

Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter

VOLUME XXXII, No. 3

Guest Editor, Jean Tsien, Beijing, China

RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA

Willa Cather's Reputation in China

By JEAN TSIEN

Cather was first read in China much earlier than most of us would think. Though there were virtually no translations of her work into Chinese during her lifetime, we have reason to believe they were being read in the original in the 1920s and 1930s by a small number of Chinese readers, mainly college students and intellectuals. Here are a few examples to show this.

On February 18, 1927, Yu Dafu, a well-known Chinese writer and one of the founders of modern Chinese literature, wrote the following entry in his diary after reading *O Pioneers!*:

Read about sixty to seventy pages of Cather's novel *O Pioneers!*. Miss Cather writes about the life of the immigrants on the prairies of America. Her writing is very sure, her style rather similar to that of the Russian writer, Turgenev. While we read her novel, scenes of the life of Swedish immigrants unfold vividly before our eyes. The character of the woman protagonist, Alexandra, as well as those of several other characters, is well portrayed though not as well as those of the Russian writer. Her description is natural and excellent, comparing favorably with that in the early works of Turgenev.¹

In 1935, as Sun Jiabin notes in his essay, Cather was mentioned in a review by Zhao Jiabi. That was how Sun became

acquainted with her name and was later led to read her works. Most likely he was her first translator in China, having translated "Paul's Case" for the literary journal *Time and Tide* in 1943.

It was also around this time that Chang Lochi, then a Shanghai college student, discovered Cather's works in the original in the library. After reading them, she became so enthusiastic about Cather that she wrote her B.A. paper on her.²

However, Cather did not really gain a foothold in China till the 1980s. The most important reason for this was that hardly any of her works had been translated into Chinese and for this reason, she could not reach a wider audience. The twenties and thirties were a flourishing period for the translation of Western literature. Chinese students had only gone abroad to study in Britain and the United States on a large scale after the 1910s and had just discovered the treasure-trove of literature there. As the period after World War I was one of social turmoil and political awareness, Chinese intellectuals, who comprised a very small group, tended in their translations to focus on writers who were socially conscious. The most popular at the time were Russian (Tolstoy, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Gogol, Gorkey and Pushkin were greatly admired) and French (Zola, Balzac and Maupassant were among the favorites). Ibsen, too,

was very popular as was George Bernard Shaw. Little American literature had yet been translated for American literature had not yet entered the curriculum anywhere — not even in the United States. It was not until after the twenties of this century that critics in Britain and America began to acknowledge that the U.S. was producing a distinctive literature worthy of a position in world literature. In China, the first American writers to have an important influence on Chinese writers were Walt Whitman and Eugene O'Neill. Two famous Chinese writers Guo Moruo, a poet and dramatist, and Cao Yu, a dramatist, were influenced by their style.

In general, however, the presence of American culture did not make itself really felt in China until the forties, when the U.S. and China became allies against fascism. No doubt the showing of films based on works by Hemingway and Steinbeck helped to enhance the popularity of these writers in China. The works of a number of earlier writers whose canon had risen such as Irving, Hawthorne and Poe were also translated and a number of their stories were used in the original as high school English texts. Hardly anything of Cather's was translated, though. She was still living but neither popular enough to be read widely nor to be regarded as a serious writer whose works would be enduring.

After 1949 and in particular during the Cultural Revolution most works of Western literature, particularly American literature, were regarded with suspicion and dismissed as "bour-

geois" or "apolitical" because of the policy that literature should serve the workers, peasants and soldiers. A rigid interpretation and adherence to this meant that only works calling on revolution or exposing the corruption of bourgeois society or the poverty of the poor could be translated into Chinese or taught in the classroom. Obviously Cather's work did not belong to these categories. So what little there was of her works in China lay neglected on the library shelves until new policies were introduced in the late seventies.

Since then, Cather has become widely read in China. Beginning from 1980, her works have been taught to English majors and graduate students in English at Beijing Foreign Studies University, Peking University, and Beijing Languages Institute, in Beijing alone. In recent years all her major works have been or are being translated into Chinese. More of her works have been translated into Chinese than those of Faulkner, Hemingway or Fitzgerald or any other of her American contemporaries.⁹ Critical articles have also been written about her and last year a national symposium was held to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of Cather's death, at which some sixty scholars, translators and reporters from various parts of the country were present. Reports of the conference were carried in a number of newspapers and literary journals, including China Daily, the prestigious English language newspaper in circulation in China.

It is no exaggeration to say that Cather's reputation is very high in China, or that her works are becoming increasingly popular. Between 1981-86, for instance, "Neighbour Rosicky" was translated five times by five different translators in North, East, South-East and South China. Two of these translations appeared in literary periodicals,

the other three in collections of short stories. This story alone would reach hundreds of thousands of Chinese readers scattered over the country.

What is the reason for Cather's appeal to Chinese audiences in recent years? The essays in this issue, all written by her translators in China, give some idea of why Chinese readers love her works and choose to translate them. As Li Wenjun, deputy editor-in-chief of *World Literature*, a prestigious literary magazine, says in his article: "Chinese readers get an instinctive feeling of closeness and warmth, a shock of recognition, as if they were re-reading the works of a familiar writer," when they read Cather. In the remainder of this essay, I shall attempt to analyse why this is so and to pinpoint where I think Cather's appeal lies to present-day Chinese readers.

One very important reason why Chinese readers find it easy to identify with the protagonists, situations and even moods in Cather's works, particularly in those dealing with the pioneering era or the passing of that era, is that China was, and still basically is, a predominantly agrarian society which at the present time is undergoing the same transition from an agrarian society to a highly industrialized one that Cather's American society underwent during her own lifetime.

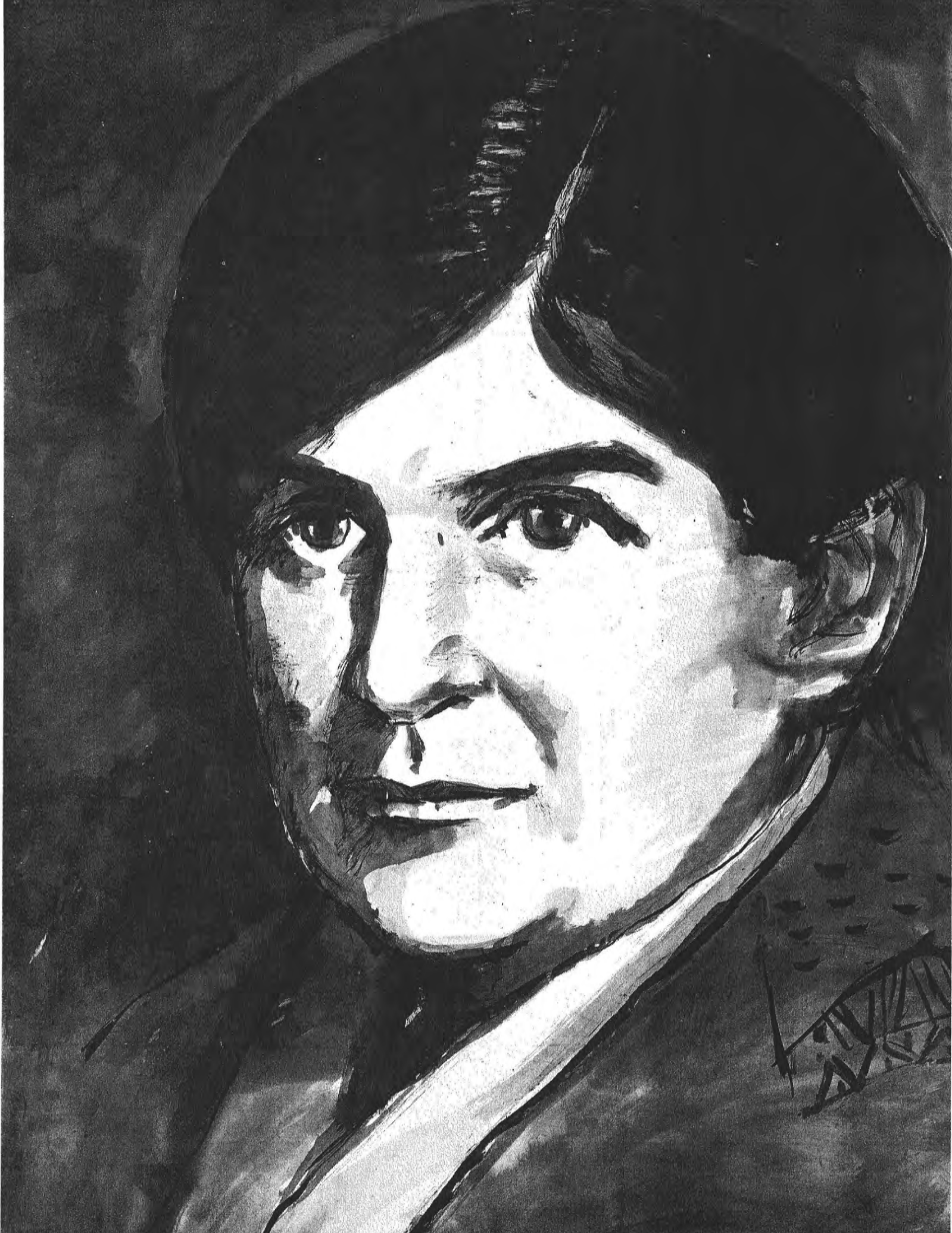
Cather had grown up in Nebraska at a time when the country was predominantly agrarian, when such virtues as courage, perseverance, thrift, industry, warm human relations, love of labour and of land were upheld and admired and were in tune with the times. She had seen the nation transformed into an industrial giant with a modern society based on modern methods of production. The pioneering age had come to an end. Machinery had replaced manpower on the farms. Laborers were drifting from the country

into the cities to find jobs in industry. Mass production had brought material abundance along with greater comforts and conveniences, which Cather together with others had come to appreciate. But at the same time, it promoted commercialization and standardization and thus the decline of individuality. Still worse, it had a corrupting effect on people in the form of a growing desire for more material possessions. Because of this, money came to be valued more and more for its own sake, to the point of tainting human relationships.

The change disturbed Cather greatly. Like many other Americans of her own day, she was coming to feel that "commercialization and the mad desire to make money [had] blotted out everything else, and as a result we are not living, but merely existing."⁴ It made her nostalgic for the simple and harmonious relationships of an earlier agrarian order before the corrosive inroad of pecuniary interests. She felt that life had been more meaningful in the past, people better able to appreciate beauty and culture, values more certain. And as her disgust with the present grew, so did her respect for the values and qualities of a by-gone era, embodied in the noble figure of the pioneer; while her life among them as a child underwent a kind of transfiguration and took on a special meaning. This is most apparent in such works as *O Pioneers!*, *My Ántonia*, *A Lost Lady* and "Neighbour Rosicky" which deal with the early struggles of the pioneers and their noble qualities with the poignancy of a writer celebrating a saga that is already over, extolling people and values that have ceased to exist.

(Continued on Page 14)

AT RIGHT (on page 13), is an original painting by Gao Mang, China.



China is, and has been, an agrarian society for thousands of years. Many of our intellectuals come from the countryside; nearly all of us except the very young have been there, a number for fairly long periods. We, too, have our Antonias and Alexandras, our Rosickys. We, too, admire them for their love of land and of labour, for their frugality, industry, perseverance, and warm personality. When we read about Alexandra Bergson's perseverance during several years of drought and her love of the stark land which "seemed beautiful to her, rich and strong and glorious," we believe it, for we have met people like her; in fact, we ourselves have experienced similar feelings. And strong women like Antonia, toiling in the fields from dawn to dusk with a big brood of children are also to be found in the Chinese countryside. Looking at them at work, we too "feel the goodness of planting and tending and harvesting"

As in America during that period, we Chinese also experience warm human relations. In the family, relations are close between grandparents, parents and children. Grandparents are often as self-sacrificing as Old Mrs. Harris, parents as loving as Antonia. Elder children take care of younger ones much as Alexandra and Antonia take care of their younger siblings. Neighbors have a smile and kind words for each other and behave much as Rosicky or Old Mrs. Harris do towards their neighbours or acquaintances. In short, our society is still one based on agrarian values, in which human warmth, decency, concern for others, frugality, industry and other moral qualities are judged by the society to be more important than wealth. This is one important reason for our quick and instinctive response to Cather's works.

All this, however, is fast changing with the times. With the speedy industrialization of

the nation, more and more people are turning away from the land and drifting into the cities. More and more are giving up farm work for building construction, transportation or business. Mass production is providing people all over the country with new comforts never known before. Color TV sets, stereo radio recorders, washing-machines, refrigerators, sets of matching furniture, are now available to all who have the money. Naturally there are people who are interested only in the acquisition of such goods. This is not new. What is new is that while ten years ago such commodities had not been available or were scarce, today they are flooding the markets, providing those who formerly had the desire but not the means with the opportunity to realize their desires. In the midst of an increasingly materialistic culture, it is refreshing for us to find a defender of the spiritual graces and a timely warning to us Chinese not to relinquish the fine traditions of the past together with useless, outmoded values, which have become an obstacle to progress. Improved living standards should make it easier for us to realize our spiritual goals, not lose sight of them. Cather's satiric portrayal of Rosamond Marcellus's acquisitive nature and of the vain and petty attempts of the government employees in Washington, D.C., to "keep up with the Joneses" shows us the emptiness of such a life and brings her closer to us in time.

Of course, Cather's defense of frontier values and indictment of commercialized values are not the only reasons for her popularity in China. We do not read works of art for ideas alone. Were it not for artistic merit, none of her works would have been translated into Chinese. What her translators admire her for most is her rare combination of a sensitive mind attracted by spiritual beauty but critical of

false values together with a lucidity and naturalness of style, seemingly effortless prose and a richly evocative, often poetic presentation of certain moods or emotions.

