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剑桥美国小说新论·5  
(英文影印版)

New Essays on

# *My Ántonia*

《我的安冬尼亚》新论

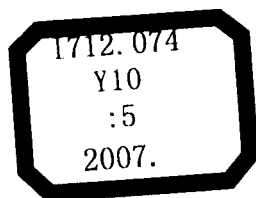
Sharon O'Brien 编



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# 导 读

北京大学英语系教授 陶洁

近年来,美国文学在我国很受欢迎。大专院校英语系纷纷开设美国文学选读和专题课,学生从中学到的大部分内容是美国小说。不仅如此,在本科毕业论文、硕士论文或博士论文方面,学生所选题材也大多为关于某部美国小说或某个美国小说家。然而,我们的学生往往热衷理论而对作品或作家缺乏深入细致的了解和分析。他们往往先大谈理论规则,然后罗列一些例证,不能很好地把理论和文本融会贯通,恰如其分地结合在一起。在这种情况下,我们需要一些好的参考资料来帮助学生更好地认识和理解他们在阅读或研究的作品和作家。《剑桥美国小说新论》正是这样一套优秀的参考书。

这套丛书的负责人是曾经主编过《哥伦比亚美国文学史》的艾默里·埃利奥特教授,并且由英国剑桥大学出版社在上世纪80年代中期开始陆续出书,至今仍在发行并出版新书,目前已有五十多种,不仅出平装本还有精装本。一套书发行二十多年还有生命力,估计还会继续发行,主要因为它确实从学生的需要出发,深受他们和教师的喜爱。

《剑桥美国小说新论》的编排方式比较统一。根据主编制定的原则,每本书针对一部美国文学历史上有名望的大作家的一本经典小说,论述者都是研究这位作家的知名学者。开篇是一位权威专家的论述,主要论及作品的创作过程、出版历史、当年的评价以及小说发表以来不同时期的主要评论和阅读倾向。随后是四到五篇论述,从不同角度用不同的批评方法对作品进行分析和阐



释。这些文章并非信手拈来,而是专门为这套丛书撰写的,运用的理论都比较新,其中不乏颇有新意的真知灼见。书的最后是为学生进一步学习和研究而提供的参考书目。由此可见,编书的学者们为了帮助学生确实煞费苦心,努力做到尽善尽美。

这五十多种书有早期美国文学家库珀的《最后的莫希干人》,也有当代试验小说大师品钦的《拍卖第49号》和厄普代克那曾被《时代》杂志评为1923年以来100部最佳小说之一的《兔子,跑吧!》;有我们比较熟悉的麦尔维尔的《白鲸》,也有我们还不了解的他的《漂亮水手》;有中国学生很喜欢的海明威的长篇小说《永别了,武器》,令人想不到的是还有一本论述他所有的短篇小说的集子。有些大作家如亨利·詹姆斯、威廉·福克纳等都有两三本作品入选,但它们都分别有专门的集子。丛书当然涉及已有定论的大作家,包括黑人和白人作家(可惜还没有华裔作家的作品),但也包括20世纪70年代妇女运动中发掘出来的如凯特·肖邦的《觉醒》和佐拉·尼尔·赫斯顿的《他们眼望上苍》,甚至还有我国读者很熟悉的斯托夫人的《汤姆叔叔的小屋》。当年这部小说曾经风靡美国,在全世界都有一定的影响,后来被贬为“政治宣传”作品,从此在美国文学史上销声匿迹。70年代后随着要求扩大文学经典中女性和少数族裔作家的呼声日益高涨,人们才开始重新评价这部作品,分析它对日后妇女作家的影响、对黑人形象的塑造,甚至它在美国文学的哥特式传统中的地位等等。

这样的例子还有很多,例如威廉·迪恩·豪威尔斯和他的《赛拉斯·拉帕姆的发迹》。以前人们只肯定他在发展现实主义文学和理论方面的贡献,对他的作品除了《赛拉斯·拉帕姆的发迹》评价都不太高。但在这本新论文集子里编者对已有定论进行挑战,强调豪威尔斯的小说、他的现实主义跟当时的社会经济文化现状有很大的关系。他的小说既有其文学形式,又是一种社会力量。另外一位19世纪新英格兰作家萨拉·奥尼·裘威特过去一向被看成是乡土作家,现在学者们用女性主义观点强调她的《尖枞树之乡》对美国文学的贡献,分析当年的种族、民族主义和文学市场

