Afternoon all,

The first (virtual) session of this year’s Literary and Visual Landscapes is fast approaching. Next Wednesday 13th October (4:30-6pm UK time) we have Dr Noreen Masud presenting ‘Slippage and Fakery in Willa Cather’s Prairie Landscapes’. In an interview in the Omaha Daily Bee from 1921, Cather describes how, quote, ‘that shaggy grass country had gripped me with a passion I have never been able to shake. It has been the happiness and the curse of my life.’ This talk explores how, in the prairies of Willa Cather’s Nebraska novels, flat spaces unexpectedly become an arena for dealing with strange forms of attachment. Cather’s novels handle love in fugitive, furtive ways: they focus on attachments which are queer, unrequited, tragic, private and incommunicable, and all against a landscape which itself invites a queer and enigmatic love. By examining late nineteenth-century photographs of Nebraska, and a series of Catherian identifications and misidentifications with Jules Breton’s painting The Song of the Lark, I argue that in Cather’s hands, flat landscapes affect attachments, and to the power to attach: to register ordinary patterns of joy and grief and fear. Yet precisely because of this, a flat landscape may offer or model a mode of attachment which might house those who, like the intensely private Cather, cannot withstand other kinds of relationship. As such, it might accommodate a mode of queer attachment not otherwise legitimised.

Noreen Masud is a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at the University of Durham, and will be a Lecturer at the University of Bristol from January 2022. Her first book is on aphorism (out 2022); her second is on literary flat landscapes and how they make us feel and remember. She is also an AHRC/BBC New Generation Thinker 2020. We are very excited to host Noreen and introduce her to the Bristol environmental humanities community ahead of her move in January!

Free tickets for Noreen’s Zoom session can be found on Eventbrite, where you can also book free tickets for this semester’s other upcoming seminars: https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/literary-and-visual-landscapes-autumn-2021-tickets-173046255007. A Zoom meeting link will be circulated to ticketholders in advance of each session.
Have a lovely weekend and we hope to see many of you next week!