which no evidence has survived. This unfortunate circumstance often forces the author to keep the narrative continuity going by telling the story *around* her subject rather than the story *of* her subject. Murray is aware of this challenge and handles the unavoidable gaps by clearly identifying the limits of her source base as she goes along. Another difficult challenge for biographers is the problem of first discerning and then documenting the subject's internal motivation. This latter issue has more frustrating results for readers of this specific biography because of the many instances in which the author asserts that something might have happened, or a person might have been thinking something, or been motivated by something. Although these types of conjecture are always based on logic and available evidence, there are enough of them in this biography for the cumulative effect to be noticeable.

Pamela Murray's biography of Manuela Sáenz is well written, intensively researched, and engagingly told. The author has incorporated the best recent research into the activities and changing status of women during the Independence era to put La Libertadora's experience into its proper context. In several places there are interesting hints of the way race, class and gender intersected to shape the parameters of her life's possibilities. Sáenz's national affiliations also shifted over the course of her life, underscoring the fluidity of both nation and identity in the early republican era. This modern, professional, nuanced retelling of Manuela Sáenz's biography is a welcome addition to the growing body of work on Latin American women's history, and will also be useful to those interested in the Independence era more generally.

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William Edmundson, *The Nitrate King: A Biography of 'Colonel' John Thomas North* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. xxviii + 186, £55.00; $85.00, hb.

Largely forgotten in the country of his birth and often pilloried in Chile, John Thomas North appears the epitome of a late nineteenth-century entrepreneur, a self-made man who worshipped his creator. From humble origins in Leeds – although not as deprived, it seems, as he sometimes pretended – North grew rich from involvement in nitrate extraction on the west coast of South America during the 1870s and 1880s, and in supplying the crucial complementary services – transport, provisioning and banking – on which mining depended, earning himself the soubriquet of the 'Nitrate King'.

North understood the value of self-promotion, and being in the right place at the right time, allied to a willingness to take risks, seems to have been the secret of his success. He rode his luck, shrewdly choosing business associates such as Robert Harvey, the inspector-general of nitrates under the Peruvian and then the Chilean governments; John Dawson, the Iquique manager of the Banco de Valparaíso; William and John Lockett of the eponymous Liverpool merchant house; and Maurice Jewell, the British consul at Iquique. Having acquired valuable *salitreras* (nitrate deposits), he floated companies in London to which he sold the mines, earning a fortune in the process. Towards the end of his career North was essentially a financier, probably more interested in buying and selling enterprises for short-term capital gain than in a long-term commitment to running them; also, just before his death, he seems to have lost interest in nitrate in favour of Welsh coal, gold-mining in Australia

and rubber in Africa, as well as other business ventures. Even if he was regarded as something of a nouveau riche who was never quite accepted by society, his wealth and largesse created the lifestyle of a landed gentleman. He expensively refurbished a country house, Avery Hill, in present-day south-east London, where he entertained lavishly. He became the honorary colonel of the 2nd Tower Hamlets (East London) Engineer Volunteer Corps. He invested in art, rode to hounds and ran greyhounds and a racing stable. The intense media attention he attracted draws parallels with today's celebrity magazines. He unsuccessfully pursued a political career, standing as a Conservative in Leeds West against Gladstone's son. He was honoured internationally, and at his death six carriages were needed to carry the 800 wreaths. North's success was comparatively short-lived, however. He died at the age of 54 in 1896, while chairing a meeting of one of his companies, and his kingdom quickly disappeared. The boom of the late 1880s gave way to overproduction and falling prices which subsequently undermined nitrate's profitability. By 1920 it was no longer a major player on the London Stock Exchange as it gave way to a synthetic substitute. Many of North's companies were soon liquidated; the Nitrate Railways and the Tarapacá Waterworks lost their monopolies; the Bank of Tarapacá and London was absorbed into the Anglo-South American Bank. Within two years of North's death his widow had sold Avery Hill at a fraction of its cost, as well as most of his shares.

