Fictionalizing South Dakota from a Feminist Point of View: 
The Western Novels of 
Virgil D. Boyles and 
Kate Boyles Bingham

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South Dakota history lends itself to fiction because of its conflict, drama, and color. It is full of good stories. More than one literary artist—Ole Rølvaag, Frederick Manfred, and Hamlin Garland, to name a few—has used incidents from the state’s past to create novels. Like all artists, these authors shaped the material to express their own visions of reality. Often, these imaginative renderings intensified the South Dakota experience for readers, conveying it more vividly than factual and prosaic accounts could.

Less well known practitioners of the art of fictionalizing South Dakota history are the brother-and-sister writing combination of Kate Boyles Bingham and Virgil D. Boyles. Together, they published five novels no longer in print: Langford of the Three Bars (1907), The Homesteaders (1909), The Spirit Trail (1910), The Hoosier Volunteer (1914), and A Daughter of the Badlands (1922). The Hoosier Volunteer is based upon the Civil War experiences of their father when he lived in Indiana, but the other four books have South Dakota settings. Attempting to recreate actual moments in the development of the state, Bingham and Boyles often relied upon specific historical material to form the plot structure of their novels. The books do not purport to be history, however. Kate Boyles Bingham infused them with her ideas and feelings (Virgil Boyles assisted with plot
structure and background information), forging her own interpretation of South Dakota experiences in the area west of Chamberlain.

Although she was too modest to claim much credit for her efforts, Bingham was the real writer of the pair. Her brother admitted as much when he told Leonard Jennewein in a 1958 interview: "I gave her the facts and the foundation for the story. I would say that she was really the author." Oscar W. Coursey, who collaborated with Virgil Boyles on a nonfiction work, claimed that Kate "worked out the technique" for their first book. More significantly, the books themselves reveal Bingham's artistic and literary influence in their strong female characters, their feminist point of view, and their treatment of Indian-white relations.

Kate Boyles Bingham (1876-1959) and Virgil D. Boyles (1872-1965) grew up in Yankton in the 1880s and 1890s, the offspring of a distinguished lawyer, judge, and territorial legislator and his Indiana-born wife. Brother and sister attended Yankton College, after which Kate became a fourth-grade teacher in Yankton and Virgil studied law in his father's office. Kate Boyles later taught English at a business college in Mitchell that brothers Virgil and Edwin established and ran for a brief time. Virgil had learned shorthand and typing and in 1898 became a court reporter for Judge Frank Smith of the Fourth Judicial Circuit, which included Lyman County, located west of the Missouri River from Chamberlain. In his new position, Virgil Boyles found himself recording for the court in cases of cattle rustling.

According to at least one witness, cattle- and horse-stealing gangs were common in the west river country in the 1890s and the first decade of the 1900s. Ranchers, afraid of retaliation from the gangs, often declined to testify in court against the alleged rustlers or to serve as jurors in such cases. One of the area's most notorious characters was Jack Sully, a drifter who had settled on Pocahontas Island, approximately thirty miles downriver from Chamberlain, where he raised cattle and horses. Frequently brought before the court on charges of cattle rustling, Sully succeeded in evading conviction. He was finally shot by a posse in 1904.

3. William Red Cloud Jordan, "Eighty Years on the Rosebud," South Dakota Historical Collections 35 (1970): 356-58; Bert Hall, "John Edmund Boland, Riverman," South Dakota Historical Collections 23 (1947): 215-16. Some scholars believe that Sully may actually have been a scapegoat for ranchers who believed he might turn state's...
Kate Boyles Bingham crafted western novels with a feminist point of view, while her brother, Virgil D. Boyles, researched South Dakota history for plot material. Court reporter Virgil Boyles recognized the literary potential of such material and sent a rough plot outline to his sister, who had already published a few short stories in national magazines. Together, they worked on a chapter-by-chapter outline for their first novel. Kate Boyles then wrote *Langford of the Three Bars*, developing the characters, polishing the style, and adding her own ideas.

