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SIX NOVELS OF WILLA CATHER:
A THEMATIC STUDY

DISSERTATION
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of the Ohio State University

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Six Novels of Willa Cather: A Thematic Study

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the presentation of themes in six of Willa Cather's novels: *My Antonia* (1918), *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), *The Song of the Lark* (1915), *A Lost Lady* (1923), *My Mortal Enemy* (1926) and *The Professor's House* (1925). By theme I mean governing idea which runs through a novel and is embodied in a variety of ways—plot, character, point of view, style, auctorial aphorism, or image. (Thus, though the idea of the effect of money on character is stated in *My Antonia*, it is merely stated and so does not constitute, in my definition, a theme.) I shall examine themes one at a time, comment on the ways in which they overlap and intertwine, and observe the devices by which the various themes of each novel are combined and unified. In this way, I hope to define rather accurately the meaning of each novel.

There are, of course, other quite different and extremely valuable approaches to the Cather novels. Her choice of certain historical epochs rather than others has been thoroughly and satisfactorily discussed by Raymond
Thorberg. Her use of historical documents is another profitable avenue of exploration which Thorberg and the Blooms have begun to follow. Yet to be done is a thorough comparison of Cather's frontier novels with those of other writers--Rølvaag comes to mind at once. Nor has a thorough study been made of literary influences on the Cather novels. How large and of what nature are her debts to Virgil, Tolstoi, James, Jewett and a dozen others? Such a study would have obvious importance.

Or Willa Cather's novels might be studied from the point of view of any of the elements which together produce thematic statement. One might study plot in the novels and the changing conception of plot-structure which the novels as a whole display; or her characters, their types and motivations and the way in which characters are grouped within each novel, a facet of her structure to which I have

1 "Willa Cather: A Critical Interpretation," unpub. diss. (Cornell, 1954). This work also deals impressively with Cather's experiments in the novel form.


devoted much attention in this study; or point of view and its bearing on her development; or style--emotional tone, manipulation of sound, description and dialogue and the interweaving of the two; or the images which she employs with considerable skill (though the Cather novels are perhaps insufficiently rich in images to justify a long study of this nature).

The present broad thematic study allows consideration of all of these different elements, proportioning attention to them according to the special nature of each novel. The study is feasible because Willa Cather is a limited writer, both as artist and as thinker. She is not a novelist of ideas and not a philosopher. Even in The Professor's House, which is, in all respects, the most rewarding of her novels, she presents not an articulated and complete system of thought but a poetic vision. However, the few and simple ideas which Willa Cather turns this way and that in her novels gain strength through their successful embodiment. Thus, Willa Cather's handling of ideas is often impressive. A brief glimpse of her main actors may serve to summarize her themes, her methods of presentation, and her scale of values.

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4 Elizabeth S. Sergeant, Willa Cather: A Memoir (Philadelphia, 1953), p. 215, reports that Cather wrote to Robert Frost about this novel: "This is really a story of 'letting go with the heart' but most reviewers seem to consider it an attempt to popularize a system of philosophy."
Each of the six novels I have chosen deals with the exceptional individual who is a pioneer, an artist, or a kind of saint; often he combines within himself elements of all three great types. He lives in relation to nature, to history, and to society. The exceptional individual identifies himself with nature and becomes fully conscious of his love for it. Nature may be a vision of beauty and majesty, or a parable of mutability. Equally important, this individual becomes aware of history—his own past, the past of a particular group, or that of the human race. His sense of connection with history may be a sudden revelation that exhilarates his spirit and frees his powers. The meaning of his personal past may also come in a moment and may be a shattering experience that requires him to turn aside from commitments and break promises. Sometimes, nature and history are fused as the individual sees nature as a theater of great historical action or a source of emblems having to do with his personal past.

Between the exceptional individual and society, there is struggle. The struggle may be unceasing but loving, as between Archbishop Latour and his region, for whom he restores to life a buried and half-dead faith. The struggle

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5 The weakness of three other Cather novels, *One of Ours* (1922), *Lucy Gayheart* (1935) and *Sapphire and the Slave Girl* (1940) may be related to the fact that their main characters fit none of these categories and are not exceptional enough to command the author's deepest attention.
may be fierce and unending, as between the singer, Thea Kronborg (heroine of The Song of the Lark) and her natural enemies, the advocates of tepid mediocrity. Or the struggle may result in the individual's withdrawal from society (The Professor's House). In each novel, the exceptional individual wins through to some sort of victory, though it may be somewhat qualified (My Ántonia) or bitter (The Song of the Lark) or sad (My Mortal Enemy).

Pairs of characters (Jim and Antonia in My Ántonia, Latour and Vaillant in Death Comes for the Archbishop, Godfrey and Augusta in The Professor's House) help to suggest Willa Cather's scale of values. The association of these characters suggests that strength may accrue from the blending of complexity with heartiness.6 While this union of opposites is stated clearly in a number of the novels, it is incompletely dramatized. Civilized characters are not put to the test of prolonged exposure to simple ones. Emphasis is always placed on the civilized half of each pair. Antonia is to be the source of strength for Jim, Augusta for the professor as the two novels end. But Antonia is "My" Antonia, that is, Jim's, and much of her value springs from this fact. Augusta is a minor

6 Edwin H. Cady, Frederick J. Hoffman, Roy H. Pearce, The Growth of American Literature (New York, 1956), II, 514, discuss Cather's use of pairs of characters and conclude that her ideal character is an equal blend of the two types.
character in The Professor's House; the reader is left to imagine—if he can—that she becomes a major force in the life of the professor after the events described in the novel. In Death Comes for the Archbishop, Latour and Vaillant are unshakable in their affection for each other; but they are separated, more often than not, by vocation, and the civilized Latour is clearly the leading figure in the novel. While Willa Cather praises the tonic value of simplicity and instinctiveness, she puts greater faith in complexity and civilization. The final simplicity of Professor St. Peter and Myra Henshawe (the latter from My Mortal Enemy) is an achieved simplicity, no less natural for being achieved, but the less purely simple.

In general, Willa Cather's scale of values is extremely wide. She praises peasant wisdom but shows how it may fail to cope with a practical task at hand. She praises endurance, but she has deep sympathy for the weak person who snaps under stress. She celebrates faithfulness to people and ideas. But she points out with great understanding how the exalted search for truth may lead away from fidelity. Occasionally, she laments what seems to her the passing of peasant wisdom, endurance, and fidelity--one might call these qualities pioneer virtues—but she never suggests that they are all-sufficient.

The consideration of how Willa Cather embodies her ideas leads inevitably to esthetic judgment. Though her
presentation of themes is often impressive, it is nonetheless marked by a number of flaws. Sentimentality mars not only her early work but a relatively late novel, Death Comes for the Archbishop. Furthermore, her effort to avoid sentimentality may be partly responsible for the excessive brusqueness of My Mortal Enemy, the ineffective compression of the ending of A Lost Lady, and the somewhat blurred concluding tone of The Professor's House. The attempt to escape undue emotionalism may reduce clarity or even lead to insufficiently emotional statement.

Larger problems of style and structure are not always happily solved in the novels. Neither the overstuffed, fact-beladen Balzacian novel which Willa Cather attempts in The Song of the Lark nor the sharply restricted Maupassant-like novelette, such as A Lost Lady and My Mortal Enemy, is the best vehicle for her ideas. Rather, in the combination of spare style and superficially free (yet firmly controlled) structure of The Professor's House and Death Comes for the Archbishop, she arrives at her perfect solution.

7 Sergeant, op. cit., p. 212, remarks that Cather's struggle against sentimentality was conscious.

8 These problems of style and structure are discussed intelligently and at length in Raymond Thorberg, op. cit. Compare p. 221 ("...she indicates how the 'loose,' episodic novel...could embrace tremendous advances in technique, and remain a visible genre.") with my summary here.
Characterization and point of view also cause difficulty throughout her career. There are small but annoying inconsistencies in major characters in *My Ántonia* and, nine years later, in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. Willa Cather's placing her male narrator in *My Ántonia* in the action yet keeping him esthetically distant from it raises unsolved problems in plot and motivation. In addition, the narrator's deficiencies in vision, though believable enough, have little point in relation to the action he describes. In *A Lost Lady*, the wilful blindness of the "window" character⁹ is turned to positive advantage in evoking the quality of the heroine; but at the same time, the author awkwardly solves the problem of the window character's absence from certain important scenes.¹⁰ In *My Mortal Enemy* (told entirely by one narrator whose deficiencies are necessities transformed into virtues), in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (told by an omniscient but

⁹ The window character is that character through whom the author chooses to show events. One of the advantages of the window character over the first-person narrator is that, with the window character, the novelist may use language and implication clearly beyond the range of the character rather than having to, so to speak, smuggle richness and implication into the first person. Yet, like the first-person narrator, the window character clearly defines point of view.

¹⁰ Edith Lewis, *Willa Cather Living* (New York, 1953), p. 125, describes Cather's long search for a satisfactory point of view during the early stages of writing *A Lost Lady.*
rather reticent observer with access to a number of minds) and in *The Professor's House* (told in part by a first-person narrator, in part by an omniscient observer), Willa Cather gives three different but equally satisfactory answers to the question of point of view.11

Willa Cather is an imperfect novelist, and her achievement is unsteady. In the pages that follow, I have concerned myself to some extent with her progress, but I have focused, as a rule, on her chief ideas in each of the six novels and her success and failure in embodying them.

Although I have chosen these six novels only because they seem to me the best of Willa Cather's work, a number of advantages spring from the choice. To review for a moment the ideas I have stated and implied above, within the group of six are represented (1) her historical and her non-historical novels, (2) her novels of frontier life and of life away from the frontier, (3) her three great types, pioneer, artist, and saint, (4) her various lights on the unusual individual and his relation to society, nature, and the past, (5) her use of pairs of main characters, (6) her experimentation with point of view, with two types of plot structures, and with both the loosely furling and

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tightly knit novel forms.

Whether one considers chief characters or main themes, the six novels fall into the same three groups. *My Antonia* and *Death Comes for the Archbishop* deal with pioneers; despite the limitations of the title-characters, the nature and degree of their success makes the mood of both books happy rather than not. *The Song of the Lark* and *A Lost Lady* deal with artists of contrasting types. In the success of the one artist and the temporary but significant failure of the other is apparent the large price that the possessor of a great gift must pay and the large price that he exacts from others. In the third pair of novels, *My Mortal Enemy* and *The Professor's House*, two unorthodox religious seekers, reacting in opposite ways to their need to betray the present, also demand much from themselves and others. In *My Antonia*, the notion of the revolt against the village is denied; affirmed, the same notion is a theme in *The Song of the Lark* and *A Lost Lady*. A related theme, the revolt against (and withdrawal from) society is of high importance in *My Mortal Enemy* and *The Professor's House*.

A few final words about arrangement, procedure and aim. I have chosen to write about six of Willa Cather's novels because to focus on these rather than to deal with all twelve of her novels has seemed to give a more accurate account of her art than mere comprehensiveness would allow. In each of the three main sections of my dissertation I
have arranged the members of each pair of novels in order of artistic development. Artistic development and chronology coincide in Parts One and Two; they do not do so in Part Three. The Professor's House (1925), as the chapter devoted to this novel argues, represents the peak of Willa Cather's achievement; that it precedes less fully realized work is a circumstance so usual as to be scarcely worthy of remark, except in pointing to the somewhat unconventional arrangement of Part Three of this study. Each of my chapters—separately and taken together with the others—provides a rationale for this arrangement.

My procedure within each chapter is to describe the relation between theme and other elements—plot, structure, point of view and style—and then to analyze the embodiment of each of the main themes. I have striven to re-create, as exactly as possible, the structure of meaning in each novel. My aim is, of course, to send my reader back to the novels with quickened eyes. I am aware that only the novels themselves can exactly present their meanings and structures.
At first glance, Willa Cather's *My Antonia* (1918) is a very loosely constructed novel, but careful examination reveals a number of forces binding it together rather closely. Among these are the form of the double memoir, the consistent voice of the first-person narrator, Jim Burden, and the moods of nostalgia and hopefulness which pervade his recital. More important still in their unifying effect are the themes which his story expresses. E. K. Brown testifies to both the apparent looseness of construction and the unifying effect of the themes when he writes: "For a while...the pictures seem to be hung

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1 Within the novel itself, Cather announces that the structure is to be an apparently artless one. See *My Antonia*, p. xii. All page numbers refer to Volume IV of the Library Edition of The Novels and Stories of Willa Cather (13 vols., Boston, 1937-1941). Hereafter I shall refer to volumes of the Library Edition simply by the Roman numerals.

Against reviewers who found her books difficult to classify, Cather publicly defended her use of the free, or apparently free, type of novel structure. See her articles on Death Comes for the Archbishop (Commonweal, VII [Nov. 23, 1927], 713-714) and Shadows on the Rock (Saturday Review of Literature, VIII [Oct. 17, 1931], 216). These articles were reprinted in her *Willa Cather On Writing*, edited by Stephen Tennant (New York, 1949), pp. 3-17. In the light of this disagreement, the dedication of *The Professor's House* (1925) takes on a special meaning. The dedication reads, "For Jan because he likes narrative."
in a casual and episodical fashion;...They have been painted and arranged so that one may apprehend the values in that old Nebraska world..." 

Before considering themes, I shall discuss a number of elements from which they spring: the simple story of Antonia's life, the stages of Jim's feeling about her which themselves constitute a story, Jim's qualities as a narrator, and the most striking problem in the construction of the novel, the relevance of the "Lena Lingard" episode (the fourth section of My Antonia).

Jim Burden nostalgically depicts the development of Antonia Shimerda, who leaves Bohemia and arrives on the Nebraska prairie when she is fourteen years old—old enough to have strong and precious memories of the old

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3 A similar situation, the development of two people with their background as a parallel to their experience, is described in Willa Cather's A Lost Lady. Three of her novels—The Professor's House, My Mortal Enemy and Death Comes for the Archbishop—are double memoirs, and the five books show her fascination with the form and the variety that she achieved within it.
country, and young enough to love a new one. Her life is hard. Her father commits suicide shortly after the arrival of the family, long before the family has established itself. Antonia must work in the fields like a man rather than going to school as she would like. Later, after two years in town as a hired girl, she falls in love with a railroad conductor who gets her pregnant and deserts her. Then she marries a Bohemian whose gentle worldliness is rather like her father's and they struggle successfully to make their farm thrive. When the novel ends, she is forty-four years old; she has nine children and one grandchild. Her gestures convey her love for people and animals, and plants and trees. She has not the majestic largeness and perfection of an earlier Cather heroine, Alexandra Bergson (O Pioneers, 1913), but to Jim Burden she is a mother of races, in tune with great forces which she instinctively understands.

By stages Jim comes to value Antonia thus highly. At first, when they are children, he immediately accepts her. The first section of the novel shows the friendship between the two, a friendship which is deep and pure but which comes to be troubled by diffidence and condescension. On occasion, Antonia is a puzzling foreigner to Jim; sometimes he is an unsympathetic native to her. In adolescence, he is half in love with her: he would like to have romantic dreams of her, and he would like her to
think of him as a lover. But his dreams are visited by another, Lena Lingard; Antonia, four years older than he is, treats him like a younger brother.

When Jim is graduated from Black Hawk High School, he leaves town to free himself of his past life. To his surprise, he learns that he cannot dismiss from his mind forever old friends, acquaintances and enemies. His mind is not free for the contemplation of the higher things which college is meant to offer. But suddenly Jim perceives a connection. One evening while he is studying the Georgics, the voluptuous and sweet-tempered Lena Lingard comes to visit him.

It came over me...the relation between girls like those [Lena, Antonia and their friends] and the poetry of Virgil. If there were no girls like them in the world, there would be no poetry. I understood that clearly, for the first time.

(p. 270) 4

Jim Burden's experience may be compared with the insight that comes to Thea Kronborg in Panther Cañon (The Song of the Lark, 1915) and to Tom Outland on the mesa (The Professor's House, 1925). The little part of each character suddenly merges with a much larger past. Cather describes the experience undergone by a much less thoughtful person in One of Ours (1922), V, 384.

Cather's reference to Virgil's Georgics at this point in My Antonia reminds one that the two works share certain aims: to describe with poetic realism a round of rural labor, to show the intimacy of man and nature within that life, to contrast the purity of country life to the luxurious and unsatisfying life outside of it.
Jim toys with the idea of marrying Lena, but their love affair slowly comes to a rather indefinite stop. She becomes a beautiful part of Jim's past, a reason for his wishing to look backward. Jim's memory of her partly explains the nostalgia which colors events of the novel.  

Jim is to see Antonia only twice more. He next sees her two years after the birth of her illegitimate child, bowed down by troubles but unbroken. His feeling on this occasion is tinged with pity, as well as admiration for her great strength; Jim tells her more explicitly than elsewhere in the novel of his great love and admiration for her. (At this point, he thinks her most in need of such an avowal.) At this point too, Jim is most openly nostalgic; if he has his troubles, he does not say what they are, but he wishes he were a boy again. Two decades later, Jim's reference to his troubles is almost as oblique: "In the course of twenty crowded years one parts with many illusions. I did not wish to lose the early ones." (p. 328)

We shall see that Jim's final view of Antonia has melancholy elements, but it is mainly triumphant.

5 Will the inconclusiveness of Jim's romance with Lena and the unhappiness of his marriage lead him to look longingly at the past? Parts of Jim's account are sentimental (Jim's appreciation of Antonia's husband is perhaps over-enthusiastic), but that most objects are not painted out of recognition we have a number of assurances in the novel. The introduction, outside the novel proper, also shows us that Jim is not alone in his attitudes about Antonia's significance. (The "voice" of the introduction, belonging to no clearly defined person, seems to be Cather's.)
Jim's story of Antonia is one of growth and success; his story of himself contains some implications of failure. Jim and his friend Antonia grow and change while the prairie itself, partly because of their efforts, takes a civilized shape. But we learn less and less of Jim as the novel progresses. At its end his chief happiness is his memory of the young Antonia and his renewed friendship with the middle-aged woman. Jim sees her life as successful: her children and her husband reflect her happiness; her personality has unflagging strength. Behind Jim's sense of his own failure (if failure is not too strong a word to explain his complete silence about his wife and his work) and Antonia's success, lies his notion of right relationship to the land, a notion which I shall discuss later.

