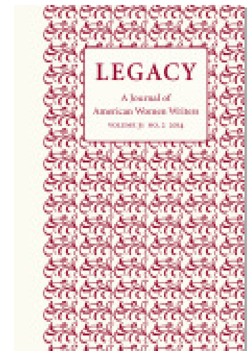
Big Books Wanted: Women and Western American Literature in the Twenty-First Century



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REVIEW ESSAY

Big Books Wanted: Women and Western American Literature in the Twenty-First Century

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The study of women writers of the American West emerged from the margins of a marginal field. The identification of western writing with a denigrated popular form, along with the location of western writers and scholars on the margins of eastern power and prestige, meant that the literary West did not enter the scholarly scene until the 1960s. Leslie Fiedler, whose influential thesis—that classic American literature depicts heroes in flight from the domestic—foregrounded western texts and themes, perhaps creating space for a series of monographs published in the 1960s that redefined the West as a literary region in its own right, worthy of high literary treatment and inhabited by great American authors capable of transforming its people and places into art. In 1965, the Western Literature Association (WLA) was founded and began publishing its journal, *Western American Literature*. Major monographs were published within the space of a few years, including Edwin Fussell's *Frontier: American Literature and the American West* (1965), Robert E. Lee's *From West to East: Studies in the Literature of the American West* (1966), and James K. Folsom's *The American Western Novel* (1966). Women writers were on the margins of this conversation, with the exception of the Pulitzer Prize–winning Willa Cather, the only woman writer to receive more than cursory mention in early monographs in the field. It wasn't until 1979 that the first anthology on western American women writers was published: L. L. Lee and Merrill Lewis's *Women, Women Writers, and the West*. Meanwhile, critical paradigms for the study of the frontier, most notably those by Richard Slotkin, emphasized its legacy of violent conquest, making a strong case for the importance of the

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West in literature and culture but further distancing women writers from western and frontier topics.

More than thirty years have passed since the earliest anthologies on women and the West appeared. There is no doubt that tremendous inroads have been made in the field, as the essays in Nicolas Witschi's *Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American West* (2011) make clear by devoting significant attention to women writers. A newcomer to the field might be surprised, however, to find relatively few "big books" on the topic, to use Christine Bold's phrase ("Frontier Story" 212). Much recent analysis of women's writing of the West is embedded in studies of other topics and rightly considers gender as one of many relations structuring western American literary production and reception. However, there is still a need for more work that attempts to organize the diverse study of women writers into larger narratives that position individual women within broader social networks and historical patterns. The relatively small number of monographs on western American women's writing is due to conditions structuring scholarship in the field, including the historically marginal status of western American literature and the extensive archival and recovery work required to underwrite substantive, major statements about the topic.

ESTABLISHING THE FIELD

If the early decades of the print record on women's writing of the American West reveal little activity, it is not because scholars were not writing; rather, the task of establishing the field involved work that was not visible to conventional measures of scholarly achievement. In other words, the sparseness of print scholarship on women's western writing appearing during the early period in the field's history belies the groundswell of activity that was occurring at the grassroots level, as a new generation of scholars influenced by the feminist movement began actively to interrogate the received canon of frontier and western writing and seek women writers who, with a few exceptions, had largely fallen out of print. Progress in scholarship proved slow. Although Annette Kolodny, author of two landmark feminist studies of frontier literature, enjoyed strong support from her dissertation committee chair, who, she reports, "never tried to constrain me to any kind of critical or canonical orthodoxy" and "encouraged me to find my own intellectual path," others dismissed her feminist work as "faddish" and "not really literature" (Interview).