This is present sometimes in the simplest passages. Take, for instance, the description of the difficulties Nat Wheeler in *One of Ours* confronted when he first settled in Nebraska. He arrived, "when the Indians and the buffalo were still about, remembered the grasshopper year and the big cyclone, had watched the farms emerge one by one from the great rolling page where once only the wind wrote its story." We are struck not just by the terseness of her prose but also by her striking use of metaphor. The rolling prairies have become a page on which man records his history of repeated struggles against nature. The whole history of the taming of the barren land is suggested in that metaphor. We hear the wind howling over the desolate prairies; we see the pioneers wrestle with the land and finally tame it.

Another example I would like to give of her evocative prose is to be found in the last paragraph of *My Antonia*. Jim Burden, the rich but city-weary narrator, has returned after many years to the prairie where he grew up with his childhood playmate, Antonia. He stumbles over what is left of the old dirt track which had taken him and Antonia over the prairie on his first night in Nebraska and meditates thus:

This was the road over which Antonia and I came on that night when we got off the train at Black Hawk and were bedded down in the straw, wondering children, being taken we knew not whither. I had only to close my eyes to hear the rumbling of the wagons in the dark, and to be again overcome by that obliterating strangeness. The feelings of that night were so

near that I could reach out and touch them with my hand. I had the sense of coming home to myself, and of having found out what a little circle man's experience is. For Antonia and for me, this had been the road of Destiny; had taken us to those early accidents of fortune which predetermined for us all that we can ever be. Now I understood that the same road was to bring us together again. Whatever we had missed, we possessed together the precious, the incommunicable past.

How vividly Jim's mood is recaptured for us! We almost hear with him the rumbling of the wagons and sense the darkness and strangeness of the place. And how well Cather captures Jim's sense of coming home both physically and spiritually! Chinese readers are particularly fond of simple, direct writing that comes from the heart as much of our own literature is written this way.

Cather firmly believed that in the final analysis, technique was closely related to the author's feelings. The poignant quality of good prose came only when the writer felt strongly about what he was writing — when he poured the whole of himself and his feelings into his book. As she put it, "the emotion is bigger than the style" because it creates it. This is certainly true of her own work. Without her deep love of the land and people of her childhood, no amount of skill could have produced the sincerity and depth of feeling that characterize her major works. Nor would her writing have the power to evoke such poignant feelings in her readers. Perhaps this is the chief reason why her works have endured.

NOTES

¹The diaries of Yu Dafu (1896-1945) were later published under

the title of *Journal of a New Life*. The entry for February 19th is also on *O Pioneers!* but is merely a synopsis of the novel.

²Chang Lochi, late of Shanghai Teachers' College, wrote "Willa Cather and China" in 1982. It was carried in the 1984 Literary Issue of the *Newsletter*.

³Faulkner's works are difficult to translate into Chinese and difficult to understand even when translated. Hemingway's

major works were translated in the forties, but his stories are still being translated and retranslated. *In Our Time* was recently translated into Chinese.

⁴In a letter from Joe Knowles who lived in complete isolation in the Maine woods for sixty days in 1913. This is quoted from Roderick Nash, ed. *The Call of the Wild*, (New York: George Braziller, 1970), p. 4.

Art Lies in Appropriateness Willa Cather's Mode of Expression in *A Lost Lady*

By DONG HENGXUM

In the past ten years or so, the works of the American woman writer, Willa Cather, have been introduced into China and have attracted many Chinese readers. Cather, a writer with her own distinctive qualities, is sensible, tolerant, and admires the spirit of hard work of the pioneers and their warmth of humanity. These qualities suit the taste of Chinese readers.

The novella *A Lost Lady* was published in 1923, during a period of transition in Cather's literary career in between two of her famous works, *My Antonia* (1918) and *The Professor's House* (1925). Cather looked back to the past with nostalgia for the time when Americans were moving swiftly westward to settle on hitherto virgin land and claim it for the plow. She admired the spirit of self-sacrifice of these pioneers and the warmth of human relationships in those days. But with the increase of mass production, standardization of life and commercialization of values after World War I, she became more and more disenchanted with her times and sought to offset this by portraying the values of the pioneers of an earlier time. In *My Antonia*, the farmer-pioneers work outdoors under the sun with an energy that is infectious. In *The Professor's House*, the

pioneering spirit exemplified by Tom Outland and his professor is already regarded as outmoded. The professor struggles on alone against the new materialists of this age, represented by his own daughter, son-in-law, and wife, whose acquisitiveness has already encroached upon his academic work. *A Lost Lady*, written between these works is an elegy to the declining years of the pioneers, their glory fading like that of the setting sun.

How does Cather portray the decline of these pioneers? How does she make the various characters come to life for us? The details that she selects with care play a crucial role here. Cather disliked Balzac's method of heaping detail onto detail to create a realistic setting. Instead, she called for the "novel demeuble" (unfurnished novel). This is not to say that all the furniture — or details in a novel — should be thrown out, but that the room should only be sparsely furnished so as not to create an oppressive or stifling atmosphere. The amount should be appropriate, neither too much nor too little. That is to say the details Cather selects to portray character should serve to heighten or accentuate the person's characteristics.

The methods Cather adopted in *A Lost Lady* are fairly straightforward: accentuation, repetition and an alternation of the two. For minor characters, Cather liked to stress the most obvious characteristics. One sees this most clearly in characters the author herself dislikes. When Ivy Peters, representing new materialistic values, appears in the book for the first time, our attention is drawn to his face "flecked with tiny freckles like rust spots." His eyes are even more unpleasant. They are "very small, and an absence of eyelashes gave his pupils the fixed, unblinking hardness of a snake's or a lizard's." This description of him somehow makes obvious his greed for money and his cruelty. The latter is emphasized on this occasion by his slitting the eyes of a woodpecker. He holds the woodpecker's head in "a vice made of his thumb and forefinger . . . Quick as a flash, as if it were a practiced trick, with one of those tiny [knife] blades he slit both the eyes in the bird's head."

Cather's description of Frank Ellinger, another representative of this new generation, shows less exaggeration. She makes Niel, the narrator, explain again and again that "he didn't know whether he liked him or not," though if one reads between the lines, one knows Cather's attitude. "His chin was deeply cleft, his thick curly lips seemed very muscular, very much under his control, and with his strong white teeth, irregular and curved, gave him the look of a man who could bite an iron rod in two with a snap of his jaws." And this strong masculinity of Ellinger's, hardly more than wolfish desire, is emphasized again and again in this encounter with "the lost lady," Mrs. Forrester, later that evening: "The white fingers clung to the black cloth [of Ellinger's coat] as bits of paper cling to magnetized iron." And in Sweet Water the

next afternoon: "When the strokes of the hatchet [Ellinger was wielding] rang out from the ravine . . . soft shivers went through her body." To a Chinese, Ellinger with his thick muscular lips and strong irregular teeth conveys the sense of cruelty and sexuality, and the energy of a predatory beast. If Ivy Peters represents the lust for money, then Frank Ellinger is driven by bestial desire for sex, though this does not prevent him from seeking wealth as well. The images of those two men seem wrought of iron in their vividness, accentuating their characteristics and leaving a deep impression on the reader's mind.

It is difficult enough to select the most distinctive details to reveal the personality of a character but even more difficult to employ repetition as a method yet avoid monotony. However, Cather has successfully employed this method with the character of Captain Forrester. He represents the pioneering era and reveals all the fine qualities of that period. His polite words and behavior remain the same and never change. When he wishes to smoke a cigar after a meal, he always asks his women visitors politely, "Is smoking offensive to you?" No matter how many women visitors there are, he always repeats the question as many times and always in the same words. To him, "if an expression answered his purpose, he saw no reason for varying."

When his bank failed, Captain Forrester's bankruptcy brought about a crisis in his old age which Cather handles very skillfully. Instead of tackling the scene of the bank failure directly, she only describes his weariness after his return from Denver to "square up" with his depositors. He is sweating, his eyes are tired and swollen, and all he wants is to lie down and rest. It is Judge Pommeroy who explains the situation to Mrs.

Forrester after the Captain leaves the room. He tells her that the Captain was the only one of the bank officers who was determined not to let the depositors suffer for the bank loss. As president, he stripped himself of all his money so that his depositors (who were all laborers) would get every cent of their money back. That is to say, Cather avoids direct scenes which would have been sentimental or melodramatic and prefers a quieter, more objective and indirect method to portray the nobility and dignity of the old pioneer. What other method of portraying a conservative yet at the same time entirely honorable man of an earlier generation would have done so well?

It is, of course, too superficial to attribute Cather's success in portrayal of character to accentuation and repetition alone. The vividness of her portrayal is first and foremost due to the fact that these characters actually live in the author's mind. Without the author's love or dislike for her characters, without the nostalgia and regret, her characters could not have come to life. The success of any literary technique has as its basis the emotions of the author. What we mean by the Chinese expression, "deep thoughts shaped into simple language," is that the thoughts are shaped in the mind before being written and they go on existing in the reader's mind even after the story has ended. Whatever her methods in *A Lost Lady*, whether it be accentuation and repetition, what lies behind them is the regret and nostalgia for "the end of an era, the sunset of the pioneer." All those who had helped to build up this glorious cause are dead, and now Ivy Peters and his ilk — the new rich materialistic values — have seized greedily the fortunes built up by the pioneers. "The people, the very country itself, were changing so fast that there would be nothing to come back to."

John Steinbeck, who came from the west, was also deeply aware of the generation gap between Captain Forrester and Ivy Peters. In *East of Eden*, he says:

A new country seems to follow a pattern. First come the openers, strong and brave and rather childlike. They can take care of themselves in a wilderness, but they are naive and helpless against men, and perhaps that is why they went out in the first place. When the rough edges are worn off the new land, businessmen and lawyers come in to help with the development — to solve problems of ownership usually by removing the temptations to themselves.⁷

He spoke truly, saying the same things as Cather but somehow lacking her pain and regret. Cather writes of the same feelings this way:

The Old West had been settled by dreamers, great-hearted adventurers who were unpractical to the point of magnificence; a courteous brotherhood, strong in attack but weak in defense, who could conquer but could not hold. Now all the vast territory they had won was to be at the mercy of men like Ivy Peters, who had never dared anything, never risked anything. They would drink up the mirage, dispel the morning freshness, root out the great land-holders. The space, the colour, the princely carelessness of the pioneer they would destroy and cut up into profitable bits, as the match factory splinters the primeval forest.⁸

The reader may ask: Why return to the author's times and society when you are discussing such techniques as accentuation and repetition? However, Cather was both a dedicated ar-

tist and deeply moral. Because of this, her criticism of moral values has stretched into the realm of aesthetics, just as her sense of beauty is the quintessence of her moral judgment. In her, beauty of imagination is in complete accord with modes of imagination. She never tries to give her characters a heart of pure gold to purify her readers as Bret Hart does; or plays with writing techniques for momentary artistic effect like O. Henry.

Mrs. Forrester is the heroine of the novel, the lost lady. Cather repeatedly uses accentuation and repetition to describe her. What leaves the deepest impression on the readers is her laugh. Her laugh is repeatedly described, but the repetition accentuates the multiple facets of her character. It is sometimes "a soft, musical laugh which rose and descended like a suave scale," at other times, her soft laughter can be "impatient, indulgent, teasing, eager." No wonder Cather describes it as "many colored." The first description of her laugh is a lively one, showing her affection for people. The second description of her laugh, when she is sleeping with Ellinger, reveals her innate desire for a life of self-indulgence.

Like the descriptions of Captain Forrester and lawyer Ivy Peters, the author infuses her depictions of Mrs. Forrester with love or contempt. When basking in the setting sun of the pioneering era she is at one with her pioneer husband and is memorable. See how Niel describes her laugh: she laughed at him "with that gleam of something elegantly wild, something fantastic and tantalizing."⁹ But when she refuses to pass away with that era, and prefers "life on any terms," the readers feel it a great pity. See how, after Captain Forrester's death, she reacts to Niel's advice. "I know!" She tossed her head. Her eyes glittered, but there was no mirth in them, — it was more like hys-

terical defiance. "I know; they call me the Merry Widow. I rather like it!"¹⁰

There are descriptions of dinners on two occasions in *A Lost Lady*. The first time, Captain Forrester is still alive. Through Niel's eyes, we see the dignified manner with which the awkward but awe-inspiring Captain Forrester presides at the dinner. And when the Captain proposes a toast, it "seemed a solemn moment" to Niel. "Niel drank his wine with a pleasant shiver, thinking that nothing else made life seem so precarious, the future so cryptic and unfathomable, as that brief toast uttered by the massive man, 'Happy days!'"¹¹

In this scene, Willa Cather did not lay much emphasis on the description of Mrs. Forrester. She only smiles and nods, encourages Captain Forrester to tell the pioneering story which she has heard many times. And then she laughs teasingly and asks him to "tell us your philosophy of life, — this is where it comes in."¹² Not too much depiction does not mean that she is a minor character. There are no minor characters in art. In the appropriate place, minor characters become major characters. From Cather's concise description, one sees how much she knows the importance of appropriateness in artistic description. She well remembers the experience passed on to her by Stephen Crane, author of *The Red Badge of Courage*: "The detail of a thing has to filter through my blood, and then it comes out like a native product, but it takes forever."¹³ She later sums up her experience thus: "The higher processes of art are all processes of simplification," which is to cut out all the clichés and minor details without affecting the essence of the writing.¹⁴ Good works of art are like this. When you want to add something to them, you find that you are adding too much; and when you want to delete

something, you find you are removing too much. In classics, the author has intuitively judged the appropriate amount.

