

Cather renews a tradition which needs to be renewed—the tradition that the human personality is something given, like the cloud or the prairie, and not something to be laboriously assembled by the novelist as Frankenstein assembled his monster from the dissecting laboratory. Miss Cather has not withdrawn from life, she has merely lived it on another plane, the plane of the Golden Day. Her characters instinctively trust themselves as Hester Prynne and Miriam, yes, and as Evangeline and Miles Standish trust themselves. They have high authority for believing that every heart vibrates to that iron

string, and therefore it is that fortunate accidents happen to them.

To say that in this admirable fiction life is highly personalized is to give a false impression of self-consciousness. What I rather mean is that for Miss Cather personal relations count more than all other relations whatsoever, and that her stories are planned, her style is managed to reveal these relations cumulatively. To use her own phrase, hers is the novel *démeublé*. "If the novel," she writes, "is a form of imaginative art, it cannot at the same time be a vivid and brilliant form of journalism." This parallels Hawthorne's dis-

tinction between the novel and the romance, and precisely as in "The Scarlet Letter" everything exists only as it enriches the story of Hester, so in "A Lost Lady" (1923) everything exists only as it enriches the story of Mrs. Forrester. The result is something timeless and not topical; and it is instructive to see how, when Miss Cather violates her own principle and touches upon topical things like the World War or the life of the opera, she sinks from the level of romance to the level of the novel—that is, from imaginative art to journalism.

Like Hawthorne she is most successful with the tale which can be thought of as a single curve of personalized experience. Her more pretentious books—"The Song of the Lark," "One of Ours," "The Professor's House"—break down as if they were not expertly plotted. But in truth they are not plotted at all. For Miss Cather, as for Hawthorne, plot is in this sense irrelevant. And books like "Death Comes for the Archbishop" or "Shadows on the Rock," though they seem ampler than "My Antonia" or "A Lost Lady," succeed, not by violating the single curve principle, but by enriching it. They are not, like "The Song of the Lark," stuffed with artificial incident. It is true that it does not require 325 pages to tell us of Euclide Auclair and Cécile, but Miss Cather (again like Hawthorne, in "The House of Seven Gables") goes to unusual pains to create a harmonious setting for these excellent souls. The good apothecary does not perform one half the feats of Thea Kronborg, but his existence and that of his daughter are sufficient excuse for the volume because they are charming and noble hearts, who demand (and receive) the right landscape.

If the Catholic stories are only apparently separated from the rest of this work, the distinction between stories of artists and stories which deal with wise, rich, and simple natures like Antonia and Neighbour Rosicky is likewise superficial. I do not mean merely that the career of Thea Kronborg begins like that of Alexandra Bergson, but that for Miss Cather the creative personality may equally express itself through music or through a calm acceptance of the natural environment and the shaping of human lives. Of Antonia and Mrs. Harling, for whom she works, Miss Cather writes:

There was a basic harmony between Antonia and her mistress. They had strong, independent natures, both of them. They knew what they liked and were not always trying to imitate other people. They loved children and animals and music, and rough play and digging in the earth. They liked to prepare rich, hearty food and to see people eat it; to make up soft white beds and to see youngsters asleep in them. They ridiculed conceited people and were quick to help unfortunate ones. Deep

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Jersey Eclogue

BY ROLFE HUMPHRIES

Daphnis

SOME small-leaved solitary light-green trees
Convey in summer still a look of spring.

Corydon

Light, clinging to the under side of leaves,
Hangs like a bronze or silver decoration.

Daphnis

A week before they ripen, oats are pale,
Pale green and jade, translucent as a wave.

Corydon

Oats, when they ripen, are a tawny color,
More rich and yellow than a stretch of sand.

Daphnis

I found a yellow spider on some tansy.

Corydon

And I, a tiny red one in the bee-balm.

Daphnis

Unseen, the cardinal whistles like a farmer
Calling his dog across an open pasture.

Corydon

The goldfinch, in his bounding flight, keeps chirping.

Daphnis

The Morse code of a woodpecker has no dashes.

Corydon

The hummingbird shows off before the female
Making a dozen U's before he's winded.

Daphnis

Cut sumach, drying, has an upland smell,
More so than sorrel, timothy, or clover.

Corydon

You mightn't think water had any odor;
Notice it next time, over the wet stones.

Daphnis

White cows turn lavender when slanting sunlight
Stains the brown area wherein they graze.

Corydon

Lavender cows turn white again when evening
Is far enough along, and the sun all gone.

Daphnis

The wind pours through the tree-tops, pauses, pours
Loud with autumnal omens. Hear, oh, hear!

Corydon

Rain sounds like wind, but when you listen for it,
Only the wind is all you ever hear.

