

From the Editor

As readers of the print version of these editorial notes may immediately notice, our cover has not changed: the alternative designs that we considered last year for a possible new book jacket for *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* (which I mentioned in "From the Editor" in our fall 2000 issue)—while visually articulate in an impressively punk style—also rather looked like the jacket for any other contemporary scholarly journal. Moreover, we felt no prods in the direction of change, but instead received some urgings not to revise the journal's look. So, for now, we retain our style as of old.

This particular issue brings together a number of essays that focus on cross-currents of the old and new from the past 140 years. Since these essays are so unusually mixed in their sense of overlapping times (for example, of the Victorian with the modernist, of modern feminism with Victorian "true womanhood," of the Victorian diary form with the contemporary novel), I have arranged them in thematic clusters rather than in a strictly chronological progression—or, in accordance, with what Wendy Parkins describes in this issue as "the nonsynchronicities of modernity." The issue's article section thus begins, not with the earliest of its writers (Anne Thackeray Ritchie), but with a study of "the roots of ecological feminism" in the first decade of the twentieth century; and the article section ends, not with the most recent of its authors (A. S. Byatt), but with the resurgently contemporary interest in vampirism. In between this frame are a cluster of essays (on Elizabeth Robins, Ritchie, and Elizabeth Bowen and Stella Gibbons) that rethink feminist writing in the process of transition from the Victorian to the modern and a culminating essay (on Byatt) that uses a 1990s novel to interrogate the private-public distinction in Victorian diary writing. Finally, in this issue, our archives section includes an essay that tracks Willa Cather's backward look at Walt Whitman for her sense of a future.

A quiet interest in Appalachian women's literature awakened in me thirteen years ago in the spring when I first began reading submissions and readers' reports for *Tulsa Studies*. So it is with a sense of overdue urgency that we publish at last the first article to have met with readers' approval in this area. Leading this issue is Elizabeth S. D. Engelhardt's exploration of early ecological feminism in the writings of Emma Bell Miles and Grace MacGowan Cooke. Distinguishing these women's views from "environmental" feminism—which, as Carolyn Merchant has argued, was a type of conservatism premised on the separation and even superiority of

human from and over the nonhuman—Engelhardt writes that “because their feminism is neither northeastern nor only for a fairly small group of upper-class white women, because it is rural, working class, and because it rejects the automatic superiority of certain human beings over nature and other human beings, it is, instead, an early form of ecological feminism.”

Taking up the case for Elizabeth Robins, against a number of feminist modernists from Virginia Woolf to the present, Sue Thomas shows us some other sides of Robins. Well known as a realist as well as a suffragist in her writings from 1907-13, Robins had “both aesthetic and feminist reservations about aspects of modernist literature,” particularly as represented by T. S. Eliot’s *Prufrock and Other Observations* and Dorothy Richardson’s *Honeycomb*. Robins nonetheless admired and was inspired by Joseph Conrad’s *Chance* and Richardson’s *The Tunnel* and *Deadlock*, and her observations about such texts in the late 1910s and 1920s are richly recorded in the Elizabeth Robins Papers—in diaries, notebooks, letters, and notes for her fiction—as well as being reflected in her novels *Time Is Whispering* and *Ancilla’s Share*. Moreover, Robins continued in the 1920s to pursue the problem she had earlier formulated as “sex antagonism” and the “sex disgust of male modernist writers as well as the limiting ideals of women’s place projected by social visionaries like H. G. Wells.” Although her feminist project partly conformed to a racist shift among Anglophiles “towards a more parochial sense of Englishness,” her writings about “feminist social reclamation based on production and women’s participation in the public sphere” suggest the ways that male modernists’ sex antagonism was “implicated in other antagonisms—generational conflict, militarism, and imperialist alienations.”