对她写作的影响。用封底宣传语言来说,这本集子对美国文学研究、女性主义批评理论和美国研究等方面都会引起很大的兴趣。

还有一本书似乎在我们国家很少有人提起过——亨利·罗思的《就说是睡着了》。此书在 20 世纪 30 年代曾经风靡一时,此后长期销声匿迹,60 年代又再度受到推崇。现在这部小说则是上面提到的《时代》杂志 100 部优秀小说中的一部,被认为是上个世纪头 50 年里最为出色的美国犹太小说、最优秀的现代主义小说之一。评论家认为集子里的文章采用心理分析、社会历史主义等批评方法探讨了有关移民、族裔和文化归属等多方面的问题。

这套集子里还出现了令人信服的新论点。很长时间内海明威一直被认为是讨厌女人的大男子主义者。但在关于他的短篇小说的论述里,作者通过分析《在密执安北部》,令人信服地证明海明威其实对妇女充满同情。不仅如此,这一论断还瓦解了海明威在《太阳照样升起》中充分暴露他的厌女症的定论。

然而,作者们并不侈谈理论或玩弄理论名词,所有的论断都是既以一定的理论为基础,又对文本进行深入的分析;既把理论阐述得深入浅出,又把作品分析得丝丝入扣,让人不由得不得信服。他们能够做到这一点完全是因为他们了解学生的水平和需要。

我认为《剑桥美国小说新论》是一套很好的参考书。北京大学出版社购买版权,出版这套书是个有益于外国文学研究教学的决定。

## Series Editor's Preface

In literary criticism, the last twenty-five years have been particularly fruitful. Since the rise of the New Criticism in the 1950s, which focused attention of critics and readers upon the text itself – apart from history, biography, and society – there has emerged a wide variety of critical methods which have brought to literary works a rich diversity of perspectives: social, historical, political, psychological, economic, ideological, and philosophical. While attention to the text itself, as taught by the New Critics, remains at the core of contemporary interpretation, the widely shared assumption that works of art generate many different kinds of interpretations has opened up possibilities for new readings and new meanings.

Before this critical revolution, many works of American literature had come to be taken for granted by earlier generations of readers as having an established set of recognized interpretations. There was a sense among many students that the canon was established and that the larger thematic and interpretative issues had been decided. The task of the new reader was to examine the ways in which elements such as structure, style, and imagery contributed to each novel's acknowledged purpose. But recent criticism has brought these old assumptions into question and has thereby generated a wide variety of original, and often quite surprising, interpretations of the classics, as well as of rediscovered works such as Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, which has only recently entered the canon of works that scholars and critics study and that teachers assign their students.

The aim of The American Novel Series is to provide students of American literature and culture with introductory critical

guides to American novels and other important texts now widely read and studied. Usually devoted to a single work, each volume begins with an introduction by the volume editor, a distinguished authority on the text. The introduction presents details of the work's composition, publication history, and contemporary reception, as well as a survey of the major critical trends and readings from first publication to the present. This overview is followed by four or five original essays, specifically commissioned from senior scholars of established reputation and from outstanding younger critics. Each essay presents a distinct point of view, and together they constitute a forum of interpretative methods and of the best contemporary ideas on each text.

It is our hope that these volumes will convey the vitality of current critical work in American literature, generate new insights and excitement for students of American literature, and inspire new respect for and new perspectives upon these major literary texts.

