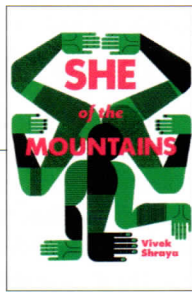


## She of the Mountains

by Vivek Shraya  
ARSENAL PULP PRESS  
\$18.95/149 PP.



What is life like for a contemporary young Canadian of South Asian descent, living in Edmonton and attracted to both men and women? Writers of fiction don't ask such questions much, even in today's climate of growing interest in queer and marginalized identities, but the unnamed protagonist of Vivek Shraya's debut novel experiences the negative stereotypes and the self-doubt that are a constant for many non-monosexual (neither gay nor straight) individuals. He also experiences the sense of displacement and alienation that many children of immigrants face.

It's a lot to pack into a short book, and Shraya manages it by keeping his focus tight on the protagonist, moving quickly but smoothly with only a small cast of supporting characters. Like gesture sketches, the supporting characters are given enough definition to hint at a wealth of stories. However, they are spare enough that the protagonist remains the focus.

Shraya's willingness to unflinchingly engage with the impact of racism and biphobia on his protagonist is moving and liberating. By telling this story, a story conspicuously absent much of the time, Shraya opens up the opportunity for other children of immigrants to see themselves reflected, for other queer men and women to see their non-monosexuality validated, and for readers of other races and orientations to empathize with and understand a character who is long overdue in our cultural imaginary.

The sections that rework Hindu mythology are a riot of colour and character, adding a sense of vast timelessness to the tightly contracted contemporary setting. Shraya focuses primarily on the deities Parvati, Shiva and Ganesh rather than trying to introduce the whole pantheon, with the effect of introducing the reader to what feels like a tightly knit and surprisingly relatable family.

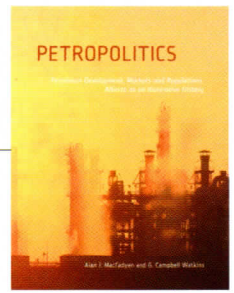
*She of the Mountains* also relies on visual elements to convey a depth of information in a small space. Raymond Biesinger's geometric, often abstract illustrations are not the only visual elements—there are whole pages of repeated words, italicized or capitalized or strung together in a multi-line string. These sections of text are alarming for the reader, which helps us empathize with the protagonist.

Everyone should read this book. Does that sound hyperbolic? Perhaps. But as a bisexual activist, I see the negative impact of the untold, unimagined story on a daily basis. It is too much to ask a novel to fix the world, but I think that *She of the Mountains* has the potential to bring more understanding and compassion to some communities that desperately need it.

—Tiffany Sostar is a writer, student and queer activist.

## Petropolitics: Petroleum Markets and Regulations, Alberta as an Illustrative History

by Alan J. MacFadyen  
and G. Campbell Watkins  
UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY PRESS  
\$44.95/512 PP.



In *Petropolitics*, former U of C economists Alan MacFadyen and the late G. Campbell Watkins offer a detailed examination of Alberta's petroleum industry from a historical, economic and public-policy perspective. Although intended for business and economics experts, *Petropolitics* will also appeal to those familiar with the industry and those interested in a closer study of it.

Alberta's oil production was negligible until the late 1930s and did not increase significantly until the late 1940s, when in the authors' words, "Gross production in Alberta grew more rapidly than the Canadian average, as did employment and the population." MacFadyen and Watkins disdain government policies that interfere in the market, but betray hypocrisy in their support for the dramatic increases in crude oil prices in the 1970s by the governments of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, which spurred increased economic growth in Alberta. They also criticize Ottawa's National Energy Program (1980–1985), which held the domestic price below world price—but I remain convinced that Trudeau's intention of fairness for all Canadians was sound. The authors also fail to address the fact that high oil prices accelerate and magnify economic problems, and that unemployment was widespread in the eastern provinces where the Trudeau government had much of its political support.

Debatable too is the authors' view that the deregulation of Canadian crude oil prices in 1985 and the commitment to free markets implied by the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement and NAFTA were "eminently sensible policies." They contradict themselves, acknowledging "the variability of oil and gas prices has led to greater instability in the Alberta economy." Indeed, a sharp decline in oil prices after 1985, price rises from 2004 to 2008 and a quick rebound following a price collapse after 2008 all subjected Alberta's economy to bust and boom cycles.

Former premiers Ralph Klein's and Ed Stelmach's drastic reductions in oil and gas royalty rates are overlooked: the former from 40 per cent to 20 per cent and the latter to 10 per cent. These changes have deprived our province of billions of dollars needed for a rainy-day fund. MacFadyen and Watkins also fail to address the pressing environmental issues (e.g., climate change) inseparable from rapid oil sands development. The reluctance of our provincial and federal Conservative leaders to slow the pace of oil sands development is shameful.

Despite its shortcomings, *Petropolitics* is a worthwhile read. Its wealth of information enables readers to better understand energy issues dominating today's headlines in our province.

—Jamal Ali writes non-fiction, poetry and fiction in Calgary.