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“THERE IS SOME SPLENDID SCENERY”

WOMEN’S RESPONSES TO THE GREAT PLAINS LANDSCAPE

JULIE ROY JEFFREY

During the decades of exploration and settlement of the trans-Mississippi West, travelers and emigrants encountered a new kind of landscape on the Great Plains. Aside from dramatic geological formations like Courthouse Rock, this landscape lacked many of the visual qualities conventionally associated with natural beauty in the nineteenth century. “It may enchant the imagination for a moment to look over the prairies and plains as far as the eye can reach,” Sarah Raymond wrote in her diary in 1865, “still such a view is tedious and monotonous. It can in no wise produce that rapturing delight, that pleasing variety of the sublime and beauty of landscape scenery that mountains afford.” Although Raymond used romantic standards in evaluating the plains, others judged the setting in terms of what it might become. As Alexis de Tocqueville had

noticed, some Americans seemed “insensible to the wonders of inanimate nature” because “their eyes . . . [are] fixed upon another sight . . . draining swamps, turning the course of rivers, peopling solitudes, and subduing nature.”¹

Many women settlers between 1850 and 1900 saw the Great Plains in culturally predictable ways, with attitudes ranging from indifference to romantic ecstasy. Their response to the new landscape was also colored by their sex and the values, interests, and habits of the female world. If environmental perception is affected by “personality, training, presuppositions, and prejudices,” then certainly gender, which can influence all of these, should also be considered in coming to understand how nineteenth-century Americans evaluated the visual characteristics of the Great Plains.²

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WOMEN’S PERCEPTIONS OF THE PLAINS

To note the impact of gender on women’s perceptions of the Great Plains does not mean, however, that there was one female response. What women settlers noticed and thought about their surroundings differed according to their location, background, condition, and

even the weather or time of year. North Dakota settler Mary Roberts recognized as much when she wrote in her diary that "Shurly no one want a priettier place than the prairie *when it is calm*."³

Individual expectations and goals also could affect perceptions. Northern women who went to Kansas to save it from slavery might view Kansas as a threatened Eden, whereas settlers like Flora Heston, who were making "a desperate effort to get a home," would see the territory in light of its domestic possibilities. Books, pamphlets, and letters also influenced impressions. Clarissa Griswold carried with her from Minnesota "glowing reports . . . of thrills experienced, and fortunes made . . . in the territory of Dakota," and correspondence from Mary Faeth's husband boasting about "the beauties and the pleasures" of "the wonderful plains" of western Kansas shaped her hopes.⁴ Despite these differences, however, it is possible to make some generalizations about the responses of a varied group of women settlers to the Great Plains between 1850 and 1900. Most literate and accessible are women like Miriam Colt, Sara Robinson, and Hannah Ropes, Kansas emigrants of the 1850s from New England middle class families, or educated women like Mary Dodge Woodward, who located in Dakota in the 1880s. Although more ordinary women's sources are limited, evidence of their perspectives does exist.⁵ Letters written by Flora Heston, who emigrated from Indiana to Kansas with slender resources, or the reminiscences of Martha Smith, who with her husband and "five litel children" left Missouri to go "to a new land and get rich" and "have a real home of our own," give some idea of the parameters of the experiences of ordinary women.⁶ Pioneer collections and interviews also capture aspects of these women's relationships with their environment.

Some have argued that women settling on the Great Plains either found their surroundings depressing or, perhaps because of their class and limited education, failed to see any beauty in them.⁷ There is ample evidence,

however, that women from different backgrounds shared an aesthetic appreciation of the natural setting. Even if they were only dimly aware of romantic standards of landscape beauty, the most pragmatic women were capable of going beyond utilitarian or minimal responses. Flora Heston peppered her letters to her husband, Sam, who was filing his claim in 1884, with practical questions: Was Ford County subject to droughts? Were there snakes, varmints and wolves? Would water be handy? Yet once there, Flora wrote to her mother and sisters that Kansas was "the most beautiful country I ever saw," praised its pure air, the "perfectly green" prairies, "the prettiest flowers," and the wondrous mirages.⁸

The act of settlement itself forced emigrants into a special and often intense relationship with the environment. Travelers to the Great Plains realized as much. Frances Fulton, who visited Nebraska in the 1880s, sensed how different the prairies were "for those of us who carried our return tickets," and Abbie Bright, who spent several months in the 1870s with her brother on his Kansas claim, confided in her diary, "I like it, but if someone said I must stay here always, then I fear I would not."⁹

One of the differences between passing through the plains and settling there was visual. The traveler experienced the landscape as an ever-changing panorama. Fulton likened the view from her train one early morning to a picture unrolled from beneath the wheels on a great canvas while we stood still.¹⁰ The settler, fixed in one place, saw only the change of seasons and the changes wrought by human hands. A view monotonous one day would most likely be monotonous the next. What for some was a scenic backdrop for a journey became for others the stage for everyday activities. Involvement with nature replaced casual interest or romantic rhapsody.

