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## Review of *Willa Cather and the Myth of American Migration* By Joseph Uργο

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*Willa Cather and the Myth of American Migration*. By Joseph Uργο. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995. Bibliography, index. 209 pp. \$39.95 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

If we think of America simply as a land of migration and settlement, we are missing the broader picture, the one Joseph Uργο draws so clearly. Uργο analyzes more than a westward movement of settlers, concentrating instead on the concepts of the movement of ideas and cultures between a variety of old worlds and new, and making the point that Willa Cather "is a comprehensive resource for the demarcation of an empire of migration in U.S. culture." As he explains, his interest in Cather's work lies in "the aesthetics of migration." Willa Cather certainly knew migration, from her move to Nebraska from Virginia as a child to her continuous travel as an adult.

Focusing on her novels, Uργο shows how Cather's representation of American culture is based on the perpetuation of movement and impermanence—physically, intellectually, and temporally. Drawing from *O Pioneers!* through *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, Uργο analyzes Cather's use of migration and her awareness that life continually brings us to crossroads. Some of these conclusions would seem self-evident—certainly the Shimerda family, Claude Wheeler, Father Latour, and Euclide Auclair come to mind. While Cather establishes the act of physical migration with these characters, she also develops the sense of cultural migration—how ideas pass between characters, leaving influence on the culture around them. Uργο's approach to interpreting Cather in this way keeps the reader asking what *place* and *home* and *history* really meant to these characters.

The strength of Uργο's work is not only the depth of his explication of Cather's use of migration in her novels, moving far beyond a simple literary context, but the extent to which he establishes cultural context, citing sources as varied as Salman Rushdie and Dorothy Gale from *The Wizard of Oz*. Uργο allows those of us who think that we know a bit about Cather to re-think her treatment of movement, home, and culture in her novels.

Chapter one opens with this Cather quote: "I keep my own suitcases under the bed." Debunking the myth of an American homeland, Uργο accurately concludes that Cather has encapsulated not only a statement of personal migration, but also that of our transitory culture.

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