Beyond overt sexism, scholars doing this early work faced what was perhaps a more significant obstacle: very little writing by women was available to them. Both Kolodny and Melody Graulich considered including women in their respective books on western writers but were deterred by the dearth of

accessible women-authored material. Kolodny explains that she wanted her first book, *The Lay of the Land*, to include women writers, "but I just couldn't find enough, and I didn't know where to look" (Interview). As a graduate student, Graulich faced similar challenges to including women writers in her dissertation work on frontier literature:

> My three male mentors were solid and suggested dissertation topics on women writers (Ellen Glasgow was one), but I wanted to write about the frontier, and there just weren't critical books about women then to help me move along. It was even difficult to find frontier women writers before Kolodny's second book. I knew of Caroline Kirkland, who I should have written about, and Susan Magoffin but that was about it. And I had no critical apparatus available to interpret their lives. (Interview)

The prevailing intellectual culture, together with a lack of material, engendered an all-or-nothing approach to the study of women writers of the West. The recovery of forgotten, out-of-print material and the development of critical paradigms for the study of women's writing were thus crucial to the establishment and growth of the field.

Kolodny's second book was delayed by the years of grant applications and archival research necessary to locate women-authored texts. "It took me years and years of research to uncover lost women writers like Caroline Kirkland, Alice Cary, Caroline Soule, [and] E. D. E. N. Southworth," who are now well known to literary study. To find these women at all required more than a little detective work: "I . . . discovered to my horror that women's letters and diaries were rarely cataloged under their own name[s]—if they were cataloged at all. I traveled to many historical societies and library archives and had to wade through boxes labeled under a husband's or a father's name in order to ascertain whether there were letters or diaries of any women in the family" (Interview). Indeed, Kolodny is to be credited for giving many libraries the impetus to index women writers in their collections. Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land* (1975) and *The Land Before Her* (1984) proved to be key feminist interventions in studies of the American frontier and the literary West. In *The Lay of the Land*, Kolodny denaturalized as male fantasy the gendered assumptions underlying dominant constructions of the frontier landscape as a female body awaiting penetration and conquest. She also brought questions of feminism and the West into the forefront of American literary studies. Kolodny built on this foundation with *The Land Before Her*, in which she recovered several women writers, arguing that their work was structured by what she termed domestic fantasy. "They dreamed, more modestly [than men], of locating a home and a familial human community within a cultivated garden" (xii–xiii).

Kolodny's work is now considered foundational in the field of ecocriticism, and the study of landscape continues to occupy a prominent place in western American literary study.

While Kolodny was engaged in her archival work for *The Land Before Her*, a different community of scholars was collecting feminist scholarship on the literary West, resulting in two important collections, which began to map a broader project for the study of a "women's west." The WLA was founded in the 1960s by a small group of scholars working in western colleges and universities. Whereas the American literary canon of the time valued western literature primarily as it was identified with the frontier origins of a national American literature, the WLA was established to redress the eastern focus of American literary studies as well as to foster work by contemporary western writers. Scholarship on women writers in this community was situated within a larger project of validating the West as a mature literary culture in its own right. Despite the masculinist bent of the association's scholarship, Ann Ronald, an author of books on Zane Grey and Edward Abbey who has been active in the WLA since 1974, remembers it as a supportive community for women scholars (Interview). Graulich postulates that East-West regional politics may have made the WLA relatively receptive to feminist scholarship: men in the WLA "were perhaps comfortable working on marginalized writers and had the typical western chip-on-your-shoulder about the East, its pretensions, and hegemony" (Interview). Historians of western women, concurrently establishing their own field, enabled literary scholars both methodologically and by holding conferences, which contributed to an interdisciplinary community of feminist scholars working on women and the West (Graulich, Interview). Within the WLA, women scholars, regardless of research topic, found opportunities for community building that an earlier generation lacked. These efforts played a crucial yet largely invisible role in advancing the field of western women's literary study.

