



Felicitous Space: The Imaginative Structures of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather

Judith E. Fryer Davidov

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Judith Fryer's study of novelists Edith Wharton and Willa Cather is a rich examination of the actual and imagined spaces women inhabit, perceive, and create. Turning to the period of "America's coming of age," Fryer offers a woman-centered inquiry into an era whose traditional landmarks are the frontier, the rise of the city, and World War I.

Fryer draws her analysis from history, philosophy, environmental psychology, anthropology, sociology, and geography as well as from literature, architecture, and painting. The book's conceptual bonds are women's structures of the period: the Woman's Building at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 and the 1915 feminist utopian community, *Herland*, imagined by Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

Focusing on the experience of women, Fryer presents a series of meditations that are concerned with the structures of fantasy -- a plan for a house, a room, a set of furnishings, a landscape, a story. Offering new readings of the fictions of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather that depart from existing biographical or psychological analyses, Fryer provides an original view of the meaning of space for such educated women.

Wharton and Cather departed from the customary "American" expressions of the dominant culture, Fryer argues, to explore and inscribe their own experiences. She focuses on their imaginative structures, from Wharton's meticulously conceived interiors, which include all that the eye can encompass, to Cather's unfurnished rooms and landscapes, which are her physical and spiritual correlatives. In demonstrating the relationship between the spaces women inhabit and the language of their imaginative creations, Fryer brings new meaning to the ongoing investigations of creativity versus environment.

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