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Review of *Laura Ingalls Wilder and the American Frontier: Five Perspectives* Edited by Dwight M. Miller

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Laura Ingalls Wilder and the American Frontier: Five Perspectives. Edited by Dwight M. Miller. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002. 121 pp. Notes, index. \$50.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.

One of the most interesting literary figures of the twentieth century, Laura Ingalls Wilder, through her books about the American heartland, examines in many ways the heart of America. She questions the Euroamerican pioneer experience, the racial tensions of the contested West, and assumptions about gender roles. Even her relationship with her daughter, Rose Wilder Lane, asks readers to reconsider the privileging of authorial autonomy; and, with respect to genre aesthetics, Wilder's mimesis of autobiography blurs the line between fact and fiction. *Laura Ingalls Wilder and the American Frontier: Five Perspectives*, a collection of essays that originated at the "Laura Ingalls Wilder and the American Frontier" conference hosted by the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library in 1998, touches on each of these issues. Ranging in depth and significance, the essays seem geared to readers coming for the first time to research and commentary on Wilder and will likely leave them desiring to know more.

Those familiar with the critical body of work on Wilder will recognize the names of John E. Miller, Ann Romines, and Anita Clair Fellman, who, as notable biographers and cultural critics, largely discuss how their previous research came into being. Romines considers Wilder's work in relation to consumer culture, and Fellman comments on how basal readers for primary and middle grade education have shaped the Wilder cultural legacy.

Elizabeth Jameson, whose work anchors the collection, offers a New West perspective that examines feminine roles in Western history as represented in Wilder's books, particularly as these roles contrast with Frederick Jackson Turner's male-gendered notions of the frontier. Jameson looks at Wilder's maturation process in the Little House series as the child moves toward an adolescent independence during her family's "inexorable migrations of Manifest Destiny" to a "secure homestead." Jameson contends that "If we really examined the 'feminine role' it would turn the frontier thesis outside in. It would shift our focus from the new nation to the family, with all its difficult legacies of intimacy, labor, interdependence, and endurance."

In addition, Ann Dahl offers a glimpse into the teaching of Wilder in grammar school, though I won't take issue here with Dahl's contention that readers enjoy characters who are "*real* people who lived in *real* places [*sic*]." And editor Dwight M. Miller offers in his afterword a brief but intriguing look at how the Laura Ingalls Wilder papers became a part of the Hoover Library collection.

The book concludes with an annotated list of suggestions for further reading and research that seems limited and somewhat dated (pre-1998). When I think about where I might find this collection, I see it on the shelves of the Hoover Library gift shop. The collection, with its arsenal of noted scholars using conversational address, seeks to bring Wilder to a wider audience and seems less concerned with advancing new scholarly approaches. To those who most likely grew up reading the Little House books, this collection's overviews rep-

resent a good starting point for Wilder studies. To those already in the cult, we might best send this book to friends and ask them to join us at the induction ceremony.

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