and viewpoint to the story. A. C. McClurg and Company of Chicago immediately accepted the book, which became a 1907 best seller. The first sixteen-hundred-dollar royalty check arrived to much "laughter and capering [and] hugging" in the Boyles household. \(^5\) Langford sold well over one hundred thousand copies and remained profitable for McClurg's for many years. \(^6\)

The publisher asked the Boyleses for a second volume for the Christmas trade of 1908, and brother and sister set out to mine the riches of their South Dakota locale. Writing novels also led, indirectly, to Kate Boyles's marriage. When Virgil became interested in a murder that had occurred on Phelps Island near Chamberlain, he and his sister traveled by train to Chamberlain to research the crime. Meeting them at the railroad station was Virgil's college classmate, John Bingham. His family farmed in the area, and he later ran the abstract office in Chamberlain. In 1908, Kate Boyles married John Bingham and moved to Chamberlain, where she lived until his death in the 1950s. Virgil, who lived in Mitchell at the time, eventually returned to Yankton, where, like his father, he became a judge. \(^7\) Even though considerable distance separated the brother and sister, they continued to write books together based on South Dakota material.

The Bingham-Boyles novels have something in common besides their west river settings. They all have complicated plots with two or three story lines. They have clearly delineated "good guys" and "bad guys," and the reader is never confused about which is which. Finally, they all possess the standard elements of what was then a new form of literary expression, the "cowboy western." Cattle rustling, brand changing, shootouts, chases, court trials, posses, round-ups, and Indians are all present. Owen Wister, an easterner who lived for a time in Wyoming, is credited with creating the literary form. His cowboy western, \textit{The Virginian}, burst upon the reading public in 1902 and became immensely popular, going through fifteen editions in eight months. \(^8\)

The background for Wister's story is the beginning of the Johnson County War in Wyoming, a late 1880s conflict that pitted cattle

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5. Fulweiler, "Recollections.
barons who wanted an open range against homesteaders and small ranchers who sought to fence the land. Charges of cattle and horse stealing, bought juries, and political corruption all bore some resemblance to conditions in Lyman County at the beginning of the century. In one plot line, the Virginian explores the conflict between gun law and court law in the West. Judge Henry, a cattle baron in the novel, justifies the lynching of an alleged cattle rustler in which the book's hero (the "Virginian") has participated. Molly, the Virginian's beloved, has trouble accepting a form of behavior that is so at odds with the code of law she learned in Vermont. The judge tries to educate her about western morality, explaining: "At present we lie beyond [the] pale. The courts, or rather the juries, into whose hands we have put the law, are not dealing the law. They are withered hands... They cannot hold a cattle-thief. And so when your ordinary citizen sees this, and sees that he has placed justice in a dead hand, he must take justice back into his own hands."

In this story, the cattle barons are clearly the "good guys." Although this conflict is important in the setting of the novel, the creation that made the Virginian literary significant and popular with the reading public was that of the "cowboy hero" who is the center of the action. He is an independent, untutored natural aristocrat who can outride, outshoot, outrope, outfight, and outwit everyone. In the main story line, the Virginian woos the genteel eastern schoolteacher until he wins her. She, in turn, succeeds in educating and domesticating him. The story's secondary plot involves the capture, lynching, and shooting of the outlaws Trampas, Shorty, and Steve, in which, again, the Virginian is the central hero. The novel is written from an admiring, but decidedly eastern, point of view. The narrator, a cultured, educated Philadelphian (as was Wister himself), has come west for his health. Here, he becomes entranced by the natural nobility of the Virginian and, through the narrative, casts him as an archetypal cowboy hero. Wister obviously admired the strong male society of the West, even though the conventional heroine, Molly, eventually tames her cowboy.

