From the Editor

On the facing page of this editorial note, you may already have noticed a call for feminist papers responding to the tragedy of the Oklahoma City bombing. This is an event that deserves our attention, and, as the only feminist scholarly journal published in Oklahoma, Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature is especially well situated to initiate conversation, meditation, interrogation not only of the event itself—reconstructed through eyewitness accounts, media narratives, electronic bulletin boards—but of the right-wing militant movement allegedly behind it, the legal and political maneuvering following upon it, and related cultural phenomena (it is perhaps no coincidence that Miss Oklahoma has just been crowned Miss America). To this end, I wish to set aside pages in a forthcoming issue for a forum of discussions, ranging anywhere between a brief note of 3 pages to a short paper of 15. These may be scholarly/critical engagements or nonfictional narratives, but they may also be fictional or lyric responses—or some kind of combination of argument and fiction, nonfiction and poetry. I could be persuaded to consider full-length scholarly articles as well, if their arguments, strategies, materials proved sufficiently compelling. I am interested in hearing from anyone who writes, and I welcome responses from writers/scholars living outside the States. I hope writers and scholars who reside currently in Oklahoma or have resided here in the past will take this call particularly seriously; this should be an opportunity for self-examination as well as for critical evaluation.

The fall 1995 issue of Tulsa Studies brings together a group of articles on a diverse group of modern women writers, opening with Jean Wyatt’s essay on Anglo-Mexican, male-female “border negotiations” in stories by Sandra Cisneros. Wyatt shows how, as two complex cultures intersect in Cisneros’s texts, conflicting cultural gender definitions and “icons” of femininity clash—becoming either more fluid or more tenacious. Wyatt reconsiders processes of gender identification and gender subversion and critiques Judith Butler’s theories of gender as constituted by discourse: “identification,” argues Wyatt, “is an archaic process that long predates the entry into language.”

Jonathan Crewe’s “Queering The Yellow Wallpaper?” takes as its point of departure the 1992 Feminist Press republication of this now-classic feminist text in the critical casebook The Captive Imagination. In the title of
this casebook, Crewe discovers a romantic dialectic between imagination and form hearkening back to an earlier era of criticism than that of most of the essays published within the casebook. The casebook title shadowily recalls an old notion of “good form” that, Crewe argues, haunts both The Yellow Wallpaper and the feminist critical enterprise. Queer theory has “unexpectedly revived” the question of “good form,” however, by flying in the face of its proprieties, potentially “queering” The Yellow Wallpaper itself and radically placing “form” back in question.

The Argentinian writer Luisa Valenzuela is less widely known to the English-reading world than are the other writers represented in this issue of Tulsa Studies despite her importance within Spanish language studies and the increasing number of her works available in translation. Mary Janell Metzger redresses this neglect by showing how “even in translation” Valenzuela’s work offers feminist critics and teachers” a particularly “rich and clearly significant” example of “the interlocking relationships” of narrative, subjectivity, and violence. While difficult and political, her writing is not more difficult than that of Cortázar or Borges, Duras or Lispector, nor more political than that of García Marquez or Devi. Metzger examines the questions Valenzuela’s “Fourth Version” raises about “the place of the feminine subject in narrative and the violence apparently requisite to that place” by comparing its narrative strategies to the hermeneutic detective work of Freud.

Anaïs Nin’s reputation has suffered—Lynette Felber reminds us—neither from inaccessibility of her texts nor from lack of awareness on the part of feminist critics; quite the contrary, it was to a large extent her successful self-promotion that obstructed feminist reconsideration of her work in the 1970s and ’80s. Taking up the issue specifically of the ways “Nin may have relegated herself to the status of a vogue writer and contributed to her own literary marginality” by “choosing to cultivate the identity of a feminine writer,” Felber joins a growing number of feminists now attempting a reconsideration of Nin’s texts. Nin’s “feminine writing” provoked disdain in male critics and drew accusations from feminist critics of “essentialism,” but Felber argues that Nin “moved through . . . écriture féminine to produce a double discourse,” a double “competence in two languages, the masculine and the feminine.”