The second dinner at the Forresters is held after the death of the Captain. The "Merry Widow" wanted to give advice to the new generation of youth who have not seen the world. Again through Niel's eyes, we see that her former composed, harmonious and gracious manners are gone, and in their place we find cheapness, vulgarity, and ignorance.

Mrs. Forrester has changed. Such were the intentions of the author. In Cather's eyes, the social changes caused by World War I, including the progress in science and technology and the changes in value judgments, divided the world and lowered morals. She detested the reality of the commercialized present and longed more than ever for the past. Mrs. Forrester was the product of such thinking. Was Willa Cather conservative? It depends on the angle from which one is to analyze her. Social changes benefited some but victimized others. Cather belonged to the victims, a victim in the spiritual sense of the word. The progress in science and technology could improve people's material life, but it by no means could elevate the mind, though the latter was what Cather was mainly concerned about. At the present time, the Chinese people, who are also living in an era of economic reform, are facing the same problems.

Thus the second dinner is not a simple repetition of the first one. They form a sharp contrast. The selection of a number of vital details accentuate Mrs. Forrester's decline from graciousness to vulgarity. Just as selectivity is employed with the heroine, it is used to heighten the characteristics of the younger generation. At the second party, each of the youths "sat with his legs crossed, one tan shoe swinging in the air and display-

ing a tan silk sock," and discussed the latest fashions in clothes. They eat very fast; they "wanted more duck," and "the salad and frozen pudding were dispatched as promptly as the roast had been."¹⁵ The author uses these scenes to reveal the degradation of Mrs. Forrester. The "Merry Widow's" moral decline becomes real for us because of the careful selection of details instead of the piling up of them.

If *A Lost Lady* nears perfection because of the appropriateness of its artistic description, then one unbalanced point pulls the work away from it. Willa Cather has not dealt successfully with the problem of the theme of the book and the work as a piece of reminiscence. As reminiscence, the story has to be complete, and endings for the characters have to be provided. This is different from the theme of the book — the end of the pioneering era. The theme of the idea of being lost is completed when the heroine was "like a ship without ballast, driven hither and thither by every wind."¹⁶ This echoes the symbolic description of details at the beginning of the novel, the bird, after its eyes are slit, whirling in the sunlight but never seeing it.¹⁷ But the author abandons the symbolic meaning of being lost, and follows the threads of reminiscence for the last traces of Mrs. Forrester. For

this reason she adds the details of the encounter between Niel and Ed Elliott, the latter telling the former about Mrs. Forrester's death in South America. Willa Cather has added an extra piece of "furniture" to the novel! Saturation is not art. It would be nice to imagine that the novel could have ended when the heroine was lost like a drifting canoe in turbid waters.

NOTES

¹ See *A Lost Lady*. New York: Knopf, 1923, pp. 21-22.

² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁷ *East of Eden*, Part 2, chapter 19.

⁸ *A Lost Lady*, p. 106.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹³ See Willa Cather, *The World and the Parish*. Vol. 2. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970, pp. 776-777.

¹⁴ "The Novel Demeuble," in *Willa Cather on Writing*, New York: Knopf, 1949.

¹⁵ *A Lost Lady*, pp. 159-162.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Willa Cather, Tao Yuanming and Hiawatha

By LI WENJUN

Chinese readers studying Cather's works for the first time get an instinctive feeling of closeness and warmth, a shock of recognition, as if they were re-reading the works of a familiar writer. The fresh country air, the scenes of simple folk toiling in the fields, the pure and harmonious relations between people, and their love for their home-

town, are all traditional themes in Chinese literature. Reading Cather's works, differences of land and race are obliterated; we recognize and identify with her characters as we would with those of an outstanding Chinese writer.

This is particularly the case with "Tom Outland's Story" in *The Professor's House*. I still

recall the first time I read the story of Tom Outland's search for the lost cattle, which led him to the discovery of the Indian cave-dwellings in the Blue Mesa. This was during the latter years of the "Cultural Revolution" when China was still in a state of ignorance. The atmosphere was stifling; one longed for a breath of fresh air. I remember coming to the part where Tom turns into a canyon and looks up: "Far up above me, a thousand feet or so, set in a great cavern in the face of the cliff, I saw a little city of stone, asleep." It was as if a breath of fresh air had blown into the window of my dark, stuffy room. I too longed to see the cavern Tom found and to regain innocence and simplicity. The cavern in the story reminded me of another cavern, the story of which is one that almost every Chinese child knows. This is the cavern in the "Peach Blossom Source," written by the great Jin poet, Tao Yuanming.² In the famous preface to that poem, Tao describes how a fisherman made his way through a cavern and discovered another world, an idyllic world of peace and harmony and innocence, far different from the world of corruption and turmoil in which he was living.³

How similar the two stories are! Although the people the fisherman discovered in the village beyond the cave were living, whereas the inhabitants of the village that Tom Outland discovered had died several hundred years before, they had both discovered a people with a different culture and different values from their own. The authors of both works had expressed their dissatisfaction with their own current cultures in their works and their strong desire for a simpler culture and warmer human relations. Tao Yuanming had lived during a dynasty marked by palace revolutions, peasant revolts, banditry, civil war, assassination and regicide. The turmoil and

corruption deeply upset him and he admired the courage of those who refused official posts and became recluses rather than compromise their own principles. His nostalgia for a happy time in the past when life had been much simpler and his disgust for a society in which people were motivated by the lust to become rich and powerful and to hurt and kill each other is very similar to Cather's nostalgia for a simpler age when people found pleasure and fulfillment in their labour and in their warm relations with others rather than in the desire to 'keep up with the Joneses' or in other petty materialistic ambitions. Cather describes in much detail the sordid life of the civil servants in Washington, D.C. in "Tom Outland's Story." Critics are agreed that Tao's poems reveal his dissatisfaction and distrust with the bureaucracy and corruption of his own day and that "Peach Blossom Source" is a Utopian world to which he longed to escape. It is not just the beauty of the natural surroundings that allures him though that is great. Still more alluring is the way the people there live in harmony with nature and with one another. Their desires have not yet been corrupted by the desire for money or for power. They are content with their lot, their work is self-sufficient and brings fulfillment, they live in peace and harmony "far from the madding crowd." As Tao mentions in his poem, "Spring silkworms provided long silk threads, No taxes were paid to the ruler on the autumn harvest." In short, this is a society without a tyrant, without exploitation, where all work and gain the fruits for their industry and where all are equal.

In the same way, Cather's Pueblo Indians also lived in harmony, peace and security, and took pleasure in their simple labour. As Father Duchene remarked, ". . . in an orderly and secure life they developed considerably the arts of peace.

There is evidence on every hand that they lived for something more than food and shelter. They had an appreciation of comfort and went even further than that"⁴

As for artistic skill, there are also amazing similarities. Chinese literary critics agree that Tao Yuanming's works were written simply and naturally; he did not like to use many allusions, nor did he care for flowery language. His work seemed effortless while actually involving a great deal of care. Zhu Xi (1130-1200), the major philosopher of the Song Dynasty (960-1279) commented, "The plain style comes from naturalness." The Song poet Huang Tingjian (1045-1105) said of Tao's style, "Naturalness and harmony without effort." Su Dongpo (1037-1101), a famous Song poet said, "At first glance Yuanming's poetry seems loose and the pace is slow, but when one is familiar with it, one finds a peculiarly lasting appeal. It is like a highly skilled artisan wielding his hammer and chisel: there are no marks of the tools on his products, whereas artists less skilled than he wear themselves out, yet do not know where their weaknesses lie."

Critics feel that in Tao's works, there is talent in plainness, and richness in simplicity. In such famous phrases as "On meeting, no talk of trouble, only parley of how the mulberries and flax are growing," and in "Leaving at dawn to reclaim the wasteland/Returning with hoe in the moonlight," the words have been carefully selected to contain the minimum nouns and verbs. Not a single adjective can be found.

All that has been said of Tao's work could equally be used to describe Cather's work, especially the last point dealing with selection and conciseness. This coincides with Cather's views of the novel *demeuble* which are based on the belief in simplifica-

tion: that is "finding what conventions of form and what detail one can do without and yet preserve the spirit of the whole."⁵

My amazement at Cather's consummate skill and my pleasure at discovering the similarities between her and Tao Yuanming made me decide to translate "Tom Outland's Story" into English. This translation has been twice selected in collections of short stories since 1980 and has become well known to Chinese readers. In 1987, to commemorate the 40th anniversary of Cather's death, I wrote a paper entitled "Willa Cather's Love Affair with Indian Culture," in an attempt to trace a lifelong interest of Cather's that appeared in her works at various stages of her literary career and that first revealed itself in the short story "The Enchanted Bluff," published in *Harpers* in April, 1909.

This paper was presented at the Cather Conference in Beijing, April 1987 and later published in *Reading* in September of the same year. Two months later, I happened to be attending a conference in Nanjing to which I had taken a copy of Philip Gerber's *Willa Cather* to read in my spare time. What was

my surprise when I discovered in the work an account of a charity performance held in Red Cloud when Cather was fourteen to collect money for victims of a terrible blizzard that winter. Cather is described as having recited "Hiawatha," dressed in Indian garb. Maybe this was the source of her interest in the Indians, a lifelong interest which took hold of her imagination and which was strengthened by her visits to cave dwellings in Arizona and New Mexico inhabited by tribes of American Indians long before any white people had made their appearance in America.

NOTES

¹See *The Professor's House*, New York: Knopf, 1925, p. 201.

²Tao Yuanming (Tao Qian, A.D. 365-427). One of China's greatest poets. He lived in the Jin Dynasty, a period of turmoil and instability between the Han and Tang Dynasties.

³See "Account of the Peach Blossom Source" in this issue.

⁴*The Professor's House*, p. 219.

⁵From "On the Art of Fiction," in *Willa Cather on Writing* (New York: Knopf, 1949), p. 102.

and the crowing of cocks and barking of dogs could be heard. People were moving about, busy doing farm work. Men and women were dressed in the same way as those in the outside world. Old and young were both contented and happy. They were astonished to see the fisherman and asked where he came from. After he told his story, they invited him home for wine and killed a chicken for a feast. When the villagers learnt of his arrival, they all gathered there and told him their ancestors had fled to this beautiful place with their families and neighbors during the turmoil and unrest of the Qin Dynasty.⁴ Once there they had never ventured forth again so that they got cut off from the outside world. They asked him which dynasty it was but had never heard of the Han, Wei or Jin Dynasties. They sighed with sympathy when the fisherman recounted the troubled events one by one. Then the others also invited him to feasts in their homes. The fisherman left several days later after being warned not to tell outsiders about the place. On this return voyage the fisherman took careful note of the route. On reaching the prefecture, he told the prefect what he had seen. The latter immediately sent men to follow him back and look for the landmarks but they lost their way and were unable to find the route. Hearing of this place, Liu Zhiji, a noble-minded gentleman of Nanyang, was eager to go there but he died before his wish could be fulfilled. Hereafter, no one made further inquiries.

When the Ying family⁵ violated the decrees of Heaven, Virtuous people withdrew from the world.
Huang and Qi⁶ left for Mount Shang,
And the people now living here also fled.
The traces of their flight gradually vanished,
The paths became disused and were choked with weeds.

Account of the Peach Blossom Source

By TAO YUANMING¹

Once during the rule of Tai Yuan in the Jin Dynasty,² a fisherman of Wuling³ was traveling along a stream, heedless of the distance he had covered, when all at once his boat entered a dense grove of peach trees in bloom, which extended for several hundred paces on either bank, no other trees being in sight. Fallen petals were scattered profusely on the fragrant, luscious grass. Marveling at the sight, the fisherman continued his journey to see how far the grove reached. At its end, he

found the source of the stream issuing from a mountain. In the latter was a small opening, through which a gleam of light seemed to emerge. Abandoning his boat, the fisherman entered the cavern which was at first so narrow that he could barely pass. After a few dozen paces, however, it suddenly came to an end and spread before his eyes was a broad plain dotted with neat houses, fertile fields, lovely ponds, mulberry trees, bamboos and other kinds of vegetation. Footpaths intersected the fields

Relying on each other, they engaged in farming,
 Returning home at sunset to rest from their toil.
 Mulberries and bamboos provided shade,
 Beans and millet were tended in their season.
 Spring silkworms provided long silk threads,
 No taxes were paid to the ruler on the autumn harvest.
 Undergrowth obscured the paths,
 The crowing of cocks and barking of dogs intermingled.
 Ritual vessels followed the same molds,
 Styles of clothing did not undergo any change.
 Children sang joyfully as they ran about,
 Old people cheerfully paid each other calls.
 When plants blossomed, they knew the season was mild,
 When leaves fell, they knew cold blasts would come.
 Though they had no calendar to aid them,
 From the seasons they could tell the time of year.
 Happy and contented in their lives,
 What need had they to strive for wisdom and knowledge.
 Five hundred years did the miracle remain unknown,
 Before one morning this beautiful land was brought to light.
 As the pure and the superficial belong to different worlds,
 So the land was soon shut out from sight again.
 Pray tell me, worthy travelers,
 What make you of those beyond the madding crowd?
 Would that I could ride on the gentle breeze,
 Rise high in search of my own kind.

— Translated by
 Qian Qing

NOTES

¹Tao Yuanming (A.D. 365-427). Famous Chinese poet of the Jin Dynasty, one of the six dynasties between A.D. 222-589, a

period of great turmoil and instability in between the Han and Tang Dynasties. Tao's "Peach Blossom Source" is in two parts: one prose, the other poetry. The poem is based on the prose account.

²Jin Dynasty: A.D. 265-420, the dynasty following the Wei Dynasty (A.D. 220-265). The Tai Yuan period is A.D. 376-396, corresponding to Tao Yuanming's own youth.