The introduction to the novel, a part of the fiction told by a friend of Jim's, immediately puts perspective behind Jim and begins to set the mood of his narration. Directly and indirectly, the introduction gives information about Jim. The friend who narrates the introduction

6 See IV, x. The introduction tells us that "His faith in it [the prairie country] and his knowledge of it have played an important part in its development." (Jim is a lawyer for a western railway.)
is rather like Jim: she has left the same little prairie town; she too lives in New York City; she too finds Antonia the symbol of a special and beautiful past. Like Jim, the first narrator has had a lover's quarrel with the region. The friend mentions Jim's unhappy marriage and his "disappointments." Jim is romantic, she tells us, and her description is repeated within Jim's narrative. (Romantic is not simply opposed to realistic here. "The romantic disposition which often made him seem very funny as a boy has been one of the chief elements in his success," she says, p. x, and Jim's favorable judgment of the hired girls is, in the long run, more accurate than Mrs. Harling's cynical view.) But though the first narrator points out Jim's romantic disposition as though she eschews it, she does not share his nostalgia, and her own phrase about

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7 In the first edition, the sex of the introduction-narrator is female. The sex is not stated in the revised introduction. Brown, op. cit., p. 201, suggests that Cather did not wish her reader to ask whether the whole story might not be better told by a woman.

8 See especially the opening paragraph of the revised introduction with its evocation of the beauty and wretchedness of the prairie. This mixture of feeling was also Cather's. See Mildred R. Bennett, "Catherton," Prairie Schooner, XXIII (Fall, 1949), 279. Inner conflict, when it does not produce anarchic confusion, when it provides detachment and involvement, can be a profitable attitude for the artist. Among the writers who testify to this are Nathaniel Hawthorne, Marcel Proust and W. B. Yeats.
remembering is often echoed in Jim's narrative.⁹

Jim's first-person narration lends itself to the retrospective mood and takes the reader into what the introduction calls the "freemasonry" of prairie-dwellers. Jim is not alone in his appreciation of Antonia's personality, but he is best equipped to write of it. His attitude is complex. He has left the prairie and yet he cherishes the memory of it. He is involved in Antonia's life and yet is detached from it. He is the best educated of Antonia's friends, and he has seen enough of the world to know his village. The fact that he is a man increases the interest of his position. Jim says to Antonia: "I'd have liked to have you for a sweetheart, or a wife, or my mother or my sister—anything that a woman can be to a man..." (p. 321) Except for that of wife, something of all these roles enters into the relationship between Jim and Antonia. There is some justice in E. K. Brown's statement that the story of Antonia could as well be told by a woman.¹⁰ Some awkward problems arise from the masculinity of the narrator. One wonders, for example, why he does not make more effort to marry Antonia, particularly in the light of the speech I have just quoted. On the

⁹ See IV, 4, 5, 8, 16, 23, 24, 31, 32, 174.

¹⁰ Brown, op. cit., p. 201.
other hand, if the story were told by a woman, many scenes, such as Jim's encounter with the snake and his dancing with Antonia, might lose their force or disappear from the novel; perhaps the tone of the entire novel would be marred. It is fruitless to speculate on what a work of art would be if it were quite different—and therefore a quite other—work, but the work of art before us does show that its unsatisfactory solutions provide compensations.

Another difficulty within the novel, the intrusion of the Lena Lingard episode, is apparent only. Until this section, the narrator's eye is never far from Antonia. Although there have been steady motions away from and back to Antonia, the third section is the longest motion away. It is, however, prepared for by the established rhythm of the novel, and Lena herself has been rather lengthily introduced to us earlier. "Lena Lingard" also presents implications about Antonia's character. In Lena's thoughtless flirtation, her worship of pretty clothes, her careful avoidance of marriage (she does not wish to be hampered by home, husband and children), her bitterness toward the past, she is the opposite of Antonia.\(^1\) What happens to Lena and Jim in this episode

\(^1\) Brown, op. cit., p. 203 cites other details to make this point.
is unimportant to Antonia and so it is not so firmly bound to the rest as it might be.\textsuperscript{12} But Antonia is kept in the background of the Lena episode, and her name occurs in all of its chapters except one. (In that one, Jim keeps the focus almost entirely upon himself. The result is a kind of demonstration of his "romantic" disposition, his strain of sentimental gallantry, presented by his lyrical reaction to a performance of \textit{Camille}.) The episodic rhythm of the novel, the preparation for this section, the descriptions of Jim's and Antonia's characters within it, all tie the apparently digressive episode securely to the rest of the novel. Furthermore, the subsequent section, through the person of the Widow Steavens, makes explicit the contrast between Lena and Antonia which Jim has been too gentlemanly to do more than provide the materials of. Finally, the thematic importance of the "Lena Lingard" section helps to give it a vital relationship to the other sections of the novel. We have seen earlier that in this episode Jim connects his past with a longer one. We shall see later how important in the entire novel is the subject of the past as a

\textsuperscript{12} Contrast \textit{O Pioneers} (1913), in which the "intrusive" episode concerns the death of the favorite brother and the best friend of the heroine.
source of values.\textsuperscript{13}

Love for the land and for the past: these are the most important themes of the novel. Antonia is the most powerful embodiment of the first theme; her father, Mr. Shimerda, a poignant representative of bygone ways and immutable standards, is the powerful symbol in the second. A closely related theme is that of human struggle: there is a great interplay of forces, as human beings change the land and are changed by it. The symbol of the land as a tabula rasa crying out to be written on\textsuperscript{14} is important in a fourth theme: the sense of hopeful possibility. These themes cross each other's boundaries from time to time, and are most clearly unified by the last theme and the title character.

II. The Land as a Source of Values

Repeatedly in \textit{My Antonia}, the beauties of the land are celebrated, the singing crickets, the gold sunflower

\textsuperscript{13} Can theme alone connect disparate elements? R. G. Stern ("A Perverse Fiction," \textit{Kenyony Review}, XX \textit{(Winter, 1958)}, 140-144), in the course of remarks on the paradoxical importance of theme, answers the question in the negative. Cather's practice indicates that her answer is the same. The Lena Lingard section comes closer to pure digression than any other episode in all of the Cather novels, but it does not come very close.

\textsuperscript{14} IV, 7.
trails and cornfields, the sunsets splendidly visible from the flat land, the terrible winds and great storms. Soon after his arrival on the prairie, Jim submits to these beauties with a self-dedication which is the reverse of striving:

I was something that lay under the sun and felt it like the pumpkins, and I did not want to be anything more...Perhaps we feel like that when we die and become a part of something entire, whether it is sun and air, or goodness and knowledge...When it comes to one, it comes as naturally as sleep.

(p. 18)

Antonia also gives herself immediately to the land. Her doing so creates a strong bond with Jim even before she learns English. The two children visit together the orderly civilization of a prairie-dog town, chase their shadows over the long red grass, glory in heavy snowfalls, climb to a shed-roof to watch distant lightning. From first to last, Antonia and the country are identified:15 "More than any other person we remembered, this girl seemed to mean to us the country..." (p. x) But Jim does not give himself to the land so variously and completely

15 IV, 23, 353.
as does Ántonia. He makes no sacrifices for it. He is "reserved for something better"—which turns out to be less good and less happy.16

About the prairie region, Jim always has conflicting emotions. Although it is a blank sheet for man to write upon, it is also a mockery of man's desire for landmarks and for a protective God. Ántonia and the region become associated with each other as Jim describes his identification with both. He loves them and puts them out of mind for a time; in the end, he accepts them as parts of the "precious, the incommunicable past." (p. 372) Even in the midst of his final idyllic description of Ántonia's family and their merry abundance, however, Jim does not neglect to mention the dreadful loneliness of this country.17

Nor is the countryside simply forlorn. It contains elements that are positively hostile—a fact which Jim senses when he first glimpses Nebraska; his feeling is soon confirmed by his grandmother's warning against the ever-present snakes. Winter is mercilessly cold, summer is mercilessly hot. No wonder that Jim and Ántonia respond to Peter's story of the man-eating Russian wolves; the story only exemplifies the savagery in that nature

16 Although the introduction refers to Jim's part in developing the prairie country, his contribution is unsatisfactorily explained.

17 IV, 347, 366.
which surrounds them. A little later, Jim dreams that wolves pursue him through a mysterious land that is a cross between Nebraska and Virginia, his previous home. Jim's dream, a very minor incident, serves to underline the thematic connection of apparently diverse episodes of the novel.

Some of the losses exacted by the savagery of nature can never be restored; they can only be accepted and, in some cases, set within a heroic framework. Nature achieves a climax of ferocity when Mr. Shimerda, Antonia's father, commits suicide during the incredible cold. More than any other single fact, the horror of prairie winter is responsible for his death. Later in the novel, his death is given perspective as man's battle against nature is summed up again in an atmosphere of mingled hope and melancholy. During an afternoon with four hired girls, Jim talks of Coronado, his passing through Nebraska and his "death in

cause and effect are suggested first in the novel by the careful way in which the conditions of winter and the conditions of Mr. Shimerda's death are described side by side. Perhaps Cather felt that the relationship of the death to the frightful weather might be lost in the mere juxtaposition, particularly since Jim's vision of deep snow and intense cold is seen through childlike wonder. There is a symbolical hint: Mr. Shimerda's body requires a square coffin because his corpse has frozen stiff in a doubled-up position. There are stronger indications later from Antonia (pp. 179, 244) when she remarks on two other deaths.
in the wilderness of a broken heart." To this Antonia replies, "More than him has done that." (p. 244) A few moments later the nickerers see a curious sight:

On some upland farm, a plough had been left standing in the field. The sun was sinking just behind it. . . .

Even while we whispered about it, our vision disappeared; the ball dropped beneath the earth. The fields below us were dark, the sky was growing pale, and that forgotten plough had sunk back to its own littleness somewhere on the prairie.

(p. 245)

Thus is evoked the real but temporary dominion of man over nature. 20

At the end of his story, although Jim finds that the old sadness of the landscape persists, he is overjoyed by the great changes which lie before him:

I could see black puffs of smoke from the threshing machines. The old pasture land was now being broken up into wheatfields and cornfields...the whole face of the country was changing. There were wooden

19 There is a heroic human past to warn and inspire the pioneers, but there is also a sinister past suggested by the Indian ring where, according to a hired man, Indians used to torture their prisoners.

20 The same point about man and nature appears in O Pioneers (1913). See I, 307-309. Because the point is made through labored, preachy dialogue in the earlier novel, it is clearer and less powerful than in My Antonia.
houses where the old sod dwellings used to be, and little orchards, and big red barns; all this meant happy children, contented women, and men who saw their lives coming to a fortunate issue....all the human effort that had gone into the land was coming back in long, sweeping lines of fertility.

(p. 306)

Humanity has triumphed over this land; Antonia has triumphed over her misfortunes. We see Antonia at closest range because Jim knows and likes her best. Her triumph is but one of many. She is representative of the

...fine, well-set-up country girls who had come to town to earn a living, and in nearly every case, to help the father struggle out of debt, or to make it possible for the younger children of the family to go to school.

(p. 197)

And so a dominant mood of the novel is happiness, for the land has been tamed, and lives have come "to a fortunate issue." Even the three Bohemian prostitutes, very minor characters, have become heads of households.21

Lena Lingard, Tiny Soderball and Jim Burden are successful too--Lena and Tiny are wealthy when the novel ends, and Jim is an important lawyer. But their success is

21 Contrast E. W. Howe's The Story of a Country Town (1883) in which a legend that individuals can "grow up with the country" is painstakingly debunked.
ambiguous. There is a higher goal than taming land on the Divide, and there is a higher goal than material success in the cities. I have already spoken of Lena's stubborn avoidance of marriage and her almost single-minded concentration on pretty clothes--these are determined by her first home with its abundance of raggedy children. (While Antonia is fortified by the past, Lena is hobbled by it.) Tiny, who has risked life, limb and reputation to acquire a fortune, has "lost the faculty of being interested." She does not even wish to recount the events of her own melodramatic life. The way in which Jim spends much of his life, traveling about on trains, is not a more rootless way than theirs. In him the faculty of being interested is alive and flourishing, and he amuses himself during his long trips by writing down his memories of Antonia. Unlike Lena and Tiny, he is keenly aware that his life lacks intensity, and he tries to restore to it an emotional center. The end of the novel assures us that the living Antonia and her family, not merely Jim's memory of the
young Ántonia, are to form that emotional center.22

The pattern of events in the novel suggests that there is a clear connection between the achievement of a rich and dignified life, on the one hand, and love for the land, on the other. Ántonia has, of course, achieved this kind of success. Jim, Lena and Tiny have not achieved it, and their residence in cities, their desertion of the prairie, is partly the sign, partly the reason for their failure. Mr. Shimerda's suicide springs from a wrong relationship to the land: he lacks the endurance and the bravery to bear its hardships.23 There is another example of such a wrong relationship, a hideously comic example, in Ántonia's story of the tramp who commits suicide at harvest time, a clipping of "The Old Oaken Bucket" in his shirt. The countryside, even at its most gloriously fruitful, fails

22 Does Jim need to take a heritage at second hand from Ántonia? Does he not have a Virginia background? Jim refers briefly to Virginia, and his visit there after his high school graduation may be an attempt to pay tribute to or to restore that heritage. But he says so little about it that perhaps it should be classed with his job and his wife as one of his great dissatisfactions. It is important to remember in this connection that Jim is torn away from his "old country" when he is 16, and that both of his parents are dead then. (The resemblance to a much-publicized fact of Cather's life--her leaving Virginia for Nebraska when she was ten--is obvious.)

23 But there are losses and limitations also as a result of taming the wild land. The beautiful wild red grass over Mr. Shimerda's grave is a token of what is lost. The limitations are referred to thus: "Those girls had grown up in the first bitter-hard times, and had got little schooling themselves. But the younger brothers and sisters for whom they made such sacrifices and who have had 'advantages,' never seem to me, when I meet them now, half as interesting or as well educated." (p. 197)
to measure up to "the scenes of my childhood" described in the poem. Cuzak, Antonia's husband, even though he gives up city life sadly, even though he must draw strength from Antonia, yet achieves happiness from his reluctant sacrifice to the land.24

Elsewhere Willa Cather shows lives of richness and dignity which have, in so far as that is possible, no relationship at all to the land. Two short-story characters come to mind: Don Hedger in "Coming, Aphrodite" (1920) and Gabrielle Longstreet in "The Old Beauty" (1948).25 The novel, O Pioneers (1913), also presents a rebuttal of the notion that success springs from a right relationship to the land. In O Pioneers, the heroine describes life away from the farm as proper to man. Because the heroine of this earlier novel has great stature and because her statements and implications of this kind receive no criticism (in the action, dialogue, summary and auctorial statement of the novel), we may assume that they

24 Brown, op. cit., p. 275, suggests that "Neighbour Rosicky" (XII, 7-62, first published in 1928) is a kind of sequel to My Antonia. In this story old Rosicky (the name given to Antonia's husband) unqualifiedly accepts the country and rejects the city.

25 "Coming, Aphrodite" appears in VI, 3-75. "The Old Beauty" is in The Old Beauty and Others (New York, 1948), pp. 3-72. The latter book is not part of the Library Edition.
reflect Willa Cather's views of that time to a greater or lesser degree. Jim, the narrator of *My Antonia*, has colored his views of prairie life with his own sense of failure and with his separation in the city from the country joys of his childhood. The author has chosen a somewhat sentimental narrator and has given us the means to criticize him.\(^\text{26}\) In two later novels, *A Lost Lady* and *My Mortal Enemy*, she is to make effectively pointed use of the limitations of the narrator. But Jim Burden's inadequacies are not turned to advantage, and, for this reason, *My Antonia* is not a wholly satisfying work of art.

III. The Past as a Source of Values

Antonia's success shines all the brighter because it is contrasted to the unhappiness of her friends and is enhanced by both usual and unusual hardships: the endless demands of farm work on a hostile land, the biting small-mindedness of the townspeople, her father's suicide, her brother's harshness, and desertion by her lover. In view of these difficulties, her acceptance and transmission of

\(^{26}\) Another way in which the novel is saved from sentimentality is explained in a note which, despite its brevity, is one of the best critiques of the novel (Wilbur Scott, "Cather's *My Antonia*," *Explicator*, V [June, 1947], item 58). This note explains how pleasant, warm and gracious elements are balanced by the unpleasant, the grotesque and the evil. My only quarrel with Mr. Scott is that he does not push his argument far enough and so overlooks the posthumous mutilation of Mr. Shimerda by Krajieck.
a cultural heritage are impressive, even though this heritage, as Antonia conceives it, is simple and sketchy.\textsuperscript{27} Antonia's important victory over the land attests to her love and endurance, but it is a means as well to an end,\textsuperscript{28} and Antonia uses it to make her home a tiny, ordered civilization, to pass on her own flair for music, for language and for good manners.

The only sign of Antonia's musical ability is the ease with which she learns to dance. She takes to dancing with the instinctiveness which is so striking a part of her character, and her teacher knows during Antonia's first lesson that she will be the best pupil. Jim likes to dance with her.

When you spun out onto the floor with Tony, you didn't return to anything. You set out every time upon a new adventure. I liked to schottische with her; she had so much spring and variety, and was always putting in new steps and slides.

\textsuperscript{27} Another way of gauging the significance of this heritage is to compare it with the heritage of Nat Wheeler, father of the hero in Cather's \textit{One of Ours} (1922). Wheeler has something of Antonia's pioneering spirit and many more than her advantages. As far as we know, he has taken no values from the past, and money-grubbing is the only aim he borrows from the present; he has no respect for manners, learning or the arts.

\textsuperscript{28} See \textit{O Pioneers} (I, 106-107), where the same point is made less gracefully, in diagrammatic conversation.
She taught me to dance against and around the hard-and-fast beat of the music...

(p. 223)

Twenty-six years later Jim observes that Antonia and her husband have bought an organ for their children. (How much struggle the purchase of this instrument must have cost the prairie family!) Old Mr. Shimerda's violin is now in use by one of his grandsons who shows a talent for it; the boy has taught himself to play. Antonia's smallest child has taught herself to dance.

