

8-1-2014

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Recommended Citation

Castonguay, Laura (2014) "Caraway & Pippins by Harold Rhenisch," *The Goose*: Vol. 13: Iss. 1, Article 23.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/thegoose/vol13/iss1/23>

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Rhenisch's Seeds of the Past

***Caraway & Pippins* by HAROLD RHENISCH**

Okanagan Okanogan Publishing, 2011
\$5

Reviewed by **LAURA CASTONGUAY**

Harold Rhenisch's *Caraway & Pippins* is the second in a proposed series of essays related to the Okanagan Valley and food. In this short piece of nonfiction, Rhenisch follows the cultivation and evolution of the wild apple—called a pippin—through the early 19th century of North America. Similar to Thoreau, Rhenisch heralds the natural world, while describing what we stand to lose in our domestication of food.

While Rhenisch gives specific examples of farms in which the wild apple still survives, his focus pertains to the pippin as an object of mankind's relationship with nature. Detailing the loss of the pippin both in the wild and in farmland orchards, Rhenisch notes the increasing distance that has grown between humans and nature. The apples we are familiar with today are no longer reminiscent of the little wild knobs of pippin fruit we used to relish for sustenance. In the same way, Rhenisch seems to appeal to our sense of history by noting that this loss relates to the decline in individual family farms, their decreasing cultural appeal, and their lessened ability to maintain historical forms of horticulture.

Like Thoreau, Rhenisch stocks his sentences with historical information and metaphors that are as lyrical as they are apt to describe beauty and loss.

While some of his text can feel meandering, he incurs a story that follows closely on the heels of humanity's relationship with nature. While his facts about the pippin are fascinating, the inclusion of farmers' voices as they discuss these disappearing gems is most important—both for connection and a sense of nostalgia. As these farmers describe their relationships to the land, one can't help but see value in maintaining an old species of apple. In this way, we are connected to a history, a people, and a land.

In an age of GMOs, hybridization, and food patents, it's key to look at our food sources and their evolution. Rhenisch's work is relevant to those interested in history, cultivation, land, food, and culture. It speaks to those of us who are interested in the progress of humanity, but at the same time want to retain original aspects of our past. While the idea of retaining an original strain of apple might not interest the general public, those who are keen to maintain some wildness of nature and food in the face of so much domestication would do well to read this piece.

We are constantly faced with information about the loss of environment and fauna, but after reading Rhenisch, one can't help but wonder what else we stand to lose in terms of original food. The advent of more Rhenisch investigations is a welcome prospect.

LAURA CASTONGUAY is a writer in a city that grows greener by the day—both seasonally and environmentally. She loves writing and reading fiction,

nonfiction and poetry. She is passionate about the environment, art, music, and laughter.