OBSERVERS OF THE LANDSCAPE

In their roles as mothers, housekeepers, and food providers, women had no choice but to study the natural world. Responsible for

children's safety, they searched for snakes lurking in the house or outside in the grasses. Doing the laundry demanded watching the weather and recognizing its swift changes, as Mary Dodge Woodward realized: "We had just hung the clothes out when the wind began to blow," she wrote in her diary. "We had to bring them in and dry them around the kitchen fire." The threat of fire also called for "close vigilance in watching" the skies. Anna Ruppenthal, a Kansas settler of the 1870s, recalled that her "last act at night, after seeing that the children were all asleep, and all quiet among the livestock . . . was to sweep the entire horizon for signs of flame." Keen eyes searched out wild fruits and nuts to supplement the family diet. Women by necessity became astute observers of the natural world and, as Elise Isley remarked, "we watched the shoots coming through the ground with more than the eye of mere Nature lovers."¹¹

Comments in letters, diaries, and reminiscences indicate how frequently the environment intruded upon women's lives, forcing them to notice and respond. The tough prairie grass made "such a wear and tear upon our shoe leather," wrote Kansas settler Miriam Colt, that she went barefoot or wore rubbers outside to save her shoes. When the grass was high, walking was difficult for everyone, but long skirts made getting around especially hard for women. When the prairie grass was plowed under, "black and heavy and sticky" mud bothered women in skirts. Colt discovered yet another drawback of her costume by finding that "on a dewy morning one gets as wet as though they had forded a river." Other nuisances affected women and their spheres of action and responsibility. High winds rocked their houses, blew off roofs, and carried the laundry away; rains leaked into soddies and log cabins making them "dark, gloomy, cheerless, uncomfortable and cold inside." Sometimes there were "terrible gale[s] of dust" that made the house filthy.¹² No female settler could be oblivious to nature's power on the Great Plains.

The writings of nineteenth-century settlers

also reveal basic visual desires and needs. At the most fundamental level, women wanted to be able to see where they were. Women found the landscape depressing when a flat terrain or confinement in a one-story house or cabin made it impossible to have a panoramic view. Adela Orpen's account of her years on the Kansas frontier suggests the importance women placed on being able to see their surroundings properly. Early in her reminiscences, Orpen reflected that the reproduction of an antique statue was the "only thing of beauty in our Kansas house and in the whole prairie." Outside, there was nothing worth looking at on the "vast, measureless prairie." In the second year of living in Kansas, however, her father built an outdoor staircase leading to the second floor. From this staircase she wrote, "we had a glorious view across the prairie."¹³ The landscape was, of course, the same; the difference was that now Orpen could see it as a whole and place herself in it.

POSITIVE RESPONSES TO THE LANDSCAPE

Orpen's reminiscences suggest that the scenic sense of the landscape did not disappear just because nature was so often intrusive. Indeed, female settlers lavished praise on the "beautiful rolling prairies" that so easily afforded panoramic vistas and views. When Sarah Randall arrived in Nebraska in 1861, she proclaimed herself "charmed with the scene, which was vastly different from the mountains and narrow winding valleys of Pennsylvania." Some women even sited their houses with a certain view or picture in mind. Mrs. Isley and her husband built their house "on a treeless prairie swell" where they could take advantage of "the beautiful view" and "the summer breezes."¹⁴ "It all seemed like a picture," Mary O'Neil said of the North Dakota landscape.¹⁵ Her use of the word picture indicates not only her interest in the scenic character of her surroundings but also her aesthetic preference for a landscape that, like a picture, had some kind of definition. Similarly, the positive value women placed on

variety and contrast and the pleasure they expressed in seeing the beautiful rolling prairie balanced by a line of forest, bluffs, a graceful ravine, stream, or river indicated their predilection for a landscape that was bounded and measured.¹⁶ It may be that the value women placed on these landscapes revealed their desire to see a nature that was controlled though not transformed in the manipulative fashion that de Tocqueville had described.

