

ticularly Antonia in *My Antonia*, appropriate typically male qualities—such as exploration and discovery—and use them to tell powerful stories about their identification with nature and their return to self. Stafford follows in Cather's footsteps, but writes from a West "fictionalized as a cultural code" (94). She uncovers the violence and desire behind the fantasy of the formula Western and its "anxiety over articulation of masculinity" (143).

Rosowski extends her study of the subversion of masculinity in chapter 8. She implicitly opposes the male logos—a "struggle against words"—to the freedom of expression that characterizes the four female authors in question. Marilynne Robinson, according to Rosowski, also incorporates the birth metaphor into her novels and values the epistemological aspect of language.

Rosowski is ambitious in her quest for thematic consistency in these authors' works. The idea of birthing a nation often seems artificially imposed upon and not born out of the novels, stories, and essays she analyzes, but her analysis is careful and well documented. Her approach is semi-historical, semi-text-based, and semi-philosophical, which makes for an intriguing if not overwhelming introduction to the world of female creativity in western American literature.

*Uneven Land: Nature and Agriculture in American Writing*, by Stephanie L. Sarver. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999. xiv, 207 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$40.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY FRIEDA KNOBLOCH, UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

For nearly thirty years, critics have combed through American literature for themes and ideas describing people's relationships with nature. Ecocriticism has come into its own as a literary subfield, often inspired by the search for a usable past with which to approach contemporary environmental problems. Agriculture has received sustained critical attention over the same period, representing another front of environmental inquiry primarily grounded in history. Some literary scholars have recently approached agricultural history and literature together, extending ecocriticism to include agriculture, and extending agricultural-historical questions to literature and letters more broadly. They help us understand the place of farming as a nexus of nature and culture in American thought and experience. Sarver's *Uneven Land* contributes to this emerging literary scholarship.

In five suggestive, brief chapters, Sarver explores the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Hamlin Garland, Frank Norris, William Smythe,

and Liberty Hyde Bailey for their understandings of the human place in nature expressed through farming. These five figures—some of them midwesterners in background—are “joined by their attention to agriculture and to the relationship among the agrarian experience, the human spirit, and human culture” (16). They allow Sarver to cover a period of significant agricultural change, from the mid-nineteenth century through the 1920s. An afterword addresses more contemporary figures, including Jane Smiley and Wendell Berry. By including an agricultural scientist (Bailey) and a promoter of irrigation (Smythe), she relies on a useful approach to cultural study beyond an exclusively literary focus.

Throughout the book Sarver locates tensions within each writer’s conception of farming and environmental worldview, beginning with Emerson’s equivocation about the value of farming to the individual spirit as distinct from the means (and need) to dominate nature to make a material living. Quietly, without admonishing, Sarver maps the contemporary debate about ecocentric and anthropocentric approaches to nature (and their variations) against the agricultural landscapes of each writer. Not surprisingly, those who know the most about farming (Garland and Bailey) engage the problems of nature, culture, farm work, and the spirit most compellingly. Norris and Smythe reduce the agricultural landscape to an abstract scene for human—particularly American—dramas of capitalism and progress.

Sarver is aware that her book may be a disciplinary anomaly, but in fact her approach draws on a longstanding, if interrupted, tradition in American Studies. Scholars such as Henry Nash Smith, Leo Marx, Peter Schmitt, Donald Worster, and Annette Kolodny have examined American attitudes about nature and cultivation in a variety of sources. Sarver’s sustained attention to contemporary environmental debate throughout her study—always thoughtful and suggestive rather than preachy—reopens and extends this tradition. The agricultural historical context may be thin for some readers, but the broad outline is clear. Her real search is for ideas expressed in literary form, and she gravitates towards the literary gestures even of Smythe and Bailey. Although she cites him briefly, Sarver might have used Peter Schmitt’s exposition of American Arcadian thought (*Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America* [1969]) more systematically to inform her analysis; Schmitt was concerned with the period under consideration in Sarver’s book, and her subjects arguably outline the contradictions inherent in Arcadian beliefs and practices. Nevertheless, the book makes compelling connections between past and present considerations of social and environmental change. Her chapter on

Bailey is the best of the five, a detailed and appreciative reckoning with a major scientific figure rarely engaged as thoughtfully as he is here. Sarver reminds us that, while we may think we know the American literary canon—or indeed agricultural history—there are always nuances and surprises worth looking into.

*The Follinglo Dog Book: A Norwegian Pioneer Story from Iowa*, by Peder Gustav Tjernagel. The American Life and Land Series. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999. xiii, 172 pp. Illustrations, notes. \$32.95 cloth, \$15.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY GAYLE R. DAVIS, WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY

Family lore has a way of evolving. Particular characters and events become emblematic of the values, history, and heritage of a group of people. In *The Follinglo Dog Book*, the dogs who resided over the course of five human generations at the Follinglo Farm in Story County, Iowa, serve as symbolic markers of time in the Tjernagel family. The dogs' names are the titles of the chapters, but it is not only because the book includes some of their stories. The focus on the dogs was also a ploy used by the author to engage the imaginations of his eight children, enticing them to learn the core Tjernagel family tales. In 1909, the children convinced their 44-year-old storyteller to write down those narratives, using the title *From Milla to Chip the Third*. That handwritten manuscript covered the time from 1864, the family's earliest days in Iowa, to 1908.

Since then, the text has gone through several iterations. Peder Gustav and two relatives produced a typed and edited draft of the original in the 1920s; in 1966, the 1920s version was edited again and privately published under the present title by three other family members. The location of the original handwritten manuscript is unknown, but it is assumed to have been burned in the fire that devastated Follinglo Farm in 1968. The 1999 edition of the book is taken from the 1966 version, with additions of a foreword by series editor Wayne Franklin and a prologue and epilogue by Peder Gustav's maternal grandson, Peter Tjernagel Harstad. Twenty pages of Tjernagel photographs further enliven the narrative. Of course, many of the family dogs are pictured.

The book's value is augmented by the additional materials included in the 1999 edition. Franklin's foreword gives the modern reader some context. He places Peder Gustav in the company of local colorists and regional writers, and he provides a framework for un-

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