Emory Elliott  
University of California, Riverside



## Introduction

SHARON O'BRIEN

"LIFE BEGAN FOR ME," Willa Cather once said, "when I ceased to admire and began to remember."<sup>1</sup> Her artistic power was also born when she moved from admiration to memory. But this was a long process. Cather began writing fiction as an undergraduate at the University of Nebraska in the early 1890s; in her first novel, *Alexander's Bridge* (1912), she was still writing as an admirer of the great writers who preceded her. Honoring in particular the fiction of Henry James, whom she once referred to as the "mighty master of language," Cather set her novel in the Jamesian drawing rooms of London and Boston.<sup>2</sup>

In *O Pioneers!*, published a year later in 1913, Cather began her literary breakthrough, returning to the Nebraska cornfields and inventing a character new to American fiction – a strong, creative woman who (unlike the heroines of Henry James) is not rebuked for her independant-mindedness. Cather continued to take what she called "the road home" in *The Song of the Lark* (1915), her novel of a woman artist's emergence from a Western background much like her own.<sup>3</sup>

It was in *My Ántonia* (1918), however, that Cather most fully transformed memory into art. She dedicated the novel to two friends of childhood, Carrie and Irene Miner, "in memory of affections old and true." Many friends from her Red Cloud childhood inspired characters in her novel – most notably the Bohemian "hired girl," Annie Pavelka, who was the source for Ántonia Shimerda.<sup>4</sup> The story of narrator Jim Burden's childhood uprooting from Virginia and transplanting to Nebraska was also Cather's own. Of course the novel is fiction, drawing on life but

transforming it into art. Yet in *My Ántonia* Cather not only drew more deeply on her Nebraska past than she ever would again; she also made the role of memory in shaping the past central to the novel's design – memory infiltrated by the transformative energies of imagination and desire.

Cather spent most of her childhood and adolescence in Red Cloud, a small Nebraska prairie town, and graduated from the University of Nebraska in Lincoln in 1895. She then moved east, working as a journalist and a teacher in Pittsburgh and moving to New York City in 1906 to take up a staff position at *McClure's Magazine*. Eventually Cather became managing editor, before plunging full time into writing in 1912. Investing herself in a literary and professional world dominated by East Coast values, Cather at first saw no way to link her regional past with her hopes for an artistic future. During the early 1900s, she said later, Nebraska was considered “declassé” as a literary background by snobbish Eastern critics; no one who was anyone “cared a damn” about Nebraska, no matter who wrote about it.<sup>5</sup>

Willa Cather was shaped by nineteenth-century assumptions about gender as well as region. Confronted by an ideology of femininity that associated womanhood with domesticity – not authorship – for many years Cather associated artistic greatness with masculinity. She did not have “much faith in women in literature,” she claimed in 1895. “As a rule, if I see the announcement of a new book by a woman, I – well, I take one by a man instead. . . . I have noticed that the great masters of letters are men, and I prefer to take no chances when I read.”<sup>6</sup> But as long as Cather did not have much faith in women writers, she could not have much faith in her own literary talent. Her acceptance of a patriarchal culture's disparagement of women writers inevitably delayed her own artistic emergence.

Central to Cather's evolution as woman and writer was the respected Maine writer Sarah Orne Jewett, whom Cather met in 1908. Jewett was Cather's guide at the crucial transitional moment in her life, supporting her as she found both her voice as a writer and her literary road home to Nebraska. A woman and a gifted writer herself, Jewett helped Willa Cather to see that these identities could coexist in herself.

Although Jewett – best known for *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896) – outranked the younger writer in literary achievements, their brief friendship, which lasted until Jewett's death in 1909, was marked by mutuality. Jewett was mentor to Cather's emerging creativity; at the same time, Cather gave Jewett the chance to find a literary heir. "One of the few really helpful words I ever heard from an older writer," Cather said in 1922, "came from Jewett, who said, Of course, one day you will write about your own country. In the meantime, get all you can. One must know the world *so well* before one can know the parish."<sup>7</sup>

Cather dedicated *O Pioneers!* to Jewett, and she easily could have dedicated *My Ántonia* as well, for the novel reflects both Jewett's advice and her example. In *My Ántonia* Cather returns to her own country for inspiration, and there she, like Jewett, finds creative power in the folk art of storytelling, a creative inspiration that we can trace in Willa Cather's life back to her birthplace in Virginia.