Over the ensuing decades, the field continued to grow. "Women, Women Writers, and the West" was designated one of the special topics of the WLA's 1976 meeting; papers from that meeting were subsequently collected in Lee and Lewis's 1979 anthology with that title, the first volume on the topic. A second anthology, Helen Stauffer and Susan J. Rosowski's *Women and Western American Literature* (1982), soon followed. Both collections offer an eclectic array of methods and topics reflecting the fragmented state of this emergent field. Nevertheless, the editors of both texts arranged the essays in ways that suggested an underlying project: they argue that women's experiences and voices have been obscured by a male-centered mythology that must be exposed and denaturalized so that women's western writing can be fairly valued and understood. First, both editorial teams introduced their collections by privileging a woman's

voice or reality in order to displace the dominant masculinist paradigm. Lee and Lewis do so by prefacing their introductory section with a poem by Clarice Short; Stauffer and Rosowski, on the other hand, begin with a section of essays on "Women and History." Second, both collections interrogate the popular frontier myth. Susan Armitage's feminist critique of masculinist narratives is the lead scholarly essay in Lee and Lewis's volume; similarly, Stauffer and Rosowski group some essays under the heading "Myth as Filter." Finally, both collections include sections on the representation of women in western literature and culminate with essays on women writers who recast the frontier myth. The objectives shaping these two early anthologies, which privileged western women's life narratives and private writing against a masculinist public mythology, would continue to occupy a significant place in the field in such works as Janet Floyd's *Writing the Pioneer Woman* (2002) and Cathryn Halverson's *Maverick Autobiographies* (2004) and *Playing House in the American West* (2013).

As the reverberations from the 1970s feminist movement were felt in academic institutions, the volume of books and articles about women writers increased. Essays on women writers began to appear regularly in *Western American Literature*, the premiere scholarly journal in the field. The emphasis on literary value at that time privileged the study of Anglo- and Euro-American women writers, who had more access to the resources that would enable them to produce literature that would meet dominant standards of literary value. Willa Cather continued to receive the most attention from critics, but essays on Jean Stafford, Mary Austin, and a few others were also published. Most books published on western women's writing during this period were single-author studies, also reflecting conditions in the field at the time: given that many women writers were out of print or had a minimal presence in scholarship, the first priority had to be to get them on the map through biographical and introductory works such as Esther Lanigan Stineman's *Mary Austin: Song of a Maverick* (1989) by and Helen Winter Stauffer's *Letters of Mari Sandoz* (1992). Women scholars such as Barbara Meldrum, Rosowski, and Ann Ronald gained prominence in the WLA and began to mentor emerging women scholars. Among these was Graulich, who wrote one of the first essays to summarize the larger oeuvre of western women's writing, cheekily titled "'O Beautiful for Spacious Guys': An Essay on 'the Legitimate Inclinations of the Sexes'" (1989). Graulich later became the editor of *Western American Literature* and mentor to yet another generation of woman scholars, including me. Within the WLA "there were many women in very visible leadership roles, which was stunning to me," Graulich remembers (Interview). Nevertheless, scholarship on women writers of the American West did not enjoy the same prestige that male-centered scholarship did, if the scholarly monographs published during

the 1980s by university presses are an indication. With the exception of Kolodny's *The Land Before Her*, major monographs on western literature from this period, including Loren D. Estleman's *The Wister Trace: Classic Novels of the American Frontier* (1987) and Carl Bredahl's *New Ground: Western American Literature and the Literary Canon* (1989), were focused on men.

In the broader field of the feminist literary studies that exploded in the 1980s, the new paradigms for enabling the study of women writers emphasized women's different histories, social positioning, psyches, and languages in what Cathy Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher, writing about American studies more generally, describe as a "separatist view," particularly in the study of the nineteenth century (16). While, as I have suggested above, separatism was a structural by-product of conditions for women's study within the academy of the 1970s, Davidson and Hatcher are right to point out its limitations: "the separate spheres model has narrowed the possibility that terms and fields occupying 'opposite' sides of these binaries will come into contact and conversation with one another" (20). Thus, women's writing of the West was so different from predominant "western" paradigms that it remained at the margins of scholarly conversation. Major monographs on western literature in the 1980s continued silently to equate "western" with "male-authored." Indeed, Jane Tompkins argued in her 1992 book *West of Everything* that the Western was conceived as a male-authored backlash against women's sentimental culture (47–68). As one of the most high-profile scholars to comment on women writers of the American West, in a book published by the highly prestigious Oxford University Press, Tompkins has had tremendous influence on subsequent studies of the field; the assumption that the popular and women's West are antithetical continues to exclude popular western writers such as B. M. (Bertha Muzzy) Bower and Caroline Lockhart from scholarship on the popular Western, which has emerged as a major topic in western literary studies. It also obscures the characteristics that men and women writers of the West have in common. Indeed, the contestatory relation to a mythical West is by no means limited to women writers; it has structured western literary production from its earliest moments, as Nathaniel Lewis has demonstrated (19–20).