While they were clearly influenced by the new genre, there is no evidence that either Kate Boyles or Virgil Boyles read the Virginian itself, and their own work, published several years later, takes a different tack. As residents of South Dakota, they had direct experience with the still somewhat "wild" West of the ranch country across the Missouri River. Although Kate Boyles noted the beauty of the country and vividly described the breaks and bluffs along the river,

she did not glamorize or romanticize the cowboy. The two heroes of their first book are not cowboys but a cattle baron, Paul Langford, who owns the Three Bars Ranch, and an attorney, Richard Gordon, who prosecutes the outlaw cattle rustler Jesse Black. The role of cowboy is assigned to Jim Munson, a thoroughly likable but uncultured man who regards the Three Bars as Eden because it has no women. Rough and unromantic, he ultimately kills and is killed by Jesse Black in a gun duel. While Munson's character is necessary to dispatch the villain, he is not really a hero. He certainly does not win the girl in the end. In fact, he never competes for her at all. The reason Langford of the Three Bars provides a different scenario for the western drama may be the fact that it is based upon historical characters and a specific historical incident. Jesse Black, of course, represents the real-life Jack Sully, and the lawyer Gordon is loosely patterned after Judge John Bartine, the Lyman County state's attorney who attempted to bring such lawbreakers to justice. Allegedly, stolen
Illustrator N. C. Wyeth depicted Jesse Black, the villain of Langford of the Three Bars. Black was patterned after real-life cattle rustler Jack Sully, one of many lawbreakers Virgil Boyles observed in his work as a court reporter.
cattle were held and rebranded in the area around Sully's ranch on Pocahontas Island, where he lived with his mixed-blood wife, Mary Louise Drapeau. One narrative line in *Langford* follows the pursuit, prosecution, and eventual gunning down of Jack Sully fairly closely.

Like Wister, Bingham and Boyles depict the conflict between big and small cattle ranchers. In the first chapter of *Langford of the Three Bars*, we meet George Williston, a small rancher and a sympathetic character because his daughter, Mary Williston, is one of the heroines. The book's narrator muses in the opening pages on the two forces that threaten to push George Williston off his land: "On the one hand was the wealthy cattle owner, whose ever-increasing wealth and consequent power was a growing menace to the interests of the small owner. . . . On the other hand was the vicious combination of the boldness, cunning, and greed of the cattle rustlers who harassed all the range country of the Dakotas and Nebraska." The issue of the large versus small operator is never really resolved in this novel. As in the *Virginian*, the cattle barons of *Langford of the Three Bars* are generally portrayed in a favorable light. George Williston enlists the support of one of the big cattle ranchers, Paul Langford, partly because of Langford's interest in his daughter. At the end of the story, Langford solves Williston's dilemma when he buys up the smaller rancher's land and makes him foreman of Three Bars, a solution unlikely to be possible or acceptable to most small ranchers.

Rather than focusing on the cattle wars alone, Kate Boyles gave a new twist to the cowboy western in the roles she awarded to women. Although Mary Williston is the girl Paul Langford falls in love with and eventually wins, she is the female equivalent of Wister's cowboy hero. She shows all the skill and spirit of her male counterpart, herding cattle, tending the horses, and being her father's "boy." When outlaws besiege her father's ranch house, she fires shot for shot with him, even though she is horrified at the prospect of killing someone: "A stream of icy coldness struck across her heart. She found herself calculating in deliberation which tree it was that held this thing—death. . . . It was coming closer and closer. . . . She turned the barrel of her rifle slowly and deliberately . . . and fired, once, twice, three times. . . . Shrinking low at her window, her eyes glued on the still black mass out yonder, Mary

wondered if it were dead. She prayed passionately that it might be, and yet—"it is a dreadful thing to kill." Nevertheless, she is willing to kill again when Richard Gordon's life is threatened. This time, she does so with stoic resolve: "Swiftly and silently, she seized her revolver from the bureau, glided to the window, and fired three times in rapid succession... 'I think I hit him the second time, Louise,' she said, with a dull calm."

