

TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN
WOMEN'S FICTION

Also by Guy Reynolds

WILLA CATHER IN CONTEXT

Twentieth-Century American Women's Fiction

A Critical Introduction

Guy Reynolds



© Guy Reynolds 1999

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No paragraph of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1P 9HE.

Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The author has asserted his right to be identified as the author of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.



First published 1999 by
MACMILLAN PRESS LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS
and London
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

ISBN 978-0-333-65773-7 ISBN 978-1-349-27794-0 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-27794-0

A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library.

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and
made from fully managed and sustained forest sources.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
08 07 06 05 04 03 02 01 00 99

Typeset by Cambrian Typesetters,
Frimley, Surrey



Published in the United States of America by
ST. MARTIN'S PRESS, INC.,
Scholarly and Reference Division
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010
ISBN 978-0-312-22636-7 (cloth)
ISBN 978-0-312-22637-4 (paper)

For Isabel

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
Introduction: the Genealogy of American Women's Narrative, 1892–1995	1
1 'Sickbed Deathbed Birthbed': Therapy and Writing in the 1890s	11
2 Re-making the Home, 1909–33: Gertrude Stein, Edith Wharton, Mary Antin	38
3 Modernist Geographies: Space in the Fiction of Willa Cather, Djuna Barnes and Gertrude Stein	64
4 The Interwar Social Problem Novel: Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen, Jessie Fauset, Agnes Smedley	88
5 'There are So Many Horrible Examples of Regional Writers, and the South is Loaded': Eudora Welty, Caroline Gordon, Katherine Anne Porter, Flannery O'Connor	114
6 Dysfunctional Realism: Ann Petry, Elizabeth Hardwick, Jean Stafford, Jane Bowles	146
7 'What's Happening in America': Sylvia Plath, Susan Sontag, Joyce Carol Oates	168
8 Fictions for the Village: Toni Morrison, Maxine Hong Kingston, Cynthia Ozick	195
<i>Notes</i>	219
<i>Bibliography</i>	238
<i>Index</i>	251

Preface

This book sets out to provide readers with a reasonably comprehensive account of a range of novelists, all of whom were women and Americans (whether they have anything in common on account of their gender and nationality is one of the subjects of the book). It is, I hope, a sufficiently wide-ranging account to achieve the authority of a 'critical introduction' or 'survey'. But it is also, I again hope, argumentative enough to take on the flavour of a monograph. That the book is something of a critical hybrid is a testimony to its subject: fictions by American women have often shifted across idioms or conflated genres.

Another form of hybridity might be found in the imagined readerships for this book. Most authors find themselves predicating a reader; in my case, I have had to imagine a number of different, and perhaps competing, readers. Written in the UK, by an Englishman, for a British (and now German-owned) publisher, this is a work rooted in a European context. But it will also be published in New York, and I trust it will find an American audience. What is known to an American reader is not necessarily known to a European, and vice-versa; I found myself moving between the continents in terms of what can be expected to form a general body of received cultural knowledge. Thus, American readers might be slightly surprised at the emphasis on the particulars of their own national life. The book is written by an outsider, and the explication of historical detail is designed to help readers unfamiliar with American history. Equally, non-American readers will have to accept that, in some places, it seemed sensible to preserve US rather than British spellings of key terms: 'local color' fiction remains just that, 'local color'.

GUY REYNOLDS

Acknowledgements

The writing of this book has been greatly facilitated by the support, encouragement and, not least, money of two institutions: the University of Kent at Canterbury and the British Academy. The School of English at UKC granted me study leave to work on the project; the British Academy provided further support under the 'Research leave' scheme. Several colleagues have helped with suggestions, corrections and insights as I drafted the manuscript: Henry Claridge, Rod Edmond, David Herd and Lyn Innes. Thomas Docherty hosted a seminar where a valuable commentary about ideas of 'genealogy' evolved under his guidance. And the members of the Kent Centre for American Studies indirectly but significantly contributed, by turning my teaching towards the interplay of history and literature.

In the United States, I have had a regrettably intermittent but none the less important connection with members of the Willa Cather scholarly community, particularly with Susan Rosowski of the University of Nebraska. Becoming part of the wide circle of Cather scholars gave me the confidence to move into other areas of American literary studies. At the University of Tulsa, Oklahoma, the librarians of the McFarlin Special Collections helped me enormously, both with primary and secondary materials in the field of women's literature.

The production of the book was handled with characteristic smoothness by staff at Macmillan, notably Margaret Bartley. I must also add my thanks to the anonymous reader of the manuscript, whose perspicacious review helped me to clarify the direction of the final text.

Finally, a phalanx of family members from the Reynolds and Anton-Smith clans provided the reasonably calm conditions in which to write. Above all, Cal Anton-Smith kept the two little wolves from the door.

Every effort has been made to trace all the copyright-holders, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked, the publishers will be pleased to make the necessary arrangements at the first opportunity.