

A STUDY
OF
THE PROSE WORKS
OF
EDITH WHARTON AND WILLA CATHER

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PREFACE

When the author was taking the survey course in American Literature offered by the Faculty of Arts at Chulalongkorn University, she became acquainted only with the names of famous writers and titles of their works as well as one or two works; therefore the author wished to make a deeper study of some famous American writer and his works. The author having come across, in the American Literature course, the names of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather and their masterpieces, subsequently read Ethan Frome and My Antonia and became more interested in these two novelists. The fact that they were both women who had been contemporaries and had witnessed similar changes in America at the turn of the century increased the author's curiosity. Therefore when the author decided to study for a Master's degree she naturally chose Edith Wharton and Willa Cather.

The author has tried to study these two writers and their works mostly by reading their fiction and then trying to interpret their works. The author, being a Thai, has naturally judged them from a point of view which may be somewhat different from the point of view of an American — especially a Nebraskan or a New Yorker. Points that an American reader may consider important are perhaps not treated in detail in this thesis since the author only takes up certain points that interest the author as a Thai.

In making this study the author was also fascinated by the language, beautiful style and technique of these two writers and became convinced that reading works like these helps to improve the English of a foreign reader because the English of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather is the kind that not only gives pleasure but can also serve as a model for Thai students.

Because the author intends to present in the thesis the characteristics that seem most significant to her, Edith Wharton and Willa Cather are treated differently. The study of Edith Wharton is based on the novelist's biography, the importance of background in her works and her recurrent themes, for these should enable any reader, who knows nothing about Edith Wharton, to know her as a person and read her works with greater understanding and appreciation. The study of Willa Cather and her works, on the other hand, is done on quite a different basis. Her works are treated chronologically since the author feels that if they are studied thus, it helps one to see the full development of Willa Cather as a writer. As a result the part concerning Willa Cather is divided into her life and her fiction, which is further subdivided into periods: 1892-1912, 1913-1920, 1922-1926 and 1927-1940. The final chapter of the thesis is then a summarized comparison and contrast of these two contemporaries.

The author wishes to thank her colleagues and friends for their generous assistance and also to thank the USIS library for its helpful cooperation in ordering much needed works of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather and for extending to the author more than the usual library privileges.

Nongyao Karnchanachari

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