

gin, meaning, and results of these problems. To take but one example, how do we celebrate the success of middle-class Mexican-American women without wondering about the exclusion of working-class women from their civic organizations?

Stirring the history of the American West with the analytical tools of gender, race, and class reveals aspects of cultural strength that have been hidden in less inclusive historical treatments. Armitage and Jameson and the authors of the individual essays have, indeed, advanced our knowledge of the American West as a cultural crossroads.

Re-Imagining the Modern American West: A Century of Fiction, History, and Art, by Richard W. Etulain. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996. xxviii, 241 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$45.00 cloth, \$17.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY JONI L. KINSEY, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

This is not the book I expected when I first began reading it. Proclaiming in the initial sentence that this is an "introductory, non-theoretical study of . . . the main cultural-intellectual contours of the twentieth-century American West," Etulain seems to promise a wide-ranging overview of the subject, full of both information and insights about books, events, and images, in a format geared toward readers hoping for a comprehensive yet not overly exhaustive view of the subject. In some ways he fulfills his goal, but his uneven treatment of his three subjects—fiction, history, and art—renders the book unusual and somewhat disappointing, even as it offers much good material.

After a thoughtful and solidly grounded preface that introduces the whole, Etulain divides the West as subject into three roughly chronological and logical categories—frontier, region, and post-region—and within each of these he offers chapters on fiction, history, and art. Tackling such a monumental subject as the twentieth-century West through any *one* of these genres would seem a complex enough task, but taking on all three in a short book is daunting. Consequently, the presentation, at least in the fiction and art chapters, is necessarily limited to basic material rather than in-depth treatments. If this were consistent throughout it would constitute a respectable study for a general audience and be worthy of recommendation on that merit. The history chapters, however, are quite different, and render the whole a disorienting combination of aspirations.

The fiction chapters read much like a collection of book reviews or author biographies. Etulain presents and discusses a number of the most important writers and their texts, and despite their somewhat

dry organization these do effectively introduce the uninitiated to each writer's significance within the genre of western literature. Here we glimpse Owen Wister, Mary Hallock Foote, Jack London, Mary Austin, Willa Cather, Zane Grey, Larry McMurtry, and many others, along with their work and its contribution to the formulation of a literary West. Despite the serial presentation, these sections are quite readable and informative, enjoyable for both those familiar with the books and new readers.

The history chapters in each of the three sections, by contrast, are discussions of the development of western historiography—not a survey of events, people, and movements that have shaped the twentieth-century West as I expected from the title and would have preferred for a book of this sort. Directed more at specialists in the field or graduate students seeking an in-depth perspective on the changes in scholarly *perceptions about* the West in the past century than at general readers, these chapters include the ubiquitous Frederick Jackson Turner, of course, as well as the many academic detractors from his 1893 theory that the American frontier was a thing of the past. Moving through the subsequent formulation of western studies as a discipline, Etulain presents a remarkably balanced view of a field that has had its contentious moments. Although this is not uninteresting, it is not all that helpful for understanding the *West itself* in this century. Especially balanced in his assessment of the "new western history" that has in the past decade-and-a-half challenged the status quo and its triumphal view of the region, Etulain seems nevertheless anxious for a new paradigm, a "synthesis" capable of replacing discredited notions about the West and its significance. While I am skeptical about this point, I would strongly recommend these sections for university courses on the West as students negotiate their way among the competing theories and ideas about the region over the past hundred years, but they may tire readers more interested in the *place* and its development.

Not surprisingly, for me as an art historian who specializes in the art of the American West, the art chapters were predictable. But even for those with only a casual interest in the subject, these sections seem remarkably thin, focusing mostly on major and well-known artists such as Russell, Remington, the midwestern regionalists, and O'Keeffe, with a few lesser known and ethnic artists sprinkled in. Most notable, and especially distressing for those unfamiliar with the imagery (and for those like me who love pictures even when we know them well), the book is woefully under-illustrated, with only seven small black-and-white reproductions throughout. Without images to correspond to the text, this is a rather abstract and distant gloss on an otherwise very

tangible subject that highlights the changes the American West has undergone in the past hundred years.

Richard Etulain is a respected historian of the West with many important studies to his credit. He brings much to bear in *Re-Imagining the Modern American West*, and it has its moments, but the book really seems to be three separate undertakings within one cover: a decent introductory survey of western writers and writings, a thoughtful review of western historiography geared to specialists, and a serious but incomplete examination of twentieth-century western visual imagery and its makers. It is a book best taken in pieces, for different purposes at each sitting.

Becoming Laura Ingalls Wilder: The Woman Behind the Legend, by John E. Miller. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998. x, 262 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY ANNE B. WEBB, METROPOLITAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Readers who loved Laura Ingalls Wilder's novels when they were children will cherish renewing their acquaintance with Laura and her family in John E. Miller's rich biography. He tells the story of how the little girl, Laura Ingalls, became at 65 the writer Laura Ingalls Wilder, when she published her first novel in 1932. Miller gives a detailed analysis of the controversy over the extent to which her only child, Rose, contributed to the children's books that bore Laura's name. Miller faces this question in his introduction and keeps it central in his discussions of her writing career. Because Rose edited each of her mother's books, there is no doubt that Rose helped her mother, but Miller comes down firmly in crediting Laura as their true author.

Miller paints a broader picture of pioneer life than Laura's children's books tell. Life for the Ingalls family was often chaotic and sometimes filled with sorrow. The family made many moves. One move brought them to Iowa after grasshoppers destroyed the Ingalls's crops in southwestern Minnesota in 1876. In the little town of Burr Oak, they joined friends in running a small hotel. During their brief stay, Laura's only brother, a baby of nine months, died after a short illness, and the last of her sisters was born. The next year the family returned to Walnut Grove. This was but one of the many moves the family made, and one of the many jobs Laura's father held.

With her birth family, Laura experienced the yeoman life practiced by her father. When she married Almanzo Wilder in 1885, she entered into capitalist agriculture, which emerged in the last decades of the

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