\* \* \* \* \*

Although we associate Willa Cather with the Nebraska landscape she evokes so powerfully in *My Ántonia*, she spent her childhood in the enclosed green world of Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. Born in the small farming community of Back Creek, Virginia, in 1873, the eldest of seven children of Charles and Virginia Cather, Willa Cather found her first introduction to narrative in the storytelling of local women who came to the Cather farmhouse, Willow Shade, to help with the canning, preserving, and quilting. Many of these stories Willa Cather "remembered all her life," her partner Edith Lewis recalls; they would finally shape the last book published in her lifetime, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940), the novel in which she most fully returned to her Southern inheritance.<sup>8</sup>

In 1883 Charles Cather decided to join his father and brother, who were farming in Nebraska. So the young Willa was uprooted from the gentle, sheltering landscape she loved and "thrown out" into a country "as bare as a piece of sheet iron." She experienced an "erasure of personality" during her first

months in Nebraska, almost dying, she later said, from homesickness.<sup>9</sup> In *My Ántonia* Cather gives this experience of uprooting and transplantation to Jim Burden, who shares her initial sense of Nebraska's bleak immensity:

There seemed to be nothing to see; no fences, no creeks or trees, no hills or fields. If there was a road, I could not make it out in the faint starlight. There was nothing but land: not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made. No, there was nothing but land. . . . (7)

Eventually Cather came to love her new home. The wide expanse of prairie gave her a sense of freedom rather than annihilation, and her exhilaration with the West's open spaces lasted a lifetime. "When I strike the great open plains, I'm home," she would say. "That love of great spaces, of rolling open country like the sea – it's the grand passion of my life."<sup>10</sup>

Helping Cather to feel at home on the prairies were the immigrant farmers who had come to the Midwest to start over; like the young Cather, they were surviving the trauma of uprooting and resettlement. She was surrounded by a far more varied ethnic mix of people than she had experienced in the more homogeneous culture of the Shenandoah Valley – Scandinavians, French, Russians, Germans, and Bohemians farmed alongside native-born Americans. Cather particularly loved to spend time with the immigrant pioneer women, who replaced the storytellers of Willow Shade, telling her stories about their European homelands, just as Ántonia tells Jim about Bohemia.

Even after the Cather family moved to the small prairie town of Red Cloud in 1884, Cather kept up these attachments. She also found herself drawn to the daughters of these immigrant women, the "hired girls" like Annie Sadilek, later Annie Pavelka. In Red Cloud Cather formed other new friendships with native-born Americans, in particular the daughters of the Miner family, Carrie and Irene. In *My Ántonia* Carrie is transformed into Frances Harling, and Mrs. Miner, for whom Annie Sadilek worked, becomes Mrs. Harling – the only exact fictional portrait Cather claimed to have drawn. Cather also drew on her grandparents William and Caroline Cather for the portrait of Jim Burden's grandparents; and an occasional visitor to Red Cloud, the

black pianist Blind Boone, became the model for the novel's Blind d'Arnault.

Transforming her own experiences into Jim Burden's narrative, reworking Nebraska friends and acquaintances into the fictional weave, in this novel Cather drew most profoundly on her childhood memories – which may be the reason why, of all her fiction, *My Ántonia* was the novel about which she cared most deeply.

Yet *My Ántonia* is neither a childhood memoir nor a “young adult” book (despite its popularity on high school reading lists): it is a midlife novel about childhood. Like Jim Burden, Cather needed emotional, aesthetic, and chronological distance from her Nebraska past in order to write about it. Cather's creative process was based on loss. In order to write, she needed to feel the desire to possess and recreate what was missing or absent. So the creative process for her was joyous in that she could, in memory and imagination, bring to life what was gone; but it was also always and inevitably imbued with sadness. What is lost can be remembered and transformed into art, but it cannot ever be recaptured. We can see this doubleness in Jim's first-person narrative, which dramatizes Cather's own creative process. During the act of writing the past comes alive for him again: phrases like “I can see them now,” or “they are with me still” recur throughout the novel. “They were so much alive in me,” Jim says of the Black Hawk friends he brings with him in memory to Lincoln “that I scarcely stopped to wonder whether they were alive anywhere else, or how” (262). And yet there is a melancholy tone to *My Ántonia*, reflected in the epigraph from Virgil – “*optima dies prima fugit*,” the best days are the first to flee. Some losses are permanent; time, change and death must be accepted if we are also to accept life.