Antonia also has a gift for language. The ease with which she learns English is astonishing, even when we remember that she has the advantage of being only fourteen years old when she first encounters it. And when she becomes a hired girl in town, only a few weeks pass until she is able to sneak as well as her friends who go to school. In addition, she can tell stories well enough to please the demanding and rather cultivated Mrs. Harling.29

29 The reader must take the narrator's word for it that Antonia is a good story-teller. In one of his few lapses from clear characterization, the narrator puts into Antonia's mouth a puzzling story (p. 178). If its humor is intentional, Antonia is satirical and witty only at this point in the story. If its humor is unintentional, then Antonia is insensitive only at this point. I do not believe that this flaw can be explained away as a device of characterization. There is a comparable lapse in characterization in O Pioneers (I, 53, 88), where Cather, having described the heroine as gentle, naive and without an ounce of cleverness, gives her a speech that is cutting, sophisticated and clever.
The same gifts are noticeable in her children who, though they speak little English until they begin grade school, quickly learn to speak with easy correctness. Antonia's son Rudolph has inherited her story-telling ability.

Perhaps most interesting of all Antonia's gifts is the politeness which she transmits to her household. She has been a rough girl; she is still rough in many ways and even now her impulsiveness draws a reproof from one of her children. But the standards of the Harling household, where Antonia worked as a hired girl, have reinforced her admiration for her father's gentle, orderly ways. She passes on to her children more than a mere respect for good manners because she has the love for things and people which good manners are supposed to express. The children have a deep, affectionate appreciation for Antonia and for the narrator who is an unexpected visitor on the farm. Jim observes that dinner (with eight children) is quiet and well-managed. There is a sunny, peaceful conversation in the orchard arbor. Jim reminds us that on a farm, where every bit of energy is required for more prosaic tasks, this arbor and the trees that surround it have cost a great deal.

In a sense, all of this heritage is specifically Bohemian, since Antonia's respect for music and learning and good manners springs from her continuing devotion to her father, and her love for her Bohemian husband.
Furthermore, the pattern of family behavior takes a Bohemian coloration from Bohemian dishes on the dinner-table, Bohemian language rolling off the oldest and youngest tongues, and Bohemian superstition in the background.  

Antonia entertains a number of moods toward the Bohemian past. When she is a child, her feeling is a bitter longing like her father's. Six years after her father's death, she thinks nostalgically of the old country. But after her marriage, when she is surrounded by her children, the Bohemian past, even though it may have its sad and bitter aspects, is joyous— for it is now a living past, its life assured as her children accept and savor it. She is more constantly devoted to her old-country past than is Jim to his Nebraska past, but her change of feeling parallels this.

In Antonia love for the old culture merges with love for the new land. For her, nature as it manifests itself

But the narrator does not view the Bohemian heritage sentimentally; another kind of Bohemian heritage is shown in Antonia's mother and brother, who are harsh, greedy, and dishonest, without the faintest desire for culture. The disappearance (almost without explanation) of mother and brother from the end of the novel and the re-introduction of the "good" Bohemian Jelinek, a minor character, may conceivably be regarded as sentimental.

Again My Antonia may be compared with O Pioneers to the detriment of the earlier novel. Announcements of the Bohemianness of Antonia and family are quietly made and from that quietness they gain some of their power. In O Pioneers the heroine's Swedishness is a much-discussed question, and her insistence on the importance of being Swedish seems almost as vulgar and insincere as her family's insistence upon becoming "American" as quickly as possible.
on the prairie is a reminder of old-world ways. A cricket is like the old beggar whom she loved in Bohemia; the elder bushes near the river resemble those in her father's orchard-arbor in Bohemia; her multi-colored geese are uniformed Bohemian soldiers. Thus, the old world maintains its reality within the new.

There are other senses of the past which Antonia feels are worth preserving. Her Nebraska past is a well from which she draws beauty and meaning. Her Nebraska experiences mean enough to her that she sees fit to hand them on to her children; they know a good deal even about persons who were friends of Jim's rather than of Antonia's. The long past of the prairie is also of the keenest interest to Antonia. It is she who urges Jim to tell of Coronado and his men in Nebraska. Perhaps Antonia loves this prairie past because it puts her father in a heroic framework. Perhaps her feeling is also like Jim's when at first sight of the country he bewails the absence of landmarks, or like an emotion described in a later novel.

To people off alone, as we were, there is something stirring about finding evidence of human labor and care in the soil.

31 But Antonia and Jim treasure natural beauties for their own sakes, not only when they stand as emblems and suggestions. Contrast Thea Kronborg, heroine of The Song of the Lark (1915), for whom natural objects are beautiful only as emblems or historical props.
of an empty country. It comes to you as a sort of message, makes you feel differently about the ground you walk over every day.

The deepest sense of Antonia's heritage emerges through an examination of her father. Mr. Shimerda appears in but a few scenes, and his suicide occurs within the first quarter of the novel. Nonetheless, he is a major character. After his death, Jim describes how he himself is, in a sense, haunted by Mr. Shimerda's ghost; the entire novel is haunted by his spirit. He is mentioned at most of the climactic points of the novel: when Jim tells the hired girls of the heroic Nebraska past, when Jim delivers his graduation speech, (dedicated to Mr. Shimerda), when Antonia congratulates him on it, when Antonia meets Jim shortly after the birth of her illegitimate child, and finally when Jim sees Antonia's large and happy family. Even Mr. Shimerda's burial is a symbol of heritage. Protestant hymns are sung over the Catholic corpse, buried at what is thought to be a crossroads, in obedience to old-world notions of what is due a suicide. But later when roads are put through the territory, they do not cross the grave. Thus does the new world modify the old.

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32 The Professor's House, VIII, 191.
Ten-year-old Jim senses in Mr. Shimerda a patrician quality of which his scarf and stick-pin are the most obvious signs. His courtly manners and neatly-brushed, rather long white hair remind Jim of ancestral portraits back home in Virginia. Far from regarding Mr. Shimerda's foreignness as a blemish, Jim pays it immediate respect and thinks somewhat defensively of his own "old country." Mr. Shimerda's decorum is to find expression even in the management of his own death, in the very careful way in which he places his clothes and his body before he shoots himself. His manners, his rather elaborate fashion of dressing and his quaint gun, are traces of his esthetic response to life. The fact that these traces are small is significant, just as it is significant that there is a whole side of Mr. Shimerda (his love of music, of ideas, of camaraderie) that is spoken of but never shown. So

33 Paradoxically, Jim's patrician notions make him appreciate the hired girls as the other townspeople do not. What do the townspeople care if Lena Lingard's grandfather was a much respected minister in the old country? But one reason that Jim respects Lena is that she is, despite appearances, of good family. (Compare the attitudes of Hepzibah and Phoebe toward Uncle Venner in The House of the Seven Gables and of the townspeople in Cather's Obscure Destinies, XII, 113, who live in "a snappy little Western democracy, where every man was as good as his neighbour and out to prove it."

little room is there on the prairie for Bohemian amenities. Not only his sense of decorum but his great love and generosity are apparent throughout the novel. His somewhat effusive love for Jim and Antônia is strange to Jim. (Mr. Shimerda is very different from Jim's grandfather who also has a capacity for love but who speaks his mind only at prayers.) Mr. Shimerda's generosity is in strong contrast to his wife's, for it contains no desire for recompense. But Mr. Shimerda's love and generosity receive their finest testimony after his death. Six years after, Antônia tells Jim of her father's marriage. He had been of a much higher social status than her mother. "...he could have paid my mother money, and not married her. But he was older than she was, and he was too kind to treat her like that." (p. 237) It is plain whence springs the nobility of Antônia's behavior toward her rascally lover; it is plain why her good manners are more than carefully followed rules. The heritage which Antônia so wholeheartedly accepts and of which Jim has so keen an appreciation, is not simply a miscellaneous collection of beliefs and habits from a certain corner of the world. It is embodied in a man of character, and the beauty of his character is a part of that heritage.
IV. The Interplay of Character and Environment

In *My Ántonia*, there are numerous examples of the way in which surroundings shape character. Grandmother Burden suggests that Mrs. Shimerda is not as bad a woman as poverty makes her seem. I have already remarked on the warping of Lena Lingard's character by her early environment. Hers is a mild tragedy in reaction. But Mr. Shimerda's tragedy is not mild. If only, somehow, he had been able to take his environment with him to the new land! If only his first winter had been less severe! Ántonia's life too is hampered by environment. As Jim watches her wonderfully inventive dancing, he thinks, "If instead of going to the end of the railroad, old Mr. Shimerda had stayed in New York and picked up a living with his fiddle, how different Ántonia's life might have been!" (p. 223)

Perhaps Ántonia's relationship with Donovan, the railroad conductor, is an instance of the way in which character cannot shape environment. Her gravest misfor-

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35 Brown (*op. cit.*, p. 286), comparing Mr. Shimerda with Euclide Auclair, a main character in *Shadows on the Rock* (1931), points out that Auclair was able to bring all his household goods to Canada with him and to live, as he had in Paris, close by his beloved patron.
tune is shown to spring directly from her good nature. Because Antonia gives her heart fully and unquestioningly, Donovan has no trouble persuading her to come to the city and marry him at some later time. Antonia has so little of shrewishness or worldly caniness that she makes no attempt to force him to marry her when he seems reluctant. She showers him with kindness so that he will want to marry her. And then he disappears.

Destiny plays other tricks in the novel. The three Bohemian prostitutes attain great respectability. The indolent, sensual Lena Lingard makes her fortune and never falls even temporarily from grace. She too gives her heart away, but she gives it "now and then," and she is incapable of giving it completely as Antonia does. The domineering Tiny Soderball takes every possible chance with her good name. Money is her object, and she grows old amid wealth and reputation.

But on the whole, good and evil are appropriately rewarded and character does shape environment. When Jim first sees the Nebraska prairie, it is "...not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made." (p. 7) In the end, only the red grass over Mr. That Antonia's devotedness traps her——she can never believe evil of anyone she loves——is made clear three separate times, by Lena, by Mrs. Steavens and by Antonia herself.
Shimerda's grave serves as a reminder of the old wilderness. The vast change is a tribute to the hired girls (among others), even the most giddy of whom sent home a part of each week's wages in order that their parents' sod houses might be replaced by wooden ones.

There is a quite different sense in which environment is important in this novel, that sense in which each man makes his environment by looking at it through his own eyes. I have mentioned earlier the way in which the new land bears its symbols of the old for Antonia. Of course, such symbols are not written on the earth for all to read; they exist because Antonia is there to read them.

As I have remarked earlier, Jim makes the picture-gallery of *My Antonia*. There are no ironic attacks on Jim delivered inadvertently by himself (a situation that occurs frequently in, for example, Ring Lardner), but his view of existence is not identical with Willa Cather's, a fact of which she gives us brief but clear warning when Frances Harling (her wisdom and knowledge already established) says to Jim:

"I expect I know the country girls better than you do. You always put a kind of glamour over them. The trouble with you, Jim, is that you're romantic."

(p. 229)

Jim does not grow less so with time; as I have explained earlier, there is reason to think that he has grown
more romantic. The epigraph of the novel is "Optima dies ... [sic] prima fugit." Jim's novel abounds in tokens of the vanishing best as the light of youth (no metaphor, alas, says Jim) disappears from the eyes of the hired girls, Antonia loses her girlish beauty, and Tiny Soderball's vivacity is gone with the red grass and wagon-roads of the earlier prairie.

It is largely through Jim's descriptions of his feelings—less through events themselves or through speeches of the other characters—that the revolt-from-the-village theme appears in the novel. Almost the whole of three chapters and a number of scattered remarks present this theme. Here is Jim's opinion of the town girls, as opposed to the hired girls:

Some of the High-School girls were jolly and pretty, but they stayed indoors in winter because of the cold, and in summer because of the heat. When one danced with them their bodies never moved inside their clothes; their muscles seemed to ask but one thing—not to be disturbed.  

(pp. 198-199)

And Jim has sharp words about the ways in which the townspeople entertain themselves: dreaming of far-away towns and cities, listening to the quarrels of the violent Cutters (who suggest the epigram that small towns are composed of hungry little minds with nothing to feed on but one another), stealing glances at the hired girls who
are thought to be of another and a lower class. Yet it is
Jim who has told of the pleasant evenings at the Harlings'
house—the candy-makings and story-tellings, and the opera
scores for piano simultaneously played and described by
Mrs. Harling whose great intensity about people and things
is almost a match for Antonia's own. When he is summing up
the town, Jim is inclined to disregard everything that is
exciting and charming (the Harlings, the dancing tent, the
visit of the negro pianist) but Antonia is not so inclined:

"Oh, I'm glad I went! [Jim has just said
that she ought never to have gone to
town.] I'd never have known anything
about cooking or house-keeping if I
hadn't. I learned nice ways at the
Harlings', and I've been able to bring my
children up so much better. Don't you
think they are pretty well-behaved for
country children?..."

(p. 343-344)

These remarks, coming near the end of the novel and from
Antonia, are important. Just as the novel is saved from
sentimentality by criticism of Jim's perspective, so
Antonia's utterance here prevents the book from becoming a
document in the revolt against the village. Jim's attack
on the village is bitter, clever and memorable. But
Antonia's few and simple remarks on the subject are as
significant. After Jim is beaten up by Wick Cutter, his
wounds take long to heal. The wounds show that the evil
of the village is real, but Jim is the only person whom we
see suffering harm from either of the dreadful Cutters. He alone is in serious conflict with the spirit of the village.

V. The Sense of Hopeful Possibility

It might be remarked of any novel that human possibility is a theme. But My Ántonia differs from, let us say, Thomas Hardy's Far From the Madding Crowd, in its air of persistent hopefulness. The way in which individuals mold environment is more than observed fact in the novel. From the first the mood is exclamatory: "What glorious possibilities lie around us!" The land without boundaries offers unlimited promise and that promise is transferred to the characters, including the sickly and apparently demented Blind d'Arnault, Jim's loving grandfather, the lissome hired girls who work and play and save their money so intently, the kind and loyal hired men, and Jim and Ántonia themselves.

Blind d'Arnault becomes a happy and successful pianist. Grandfather Burden's vast love often takes in actions and religions foreign to, even opposed to, his own, although his narrow-minded propriety helps to make Black Hawk an unhappy place for Jim. The hired girls are strikingly successful, except for Lena and Tiny, whose empty lives I have earlier described. But the
hired men drift off to the Yankee Girl Mine and then out of sight; they are "unprotected" and doomed. Although Jim fulfills Lena Lingard's childish hope that he become a traveling man, his greatest triumph is in his nostalgia, his account of the past.\(^{37}\) (The violent quarrels of Mr. and Mrs. Cutter end when Mr. Cutter kills first his wife and then himself. Their history satirizes the theme of possibility and fulfillment.)\(^{38}\)

The prairie without boundaries is also sadly without landmarks, and Jim's story lies within the fatalistic circle of his opening and closing remarks:

...here, I felt, what would be would be.

\(^{(p.8)}\)

\(^{37}\) Jim's turning to the past is, on the whole, a sign of health. In Cather's first novel, Alexander's Bridge (1912), the same action is a sign of disease. The hero of the earlier novel is more fascinated with the youth that he himself was than with the beautiful woman that the sweetheart of his youth has become. By taking up his love affair with Hilda, Alexander can go back and live out the possibilities of his youth—or so he thinks. The situation in My Antonia is, of course, quite different. Antonia did not permit Jim to have a romance with her in the past, and she is happily married now.

\(^{38}\) Partly because of the lightness of tone with which the Cutters are described, My Antonia is not a document in the revolt against the village.
For Ántonia, and for me, this [old wagon-road] had been the road of
Destiny; had taken us to those early accidents of fortune which predeter-
mined all that we can ever be.
(p. 372)

Jim does not qualify his praise of the developed land
and of Ántonia as the novel closes; the reader, warned of
Jim's propensity for "putting a glamour over them," finds
Ántonia impressive but only that. Ántonia's mature
character and happy family life are enviable possessions,
but Jim's question remains--"What might she have become in
a more civilized society?" The notion of boundless possi-
bility gives pathos to Ántonia's fate.39

Yet Ántonia is the happiest of the characters. She
alone is blessed with a continuing deep response to the
beauty and fascination of life. Her response is stronger
than ever in the fruitful early autumn of her life.
Stronger than ever also is her complex sense of the past,
a sense which she uses as a wholesome escape, a source of

39 I believe that Raymond Thorberg, op. cit., p. 151,
accurately explains the final mood of the novel:

Willa Cather presents us the picture of
Ántonia--one which extends our notions
of human possibility and promise to the
point where, even before anything spe-
cific enters as indication, we have the
feeling that whatever the outcome of
Ántonia's story, it can never measure
up to what we desire for her.
advice, and a gift for the future. Her sense of growing from the past is a part of her growth in the present; to her, the vivid past is part of the vividness of the present. As she stands before us at the end of the novel, engaging in a victorious struggle with environment, drawing strength from the land and from the past, Antonia’s person seems to contain all the themes of this various but unified novel.
Part One: Pioneers and the Land: Fulfillment

Chapter Two: Death Comes for the Archbishop

I. Introduction: Form and Themes

Like My Antonia (1918), Death Comes for the Archbishop (1927) is loosely constructed, but, as far as I know, the unity of the later novel has never been questioned.¹ Death Comes for the Archbishop centers about two French priests—the complex, rather austere Jean Latour, and the very

¹ See Willa Cather on Writing, ed. Stephen Tennant (New York, 1949), pp. 3-14. (This essay, "On Death Comes Archbishop," appeared first in 1927.) Cather's own equivocal words are of interest:

I am amused that so many reviews of this book begin with the statement, "This book is hard to classify." Then why bother? Many more assert vehemently that it is not a novel. Myself, I prefer to call it a narrative. In this case I think the term more appropriate. But a novel, it seems to me, is merely a work of the imagination in which a writer tries to present the experiences and emotions of a group of people by the light of his own.

(pp. 12-13)
friendly, rather simple Joseph Vaillant. The novel is an account of their attempts to organize the new diocese of New Mexico and thus to restore the Church in this part of the new world; small biographies, anecdotes and legends are scattered at almost regular intervals through this account. None of these little stories occupies more than a few pages; all of them clearly reflect the interest of the heroes. At the exact center of the novel, dominating it, is the highly individualized Father Latour. Although events are told in the third person with access to a number of minds, Latour's is entered most often, and he appears often and for longer periods than any other character.

2 Cather uses a number of real names in Death Comes for the Archbishop (among them Kit Carson, Antonio Martinez and Marino Lucero), but Joseph Vaillant and Jean Latour are her names for Joseph Machebeuf and Jean Lamy. Vaillant suggests the active bravery of the one, Latour the austerity of the other.

Although Cather makes wide use of tag-names in her novels (the tribal Antonia, the hardly glittering Sapphira, the conquering Alexandra of O Pioneers, the goddess-like Thea of The Song of the Lark), her practice has never been properly studied, as far as I know.