³Wuling is present-day Changde county, Hunan province.

⁴The Qin Dynasty (B.C. 221-206) was the period of rule of the

First Emperor of the Chinese empire (Qin Shi Huang). He was cruel and had many people killed, including scholars.

⁵Ying is the clan name for the first emperor (Qin Shi Huang, B.C. 220-210) whose excesses horrified many. He drove scholars into hiding because he had buried so many of them alive.

⁶Huang and Qi were among those scholars who withdrew from the world to become hermits during the rule of the first emperor, Qin Shi Huang.

Random Thoughts on Willa Cather

By SUN JIAXIN

Willa Cather's name was, as far as I know, mentioned in China as early as the mid-thirties of this century, when I was a high school student. Reviewing contemporary American literature, a Chinese writer made the following remark on her: "At present Cather occupies an apartment in New York City. Looking westward through the open window, she thinks of her home pasture which has been totally industrialized. She shuts the window and meditates on her Virgillian and Catholic paradise. Mass production, economic depression, unemployment, war preparation, revolution . . . all these social events are going on about her, but Willa Cather sees none of them."¹ As a teenager with a romantic temperament, I was curious to know more about this dreamy woman novelist. But there was no Chinese translation of Cather's works at the time and my curiosity was not satisfied for several years.

In 1943, when I served as an editor of the magazine *Time and Tide: Literature and Art*, Professor Sun Jinsan the editor-in-chief, showed me a copy of Ca-

ther's book, *Youth and the Bright Medusa*, asking me to translate a story from it. I read the book and was surprised to find a Willa Cather quite different from the idealistic woman novelist I had read of previously. Certainly she is somewhat idealistic, as shown in her abhorrence for the monotony and ugliness of bourgeois society, and her yearning for artistic beauty. But she does not shut her window nor her eye against the realistic world around her; she keeps a sharp eye on it. The disastrous effects of machinery, of mass production and crises, the misery of the common people, especially the sufferings of the sensitive soul — all these are carefully observed and depicted.

I translated her short story, "Paul's Case," with pleasure. It appeared in the No. 2, Vol. 2 issue of *Time and Tide* (October, 1943). It turned out to be the first piece of Chinese translation of Cather's works. I was very glad to know that my choice proved to be well founded when I learned in the February-March issue of *The English Journal*, 1979, that "Paul's Case" was

still among the English Teachers' Literary Favorites.

I admire Cather's skill in character portrayal. Through the eye of Paul's drawing master, the author presents us with a portrait of the sensitive boy:

One warm afternoon the boy had gone to sleep at his drawing board, and his master had noted with amazement what a white blue-veined face it was, drawn and wrinkled like an old man's about the eyes, the lips twitching even in his sleep, and stiff with a nervous tension that drew them back from his teeth.

Such a boy was brought up in a flavorless, colorless environment:

Cordelia Street was a highly respectable street, where all the homes were exactly alike, and where business men of moderate means begot and reared large families of children, all of whom . . . were interested in arithmetic, all of whom were exactly alike as their homes, and of a piece with the monotony in which they lived.

Unable to tolerate the suffocation in his home and the maltreatment from his school and filled with the desire for artistic beauty, the sensitive boy, Paul, was misled to embezzle a large sum of money and go to New York for pleasure. The structure of the story attains a remarkable architectural achievement. The scene of New York provides a sharp contrast to that of Pittsburgh as seen through Paul's eyes. But when Paul discovered that his misdeed was publicized, he willfully "snapped the thread" in the same way as poor Anna Karenina did thirty years before. The great lesson he learned was "that money was everything, the wall that stood between all he loathed and all he wanted." By no means the only tragic figure in the Catherian

world, Paul shares the fate of Harvey Merrick in "The Sculptor's Funeral," of Katherine Gaylord in "A Death in the Desert," or of Aunt Georgiana in "A Wagner Matinee." Each story shows a "tragedy of effort and failure."² Therefore I hope I may be justified to have rendered the title of the story as "Paul's Tragedy," when I translated "Paul's Case."

Whether conscious of it or not, the author implies social criticism in these tragedies. Had the society been more reasonable, the sensitive soul would be well developed, the efforts would be fruitful. But when Cather wrote "Behind the Singer Tower," she might be counted as a conscious social critic, as Curtis Bradford pointed out.³ The story "seems to indicate that Willa Cather had taken in more of the muckraking attitude that she maintained at *McClure's* than is generally supposed If we can judge from a single story, 'Behind the Singer Tower' indicates that she would have succeeded as a social critic had she wished too." After the skyscraper hotel caught fire, Graziani, the tenor, plunged from its thirty-second floor to his death. Half a dozen people were talking about this "Behind the Singer Tower." The central figure of the story, engineer Fred Hallet related how the skyscraper was built at the cost of the lives of workers of Italian origin. In New York, he said, "the average for window cleaners, who, for one reason or another, dropped to the pavement was something over one a day." Cather rejects the machines and materialism, as symbolized by the skyscraper.

Cather did not carry on her direct social criticism any longer, however. Beginning with the novelette, "The Bohemian Girl," she turned to her home pasture in Nebraska, with "an enthusiasm for a kind of country and a kind of people."⁴ She had once told an interviewer that "the years from eight to fifteen

are the formative period in a writer's life, when he unconsciously gathers basic material." Following the advice of her friend, Sarah Orne Jewett, she got the thing "that teases the mind over and over for years . . . put down rightly on paper."⁵ The river country south of Red Cloud, Nebraska, and the high plain region called "The Divide" furnished the legendary setting of a number of her novels. Those old neighbors of her childhood, "once very dear," came again to her imagination. *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia* have made her hometown as famous as Haworth, Yorkshire of the Bronte sisters.

I wonder if Cather really acted upon her own theory of "the novel demeuble," or "unfurnished novel," which lays stress on people rather than external details. I think she showed excellent descriptive sensibility as well as psychological depth. To my mind, the term, "the novel demeuble," may be better applied to the robust, masculine works of Ernest Hemingway, perhaps. Here, I don't mean that Cather's works are entirely feminine. The trademark of her novels is the spirit of pioneering, which means struggle and creative labor. She declares in *O Pioneers!* that a pioneer must have imagination; he enjoys more from the idea of creating things than from using the things themselves. In the preface to the 1932 edition of *The Song of the Lark*, Cather affirms "success is never so interesting as struggle — not even to the successful." There is such strength and sublimity in her accounts of heroic immigrants that these works may be ranked among the old sagas. But her extraordinary ability to capture the local color and her exquisite description of environment, customs and figures suggest to us something from the eye and the hand of a female. "A thing of beauty is a joy forever." I like Cather no less than Hemingway.

Shoulder to shoulder with these two I would place my favorite author Liu Qing, whose titanic work, *The Builders*, ennobles west China just as Cather's does west America.

Cather's later novels, when they cover a broader range including Virginia in the east and Quebec in Canada, go farther into the past.

Perhaps we see some truth in the remark made by the Chinese writer in the thirties so far as *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock* are concerned. But even in these later works, especially in her novelette, "Neighbour Rosicky," her tribute to the spirit of pioneering, her eulogy of creative labor and devoted enthusiasm, her admiration of the kindness and honesty of common people, are so inspiring that the reader can feel the throbbing of her heart. In my opinion she should not be considered cut off from real society. She may be ranked among the writers from the people and for the people at all times.

One cannot talk of Cather without mentioning her literary craftsmanship, which she herself laid so much stress upon. She compared her attitude to that of an apple-grower careful of his reputation: the "fruit that was below standard should be left forgotten on the ground, only the sound apples should be collected."⁶ She wrote a graceful, measured prose, always made sure to put the right word in the right place, and cut out whatever epithet or sentence was unnecessary. For example, the subtitle of "Paul's Case," is "A Study in Temperament." This appeared in *The Troll Garden* (1905) but was deleted from *Youth and the Bright Medusa* (1920). She pruned and polished her stories again and again and ruthlessly prevented the republication of those she considered below standard. What she regarded as her "sound apples" are indeed "touched with the

serenice radiance we associate with the poets of classic antiquity."⁷ Thus her idylls of pioneering and her anthems to artists and working people, women in particular, endear themselves to the reader's heart. The refreshing flavor, the alluring music and the bewitching beauty in her books have heightened her reputation during the forty years since her death and this reputation will endure. I am sure.

NOTES

¹Zhao Jiabi, *New Tradition*. Liangyou Publishing Co., 1935.

²Willa Cather, "A Death in the Desert," in *Willa Cather: Collected Short Fiction, 1892-1912*, p. 213.

³See Curtis Bradford, *Willa Cather's Uncollected Short Fiction*, pp. 546-547.

⁴See Latrobe Carroll, "Willa Sibert Cather," in *The Bookman*, May, 1921, LIII.

⁵Quoted from Cather's preface to *The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1925).

⁶Quoted from the Publisher's Preface to *Collected Short Fiction, 1892-1912*, p. vii.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. ix.

I Love My Antonia

By ZHOU WEILIN

Willa Cather is one of my favorite American authors. Six years ago when I first read her famous work, *My Antonia*, I was deeply attracted by it. Its lyrical qualities and rich flavor of life transported me to the prairies of the American Mid-West in the pioneering era. I could visualize the small towns on the prairie while the immigrants from various parts of the Old World struggling for survival there seemed like old friends whose joys and sorrows I shared. The year 1918 in which *My Antonia* was published, happens to be the year in which I was born. Yet in the seventy years since then my experiences have been completely different from those of the author. Why then should the novel have such a great impact on me? I think it is due — at least in part — to its great artistic merit. Art, through its various modes, expresses the universal feelings of mankind, so that readers from different lands may experience the same emotional reactions. In this sense, great works of art always belong to the whole of mankind.

Cather is decidedly not a writer who likes to employ many artifices in her writing, at least not in her mature writings. She explains in her essay "My First Novels," "Here there was no arranging or 'inventing'; everything was spontaneous and took its own place, right or wrong," without premeditation. As a result, the images of her memorable characters are stamped indelibly on our minds through vivid details and come to life for us.

Cather was able to accomplish this difficult task because she had spent her youth in a small town on the prairies and was familiar with life there. She had come to love deeply the people there and their surroundings. I believe that this love of the author for his or her subject is the most important element in true art.

The picture of the Nebraskan prairies that Cather creates is truly impressive: the endlessly rolling red grass which at times seems so bleak and lonely; the cold wind howling over the prairies; the angry red glow in

the heavens at sunset; the dazzling blue skies after the first fall of winter snow; the cracks and crevices in the snow that earlier had been meandering brooks; in springtime, the clear blue of the water and the acrid smell of burning grass and shooting flames; and in summer, the violent storms shedding big, hot drops of rain onto upturned faces.

But without the people populating the prairie, the beauty of the land would be static, only a backdrop for life, and would not have such great artistic appeal. Cather is greatest at creating character. Even minor characters who only make a brief appearance leave a deep impression. The Bohemian immigrants, the Norwegians, the Swedes, the Russians — each ethnic group has its own national traits, and Cather portrays them all superbly. Even the blind black pianist who makes a brief appearance at the local opera house leaves a deep impression on the reader. Needless to say, this is much more the case for the protagonist, Antonia.

Antonia, the pretty, large-eyed Bohemian girl, is a very lovable character. Her fate is like that of so many other girls from Old World immigrant families. To support the family and pay debts for land and tools, she has to give up schooling and toil in the fields like a man. But she is hardworking and strongwilled with a zest for life that nothing can destroy. She seems to have endless vitality. When she first came to America with her parents she was only about twelve or thirteen. Her father had previously been a skilled violinist who loved music and treasured friendship but in the American Mid-West he was extremely homesick because he spoke no English and was unaccustomed to living in a strange land and to working in the fields. Unable to adjust, he eventually took his own life. This was a terrible blow to Antonia, who was her father's

favorite and who, like him, was deeply emotional. She alone had understood him. Notwithstanding the blow, she took the burden of supporting the family upon herself, working without complaint like an ox and doing hard work no other girl would have dreamed of doing. She later became a hired hand in the nearby town of Black Hawk and won the love of her mistress through her diligence and intelligence.

Antonia naturally had her weaknesses, the greatest of which was also her strength. She was too emotional. When she liked doing a thing, she had no control over herself. She loved to go to the dances and since they interfered with her work and her mistress could not persuade her to give them up, she was dismissed and went to work for a debauched moneylender. Later, because of her warm emotions, she was deceived the first time she fell in love and was abandoned before her marriage. After this, she went back to the prairie to work on her brother's farm, where she gave birth to an illegitimate daughter. Any other girl under similar circumstances would have hidden the child. Antonia, however, loved the child too much for that. She had its picture enlarged and hung on the photographer's wall in a gilt frame. This little detail tells us something of Antonia's loving nature. She later married a Bohemian and they had a farm and many children. Although hardships aged her quickly, she retained her youthful vigor, her love of life, of land and of children. Antonia is an outstanding representative of American pioneer women. In those early days, the hardships they had to endure caused many of these women to form strong characters. Cather creates a number of such women in this novel in addition to Antonia; there is Lena, the first-rate dress designer, and Tiny, who makes a fortune from running hotels near

newly-struck goldfields. Yet their legendary feats cannot move us in the way that Antonia's does. Her life is an ordinary one but she has made it extraordinary for us because of her firm convictions and her loving nature. When still a girl she had gone out one autumn day with Jim Burden, the narrator of the story, and they had discovered a half-frozen cricket near Squaw Creek. After being warmed in her hands, the little insect began to chirp feebly. It reminded her of an old beggar woman she had known back in the Old World. If anyone let her in to warm herself by the fire she would sing songs from the old days for the children in her cracked voice. To keep the cricket warm, Antonia carefully lifted the little creature into her hair and then draped a big handkerchief loosely over it. Through these details, Cather not only shows us in a vivid manner Antonia's forceful character but also her loving nature. Over twenty years later Antonia's son mourns over the loss of his dog. This reminds us of the warm loving nature of his mother. I think that is one of the reasons why Cather wrote the novel. She felt a very deep affection for that lovable character.