In a shift from the emphasis on single-author studies, but enabled by this earlier archival and recovery work, the mid- to late 1990s saw further attempts to articulate broad critical paradigms for the study of women writers of the American West, with quite divergent results that reflect broader shifts in the discipline. These include the increasing influence of critical theory and an emphasis on social and cultural differences among women. Sylvia Ann Grider and Lou Rodenberger's edited essay collection *Texas Women Writers: A Tradition of Their Own* (1997) is still one of the most comprehensive works of west-

ern women's recovery, spanning from 1830 to the contemporary period, and including essays on novelists, poets, dramatists, and short fiction authors of diverse cultural backgrounds. Norris W. Yates's *Gender and Genre* (1995) grappled with the implications of the fact that many women wrote popular Westerns despite the orthodoxy that the Western was intrinsically masculine. Yates recovered writers including Bower, author of over sixty Westerns, and Lockhart, whose *Me Smith* (1911) was favorably compared to Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1902) and was also a commercial success. Rather than challenging the prevailing view of the popular Western as a genre written by and for men, however, Yates's thesis was that women writers of Westerns were subversives infiltrating a "male camp" (4). Rosowski's *Birthing a Nation* and Krista Comer's *Landscapes of the New West*, both published in 1999, on the other hand, contest masculinist constructions of the West but do so using divergent approaches that again reflect a discipline in transition.

Working from within a still nascent Anglo-American western canon, Rosowski sought to recover a women's western literary tradition and argue for its influence in American literary discourse. She traces the metaphor of creativity as birth through the work of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Anglo-American women writers from Margaret Fuller to Marilynne Robinson, arguing that this metaphor influenced classic American texts as well. While the literariness of western writing was highly valued in western literary studies because of its origins in the advocacy of the region's literary culture, arguments about the unacknowledged influence of women writers proved problematic because they tended to privilege influential women—mainly Anglo-American women who already enjoyed a degree of power within western American society. Two important books of the 1990s brought critique of such power relations to the center of the field. Comer attended to the social relations underlining the construction of the recent western literary canon. Her project was precisely "*not* to make a claim for a cohesive or distinctly female literary tradition," although she did argue for the existence of a post-1970 western-feminist literary movement that included writers such as Joan Didion, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Gloria Anzaldúa (10, 9). Comer's critical apparatus positioned these and other writers in relation to a "dominant western aesthetic" that contested national discourses of a mythic West by privileging realism (3). Comer was interested in the writers, "most of them women writers and/or writers of color," who dissent from this aesthetic, arguing that "there exists a racialized and gendered pattern as well as subregionalist pattern as to who rejects postmodern strategies and who indeed *needs* these strategies in order to tell their own versions of western stories" (4). Brigitte Georgi-Findlay interrogated women writers of the frontier and American West, particularly those of relatively privi-

leged Anglo- and Euro-American backgrounds who gained access to power and privilege through their participation in colonialism. Her book *The Frontiers of Women's Writing* took a more critical stance toward women's frontier writing than Kolodny did by foregrounding their role as agents in the colonial project. Georgi-Findlay's work also took up Kolodny's 1992 essay "Letting Go Our Grand Obsessions," which redefined the frontier as a contested, multicultural space rather than an originary moment in the development of a cohesive, mature American literary canon (Georgi-Findlay 12, 14–15).