3 "The Legend of Fray Baltazar," twelve pages long, is an exception. This long flashback vividly suggests part of the Spanish past of the region and is skilfully connected with Latour's experience in order that it may not seem to intrude upon the narrative.

4 In contrast to my view, Thorberg, op. cit., believes that Latour is a stock figure who helps to unify the novel without dominating it.

39
At the beginning and end of the novel, he appears alone. Like Antonia, he helps greatly to integrate the ideas and events of the novel.

Suspense and big emotional scenes are infrequent in the novel, and on the whole, the tone of the writing is unusually quiet. The tone, the dates mentioned near the beginning (1848, 1851), and the early introduction of Kit Carson as a character give the book some resemblance to a historical report. But the tone of the novel is not always quiet;

Brown, op. cit., p. 242, gives a valuable description of the ways in which Cather keeps Latour at the center of her narrative.

Willa Cather On Writing, p. 9, explains the tone which she wished to achieve:

The essence of such writing is not to hold the note, not to use an incident for all there is in it—but to touch and pass on. I felt that such writing would be a kind of discipline in these days when the "situation" is made to count for so much in writing, when the general tendency is to force things up.

Typical of Cather's avoidance of obvious dramatic effects is her omitting to describe Latour's immediate reaction to the death of Vaillant.

See Death Comes for the Archbishop, IX, 125, footnote, where Cather, by pointing out a departure from historical fact, suggests that everything else in the novel is factual. See also Edward A. and Lillian D. Bloom, "The Genesis of Death Comes for the Archbishop," American Literature, XXVI (January, 1955), 480-506. The Blooms present evidence that the novel is, for the most part, based on carefully chosen facts.
sometimes it is hearty and forthright, sometimes lyrical. The title of the novel may appear out of keeping with its

8 Here are examples of the three styles, the quiet, the hearty and the lyrical. The first is artfully simple, its two most conspicuous adjectives presenting a balance of moods:

In the late afternoon of the following day the Bishop was walking alone along the banks of the life-giving stream, reviewing in his mind the events of the morning. Benito and his daughter had made an altar before the sorrowful wooden Virgin, and placed upon it candles and flowers.

(p. 34)

The second passage takes its heartiness from the onomatopoetic "horseback back to Abiquiu" and from its two trite, downright phrases, "medicine to his soul" and "his day was over."

All the while [Martinez] had been in Taos, half a lifetime now, he made periodic pilgrimages on horseback back to Abiquiu, as if the flavor of his own yellow earth were medicine to his soul. Naturally he hated the Americans. The American occupation meant the end of men like himself. He was a man of the old order, a son of Abiquiu, and his day was over.

(p. 177)

The lyricism of the third passage needs no comment.

...what one saw when one looked about was that brilliant blue world of stinging air and moving cloud. Even the mountains were mere ant-hills under it. Elsewhere the sky is the roof of the world; but here the earth was the floor of the sky. The landscape one longed for when one was far away, the thing all about one, the world one actually lived in, was the sky, the sky!

(p. 270)
happy mood. But the word for in the title suggests a social call (as it does in Emily Dickinson's "Death...kindly stopped for me"), and the Holbein picture of Death coming for the bishop is the most nearly serene of the Dance of Death series. There is some justification too for regarding the novel as a detailed account of the memories which come to the archbishop as he lies contentedly dying; in this way the title, together with the last section of the novel, helps to unify the whole work.

The story begins with Jean Latour's appointment as vicar Apostolic of New Mexico in 1848; shortly afterward, he is made bishop; he and his vicar, Joseph Vaillant, are in charge of the vast New Mexico Territory, including what is now Arizona. They beg money for the building and supplying of churches and religious houses; Vaillant is so accomplished at begging as to be almost an embarrassment to Latour. They risk contagion in their attendance on the sick; they risk death in travelling across their great region in dense snows, its vast, stormy deserts, and its tiny, obscure, lawless settlements. They battle the Mexicans' superstition, and their occasional terrifyingly excessive dramatizations of piety. Latour and Vaillant work

Cather (Willa Cather on Writing, p. 11) explains her title by referring to the Holbein Dance of Death. Although there is no archbishop in the woodcut-series, Cather's title may well allude to the picture of the bishop, who is neither tricked nor forced away by Death but who walks of his own will, resignedly. The radiant setting sun in the etching also suggests the mood of the novel.
to restore a faith which many of these church-forsaken people have almost forgotten. The two priests have distrust and indifference to overcome. Indian babies are sickly; their parents spurn medical aid; the priests can do nothing. When the Indians are persecuted by the government and Latour refuses to intervene (on the grounds that he is a Catholic priest in a Protestant country), the Indians are not understanding.

Priests offer various other problems. One priest appears to have been infected by Indian superstition. Two others break off from Rome to form a church in harmony with their own lust and greed. Latour himself, unlike Vaillant, endures struggles within his own soul. On one occasion, Latour’s desire to see his old friend Vaillant overrides his determination to do whatever is best for the Church. Latour is given also to grey moods; sometimes he despairs of his vast work and feels distant from man and God. But he is saved from ultimate or long-lasting despair. In almost everything they do, Latour and Vaillant are successful. Vaillant dies as bishop of Colorado; Latour, Archbishop of New Mexico, dies near the cathedral which is one of the many fruits of his labor.

The themes of this novel are those of My Ántonia: the land as a source of values, the past as a source of values, the interplay of character and environment, and the sense of happy possibility. All four themes are faintly sketched
out in the scene of Latour's entrance into the novel. Facing death in the desert, Latour discerns a cross-shaped juniper tree. He forgets his thirst by thinking of the Saviour on the cross. Shortly afterward, he comes upon a village by a stream.10

Love of the land is seen chiefly through Latour, the chief window character of the novel. His taste in landscape, like his taste in historical epochs, is very wide. His love takes in the tamed Franch townscape and the wild, various territory of New Mexico. Of the past Vaillant and Latour are both reverential. But for Latour, the valuable past includes the past of the Indian, the Spaniard, the Mexican and the Frenchman. All parts of the human past—even the Roman and the Moslem—are precious to him.

In her essay on *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Willa Cather vividly describes the effect of environment upon character.

In lonely, sombre villages in the mountains the church decorations were sombre, the martyrdoms bloodier, the

10 The themes of the novel are sketched in the Prologue also. Three cardinals and a missionary bishop sit dining out of doors at a villa in the Sabine hills, overlooking Rome. The magnificent landscape and the holy city suggest the land and the past as sources of value. The interplay of character and environment is exemplified principally by the American missionary bishop, a cultivated Frenchman somewhat roughened by hard years in the new world. The sense of hopeful possibility is in the glittering Roman sunset and in the decision (announced in the last words of this opening section) of a powerful Spanish prelate to make Jean Marie Latour the new bishop of Durango.
grief of the Virgin more agonized,
the figure of Death more terrifying.
in warm, gentle valleys everything
about the churches was milder.

The notion is bodied forth, qualified, even momentarily
denied at various points of the novel. While the landscape
always affects man, Willa Cather implies that man ought
always to dominate the landscape if only by observing it.

A glance at the events of the novel shows the great
number and variety of its conflicts, yet the mood of hap-
piness is constant. Latour and Vaillant have fulfilled
their youthful dreams; the writer implies that there is no
happier fate than to enjoy having got what one wanted.

In Death Comes for the Archbishop, there is none of the
painful loss that we feel in My Antonia, no sense that man's
fate is sadly out of keeping with his capacities and efforts.
Priests' work is difficult to measure, but we can point to
the archbishop's cathedral, consider that a good influence
never certainly ends, and remember the feelings of old
Latour and old Vaillant that they have striven, and won a

11 Willa Cather On Writing, p. 5.

12 Numerous critics have described the novel as
lacking in conflict. See, for example, Caroline Gordon, "A
Review (March 8, 1953), p. 31. See also David Daiches,
Willa Cather: A Critical Introduction (Ithaca, 1951),
pp. 113-114.

13 Leaving their orderly French civilization is a jolt
for Latour and Vaillant, and they attempt a partial recrea-
tion of that civilization. Their attempt is colored, of
course, by the nature of the new land. Such problems of
cultural shock and transplantation are among Cather's
permanent concerns.
victory for and through God. In this novel, as in *My Antonia*, the theme of fortunate possibility and the title character help to create an effectively unified thematic structure.

II. The Land as a Source of Values

While beauties of the land are celebrated in *My Antonia*, they are described with equal love, but for the most part, with much less ecstasy in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. Here is a description typical of the restrained and austere Latour:

> [Wild pumpkin] is a vine, remarkable for its tendency, not to spread and ramble, but to mass and mount. Its long, sharp arrow-shaped leaves, frosted over with prickly silver, are thrust upward and crowded together; the whole rigid, upthrust matted clump looks less like a plant than like a great colony of grey-green lizards, moving and suddenly arrested by fear. (p. 101)

To this wild land Latour dedicates himself when he is an old man (contrast Jim Burden's early dedication to the wild land in *My Antonia*) under the shock of the familiar, during a visit to his home in France:

...in the Old World he found himself homesick for the New. It was a feeling he could not explain; a feeling that old age did not weigh so heavily upon a man in New Mexico as in the Puy-de-Dome.
He loved the towering peaks of his native mountains, the comeliness of the villages, the cleanness of the countryside, the beautiful lines and cloisters of his own college. Clermont was beautiful,—but he found himself sad there; his heart lay like a stone in his breast. There was too much past, perhaps... When the summer wind stirred the lilacs in the old gardens and shook down the blooms of the horse-chestnuts, he sometimes closed his eyes and thought of the high song the wind was singing in the straight, striped pine trees up in the Navajo forests.

(pp. 317-318)

The love of wildness is part of Latour's love of nature. He sympathizes with the Indians' love of nature unmarked by man; he notes that the rejuvenating air of a land seems to depart after the land has been tamed.

But though the love of wildness is decisive at one point, it is nonetheless not the greatest part of Latour's love of nature. From the beginning of the novel, Latour's appreciation of nature has mingled with an appreciation of man and his works. Few of his descriptions of nature are free from overtones of civilization:

...in that depression was Santa Fé, at last! A thin, wavering adobe town...[sic] a green plaza...[sic] at one end a church with two earthen towers that rose high above the flatness. The long main street began at the church, the town seemed to flow from it like a stream from a spring. The church towers, and all the low adobe houses, were rose color in that light,—a little darker in tone than the amphitheatre
of red hills behind; and periodically
the plumes of poplars flashed like
gracious accent marks—inclining and
recovering themselves in the wind.
(p. 25)

From the flat red sea of sand rose
great mesas, generally Gothic in
outline, resembling vast cathedrals.
They were not crowded together in dis-
order, but placed in wide spaces, long
vistas between. This plain might once
have been an enormous city, all the
smaller quarters destroyed by time, only
the public buildings left...
(p. 108) 14

As these quotations suggest, there is in Death Comes
for the Archbishop no notion that the land is to be pitted
against the town and the city; nor is there any assumption
that character is to be tested by perception of the superi-
ority of the land. Vaillant prefers the town to the wild
land; the more people, the better for him; we are not urged
to respect him less because of that. Nor does it matter
that Latour is more likely in the city than in the country
to gratify his tastes for good wines and cultivated men.
But town and city are judged by their ability to fit into
the land. The adobe houses of Santa Fé are right because
their crude lines match those of the rugged country and
their hues match those of the earth. The thoughtlessly
transplanted Ohio-style wooden buildings with their flimsy

\[14\] For other examples of such fusion of nature and
civilization in the novel, see IX, 19-20, 25, 27, 47-48,
61-63, 73-74, 97, 108-109, 113-114, 118, 146-147, 174-175,
191-192, 258-259, 270, 279, 322.
woodwork glaring white in the Santa Fé sun are exactly wrong.

Though the land possesses untamable aspects, they are made to count for little and are chiefly associated with the Spanish fathers of the earlier eras. Some very unpromising spots, such as the Ácoma mesa, turn out to be ideal habitats. Only when man removes himself too much from the Indian ideal of respecting and blending with the landscape does the land damage him. Such a man is Fray Baltazar of Ácoma, whose legend constitutes the longest interruption in the flow of the novel.

The Ácoma mesa is high, large and grim, its base surrounded by a luxuriant flowering of deadly nightshade. Here the Indians have built their town on a rock in an ideally defensible place: the rock is difficult to climb; the white pueblos are near enough to the grey of the rock to be indiscernible from a distance. The Church has failed here; Latour feels defeated by the cold acquiescence of these Indians as he celebrates mass for them. Observing the discrepancy between the Ácoma ecclesiastical buildings and their surroundings, Latour senses part of the terrible history of the Church on this site. The Ácoma buildings are grand; their huge carved roof-beams must have been carried by the Indians from fifty miles away; the thick walls of the cloister, the depth of earth in the cloister gardens must also have required much labor from the Indians. The church
speaks to Latour not of the needs of the Indians but simply of worldly ambition. Thus Latour and the reader are prepared for the legend of Fray Baltazar, who lived here in the early years of the eighteenth century. Baltazar bore down heavily on the natives and made his apartments, his cloisters, his fancy garden and his elaborate meals the joys of his life. All but one of the seven deadly sins were his, and he was chaste only as a political manoeuvre to insure his rule. When, in a fit of rage, he killed one of his Indian servants, he was in turn killed by his Indians. His abuse of his surroundings is a failure of human understanding.

By contrast, Latour's appreciation of nature goes hand in hand with his profound human understanding. He finds the unusual and right stone for his cathedral near at hand, and his cathedral is designed to make the most of the setting behind it. Against the advice of the natives, Latour chooses a site for fruit trees; the site proves to be ideal. Just as he senses the peculiar beauties of the plants and rocks and clouds of the region, he senses Kit Carson's honor, Doña Isabella's graciousness and the old servant-woman's religious fervor. Latour's actions verify the description which introduces him:

His manners, even when he was alone in the desert, were distinguished. He had a kind of courtesy toward himself, toward his beasts, toward the juniper
tree before which he knelt, and the
God whom he was addressing.
(p. 21) 15

III. The Past as a Source of Values

Fathers Vaillant and Latour are both deeply concerned
with the past. Indeed, the proper transmission of the past
is a part of their priestly function. Vaillant clings to
his simplified version of the Christian past. That
Christianity may have absorbed even very minor customs
from other religions, he would prefer to overlook. Latour
finds interesting and ennobling the ideas of superimposed
civilizations and of a complicated Christian past. Vaillant
has little interest in the various histories about him.
For example, about the Mexican past only one fact interests
him—that it has sometimes been cut off from the Church.
His affinity with the Mexicans is based on immediate reve-
lation. Latour, by contrast, learns to love his Indians
as he learns what has happened to them and what their
ideals are. For Latour, the Mexican past, the Indian past,
and the Spanish past are all significant. All are

15 Antonia's heartiness contrasts to Latour's
restraint but there is a likeness of fundamental attitude
between the two characters. With the description of
Latour's manners compare My Antonia, IV, 359:

She had only to stand in the orchard,
to put her hand on a little crab tree
and look up at the apples, to make you
feel the goodness of planting and tending
and harvesting at last.  

51
presented in the novel almost solely through the medium of Latour himself, with his heritage of French traits. But different as Vaillant and Latour are in most of their attitudes toward the past, the two men are alike in one respect: they are from the same part of France, and their personal past is a memory which they enjoy together.

How important the Christian past is to Father Latour and how efficacious for him is shown by the scene in which he enters the novel, wandering lost in the desert.

Since morning he had had a feeling of illness; the taste of fever in his mouth, and alarming seizures of vertigo...he began to wonder whether his long wayfaring from the mountains of Auvergne were possibly to end here. He reminded himself of that cry, wrung from his Saviour on the Cross, "J'ai soif!" Of all our Lord's physical sufferings, only one, "I thirst," rose to His lips. Empowered by long training, the young priest blotted himself out of his own consciousness and meditated upon the anguish of his Lord. The Passion of Jesus became for him the only reality; the need of his own body was but a part of that conception.

(pp. 22-23)

Latour's interest in the interwoven layers of history is displayed shortly afterward through his thoughts at Agua Secreta:

The old grandfather had shown him arrowheads and corroded medals, and a sword hilt, evidently Spanish...This spot had been a refuge for humanity long before these Mexicans had come upon it. It was
older than history, like those well-heads in his own country where the Roman settlers had set up the image of a river-goddess, and later the Christian priests had planted the cross.

(p. 36)

Much of the Mexicans' heritage that Latour sees in their actions, he can only be immediately grateful for—their great sensitivity to facial expression as a means of communication, their generosity and open-heartedness, their eagerness to make every act of life a religious one. Mexican interpretations of religious figures charm him. Latour's St. Jacques, for example, is Santiago at Agua Secreta. Santiago is shown on horseback, and Latour is informed that he is the patron saint of horses. But Latour must learn to love the Mexican fondness for high religious color and elaborate ritual. During Latour's terrible dark night of the soul, he thinks that "the Mexicans were children who played with their religion." (p. 212) Later, he is able to love this playing with religion because he sees it in a great context:

Father Latour had delighted [the wardrobe-keepers of the De Vargas Virgin in Santa Fé] when he told them he did not believe...the Empress of France had so many costumes. She was their doll and their queen, something to fondle and something to adore, as Mary's Son must have been to Her. These poor Mexicans, he reflected,
were not the first to pour out their love in this simple fashion. Raphael and Titian had made costumes for Her in their time, and the great masters had made music for Her, and the great architects had built cathedrals for Her. (pp. 297-298)

The three rebel priests, Gallegos, Martinez and Lucero, are also a part of the history of their regions; Lucero, in particular, with his dreadful stinginess, is a creature of delightful fable to the generous and spendthrift Mexicans. But Latour must cut the rebels out of the Church; however much he may appreciate the strength of their characters, he knows that their strength has been misdirected. (And thus the two heroes purify as well as restore their Church.) As for the Penitential Brotherhood, with its violent scourgings and mock crucifixions, it too must be cut out, but the time is not yet, for, to a greater extent than the three priests, the Brotherhood has received the benediction of time.16

The Mexicans are all too easy to understand; the Indians can never be fully understood, certainly not by the white trader who is supposed to know all about them, and not even by Latour, who early wins their respect. The Indians are reserved; sometimes their reserve becomes impenetrability. White men have a vested interest in misrepresentation of the Indian; white men, not wishing to admit their own rapacity,

16 I am informed that the Penitential Brotherhood still exists in New Mexico.
eagerly accept incredible explanations of Indian failure. Newly arrived, practical-minded settlers may dislike inflexible, ancient Indian traditions and the exaltedness of Indian ideals. Some of these barriers are dramatized by Latour's interview with Zeb Orchard, the trader.