Louise Dale, the other female heroine in Langford of the Three Bars, likewise exhibits strengths uncommon in a woman of that day. Although she has come from the East, she is not a schoolteacher, the usual role assigned to young, single women of the time. Instead, she holds the very job that Virgil Boyles held, that of court reporter in a rough and boisterous west-river town. The West that Kate Boyles envisioned was not just the male playground of the Virginian but was also the environment of strong, courageous, and aggressive women who could hold their own there. Louise Dale eventually marries attorney Richard Gordon, and Mary Williston marries Paul Langford, moving both women into conventional roles at the end of the story. Nevertheless, the strength and independence Kate Boyles gave her female characters in Langford reveal her own feminist leanings.

She had been over thirty years old when she married, having followed a career of teaching and writing for some years. Even after she settled into conventional married life in Chamberlain, she did not retire completely into domesticity but remained active in the community. In addition to participating in the usual women's organizations, she was a charter member of the Chamberlain Library Board and an ardent supporter of woman suffrage. She also continued to write, encouraged by McClurg's request for a sequel. Bingham's feminist touch makes Langford of the Three Bars a distinctive early cowboy western.

The second novel the brother-and-sister combination produced sprang from an incident involving a courageous west-river woman. For some time, John Bingham's sister had lived in a farmhouse on the bottom land across the river from Phelps Island. This site a few miles below Chamberlain had been the scene of the murder of Matt Matson, a Swedish homesteader, in the 1890s. Through the Bingham family, Kate and Virgil learned the details of the tragedy and used it as a basic plot line in their second novel, The Homesteaders, published in 1909. In the historical situation, Frank Phelps and his

13. Ibid., p. 248.
15. Ibid., p. 139.
sidekick, Henry Schroeder, allegedly headed one of the worst cattle-rustling gangs ever to infest the area. The island was a rendezvous for the gang, and Phelps did not want the adjacent bottom land (where the Matson farm was located) settled because it would close his outlet for moving stolen stock. When Matt Matson, his sister Christina, and an orphan boy from Sioux City moved onto the claim, Phelps began almost immediately to harass them. Their dog was poisoned, a cow was stolen, and Schroeder attempted to shoot Christina Matson one day when she was herding cattle. Undaunted, she decided to fight back and filed a complaint against Schroeder, an action that led to the violence that took her brother's life.

On an evening in May 1893, Matt rested in the doorway and Christina sat by a lamp reading a letter from their brother in Kimball. Suddenly, a shot rang out, killing Matt. Looking through the window, Christina recognized the assailant as Henry Schroeder. Later that night, she dressed in her brother's clothes and attempted to escape through a window. Upon hearing the click of a trigger, however, she stayed indoors, firing her gun occasionally to keep the attacker at bay. She reportedly emerged from the house after this night.

After her marriage, Kate Boyles Bingham continued to write novels and remain active in community organizations. She stands in front of her first home in Chamberlain in this 1908 photograph.
of horror with her brown hair streaked white. The convictions of
both Schroeder and Phelps after a two-year-long trial helped to put
an end to cattle rustling in the area.16

In Boyles and Bingham's fictional version of the Matson story,
Josephine and Jack Carroll are the sister and brother, and they are
from Virginia rather than Sweden. Although the authors follow the
Matson incident almost exactly, with Josephine fending off her at-
tacker as she watches over Jack's body, they embellish the Home-
steaders with other elements. The struggle between ranchers and
homesteaders, a rodeo, and a chase in which Josephine fearlessly
shoots and wounds one of the outlaws provide both color and con-


The struggle between ranchers and homesteaders, a rodeo, and a chase in which Josephine fearlessly shoots and wounds one of the outlaws provide both color and conflict. Again, Josephine is a heroine with the courage and skills of the cowboy.