In her depiction of Antonia, Cather seldom makes any direct comments. She brings readers round to her own view of Antonia by describing vivid little incidents in the latter's life. One of these is the scene in which the Shimerdas arrive at the railway station in Black Hawk. The strong national characteristics of each member of the family are shown in their customs and habits, their conversation and gestures. As a result the reader is fully convinced that the Shimerdas are Bohemians. It shows the author is very observant and sensitive to life.

The rich flavor of life portrayed in the work is such that the reader feels he has been transported to the scenes and

witnesses them together with Jim Burden. Many of them are very moving and the prose is almost lyrical. In the scene immediately following the incident with the cricket, Antonia meets her father who has just returned from hunting. She shows him the cricket, which revived a little by the warmth gives a few thin chirps. Mr. Shimerda smiles as he listens with a look full of sympathy for the little cricket. Because of this scene he appears real to us and we feel sorrowful later when we hear of his death.

Another scene which has left a deep impression on me is of a sleighride in the snow in early winter for which Jim takes Antonia and her sister. The cold is penetrating; we can feel it in the way Cather describes the street glittering with ice, the lights

shining through the stained-glass windows of the church, the passers-by lingering outside, shivering with cold, their feet frozen. It is such scenes that the reader savours with pleasure.

Cather is a talented writer of extraordinary artistic merit. I loved *My Antonia* deeply and so I decided to translate it. During the translation of the work I not only derived great artistic enjoyment from the work but also deepened my understanding of America's heritage and of the American people. Consequently, after finishing *My Antonia*, I embarked on the translation of *The Professor's House* and *Death Comes for the Archbishop* so that I could share my love of the work of this outstanding writer with the masses of readers in China.

good homes and a good life, and they also realize self-fulfillment in their struggle to survive.

One can read *O Pioneers!* in different ways. For instance, one can read it for an understanding of the opening-up of the American frontiers, of the disintegration of the pastoral human relationship, the changes in the relationship between neighbors, within families and between the sexes, in the development of capitalism in America at the beginning of the century. One can also read it for the position and effect religion have on the life of that generation. But, as a lasting piece of literature, this little book possesses a unique charm in that everywhere in the book one finds a simple, intrinsic but heartrending beauty. This beauty comes from a deep love for the land. One can say that from the words on the flyleaf to the last sentence of the book there burns a passion, a persistent pursuit, a burning attachment, hope and disappointment, pain and happiness, yearnings, selfless devotion, which the author holds for the land deep in her heart. They compose a symphonic poem. Indeed, this is a novel that one can read as poetry.

The special sentiments toward the land come from the hard struggle to subdue it. Initially, the land "wanted to be left alone, to preserve its own fierce strength, its peculiar, savage kind of beauty, its uninterrupted mournfulness."¹

The hard work in the first few years was almost all wasted. "The record of the plow was insignificant, like the feeble scratches on stone left by prehistoric races, so indeterminate that they may, after all, be only the markings of glaciers, and not a record of human strivings."²

The land organized resistance for the last time against the invading plows. A drought befell the land which lasted for three years and left nothing in the fields, forcing many to move

Enduring Perfection: Reflections on the Beauty of Willa Cather's Representative Work, *O Pioneers!*

By ZI ZHONGYUN

Many years ago, I accidentally got hold of a slim book — *O Pioneers!*, by the American woman writer, Willa Cather. I was at once attracted by its special charm, and finished reading it at one go, experiencing a special sense of beauty. Later, by accident, the Foreign Literatures Press asked me to translate this book for Chinese readers. Now, this book will be reprinted in a series for young readers. I think it is very much worth it.

On the flyleaf of this book is written:

"To the memory of Sarah Orne Jewett in whose beautiful and delicate work there is the perfection that endures."

This crystallizes the kind of goals Cather herself pursued in this book, and the perfect spiritual state this exquisite work has reached. The words of the dedi-

cation would be just as appropriate if Jewett's name were replaced by Cather's own name, or by that of the heroine in the book, Alexandra Bergson.

This is a story forever repeating itself in the history of man's development, ancient but often renewed, common but soul stirring. A group of people, old and young, men and women, leave their homes for a primitive and desolate tract of land, and start cultivating it with their bare hands. It is hard work. Some fall before they can realize their goals, and some retreat in the face of difficulties. Victory belongs to those who persist and command confidence, will power, and wisdom. Nature, with its wild resistance to man, is subdued by such people. The desolate plains and hills become fertile land. The pioneers finally create for themselves

again. But, to people like Alexandra Bergson who remained and who knew how to deal with the land, it finally "woke up out of its sleep and stretched itself, and it was so big, so rich . . ."³

Look at the intoxicating scene of spring plowing. ". . . [T]he brown earth, with such a strong, clean smell, and such a power of growth and fertility in it, yields itself eagerly to the plow; rolls away from the shear, not even dimming the brightness of the metal, with a soft, deep sigh of happiness."⁴ The land "gives itself ungrudgingly to the moods of the season, holding nothing back,"⁵ so much so that Alexandra, who has devoted all her youth to it, feels she is getting rich "just from sitting still." And Carl, who loved painting from his childhood and who has been away for over ten years, sees the most beautiful picture on his return. It is a picture that he can never paint for the canvas is the endless land, and the painter, Alexandra.

Alexandra, the heroine of the book, is the embodiment of intrinsic beauty and solid wisdom, which are closely associated with the land. She hardly had a carefree childhood, nor did she spend her youth enjoying herself or having love affairs. She does not have time to pay special attention to her clothes. Those who meet her daily hardly notice whether she is beautiful or not. But everywhere in the book, one feels that she is. As for her outward appearance, not much is said in the book. We only know that she has a healthy and strong body, skin as fresh as snow, deep blue eyes, and thick, flame-like hair which she braids and winds round her head. The several passages which describe her best combine land, farm work, scenery and her good feelings in a remarkable manner.

Here is the Swedish girl who left an enduring impression on Carl:

He could remember exactly how she looked when she

came over the close-cropped grass, her skirts pinned up, her head bare, a bright tin pail in either hand, and the milky light of the morning all about her. Even as a boy he used to feel, when he saw her coming with her free step, her upright head and calm shoulders, that she looked as if she had walked straight out of the morning itself.⁶

In the year of great drought which forced others to sell their land and leave, Alexandra went to examine the situation in their neighboring village and came back with much more confidence. On her way back, she was radiant, which surprised even her younger brother, who was closest to her.

For the first time, perhaps, since that land emerged from the waters of geologic ages, a human face was set toward it with love and yearning. It seemed beautiful to her, rich and strong and glorious. Her eyes drank in the breadth of it, until her tears blinded her.⁷

That night, she looked up at the starry sky, thought about the laws governing the movement of the universe, and felt a new attachment to the land.

Alexandra's intelligence is not the quick, showy type. She is a typical country girl: steady, honest, and sometimes even a bit slow. But she has more brains, more pursuits, than her neighbors and two brothers. She can absorb new ideas, and run risks. This quality distinguishes her from her neighbors who cling to tradition, and enables her to be always a step ahead of others. This is the quality of pioneers and entrepreneurs. The first generation of entrepreneurs in the world who started from scratch all possess this quality. Just because she has innate wisdom, although it does not show, she stands head and shoul-

ders above others. For this reason, she lacks friends who really understand her. Although she wins respect and esteem from her neighbors by her successful enterprises and generosity, she is lonely at heart. People are used to getting help and care from her, but nobody thinks that she, too, needs understanding and care. The only person who appreciates her beauty and understands her is Carl Linstrum.

Alexandra's friendship, love and final union with Carl are also in tune with her character and with the keynote of the book. The two of them spent a dismal childhood and youth together, caring for and supporting each other in their hardships. They matured early in the difficult years, but love came late. They never had a chance to be romantic and to demonstrate their love to each other in words. What they had was a deep understanding and trust in each other. Only they two know each other's inherent qualities, qualities which others do not see. Carl alone understands what land means to Alexandra and fully appreciates her outstanding ability in managing her farm. Only he notices she is very beautiful, just as beautiful when she is a successful middle-aged farmer as when she was a little girl holding a tin pail. On the other hand, only Alexandra retains full trust in Carl amid the contempt, prejudice, doubts and reproaches that surround him. Whether he made a name for himself or not, she would always give him her support. This kind of acquaintance is truly rare. Balzac once said: "Love without friendship is philandering." But Carl and Alexandra's belated love is built upon a pure friendship which withstood all the hardships of several decades. The courtship is a little too long, characteristic of that time and of an agricultural society. But this kind of love is really different from fall-

ing in love at first sight. It shines like gold and is as solid as diamond.

Today, when one thinks of America, one thinks of "Silicon Valley," "moon man," a society with a high consumption rate and bustling cities and a distorted and exaggerated sense of freedom. It is difficult to remember that less than a hundred years ago, on this wide and desolate land over which cold winds swept, the pioneers who started cultivating the virgin soil toiled and sweated in their fight against nature. Perhaps not even many Americans think about it any more. The heroine of the book is a Swedish immigrant, but this story, except for some minor details, can also be applied to immigrants from other countries. America is a country of immigrants. The "nationality" of America is composed of the common characteristics of immigrants from all over the world, only they come at different times, some early, and some late. These immigrants' success at opening up and building the new world will be remembered by later generations. Today Americans, irrespective of their original nationalities, seem to have far different characteristics and morals. But if one takes a closer look at their society, that pioneering spirit is still the crystalizing quality of Americans as a whole. The fact that some nations flourish while others decline, apart from other reasons, indicates internal qualities which characterize these nations as different from others. The steady, hard-working, innovative, competent, skillful, self-confident, forward-going qualities of Alexandra, are perhaps the contributions brought to America by the immigrants of the various nationalities that make up America. The reason why America prospers can be related to this.

The beauty of this slim volume is devoid of any superfluity and artificiality. It is healthy,

substantial, noble, and lasting. It is related to truth and kindness. The feeling one has after reading the book is comparable to the feeling one gets when, after seeing a lot of colorful cheap fake diamonds, one sees a piece of spotless white jade.

NOTES

- ¹ *O Pioneers!*, p. 15.
- ² *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 116.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 126.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 65

A Checklist of Publications on Willa Cather in China (1949-1986)

Compiled by QIAN QING

Translations of Cather's works in book form:

My Ántonia and O Pioneers! Trans. Zhou Weiling and Zi Zhongyun. Beijing: Foreign Literature Press, 1983.

A Lost Lady and Other Works. Ed. Dong Hengxun. Guilin: Lijiang Press, 1986. Includes the three stories in *Obscure Destinies*, "Tom Outland's Story," "The Best Years," and *A Lost Lady*.

Selected Short Stories by Willa Cather. Ed. Tang Jen. Nanchang: Jiangxi Press, 1986. Basically the stories in *Youth and the Bright Medusa*.

The Bohemian Girl and Other Early Stories. Ed. Zhu Junqiang. Hangzhou: Zhejiang Literary Press, 1986. Over thirty short stories, mainly the very early works from "Peter," "The Princess Baladina," etc., to "The Bohemian Girl," with "Neighbour Rosicky," and "The Old Beauty" added.

In preparation:

Death Comes for the Archbishop. Trans. Zhou Weilin.

The Professor's House. Trans. Zhou Weilin. Both books are to be published by the Beijing Foreign Literature Press.

The Professor's House. Trans. Zhang Zhengjen. To be published by the Shanghai Foreign Languages Publishing House.

Translations of books published in Taiwan and Hong Kong:

Death Comes for the Archbishop. Trans. Wang Ching-hsi. Hong Kong: World Today Press, 1965. New ed., 1972.

O Pioneers!, Trans. Tong Hsin-mei. Taipei: Cheng Wen Press, 1967; Hong Kong: World Today Press, 1975.

My Ántonia. Trans. Su Hsueh-yin. Taiching: Tong Hai Press, 1968.

My Ántonia. Trans. Tong Hsin-mei. Taipei: Cheng Wen Press, 1977.

A Lost Lady. Trans. Ch'en Ch'ang-tuo. Taipei: Cheng Wen Press, 1969.

Translations of Cather's stories, novellas and Cather criticism in anthologies of literature or in literary periodicals: (Translations of stories collections in Section One not included.)

"Tom Outland's Story." Trans. Li Wenjun in *Selected American Short Stories*, ed. Wang Zuoliang (Beijing: China Youth Press, 1980).

"Critical Reflections on Willa Cather," by Katherine Anne Porter. Trans. Zhang Yosong in *American Literature Series*, 2, 1981.

"Neighbour Rosicky." Trans. Fu Taotao in *American Literature Series*, 2, 1981.

"Neighbour Rosicky." Trans. Nieh Hualing in *The Unlighted Lamp and Other Stories*, ed. Nieh Hualing (Beijing: Beijing Press, 1981).

"Neighbour Rosicky." Trans. Gong Yi in *Foreign Literatures*, 11, 1983.

"Nanette." Trans. Qian Bing-su. In *Recent American Short Stories*, ed. Song Zhaolin. Hangzhou: Zhejiang People's Press, 1982.

"A Death in the Desert." Trans. Ding Jiu in *Guangzhou Translated Literature*, 4, 1982.

"Paul's Case." Trans. Lu Jin in *Hundred Flower Islet*, 6, 1982.

"A Gold Slipper." Trans. Yang Yi in *Hundred Flower Islet*, 6, 1982.