Menalcas

Home to the city, boys, the bus is coming,
Ite domum, pueri—the company calls you home.



Jacket design for "Voices in the Square."

Story of a Country Town

VOICES IN THE SQUARE. By George Abbe. New York: Coward-McCann, Inc. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by N. L. ROTHMAN

THE best news we can bring about a novel, above all a first novel, is that it is set squarely in the stream of American writing. "Voices in the Square" gives us that sense very sharply, of having literary forbears and carrying forward a literary tradition. Mr. Abbe has written of a town he calls Vernon, in Massachusetts, yet as we follow the life of this town its boundaries seem to reach out and envelop three others, and we are remembering Atchison, Winesburg, and Spoon River. The scene has changed, almost the century, but there are strands that move constantly through every decade of American life, from Ed Howe's Atchison to George Abbe's Vernon. The struggle of the youth against the town, the struggle of the town against beauty, of the minister against hypocrisy, of the town women against the town Woman, of blind, joyous life against the mores—these are the constants that will come to the surface any year in the American town, for the novelist who will dig for them. Mr. Abbe has used them to write a sound, stirring book.

That is the important news, which is not the same thing as saying that Mr. Abbe is today another Howe, or Anderson, or Masters. We can spare him that until he has pushed further along, although even now comparisons will not hurt him too much. The two Upton boys,

at two different levels of youth, are given to us with a freshness that brings them entirely to life. They and the gang, the girls, the elders, the stores, the hills around the town, the dust in the square and the mists over the lake, all of it fuses to make Vernon known to us, and unforgettable. One character, Rena, seems a flaw, and the importance of her position in the story makes the flaw unreasonably large. Rena is the element of wanton beauty that disturbs Vernon. Her coming is like a gong in the opening pages; her passage through the book gives design to an otherwise scattered story. We expect the town to be uneasy about her, the men to pursue, the women to band against her, but we expect also that Mr. Abbe will stay clear of the pack. Instead, he seems himself to be uneasy and uncertain. This is the one character he does not understand, and she remains misty and unformed to the end. The design comes out all right, but it is forced and has no meaning.

The writing itself is eager and vigorous. Wherever the tradition of this tale springs from, the emotional intensity of it is the writer's own. The colors and smells in the woods, as well as the muscular feel of hurtling the bowls down the alley or Chuck's ecstatic discovery he can draw with charcoal sticks, are different exercises in the one capacity to write of experience freshly, at first hand. With that, and with its fine, realistic recreation of a diverse set of characters, this book carries more of portent in it than any recent first novel.

Lysistrata in 1942

THE IMPREGNABLE WOMEN. By Eric Linklater. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GEORGE STEVENS

THE story of Lysistrata is certainly well known to the kind of reader who is likely to pick up a novel by Eric Linklater; but Mr. Linklater retells it in such detail as to imply that he has dug up not one of the most perennially popular of all comedies but some forgotten legend. Aside from overwriting, however, he tells it on the whole very well, and with a great deal of the gusto familiar to readers of his "Magnus Merriman." He places the story in England of the 1940s, at the outbreak of the next war; his heroine is Lady Lysistrata, wife of Colonel Scrymgeour and intimate friend of Eliot Greene, Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs. She is the exact prototype of her Athenian namesake, and she has exactly the same bright idea for putting an end to war by organizing a "love-strike" (Mr. Linklater's phrase) among the wives, sweethearts, and camp-followers of the fighting men. The plot and even the characters are by Aristophanes; only the setting and the incidentals are by Linklater.

It is the setting and incidentals, then, which give the book its interest. The first incidental is the author's idea of the line-up for the next war: France finally becomes exasperated by the policies of a British government and suddenly sponsors an air-raid on London. Great Britain allies herself with Germany; the armies fight to a stalemate in Flanders, while all the cities of Europe are devastated from the air. The book alternates between stretches of dullness, where Mr. Linklater gives us long descriptions of battle scenes indistinguishable from countless memoirs of the last World War, and stretches of interest, when the air raids drive the seat of the British Government from London to Edinburgh. The best idea in the book is incidental: a spontaneous popular uprising in all countries against the air forces. Mr. Linklater makes the most of this episode before he goes on to the uprising of women, organized by Lady Lysistrata after the wounding and death of Eliot. This is Mr. Linklater's big climax, and he gives it all he has—if anything, a little too much.

For in spite of many good things in the book, there is too much of it. The characterization in major and minor roles is too conventional, the episodes are in general too easily foreseen; the argument throughout is intelligent but obvious; there is enough gusto to carry it, but the gusto runs away with it, turns it into an extravaganza instead of the satire it ought to be. "The Impregnable Women" is distinctly worth reading, but it might have been memorable.