matches were motivated by falling in love. That, of course, doesn’t account for the mixture of motives present in any individual’s decision. Some of the women were certainly charmed by the idea of a Canadian future. One of them who calls herself “a Lancashire Lass” describes her home in England as being without even the most basic of amenities, though her family was a close and loving one. She was totally unprepared for a mother-in-law, with whom she had to live and who resented and abused her verbally from the day she arrived. When, finally, after enduring some years of abuse she broke down in her doctor’s office, the mother-in-law was removed and she, for the first time in Canada, was free and happy to be the homemaker she wished to be. Another bride suffered serious family reverses when her husband was diagnosed with a brain tumour and after a lengthy and agonizing illness, died. She was thrown on the meagre resources and accompanying humiliation of our welfare system as it stood then. Most of the couples, however, slowly made their way to a comfortable future and none of the corresponding brides admits total defeat and disappointment. On the contrary, they report on their

families with the greatest pride and satisfaction: “As brides we promised for Better, for Worse and as women we have a great part to play in the building of a new world.”

Clara Thomas is Professor Emerita, York University. With her husband Morley, she has retired to Stratbrov, Ontario.

STEFANI VAN WIJK

Night in the city

An empty road

Lit by streetlights

Shining each their own
circle

I run

Barefoot

as fast as I can.

I run faster

The wind will guide me,

I trust the ground

the wind

the space.

Stefani van Wijk loves to live her life as a series of adventures. She tries to spread thought and empowerment to all she connects with. We are one.