Other aspects of the Great Plains landscape also elicited a positive response. If it is true, as Neil Evernden has suggested, that the prairie landscape with its absence of things demanded a new way of seeing beauty in the relationship between sky and land, then some women early began to see anew.¹⁷ Many referred to the special quality of the Great Plains sky. They noted its brilliance when blue and cloudless, the dramatic shadows that the clouds produced on the land, the spectacular sunsets and sunrises, the sudden way in which darkness descended in a place in which twilight hardly seemed to exist. Some spoke of the silvery qualities of the moon and the special kind of light that it cast over the landscape. Many referred to the region's amazing mirages.¹⁸

The weather and climate that impinged so often on daily life produced a steady stream of comments. It was easy to love the spring days, the bright climate, the cool nights during hot summer months. The violent and sudden storms were less easy to appreciate. Occasionally women could even see value in these weather patterns, finding the storms as well as prairie fires among the few awesome, sublime, and grand features of their new environment. Those who were knowledgeable about romantic conventions used familiar descriptive vocabulary for these dangerous natural phenomena. Others found simpler ways to express themselves. Dakota settler Kate Gaspell pronounced a tornado "the greatest thrill I experienced in my pioneer life."¹⁹

Women noticed the small elements of the plains and prairies and of the wildlife and vegetation that provided variety, color, and a certain unpredictability the larger landscape

often lacked. Above all, flowers drew women's attention. They carefully noted the number, colors, seasonal progression, and occasionally even the scent of prairie and plains flowers. Women exchanged bouquets, gathered, pressed, and decorated their houses with flowers.²⁰ The many references women made to flowers suggest not only aesthetic appreciation but the symbolic meaning women attached to them. Wild flowers connected many women to the remembered world of their flower gardens—landscapes that were cultivated, fertile, and familiar. Not only did wild flowers suggest a domesticated nature but also female rituals of friendship in which sharing delight and flowers affirmed ties of affection.

These observations show the range of female responses to the visual character of the Great Plains and suggest the careful study and aesthetic appreciation certain natural features elicited. Women often struggled to describe what they saw, however. Interestingly enough, it seems as if the better educated women, those acquainted with literature and art, had the most trouble writing. Miriam Colt found the moon lovely "far beyond describing words;" Clarina Nichols felt she had left Kansas' beauty "all unsaid." Perhaps their difficulty stemmed from the landscape's character, from its not being sublime, wild, nor romantic. Without the language of convention, as other scholars have suggested, women were at a loss for the right words.²¹

Women less familiar with formal aesthetic standards did not wrestle with the burden of elaborate language and description. Their simple style was neither a sign of indifference nor of a utilitarian approach to the environment.²² Often it appears as if they noticed the same natural features as women who wrote extended descriptions of their surroundings. Martha Smith, who moved from Missouri to Oklahoma to Texas to Oregon, had few words at her disposal. "When we reached Kansas," she wrote, "it looked so beautifull that I ask my husband why we should not stop there." Later she described their homestead in this way: "landed home just before sun set. Well we felt

so happy for everything looked so beautiful. All the prairie with the cattle grazing and to know that we had our own home." Despite the limited vocabulary, one can see Smith's responsiveness to the rolling Kansas hills, to a sunset, and to a pastoral vista with her home as its focus. Take Anna Hawks's simple word picture of Custer County, Nebraska: "The country was beautiful. Lovely pictures pass through my memory of tall blue stem in the lowlands, buffalo grass on the hills, lovely wild roses, sweet peas, cactus and sunsets that only Nebraska can boast of." Despite the use of only two adjectives, "lovely" and "beautiful," the listing of precisely noted natural features begins to convey something of the character of Hawks's observation and appreciation.²³ Her sweeping statement describing Nebraska's unique sunsets suggests her awareness of the country's special visual qualities.

NEGATIVE RESPONSES TO THE LANDSCAPE

If women found many features of the plains and prairie landscape memorable and beautiful, they found others disagreeable. The further west they located, the more likely that their first response was disappointment. The prominent place the arrival scene and early impressions occupied in their reminiscences reveals the power of their initial confrontation with their new environment.²⁴ One woman who came to the valley of the Elkhorn River in Nebraska in the late 1850s wrote, "This is the picture as I see it plainly in retrospect—a country . . . with a smooth, level, gray surface which appeared to go on toward the west forever and forever. . . . Ten or twelve log cabins broke the monotony of the treeless expanse that stretched far away, apparently to a leaden sky." The features of this landscape hardly demanded elaborate language. The spare vocabulary and the repeated use of a few key words such as "dreary," "desolate," and "barren" suited the minimal places described.²⁵