The most interesting addition to the story reflects Bingham's grow-
ing fascination with the Dakota people living on the nearby Crow
Creek and Lower Brule Indian reservations. One of the principal
characters in the Homesteaders is Onjijitka, or Rosebud, the daugh-
ter of a Dakota mother and a white father. Josephine befriends
Rosebud, who has recently returned to the reservation from school
in the East, and visits a summer encampment of her people on the
Lower Brule. Bingham's description of American Indian life provides
the story of the homesteaders with a new dimension.

Rosebud appears to have the same strength of character, the same
courage and independence that Bingham gave to her white female
characters. She persuades Josephine Carroll not to give up her
dream of homesteading. Writing to her in Virginia, where Josephine
has taken her brother's body for burial, Rosebud vows: "If you will
come back, Josephine, I will gladly come to you as I promised, and
we, you and I, just two girls, will fight it out together. . . . We will
force these insolent [stock]men to acknowledge the justness of our
position."17 Josephine complies, of course, and works to prove up
her own claim, even though she has been told that the threats upon
her life were meant to show her that this country was no place for
a woman. The novel ends fairly conventionally with Josephine receiv-
ing a marriage proposal from the cattle rancher who loves her.

Although Kate Boyles Bingham romanticizes and idealizes the
character of Rosebud according to the conventions of her time, she
reveals through the character an awareness of the prejudice that

How do you do?" answered the stranger, in a clear, sweet voice."

In The Homesteaders, Bingham explores Indian-white relations through the friendship of Rosebud Gireaux, an eastern-educated Dakota Sioux woman, and Josephine Carroll, a white settler from Virginia.
mixed-blooded people experienced and the confusion they felt in being caught between Indian and non-Indian cultures. Speaking of her eastern education, Rosebud tells Josephine bitterly but proudly: "I thought I'd learn to be white. I learned—almost. I learned this much and then I had to stop: that I might learn to read and write, comb my hair according to the mode, wear abominable stiff corset things, sing and dance and play the piano and embroider . . . but that I could never be white. . . . I beat my heart out until it was all bruised and bleeding; with sorrow at first, then with rage, because you had lied to me, you know, and then because I would not be a dog of a half-breed, to fawn upon the white man."18

While the historical Christina Matson incident provided the basic framework for the second novel, Bingham's additions to it expressed her own ideas and feelings. She not only presents a feminist interpretation of the main character but also explores a friendship between a white woman and a Dakota woman. Her views are hardly radical, however. As the offspring of a white man and a Dakota woman, Rosebud is less threatening to the dominant society than the union of a white woman and a Dakota man. Nor does the author deal directly with the question of intermarriage. Rosebud falls in love with Jack Carroll in the story, but his death prohibits any union.

Bingham's interest in Indian-white relations is also reflected in the third book she wrote with her brother. Although historically focused, The Spirit Trail does not concentrate on ranchers and outlaws but instead involves the 1870s activities of Episcopal missionaries to the Dakota people, particularly those in the Crow Creek-Lower Brule area. Playing a background role in the story is Bishop William Hobart Hare, a New Jersey native appointed missionary bishop of the Niobrara (the Indian people) in 1873. Coming to Dakota Territory, he joined several young clergymen from Berkeley Divinity School of Connecticut who had already answered the call of the church and were tentatively established at the Santee, Yankton, and Crow Creek agencies. Hare became bishop to both white and Dakota Episcopalians in South Dakota in 1883. With the exception of periods of travel for the church or for his health, he remained active in missionary work in the state until his death in 1909. He is buried on the grounds of All Saints School in Sioux Falls.19

Bishop Hare's death might have provided the impetus for the writing of the *Spirit Trail*, published in 1910. The Boyles family were devout members of Christ Episcopal Church in Yankton, and Kate Boyles Bingham and her husband continued allegiance to the Episcopal faith as active members of Christ Church in Chamberlain. As early as the writing of *Langford of the Three Bars*, Bingham had expressed her admiration for Bishop Hare. In that story, court reporter Louise Dale crosses the ice of the Missouri River to attend church in order to hear him preach. Lawyer Richard Gordon, who accompanies her, claims the bishop as one of his best friends, calling him "an incomparable scholar—an indefatigable workman—truest of
“My people,” he began, “stay your hands. Put away your weapons.”