[Zeb] saw a party of Indians bringing in a chest by torchlight...."If I'd seen white men bringing in a chest after dark," he observed, "I could have made a guess at what was in it; money, or whisky, or fire-arms. But seeing it was Indians, I can't say. It might have been only queer-shaped rocks their ancestors had taken a notion to. The things they value most are worth nothing to us. They've got their own superstitions, and their minds will go round and round in the same old ruts till Judgment Day."

Father Latour remarked that their veneration for old customs was a quality he liked in the Indians, and that it played a great part in his own religion. The trader told him he might make good Catholics among the Indians, but he would never separate them from their own beliefs.

( pp. 155-156)

Of the Indians' heritage much that Latour is able to learn fills him with respect: their love for wildflowers, changing lights, and all natural objects; their curiosity, dignity, and refined, subtle expressions of affection; their chastity and stoic bravery. (A flashback to a scene one hundred and fifty years earlier helps to establish these as traditionally Indian.) All of these qualities find their answer in Latour's soul. That Latour is taken
through the stone lips into the ominous Indian cave dramatizes his intimate knowledge of the Indians; that he is barred from the secrets of the cave shows the limits of his knowledge.

The few references to the Spanish past of the region are conspicuously placed as indications of their importance. The Spaniards were gold-hunters and cruel conquerors. Only the Spaniards were ever able to conquer Acoma; for the Pecos pueblo the Spaniards exacted an immense tribute. Yet the first bringers of the true cross, disinterested and heroic, were Spaniards. In the Prologue of the novel there is a brief tribute to the Spanish fathers who suffered martyrdom in the new world. The faith that Latour wishes to restore he describes as "planted by the Spanish friars and watered with their blood." (p. 30) Near the close of the novel Latour meditates once more on the Spanish friars:

[If Latour] had used to be abroad for weeks together on short rations, sleeping in the open, unable to keep his body clean, at least he had the sense of being in a friendly world, where by every man's fireside a welcome awaited him.

But the Spanish fathers who came up to Zuñi, then went north to the Navajos, west...came into a hostile country... Surely these [Spanish fathers] endured Hunger, Thirst, Gold, Nakedness, of a
kind beyond any conception St. Paul
and his brethren could have had...
(pp. 321-322) 17

Of the French past there are many reminders in Death
Comes for the Archbishop. The order and decorum that
Vaillant and Latour impose on every department of their
lives are shown by Willa Cather as distinctively French.
They are certainly very different qualities from that pas­
sion ate engagement in ritual which characterizes Father
Martinez. During the rapid events of their American lives,
the men come to value the high gloss of French civilization
less than the strong natural beauties of their New World
home. But they never lose their identity as Frenchmen;
part of their success in America is due to this very iden­
tity. Latour is chosen for his mission during a dinner­
party in Rome where he is said to possess a Frenchman's
devotion to intelligence and arrangement. Symbolic of their
success as Frenchmen is Latour's French cathedral, merging
handsomely with the carnelian hills of Santa Fé.

In the French village of Clermont, Latour and Vaillant
have lived together and made their decision to become mis­
ionaries. Clermont is referred to only a half-dozen ti­es

17 Compare Cather, Shadows on the Rock, X, 97:

Courageous these Sisters were,
accepting good and ill fortune with
high spirit—with humour, even. They
never vulgarly exaggerated hardships
and dangers.

57
in the novel, never at great length. One such reference occurs during the first scene in which Latour and Vaillant appear together.

...they fell to talking of the great yellow [plums] that grew in the old Latour garden at home. Their thoughts met in that cobble street, winding down a hill, with the uneven garden walls and tall horse-chestnuts on either side; a lonely street after nightfall, with soft street-lamps shaped like lanterns at the darkest turnings. At the end of it was the church...

(pp. 47-48)

Clermont becomes the symbol of order, refinement and restraint, of a long and cultivated past. Latour has the opportunity to spend his declining years there. But in the end, to his own surprise, he rejects Clermont where the hand of the past lies everywhere beautiful but heavy. He chooses to die in New Mexico.

In New Mexico he always awoke a young man;...His first consciousness was a sense of the light dry wind blowing in through the windows, with the fragrance of hot sun and sagebrush and sweet clover; a wind that made one's body feel light and one's heart cry "To-day, to-day," like a child's.

(p. 318)

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Death Comes for the Archbishop, IX, 37, 47-48, 210-211, 317-318, 330. These sketchily and evocatively drawn French townscapes form an effective contrast to the New Mexican landscapes.
Nevertheless, his last thought as he lies dying in his beloved New Mexico is of Clermont and of the moment when he succeeded in persuading Vaillant to leave his town and become a missionary. To fulfill the dreams of youth or simply to dream them? One hardly knows, as the novel ends, which is the more joyous action.

IV. The Interplay of Character and Environment

Important as is the physical background in My Antonia, it assumes still greater importance in Death Comes for the Archbishop, and the later novel exemplifies a number of ways in which environment, taking the word in a rather literal sense, shapes and colors human character. Latour believes that the strange and mighty setting of the Acoma church and the magnificence of the church itself may well have had an undermining effect upon earlier priests there.

Pacing those shady passages with four feet of solid, windowless adobe shutting out everything but the green garden and the turquoise sky above, the early missionaries might well have forgotten the poor Acomas, that tribe of ancient rock-turtles.

(p. 117)

For the flock of Father Martinez's church, landscape has colored religious emotion.

When the Bishop dismounted to enter the church, the women threw their shawls on
the dusty pathway for him to walk upon, as he passed through the kneeling congregation, men and women snatched for his hand to kiss the Episcopal ring. In his own country all this would have been highly distasteful to Jean Marie Latour. Here, these demonstrations seemed a part of the high colour that was in landscape and gardens, in the flaming cactus and the gaudily decorated altars...

(p. 164)

Mistreatment, sometimes ending in martyrdom to which the early Spanish fathers were subjected, is joined with another vision of the landscape:

But in the alkali deserts the water holes were poisonous, and the vegetation offered nothing to a starving man. Everything was dry, prickly, sharp; Spanish bayonet, juniper, greasewood, cactus; the lizard, the rattlesnake—and man made cruel by a cruel life. Those early missionaries threw themselves naked upon the hard heart of a country that was calculated to try the endurance of giants.

(p. 322)

There are in the novel only a few more passages as specific as these. On the whole, implication, juxtaposition and atmosphere develop this theme.

The Ácoma Indians resemble the rock on which they live. The gentle inhabitants of Agua Secreta inhabit a gentle land. The extremist Penitential Brothers are surrounded by a wild scenery; their pyramidal mountain is perhaps intended to suggest the ancient Mexican teocalli and the human
sacrifices which took place within them. The parrots of
Father de Baca's region have much to do with his half-
surrender to parrot-worship. We have seen how deeply Father
Latour is affected by elements in the new world environment,
elements for which the old world has not prepared him. 19

But the novel by no means holds that men are simply
products of geography. The land does not undergo a vast
domestication as in My Antonia; other means of stressing
man's freedom and power are employed in Death Comes for the
Archbishop. Numerous examples show that however deeply the
land may affect a man, it is not the total of his environ-
ment, and often it is not the most important part of it.
To Don Antonio, for example, the great influence is not his
land but his European-minded wife. As for Magdalena, wife
of the professional murderer, her youth and beauty return
not because she is taken from an ugly place to a beautiful
one but because she is suddenly shown kindness.

It is the business of a priest to make his faith his
most important context; when Fathers Gallegos, Lucero and
Martinez fail to do this, they are expelled from the Church

19 Father Vaillant's reactions to his surroundings are
not so surely and convincingly described. If he is totally
indifferent to the style of Latour's projected cathedral,
why should Vaillant respond so warmly to the architecture
of the church at Tucson? (See IX, 259, 284.) Once again,
as in O Pioneers and My Antonia, there is in Death Comes
for the Archbishop a small but irritating flaw in the charac-
terization of a major figure.
by Latour. Fray Baltazar's successor on the rock of Ácoma may or may not be affected by the grandeur of the place, but, unlike Baltazar, he does not identify himself with that grandeur. Though Latour, traveling in his diocese, must sometimes go for weeks without bathing, without eating sufficient food and without sleeping in a bed, he is chiefly aware of the friendliness of the natives around him. When we first glimpse Latour, he blots an insane landscape out of his mind by thinking of the passion of Jesus Christ. His ability to read natural objects as emblems is thus more impressive than Antonia's.

Death Comes for the Archbishop signifies that man must have a sense of fitness about the land, must fit himself into the land and yet may not yield himself to whatever the land may suggest. Thus his freedom is imperfect and his possibilities limited. But to the strong and good man, fulfillment is possible; understanding his environment, he stamps his soul upon it. There is no hint of grand promises unkept as in My Ántonia.

V. The Sense of Hopeful Possibility

In Death Comes for the Archbishop, the sense of hopeful possibility is the most pervasive and unifying of the themes. This sense is happier and less qualified than in My Ántonia. In the later novel, the theme is exemplified by the land
itselh, by the Mexicans and, to a lesser degree, by the Indians and by the spirituality that manifests itself often and sometimes exists side by side with vice. The sense of happy possibility is qualified by Indian reserve and distrust, by the not altogether reclaimable countryside and the occasional presence of unreclaimable evil. There are in the novel no examples of ambiguous success, such as we have observed in those renegades from the land, Tiny, Lena and Jim in My Antonia. Furthermore, to the two priests of Death Comes for the Archbishop, no sense of failure attaches. Their circumstances and their characters allow them complete fulfillment, the mood of which pervades the novel, and is supported and enriched by a pattern of light-imagery.

There are two conflicting ideas about land in My Antonia: one that is unshaped and God-forsaken, the other that the land, because it is unshaped, is infinitely promising. Only the first of these ideas is explicit in Death Comes for the Archbishop. At one point early in the novel, when Latour is climbing the rock of Acoma where he is to undergo spiritual defeat in celebrating the Mass for a group of rock-like Indians, the land seems frightfully unfinished:

This mesa plain had an appearance of great antiquity, and of incompleteness; as if with all the materials for world-

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20 The sincere, good and sadly misguided Kit Carson may be regarded as such an ambiguous success (see IX, 340-344), but his final status is much less vividly rendered than the final status of Tiny, Lena and Jim in My Antonia.
making assembled, the Creator had desisted, gone away and left everything on the point of being brought together, on the eve of being arranged into mountain, plain, plateau. The country was still waiting to be made into a landscape.

(p. 109)

But in the end, though he still loves the ordered nature of a cultivated garden, Latour finds in wildness and incompleteness a type of spirituality:

Beautiful surroundings, the society of learned men, the charm of noble women, the graces of art, could not make up to him for the loss of those light-hearted mornings of the desert...He had noticed that this peculiar quality in the air of new countries vanished after they were tamed by man and made to bear harvests.... That air would disappear from the whole earth in time, perhaps...He did not know just when it had become so necessary to him, but he had come back to die in exile for the sake of it. Something soft and wild and free, something that whispered to the ear on the pillow, lightened the heart, softly, softly picked the lock, slid the bolts, and released the prisoned spirit of man into the wind, into the blue and gold, into the morning, into the morning!

(p. 319) 21

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Of Father Vaillant's love of nature we learn little. For him natural objects are associated with the goodness of ordinary people, in particular with the Mexicans whom he is peculiarly able to help. Father Vaillant's favorite site, the Arroyo Hondo, a great ditch between two huge earth walls, with its brilliant profusion of wildflowers, suggests to him a world from which sin has been washed away. "The men and mules walking about down there, or plowing the

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21 Cather was a loving and critical reader of Parkman. Her views as indirectly expressed here and elsewhere in Death Comes for the Archbishop resemble both Parkmanian primitivism as described in Chapter V of H. N. Smith's Virgin Land (Cambridge, 1950) and the "less imaginative" views which Smith describes as opposed to that primitivism. Cather admired both the wild and the agricultural West. She respected the graces of art which Latour had brought to the land, and yet she shows him near the end of his life captivated by graces quite other than artistic.

One other question is raised by this passage—the question of its language, which appears inappropriate to the restrained character of the archbishop. It is an auctorial intrusion explained but not excused by its resemblance to Cather's language when speaking in her own person. Compare, for example, Cather's essay, "Le Levandou," which first appeared in 1902 and is reprinted in Willa Cather in Europe: Her Own Story of the First Journey edited by George N. Kate (New York, 1956), pp. 152-162. (This volume is not part of the Library Edition.) See also Edith Lewis, Willa Cather Living (New York, 1953), p. 150; Lewis's remarks tend to confirm the notion of unfortunate auctorial intrusion in the latter part of Death Comes for the Archbishop.
fields looked like the figures of a child's Noah's ark." (p. 167) They are his beloved Mexicans. Generous, simple, superstitious, fascinated with those miracles which, as Latour says, work not in accordance with but in defiance of nature, quick to see everywhere the direct intervention of God, the Mexicans appeal to Vaillant because they resemble him. Vaillant's impetuousness which repels the Indians is an affinitive fire to the Mexicans; for them, even his great ugliness is an advantage, a sign of great holiness.

When gold is discovered near Pike's Peak, Vaillant must leave his Mexicans in order to go to Denver City, but their usefulness to him is not quite over; he returns years later.

Once again among his own people, as he called them, Father Joseph opened his campaign, and the poor Mexicans began taking dollars out of their shirts and boots (favorite places for carrying money) to pay for windows in the Denver church. His petitions did not stop with windows—indeed, they only began there. (p. 301)

Father Vaillant's life is in many ways a sermon in possibility. Frail from childhood on, he is physically unsuited to the rough missionary life; in the course of tending the sick, he suffers many broken bones and diseases. Yet he does the work of a dozen men and cheats death time after time while stronger men go under. A beehive humming with continual creation, he believes in "rest in action"; Latour says that the great dinners Vaillant eats are quickly
turned into spiritual activity. Vaillant is almost always concerned with immediate problems; partly because he has little sense of the long term, he accomplishes a great deal. His notion that the saints are helping him at every turn and that God will provide—directly if need be—gives him the courage to beg endlessly and to engage in rash and complicated schemes of acquiring lands for the Church. His influence is widespread and profound. A friend rises from his death-bed to attend Vaillant's funeral. "It was one more instance of the extraordinary personal devotion that Father Joseph had so often aroused and retained so long, in red men and yellow men and white."

(p. 292)

Unlike Vaillant, Latour has little interest in the direct intervention of God. Although Father Junipero Serra's22 meeting with the Holy Family does interest Latour, he describes it not as a beautiful event but as an "endearing belief."23 Latour is, however, impressed by

22 Father Junipero Serra (1713-1784) is a historical figure.

23 E. K. Brown, op. cit., pp. xv-xvi, 271, does not clearly describe Cather's view on miracles. Furthermore, Brown's description of events in Death Comes for the Archbishop falsifies the view of miracles presented in the novel. (Contrast Brown, p. 265 with Death Comes for the Archbishop, pp. 57-58.)
It seems likely that Cather viewed miracles as Latour does, since his attitude exactly resembles that of the omniscient narrator in her next novel, Shadows on the Rock (1931). That human embroidery colors many miracles is stated flatly in Shadows on the Rock, X, 136. Miracles are shown as stories of desires. Events in the later novel also tend to qualify the importance of the supernatural as when the priest cheers himself during a freezing night by reciting a jolly Latin poem. Furthermore, the two leading characters, Euclide and Cécile, are rather critical of miracles (pp. 39-40, 126-127, 257). Skeptical Euclide dismisses Mother de Saint-Augustin’s miracle of bones as poppycock, but he does not dismiss her goodness. He thinks it rightly capable of effecting a conversion. (Euclide and Cécile are Catholics and their criticism is thus in the family, so to speak. Cather’s remarks about miracles are in no sense anti-Catholic.)

In Death Comes for the Archbishop, Cather implies that stories of miracles are not factual records of supernatural occurrences. Cather implies this by detail, by tone, and by arrangement of speeches. Only two miracles are described at length in the novel (pp. 53-56, 324-327); in both of these, discrepancies in detail suggest all-too-human embroidery. In the miracle of the tilma, a peasant sees the Virgin in blue and gold; later she is pictured on his tilma dressed "exactly as in his vision"—in blue and rose and gold. In the miracle of the Holy Family, Junipero Serra tells his story. After his experience is pronounced miraculous, he supplies more miraculous details.

A few passages in the novel (pp. 33, 198, 293) suggest that some miracles are fabricated rather than embroidered. Father Lucero’s visit to hell, for example, is thought to occur because everyone around his death-bed, in a state of excitement, is hoping for some such event and is ready to misinterpret his words. (A few pages earlier, Cather has given a non-miraculous explanation of Lucero’s words.)

On two occasions when Vaillant and Latour discuss specific miracles (pp. 57-58, 292-293), Latour has the last word. In one argument, Latour finds the miracle less significant than a non-supernatural event; in the other argument, Latour bluntly explains the miracle out of existence.

But though Latour may shrug at some supposed miracles, he is deeply moved by the story of Father Junipero and the Holy Family. Such a story is part of what Latour calls "the great history of desire and dream."
marvels like these: Vaillant's untiring energy, the transforming love of Vaillant and himself for each other, the servant-woman's passionate experience of the Mass, the sensual Father Martínez's inspiring conduct in his church, the accidental discovery of the yellow hill that is to furnish the stone for Latour's cathedral. The refining of the senses so that transcendent values may be perceived is, to him, the greatest miracle of all.

Latour's life too is a sermon in possibility. Withdrawn, dignified, aristocratic, he seems hardly the man to be a missionary in a raw and wild country. Gracious to all, he has scarcely a close friend, and the years do not teach him how to form ties. He has an agonizing sense of distance from his Indians; almost all of sections three and four of the novel are devoted to this emotion. But his Indians respect him almost from the very first, long before he is aware of their admiration.

...Jacinto liked the Bishop's way of meeting people; thought he had the right tone with...Padre Jesus, and that he had good manners with the Indians. In his experience, white people, when they addressed Indians always put on a false face. There were many kinds of false faces; Father Vaillant's, for example, was kindly but too vehement. The Bishop put on none at all. He stood straight and turned to the Governor of Laguna, and his face underwent no change. Jacinto thought this remarkable.

