

## APPENDICES

### Synopsis of Willa Cather's The Song of the Lark

Thea Kronborg is a Scandinavian-American singer who works her way up from the dusty desert town of Moonstone, Colorado, to the boards of the Metropolitan Opera house. Thea comes of Swedish-Norwegian stock and is the musical daughter of a Methodist minister, obliged to give lessons and play and sing at the prayer meetings and revivals. Thea is one of seven children growing up in an overcrowded little house in Moonstone, Colorado.

Thea leaves home to study music in Chicago. Through a Jules Breton painting in the Art Institute called "The Song of the Lark," Thea realizes what she wants, and she leaves determined that she would live, work, die for reaching her dream.

Thea's first teacher in Chicago, a sensitive, one-eyed Hungarian violinist named Harsanyi, discovers her voice, and steers her away from piano to the voice teacher Madison Bowers. She finds both a champion and a romantic interest in the musical dilettante Fred Ottenburg.

The mature Thea Kronborg has returned from study and successful performances in Germany, and is now a reigning soprano at the Metropolitan Opera. The diva Thea Kronborg, whose first name means "gift of God" and surname means "crown fortress," is presented as a woman both blessed and isolated by her divine gift.

### **Synopsis of Howard Fast's The Immigrants**

The Immigrants is the enthralling story of Dan Lavette, born in poverty, who battles his way to success as founder of a vast shipping empire and head of a wealthy and powerful family. He is the son of an Italian immigrant fisherman, in San Francisco in the first third of the twentieth century. Dan eventually expands the business into a fleet of transport ships and he drives to the top, buying up ships, hotels, a department store, and even running an airline and becomes a successful man.

He marries a wealthy socialite but has fallen in love with the Chinese-American daughter of his firm's accountant. When he and Jean divorce, he wants her and their two children to have all their common property. Dan and Mark (the business partner and also a very close friend of him and his family) lost everything in the stock-market crash of 1929. With his last \$ 120 in his pocket Dan goes to Los Angeles on a one-way bus ticket.

The next morning he is seen by a fishing-boat captain who had worked for him in San Francisco and who offers Dan a job. With some money and clean clothes, he musters all his courage and goes to see May Ling. She, their son, and her parents receive Dan warmly and gratefully, and he pulls out the words to share what had transpired. The stock market crash has freed him from his false self, enabling him to live his own life with the wife and son he loves.

## **Biography of Willa Sibert Cather**

Willa Cather was born on December 7, 1873 in Back Creek Valley, Virginia. Her childhood was reportedly happy and well-ordered, and is remembered in her late novel Sapphira and the Slave Girl. In 1883, the Cathers moved to Webster County, Nebraska, joining members of the family who settled there earlier. This crucial move, dislocating and dramatic, introduced Cather to the landscape and to the ways of life she would memorialize in her famous prairie novels, O Pioneers!, My Ántonia, and A Lost Lady, as well as in parts of The Song of the Lark.

In Lincoln, Nebraska, where she attended the state university, she began her journalistic career, writing numerous reviews for the local newspapers. Her literary ambitions had to wait for their fulfillment while she earned a living in Pittsburgh as journalist and teacher, and then in New York as an editor for McClure's Magazine. With the publication of O Pioneers! in 1913, Cather became the dedicated writer of her own dreams, in time achieving recognition for her prairie novels and for rare and unique works such as The Professor's House, Death Comes for the Archbishop, and Shadows on the Rock. She was honored for her writings, receiving the Pulitzer Prize in 1923 for One of Ours, a novel about a soldier in World War I. She died at her New York home on August 24, 1947 (“Book club/ Reading Guides”).

## **Biography of Howard Melvin Fast**

Howard Fast (November 11, 1914 - March 12, 2003) was an American novelist and television writer. Born in New York City, his mother was British and his father the son of Ukrainian immigrants. His first novel, Two Valleys, was published when he was 18, in 1933. His first popular work was Citizen Tom Paine, a fictional account of the life of Thomas Paine. Always interested in American history, he also wrote The Last Frontier and Freedom Road.

Fast wrote also under the pen names E.V. Cunnigham, under which he published a series of popular detective novels starring a Nisei detective with the Beverly Hills, California Police Department. In 1952, Fast ran for Congress on the American Labor Party ticket. During the 1950s he also worked for the Communist Party newspaper, the Daily Worker. In 1957, he was awarded the Stalin Peace Prize. But, later in the decade, Fast broke with the Party over issues of condition in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

In 1974, Fast and his family moved to California, where he wrote television scripts, including such television programs as How the West Was Won. In 1977, he published The Immigrants, the first of a six-part series of novels. Fast's son Jonathan, himself a novelist, was the husband of novelist Erica Jong (“Howard Fast Biography”).