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Review of *Updating the Literary West* Sponsored by The Western Literature Association

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BOOK REVIEWS

Updating the Literary West. Sponsored by The Western Literature Association. Forth Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1997. Preface, chronology, contributors, bibliographical references, index. xxiii + 1,031 pp. \$79.50.

When *A Literary History of the American West* (LHAW) appeared in 1987, it legitimized the field of western American literary studies, defining a tradition and a canon. Yet even as that lengthy volume was completed, the indefiniteness of its title—A, not *The*—called for a sequel. *Updating the Literary West* (ULW) provides that necessary sequel, not simply updating but in significant ways reconstructing the West's literary history.

The central core of the new volume provides most of the updating. Some of the authors given individual chapters in LHAW reappear with discussions of their recent works and reviews of scholarship since 1980; for some who have died since LHAW's publication the chapters are summations and tributes. Many new authors appear in ULW—some (such as Cormac McCarthy) not previously mentioned, others (such as William Kittredge) barely mentioned in LHAW and now receiving chapter-length consideration. All chapters end with bibliographies of primary and secondary sources, including useful annotations. Most listings are of post-1980 publications.

The reconstruction of western literary history is most apparent in ULW's opening and closing sections. The epilogue of LHAW pro-

vided a brief survey of the development of western literary criticism; ULW begins with a four-chapter section focused on new critical approaches. The chapter on canonical issues is especially well-done. Treatment of the popular western in LHAW focused on movies with little attention paid to written texts, and consideration was fragmented (two chapters in Part I, two chapters concluding the final section). Closing ULW is a fourteen-chapter, ninety-six-page section on "The Popular West" which focuses on written texts and explores cultural issues. Max Westbrook, in his Preface to LHAW, summarized common thinking of those responsible for that volume when he wrote, "literature of the American West, although handicapped by association with Hollywood horse operas and stereotypical paperbacks sold in bus stations, includes a large body of first-rate literary art." Much of the purpose of LHAW was to make this "quality" literature more visible. As one might expect in a 1990s volume which reflects the changing face of both literary and historical studies, ULW sees questions of "quality" as problematic and embraces diversity in what constitutes a text and what that text accomplishes.

The reconstructing of western literary history in this volume does not ignore the old, but adds to it. For instance, LHAW contained a chapter on the adventure narrative from Lewis and Clark to Powell; ULW includes a new chapter, "Pre-Lewis and Clark Exploration Narratives of Western North America."

Although far from ignored in *LHAW*, more women writers and feminist issues receive attention in *ULW*, as do writers from various ethnic backgrounds. The nature essay was recognized as an important genre in *LHAW*, but the growth of ecological concerns has greatly expanded both the available literature and the critical study of that literature, as reflected in *ULW*. Since contemporary western writers do not necessarily write about the frontier era of Anglo expansion and settlement, the definition of what constitutes western American literature necessarily has expanded. This broader range is well-reflected in *ULW*.

The mapmaking metaphor used by many contributors to this volume sums up the enterprise. Tom Lyon concludes with consideration of the changes, physical and cultural, that have taken place in the West since 1980 and sees that the new literature as well as new literary histories will of necessity be different as the exploration and mapmaking continue.

In spite of the variations of approach that inevitably result from a volume written by ninety-seven different critics, *ULW* has reasonable coherence. Readers will find it a useful reference with many provocative discussions as well as basic historical surveys and bibliographic detail. Its usefulness is enhanced when consulted in conjunction with *LHAW*, for there is little repetition in the two volumes.

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