REREADING THE WEST

Recent scholarship on women writers of the American West continues the work of recovery, developing critical paradigms for mapping western American women's writing and refiguring the West in ways that address complexities of identity, power, and region. Landscape remains a central focus of analysis in a cultural field dominated by its iconic geography. Continuing the recovery of women's alternative western landscapes begun by Kolodny, Janis P. Stout's *Picturing a Different West* (2007) locates such a West in the work of Austin and Cather, who represent western landscape as an androgynous space that enabled men and women alike to contest normative gender roles (xviii). Such links between gender and geography have been influential in ecocritical practice. Indigenous women writers are playing a particularly important role in this work: in separate essays, Eric Cheyfitz and Susan L. Dunston single out Silko's *Ceremony* as a resource for sustainable philosophies of the environment and of science. John Beck includes Silko in his study of the postwar western landscape—characterized by internment camps and nuclear wastelands—that Beck argues has "become, metaphorically and literally, the arsenal, proving ground, and disposal site for American military-industrial power" (4).

Recovery of early women writers remains an important facet of academic work in the field. The output of western American women writers has proven expansive: Bower alone published more than sixty novels, only a few of which are currently in print on paper, although they are available digitally. To be sure, digital technology now supplies unprecedented access to materials. Much of the detective work that Kolodny did in historical society basements can now be done on computers, although there remains much material that has not been digitized. Digital materials enable scholars and students access to out-of-print texts and appear to obviate the need for reprints or new editions. However, recovery is not merely about making texts available, but about supplying the critical and historical context for understanding this work, much of which still languishes unread and unstudied even though it is available digi-

tally. Recent recovery work is particularly attuned to the material conditions of production that shaped early women's texts. Jennifer Dawes Adkison's *Across the Plains: Sarah Royce's Western Narrative* (2009) is a new edition of Royce's memoir, transcribed by Adkison from Royce's handwritten original, that undoes earlier editorial interventions and omissions while also reconstructing Royce's positioning within her more famous son's mythmaking project. Scholars including Jennifer S. Tuttle are also recovering the western connections of women writers traditionally not identified with the region, such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Indebted to the substantial recovery work that preceded it, Nina Baym's *Women Writers of the American West, 1833–1927* (2011) itemizes by region 343 women who published books (including fiction and nonfiction, prose and poetry) about the American West. Each chapter is organized into shorter essays that link clusters of texts by topic and theme, precisely the kind of resource that Kolodny and Graulich needed when they were emerging scholars in the 1970s.

Single-author studies continue to do the important work of recovery, both expanding the historical corpus and demonstrating the relevance of western writers to the broader American literary field. A case in point is western writing by African Americans, which has been excluded, Eric Gardner argues, from dominant narratives of black American literary history. Cynthia Davis and Verner D. Mitchell's *Western Echoes of the Harlem Renaissance: The Life and Writings of Anita Scott Coleman* (2008) makes a strong case for studying Mexican-born, Southwest American writer Coleman alongside better-known Harlem Renaissance writers, while also broadening the corpus of the black West. The best single-author studies are of wider relevance because of how they contextualize their subjects, as Davis and Mitchell do by linking Coleman to the culture of early-twentieth-century southwestern black communities. Such is also the case with Christine Hill-Smith's *Social Class in the Writings of Mary Hallock Foote* (2009), which examines the shifts in nineteenth-century American class relations that enabled and structured Foote's literary output. Foote was descended from a privileged, eastern family but moved west with her engineer husband. When Arthur Foote had difficulty finding steady work, Mary, who was well educated and socially connected, earned money writing for genteel eastern magazines and eventually published several novels. Her story, Hill-Smith points out, is also that of a new class of "'outsourced' . . . professionals," enabled by the expansion of the railroad and telegraph to produce western content for eastern book and magazine publishers (xii). And it is the story of the emergent professional-industrial elite, whose values competed with and eventually displaced Victorian social codes. Lois P. Rudnick's *The Suppressed Memoirs of Mabel Dodge Luhan* (2012) analyzes some recently

released private papers of this daring and dissenting author, who sacrificed her privileged social status to live among the Pueblo in Taos, New Mexico. Documents made public in the 1980s and 1990s reveal that Luhan experimented both with her sexuality and with the emergent discipline of psychoanalysis, providing contemporary scholars with a rare glimpse into aspects of American life that are rarely documented in print. Both Hill-Smith's and Rudnick's work sheds light on social networks that enabled eastern women to access careers as writers of the West, drawing attention to the interdependence of eastern and western literary histories.