In The Spirit Trail, Bingham and Boyles used the character of Hugh Hunt, shown here calming a crowd after a shooting, to focus on the need for understanding between Indians and whites.
saints.”^" Although he does not appear in the narrative of the Spirit Trail, the bishop is a kind of abiding presence, frequently referred to as “White Robe” or “Apostle to the Indians.”

The story takes place during the time between George Armstrong Custer’s expedition into the Black Hills and his defeat at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, events that happen offstage in the novel but influence its action. The historical event fictionalized in the Spirit Trail is the 1876 trial of Henry F. Livingston, Crow Creek Indian agent, for mismanagement of funds. While he was eventually acquitted, the trial pointed up the conflict between the church and the United States Indian Service. Under Grant’s Peace Policy of 1869, churches had some say in the choice of agents in the areas where they had been given missionary jurisdiction. The Episcopal church, responsible for Crow Creek, had selected Livingston; Bishop Hare, newly arrived in the territory, supported him. The Indian Service, however, opposed Livingston even though he had been credited with getting rid of the illegal whiskey trade on the reservation.21

Kate Boyles Bingham and Virgil Boyles adapted these historical events for use in the Spirit Trail. The agent in their story, Major Mendenhall, does fight the illegal whiskey traffic. However, it is Locke Raynor, a young man from the East and Mendenhall’s deputy agent, who is accused of a crime by a federal inspector, put on trial in Yankton, and eventually acquitted. This shift in characterization was essential to the plot because Raynor is the love interest for Katherine Mendenhall, the agent’s daughter who has come from the East with her mother. Katherine’s character is modeled after Bingham’s earlier heroines, displaying the same daring and independence. She teaches Dakota children; saves the life of her friend, White Flower, through her knowledge of white man’s medicine; and makes a daring escape from the Brule Sioux Indians who have kidnapped her. As in the earlier works, Bingham contrives a conventional ending for the novel when Katherine marries Locke and returns east.

In this story, however, the figure of missionary Hugh Hunt greatly overshadows and influences Katherine’s character. Their discussions develop the central theme of the book, which is the need for greater understanding of native culture by the white people, who will, in turn, teach the Indian to accept that white culture. Through his friendship with and understanding of the Dakota people, the missionary greatly impresses Katherine Mendenhall. He persuades

20. Boyles, Langford of the Three Bars, pp. 163-64.
21. Sneve, That They May Have Life, pp. 4-5, 8-9, 41.
her to take up teaching Dakota children and encourages her when she is ready to give up. Having once been driven to despair himself over the treachery of the white man toward the Indian, he tells of how a visit to the missionary bishop renewed his strength to remain on the reservation: "This meeting . . . had been a revelation. All his hurt and weariness and bitter soul cry of 'No use, no use,' had dropped from him. . . . He had left the compassionate presence of the prelate a prophet."

The character of Hugh Hunt might well have been based on the life of the Reverend Heckaliah Burt, whom Bingham undoubtedly knew. One of the missionary priests who had come out to Dakota from Connecticut in 1872, Reverend Burt served forty-five years in the Indian field, mostly on the Crow Creek reserve. His devotion to his adopted people was legendary. In 1881, when whites were trying to abolish the reservation and take the land, he encouraged the Crow Creek chiefs to sign a petition asking the president for protection against the white settlers. Burt's house at Fort Thompson was always a social center for the Dakota people there.

The ideas that Hugh Hunt expresses in the Spirit Trail are assimilationist. Appropriate for the time the story takes place, they also presumably represent Kate Bingham's own views. Hunt regards the Indians as unruly children who need education and religion but who are not the "savages" of conventional opinion. He is also intensely critical of the white lust for land and gold that the Custer expedition into the Black Hills foreshadowed. He stands with the Indian in demanding fair treatment. Viewing himself as a bridge between white and Indian, he calls for the mingling of the two cultures "man to man, friend to friend, brother to brother." Only then, he believes, could the walls fall and the "miracle of one people" be achieved.