While North's business practices were unexceptional for the time, and others also grew rich from exploiting nitrate, he remains a particularly controversial figure, especially in Chile. The charge sheet is lengthy. He has been accused of what today would be considered insider trading, when he almost certainly used Harvey's knowledge that after the War of the Pacific Chile would recognise the mine ownership rights of those who held Peruvian nitrate certificates, which North had bought, often at rock-bottom prices. He made the most of his monopoly position in provisioning the mines and transporting ore by his railway company. He was a leading proponent of the nitrate cartels which threatened the Chilean government's export duties and the livelihood of the labour force. Whatever North's charitable works in England – and his philanthropy was often generous, if somewhat erratic – nitrate miners worked under almost intolerably harsh conditions. He cynically bid up the share prices of his London-based nitrate businesses and later sold his overcapitalised companies to gullible investors. Most notably he has stood accused of orchestrating the opposition to President Balmaceda, whose policies threatened his business empire. This last charge can at least be set aside. Many years ago Harold Blakemore concluded that North had little or no influence upon the outcome of the Chilean civil war in 1891, whatever his personal views of the two sides.

Whether Edmundson really provides a reappraisal of the 'Nitrate King', as indicated in the short preface by Juan Ricardo Couyoumdjian, is debatable. The discussion of the possible developmental aspects of North's activities in Chile might have been extended. Essentially, the book synthesises what has already been published about North rather than providing fresh evidence with which to fashion a new interpretation. Edmundson's sources include newspaper files, and even Wikipedia, and his frequent use of long quotations draws heavily on well-known secondary sources. Consequently, while there is much detail on North's career, especially his life and business affairs beyond Chile, his accusers are neither vindicated nor routed. The problem is that, without an epistolary archive to clinch matters one way or the other, it is sometimes difficult to separate fact from fiction. In his desire to be even-handed

Edmundson cannot quite make up his mind, seeming to prefer, as Couyoumdjian says, to present the evidence and let the reader decide.

The book is one of a series by academics and practitioners for the Institute for the Study of the Americas. Its approach is largely chronological but there is some repetition of facts. Edmundson helpfully includes a timeline of notable events in North's career and an appendix of his descendants. Despite its footnotes and an extensive bibliography, the book is an exercise in popular history rather than a scholarly monograph. Edmundson's lively style, the many illustrations and some entertaining anecdotes make for a good read. But it is doubtful whether this is the final word on the 'Nitrate King'.

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Oliver J. Dinius, *Brazil's Steel City: Developmentalism, Strategic Power, and Industrial Relations in Volta Redonda, 1941–1964* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. xxi + 352, $65.00, hb.

The Brazilian steel complex at Volta Redonda, in the interior of the state of Rio de Janeiro, has long been seen as a triumph of Brazilian developmentalism. Founded by Getúlio Vargas in 1941, the Companhia Siderúrgica Nacional (National Steel Company, CSN) was one of the dictator's greatest successes in state planning and economic growth: its steel fed the great construction boom throughout Brazil after the Second World War and the new automobile industry in São Paulo beginning in the late 1950s. Despite its importance to Brazil, Volta Redonda is a little-studied city. Oliver Dinius's thoroughly researched book admirably fills that historiographical void.

Dinius argues that the steelworkers of Volta Redonda were unique in Brazil because they worked in a state enterprise that was also a strategic industry. His thesis is that they were the beneficiaries of Vargas-era *trabalhismo* and of mid-twentieth-century developmentalism. The steelworkers of Volta Redonda, according to Dinius, used their strategic economic power to outpace all other Brazilian workers in terms of wages in the 1950s. This, it should be noted, is never supported with wage data from specific industries in specific locations, but it is a plausible assertion for the period before the introduction of the multinational automobile industry later in the decade. Dinius further argues that this success eventually hurt the CSN, which ran Volta Redonda, and thus limited the workers' ability to continue to increase their wages.

Dinius is a tireless researcher, and he has done a masterful job of collecting information from a wide variety of CSN and union archives. Indeed, this is the singular strength of *Brazil's Steel City*. Moreover, Dinius is true to his sources and rarely exaggerates his findings. He does, however, structure his arguments in often contradictory ways. Each chapter lays out an idea from the historiography. Dinius then carefully reconstructs what should have happened, at least according to theory and other histories. But, because he is such a careful researcher, he ends up concluding that things did not transpire as expected. This is clearest in his chapters on the Partido Comunista Brasileiro (Brazilian Communist Party, PCB) and on workers' strategic power on the shop floor.

In 'Beware of the Communists', Dinius is faithful to the dominant, though highly suspect, thread in the labour historiography that sees the PCB behind many successful labour struggles at this time. Most of the chapter follows government and industry