Indigenous writers, including women, are helping scholars restructure critical paradigms of the American West as a site of colonial contact, violent and otherwise. As critics in this area grapple with the interplay of oral and print transmission and multiplicity of language and culture, they are producing substantial innovations in methods of language analysis. Meanwhile, the turn to sovereigntist criticism within indigenous American studies has resulted in a shift in focus away from colonial power structures in indigenous texts and in favor of the ways that indigenous women writers assert tribal values, as exemplified in recent essays by T. Christine Jespersen and Sara Humphreys. Genre studies is helping other scholars define useful focal points for comparative analyses that include women writers in larger colonial contexts. Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola uses the captivity narrative as the basis of her cross-cultural study of the Dakota conflict in *The War in Words: Reading the Dakota Conflict through the Captivity Literature* (2009), which includes the narrative of Good Star Woman in a diverse corpus of orally transmitted as well as written captivity narratives. Derounian-Stodola argues that "captivity provided a symbolic shorthand that came to actually define these wars" and that its "wide generic web encompassing auto/biographical, historical, and fictional texts enacts contact between people of different cultures" (3, 5). As Randi Lynn Tanglen points out, Derounian-Stodola's findings have significance for American literary studies because they challenge the definition of the captivity narrative as a "white woman's genre" (215).

Further, Good Star Woman's narrative poses methodological challenges because it was transmitted orally for many generations before it was transcribed. Such challenges have made the study of indigenous women's texts particularly groundbreaking. Their conditions of literary production, as Susan K. Bernardin demonstrated in her 1995 essay on Mourning Dove's *Cogewea*, often defy foundational categories of literary study. Bernardin's reading of the novel, which was collaboratively written by Mourning Dove of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and Anglo-American ethnographer-activist Lucillius McWhorter, demonstrates that questions of authenticity in

indigenous texts, which have long been the basis for invalidating many native voices, including Mourning Dove's, are complicit in colonial power structures. Kay Yandell's "The Moccasin Telegraph: Sign-Talk Autobiography and *Pretty-shield, Medicine Woman of the Crows*" similarly demonstrates that the study of indigenous women's texts challenges the boundaries of the discipline in productive ways. Yandell's subject is written translations of autobiographies given through sign-talk, a form of communication widely practiced in indigenous communities throughout the Americas that enabled communication across different language groups. Many indigenous people used a combination of oral and sign-talk to narrate their autobiographies to American ethnographers, who translated them into written English. Doubts about whether sign-talk can reliably transmit meaning and therefore culture have, Yandell points out, discouraged scholars from attending to its prominent place in indigenous culture and communication. Through compelling examples from Pretty-shield's autobiography, Yandell demonstrates that sign-talk is indeed a valuable and viable form of cross-cultural communication and that attending to texts such as Pretty-shield's has a significant potential to challenge standard accounts of western history.

Increasing attention to colonial struggle, along with the explosion in multicultural literary studies, is drawing more attention to Chicana and Asian American women's writing of the West. Chicana writers' contributions to the literary critique of US imperialism have been overlooked, argues Emily Lutenski, within a masculinist Chicano tradition; Lutenski's study of Josefina Niggli contributes to a critical conversation about how interracial romances in Chicana writing illuminate women's perspectives on American expansion and conquest. The growing body of work on María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's novel *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), of which Karen Kilcup's essay in *Western American Literature* is a recent example, explores similar issues. The novel portrays the experience of a Mexican American family after the annexation of California in 1848 led to the gradual loss of their land and status. Writing about the early-twentieth-century and contemporary contexts, respectively, Erin Murrah-Mandril and Paul B. Wickelson demonstrate that the cultural memory of 1848 and its aftermath continue to shape Chicana writing in the Southwest. Perhaps the time is right for a work of larger historical scope that might situate these and other individual works in a broader framework. Asian Americans have also played a central role in western American settlement and development as migrant workers and immigrants; however, as Hsuan L. Hsu points out in his recovery of Chinese American author Jade Snow Wong, their literary contributions before the mid-twentieth century have been largely overlooked. Although recent Asian American women authors such as Maxine Hong Kingston, Fae