(pp. 107-108)
Not only his steadiness of demeanor but his emotional reserve suggests a link between Latour and his Indians, and yet at first Latour, missionary and reformer, proud inneritor of European civilization, is appalled by the unchangingness of Indian life, the utter unwillingness to change self or environment:

Through all the centuries that his own part of the world had been changing like the sky at daybreak, this people [the Acoma] had been fixed, increasing neither in number nor desires, rock-turtles on their rock. Something reptilian he felt here, something that endured by immobility, a kind of life out of reach, like the crustaceans in their armor.

(p. 118)

Early in the novel, Latour with his great capacity for respect, is willing to believe that the Indian has behind him a long tradition which he, Latour, is unable to comprehend. At the last, he sees that the Indian's habit of changing nothing and of effacing himself within the landscape is an act of ingenuity and esthetic response, as worthy of respect as European man's "mastery" of his surroundings.

...it was the Indian's way to pass through a country without disturbing anything; to pass and leave no trace, like fish through the water, or birds through the air.

...The Hopi villages that were set upon rock mesas, were made to look like the rock on which they sat, were imperceptible at a distance.
The Navajo hogans, among the sand and willows, were made of sand and willows.... Moreover, these Indians disliked novelty and change. They came and went by the old paths worn into the rock by the feet of their fathers...

(pp. 271-272)

No longer is Latour, as he had been after the mass at Acoma where he felt no response from his congregation, "a prey to homesickness for his own kind, his own epoch, for European man and his glorious history of desire and dreams." (p. 118) He is deeply sympathetic even with the most enigmatic Indian groups.

...he had become interested in the Navajos soon after he first came to his new diocese, and he admired them; they stirred his imagination. Though this nomad people were much slower to adopt white man's ways than the home-staying Indians who dwelt in pueblos, and were much more indifferent to missionaries and the white man's religion, Father Latour felt a superior strength in them. There was purpose and conviction behind their inscrutable reserve; something active and quick, something with an edge.

(p. 339)

Certain aspects of the Indians' lives, such as their old religion, are forever mysterious, but much about them is clear and attractive. Their manners are unvaryingly relaxed and respectful; their hospitality is quiet and tender; they are reserved about their deepest feelings. They perform no sacrilegious acts against their defeated
enemies, and they respect chastity. They are an esthetic people, fond of undecorated speech and landscapes unmarked by man. Like Latour and Vaillant, they have a deep love of place, a love which Latour comes to believe more intense than his own. There are indications that they appreciate Father Latour and his Church. At first the Indians seem "so old, so hardened, so shut within their shells, that the sacrifice on Calvary could hardly reach back so far." (p. 115) But if they exist before the Sacrifice, perhaps they exist also before the Fall. In the last glimpse of them, again through Latour's eyes, they inhabit an "Indian Garden of Eden." (p. 345)

The testing of Latour's religion provides another sign of possibility and fulfillment in the novel. Latour's piety is more complex, less orthodox, and less steady than Vaillant's. All his life, Latour has been subject to grey moods and we see him experiencing a dark night of the soul; from this he is rescued one snowy evening by a poor servant woman with whom he prays in the church, secretly, because she is in fear of her masters. Moved by the old woman's passionate devotion, Latour finds that his night is done.

His friendship with Vaillant brings the greatest test of his piety. The two men have been friends since boyhood; Latour's dependency is the greater since he makes friends with difficulty. Latour, above Vaillant in the religious
hierarchy, could command his friend to stay with him always. Only once does Latour ignore the religious needs of his vast domain and put friendship first. But he does not allow himself to enjoy for long the fruit of his mis-
demeanor. Three weeks after Vaillant has arrived at
Latour's house, the need arises for a priest in the Colo-
rado gold-fields, and Latour presents the situation to
Vaillant as an opportunity made to order for him. As
Vaillant is about to leave, Latour urges him to take both of
their mules. "They have a great affection for each other;
why separate them indefinitely? One could not explain to
them. They have worked long together." (p. 295) But when
Latour returns to his house alone and enters his study--

...he seemed to come back to reality, to
the sense of a Presence awaiting him.
The curtain of the arched doorway had
scarcely fallen behind him when that
feeling of personal loneliness was gone,
and a sense of loss was replaced by a
sense of restoration....It was just this
solitariness of love in which a priest's
life could be like his Master's.
(pp. 296-297)

When Vaillant dies, Latour feels that duty no longer
separates them; they have been joined by death.

Three minor characters, Sada, Magdalena, and Isabella,
all clearly demonstrate human possibility. Sada has been
cruelly abused by her Protestant masters; for nineteen
years she has been forbidden to see the holy things of the

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altar. But holy things have not left her memory; her faith has not faltered nor grown dim. The sense of great religious joy which emanates from her ends Latour's night. Another Mexican, Magdalena, has a still more dreadful life. For six years she has lived in a wretched hovel with her American husband, Buck Scales. A murderer-for-profit, he has also killed their three children in ways too horrible for her to relate. Taking heart from an encounter with Latour and Vaillant, she escapes from her home and is taken by Latour to live in the School of the Sisters of Loretto, founded by him. A testimony to the priests and to her own spirit is her blooming "again in the household of God."

Very different from these primitives is Doña Isabella Olivares, an American woman from Louisiana, married to Don Antonio. Frivolous, flighty, vain of her dyed gold locks and knowledge of three languages, she is so high-spirited that her Mexican servants proudly circulate legends of her secret lovers and love-potions. When her husband dies, leaving his money to her and to the Church, her brothers-in-law contest the will on the grounds that she is too young to be the mother of a forty-year-old daughter. She decides that their suit must be successful; she has the courage of her vanity, and, despite her love of finery, would rather be young and poor than old and rich. (Latour appreciates her civilized lightheadedness and her spirit;
Vaillant feels nothing for her at this point but contempt and anger.) Latour persuades her to confess to the smallest possible number of years, and she wins the suit. She is able to take up her gay life immediately afterward, surmounting her dreadful admission of fifty-two years.

Not all of the land is reclaimable; not all of the people are, either. Among Latour's last visions of his adopted country are its barren, life-destroying areas. And examples of human unreclaimability are many. For the professional murderer, there is no answer but execution.

Manuel Chavez, though proud and brave, collects Indian scalps as a hobby. There are three rebel priests. Father Gallegos is fond of dining, dancing and making love to a rich widow; his rancheros like the gay aura with which he surrounds religion, but the Acoma Indians, for whom he is supposed to be responsible, will have nothing of him. Gallegos is suave and sociable, so happily in love with the good things of life that Latour cannot dislike him; he can only suspend him from his priestly function. As for Father Martinez, he defends his mistresses, his children and his way of life:

"We pay a filial respect to the person of the Holy Father, but Rome has no authority here. We do not require aid from the Propaganda, and we resent its interference. The Church the Franciscan Fathers planted here was cut off; this is the second growth, and is indigenous."
Our people are the most devout left in the world. If you blast their faith by European formalities, they will become infidels and profligates."

(p. 170)

The undertone of violence and blackmail in this speech is borne out by Martinez's other speeches and actions. Indeed, he is proud of his violence, proud that "all the trouble that ever was" in New Mexico originated in his section. Martinez's potentialities for good are clear—his conduct of the Mass shines with spiritual power—but they come to nothing. Though the third of the rebel priests, Father Lucero, receives the last rites from Vaillant and renounces the schismatic church which he has helped to found, his reclamation seems purely technical. Lucero on his death-bed frets about the twenty thousand dollars he has ground out of his parishioners. He does not trust Father Vaillant to manage the money, and he will let no one go near his crucifix because the money lies under it.

Latour and Vaillant have accomplished a good deal. They have brought to their region the idea of the balanced diet, a keener appreciation of landscape and flowers, the restoration of pious forms and habits, order and decorum. Latour has built a cathedral, a symbol of his austere faith and in its repudiation of both the "Ohic German" style and the megalomaniac jigsaw scroll-work of the eighteen-eighties, a beautiful protest against ugliness.
The rightness of this French cathedral in Santa Fé is as strange and true as the rightness of the refined French priest in this raw territory. Although Willa Cather plays down many of the tangible effects worked by the two priests—Latour's concern with the illiteracy of Santa Fé and his establishment of a school are dismissed in a line of the novel—they embody an ideal of the priesthood which Mexicans, Indians and frontiersmen have seen too little of. Father Latour and Father Vaillant are unselfish, loving and devoted.

The dominant pattern of light-imagery in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* presents the same mood of glorious fulfillment. The most frequently described time of day in the novel is sunset. There are fourteen sunsets in the novel; two are premature and weird, associated with evil—the murderous Buck Scales and the impenetrable, possibly sinister Indian rites. The remaining twelve sunsets are glowing and gorgeous, suggestive of full and fitting ends. And the archbishop's great monument is made of a stone the bishop has found in the Santa Fé hills, a gold stone, described by the writer as the color of sunset. Thus do mood and image buttress character and incident to build a strong unity from the diverse episodes of the novel.

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24 E. K. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 254, does not develop his own remark about light-imagery in the novel, but my idea comes from him.
Antonia and Archbishop Latour seem always to have had their codes and standards. From their pasts, they intuitively make fruitful choices. In Part II of this study, dealing with The Song of the Lark and A Lost Lady, we shall observe protagonists in the process of forming their codes. The process is shown in great detail in The Song of the Lark. In A Lost Lady, a very short novel, it is only hinted at. The heroine flounders because of her failure to understand her husband's code. As the novel ends, she is glimpsed very briefly and from a distance after she has learned and applied his lessons.

In Death Comes for the Archbishop, the idea of revolt from the village is denied; in My Antonia, the idea is stated but does not become a theme. In the two novels that we shall consider next, the village is condemned for misunderstanding, discouraging and driving away its most sensitive inhabitants. In My Antonia and Death Comes for the Archbishop, many characters triumph over their environment through their ability to understand it and use it variously. Thea Kronborg, heroine of The Song of the Lark, must leave her village (as do almost all of the friends who have helped to make her life there more than bearable) in order to find education and understanding. She finds a better environment, but never one which gives her full appreciation. Marian Forrester, heroine of A Lost Lady, is almost a victim of her environment; she too leaves her village
but not before submitting herself to the rule of its worst elements. And Marian's success, smaller, more fragile, more difficult to measure than Thea's, wins no applause from a village unable to recognize any success that is not accompanied by wealth and rigid respectability.

Nature and the past are important in *The Song of the Lark* and *A Lost Lady* but less so than in the other four novels of this study. Thea Kronborg unsystematically searches the whole human past for ideals; nature she sees as a parable of achievement or a theater of noble action. Nature, to Marian also, has little immediate appeal; it takes its value from heroic actions in the past of which her husband is a superannuated representative. Nature here plays a small but important part--its symbolic overtones adding fragrance to Marian's charm and her husband's generosity. Nor are the charms of nature and the past, as Thea and Marian perceive them, able to compensate for the losses by which their successes are attended.
Part Two: Artists against Society--Fulfillment at a Price

Chapter One: The Song of the Lark

I. Introduction: Form and Themes

"Fictional biography" applies more or less accurately to all of Willa Cather's novels. Her protagonists are shown from adolescence through a critical point in maturity or until death. (Marriage ends O Pioneers [1913], The Song of the Lark [1915] and Shadows on the Rock [1931].) With few exceptions, each of her main characters is based on a real person. The term, "fictional biography," is particularly apt for The Song of the Lark. Masses of detail in the novel suggest that it is bound, not always in joyous servitude, to the facts; external evidence reveals that like two of her later novels, A Lost Lady and Death Comes for the Archbishop, The Song of the Lark does indeed stay rather close to the facts.¹

The clear story of The Song of the Lark reveals its biographical cast and its thematic unity. Thea Kronborg is born and brought up in a small Colorado town. As a child she reveals a talent for the piano, and for a short while,

¹ Edith Lewis, op. cit., pp. 81, 92-93. Thea Kronborg, heroine of The Song of the Lark, is modelled partly on Olive Fremstad, the Wagnerian soprano (1871-1951), and partly on Willa Cather herself.
her mother must force her to develop that talent. Although set apart from the townspeople by the intensity of her nature, Thea finds a number of friends: her music teacher and the German couple with whom he lives; Dr. Howard Archie, who has some claim to intellectuality and who recognizes her superiority; the musical and lively inhabitants of the local Mexican section; Ray Kennedy, a railroad worker whose idealism matches her own. After Ray's sudden death, she inherits his insurance, with which (she is now seventeen) she goes to Chicago to continue studying piano. Her teacher there, Andor Harsanyi, discovers that her real talent is in her voice. Ill, and discouraged by the atmosphere of corrupted artistry which surrounds her cynical voice teacher, she visits an Arizona ranch with a wealthy Chicago friend, Fred Ottenburg. On this ranch she explores a group of cliff-dwellings, and her appreciation of them constitutes a climax in her artistic development. Thea and Fred fall in love but they part when Fred reveals, on the very eve of marriage to her, that he is already married and cannot get a divorce. Borrowing money from her old friend, Dr. Archie, Thea studies in Europe for ten years and returns as a leading Wagnerian soprano at the Metropolitan Opera House. Although she marries Ottenburg after his wife's death, her life continues to be bound up with her career.
Only two sentences in this summary do not bear clearly on the development of the artist. From the opening pages of the novel, where we watch Thea lying ill on the parlor sofa, her eyes turned toward her book of Czerny exercises, the development of the artist is the central issue. In its conspicuous clarity of outline, *The Song of the Lark* differs from *My Antonia* (1918), which requires the reader to assimilate an apparently digressive episode. But *The Song of the Lark* employs too wide a range of points of view, tones and styles; one very important incident in the story lacks probability. Within the limitations of the story the writer takes too much freedom, and neither the clear plot nor the other devices which we shall consider later, succeed in unifying the novel.

An omniscient observer with access to twenty minds describes events in the novel. Three minds appear most often: Thea's, Dr. Archie's and Fred Ottenburg's. Most of the persons whose minds are revealed are friends of Thea's, but some are very minor characters. Among this last group are Mrs. Archie, a telegraph operator never otherwise identified, and a servant of Fred's. At times the writer intervenes in her own voice to assess the views of her characters: "He believed, and he was right in believing, that the sovereign state of Colorado was much indebted to
Mrs. Kronborg and women like her."² Heavy-handed moralism increases the conspicuousness of the writer's intervention here. Unfortunately, no consistent pattern of intrusion appears in the novel. (Contrast Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* and Hawthorne's *Marble Faun* which begin such patterns in their first chapters.)

Not only the various points of view but the various styles of the novel suggest that it is the work of several hands. Three styles are employed: the leisurely, digressive account; the crisp, careful report; the epigrammatic essay. Willa Cather does not always switch from one to another gracefully. As a rule, the style is characterized by great masses of detail about clothes, food, living arrangements and other matters, often flat, unsuggestive and unnecessary; trivial details tend to crowd and obscure important ones.³ Passion for detail seems even to create whole, small redundant scenes.

² IV, 14-15.

³ Cather later condemned the excessive detail in *The Song of the Lark*. In "My First Novels [There Were Two]" [sic] (Willa Cather on Writing [New York, 1949], p. 97), she writes of this novel, "Too much detail is apt, like any other form of extravagance to become slightly vulgar; and it quite destroys in a book a very satisfying element analogous to what painters call 'composition.'" (Her preface to the 1932 edition, reprinted in the Library Edition, condemns the novel on other grounds.)
On Monday morning, the day after Ray Kennedy's funeral, Doctor Archie called at Mr. Kronborg's study, a little room behind the church. Mr. Kronborg did not write out his sermons, but spoke from notes jotted upon small pieces of cardboard in a shorthand of his own.

Matters are not mended by the fifty words that follow those I have quoted, and the whole passage has no relevance to the section of the novel from which it is taken. This passage would fit more easily into the second chapter of the novel; but there Mr. Kronborg's easy-going nature is established well enough by other details.

The Song of the Lark is a success story and for the most part it is plausible. Thea has a rather large group of self-sacrificing friends, but this fact is prepared for in the early pages of the novel, and it is axiomatic that others help those who help themselves. As Thea's friend, Ray Kennedy, says, "...there are a lot of half-way people in this world who help the winners win..." (p. 156) Furthermore, the heroine is convincingly attractive; it is convincing that others should wish to help her.

Although most of the story is believable, there is one great flaw in the plot. Fred courts Thea, proposes to her, and is accepted by her; then he tells her that he is already married. Why has Thea not heard of his wife? Answering this question creates difficulties, evasions and elaborate explanations in the novel. The scene in which Fred
confesses to her is held off stage, and when Fred and Thea discuss their problem shortly after his confession, the reader is suddenly withdrawn from access to either mind. Thus does the writer try to conceal weaknesses of motivation. At the same time, other aspects of the situation receive full description. Thea's voice teacher is the likely person to have told her of Fred's marriage, and so a special reason must be provided to explain his silence. (He is cruel enough to hope for a tragic misunderstanding between the lovers.) Fred, on the other hand, must be shown to have a kind motive for his deception of Thea—he is to become her husband later—and the difficulty of so explaining his behavior is insuperable.

Thematically, this episode finds a secure place in the novel. The dilemma in which Fred places Thea is a demonstration of the hardness of life, the hardness which she has come to sense in her dreams and observations about the past; indeed, Thea later comes to feel that the idea of the hardness of life is the greatest of lessons that she learned in the cañon. Perhaps Fred's bitter confession following immediately upon the cañon experience made Thea settle thus upon its most important meaning for her. But despite its clear connection with the rest of the novel, the incident of Fred's proposal and subsequent disclosure remains unsatisfactory. I have implied earlier, in discussing My Antonia, that thematic connection is not enough to bind
incidents otherwise unrelated. From The Song of the Lark another limitation of the clear power of theme is evident: the pleasures attendant upon clear thematic connection are not sufficient to outweigh the pains of improbability.

But The Song of the Lark is a rich and beautiful novel. Themes are developed more fully here than elsewhere, and here too is the fullest treatment of the eclectic heritage. Three elements tend to unify the story, despite flaws that would pull it to bits. Every writer of a success story must face this problem: how shall the hero be made interesting after his success? Willa Cather has solved this problem by showing how struggle goes on after what would appear to be the pinnacle. Furthermore, the novel is held together by a net of imagery having to do with light and by the continuity of its themes: the revolt against the village, the artist's search for fulfillment, the building of a heritage from a wide variety of sources, the necessity for constant struggle and other aspects of the price of success. Finally the theme of the artist's search for fulfillment serves as a center around which the other themes

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4 My statement contradicts Cather's own; in a preface (The Song of the Lark, IV, vii), Cather says that she was wrong to show Thea after her success.

