



Birthing a Nation: Gender, Creativity, and the West in American Literature

Susan J. Rosowski

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Birthing a Nation is about national identity and the American West. If it is a truism that facing west was the American male version of invoking the Muse, what happened if you were female? Most past interpretations of western American literature have echoed Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier hypothesis, emphasizing the conflict of wilderness and civilization, the hero of rugged individualism, the act of returning to origins and reemerging as the reborn American Adam. In this reading of western American women writers who responded to the challenge to give birth to a nation, Susan J. Rosowski proposes an alternative, more hopeful affirmation of our cultural history and perhaps our cultural destiny.

Rosowski begins by tracing the birth metaphor through three and a half centuries of American letters. She reexamines the premises underlying the telling of the literary West and posits a female model of creativity at the genesis of American literature. She follows four authors on a multigenerational journey, beginning with Margaret Fuller in 1843, moving on a generation later to Willa Cather, advancing to Jean Stafford, and ending with Marilynne Robinson. In her reading of these writers who most directly and deeply believed in literature as a serious and noble form of art and who wrote to influence how the country perceived itself, Rosowski contributes to the ongoing process of remapping the literary landscape

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