

fact of the death of her youngest son and the consequences for her middle child: "I'd do anything in the world for Spence—except pay attention to him, listen to him, . . . give love he longed for" (160).

Self-doubts and marital difficulties are pervasive in later chapters, but Spence's strength of character shines through her actions: turning the ranch into lodging for tourists and hunters, clearing out many debts, realizing "I'd hung onto the rotting carcass of a marriage for twenty years after it had died," and moving to California in her fifties (201). Her anger, which comes out in raw and powerful ways, reflects a recognition that living for others is often not living at all.

Letters from the Dust Bowl, by Caroline Henderson, edited by Alvin O. Turner. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001. xv, 278 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 cloth.

Reviewer Roger Bromert is professor of history at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. His research and writing have focused on the Sioux and the New Deal.

When Caroline Boa accepted a teaching job at the Center School near Eva, Oklahoma, in 1907, she also established a claim on a quarter-section of land across the road. The following year she married Will Henderson. For nearly 60 years the couple farmed the homestead in the Oklahoma Panhandle. During those years, in letters, essays, and articles, Caroline Henderson penned firsthand accounts about farm life on the Great Plains. Alvin Turner has edited those writings into a fascinating account of hope and hardships.

Caroline Henderson was not an ordinary homesteader, plainsperson, or farm wife. She earned a degree in literature from Mount Holyoke College, taught English and Latin in the Des Moines public schools, and later earned a master's degree in literature from the University of Kansas. Her articles on the farmer's plight during the depression and Dust Bowl were published in *Atlantic Monthly* and *Ladies World*. To friends and relatives she wrote of her and Will Henderson's love for books, the coming of modern conveniences such as the telephone, electricity, and indoor plumbing, and the virtues of democracy over totalitarian rule. There are also discussions of religion, education, children, gardening, politics, and New Deal federal programs.

Most of the writings center on farm and livestock production and on the Hendersons' determination to remain on the homestead despite the hardships of drought, wind, dust, blizzards, and isolation. She writes to her daughter Eleanor of the economic importance of the turkeys she raised and the eggs she sold to supplement the family income

—often the only cash income the Hendersons had. In the end it was always the love of the land and the hope of better times to come that kept the Hendersons going from year to year.

Turner's careful editing makes *Letters from the Dust Bowl* a recommended work for those interested in farm life during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, especially the role women played in the farm economy. It is a story of a remarkable woman whose writings add an important contribution to plains literature and history.

Dust Bowl, USA: Depression America and the Ecological Imagination, 1929–1941, by Brad D. Lookingbill. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001. x, 190 pp. Illustrations, map, notes, bibliography, index. \$44.95 cloth, \$16.95 paper.

Reviewer Frieda Knobloch is associate professor of American studies at the University of Wyoming. She is the author of *The Culture of Wilderness: Agriculture as Colonization in the American West* (1996), and *Small Worlds: A Natural History of Work in Place*, forthcoming from the University of Iowa Press in 2004.

Brad Lookingbill's *Dust Bowl, USA* turns a discursive eye on stories about the Dust Bowl, a well-known but still perhaps poorly understood chapter in American agricultural, national, and environmental history. In two ominous words, *Dust Bowl* sums up a region, a drought and blowing soil, an era, and its victims. It is a subject that has been treated by many historians, as Lookingbill knows, but "the story of the dust bowl needs retelling" (4–5) to read the cultural narratives used by people at the time, creating meanings for their predicament.

The cultural narratives Lookingbill hears in *Dust Bowl* stories are about the American frontier. They take essentially one form: the jeremiad, with its images of tragic decline and romantic promise. Newspaper editorials, novels, poems, songs, hymns, even federal policy documents and public addresses repeatedly cast the Dust Bowl in terms of declension and promise. American agriculture was part of the promise of the frontier, a promise abused, neglected, taken for granted, or brutally withheld by nature. Blowing dust and ruined farms were visible omens of decline, though what that decline represented remained open to furious debate. The promise could be regained, depending on the authority at hand, through socialism, the independent spirit and hard work of farmers, scientifically advanced and conservation-oriented farming, the New Deal, or possibly a reckoning with God.

This is the beauty and malleability of the jeremiad, and Lookingbill gives us a wealth of *Dust Bowl* stories sketching its lines and refrains. Although their interpretations of the disaster could be wildly

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