As Manuela Mourão points out, Anne Thackeray Ritchie is better known for her introductions to her father’s, William Makepeace Thackeray’s, books and for her short lives of canonical nineteenth-century male writers than for her nonfictional and fictional representations of women. In the essay published in this issue, Mourão helps to correct this neglect by analyzing Ritchie’s cautious critiques of Victorian ideologies of marriage and domesticity in her short fiction. Quite unlike Robins, Ritchie, as Mourão explains, “never openly embraced a feminist identity,” but rather, in her short fiction of the 1860s and ’80s, tried to erode Victorian assumptions about marriage despite the “social pressure” she experienced “to conform.” Yet interestingly, Mourão uncovers in Ritchie some anticipatory modernist methods that enable precisely the “indirection essential for [Ritchie] to negotiate her dual position within Victorian culture.” In other words, Ritchie “explor[es] alternatives to traditional Victorian realism so as to diffuse her indictment of Victorian ideologies of marriage and thus avoid the appearance of strong opposition.” If Ritchie

becomes a “transitional figure between literary movements,” this is “partly necessitated by the attempt to negotiate between feminist principles and Victorian ideologies.” Focusing both on how Ritchie uses her short fiction of the 1880s to revisit situations and themes in her stories of the 1860s and on what Mourão further uncovers in the manuscripts behind some of this short fiction, Mourão demonstrates that Ritchie “systematically chose subtler critiques that allowed her to negotiate between a strong feminist stance and Victorian gender ideologies.”

Whereas Mourão focuses on the ways in which a Victorian writer may serve as a transitional figure to modernist methods, deployed, paradoxically, to disguise precociously feminist views, Parkins demonstrates how modernity in the work of some early twentieth-century women writers is itself a transitional phenomenon, ambivalently belonging to both the past and the future, both the country and the city, both a feminism of agency (capable of “surviv[ing] the shock of the present”) and a feminism of mobility (inescapable in the modern world in which feminism was born). In Parkins’s words, although Bowen’s *To the North* is “a serious (if non-canonical) novel” and Gibbons’s is “a satirical one . . . having in common only their year of publication (1932), . . . both these novels feature heroines who are emblematic of a modernity associated with cars, trains, and planes”—highly mobile vehicles that “Move dangerously.” Moreover, both these novels allow Parkins to “widen the frame to consider the mobility of the female subject beyond the city,” “to show that the female subject represents the disruptions and transitions between the city and the country—and between the different kinds of social relations and experience associated with each location—in ways that represent the nonsynchronicities of modernity and the instabilities of modern subjectivity.” Reapplying Ernst Bloch’s notion of “nonsynchronism,” Parkins shows how Bowen and Gibbons undercut the myths of “modernization’s limitless development” and the concomitant notion of “limitless self-development.” In addition, giving yet another twist to the complex possibilities of realism for women writers in this issue, Parkins suggests that while “the nonrealist mode of *Cold Comfort Farm* may be able to evade the consequences of nonsynchronicity through escapist fantasies of country life,” the realism of *To the North* better represents the unevenness of modernity” and the “vacuity of modernization’s promise” to reconcile divergent temporalities in an “endless present.”

Opening her article with a review of some key moments in recent feminist considerations of the diary, of autobiography, and of life writing, Adrienne Shiffman adopts the view that “a reexamination and reappropriation of the diary as a literary form locates it on the borderline or threshold of autobiography; while the diary is an autobiographical act of writing

the self, it simultaneously subverts the conventions of the traditional male-centered genre.” Further adopting Lynn Z. Bloom’s delineation of the “public private diary,” Shiffman argues that “the importance of the audience in what has been traditionally regarded as a private genre . . . cannot be overstated.” Applying these ideas to A. S. Byatt’s *Possession* and citing Byatt’s own claim that “‘of course all autobiography is fiction,’” Shiffman goes on to show the ways Byatt’s “fictional construction of a nineteenth-century female diary” by the wife of a canonical male poet “exposes the genre” of the diary “as a textual construct.” Spanning the times between Byatt’s own moment in the 1990s and the Victorian past, Byatt also imagines some fictional male scholars of the late twentieth century who specialize in the canonical poet of this novel. For these scholars, Ellen Ash’s journal is as “dull” and domestic as a female diary is expected by them to be. But dissertation student Beatrice Nest suspects that beyond the diary’s appearance of “dailiness” is a self-conscious design, to “construct her journal with a deliberate intention: to baffle”—that is, to baffle an audience Ash fully expects to possess in centuries to come. Ash deliberately “writes herself as the ideal embodiment of Victorian femininity, overtly aware of the necessary element of female inferiority that lies at the center of this ideal.” But when in her diary Ash becomes an appreciative audience in turn for the noncanonical female poet Christabel LaMotte, Ash “recognizes LaMotte’s deviance from the cultural expectations of womanhood” and “locates herself, as reader, outside the collective majority of the ‘general public’ who perpetuate such ideological constructions.” She becomes herself at last “a learned literary critic” in her own right.

