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Summer 2003

## Review of *Willa Cather Remembered* Edited by Sharon Hoover

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Madigan, Mark, "Review of *Willa Cather Remembered* Edited by Sharon Hoover" (2003). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 2406.

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*Willa Cather Remembered*. Edited by Sharon Hoover. Compiled by L. Brent Bohlke and Sharon Hoover. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002. xvi + 218 pp. Illustrations, index. \$45.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

This welcome addition to Willa Cather scholarship is composed of forty-five reminiscences of the author by friends and professional associates documenting key stages of her personal life and literary career. While there is little here that has not been published before, Cather specialists will nonetheless want to add *Willa Cather Remembered* to their libraries. What makes the volume so appealing is that it collects important biographical material previously available only in miscellaneous sources. The legal restriction on publishing or even quoting excerpts from Cather's letters makes schol-

arship such as this all the more important. General readers with an interest in the Great Plains will want the book, too, for over a dozen of the reminiscences focus on Cather's Nebraska years.

Most of the selections were compiled by Cather scholars Bernice Slote and L. Brent Bohlke. The latter envisioned the collection as a successor to his indispensable *Willa Cather In Person: Interviews, Speeches, and Letters* (1986), but was unable to complete the work before his death in 1987. Fortunately for Cather enthusiasts, Sharon Hoover picked up the project where Bohlke left off. Her sure editorial hand is evident in the volume's insightful introduction, sensible organization, and pertinent contextual information. She rightly estimates that the current volume "reflects more on Cather as a person than as a writer, although the two are often inextricably mixed." The recollections are grouped under three headings: "A Lively Apprenticeship," "A Literary Life" (various literary people), and "Friendships." These are prefaced by a concise commentary on the material and biographical notes on the writers, most of whom are now little known.

What emerges most clearly from these pieces is that Cather elicited strong reactions from those who encountered her. As Hoover notes, a few of the reminiscences express "deep resentment" toward Cather for her professional ambitions and personal choices; most, however, "reflect respect" for the author. A former high school student of Cather's in Pittsburgh recalls that her teacher was beloved by many, but "had little patience with the stupid or careless pupil." The same might be said of the stupid or careless adult. Book reviewer Fanny Butcher judged that Cather had "none of the cynic's contempt for mankind, but more the philosopher's wide observation of man and his motives." Violinist Yehudi Menuhin wrote of "Aunt Willa": "One could tell her everything in one's heart; it would never be misused, never turned against one, never cause her to alter her regard."

In sum, *Willa Cather Remembered* makes a valuable contribution to Cather studies, Great

Plains studies, and, more broadly, American literary scholarship.

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