

Illinois Women Novelists in the Nineteenth Century: An Analysis and Annotated Bibliography

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grant family in eastern North Dakota in the 1870s and 1880s. One of five children of a hard-working mother and an intellectual, alcoholic father, Aagot Raaen chronicles the family history over two decades after their move from Iowa. She does so from the perspective of her younger sister, Kjersti. From the view of a child and then a young adult, readers learn how pioneers made candles, *lefse*, and cloth; how the family survived a long blizzard; how difficult it was to get an education when the family so desperately needed the children's help to pay off a mortgage. Readers are also treated to wonderful vignettes dealing with the mother's involvement in the local temperance crusade and Raaen's own educational journey into teaching.

This memoir, like others in its genre, is significant on at least two different levels. First, it provides for general readers and for history students marvelous details about life on the prairie. Just the passage about making and dying yarn, then spinning it into cloth, will provide students with a clear sense of the long hours and genuine creativity that went into the making of one small dress. On another level, this memoir reveals a woman in her seventies in 1950 who chooses her memories carefully to present a particular view of pioneer life in the late nineteenth century. What we are left with is a story of strong women who survive a loving but "weak" husband and father.

Illinois Women Novelists in the Nineteenth Century: An Analysis and Annotated Bibliography, by Bernice E. Gallagher. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994. 206 pp. Notes. \$39.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY CHERYL ROSE JACOBSEN, WARTBURG COLLEGE

The fifty-eight novels written by Illinois women and published between 1854 and 1893 that constitute Bernice Gallagher's study were originally selected for exhibition in the Woman's Building Library of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Selection committees believed that the authors they identified had "achieved distinction for originality, great moral or religious strength, fine writing, and scholarly research" (2). Gallagher, on the other hand, anticipated that the Illinois writers would "not wander far from the formulaic and derivative" (3). Her analysis bore out her expectation, and is documented in her annotations of the novels. But Gallagher also discovered works of more sophisticated literary and social merit.

The Illinois authors were primarily middle-class, educated, married women with small families or no children. As a consequence, the plots and heroines of their novels reveal middle-class biases and preoccupations. In her brief critical essay, Gallagher identifies these

as the romance form with realistic elements, an "almost obsessive interest" (8) in the relationship of environment and character, reform issues, and a focus on marriage and religion. However, as Gallagher's annotations show, these writers were also living through cultural changes that surface in the novels as alcoholic characters, independent unmarried women, economically and emotionally deprived marriages, charlatan ministers, and the disappearance of small-town society and morality. These are "counterculture strains" (25) that stretch the novels beyond the simply formulaic popular romance.

Although the majority of the novels are set in the Midwest, the concerns of the authors were not limited to the region. Nevertheless, Gallagher's observation that these female authors were concerned with a sense of place could be clarified by some comparison with other American women regionalists, such as those anthologized by Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse. Overall, *Illinois Women Novelists in the Nineteenth Century* provides an introduction to women's fiction, once highly valued, that deserves reconsideration and study.

Kansas Quilts and Quilters, by Barbara Brackman, Jennie A. Chinn, Gayle R. Davis, Terry Thompson, Sara Reimer Farley, and Nancy Hornback. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993. 216 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, notes, appendix, index. \$40.00 cloth, \$22.50 paper.

REVIEWED BY JANICE TAUER WASS, ILLINOIS STATE MUSEUM

This work is one of many state-focused publications, resulting from the efforts of legions of volunteers dedicated to documenting quilt-making. Almost every state has benefited recently from the extensive research and exciting discoveries of statewide quilt research projects. [See the joint review of books that emerged from projects in Indiana, Nebraska, and Ohio in the Summer 1992 *Annals of Iowa*. — Ed.] The goals of the Kansas project are typical: "to heighten public awareness of quilts as examples of Kansas folk art, to document the lives of Kansas quiltmakers and their work, to collect data and establish a repository at the Kansas State Historical Society, to promote the art of quilting through public programs, and to promote the conservation and preservation of quilts" (11). To achieve these goals, volunteers conducted Quilt Discovery Days in communities, where more than thirteen thousand Kansas quilts were documented.

The essays in this volume show how folklorists, social historians, and art historians can use everyday objects, such as quilts, to yield insights into the lives of women that are unavailable through other sources. Important questions directed the project and these essays.

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