Wondering aloud why “at the beginning of the twenty-first century, vampires are as popular as ever,” Sarah Sceats looks at Angela Carter’s prescient revival of vampirism in her novels from the late 1960s through the early ’80s as a paradigmatic example of the vampire’s fascination for us. Rehearsing all that gives the vampire an essentially contradictory nature, “represent[ing] what we both fear and desire,” simultaneously “voracious” and “insatiable,” “highly sexual, yet [its] penetration . . . nongenital,” “confus[ing] the roles of victim and predator,” “combining dependence and rapaciousness,” “‘wedged,’” as Carter herself indicates, “‘in the gap between art and life,’” Sceats distinguishes Carter’s representation of vampires from previous Victorian and modern figuration in that Carter also “us[es] vampiric tropes to examine gendered behavior and heterosexual power relations.” Sceats sees Carter as ahead of her time in the 1960s-’80s in both her irony and “her insistence upon appetite, transgression, and instability.” Sceats notes that in some ways “it is surprising that this figure has not been taken up more by feminist writers,” given that “women (vampires), prowling to satisfy their transgressive appetites, offer a revolutionary possibil-

ity—an active, penetrative, and indeed vengeful role model.” Then again, as Sceats explains, “the element of dependence” and the “parasitic” in the vampire may have been “off-putting” for other women writers. Ultimately, however, as Sceats argues, it may well be “vampirism’s deconstruction of the oppositions it spans, as much as the interest in sexual or ontological risk, that makes the vampire such a compelling and undying figure,” not only for twenty-first-century general readers and film-goers, but for contemporary feminists.

In our archives section, Maire Mullins probes the influence of Whitman on Cather, an influence acknowledged by previous critics but one whose far-reaching impact calls for more extensive consideration. Quoting Eudora Welty on Cather, Mullins begins, “Willa Cather brought past and present into juxtaposition to the most powerful effect. And the landscape itself must have shown her this juxtaposition.” As Mullins argues, however, it was the writing of *O Pioneers!* under Whitman’s influence—in particular, his poem “Pioneers! O Pioneers!”—that enabled Cather “to discern and to understand the latent beauty in the landscape and in its people.” The structure itself and epic mode of this novel echo those of “Song of Myself,” but so also does its choice of a revolutionary theme, in Cather’s case, “the story of a female pioneer and her enduring relationship not to a man, not to her children or family, but to the land”—a relationship, as for Whitman, at once “spiritual and erotic.”

Time is on my mind in this issue, not only because of the serendipity of these articles, but because of a special issue in the works treating the larger theoretical concerns involved for feminists in thinking about time, history, feminist history, and our times. Derived from last December’s MLA sessions, organized by Robyn Wiegman and sponsored by the executive committee of the Women’s Studies Division, “Feminism and Time” will be published in the forthcoming volume. In addition, as I mentioned in my previous editor’s note (fall 2000), our forthcoming fall 2001 issue includes a cluster of essays on international women writers, “Women Writing across the World,” and we plan a special issue in the near future on feminism and adoption.

I have two further announcements to make in this note, the first one celebratory, the second mournful. We are pleased to announce another recipient of our travel-to-collections grants. Lynette Felber, editor of *Clio* and professor of English at Indiana-Purdue University, traveled in May of this year to the University of Tulsa to study the Rebecca West papers in McFarlin Library’s Special Collections. The annual deadline for applications for this grant is March 15, and we welcome applications from dissertation students and postgraduates as well as from established scholars.

Finally, we wish to mourn the death of Nancy Walker, an Editorial

Board member of *Tulsa Studies*. Nancy Walker served as one of our most reliable, active, and wide-ranging readers, filling several pages in the notebook in which we track our circulating manuscripts. Her energy, her staunch feminism, and her warmth will long be remembered by this journal's staff. As Susan Ford Wiltshire writes in the women's studies newsletter at Vanderbilt University, "Her acute intelligence was buffered by humor. Her generosity of spirit moved her to action for the common good. Her political skills were wrapped in a kindness in a way that draws people together. She won over skeptics. She seized opportunities. Nancy was smart, and she could move fast."¹ We will miss her.

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NOTES

¹ Susan Ford Wiltshire, "Nancy Walker," *Women's Studies at Vanderbilt University*, 12, No. 2 (2001), 6.