While the theme of the novel is a call for better understanding of the Indian by the white man, Bingham's depiction of the American Indian is stereotypically romanticized and not very credible. Running Bird, Hunt's Dakota friend, feels betrayed when a treaty is broken and the Black Hills are opened for settlement. Turning his back on white culture for a time, he follows his brothers in their fight against Custer. Both Hugh Hunt and the bishop are equally disappointed in the failure of the white man to live up to his prom-

23. Sneve, That They May Have Life, pp. 41-43.
ises, but they do not condone the warfare. At the end of the novel, Running Bird repents; he and his native wife, White Flower, become Hunt’s first converts.

The *Spirit Trail* has a complicated plot, a romanticized view of missionaries and Indians, and a sentimental ending. Nonetheless, Kate Boyles Bingham and Virgil Boyles found material for fiction in a segment of South Dakota history in which the dramatic and narrative possibilities are often overlooked. In the early years of settlement, the missionary experience played an important part in establishing the relationship between the Indian and white cultures. Kate Boyles Bingham is notable for attempting to use it imaginatively.

Boyles and Bingham's fourth novel with a South Dakota setting, *A Daughter of the Badlands*, was published more than ten years after the other three stories and is less closely tied to any specific historical material. It reworks many of the elements of the earlier tales: outlaw rustlers, a feminist heroine, and Indian-white relations. Once again, it includes the scenery, chases, and shootouts of the standard cowboy western, but romantic imagination seems to be more clearly at work as Bingham reiterates her earlier themes. The central character is Bonibel Sherwood, who, like Rosebud in the *Home-steaders*, is the daughter of an Indian mother and a white father. Also educated in the East, she returns to her father’s ranch in the Badlands. Allan Sprague, a young man who has fallen in love with her, follows her but is shocked when he sees her Indian mother. Sprague’s pursuit of her involves a complicated plot filled with cattle rustling, an attempted kidnapping, arson, a crime that turns out not to be a crime, a roundup, and seemingly endless chases.

Bonibel Sherwood is a genuine heroine. The story opens with her winning a tennis match at school, and her triumphs continue throughout the book. She wins a horse race, rescues her lover when he is lost in the Badlands, and daringly carries a message to the roundup crew through a band of outlaws. An independent woman, she takes a job teaching rather than marry a man who, she believes, does not respect her Indian heritage. “Dear God,” she angrily tells Allan Sprague at one point, “that I should have fancied I needed help and understanding from you! ... An Indian knows where to find help without asking it of a pale-face.” Ultimately, she wins the eastern hero on her terms, and they decide to settle in the Badlands.

This novel is less successful than the others, perhaps because it is not based on a specific historical incident and perhaps because it reworks the same material less convincingly. In addition, at the time of its writing, the days of the “Wild West” were farther in the past, giving the story less credibility. The book may have been Virgil Boyles and Kate Boyles Bingham’s farewell to a life that had disappeared by the time the novel was published in 1922. Nonetheless, it continues to develop the ideas that Bingham had expressed in her earlier work.

These two writers found a rich vein of material for fiction in the history of the Indian land and cattle country around Chamberlain. Out of it, they created stories based upon real incidents and locations, weaving together struggles over culture, religion, land, and law in a new country. Kate Boyles Bingham used her own vision of women in the western cattle country to shape the material, thus
stamping every novel indelibly as her own. These novels have many literary weaknesses. The characters are often romanticized; the narrative construction is frequently awkward; and the prose style is sometimes overblown and sentimental. Yet this fiction represents a unique South Dakota contribution to the literary form of the cowboy western. The books are also readable accounts of life in the early west river country and deserve to be readily available and widely known by all students of South Dakota history.