5 For this point I am indebted to Brown, op. cit., pp. 193-194.
range themselves, and all of them are sustained from beginning to end. Though *The Song of the Lark* is much less successfully unified than *My Antonia* and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, though it is marred by ill-managed point of view, styles and details, and broken by a major improbability, such unity as it has (a unity gratifying and interesting but insufficient) springs from the clear statement, connection and centering of its themes which we shall now examine.

II. The Artist in Revolt against the Village

In "The Sculptor's Funeral" (1905) and *A Lost Lady* (1925), revolt from the village plays a major part. The idea plays a minor but significant part in the three stories which make up *Obscure Destinies* (1932) and in *Lucy Gayheart* (1935). Only on first thought would one be inclined to state that *The Song of the Lark* is not a document in the revolt. It is true that Moonstone, the Colorado town where Thea grows up, is as worthy of attention as Tolstoi's Moscow:

Thea would have been astonished if she could have known how, years afterward, when she had need of them, those old faces [of Moonstone people] were to come back to her, long after they were hidden away under the earth; that they would seem to her then as full of meaning, as mysteriously marked by Destiny,
And in its deficiencies, Moonstone somewhat resembles Chicago. The sophisticated old Mrs. Nathanmeyer "expects nothing" of the city because she has lived there for twenty years. Thea, having escaped from her narrow village world, comes to see that Chicago is not so different. And later, in one of the great crises of her life, Thea identifies herself with her little town. In refusing to take Fred's money after she has become his mistress, she shows Moonstone's moral severity, although the manner of her refusal shows that she is without Moonstone's ready-made morals. Ottenburg remarks on her standard:

Tolstoi's Moscow here seems to justify Cather's Moonstone as a literary subject. But a comparison of Moonstone people with Balzac's Parisians is repudiated by Thea (pp. 50-51).

Cather elsewhere presents explicit justification for writing about countrified people. O Pioneers (1913) laboriously demonstrates that the heroine is aware of worlds outside her own. In My Ántonia (1918), the characters are worthy of Jim's attention only after he has associated them with Virgil's Georgics. The worth of countrified people cannot be taken for granted.

In passing, it is worth remarking that Balzac, whom Cather read avidly when she was attending the University of Nebraska, also presents within his novels awkward justification for his subject-matter. See, for example, Old Goriot (Edinburgh, 1951), translated by M. A. Crawford, pp. 27-28, 143, 150. (Le Père Goriot first appeared in 1834.) In the second paragraph of his novel, Balzac writes: "...not that this story is dramatic in the real sense of the word, but perhaps some tears may be shed over it in the reading—*intra muros et extra.*"
"...none of us who come later can ever hope to rival moonstone in the impression we make. Her scale of values will always be the Moonstone scale. And with an artist, that is an advantage." (p. 454)

Still later, after becoming a celebrated opera star, Thea associates Moonstone with the pleasure, Freshness and artistry of youth.

Much more serious, however, is the evidence against moonstone. There is no outlet for great energy; there is no respect for talent or art. indeed, Thea's mother is the only person in the town who understands the word talent. Everything that the town does not understand, everything that is below it or above it, it rejects.

Certain groups are the victims of frequent investigation and judgment. The Mexicans, with their obvious foreignness, their love of beautiful clothes, beautiful songs and flowery language, cannot be up to any good. The music teacher, after a single drunken spree, loses all of his pupils. A tramp is ordered to leave town and then ejected by the townspeople from a box-car in which he had planned to leave. unknown to the town, the tramp then drowns himself in the municipal water-tank.

He let himself down into seventy-five feet of cold water, with his shoes and hat and roll of ticking. The city council had a mild panic and passed a new ordinance about tramps. But the
fever had already broken out, and several adults and half a dozen children died of it.

Thus the town is poisoned by its own cruelty. Between the two leading churches there is a "not so Christian rivalry." Even in Thea's family, in her sister and in her father, who is a minister of the gospel, is observable the universal distrust that binds the town into an uneasy corporation. Thea is to link her family with the town and reject both.  

7 Few Cather novels exclude violence, often of a grotesque kind. Edith Lewis, quoted by George A. Arms in his note on "Willa Cather's Unfinished Avignon Story" (Willa Cather, Five Stories, edited by Arms [New York, 1956], pp. 200-201), indicates that Cather's last novel was to have dealt with two boys, one of whom, having been strung up for several hours by the thumbs, is unable to use his hands; the other boy, whose tongue has been torn out, is unable to speak. One recalls to the slave-ship in Sapphira and the Slave Girl, the cannibal feast in Shadows on the Rock, and the man in My Antonia who killed who killed himself by jumping into a threshing machine.

8 Moonstone is without the silent feuds and tortuous quarrels that are ever-present in E. W. Howe's The Story of A Country Town (1883); nor do Moonstoners struggle to express their deep feelings as do the inhabitants of Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio (1919). Rather, there is a deadness of feeling about the Moonstoners (as Brown, op. cit., p. 192 points out) that is even stronger than their distrust and hatred.

The atmosphere of Moonstone is somewhat like that of the town in the short story, "The Sculptor's Funeral" (1905). Because the attack on the village in the novel is more complicated and less violent than that in the short story, the novel is more damaging in effect. (David Daiches in Willa Cather: A Critical Introduction [Ithaca, 1951], p. 145, explains the artistic failure of this much-admired story.)
Perhaps Thea is fortunate to find in her town a few people, such as Dr. Archie, Professor Wunsch and her mother, who have a dim sense of her artistic potentialities; Thea also has a devoted suitor in Ray Kennedy. (She may be wrong in thinking that he does not understand her; after his death, Thea takes his ideals as part of her own.) But in Chicago, where she sees the same distrust and hatred, the same low standards and high egotism which characterize her little town, she finds also people (the Harsanyis, the Nathanmeyers and Fred Ottenburg) who understand her better than she understands herself.9

The three Moonstone persons who achieved distinction—an unnamed millionaire, Thea Kronborg, Dr. Archie—reject Moonstone and leave it never to return. Dr. Archie, who becomes a financier and a political influence, is a test case. He is not, after all, very different from the spirit of the town. He is in love with compromise and respectability; he does not sense, as Thea does, that elsewhere there is "a world that strives after excellence."10 But

9 Later Dresden is to be the perfect city for Thea. We learn this fact at second and third hand, presumably because close glimpses of perfection often fail to convince.

10 The phrase comes from Cather's *Lucy Gayheart* (1935), which also deals with an artist and her rejection of a small town. But in *Lucy Gayheart*, even the "bad" townspeople are allowed to possess warmth and liveliness; even the rather vicious Fairy Blair is pretty, and Harry Gordon, narrow as he is, is sensitive and intelligent also.
Archie finds no woman of his own age to interest him in Moonstone; Thea is twelve when he is twenty-six, and he finds no one else at all interesting. He is oppressed by the pointlessness of the town which seems to exist only because railroad tracks once ended there.

In Dr. Archie are embodied some of the worst aspects of the town. In his response to Thea, however, he displays his best qualities, and serves as a bridge between Thea and the town. He keeps up a more or less successful front during the years of his unhappy marriage. (Contrast Thea, the very slope of whose shoulders expresses her feelings.) He is socially graceless, illiterate about most of the arts and morally rigid. It is not surprising that when he becomes a political influence, he is taken in by a pack of reformers whose thoughtless methods spur new vices. But he has also a chivalrous heart and an endless sympathy for dreamers. He finances Thea's training in Europe. When he is rich and powerful, he finances the prospecting trip of the crazy and aged Jasper Flight, a trip which seems likely to lead only to the death of the prospector. But to Archie (and to Jasper Flight and Thea Kronborg), there is no better way to die than in pursuit of one's dreams.

Partly because of the kind Dr. Archie, Thea comes to treasure the memory of her home town. She is able to do so, but only when she is outside of it forever and it is
powerless to hurt her.\footnote{11} And not in the town but her youth is the real treasure, her youth which happened to take place in that stunted town. Thea says, "Then I was an artist all the time." (p. 552) A character in a later Cather novel says, "You see, there are all those early memories; one cannot get another set; one has but those."\footnote{12}

In the last paragraph of The Song of the Lark, an auctorial intrusion describes Moonstone as a back-water freshened only by the tides of the great sea. And in one of her prefaces to the novel, Willa Cather refers to Thea's "...flourishing escape from a smug, domestic, self-satisfied provincial world of utter ignorance." (IV, viii)

III. The Development of the Artist

Thea Kronborg is richly endowed by nature. She is healthy, beautiful and intelligent. She has what proves to be a remarkably good voice. She is esthetically responsive and she has a sense of mission. Whether she acquires these last two qualities or is born with them is unclear.

As a child of eleven, Thea recovers from pneumonia

\footnote{11} A similar point is made more vividly and at greater length in an early Cather novelette, "The Bohemian Girl," McClure's, XXXIX (August, 1912), 420-443. Brown, op. cit., p. 165, suggests that Cather's own years away from the prairie enabled her to appreciate it.

\footnote{12} Pierre Charron in Shadows on the Rock, X, 211.
even though she has improper care. She is healthy "like a tree or horse," as one of her teachers says. How important such health is we see in a description of another singer:

...the purplish brown circles under her eyes were pathetic enough, and foretold no long or brilliant future. A singer with a poor digestion and low vitality; she needed no seer to cast her horoscope.

(p. 329)

Thea's great beauty, as it seems to come and go, symbolizes her responsiveness to everything around her. It suggests the great dramatic ability she is to demonstrate. It is also a sign of the esthetic responsiveness which is shown in a number of childhood incidents: her remarking upon the doctor's jewelry, her love of glittering stones, her devotion to Byron and Tolstoi. Her intelligence is shown by her love of ideas, the eagerness with which she appreciates what few intellectual stimuli exist around her.

Thea's friends are aware that she is to have a mission. In the beginning, Dr. Archie finds her "worth the whole litter" (she is of a large family); he examines the shape of her head for phrenological evidence of her superiority, and though he finds no such evidence, he sees in her face "a cryptic promise." Others have a belief in her which they cannot fully explain. Kennedy, Wunsch, Archie, Tillie, Spanish Johnny—all believe in her. Do they get a sense of mission from her or do they give it to her? Thea states the question (pp. 272-273), and there is no direct answer.
An indirect one comes a little later when Thea sings for the Mexicans, her first deeply appreciative audience, and feels strength flowing from her to them and from them to her.

Very early Thea has this sense of mission. At thirteen she has had "for some time" a sense of apartness. It has been little to her but a "warm sureness," a consciousness of drawing much from things and people. Wunsch's vague talk of a destiny that waits her far from Moonstone, of knowledge and skill that she must acquire, leads her to connect a precious, intermittent happiness with her musical talent.

Thea's singing voice is beautiful and strong. She has good sense about handling it and confidence in it. When she sings with others, she instinctively leads them and conceals their mistakes with her own voice. On several occasions, Wunsch speaks to her of singing (not playing the piano) as her great goal. Thea does not accept this goal, or, at any rate, she will not consciously accept it. Harsanyi, her next teacher, forces her to accept her voice and her destiny, and convinces her that her desire to preserve her rhapsodic confidence in her voice is the very reason that she has hidden it from him and from any truly critical judge.

When she first appears, Thea is a lazy child. Fortunately, her mother sees talent as a responsibility rather
than a prize. "A child with talent must be kept at the piano, just as a child with measles must be kept under the blankets." (p. 30) Thea is forced to sit at the piano for long hours. But the desire that makes her work and drives her continually onward is her own. Wunsch teaches her the vast power of her desires: "Nothing is far and nothing is near, if one desires..." (p. 96) Archie reminds her of this power when her family's envious opposition makes her restless and dispirited.

"I won't say that you can have everything you want—that means having nothing in reality. But if you decide what it is you want most, you can get it....not everybody can, but you can..."

(p. 306)

Her desire is still a passionate force within her near the end of the novel when she has achieved a success that all the world except herself will recognize. Desire is not only a force which drives her to work and keeps her working but also an effect evident in the final artistic result.

"Her secret? [says one of her teachers who has just heard her as Sieglinde] It is every artist's secret...It is an open secret and perfectly safe. Like heroism, it is inimitable in cheap materials."

(pp. 570-571) 13

13 For other instances of desire as a part of the finished work, see also pp. 251, 379, 466 of the novel.
The great and famous seldom have greatness thrust upon them. To achieve an education, to further her career, Thea Kronborg needs daring. Thea observes that her mother and Ray Kennedy love this quality, and Thea's own admiration for it is shown in her preference of "There was a sound of revelry" (from the third canto of Byron's *Childe Harold*) to "Maid of Athens," and her interest in the Greely polar expedition. But though she greatly admires daring, she is long in possessing herself of it. She hides her voice from serious criticism. She dreams of studying in Germany, but she can put her plan into effect only when she is inspired by the cliff-dwellings and humiliated by the collapse of her relationship with Fred. Even this double impetus almost fails to be sufficient:

Oh, how good it would be to lie down in that little bed, to cut the nerve that kept one struggling, that pulled one on and on: to sink into peace there, with all the family safe and happy downstairs. After all, she was a Moonstone girl, one of the preacher's children....Why was she called upon to take chances?

(p. 466)
In Germany, she is saved from utter discouragement by her friend Landry. (Such is the implication, though few details are given here.) But near the close of the novel, she is offered what seems the ultimate risk, and she accepts, rushing onto the stage at the last minute with no rehearsal to take over the role of Sieglinde after a singer has collapsed during a performance. Indeed, the whole business of singing operatic roles involves a great many risks, and Thea is equal to them all.

Thea must also acquire a feeling for the intensity of life, a sense of the hard punishments that human beings have endured and the difficulties they have overcome.¹⁴ In childhood she begins to acquire such a sense. She sees the battering that Wunsch has received from life. She sees herself as partly responsible for the bum who drowned himself in the water tank. She muses about Ray Kennedy's endless run of bad luck; she admires his knowledge that in every job there is "money you can't take." He has never taken such money and he dies with six hundred dollars to his name. Thea begins her study in Chicago with this sum, which she later calls "the price of a man's life."

¹⁴ The idea of hard punishments is stressed in the novel and exemplified by numerous scenes, including some in which the heroine has no direct part. See also Willa Cather, Five Stories, edited by George M. Kates, pp. 211-212. In his note on Cather's last, unfinished novelette, Hard Punishments, Kates discusses application of the title to Cather's work generally.
Toward Thea's deepening knowledge of the large sacrifices demanded by art, a number of small incidents pave the way. As a small child, Thea has gazed at the Kohlers' picture made of silk-scrap, admiring it for the pains that have gone into it and the unity that results. Thea has observed Mrs. Kohler too, her artistry at living, and the hard, thoughtful work that she has put into transplanting and reconstructing a European home. Professor Wunsch has shown Thea how difficult it is to discover the central idea of a song and to make details serve that idea. But in the cliff-dwellings (for which Kennedy's enthusiastic descriptions have prepared her) Thea enlarges all of her insights.

During her stay among the cliff-dwellings, more than at any other time, Thea crystallizes her concept of art. (The great importance of her insight is underlined by the point of view. In this part of the novel, the reader enters Thea's mind and hers only for the length of four chapters, the longest visit within any mind in the novel.) Here she learns the unity and common purpose of the arts, and the continuousness of art and life:

...what was any art but an effort to make a sheath, a mould in which to imprison for a moment the shining, elusive element which is life itself--life hurrying past us and running away, too strong to stop, too sweet to lose. The Indian women had held it in their jars. In the sculpture she had seen... it had been caught in a flash of arrested motion. In singing one made a vessel of one's throat and
nostrils and held it on one's breath, caught the stream in a scale of natural intervals.

(p. 378)

The concept of an exalted civilization is new to Thea. From an old aficionado of the cañon she learns that in the cliff city, persons were somehow in their right places, and only true artists were practitioners of art. The civilization was unified: religion, art and the struggle for survival formed one activity.  

There were fragments of pottery everywhere. Old Henry explained to her that the Ancient People had developed masonry and pottery far beyond any other crafts. After they had made houses for themselves, the next thing was to house the precious water. He explained to her how all their religion went back to water. The men provided the food, but water was the care of the women. The stupid women carried water for most of their lives; the cleverer ones made vessels to hold it. Their pottery was their most direct appeal to water, the envelope and sheath of the precious element itself. The strongest Indian need was expressed in those graceful jars, fashioned slowly by hand, without the aid of a wheel.

(p. 377)  

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15 This is reminiscent of W. B. Yeats' vision of Byzantium. See Yeats' A Vision (Toronto, 1937), p. 279. (A Vision appeared first in 1925.)

16 These two quotations do this section of the novel more than justice. Parts of Thea's vision of the old city --her pretending that she is a squaw, her daydream of the Indian brave silhouetted against the sky--are as gaudy and unconvincing as a "literary" tourist handbook.
The word "stupid" in the quotation above echoes the title of the previous section of the novel, "Stupid Faces," in which is described a civilization opposed in every way to the ancient one. In the ancient city, stupid women carried water; in Chicago, the gifted like Thea, Bowers and Harsanyi, are, sometimes by cynical choice, more often by necessity, the water-carriers. In the ancient city, the cleverer moulded the vessels; in Chicago, the stupid women, such as Jessie Darcy and Mrs. Priest, are "artists." In the ancient city, art, religion and human need are inextricably combined. In Chicago, the wealthy Mrs. Priest, her name an irony, sings "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth" for the purpose of self-aggrandizement.

[Chicago is a] rich, noisy city, fat with food and drink....its chief concern is its digestion and its little game of hide-and-seek with the undertaker. Money and office and success are the consolations of importance....[and Fortune bestows its most violent lashes on those] who possess the treasure of creative power.

(pp. 332-333)

In the cliff city, at last, Thea finds a civilization which would require her to raise her standards and would bestow on her its best appreciation.

