

Willa cather and the american dream

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Abstrak

ABSTRACT

Willa Cather wrote 12 novels, more than 60 short stories, several poems, and a good number of critical essays. Her writings showed characters from all walks of life, and her settings were in quite different backgrounds and of quite different periods. Her works have never been noisy or self-assertive and yet Willa Cather, as Mildred Bennet said, has not needed a revival in the sense that there has been a Fitzgerald revival, a Sherwood Anderson revival, and a Nathanael West revival. (See Bennet, 1961: vii)

In *The World of Willa Cather*, Mildred Bennet writes that when Charles Poore reviewed her book in 1951, he wrote that there was no need for a Willa Cather revival "the world has never lost its taste for her excellent writing." She believes that the same assertion can be made quite as confidently today: from the response of a new generation of readers it is evident that the taste has been inherited; the flow of critical writing which began shortly after Miss Cather's death shows no sign of slacking off; and in colleges and universities interest in her life and work is decidedly on the increase . . ." (Bennet, 1961: vii).

Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, on her first encounter with the works of Willa Cather said that she had "discovered a genuine, first-class work of American fiction, in which a young woman of prairie background had conceived her world with new eyes and had made of it a work of art . . ." (Sergeant, 1953: 11)

Willa Cather's other biographers have written with much admiration for her works and most of her critics have been generous with their reviews. Even critics who have not seen eye to eye with her have treated her with respect. These critics who have written for and against her have such formidable names like H. L. Mencken, Carl Van Doren, Edmund Wilson, Sinclair Lewis, T. K. Whipple, Joseph Wood Krutch, Rebecca West, E. K. Brown, David Daiches, Elizabeth Moorhead, Louise Bogan, Granville Hicks, Lionel Trilling, Alfred Kazin, Maxwell Geismar, George Schloss, Henry Steele Commager, Morton D. Zabel, Howard Mumford H. Jones, Leon Edel, James Schroeter, and many others. (See Schroeter, 1968).

What is it that pulls so many to Willa Cather? Why has "the world never lost its taste for her excellent writing"? What did Willa Cather "conceive" about her world so much so that she "made of it a work of art"? Upon reading and examining Willa Cather's works, I strongly suggest that the element which attracts most readers to her writing is the "American Dream."

This is the topic I aim to write about in this thesis--Willa Cather and the American Dream. I will show that the works of Willa Cather reflect the American dream, especially the dreams of freedom, success, and the pastoral vision.