Willa Cather was well aware of the reality of loss during the writing of *My Ántonia*. In 1916 Isabelle McClung, her closest friend, creative companion, and romantic love of her life, announced that she was going to marry the violinist Jan Ham-bourg. This was a terrible blow to Cather. She had lived with Isabelle during her Pittsburgh years, and after her move to New York had returned to Pittsburgh for long visits. Isabelle had

known how to nurture her friend's creativity; Cather wrote most of *O Pioneers!* and *The Song of the Lark* in the sanctuary Isabelle lovingly created for her. In her art, Cather never wrote directly of the love between women – she was well aware of her culture's definition of lesbianism as “unnatural” – but in life her deepest emotional bonds would always be with women. Of these, her bond with Isabelle was the most significant. To lose Isabelle was like a divorce, or a death. When she spoke with her friend Elizabeth Sergeant about the marriage, her eyes were “vacant” and her face “bleak.” “All her natural exuberance had drained away,” Sergeant remembers.<sup>11</sup>

Throughout the spring of 1916 Cather remained grieving and depressed. She had an idea for a new novel (which would later become *My Ántonia*) but no interest or energy: her creativity was as dead as Nebraska's winter landscape seems to Jim Burden.

But Cather was resilient in both her life and her art. In the summer of 1916 she travelled west and spent several months in Red Cloud, renewing attachments with family and old friends, including Annie Pavelka – the inspiration for *Ántonia* and the spark for her next novel. Isabelle's marriage was a hard blow, and she would always feel the loss, but the rest of the world was still there, as was Cather's creative power.

When Cather returned to New York, *My Ántonia* was ready to emerge. She spent several months writing happily in the city before finding a new summer retreat to replace Pittsburgh – the Shattuck Inn in Jaffrey, New Hampshire. There she pitched a tent in a friend's meadow. This became the morning retreat where she wrote *My Ántonia* – “an ideal arrangement,” recalls Edith Lewis:

The tent was about half a mile from the Inn, by an unused wood road, and across a pasture or two. Willa Cather loved this solitary half-mile walk through the woods, and found it the best possible prelude to a morning of work. She wrote for two or three hours every day, surrounded by complete silence and peace.<sup>12</sup>

We can see Cather's recent as well as remote experiences of loss and change threading their way through *My Ántonia* – not just in Jim's yearning for a golden past and *Ántonia's* transfor-

mation from a “lovely girl” into a “battered woman” (353), but also in violent and disturbing episodes that may reflect Cather’s anger at loss: the suicide of Mr. Shimerda, *Ántonia*’s seduction and betrayal, the brutal story of Pavel and Peter, the villainy of Wick Cutter.

But Cather’s own renewal of creative energy is also evident in the novel it produced. In *My Ántonia* she affirms the power of people to weave the sadness of loss – of homelands, of loved friends and family, of childhood, of the past – into the web of ongoing life by telling stories. Foremost is Cather’s own story, the novel we read; but there is also Jim’s story, the manuscript we read after the Introduction; and within Jim’s story are many other stories, like the Bohemian folk tales *Ántonia* tells, the story of Pavel and Peter (which she translates for him), the story of Wick Cutter’s death (which her children tell to Jim), the story of *Ántonia*’s seduction as told by the Widow Steavens, the stories *Ántonia* and her children tell while they look at old photographs, and the stories of Jim that *Ántonia* has been telling her children during his twenty-year absence.

Just as the novel demonstrates the connection between loss and creativity, so it shows us the link between the oral and the written, the folk narrative and the novel. In *My Ántonia* Cather honors the oral tradition of storytelling that nourished both the child and the writer. But oral narrative is more vulnerable to time and change than written narrative; after a while, stories may die out if there are no inheritors to keep telling them. And written narratives can also disappear if they do not find an audience through the act of publication.

