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Review of *The Song of the Lark* By Willa Cather.

Debra Cumberland
Winona State University

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The Song of the Lark. By Willa Cather. Historical essay and explanatory notes by Ann Moseley. Textual essay and editing by Kari A. Ronning. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012. xi + 925 pp. Notes, works cited, photographs, maps. \$75.00.

Published in 1915, Willa Cather's third novel, *The Song of the Lark*, was groundbreaking in its portrayal of a talented, creative young woman who wanted to be an artist and subsequently devoted her life to the pursuit of her career, rather than marriage and motherhood. As an added bonus, she did not throw herself under a train or fling herself into an ocean. Instead, Cather's heroine, the Swedish soprano Thea Kronborg, finds her artistic inspiration in the West and eventually triumphs on stage at the Metropolitan Opera House.

Many readers, however, among them Cather's Houghton Mifflin editor, Ferris Greenslet, experienced a fundamental discord between the story of Thea's struggle to fulfill her dreams and her eventual triumph. Readers engrossed by the story of Thea's Colorado childhood and her artistic

awakening in the Southwest sometimes find her a much less sympathetic character in the second half of the novel. Her artistic success appears to be gained at the price of her humanity. Cather herself came to sense a tension in the novel, noting in her later 1937 revised edition that Thea's personal life becomes paler as her imaginative life becomes richer, but that unfortunately the novel suffered as a result. Greenslet himself pointed to the conflict between a closely documented realism in the first part and the romantic impulse that takes over in later sections. Ann Moseley's scholarly edition offers a fascinating glimpse of the correspondence between Greenslet and Cather and the subsequent shaping of the published version based upon their conversations. (Readers will be particularly intrigued by many of the revisions of Doctor Archie.) Readers are also offered a fresh look at the sources for many of the characters in *Song of the Lark*.

As Ann Moseley addresses in her historical essay, the novel also contains a tension between its romanticism and the naturalism of such writers as Frank Norris and Stephen Crane. Other influences, among them Balzac, Bergson, and Wagner, provide important links between the romantic and modernist impulses in the novel.

Cather fans will be captivated by the story Moseley unravels behind the work's composition, as well as the intellectual and geographical influences underpinning it. Music lovers will find the prototypes for many of the musicians fascinating, as well as Moseley's portrayal of the music and art scenes in Lincoln, Pittsburgh, Germany, and New York.

Lest one feel slightly faint of heart at opening this 925-page edition because of its bulk, let me reassure readers that I was captivated by Ann Moseley's essays, as well as by Kari Ronning's superb editing.

DEBRA CUMBERLAND
Department of English
Winona State University