Women identified these monotonous landscape as both visually tedious and psychologically overwhelming. Places that appeared to go

on "forever and forever," without any clear definitions, a skyline that was only "a hazy wobble," without natural or human markings, diminished human beings.²⁶ Although it was fashionable to value solitary confrontations with nature, in some landscapes, as Clarina Nichols observed, one was not "'alone with nature,' for it seems as though nature had gone on a long journey," taking her "treasures" with her. Romantic values collapsed when confronted by female preferences.²⁷

Women were also evaluating new landscapes in terms of interior landscapes or the images they were carrying with them of homelike settings. The specific components that made up these imagined landscapes—the ornamental trees, gardens, streams, or springs—were drawn from recollections of their former homes and from the ways in which women's novels and magazines portrayed and illustrated domestic settings. These interior landscapes were compelling not only because they contained familiar and artful elements but also because they supported family and social life in which women were esteemed and in which their values flourished. Hannah Ropes's criticism of Kansas could not have surprised her mother. Her 1855 letter described coming "into a broad mowing field of a thousand acres—smooth as a lawn, but by no means a dead level; not a fence to be seen, not a habitation. . . . No indeed, there was nothing cozy about this scene. Grand, beyond all conception it was, but stern and distant, like the life of the understanding without affection."²⁸ In her sweeping rejection of romantic grandness, Hannah Ropes called for domestic coziness, a life based on affection, and a landscape that allowed that way of life.

As women settlers evaluated their surroundings they asked themselves "Can I ever live in a place like this?" This query mingled visual and pragmatic concerns with psychological and emotional considerations. Could women ever feel at home? When the answer was no, women were occasionally able to persuade husbands to seek new locations. Elise Logan, who came to Nebraska in December

1866 with her three children and husband, found the "wind-swept prairie" "desolate" and "uninviting," but decided she "could be content" in the Logan Valley where the stream and groves of trees provided a "home-like look." There the family settled.²⁹

In barren places, women pointed to the absence of natural features like springs, rocks, birds, bushes, and human features. Houses were visually important because they individualized and marked the environment. They also represented the possibility of recreating human ties and women's culture. Houses and people had the power to transform the most desolate landscape. When Anna Ganser moved from eastern to western Nebraska with her husband in the 1880s, she failed to see "beauty in the barren prairie and wide open, fenceless, unsettled country." But as settlers began to take up land in the next three years, her granddaughter recorded, "Grandmother began to be more contented with grandfather's choice in settlement and began to realize something of the opportunities."³⁰

WOMEN AS SHAPERS OF THE LANDSCAPE

Since women's inner landscapes were grounded not only in memories of former homes but also in more generalized concepts of "home," they served as resources for women as they attempted to deal with frontier realities. Even though women's greatest efforts probably lay in their creating an interior space where they could, as Ketturah Belknap put it, be "monarch of all I survey and there is none to dispute my right," they did not neglect the exterior world.³¹ Men are usually given the credit for shaping the western landscape, but women left their marks as well. The space that traditionally was most under female control was land near the house; on the Great Plains, as elsewhere, women established their gardens. They transplanted wild fruit bushes and planted vegetables. Women, proud of their contributions to the family diet, also valued gardens because they provided time outside. Luna Kellie pointed out that "nothing else

equals an early hour or two in the garden . . . the outdoor interest brightens the day."³²

As one might suspect, many women created flower gardens. Lovely as the wild flowers might be, women longed for cultivated flowers that had rich associations with their past and provided proof of their power to mark the landscape and of their sense of beauty. So important was a flower garden to Helen Wooster that she instructed her husband to build their Nebraska house so that she could see the garden from her bedroom window.³³ It was not always easy to provide the color that "made the homes brighter," however. The obstacles to raising peonies and pansies in the Dakotas were daunting, but Mary Dodge Woodward was determined to have her garden even though it meant covering the garden patch with straw every night for two months. When women failed with flowers on the ground, some adorned their houses by planting a few blooms on their sod roofs instead.³⁴

Even though one can view some of these gardening efforts as pathetic, for it was often hard, as Woodward found, to succeed with flowers, one can also see them as signs of female determination to make a small mark on the landscape, to carve out a piece of land that was colorful, pretty, and an appropriate setting for a home. "I always had flowers at home," Woodward wrote in her diary, "so I feel I must have at least a few pansies." The ties that women formed with their flowers linked the past to the present and were one way of coming to terms with the environment.³⁵

Women helped to carve out special, small, intimate spaces near their houses. Enclosing spaces, of course, might have the practical purpose of ensuring their children's safety or keeping the cattle away, but such spaces symbolized more than maternal care. Women disliked landscapes that lacked definition and enclosing space was one way of defining the land. Nannie Alderson had a "pretty patch of lawn around the house. It was just the native wild grass that they call blue stem, but we fenced it in." In a related way, women helped to emphasize boundaries. Roy Sage remem-

bered that "in the fall of 1884 my mother gathered some boxelder seed from the trees in the canyons and in the spring of 1885 she planted them along the east end of our farm." Etta Crowder's mother had her children plant sunflowers on the edge of their property, saying "they would shut off the view and relieve the monotony a little."³⁶ By both marking and limiting the landscape these women were also creating the variety they so valued.

