

Surprisingly, López-Chávez, in her detailed textual analyses of many lengthy passages from both epic poems, focuses more on geography than on people. The major themes of the second half of her book, for instance, are land, topography, and climate. We can see that focus even in the titles of the four chapters of that part of the book: “The Geography of War,” “The Indians and their Natural Space,” “Spanish Entrada, Landscape, and Battle,” and “Geographic Landmarks.” Rather than land/territory being the prize of conquest, as López-Chávez explicitly states several times, her analyses actually give it a different role, as a third protagonist. The severity of the land and climate in both Southern Chile and Nueva México are repeatedly portrayed by Ercilla and Villagrà as impediments to conquest of the Native people. The natural environment typically seems to be in league with indigenous warriors. López-Chávez occasionally points this out. “Taking possession of the land in the name of the king of Spain with the aim of expanding his empire and converting the indigenous population to Christianity is presented in Ercilla’s poem with a view of nature that seems secondary to a larger theme,” she writes. That larger theme, not specified by López-Chávez, is clearly the taking of political, economic, social, and religious control of Native people, not simply appropriating land. Populations were the targets of conquest. López-Chávez’s repeated focus on land unfortunately obscures this fundamental fact.

—Richard Flint
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Good Water

by Kevin Holdsworth.

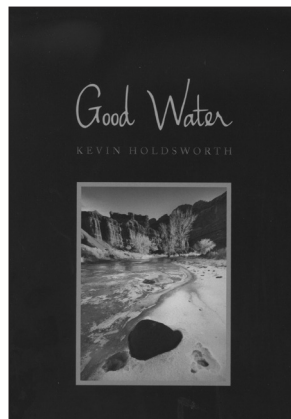
Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2016.

186 pp. \$21.95 paper.

Good Water describes Holdsworth’s relationship with the Utah village and county and their inhabitants between 1988 and the end of December 2007, with time out for graduate school and winters spent elsewhere. Rather than providing a consistent or a traditional narrative, Holdsworth offers a series of vignettes describing the spectacular Wayne County scenery and the even more interesting humans ranging from elderly eccentrics to left-over hippies. Each vignette could stand independently—and ten have in various magazines—but together they interweave to present what can be regarded as portrait rather than a story.

This approach allows Holdsworth to compress or foreshorten details. For example, Holdsworth's divorce and remarriage are mentioned almost incidentally, whereas the implications of the shed he is building at the beginning of the book and the house he has built by the end are described more fully, the significance of the latter given in a short chapter. An even more effective framing device is the contrast between his attitude, in a free-standing chapter, toward the town dump as a way-station that allows the townspeople to engage in a constant process of recycling, and the new "sanitary landfill" from which nothing emerges.

Holdsworth came to Good Water—his pseudonym for Torrey, identical to his Good Water in setting and demographics—because "Good Water is a great town for outlaws and drunks" and because "to find and frequent the periphery is imperative for the artist." This might imply that the book is at least in part, among many other parts, a *Kunstlerroman* dealing with the development of an artist, and it's true that Holdsworth has an ambition "to make [himself] into a good writer" and ends the book with a tribute to and a poem by his mentor Kenneth W. Brewer. By the end of the book, Good Water has become a place in which "to revive, purify, and play."



It's true that some of the effort to become a writer shows in occasional fancy vocabulary like "a winsome ranch-roofed structure" of someone's house, and in the recurrent lists of shades of color and other aspects of scenery and behavior. But self-conscious use of literary devices are rare, and for the most part Holdsworth avoids what he calls "literary dude-ing" and "eco-porn." His one extended passage of experimental writing, describing what it's like to be on meth, is entirely successful,

He does have some sympathy for those who espouse a kind of "high-desert Druidism," and Bill Clinton is the off-stage hero for designating the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument for preservation. Holdsworth helped to organize opposition to proposals for a "cash-register dam" that was ill-conceived and basically useless. This brought his group into conflict with long-term inhabitants who thought any kind of preservation was an affront to what they considered their rights to the land.

On the other hand—a phrase that characterizes Holdsworth's position on many issues—he regards some tendencies as less than ideal. Meditating on the changes in Good Water, which the locals try to ignore and focusing on farm implements turned into lawn ornaments, he writes "The useful

became ornamental. This is called the New West.” Change has come, is coming, sometimes in a meth amphetamine epidemic. But he doesn’t have to like it. In a kind of protest, homage, or a focus for his meditation on time, decay, and persistence, he cuts up for firewood the hayrick that has lain unused long before he bought the property. It burns well.

Opinions will vary about Holdsworth’s disquisitions on the Zen of horseshoes; his distinctions among hobbies, games, and sports; the (early—think “The Three-Day Blow”) Hemingwayesque dialogue with comic mispronouncings about moving archeological materials from Wayne County to Tucson and Bob’s deerslaying Toyota pickup. These and a few other vignettes strain to be funny and don’t appreciably add to the portrait of the town and region.

But on the whole the sketches of people and landscape in the foreground and the social, economic, and cultural conflicts in the background, which Good Water shares with a good many communities, make the book enlightening and enjoyable.

—Robert Murray Davis
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Hot Season

by Susan DeFreitas.

New York: Harvard Square Editions, 2016.

199 pp. \$22.95 paper.

There is a terrifying moment at the beginning of Susan DeFreitas’s debut novel, *Hot Season*, in which readers fear they are about to spend the next 195 pages held hostage by the aggressively twee viewpoint of Katie, an ingénue college freshman. She is introduced to us while riding her bike through her small Arizona college town, musing about Georgia O’Keeffe on her way to rendezvous with the young man she hopes will become the “bohemian lover” she has long dreamed of:

Katie rolled past the little house bounded by leaning sunflowers, the string of Tibetan prayer flags lifting gently from its porch, past the Hispanic dudes barbecuing off the back of a pickup truck in the parking lot of their apartment building. The old guy who always sat out front smoking Old Golds lifted a hand to her as she passed, and she waved back, weaving her way through a tangle of kids on bikes; they called good-natured obscenities to one another, ignoring her. This was her neighborhood, her mountain town, her funky Shangri-La.

It’s not until Katie extends her royal sense of possession over her environs that she hits the last requisite note to comprise a riotous fugue