exposed to anything besides the Eurocentric explanation of global conditions. To such readers, this book will prove an eye-opening experience.

JAMES DELLE
New York University


In Willa Cather and the Myth of American Migration, Joseph Urgo provides a provocative reading of spatial and territorial dynamics throughout Cather’s novels. Working from the popular critical conclusion that “Cather’s imagination was predominantly spatial rather than linear, “Urgo extends this idea further to suggest that “her consciousness was migratory” (24). Urgo explores this idea in explications of novels from O Pioneers! (1913) through Sapphira and the Slave Girl (1940), and traces what is essentially the development of a complex ideology of space in Cather’s conception of American identity: from Cather’s instantiation of an acceptance of movement and the provisional home as vital to American self-definition, in her pioneer fiction, to the culmination of this dynamic in the creation of an ideology of empire, in novels like Death Comes for the Archbishop (1927). Urgo’s thesis in this work is fascinating, and ambitious. He would like to replace perceptions of the frontier, as the definitive force in American national identity, with a conception of migration as the single experience “at the center of things” (12) The view of migration rather than the frontier as the central trope of American experience would enable critics to dispense with notions of the uniqueness of American culture, and to place it in a broader, and more informative, transatlantic context. Cather’s fiction, written during the era when America solidified its status as a world power, provides a singular view of the creation of an imperial character founded on the acceptance of rootlessness and movement as key elements, not only in national survival but, in a vital, admirable, and useful way, in the creation of a national identity altogether.

Urgo’s thesis enables him to perform brilliant analyses of some of the most complex and historically baffling themes of Cather’s fiction. For instance, he is able to interpret the compelling angst of St. Peter, protagonist of The Professor’s House (1925), as the malaise of a character committed to stasis rather than movement. A historian struck with a mid-life crisis, St. Peter is mysteriously afflicted with an inability to move himself psychically and literally out of the house in which he has written his successful and award-winning history of Spanish explorers in North America, into the new house purchased with the proceeds of his award. Urgo reads St. Peter’s as a consciousness struggling “with his sense that history ought to be linear, objective, and definitive” (29)—a commitment, according to Urgo, that is essentially a death wish, and one that leads to his near-death experience in the novel’s final chapters. The key
to St. Peter's vitality is his need to come to terms with the legacy of his former student, Tom Outland, a character consistently able, as St. Peter is not, to live an existence based on movement and the provisional, a-historical experience of migration, rather than on the mistaken need for preservation—of artifacts, of interpretation, of history. St. Peter acquires this understanding and accomplishes this important shift in consciousness. Simultaneously, he is able to leave his former house for his new one, notwithstanding his unresolved disease about the circumstances of his new life—it's blatant materialism, its elements of pettiness and crassness—of which he fundamentally disapproves but about which he has been able to do nothing. The Professor's House is a novel not about triumph over the circumstances of life but about the creation of a consciousness equipped to apprehend life accurately and productively. According to Urgo, this means adopting a migrant's consciousness. The central problem of The Professor's House, stasis versus migration, informs Urgo's reading of all of Cather's fiction: characters who become physically or psychically fixed are doomed; those who can migrate are triumphant.

In exploring these dynamics of consciousness, Urgo comes to terms with another significant thread of Cather criticism, which concerns her artistic imagination and the elements of kunstleroman in her work. Urgo's application of migration dynamics to this theme is particularly compelling. From Jim Burden to Thea Kronborg, Urgo's thesis illuminates the artist's necessary version and apprehension of history—the imperialistic gesture of interpreting events of the past in the a-historical, powerfully personal way—which is crucial, in Cather's imagination, to successful artistic perception, particularly that of the American artist. For Cather, who developed these ideas in her non-fiction essays as well as in her short stories and novels, an artist uses history in a manner symbolized in her famous image of the cliff-dweller pottery. Formed by history, this imagination, like the pottery, is nonetheless not bound by it. History becomes, for this imagination, rather a receptacle available to the artist capable of appropriating it, "for sale to the highest bidder or, in the telling, to the most engaging narrative, the most authoritative introduction" (64). Within his narrative, St. Peter was not an immigrant or artist; but in My Antonia (1918), O Pioneers!, The Song of the Lark (1915), and A Lost Lady (1923), particularly, Jim Burden, Carl Linstrum, Thea Kronborg, and to an extent even Marian Forrester, emerge, under Urgo's skillful treatment, as artists precisely because they possess or acquire an immigrant's sensibility: the ability to relinquish an exclusive, monolithic commitment to and interpretation of the past, and thereby the ability to appropriate and shape it in a flexible and personalized form—in stories, in arias, and in lived experience.

Urgo's ultimately political perspective emerges most sharply in his readings of The Song of the Lark, One of Ours (1922), and Death Comes for the Archbishop, which he interprets in Chapter 4, "Ambition, Empire, and America," as allegories of the immigrant's consciousness applied to the literal task of imperial expansionism. Urgo's thesis is most convincing in regard to Death Comes for the