"A Sculptor's Funeral." Trans. Zhang Yujiu in *World Literature and Art*, 3, 1983.

A Lost Lady. Trans. Dong Hengxun in *Foreign Literatures Quarterly*, 4, 1983.

"The Garden Lodge." Trans. Xue Hongshi in *Selected Short Stories by American Women Writers*, ed. Zhu Hong. Beijing: Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) Press, 1983.

"A Wagner Matinee." Trans. Huang Mei in *Selected Short Stories by American Women Writers*, ed. Zhu Hong. Beijing: CASS Press, 1983.

"A Wagner Matinee." Trans. Tang Tianyi in *Guangzhou Translated Literature*, 10, 1983.

"The Best Years." Trans. Mao Huafen and Sun Xinzhaoh in *Contemporary Foreign Literatures*, 1, 1986.

My Mortal Enemy. Trans. Qian Qing in *Foreign Literatures*, 1, 1986.

"The Strategy of the Were-Wolf Dog." Trans. Xiao Liming in *Appreciating Foreign Literatures*, 2, 1986.

Critical essays on Cather (in Chinese):

"Willa Cather's Pursuit of Spiritual Values," by Xie Lihong

in *American Literature Series*, 2, 1983.

"Willa Cather," by Dong Hengxun in *Foreign Literatures Quarterly*, 1984.

"Willa Cather and *My Mortal Enemy*," by Qian Qing in *Foreign Literatures*, 1, 1986.

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Kronborg as Orpheus: A Tragic Dimension of *The Song of the Lark*

By ROBERT HENIGAN

On the eve of twenty-year-old Thea Kronborg's departure for Germany to study voice with Lilli Lehmann, Fred Ottenburg picks up from her open trunk the score of Gluck's *Orpheus* that Herr Wunsch gave to Thea during her thirteenth summer, not long before his ignominious flight from Moonstone. Fred reads the

inscription written in purple ink on the title page:

*Einst, O Wunder! —
A. Wunsch.
Moonstone, Colo.*

September 30, 18-- (120)

After a flash of jealousy, perhaps realizing he has not shared all of Thea's life, Fred sings to himself:

*Einst, O Wunder! entblüht auf
meinen Grabe,
Eine Blume der Asche meines
Herzens.* (463)²

(Someday, O wonder, on my grave will blossom/A flower from the embers of my heart. [my translation]). At the time, Wunsch told Thea that "in ten years she would either know what the inscription meant, or she would not have the least idea, in which case it didn't matter." (120)

At the end of the first piano lesson in *The Song of the Lark*, Wunsch asks his twelve-year-old pupil to sing a hymn he has heard her sing in church. As she ends with the words "Earth has no sorrow that Heaven cannot heal," he remarks that that is good to remember, though he himself cannot believe it (36). After she is gone, he remembers the dashed hopes of his life, for himself and for his students. But now he begins to feel his "old enemy" hope returning. Wunsch (whose name means wish or desire) is "tempted to hope" for Thea, a dangerous wish for him whose life is disappointment (37). But she is different from other American girls he has tried to teach because she will not dodge her "enemy" difficulty and because she has that secret something inside. On her thirteenth birthday, following the piano lesson, he teaches her the Liszt-Heine lied "*Im leuchtenden Sommermorgen*" and tells her that if she wishes to become a singer, she must learn German, and if she learns many *lieder*, she will know German (93-96). And if she knows many *lieder*, she will surely recognize "*Einst, O Wunder!*"

The previous Christmas, Thea learned from Wunsch of Gluck's opera *Orpheus*, whose story she knows. He taught her the hero's famous lament for his lost bride, "*Ach, ich habe sie verloren . . . Euridice, Euridice*" [more familiar in the Italian "*Che farò senza, Euridice*"] (89-90) — "Alas, I have lost my Eurydice." From

the invention of opera in the late sixteenth century, composers have been drawn to the story of this archetypal artist — poet, composer, lyrist, singer — who lost Eurydice but won her from death by his art, on condition that he not look upon her until they reach the world of light. But he could not control his love and fear, and looked and lost her forever. In some versions of the myth, Orpheus is torn to bits by Thracian women.

The first great opera, Claudio Monteverdi's *La Favola d'Orfeo* (1607), softens the tragedy when Apollo takes pity on his son and raises him to eternal bliss in heaven.³ The first modern opera, Christoph Willibald Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, produced in Vienna on October 5, 1762, was written for a male contralto (a *castrato*). The opera ends happily when the god of love prevents Orpheus from stabbing himself and restores Eurydice to him. Gluck rewrote the opera for Paris, 2 August 1774, adding ballets and transposing the lead role for tenor because no *castrato* was available. The most important nineteenth-century revival of Gluck's opera was also in Paris, 19 November 1859 (Loewenberg 311-39). Hector Berlioz drew upon both the Vienna and Paris versions and again transposed the part of Orpheus, this time for the female contralto Pauline Viardot-Garcia, the "very great" but "ugly" *Spanisch* alto for whom, Wunsch tells Thea, the opera was written, the singer of those he has heard who is the most "*künstlerisch*," the most artistic or artist-like (89-93).

Richard Giannone has stated that the music and myth of Gluck's opera "contain . . . the symbolic locus" of *The Song of the Lark* (88). This locus was earlier defined by Joseph Kerman: "the fundamental conflict" in the Orpheus myth "is the problem of emotion [passion] and its control." Orpheus, by mastery of his art, expresses

such emotional intensity that he can, for a time, overcome death; but he lacks control over his human feelings necessary to keep Eurydice. As Kerman says wryly, "Life and art are not necessarily one" (28).

Giannone seems to say that Thea as Kronborg, having made her life and art almost identical, has "solve[d] the crisis of life" (90). I suggest that Thea has not solved the conflict of passion and control and that, therefore, it is mistaken to speak unreservedly of "the full tide of her success" (Daiches 34), a success "even a small-town intelligence would recognize" (Sergeant 136), "her operatic triumph in New York" (Woodress 166), her name's being "synonymous with musical greatness" (Gerber 86), or "The culmination of Thea's artistic career" (Moseley 29).

In 1913 Willa Cather wrote an article about three American prima donnas, Louise Homer, Geraldine Farrar, and Olive Fremstad. She said that Homer, in the 1909-1910 revival of Gluck's *Orpheus*, "achieved the highest success in her career" singing "perhaps the most beautiful music ever written for contralto voice" (36)⁴. (Her language is echoed by Wunsch: "There is no such beautiful melody in the world" [90].) Cather congratulated Homer's children for having a mother who so well managed house and nursery in addition to her career (34). But obviously Mme. Homer did not give herself undividedly to art. The beautiful and popular Geraldine Farrar is quoted as saying, "I have learned that talents have limitations. . . . I do not long to, nor do I believe I can, climb frozen heights like the great [Lilli] Lehmann" (42). That distinction is given to Olive Fremstad, who said, "My work is only for serious people. If you ever really find anything in art, it is so subtle and so beautiful that — well, you need never be afraid any one will take it away from

you, for chances are nobody will ever know you've got it" (42). This description of serious art is paraphrased by Thea when she tells Dr. Archie, "that one strives for in art is so far away, so beautiful . . . that there's nothing one can say about it" (551).

Throughout her life in the novel, Thea is influenced and assisted by people who, like John Berryman's Henry, have "suffered an irreversible loss" ([vii]), which art cannot undo but may make, if only for a moment, bearable. I have mentioned Wunsch's losses and frustrations that lead him to drunkenness and violence. The last Thea hears of him, he is in Concord, Kansas, described by Ray Kennedy as "a jumping-off place, no town at all," but the white dove and the blue forget-me-nots on Thea's birthday card suggest he has found some peace at last in Concord (135). The chivalrous, hard-working Ray Kennedy who believes railroad men are "watched over" (153), detests resignation, pins his future on a lucky strike of gold or oil, but cannot beat the odds against railroad men. Romantic Dr. Archie wonders why he is in Moonstone, trapped in a hopeless marriage and having only a teen-aged girl to talk to. Spanish Johnny, the wandering minstrel, suffers inexplicable bouts of madness, during which he disappears for months. Andor Harsanyi, whom Susan Rosowski well describes as "the weary artist" (63), though about to debut at Carnegie Hall, is happy only when he hears Thea sing. Fred Ottenbrug, the informed amateur musician, is successful in business but has, in a hasty marriage, ruined his young life.

If these men smooth Thea's progress, make possible her career, she is not without painful knowledge of life. She early experiences the drudgery of domesticity and observes that not all marriages are made in heaven. She discovers her nat-

ural enemies. And she knows, first hand, illness, loneliness, despair, envy, hypocrisy, violence, and death. When Fred asks her if she got some of her ideas from Panther Canyon, she replies in an Orphic note, "Oh, yes! Out of the rocks, out of the dead people . . . They taught me the inevitable hardness of life. No artist gets far who doesn't know that" (554).

Another aspect of Thea's Orphic nature is suggested by the myth of Orpheus and the career of Gluck's hero as *castrato*, tenor, and contralto, sexual ambivalence, or perhaps androgyny. As Susan Rosowski has pointed out, there is in Thea's life a reversal of sex roles, especially between her and Ray and Fred. We meet Thea as a beautiful, pre-pubescent girl-child in Dr. Archie's arms. We watch her enter her teen years "shaken by a passionate excitement" at having discovered she is "different" (99), yet simultaneously wishing herself a sandhill, to change only as wind and light dictate. We later observe her passage by water into full womanhood, erotic and aesthetic, in Panther Canyon, from which she emerges newly born, as she was once resurrected from Ray Kennedy's Avernus-like "hole in the earth" (272). We learn — discreetly — of her sexual initiation in Mexico, and we hear her refuse to become a "kept" woman. We hear the singer who may be metamorphosed on the stage of the opera house — tempting Venus, saintly Elizabeth, innocent Elsa, wise Fricka, and heroic Sieglinde. We observe the almost sexless incipient prima donna, without personal life, but not with personality (441), that individuation we associate with Nietzsche's Apollonian attitude towards life and art. But in her hard-won artistry, she has not lost her Dionysian element, her artist's secret that Harsanyi calls "passion" (570).⁵

To become a great artist in the Orphic tradition, Thea must combine artistic control with her natural passion. But to do this, to pay the debt her talent, her opportunities, and the Ancient People impose upon her, she must accept the loss of her own Eurydice.

In Chicago, having lost her childhood, her home town, her family, Wunsch, and Ray, she wonders what is to become of her. Considering the horror of "wasting away" like the girl on the train, she thinks, "Suppose there were such a dark hole open for her, between tonight and that place she was to meet herself?" (273). And as she prepares to leave for Germany, she believes that "if she failed now, she would lose her soul." After failure, there were only the "abysses of wretchedness" she had seen in Wunsch, "for she could still hear the old man playing in the snowstorm, 'Ach, ich habe sie verloren!'" (466).

Ten years later, a successful singer in Europe and a year-old veteran of the Metropolitan Opera, Thea has become Kronborg, a *diva*, a public goddess. Conventional wisdom says all is well. In fact, in 1932 Cather had come to see Thea as a "successful artist in the full tide of achievement" (Preface, *The Song of the Lark*). In 1896 she had protested against the system that created operatic superstars: "In Europe these prima donnas are singers living that they may achieve; in America they are adventuresses singing to make a fortune" (Slote 13). But that same year she realized that "There are a thousand people who see in Carmen all that Calvé does. There are a thousand who have dreamed *Alastors* and *Endymions*, but, ah, to sing it, to say it! It is an awful and fearsome thing, that short voyage from the brain to the hand, and many a gleaming argosy of thought has gone down in it forever" (Slote 416-17). The price of artistic eminence, Thea

admits to Dr. Archie, is the forfeiting of personal life; art "takes you up, and uses you, and spins you out; and that is your life" (546). The frozen heights are lonely and fraught with danger. But like old Fritz Kohler who "had learned to lose without struggle" (123), Thea tells Fred, "I've only a few friends, but I can lose every one of them, if it has to be. I learned to lose when my mother died" (559).⁶

Although Kronborg has a cultivated voice, not merely Thea's "nature-voice," it is a delicate, a fragile instrument, inextricable from the singer herself. Fred has told Thea, "A voice is not an instrument that's found ready-made. A voice is a personality. It can be as big as a circus and as common as dirt" (441). "Voices are accidental things," Thea tells Dr. Archie. The gift, the talent, the training are nothing if not informed by intelligence. Twice Thea speaks bitterly of the woman who sang Ortrud in *Lohengrin*: big-voiced, vulgar, stupid, coarse, but popular as Mme. Necker, "who's a great artist," though losing her voice (523, 550). Depending on training, technique, care, and sheer luck, the voice may last for many years, as in the case of Ernestine Schumann-Heinke who sang at the Metropolitan from 1899 to 1932, or it may be gone tomorrow. Thea wishes Fred could hear her "sing well, just once" (544), but the quality of her singing is adversely affected by a management that contracts too many singers and forces them to sing roles out of their range; by conductors who schedule exhausting rehearsals before performances; and by jealous, uncooperative colleagues, whom Thea holds in contempt. She is able to retain her standards of performance because she "cares" (555), but as Fred reminds her, "It's how long you're able to keep it up that tells the story" (556).