In their efforts to make their surroundings homelike, women tried to soften what was often a sharp contrast between the world of nature and the world of the family. Diaries, letters, and reminiscences make it clear how women brought nature into their homes. Often in spring and summer they decorated their houses with the lovely wild flowers. Clarissa Griswold went further: "I spent much time gathering wild flowers growing everywhere. . . . That first summer I copied these flowers with oil paints on silk velvet pieces sent me from home. The crazy quilt I decorated and pieced then, is now a showpiece." Many women raised houseplants. Selma Edson recalled how sod house "windows were fine for houseplants, and I remember a red rose bush my mother had. . . . The flowers . . . perfumed the whole house."³⁷

CONCLUSION

The reminiscences that women wrote late in life set their interactions with the environment of the Great Plains in a larger perspective. Candid about the bleakness or the beauty of their original natural settings they were, for the most part, satisfied with the changes they had helped to bring about. While the grand features of the land still remained, women felt they had not tamed nor quite domesticated it but humanized and beautified it. They had changed the view and created the variety the view had lacked. As Kate Davis put it, eventually she had "such a lovely yard," a flower garden that was "such a vision of beauty," and "the dreary, desolate place was

blossoming in all the gorgeous beauty that God has promised to those who try."³⁸

There are also signs that eventually some women felt proud of the area's unique features, both grand and threatening. Many claimed the region's sunsets surpassed those in any other part of the country. Others took a kind of pride in the fierceness of the winter weather. Some women clearly came to prefer the Great Plains landscape. "I *should feel dreadfully cooped up if I was back in Indiana*," Flora Heston remarked. Another Kansas settler explained that "the prairie . . . simply gets into your blood and makes you dissatisfied away from it." This was clearly the case with Martha Smith. She and her husband moved many times within the Great Plains. Eventually they emigrated to Oregon. "It was so difernt but it was a lovy country," wrote Martha. "Some-how I did not like it."³⁹

Not all of the women who settled on the Great Plains reconciled themselves as happily to the landscape as Heston or Smith. The comparison between their inner world and the outer world was too sharp to allow some to make peace with the environment. For their children, however, the story was different. Those who were born on the Great Plains and who grew up there developed a mental and psychic landscape based on that world. Their accounts of childhood on the Great Plains suggest an enthusiasm for the natural setting. Freer than their mothers to explore this world and to interact with it, these settlers recalled the exhilaration of riding horseback, picking flowers, finding calves in the grass, chasing thistles in the wind, fishing, wading, hunting wild roses, and exploring sand hills for chokecherries. Even the sounds of the prairie contributed to the conviction that the Great Plains was a special place.⁴⁰

"Let those whose tastes are on a level with the ground they tread feel proud and admire their prairie fields," Sarah Raymond had rather loftily proclaimed from her Montana home.⁴¹ Like other well-educated women, Raymond had looked in vain for signs of sublimity and grandeur on the Plains. But

Raymond, like most women commenting upon the Great Plains, did find some beauty in the scenery. Ordinary women saw the landscape in terms of "pictures," indicating that some general aesthetic standards were operating as women evaluated their surroundings even if they were not entirely aware of them or articulate in expressing them. For some, "beautiful" would have to say it all.

While sharing the perspective of the larger culture that admired the wilderness but preferred a nature that was controlled, women betrayed their own particular visual sensitivity and psychological preferences. Their preoccupation with certain smaller elements of the natural world, flowers, gardens, trees, and hedges shows their interest in a gentle domesticated setting and in visual variety and beauty. Their efforts to make this setting come to life represented an attempt to reconcile the remembered landscapes of the past with their present and their future and to create a setting that would nourish people as well as plants and flowers.