Willa Cather was able successfully to transform the oral narrative into written form, thus giving one kind of permanence to the stories she heard, inherited, and created. By 1917, she was a well-known writer with literary power and authority. So she was also able to negotiate the transformation of her written manuscript into a published novel that embodied her own creative vision, guiding *My Ántonia* from the inner realm of the writer’s desk into the outer world of contracts, book design, and advertising. The novel’s publishing history is a fascinating one, and reveals how Cather struggled to unite the role of writer with that

of author, and to integrate the private space of composition with the public space of commerce.

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Cather's first publisher was the Boston-based firm of Houghton Mifflin, inheritors of Ticknor and Fields, the nineteenth-century Boston publishers who brought Hawthorne, Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell, Jewett, and Stowe to the American reading public. Houghton Mifflin thus was associated in Cather's mind both with her mentor Sarah Orne Jewett (and with Jewett's companion Annie Fields, widow of James Fields, partner in the original publishing company) and with the New England-dominated American literary canon. So in 1912, when Cather brought *Alexander's Bridge* to Houghton Mifflin, she was associating herself with publishers who were the inheritors and disseminators of American literary culture. In joining their literary family, Cather was becoming a descendant of Hawthorne and Emerson as well as of Jewett.

The publishing industry in the early twentieth century, like the author's relationship to editor and publisher, was a complex, contradictory enterprise, at once public and private, commercial and aesthetic. Houghton Mifflin, for example, viewed itself not as a corporation but as a cultural institution dedicated to furthering American letters, fostering authors, and bringing good books to the general reader. (Of course, it was not dedicated to these aims at the expense of profit.) Publishing companies like Houghton Mifflin liked to imagine themselves more as families than as corporate enterprises, seeking to honor noneconomic motives and relationships while at the same time managing healthy sales. The uneasy compromise such publishers envisioned between their commercial and familial motives is suggested by the very term they used to describe themselves: "houses" rather than "companies" (this older image is still anachronistically preserved in "Random House" and its family-dwelling logo). Publishing houses like Houghton Mifflin hoped for familial relationships between editors and authors, based on mutual respect for writing rather than the profit motive. Indeed, when Cather's editor Fer-



ris Greenslet wrote her of his sadness at her decision to leave Houghton Mifflin for Knopf, he used the imagery of home and family: perhaps someday she would return, he hoped – the latch-string at Park Street would always be open, and she could come back any time she wished.<sup>13</sup>

During her Houghton Mifflin years Cather at first played the deferential role of the grateful daughter to Ferris Greenslet, welcoming his editorial suggestions and praising his advice. But as she began to accrue positive reviews for *O Pioneers!* and *The Song of the Lark*, she became more assertive and began to challenge the publisher's inadequacies. Cather shared Houghton Mifflin's sometimes contradictory definition of the meaning of the book. She wanted her books to sell, so that she could support herself as a full-time writer. Yet she did not want her books to be treated as interchangeable commodities, or to be grouped with popular writers who turned out one formulaic best seller after another. She wanted to be an individual artist, and for each of her novels to have its own unique vision; at the same time she wanted Houghton Mifflin to promote her work actively and to make her a writer honored by the press and supported by the public.

When she began writing *My Ántonia* in 1916, Cather was beginning to be unhappy with Houghton Mifflin, suspecting that her publisher was committed neither to the aesthetic quality nor to the commercial success of her books. Disturbed by what she considered Houghton Mifflin's careless attitude toward her books' appearance, she wanted to influence both design and production – cover, book jacket, typeface, paper, binding.

Cather's desire to determine the aesthetic shape of the book as a whole reached a height with *My Ántonia*. In addition to stating her preferences for the cover (darker blue than *The Song of the Lark*) and book jacket (bright yellow, with heavy black lettering), Cather commissioned a series of line drawings from the artist W. T. Benda to illustrate her manuscript. Born in Bohemia, Benda had spent a good deal of time in the American West, and Cather felt his imaginative vision was consonant with hers. When Houghton Mifflin balked at paying for Benda's drawings, Cather became increasingly frustrated at what she considered her publisher's stingy disregard for her aesthetic decisions. Cather