When Dr. Archie first hears Kronborg in *Lohengrin*, she is "a woman he had never known" (500), and when he sees her after the performance, she looks to him forty years old (503). We learn from Fred that Thea sang Elsa that day, a part not suited to her voice, because the scheduled singer had a bad throat (507). Awakening the day after *Lohengrin*, Thea dreads the "sense of futility" she experiences after a great effort (513), because audiences do not want everything, only "just about eighty degrees." Then she remembers that Dr. Archie is coming and is "reminded . . . of disappointments and losses" (514). She knows he will see what she has lost, but be oblivious to what she has gained (514). To prepare herself, she partakes of a ritual bath, reminiscent of the one in Panther Canyon, where, one day, the stream and the broken pottery came together and revealed to her that art is not an object or a performance but "an effort to make a sheath, a mould in which to imprison for a moment the shining, elusive element which is life itself — life hurrying past us and running away . . ." This Keatsian view of art is then related to Parsifal's quest for the Grail: "In singing, one made a vessel of one's throat and nostrils and held it on one's breath, caught the stream in a scale of natural intervals" (378).

The night before her first American *Walküre*, her first scheduled Sieglinde, Thea is unhappy. Her respected colleague, Mme. Necker, has become hostile; Thea has had a bad supper; she has lost her temper about trivial things; she has a sore throat, and she is terrified she won't be able to sleep if she goes to bed. Once again she turns to her bath, which "induced pleasant reflections and a feeling of well-being," unconsciously associated with her discovery of the connection between broken pottery and life,

the importance of the artistic impulse, the drive toward the beautiful. She is now pleased that Dr. Archie is in New York and that Fred is mature and successful: "Any success was good. She herself had made a good start" (564), but as she told Dr. Archie earlier, art is striving for the impossible, the beautiful, the inexpressible: "I haven't reached it yet, by a long way" (552).

Besides preserving her health and energy, caring for her voice, and continuing to "care" in the face of many obstacles, Thea faces other abysses, not least the audience. Before telling Fred and Dr. Archie that she at last will get to sing Sieglinde, she half bitterly, half playfully remarks, "I don't see why people go to the opera, anyway . . . I suppose they get something, or think they do" (542). Thea's first experience with an audience came when she was twelve, playing the piano to a packed Moonstone opera house. Many in that audience were friendly to her, including Spanish Johnny and his wife, but the Christmas program created "a not very Christmas rivalry" between two churches (75). The experience was so painful, Thea almost stopped taking piano lessons from Herr Wunsch. By the time she gets to New York, she can ignore opera-goers like Fred's wife, who "ridiculed . . . the singers they had heard the night before" (415). Some like Dr. Archie believe that, as they lack knowledge of music, Thea's singing will be lost on them. Fred assures him that "She gets across to people who aren't judges . . . If you were stone deaf, it wouldn't all be wasted" (482). Thea, like Orpheus, can move stones, too. When she expresses a wish to be back in Dresden, she explains, "In New York everything is impersonal. Your audience never knows its own mind, and its mind is never twice the same" (522). We may infer an audience without cultural roots, subject to whims of

critics and the cult of personalities, an audience lacking the conviction of European provincials, an audience often more concerned with being seen than seeing.

The tone of the novel becomes almost cynical when Thea is announced to replace the "indisposed Madame Gloeckler." The announcement is met with great applause from the upper balconies where the poor and the young opera lovers are seated or standing. Fred explains to Dr. Archie that those "down here" have "dined too well." By "down here," he does not mean only the orchestra seats, but more particularly the thirty-five boxes of the Diamond Horseshoe held by stockholders and arbiters of society; the Grand Tier; the Dress Circle and, perhaps, even the Balcony. Far above is the Family Circle, from which only one-quarter of the seats have a view of the stage (Kolodin 49-79). It is from this "top gallery" that Spanish Johnny joins with others of Thea's supporters for her Sieglinde. Thus, "Thea Kronborg's friends, old and new, seated about the house on different floors and levels, enjoyed her triumph according to their natures" (572). During the performance of *Die Walküre* and between acts, we observe and overhear reactions to Kronborg's performance, responses shallow and profound, but none is more important than that of the "grey-haired little Mexican." Although the exhausted singer is blind to all who crowd around the stage door, if she "was wondering what was the good of it all," the smile on his face, "would have answered her. It is the only commensurate answer" (573).

In the Epilogue, we view Thea's continuing career as Kronborg through Aunt Tillie's eyes. We may be reminded that, like Tillie, we view the successful artist as having "just happened," not as the product of a long, arduous mental, emotion-

al, and physical struggle. We do not count the cost because we do not know the cost. We applaud and shout *brava* as if the great performance were as natural as a flower bursting into bloom on the springtime prairie. Nor do we remember how fragile the blossom, how brief its beauty — beauty, as Keats said, "that must die."

NOTES

¹This is the piano-vocal score of *Orpheus: Oper in drei Akten*, with text translated into German by Alfred Dörrfel, published in Leipzig in 1866.

²This *lied*, composed by Beethoven (opus 46, 1795-96), entitled "Adelaide" (*la-dèl-a-iy-dæl*), is a setting of a poem by Friedrich von Matthiesson. The text with translation is printed in *The Fischer-Diskau Book of Lieder* (37). The poem, in theme and imagery, resembles Virgil's account of Orpheus after his second loss of Eurydice, *Georgics* IV. 506-20. In the poem, the lonely speaker wanders through a spring garden, seeing images of his beloved in flowers, trees, the sea, mountain snow, clouds, and stars; the breeze, waving grass, splashing water, and nightingale sing her name. In the final stanza he foresees a miraculous phoenix-like metamorphosis: every purple leaf of the flower will show her name.

³The earliest extant operas are two settings of *L'Euridice* by the Florentine poet Ottavio Rinuccini, by Jacopo Peri in 1600 and by Giulio Caccini in 1602. Rinuccini avoided the tragic ending by omitting any condition for Eurydice's release from the underworld.

⁴Willa Cather may have attended the first performance on 23 December 1909, with Homer as Orpheus, Johanna Gadski as Eurydice, and young Alma Gluck as the Happy Shade. The conductor was Arturo Toscanini, and the set and costumes were designed by Puvvis de Cha-

vannes (Kolodin 213-14). She did not attend the Sunday evening concert performance of Monteverdi's *Orfeo* in April 1912 because she had gone to Arizona.

⁵Ann Moseley, taking her terms from Suzanne Langer, classifies each major character as either "Apollonian" or "Dionysian."

⁶This view of learning to lose is beautifully captured by Elizabeth Bishop in her villanelle "One Art" (40-41).

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The Literary Endeavor of Willa Cather (As Inspired by Joan Crane's Bibliography)

By JACK COLLINS

Joan Crane's valuable and long awaited bibliography of the published writings of Willa Cather sets the scholarly imprimatur on the large corpus of critical articles, short stories, poetry, and longer fiction produced by the distinguished American literary figure between her college years in the early 1890s and her death in 1947 in her 74th year. Her output staggers us. Joan Crane lists 595 articles, reviews, and essays alone, all but thirty of them published before 1903, in newspapers and magazines (college, literary, and illustrated monthly). Between 1892 and the year or two preceding her death, she wrote 62 short stories, more than forty of which appeared before she published her first novel in 1912. The 23 separate publications that comprise her major work include two volumes of poetry, four collections of stories, the ghost written *Autobiography of S. S. McClure* (1914), a book of essays on writers and writing, and twelve novels.

Correlated with continuities over periods of time within the author's life, these figures indicate: a career as a cultural critic, particularly as a theater, music, and opera reviewer, from her college years through the year she went to work at *McClure's* magazine in New York (1906); a career as a short story writer which be-

gan at the University of Nebraska and which resulted in the publication of two collections, *The Troll Garden* (1905) and the breathtaking *Youth and the Bright Medusa* (1920) by the time she had fully embarked on writing longer fiction; and a career as a novelist, during which time she abandoned salaried work at *McClure's* in order to devote all her energy to writing fiction (1912-1947). Aside from her research and editorial work for S. S. McClure, she had, by 1912, written for newspapers in Lincoln, Nebraska, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and had taught high school for five years in the latter city.

Given the varied directions her professional life had taken before she even turned forty, Willa Cather must have felt particularly gratified that her novels were well received once she took the plunge. *One of Ours* (1922) won her the Pulitzer Prize. From the publication data that Crane's bibliography makes available, we can ascertain that from *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) onward, her novels enjoyed enormous popular success. That novel had sold about 266,000 copies by 1978, for example. *Shadows on the Rock* (1931) had sold about 300,000 by 1977, and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940) almost 285,000 by 1976. Her all-time best seller

My Ántonia (1918) had sold more than 660,000 copies by 1981, nearly half a million of these between 1937 and 1981, and nearly 50,000 between 1926 and 1937, when she was at the height of her powers and her fame.

Such statistical information illuminates both the achievement and the popularity of a writer who did not even turn to longer narrative until she had reached her late thirties. But in the same way that a dictionary, if one allows oneself to get lost in it, can lead a reader in circles around huge curiosities and gaps where language does not fit life exactly, this bibliography emphasizes by omission certain curious features of Willa Cather's personal and literary lives. For example, the list of "Personal Letters, Statements, and Quotations, Printed or Reproduced" is extremely short (15 items). Only five adaptations of her fiction exist on film (two movie versions of her novel *A Lost Lady* [1923], a PBS version of the story "Paul's Case" [1905], one of "Jack-a-Boy," and excerpts read from three novels in the educational film *Willa Cather's America*). A musical drama adapted from the story "Eric Hermannson's Soul" (1900), which premiered at the University of Nebraska in 1979 represents the single theatrical version of her fiction. Finally, there is no mention of the last, unfinished novel that the writer was working on during the 1940s.

The reasons for these omissions are not themselves difficult to ascertain, but once we account for the gaps, further, more provocative questions arise. Few letters have appeared in print because Willa Cather retrieved and burned a great many in the years before she died, and forbade in her will publication of or quotation from any letters after her death. Few films have been made because following an authorized version of *A Lost Lady* by Warner Brothers in 1924

which did not satisfy her, and an unauthorized version by the same company of the same novel in 1934 which infuriated her, she directed in her will "that none of her books may ever be dramatized, broadcast or televised or used in any other medium in existence or discoverable in the future." As for the unfinished novel, which was to have been called *Hard Punishments* and set in medieval Avignon, Edith Lewis destroyed the manuscript after Cather's death, leaving nothing to be published that Crane could list. Without delving into the motivations behind the writer's adamant wishes and extreme actions with respect to controlling access to her private life and versions of her fictions in other media, we sense certain mysteries here that establish a large distance between the writer herself and the critical and popular readership which has so admired her work.

Truman Capote's "Conversational Portrait" of Willa Cather in *Music for Chameleons* reveals some unusual things about her — her friendship with Yukio Mishima, for example. At the same time, unusual for the later Capote, he intrudes very little on the private self behind the eyes ("blue, the pale brilliant cloudless blue of prairie skies") which "rather mesmerized" him when he met her in 1942. These eyes and the writer's face still mesmerize, in the *Pictorial Memoir* published by University of Nebraska Press in 1974, in the article on Willa Cather that appeared last summer in *National Geographic*, in the portrait by Leon Bakst (1923) that hangs in the Omaha Public Library, and in the famous photographs by Edward Steichen (1927) and by Carl Van Vechten (1936). Whether she appears dressed as a boy, hair closely cropped, in pictures taken during her teens, or whether she shows up in later photographs as the only woman among a group of men (New

York writers, celebrities honored with doctorates by Princeton), or whether her face alone gazes out at the camera, one senses an absolute clarity of expression masking an enigma within.

In this respect, photographic images of her communicate a haunting quality similar to pictures of Georgia O'Keeffe, whose husband Alfred Stieglitz photographed her in a now famous series, and whom Van Vechten photographed the same year he did Willa Cather, in 1936. The clear eyes and facial expressions of each artist are heart-stopping: but what is the clarity of, exactly? Despite the popularity of each woman's work, despite biographies and memoirs of each woman's life, both retain their privacy and remain solitary, an ideal state in the twentieth century but relatively unusual in the age of information.

These two women have more in common than the qualities they project in photographs, although it remains unclear whether they knew each other. Both produced art of great originality and extraordinary quality at a time when American high culture remained virtually closed to women. Born near Winchester, Virginia, the writer moved with her family at the age of nine to the prairie of south-

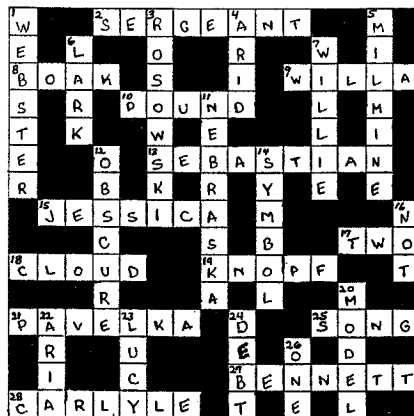
western Nebraska. The painter's early life reverses this movement, in that, born in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, she moved with her family at the age of fifteen to Williamsburg, Virginia. Although Cather was born fourteen years before O'Keeffe, each woman made a journey to the American Southwest that transformed her vision and her art at about the same time of life. At 39, Willa traveled to Arizona to visit her brother and saw Walnut Canyon near Flagstaff and the Grand Canyon; three years later she visited Mesa Verde and Taos with Edith Lewis, her companion for the last four decades of her life. At 42, Georgia went to Taos and stayed with Mabel Dodge Luhan, subsequently returning to New Mexico every summer to paint until Stieglitz died, when she moved permanently to Abiquiu.

This fascination with the Southwest developed from various sources in the life of each artist, and produced varying impacts on and within their work, but the coincidence is striking, as is the connection with Mabel Luhan, whose cottage Willa Cather rented in 1925 and whose Native American husband Tony appears in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* both as the Navaho Eusabio and the rancher Manuel Lujon. Unlike so many writers, Cather got on cordially with Mrs. Lawrence. She spent two delightful afternoons with the Lawrences in 1924 at her Bank Street apartment in New York, and then visited the British writer on his ranch outside Taos during the 1925 sojourn in New Mexico. Cather also admired one of the fictions Lawrence wrote in response to that area of the world, *The Woman Who Rode Away* (1928).