Ng, and Karen Tei Yamashita are better represented in American literary scholarship, they have yet to be fully examined in specifically western contexts.

Because gender is now recognized as one of many relations structuring literary production and reception, much recent research on women writers is included within studies of topics that are not explicitly focused on women. As a result, the body of major works that focus on western American women writers is relatively small. However, scholars continue to interrogate the representation of gender in western texts while grappling with the embeddedness of gender within other relations. An area in need of more attention is the queer West as it pertains to women, which has not attracted as much attention as queer western masculinities. There is also considerable room for more work on the complexities of femininity in the West, which is charged with idealized images of women.[1] Katie O. Arosteguy reminds us, however, that feminist analysis must be careful not to overlook hegemonies of whiteness, which can underwrite white female agency in insidious ways.

LOOKING BEYOND THE WEST

The increasing complexity of feminist work may have had the unintended consequence of allowing traditional master narratives to persist. Commenting on the state of scholarship that recovers authors excluded from the dominant narratives of the American West, Bold observed in 2005 that "we do not yet have 'big books' shaping this diverse output into the explanatory patterns and causal narratives that would produce an alternative history of the literary West." As a result, Bold asserts, revisionist scholarship has "neither made much of a dent on the popular image nor cohered into a pattern" ("Frontier Story" 212). Halverson demonstrates the continued importance of developing broader theories of western American women's writing, which are not always explained by critical paradigms focused on the East. Halverson's *Playing House in the American West* points out that western women's constructions of domesticity do not reflect the imperialist project described in Amy Kaplan's influential essay "Manifest Domesticity" (12). Instead, Halverson argues that western women writers conceive of domesticity as a form of play with domestic norms that originate in the East but are in tension with western landscapes and conditions (1–2). Halverson further highlights the East-West networks that structured western American literary production by taking into account the fact that western women's self-representations were deeply influenced by their psychic relation to a "regular American life" located in the East (2). Bold's *The Frontier Club* (2013) further foregrounds the East-West social networks that enabled an elite class of wealthy white males centered around Wister to co-opt the popular West in the service of a very specific economic and political agenda. Bold

also makes visible the significant extent to which male authors, including Wister, depended on women—as critics, editors, promoters, and readers—for the critical and economic success of their writing.

With Bold's work, the initial separatism of the study of western American women writers—a necessary condition of this scholarship in its historical moment—has shifted to work that locates western American women's writing in a complex network of relations that variously includes class, race, gender, sexuality, and region. As scholars have rejected master narratives of violent conquest and settlement, they have rightly attended to the specificity of indigenous, African American, Chicana, and Asian American women writers. The time is right, however, for more of what Bold calls "big books" about the larger patterns that link women to each other even as differences of class, race, culture, and sexuality may separate them. Such scholarship must combine a broad scope with multivocality, a method modeled by Bold's focus on the networks within which cultural agents are differently positioned and by Derounian-Stodola's use of genre as basis for cross-cultural comparison. The number of women authors of the American West now available for literary study continues to expand apace; what is still needed is a greater understanding of the larger historical, social, and cultural networks that connect them.

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NOTE

1. In this vein, Jason Williams argues that Elinore Pruitt Stewart's challenge to masculinist myths was contradicted by the illustrations of her immensely popular *Letters of a Woman Homesteader*, which reinforced conventional representations of women and homesteading.

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