NOTES

1. Kenneth L. Holmes and David C. Duniway, eds. *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1840-1890*, Vol. 5, (Glendale, California: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1986), pp. 63, 225; Raymond Settle and Mary Lund, eds., *Overland Days to Montana in 1865: The Diary of Sarah Raymond and Journal of Dr. Ward Howard* (Glendale, California: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1971), p. 157; Alexis de Tocqueville quoted in Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 23; Marcia B. Kline, *Beyond the Land Itself: Views of Nature in Canada and the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 53; David Lowenthal, "The Pioneer Landscape: An American Dream," *Great Plains Quarterly* 2 (Winter 1982): 6.

2. C. J. Tracre, "Environmental Perception and Appraisal Respecting Agricultural Settlement in the Peace River Country, Canada," in Brian W. Blouet and Merlin P. Lawson, eds. *Images of the Plains: The Role of Human Nature in Settlement* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), p. 118.

3. For different responses to the North Dakota landscape, see Vonda Kay Somerville, "To Make A Prairie," Master's thesis, University of North Dako-

ta, 1979, pp. 90-91 and following; quotation from p. 47, my italics.

4. For a discussion of the role of expectation see Malcolm G. Lewis, "The Great Plains Region and Its Image of Flatness," *Journal of the West* 6 (January 1967): 11-26 and J. Wreford Watson, *Mental Images and Geographic Reality in the Settlement of North America* (Nottingham: Hawthornes of Nottingham Ltd., 1967), pp. 3-9; Sara T. L. Robinson, *Kansas: Its Interior and Exterior Life* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), p. 6; Flora Moorman Heston, "'I Think I Will Like Kansas': The Letters of Flora Moorman Heston, 1885-86," *Kansas History* 6 (Summer 1983): 72; Asa B. Wood, *Pioneer Tales of the North Platte Valley and Nebraska Panhandle* (Gering, Nebraska: Courier Press, 1938), p. 188; Mary Lillian Faeth, *Kansas in the 80's* (New York: Procyon Press, 1947), p. 11.

5. Although Elizabeth Hampsten uses the term "working class women" to describe these settlers, I feel less comfortable with this term. See *Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. vii.

6. Heston, "'I Will Like Kansas': 70-95; Martha L. Smith, *Going to God's Country* (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1941), pp. 11, 41, 7. See Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself*, pp. 29-36; Carol Fairbanks, in *Prairie Women: Images in American and Canadian Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 44, suggests that settlers described in fiction viewed land in terms of survival, focusing on possibly destructive or favorable elements.

7. See Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself*, pp. 29-36; Carol Fairbanks, in *Prairie Women: Images in American and Canadian Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 44, suggests that settlers described in fiction viewed land in terms of survival, focusing on possibly destructive or favorable elements.

8. Heston, "'I Will Like Kansas': 72, 75, 77-79, 82. Craig Miner, in *West of Wichita: Settling the High Plains of Kansas, 1865-1890* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986), p. 50, suggests that women saw nature as nourishing their spirit and were better able than men to recognize landscape beauty.

9. Frances I. Sims Fulton, *To and Through Nebraska by a Pennsylvania Girl* (Lincoln: Journal Company, 1884), p. 25; Joseph Snell, ed., "Roughing It on Her Kansas Claim: The Diary of Abbie Bright, 1870-71," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 37 (Autumn 1971): 265. Fairbanks points out differing responses of travelers and settlers in *Prairie Women*, pp. 43-44.

10. Fulton, *Through Nebraska*, p. 107.

11. Mary Dodge Woodward, *The Checkered*

Years (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1937), p. 102; Joanna L. Stratton, *Pioneer Women: Voices from the Kansas Frontier* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981) p. 82; Elise Dubach Isley, *Sunbonnet Days* (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1935), p. 164.

12. Miriam Davis Colt, *Went to Kansas* (n.p.: Readex Microprint Corp., 1966), pp. 92, 68, 49; Woodward, *Checkered Years*, pp. 35, 125; Elizabeth Hampsten, *To All Inquiring Friends: Letters, Diaries and Essays in North Dakota 1880-1910* (Grand Forks: Department of English, University of North Dakota, 1980), p. 223.

13. Adela E. Orpen, *Memories of the Old Emigrant Days in Kansas, 1862-1865* (London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1926), pp. 18, 51, 98.

14. *Collection of Nebraska Pioneer Reminiscences* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: The Torch Press, 1916), p. 211; Isley, *Sunbonnet Days*, p. 166; see also Somerville, "To Make a Prairie," pp. 27, 32, 35; Hampsten, *To All Inquiring Friends*, p. 59.

