

a rock anchoring the changing aspirations and hopes of individuals to a larger order.”

Whether in the 19th-century Southwest of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) or in the 17th-century Quebec of *Shadows on the Rock* (1931), Seaton says, Cather is not trying to satisfy an appetite for the exotic. Instead, the glimpses the novels offer of the religion or the art of a past culture bring home “the continuing importance of everyday life, of the meaningfulness of the constant daily

efforts to concentrate upon and order an otherwise chaotic existence.” Art and religion in Cather’s fiction emerge from daily life “as continuations and deepening of everyday routine.”

In Cather’s art, Seaton concludes, one can make out “the hidden connections between grand moral principles and seemingly trivial choices, between everyday life and high art.” And, in the end, the high art includes Cather’s own.

Farewell, Miss Fremstad

“An American Singer” by Peter G. Davis, in *The Yale Review* (Oct. 1997), Yale Univ., P.O. Box 208243, New Haven, Conn. 06520-8243.

Her career was cut short when she was in her prime, and the 15 recordings she made were disappointing artistically as well as technically, but Olive Fremstad (1871–1951) has never been entirely forgotten by opera aficionados. The first homegrown American opera singer of “true incandescence,” she had “a vocal and physical presence of such charismatic witchery as to drive audiences wild,” writes Davis, author of *The American Opera Singer* (forthcoming).

The daughter of a Norwegian physician and preacher and his Swedish wife, the singer was born in Stockholm and emigrated with her family to Minnesota about a decade later. A proficient pianist by the age of 12, she served as her father’s musical assistant as he traveled up and down the state in a horse-drawn wagon with a portable organ to conduct prairie revival meetings. Decades later, notes Davis, some of the Scandinavian settlers who had attended those services still “recalled the vivid effect of Fremstad’s voice” when she sang hymns. Venturing to New York when she was 19, Fremstad studied and saved enough money for the essential trip to study in Europe. She made her debut at the Cologne Opera in 1895, and at New York’s Metropolitan Opera in 1903.

Fremstad was the Met’s first Salome (in Richard Strauss’s opera of that name), and “her graphic

portrayal of the biblical teenager’s sensual lust scandalized more than one Met patron,” writes Davis. The opera was withdrawn after the first performance. Fremstad’s commitment to realistic detail was so great that she visited a morgue to use an actual human



Olive Fremstad gave “color and passion and personality” to Wagnerian heroines such as Brünnhilde, wrote Willa Cather.

head to rehearse the scene in which Salome holds aloft the head of John the Baptist. Novelist Willa Cather called her “a great tragic actress.”

Alas, the highly paid singer was every bit the prima donna, refusing, for example, to rehearse the day before or after a perfor-

mance. In 1914, Met director Giulio Gatti-Casazza finally ousted her. She was 43 and “at the height of her powers,” notes Davis, but nothing was the same after that. In 1920, she begged to return to the Met, but Gatti refused. Olive Fremstad never sang in public again.

OTHER NATIONS

Tibet at a Turning Point

“The Dalai Lama’s Dilemma” by Melvyn C. Goldstein, in *Foreign Affairs* (Jan.–Feb. 1998), 58 E. 68th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

With the recent appearance of the film *Kundun*, dramatizing his early life, the Dalai Lama appears to have won over Hollywood. But that may be of scant help to the 63-year-old spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists as he deals with a growing dilemma. Committed to nonviolence, he is being forced to choose between making concessions to China and giving at least tacit sanction to a campaign of organized violence against Chinese rule in Tibet. Some militant Tibetans already favor such a campaign; in 1996, there were three bombings in the capital, Lhasa. The Dalai Lama’s only other choice, contends Goldstein, director of the Center for Research on Tibet, at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, is to sit back as his Himalayan homeland is changed beyond recognition.

Beijing, which has rebuffed the Dalai Lama’s recent efforts to arrange talks, is pouring economic development funds into Tibet and flooding it with thousands of Chinese entrepreneurs and laborers. Of the “several hundred thousand” residents of Lhasa, at least half, Goldstein says, now are non-Tibetan. Although the newcomers are expected eventually to return home, Tibetans fear that the character of their sparsely populated land is being altered forever.

The roots of the conflict run deep. Formally part of the Manchu-ruled Chinese Empire during the 18th and 19th centuries, Tibet functioned as a quasi-independent

theocracy under a Dalai Lama after the overthrow of the Qing dynasty in 1912. But that changed once the Communists came to power in China in 1949. China invaded Tibet in 1950, forcing the current Dalai Lama to recognize Chinese sovereignty. After an independence uprising was crushed in 1959, he fled to India, followed by 80,000 Tibetans. Secret talks with Beijing in 1982 and 1984 proved fruitless. The exiles



This Chinese guard is not the only outsider in Tibet today, as thousands of Chinese entrepreneurs and laborers have flooded in.