The final article of this issue and the archival essay take up two of the lesser-known, fascinating moments in H. D.’s prose writings: respectively, Nights, the last of H. D.’s therapeutic exercises leading into her epic poems, and Majic Ring, a confessional epistolary and prose memoir of H. D.’s visionary, psychic experiences in 1943–44. Different though the moments are that Suzanne Young and Helen Sword reread, these essays continue the work of revealing an H. D. engaged in wrestling with some of the most
difficult problems and challenges raised by psychoanalysis and psychic experimentation—an H. D. who dared to think profoundly differently from others. H. D.'s rising status in literary studies is strikingly reconfirmed by studies such as these of H. D.'s “minor” texts. Suzanne Young shifts the focus in discussions of H. D.’s psychological writings from H. D.’s relation to Freud to her critique of Freud’s popularizers. Young argues that H. D. undercuts the tendency in popular psychology to “pathologize linguistic or sexual practice as ‘deviant’” and that she instead “represents identity formation as an unsettling process—a constant negotiation among overlapping and complex discourses,” including that of the “hard” sciences whose discursive practices enable H. D. to question, in particular, the “gendered terms” of psychology.

A decade later, we encounter an H. D. as adventurous in negotiating spiritualist discourse as she was in negotiating Freudian theory. Helen Sword demonstrates that the unpublished manuscript Majic Ring (held in the Beinecke Library) offers an unusually intimate glimpse into H. D.’s visionary experiences. Professionally disinclined though scholars are to credit such experiences, H. D. was, as Sword reminds us, “deeply immersed . . . in an unabashed quest for direct revelatory experience,” and her masterpiece Trilogy was an immediate consequence of this quest, “affirm[ing] and enact[ing] her vocation as prophetic poet, during this heady period.” After the severely disappointing rejection of her revelations by Lord Dowding, to whom she confided them in letters reproduced in Majic Ring, H. D. lost her visionary purpose. Trilogy thus “remains H. D.’s most vigorous, intellectually complex, and poetically coherent attempt to unite the spiritual and the real,” to translate “otherworldly inspiration” into art. Are these two H. D.'s compatible? The juxtaposition of these two essays by Young and Sword sets before us an H. D. whose challenges to modern rationalism we have still not entirely met.

As I write this note, pondering the struggles in which these writers and scholars were and are engaged, a cloud hangs over the operations of Tulsa Studies and its peer journal, the James Joyce Quarterly. For fifteen years or so, we have both been lodged in an old house mildly Victorian in style, nicknamed “the Red House” (after the bright red paint job Germaine Greer gave it); we have worked here hard and long hours, met in discussion groups, heard informal talks, gathered for receptions and celebrations, breathed here more easily. Despite our marginal position on campus, wedged between the Baptist center and ROTC, we have become part of the spirit of this place—standing for something different. Now the roof requires extensive repair and the university cannot afford to repair it; ulti-
mately the university probably would not repair it, even if it could afford to
do so, because of a recent “Master Plan” that calls for bulldozing the house
to put in a parking lot. Granted this house has nothing in it that would
earn it a place on a historical register—its attractions are quiet, its floors
and walls sag—but it is the kind of house that belongs on a university
campus, and nearly everyone who has worked here feels she or he still
belongs to it. It is with deep regret that we announce our removal from this
house to an old white house, farther out on the campus periphery than this
one and with none of its charm.

University change has been the hallmark of my existence since I first
took on Tulsa Studies in 1988. Deans, provosts, presidents have come and
gone with remarkable rapidity, and with each new officer, Tulsa Studies has
faced a new set of expectations, a new set of people to be educated about
our operations. Like other universities, this one not only feels the pressures
of a market adverse to educational growth, but has begun to feel the im-
pingement of a new political climate retreating from support of literature
and the arts. As we prepare to pack our boxes for the trip down the block,
we have already started to wrestle with still other threats to the integrity of
these journals’ operations—competitors for diminishing space and finan-
cial resources. The house to which we are moving may itself be bulldozed
in five to ten years’ time.

These local battles—as feminists have long insisted—cannot be sepa-
rated from the larger ones, and they possess an intensity, a power to hurt,
that goes beyond what men in a boardroom, plotting master plans, could
begin to imagine. So I end this note, reporting to our readers (true owners
of this journal) the struggles we are having at home. Yet we have been
lucky in our history so far; we may be hopeful, even while grieving, for the
future. Our mailing address will not change, but the next issue of Tulsa
Studies, Spring 1996, will come to you from a new house, where we will
mark our fifteenth anniversary as a journal.

Holly Laird
University of Tulsa