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## Review of *The Nature of the Place: A Study of Great Plains Fiction* By Diane Dufva Quantic

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I begin with this anecdote because Quantic has earned her authority by living her whole life in Kansas; I admire the way she establishes her relation to "place" in the book's first line: "My mother grew up in Lebanon, Kansas, the geographic center of the contiguous forty-eight states." As she makes clear, Plains literature and history have often been told by passers-through, or, worse yet, from afar, leading to the series of myths Quantic sees as informing the literature. Many of the myths Quantic explores are familiar ones: will "rain follow the plow" into the "Great American Desert," for instance, creating a "safety valve" for refugees from the "*ancien regimes*," where they can create a "democratic utopia"? Quantic's real contribution is the way she sees the myths, like the land and the settlers, as constantly on the move, in flux, transforming in relation to each other. She "explore[s] the various manifestations of the myths of westward expansion in Great Plains Fiction and the transformation of the assumptions implicit in the mythic images that became necessary when the land was claimed, communities were formed, and life began in real time."

Basing her readings on the work of geographers and historians like Walter Prescott Webb, David Emmons, James Malin, and Donald Worster, Quantic sees as the central theme of Plains literature the decision either to resist the land, to attempt to impose one's expectations and will upon it, or to "adapt to the region's complex ecology." Like Cather, a writer she admires, Quantic sees the land as transforming those who can recognize and accept its fundamental qualities; such successful pioneers are then able to go about building the sense of community and society essential, in Quantic's view, to a fully realized sense of "place." In this process, they come to value the meaning of everyday work, which Quantic argues is one of the region's most persistent themes.

While I would have liked a bit more attention to the region's original inhabitants, Quantic's discussion of Great Plains fiction is well conceived, based on solid close readings

*The Nature of the Place: A Study of Great Plains Fiction.* By Diane Dufva Quantic. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995. Introduction, notes, bibliography, index. xx + 203 pp. \$27.50 cloth. \$15.00 paper.

Diane Quantic takes her title from Wright Morris: "Many things would come to pass, but the nature of the place would remain a matter of opinion." Quantic's "opinion" is perhaps best conveyed on a t-shirt I once saw her wearing at a conference: "Kansas is the best kept secret in the United States."

of a wealth of texts. But the author has exposed her own secret: her Kansas is not filmed in black and white but technicolor.

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