15. Sommerville, "To Make a Prairie," p. 94.

16. Asa B. Wood, *Pioneer Tales*, p. 60. See Joseph G. Gambone, ed., "The Forgotten Feminist of Kansas: The Papers of Clarina I. H. Nichols, 1854-1885," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 39 (Spring 1973): 32; Robinson, *Kansas*, pp. 2-3. Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), p. 8, argues that only when literary women reached the open prairies did they start to write about the beauty of the view that became "a recurrent theme."

17. Neil Evernden, "Beauty and Nothingness: Prairie as Failed Resource," *Landscape* 27; No. 3 (1983): 1, 6-7.

18. Robinson, *Kansas*, pp. 33-34, 89, 91; *Nebraska Pioneer Reminiscences*, p. 12; Emerson R. Purcell, ed., *Pioneer Stories of Custer County, Nebraska* (Broken Bow, Nebraska: E. R. Purcell, Publishers, 1936), p. 52; Fulton, *Through Nebraska*, p. 49.

19. As Nash points out in *Wilderness*, p. 78, painters like Thomas Cole tried to capture stormy skies in their canvases. For some comments by women, see Orpen, *Emigrant Days*, p. 185; Robinson, *Kansas*, p. 51; James E. Potter, ed., "The Ranch Letters of Emma Robertson, 1891-1892," *Nebraska History* 56 (Summer 1975): 225; Kate Eldridge Glaspell, *Incidents in the Life of A Pioneer* (Davenport, Iowa: Bowden Bros., 1944), p. 41.

20. Luna Kellie, "Memoirs of Luna Kellie," Ms. 3914, Series One, Nebraska State Archives, Nebraska State Historical Society, p. 10; Smith, *God's Country*, p. 82; Glaspell, *Incidents*, pp. 18-19; Rex C. Myers, ed., "To the Dear Ones At Home: Elizabeth Fisk's Missouri River Trip, 1867," *Montana* 32 (Summer 1982): 45.

21. John Milton, "Plains Landscapes and Changing Visions," *Great Plains Quarterly* 2 (Winter 1982): 58-59; Colt, *Went to Kansas*, p. 80; Gambone, "Forgotten Feminist": 39.

22. Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself*, pp. 32-33; Somerville, "To Make A Prairie," p. 22, notes that women were not particularly introspective in their writings. Although this may well be true, a lack of introspection does not mean that women did not appreciate or notice their surroundings.

23. Smith, *God's Country*, pp. 44, 76; Purcell, *Pioneer Stories*, pp. 11-12. Hampsten discusses style in *Read This Only to Yourself*, pp. 20-27.

24. In *West of Wichita*, Miner suggests the psychological impact of the departure from home and the journey meant that travelers had a heightened sensitivity to their new surroundings. See pp. 136, 133, and, for examples of initial responses, pp. 25-26, 34, 49, 64, 124, 172; Valeda Katharine Wood, "The Life of the Pioneer Woman on the Kansas-Nebraska Frontier," Master's thesis, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, 1940, pp. 100-101.

25. *Nebraska Pioneer Reminiscences*, p. 84; For examples of sparse vocabulary see Wood, *Pioneer Tales*, p. 188; Purcell, *Pioneer Stories*, pp. 141, 149; *Nebraska Pioneer Reminiscences*, p. 32.

26. Orpen, *Emigrant Days*, pp. 51-42; *Nebraska Pioneer Reminiscences*, p. 84; Etta May Lacey Crowder, "Pioneer Life in Palo Alto County," *The Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 46 (April 1948): 165.

27. Nash, *Wilderness*, p. 47, points out that romanticism "implies an enthusiasm for the strange, remote, solitary, and mysterious"; Gambone, "Forgotten Feminist of Kansas": 221.

28. Hannah Anderson Ropes, *Six Months in Kansas By A Lady* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1972), p. 35.

29. *Nebraska Pioneer Reminiscences*, p. 84, 32; Ropes, *Six Months in Kansas*, p. 23.

30. For examples of women describing barren surroundings, see Marlene Springer and Haskell Springer, eds., *Plains Woman: The Diary of Martha Farnsworth, 1882-1922* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 87; Kate Winslow Davis, "Neighbor to the Mortons," *Nebraska History* 53 (Spring 1972): 28; Kellie, "Memoirs," p. 4; Orpen in *Emigrant Days*, p. 49, noted how her house marked the landscape: "our house was as if a block of white wood had appeared on the top of an Atlantic roller. It could be seen from afar." Anna Ganser's response appears in Wood, *Pioneer Tales*, pp. 88-89.

31. Cathy Luchetti and Carol Olwell, *Women of the West* (Tokyo: Antelope Island Press, 1982) p. 138. Vera Norwood argues that women's greatest challenge was to create the interior space where people counted most. Unpublished paper, "Women and the Land: New Perspectives on Women and Regional Identity," delivered at Western Women:

Their Land—Their Lives Conference, University of Arizona, Tucson, January 1984.