All three of these artists found in the Southwest both a physical and an imaginative refuge from life in metropolitan centers of culture like New York, London, or Paris. The stunning geogra-

Answers to Cather Puzzle, #2

by ROBERT H. KURTH



phy of the region accounts for much of the inspiration and stimulation, particularly with respect to the work of O'Keeffe. For Cather and for Lawrence, the pre-American, even pre-Western civilization of the region, present in the form of prehistoric Anasazi cliff cities and contemporary Hopi and Navaho art and ritual, provided a certain relief from the modern urban and industrial development that each writer rejected. The search for mythic intensity led both writers toward "primitive" life in the sense that non-Western cultural forms and pre-twentieth century patterns of life offered something pristine, unspoiled, and harmonious to the modern artist and, by extension, to those who understood and appreciated his or her work.

This longing for a better time than the present underlies Cather's famous assertion, in the Prefatory Note to her collection of essays *Not Under Forty* (1936) that "the world broke in two in 1922 or thereabout." Her disgust with American values during the war and the years afterward premeates *One of Ours*, published in 1922, whose misunderstood and thwarted young hero is presented as better off killed in battle than spared to return home to further disillusionment. Her late story "The Old Beauty," written the same year *Not Under Forty* appeared in print, and set in 1922, evokes a genteel and gracious standard of perspective and behavior shattered forever by the war. Two other events that took place in 1922 have a certain retrospective value with respect to Cather's imagination and achievement, however she herself registered their impact: the uncovering of Tutankhamen's tomb and the publication of James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Three of Cather's novels assert the primary importance of the hidden tombs, hidden cities, and ancient culture of the mesas and canyons of the Southwest: *The Song of the Lark* (1915),

The Professor's House (1925), and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. These cities and cultures mean different things to the characters they affect. But underlying each impact one senses the absolute appeal of the ancient and the alien underlying contemporary existence. Cather subsequently shifted her attention from pre-Christian cities to the story of the Church, in *Shadows on the Rock*, set in Quebec in the eighteenth century, and in the unfinished last novel, set in Papal Avignon in the fourteenth. However, although she concerns herself with Catholic mythology and ritual in these later works, her primary interest remains focused on the way human structures, whether cliff dwellings or cathedrals, survive through time. Viewed from this perspective, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, which brings together the Christian and the non-Christian, becomes an important transitional work.

As for Joyce's great literary experiment, *Ulysses* divided the world in two in much the same way that Willa Cather perceived it as having broken in two. He and other artists who exiled themselves in Paris experimented so radically with traditional artforms that many figures, both established and in the process of establishing themselves, became somehow instantly old fashioned. Gertrude Stein, for example, will always represent the modern age to the few who actually read her thoroughly and to the many who celebrate her eccentricities and innovations. By contrast Willa Cather, like Somerset Maugham, still suggests Victorian times, though like him she wrote her best novels in the 1920s and 1930s.

Like Georgia O'Keeffe and D. H. Lawrence, Willa Cather remained relatively isolated throughout her mature years from the movements and circles that tend to define both the

direction culture seems to be taking and the taste with which culture is to be appreciated. O'Keeffe by and large rejected both the style and the subject matter of the Precisionist artists of the 1920s who transformed American art. Fortunately, Stieglitz understood her work and promoted it. Lawrence wandered the world after the war without ever finding or founding a circle or a permanent resting place. Although Cather enjoyed significant popular success from the late 1920s onward, critics of the time, while admiring her work, found it difficult to categorize. One reviewer of *My Mortal Enemy* (1926), one of Capote's favorites, comments: "In the first place, this is not a novel. In the second place, it is one of the most superb pieces of literary endeavor this reviewer has ever read, regardless of language or nation."

In her well known letter to *The Commonwealth* in 1927 concerning the writing of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Cather herself alludes to the many reviewers who "assert vehemently that it is not a novel," preferring herself to call it "a narrative." Unlike Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf, who both married critics and who, in Woolf's case, belonged to a brilliant and articulate circle of artists who could both appreciate and promote her experimental fiction, Willa Cather had to go it alone to a much greater extent.

Her work is very experimental. The novels celebrated as pictures of America in an historical sense — *O Pioneers!* (1913), *My Antonia*, *One of Ours*, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* — are each breakthroughs or experiments from a literary perspective. The more personal and idiosyncratic lesser known works — *Alexander's Bridge* (1912), *The Song of the Lark*, *A Lost Lady*, *The Professor's House*, *My Mortal Enemy*, and *Lucy Gayheart* (1935) — represent a core

achievement of a quality comparable to Woolf's astonishing fiction from *Jacob's Room* (1922) to *The Waves* (1931). Cather herself, commenting on her first two novels, points out that she moved American fiction out of the "drawing room" where her immediate predecessors Henry James and Edith Wharton had written so comfortably. More important even than effecting this shift in appropriate setting and subject matter for the American novel, Cather thought and heard literature much the same way Woolf did. We perceive her originality in this regard if we consider the importance of visual thinking and of voice in her fiction writing.

Cather's preoccupation with actual pictures suggested the titles of both *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (taken from a woodcut in Holbein's *Dance of Death*) and *The Song of the Lark* (taken from a painting by Jules Breton which she saw at the Chicago Art Institute). In the famous story "Paul's Case" the moment of death for the protagonist occurs when and "because the picture making mechanism was crushed." Commenting to a reporter of the time on the writing of *One of Ours*, Cather refers to the way her mind works in describing her main character's thought processes: "I have cut out all picture-making because that boy does not see pictures. It was hard to cease to do the thing that I do best, but . . . because I was willing to pay so much to write about this boy I felt that I had a right to do so."

"Picture-making" is, of course, the very foundation of metaphor and of figurative writing, so characteristic of Cather's style. In addition, she conceived the subjects and the structures of her novels in pictorial terms. For example, she refers to her first novel *Alexander's Bridge* as a "studio picture." For Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, she visualizes the heroine of *My Antonia*

as "a rare object in the middle of a table, which one may examine from all sides." In 1921 she describes *A Lost Lady*, her novel-in-progress, in terms of still life: ". . . Just as if I put here on the table a green vase, and beside it a yellow orange. Now these two things affect each other. Side by side, they produce a reaction which neither of them produce alone." The two narratives of *The Professor's House* she compares to interior foreground and exterior background planes in Dutch painting. The nine books of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* she models on the series of frescoes in the Pantheon by Puvis de Chavannes depicting the life of Saint Genevieve. In *Shadows on the Rock* she tries to render in prose "a series of pictures remembered rather than experienced."

What is most original about all this is that her visual way of thinking enables her to perceive fictional structures spatially. The planes in her pictures, as it were, can be blocks of narrative. Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) makes virtuoso use of such a conception of narrative. Yet the central panel of narrative "Tom Outland's Story" in *The Professor's House*, a work virtually obscure in comparison to Woolf's novel, achieves the same effect as the famous "Time Passes" two years before Woolf presents her own experiment to the public.

The aspect of fiction known as voice, which Woolf manipulates so brilliantly in *The Waves*, has an unusual quality in Cather's work from the beginning, exposed constantly as she was to the human voice in the oratory, theater, and opera she reviewed. Her fictional autobiography and portrait of the development of an artist, *The Song of the Lark*, traces the steps by which Thea Kronborg finds and develops her voice in the course of becoming a famous opera singer. By the mid-1920s, Cather pulls off a breathtaking experi-

ment in the central section of *The Professor's House* just alluded to. The voice that tells "Tom Outland's Story" is that of a young man long dead who never appears in the main narrative of the novel. In the short novel immediately following this work, *My Mortal Enemy*, the central character Myra Henshawe gives utterance to her anger and anguish with the intensity of a voice from Poe's repertoire. Finally, in its authorial or narratorial dimension, we must consider the rich, sad, soothing, impersonal voice of the writer herself, which deepens as her fiction progresses through five decades, a voice compassionate, comfortless, surprised at no enormity, thrilled at the possibility of beauty, inured to the persistence of dread. This distinctive voice encompasses the religious and the elegiac tones. Though we seldom hear it these days, it is one of the oldest voices in literature. In the *Aeneid*, for instance, it renders *lachrymae rerum*, the tears of things.

Among her predecessors, Willa Cather admired Poe enough to choose his work as the subject of her commencement address to the university literary society. She called him the author of "the first perfect short stories in the English language." Of Flaubert's works, she found *Salambo* her favorite; her later work in fact reminds one of the Flaubert of *Trois Contes*. Among her contemporaries, she singled out Katherine Mansfield for her virtuosity in rendering "the secret accords and antipathies which lie hidden under our everyday behaviour."

Willa Cather's less popular novels are all about such secrets and antipathies, though this undercurrent of dread, even paranoia, is seldom commented upon, obscured by her choice of popular subjects like pioneers and heroic Catholic priests or by her particularly exquisite depic-

tions of various American landscapes. Yet many of the stories which form narrative blocks in her longer fiction are ferocious in the suffering they describe and express. Her projected last novel *Hard Punishments* seems to have been conceived in this darker tone. She imagined it as the story of a friendship between two young men who have suffered grotesquely, set against the background of the Avignon Papacy in 1340. The *Hard Punishments* of the title evoke the cruelty of Pasolini's adaptations for cinema of Chaucer, Boccaccio *The Arabian Nights*, and de Sade, in that one character would have had his tongue torn out with red hot pincers for "blasphemy" and the other his hands permanently broken for stealing by being strung up by his thumbs.

Georgia O'Keeffe expressed such darker aspects of mortality in her skulls and crosses, wordlessly, while Edward Hopper captured a peculiarly American dread in his lonely houses next to the railroad tracks and sunlit empty buildings in the early morning. Willa Cather thought in pictures, but wrote in words, so that her images speak as well as appear to imagination's eye. Whether her distinctive voice sings of the freshly revealed landscape of the present or of the hidden riches of the past, of her characters' small heroisms or of their bitter reverses and agonizing degradations, this voice in her fiction is perhaps our best clue to the enigma behind those clear, sky-blue eyes that mesmerized Truman Capote: eyes that have seen everything and still see beauty, eyes that have seen beauty and still see everything.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Jack Collins, San Francisco, is a lawyer for the Sierra Club and an author.

Ántonia Farm Home Restoration

We wish to report on the planned restoration of the Pavelka (*My Ántonia*) house. The October 1 fund raising dinner has brought in many contributions from people unable to attend.

In consultation with Wendell Frantz of the Nebraska State Historical Society, we decided to secure the house for winter by putting the windows and painting the exterior. In the spring architects from Kansas University at Lawrence will make a detailed drawing of the house as it was in 1916 — at about the time Willa Cather visited Annie Pavelka while she was writing *My Ántonia*.

These plans will be amplified and corrected by talks with Leo Pavelka, Antonette Kort and Elizabeth Boyd, all of whom grew up in that house, and Roxine Pavelka, widow of Emil Pavelka. Roxine, who lived with the family before electricity and plumbing, taught the Prairie Gem School where the Pavelka children attended. In 1931 she had as a pupil six-year-old Mildred Dvoracek, daughter of

Antonette, daughter of Anna Pavelka. Little Mildred asked Miss Latta (Roxine Latta who later married Emil Pavelka) to fix her hair and wash her face and see that she looked all right because Willa Cather was coming to Grandma's house.

In 1931 Cather made her last visit to old friends in Webster County.

The money raised this fall will suffice to secure the exterior. More funds will be needed to restore the rooms to their original contour and location. Many visitors say they do not mind the fact that the house is unfurnished. A real Cather fan can people the house with furniture and children. In time, however, Dr. Frantz feels we could have a floor plan of each room posted to help visitors reconstruct the 1916 furnishings. In our present society, isolated farms fall victim to antique hunters who vandalize deserted homes.

We want to thank all of you who have sent money for this Pavelka house restoration.

Visiting Fellowships for the Academic Year 1989-1990

The Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University, offers short-term fellowships to support visiting scholars pursuing post-doctoral or equivalent research in its collections. The fellowships, which support travel to and from New Haven and pay a living allowance of \$1,000 per month, are designed primarily to provide access to the Library for scholars who reside outside the greater New Haven area. The length of a grant, normally one month, will depend on the applicant's research proposal; fellowships must be taken up between September 1989 and May 1990. Re-

cipients are expected to be in residence during the period of their award and are encouraged to participate in the activities of Yale University.

There is no special application form. Applicants are asked to submit a resume and a brief research proposal (not to exceed three pages) to the Director, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Box 1603A Yale Station, New Haven, Connecticut 06520-1603. The proposal should emphasize the relationship of the Beinecke collections to the project and state the preferred dates of residence. The applicant should also ar-

range to have two confidential letters of recommendation sent to the Director.

One of those selected to receive an award will be named the Donald C. Gallup Fellow in American Literature. There is no special application procedures for this named fellowship.

This announcement contains all of the information necessary to complete the application process.

All application materials must be received by January 15, 1989.

Awards will be announced in March 1989 for the period September 1989 through May 1990.

The Beinecke Library is open for research Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m., throughout the year except Labor Day, Thanksgiving and the following Friday, December 24-January 1, Memorial Day, and July 4.

For more information, write to the director or to the curator most closely associated with your field of study.

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- To promote and assist in the development and preservation of the art, literary, and historical collection relating to the life, time, and work of Willa Cather, in association with the Nebraska State Historical Society.
- To cooperate with the Nebraska State Historical Society in continuing to identify, restore to their original condition, and preserve places made famous by the writing of Willa Cather.
- To provide for Willa Cather a living memorial, through the Foundation, by encouraging and assisting scholarship in the field of the humanities.
- To perpetuate an interest throughout the world in the work of Willa Cather.

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