32. Lowenthal, "Pioneer Landscape": 10-11, points out that pioneer women were not so engaged in shaping the landscape as men; one should not overlook their attempts, however, just because they were less sweeping than men's. See Kolodny, *Land Before Her*, pp. 47-54. Davis, "Neighbor to the Mortons": 30; Melissa Gennett Anderson, *The Story of A Kansas Pioneer Being the Autobiography of Melissa Genett Anderson* (Mt. Vernon, Virginia: The Manufacturing Printers Co., 1924), p. 29; Nannie T. Alderson and Helena Huntington Smith, *A Bride Goes West* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1942), pp. 173-174, and Kellie, "Memoirs," p. 14. For women's interest in each other's gardens, see Hampsten, *To All Inquiring Friends*, p. 114. Fairbanks, in *Prairie Women*, pp. 252-256, when discussing the meaning of gardens in women's prairie fiction, emphasizes that they represented a means of control. The examination of women's primary sources suggests that fiction mirrored reality.

33. William F. Schmidt, ed., "The Letters of Charles and Helen Wooster: The Problems of Settlement," *Nebraska History* 46 (June 1965): 130.

34. Frances Jacobs Alberts, ed. *Sod House Memories* (Hastings, Nebraska: The Sod House Society, 1972), p. 53; Woodward, *Checkered Years*, pp. 229-230; Roger L. Welsch, *Sod Walls: The Story of the Nebraska Sod House* (Broken Bow, Nebraska: Purcells, Inc., 1968), p. 88; Wood, *Pioneer Tales*, p. 61. Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting 1825-1875* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 159, points out that landscape gardeners tried to create beautiful home-like scenes by removing "uncouth and discordant" natural elements. In a simpler fashion, many frontier women had a similar objective.

35. As Ronald Rees suggests in "In a Strange Land . . . Homesick Pioneers on the Canadian Prairies," *Landscape*, 26, No. 3 (1982): 1-2, pioneers could form strong attachments to natural features that seemed familiar to them; here we see women

creating those features. For a pathetic view of women settlers, see Christine Stansell, "Women on the Great Plains, 1865-1890," *Women's Studies* 4 (1976): 95-96; Woodward, *Checkered Years*, p. 79; Fairbanks, *Prairie Women*, p. 255. Women neither possessed nor conquered the land. Possession and conquest were male goals. See Lowenthal, "The Pioneer Landscape": 14 and Nash, *Wilderness*, p. 27.

36. Wood, *Pioneer Tales*, p. 193; Alderson, *A Bride Goes West*, p. 178; Purcell, *Pioneer Stories*, p. 13; Crowder, "Pioneer Life": 171.

37. Wood, *Pioneer Tales*, p. 190; Alberts, *Sod House Memories*, p. 25.

38. *Nebraska Pioneer Reminiscences*, p. 175; Davis, "Neighbor to the Mortons": 32-33.

39. Milton, "Plains Landscapes": 60, argues that nostalgia could occur only after the landscape "had been lived on, cultivated, and built upon." Women's writings bear out his argument. Roxane Fredirici and Stephen E. White have identified modern landscape preferences in "Kansas Through the Eyes of Kansans: Preferences for Commonly Viewed Landscapes," *Great Plains Quarterly* 6 (Winter 1986): 44-58. They note the preference for sky views, vivid color, and strong contrasts. Nineteenth-century observers seem to have valued the same features. Heston, "'I Will Like Kansas,'" p. 83; Stratton, *Pioneer Women*, p. 56; Smith, *God's Country*, pp. 175, 179.

40. Isley, *Sunbonnet Days*, p. 95; Orpen, *Emigrant Days*, p. 60; Jennie Atcheson Wriston, *A Pioneer's Odyssey* (Menasha, Wisconsin: George Banta Publishing Co., 1943), pp. 83-88; Alberts, *Sod House Memories*, p. 48; Purcell, *Pioneer Stories*, p. 91; Alma Carlson Roosa, "Homesteading in the 1880's: The Anderson-Carlson Families of Cherry County," *Nebraska History* 58 (Fall 1977): 277; Miner, *West of Wichita*, p. 50, gives similar examples of the reactions of children growing up on the plains. Rees, "In a Strange Landscape": 8, suggests that only when the bond of memory has been broken can a psychological adjustment to the landscape be made.

41. Settle, *Overland Days*, p. 157.