Although Thea's picture of Chicago is purged of its attractions and her vision of the cliff-dwellers' civilization wears a nimbus which can belong only to the departed,
the second vision sustains her, and it is not wholly a
delusion: the words of the guide, the pots and potsherds
of the vanished Indians, are evidence of nobility that is
real.17

Thea's insights are impressive partly because they are
well prepared in the novel. Her vision of the cliff-
dwellers' civilization appears before her like a flash of
lightning, but a series of atmospheric disturbances has
preceded it. The most important of these perparatory epi-
isodes is Ray Kennedy's description of the cliff-dwellers,
his sense of their hard punishments and of his own respon-
sibility to be a worthy inheritor of their spiritual
splendor.18 Thea's greatest success, as it is described at
the end of the novel, is also the inevitable result of a
long process:

Artistic growth is, more than it is
anything else, a refining of the sense of
truthfulness. The stupid believe that to

17 Contrast Thea's sense of the past, her making her-
self part of a tradition, with the sense of the past in
Hilda Burgoyne, musical-comedy-star heroine of Cather's
Alexander's Bridge (1912). Hilda, seeing a mummy in the
British Museum, is reminded only that she will die and that
she must enjoy life to the full while she has it.

18 The episode revolving around the painting entitled
"The Song of the Lark" is too weak to serve as preparation
for Thea's insight in the cañon. Cather admits in a preface
that the title is unfortunate, and her need to explain the
painting itself is an implicit confession that the title
incident is ineffective also.
be truthful is easy; only the artist, the great artist, knows how difficult it is. That afternoon nothing new came to Thea Kronborg, no new enlightenment, no new inspiration. She merely came into full possession of things she had been refining and perfecting for so long. Her inhibitions chanced to be fewer than usual, and, within herself, she entered into the fullness of the faith she had kept before she knew its name or its meaning.

(p. 571) 19

IV. An Eclectic Heritage

Behind everything Thea does, as Ottenburg remarks when he and she are frolicking in the cañon, there is an ulterior motive. Thea is constantly training her mind and her body for the role of artist which she is to fill. Not for the sake of knowledge does she strive for a deep understanding of life; learning is all for the purpose of enriching her art, and in describing her revolt from her village and her development as an artist, I have already dealt with some very important aspects of her heritage: the village which helped her to define her negative aims; the meagre cultural materials which she put to such full

19 Certain elements of Thea's experience suggest mystical terms: she rebels against the letter of religion; she has a time of quiet followed by a state of ecstasy, and a feeling of union with a higher principle. There follows a period of intense activity which results from a sudden, almost magical freeing of her powers.
use; the Arizona cañon where all the lessons of her little past made a new meaning. A few questions still remain to be asked. Is Thea's heritage passed down from her ancestors? Is it, in any sense, a national heritage? What are the most important elements in her sense of the past, of a long human past and an immediate, personal past?

The Swedish past is not far behind her. Her maternal grandfather came from Sweden; so did her father; he has had to learn English, and he has never learned to speak it well. Throughout the novel there are a number of reminders of Thea Kronborg's Swedishness, among them old Mr. Nathanmeyer's remark that Thea is a "Svensk sommar," Harsanyi's description of her to Theodore Thomas, the "Swedish movements" that she performs when she is a tired opera star trying to relax in her hotel bedroom. But for these small reminders, the heroine's Swedishness might be forgotten, so slight and negative a meaning does it seem to have for her:

She was very sensitive about being thought a foreigner, and was proud of the fact that, in town, her father always preached in English; very bookish English at that, one might add.

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Cather informs us (p. 19) that Mr. Kronborg's head is so jammed with falsely refined stock-phrases that he is unable to express an emotion. But his speeches themselves contradict this generality; they are easy and colloquial. (See, for example, pp. 128-129.) Similar contradictions between scene and summary mar two other Cather novels, O Pioneers and My Ántonia.
Thea's attitude is a popular inconsistency: foreignness in other groups is glamorous, but in one's own group, it is simply awkward and uninteresting. Her father's gentle hypocrisy and limitations of mind cannot suggest the attractions of a Swedish background to Thea, and many years pass before she sees her mother as a symbol of order and wisdom. Mrs. Kronborg remarks shortly before her death that she meant to have Thea take her grandfather's oboe back to Sweden; Thea's neglect of this sentimental errand is a reminder of how little her Swedish background means to her.

Thea's sense of the past, her reading of a message from the past, springs in the main from her experience with three groups—the cliff-dwellers, the inhabitants of Mexican Town in Moonstone, and the Germans. From her dream-like glimpse of the cliff-dwelling civilization, Thea learns most intensely her old lessons, the passion for

21 Contrast Jim Burden in My Antonia who insists on his foreignness and refers to his "old country," Virginia.

22 Olive Fremstad, the principal model for Thea, was born in Sweden and came to this country when she was a girl. Why did not Cather give Thea the same experience? Cather had shown a heroine in these circumstances (in the immediately previous novel, O Pioneers) who was, so to speak, a professional Swede. But the last few words of the passage quoted a little earlier about Mr. Kronborg's speech show Cather's condemnation of Thea's attitude.
beauty, the place of beauty among the fundamental acts of life, the process of the arts, its transmutation of the hardness of life into formed beauty. In later years, when Thea surveys the lessons that life has taught her, the cliff city means most to her, and its most important lesson is simply the hardness of life. Her creative hour had come when she arrived in Arizona, Ottenburg tells her, implying that she might have learned the same lessons elsewhere. But the reader, thinking of Ray Kennedy's discourse on the old Indians, feels that Thea had been prepared to learn from them rather than from others.

From the Mexicans, Thea learns the intensity that life may possess, the passion for beauty that is a far cry from the tepid ardors experienced by her brothers and sisters, and the terrible sacrifice that the worship of beauty must exact. Her particular friend, Spanish Johnny, is occasionally driven wild by the thrill of performing with his voice and his mandolin; he runs off along the railroad tracks, playing and singing in cafés till his musical fit is done. Then he comes home penniless and ill to his tragically resigned wife, who thinks the cause of his strange adventures as beautiful and as real as the surge of the ocean in a shell.23

23 Johnny appears for a moment at the end of the novel. His wife is dead, and he has become a circus musician. "His irregularities had become his regular mode of life." (p. 572) His career forms a little parallel to Thea's.
Although the canon gives Thea her deepest and most vivid insight, the German influence is the steadiest of those that play upon her. In her German friends, Professor Wunsch and the Kohlers, she sees the qualities that give significance to the passion for beauty: infinite pains, assignment of order and degree, and uncompromisingness. As a child Thea conceives the desire to go to Germany for study. The formal esthetic experiences that we see Thea undergoing are, for the most part, in German literature and German music. Even her introduction to the canon comes from an old German, Henry Biltmer. She becomes a Wagnerian soprano, and she plans a life for herself and her mother in Germany. (Thea believes that her mother "...would like the German people and German ways..." [p. 491]) In Dresden she finds her most responsive audience, and to Dresden she will return if the Metropolitan Opera Company does not meet her demands. Finally she marries Ottenburg, the consciously hyphenated German-American. Principally through the medium of Germany—or through her own vision of it—Thea receives wisdom that belongs to no special nation.

But Thea chooses to make her own whatever attractive object lies at hand—Russian novels, English poems, Spanish and Scotch folk songs. Her embarrassment about her Swedishness, the apparent emptiness of it, and her desire to make the most of a little town where the goods of life are too few, give her the habit of taking her values from a wide variety of sources.
V. The Price of Success

Willa Cather views Thea Kronborg's whole life as a struggle. When the novel opens, she is ill with pneumonia and is struggling for life itself; she lives after Dr. Archie has given her up. She struggles to learn to play the piano, to learn to use her voice with the greatest artistry, to grasp ideas that deal directly or indirectly with her art, to collect and weigh her spiritual possessions. She must struggle to go to Europe—it is not easy for her to ask Dr. Archie to lend her the money, nor, as we have seen, is it easy for her to take all the risks involved. Once in Europe, she continues to perfect her voice and her understanding. (Like the heroine of Willa Cather's previous novel, O Pioneers, Thea is intelligent but slow-minded.) Then she must wait for her chance at the Metropolitan Opera. At the peak of her career, when we last see her, she is still looking for a perceptive audience, even an audience of one; she says this to Ottenburg, one of the most perceptive of her admirers, and she says it in desperation because even his devotion to her artistry seems to have flagged.

From the moment when Thea becomes fully conscious of a destiny that is calling her, she is ruthless in her efforts to answer the call. She congratulates herself on her own
good health as she watches a dying girl. She refuses to sing at the funeral of a friend in her home town because she does not wish to invite other assignments and so tire her voice. (Eventually, she is persuaded to sing at the funeral, but not before the reader gains a strong idea of her ruthlessness.) In the midst of a quarrel, she insults her family, calling them "untalented." She also insults the pseudo-artist, Jessie Darcy, whom she is paid to accompany on the piano. The omniscient observer tells us that Jessie is baffled and frightened by her own success; but Thea is too preoccupied by her own vision of "what a singer might be" to sense Jessie's plight.

When Mrs. Kronborg is dying and asks her daughter to come home, Thea refuses because to accept would be to miss her great chance for a prominent role with the Dresden Opera Company. When Dr. Archie is injured in an automobile accident and cannot come to New York to see her, Thea goes to Vienna rather than change her plans in order to see him. Archie is somewhat out of sympathy with Thea because of the former incident, Ottenburg is somewhat out of sympathy with her because of the latter, and each man nervously explains her to the other:

Ottenburg moved about restlessly.
"She couldn't, Archie, she positively couldn't....I was in Dresden at the time."
(p. 485)
Archie moved uneasily. "Oh, she couldn't do that. She had to get back to Vienna to work on some new parts..."

(p. 482)

Thea is ruthless with herself as she is with others and grows angry with herself when she cannot gain the understanding and produce the effect that she wants. At any rate, this is so at first, when she is studying with Wunsch and Harsanyi. But from Oliver Landry, friend of her German years, we find that she has learned to put herself always in the right. He has given her time, energy and sympathy, serving as her accompanist when she could not afford to hire one. When things were going wrong for her and she was working badly, he tells us, she always blamed her accompanist. In the New York episode, everything that we see of the relationship between Thea and Landry bears out his report. She is even slightly resentful of his fondness for luxurious art-objects because she thinks herself diversion enough for him. (She says so in jest but the word is true.)

The novel offers more evidence of Thea's ruthlessness, but enough has been cited to show that the quality is conspicuous in her and that the writer has emphasized
In the end, Thea is an exact contrast to Antonia (Willa Cather's next heroine), who is "battered" in appearance while Thea glitters, and who is "undiminished" in soul while Thea has grown spiritually smaller. But there are reasons why Thea is not to be despised.

Thea is constantly engaged in a battle with "a world determined that no artist shall ever do his best." Well-meaning but thoughtless friends sometimes make unreasonable demands on her; audiences are inattentive and uncritical. Furthermore, there is no heavenly fellowship among artists, not even among artists as profound and sincere as Thea herself.

In the second place, Thea's gift to the world is a

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24 I have taken pains to show this at length for two reasons. First, the somewhat terrifying ruthlessness of the artist is an important part of The Song of the Lark and an important part of Cather's portrait of the artist in her novels and short stories. Second, many critics, such as Maxwell Geismar (see The Last of the Provinceals [Boston, 1947], pp. 169-170) imply that Cather inadvertently displayed Thea's ruthlessness.

25 The Song of the Lark, IV, viii. The tone and content of many of Cather's remarks about the warfare between society and the artist have a possible source in Burne-Jones. (Cather had shown her interest in Burne-Jones in a 1905 short story, "The Marriage of Phaedra.") See especially the last sixty pages of Georgiana Burne-Jones, Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones (London, 1904). Although I have found no mention of Cather's having read this book, it seems likely that she did so.
great one. Only the most appreciative of worlds could
be appreciative enough. Even to the musically illiterate
Archie, her singing is a source of pleasurable excitement.
For the pain and ugliness in the world, she has given the
best compensation that is in her power to give. To her
eccentric Aunt Tillie, and to all of Moonstone's
inhabitants, she has brought joy and inspiration. (The
epilogue of the novel is devoted to explaining this.) She
lives for the perfection of beauty in art, for art which
gives to the inevitable pain of life a pleasing form. It
is her triumph that she never adjusts to shoddiness.

It is her limitation that she can never view imper-
fection with any calm. Painful experience might have
taught her to accept the fact that the artist, with
passions stronger than others', inevitably suffers from
lack of understanding. But at the age of thirty, near her
greatest fame, she is still angry at the indifference of

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26 See Literary Encounters, XII, 261. In an essay
on Mrs. James T. Fields, Cather writes approvingly of her:
"In the artist, the true artist, she could forgive vanity,
sensitiveness, selfishness, indecision, and vacillation of
will."

27 Thea's gift is even an "answer" to the misery of
the bum who drowned himself in the Moonstone water tank.
Archie says to her, "...You're going to be a number one
musician and make us proud of you. Take Mary Anderson...
There isn't a tramp...who hasn't heard of her. We all
like people who do things, even if we only see their faces
on a cigar-box lid." (p. 176)
her audiences. She is not a kind woman; she knows but one way to be kind: to sing as well as she can.

There is no view of existence, no set of supernatural values to give her the tranquillity, the rest-within-struggle which is usually a part of the great soul. We see such tranquillity in Antonia, who has a religion (her Catholic piety is impressive though it is very briefly sketched) and a readily available heritage, both of which Thea lacks. We can but speculate whether Thea might have been happier if she had possessed these treasures; the remainder of Willa Cather's studies of artists imply that even those such as Cressida Garnett ("The Diamond Mine," 1916) and Clement Sebastian (Lucy Gayheart, 1935), much warmer and kinder persons than Thea, are unhappy and almost always in bitter conflict with their special world and the larger world beyond. Thea has not the bulwark of a religion or a philosophy; she has only the sense of life which Scott Fitzgerald calls "wise and tragic":

...the sense that life is essentially a cheat and its conditions are those of defeat, and that the redeeming things are not "happiness and pleasure" but the deeper satisfactions that come out of struggle.

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"No matter how long a breath you have, the storm has a longer," Thea says to Ottenburg (p. 555), exclaiming on the hardness of life. But the epigraph of the novel (from Lenau's Don Juan) reminds us that "It was a wondrous lovely storm that drove me!"

In the last close glimpse of Thea Kronborg, we are made sharply aware of the problems of her development as an artist and the price of her success. Later, in the few pages that remain, we glimpse her from a distance, and we are led to presume that the problems persist for her though we are not actually told that they do. The theme of the revolt against the village, however, carries explicitly through to the very last paragraph where Thea's Aunt Tillie, on whom the brief epilogue focuses, must justify Thea's success to the inhabitants of Moonstone by reference to her material wealth. Only a few dreamers in Moonstone find Thea Kronborg a mellow memory and an exciting inspiration. (The Kronborg legend may possibly help to bring forth another artist now in embryo.) The revolt against the village is related to a larger denunciation, and as The Song of the Lark contrasts the cliff-dwellers to the other societies in the novel, we may see beginning, perhaps, that criticism of society which is to receive compact, evocative, and delicately balanced expression in The Professor's House.
Part Two: Artists Against Society--Fulfillment at a Price

Chapter Two: A Lost Lady

I. Introduction: Form and Themes

Like most of Willa Cather's novels, A Lost Lady (1923) is based rather closely on the life of a real person.¹ The novel may therefore be called a fictional biography even though it does not point clearly to a body of historical fact as does Death Comes for the Archbishop (1927) and is not laden with detail, as is The Song of the Lark (1915). One of Willa Cather's shortest novels, relying heavily on synecdoche, suggestion and implication, A Lost Lady--like The Song of the Lark--deals with the artist and society. But the picture of society is much less detailed and inclusive in the later book, and the later heroine is not a distinguished creative artist but simply an artist of manners and personality.

Like The Song of the Lark, A Lost Lady has a simple story. It begins about 1890 when Marian Forrester, the title character, is thirty. She and her husband, "Captain"

¹ The model is Mrs. Silas Garber, childhood friend of Cather, and wife of a governor of Nebraska. See Brown, op. cit., pp. 36-37 for a description of Governor and Mrs. Garber.
Daniel Forrester, a railroad contractor twenty-five years her senior, spend part of each year in their pretentious home near the town of Sweet Water, somewhere between Omaha and Denver. The railroad aristocracy taking its leisure in Colorado and California resorts is the ideal audience for Marian's social gifts, but in Sweet Water she enhances her reputation as a charmer by playing hostess to the railroad men who visit her husband there. (Captain Forrester's gentle manners and unvarying integrity make a perfect background for his wife's unconventional vivacity.)

Marian's flirtatiousness, closely related to her social grace, arouses disapproval among the townspeople, only a few of whom believe her a great lady, but her money and her air of aristocratic heedlessness keep the townspeople at a distance. Then her husband's failing health keeps them in Sweet Water for longer periods of time. One of the younger railroad barons becomes Marian's lover. Captain Forrester loses most of his money in a financial panic and suffers a paralytic stroke. Shortly thereafter, Marian's lover deserts her. In addition, she is no longer effortlessly able to keep the town in its place. Most of the townspeople whom she respects and who respect her have moved away; a ruder element is now in power. Marian's house swarms with officious neighbors pretending to nurse her sick husband. After her husband's death, Marian drifts, flittering and frightened as a blinded bird. She tries
clumsily to teach the captain's code to a small-hearted
generation. She allies herself with the new man of power,
the uncouth and vicious Ivy Peters, but when he buys her
house, she leaves the town. There is one more glimpse of
her twelve years later. Still youthful in appearance, she
is now married again, to a wealthy Englishman in South
America. Marian has learned through her sad experience,
she has come at last to understand her first husband's
code, and she influences her second husband for the better.

Most of Marian's story is shown through the eyes of
Niel Herbert. To him, she is a great lady, an artist of
manners, inclined to mock the proprieties without dis-
pensing with them. Then Niel, finding her with a lover,
learns that her husband knows all there is to know about
her and that husband and wife appreciate each other. After
Forrester's death, there is another painful revelation for
Niel: Marian takes for her second lover the dreadful Ivy
Peters. Twelve years later, after Niel and Marian have
left town, Niel is pleased to have news of her and to
learn that she had been her best self again before her
death. He is glad now that this captivating woman "had
had a hand in breaking him in to life." (p. 170)

Niel's growing up under Marian's influence constitutes
a second story entwined with the first. Both stories are
concerned with initiation: Marian comes to know and
treasure her first husband's ideals; Niel comes to accept
the existence of sexuality in the world. Both stories
follow the pattern of fall and rise.

Niel's problems give him an interesting vantage-point
and increase the suspense of the novel. Niel is a Jamesian
young man almost painfully aware of social gradations; he
is searching for values and social status. His background
is unhappy. His mother, dead for some time, is remembered
for her often-voiced desire for wealth; his father,
pleasant and ineffectual, having failed once more in busi-
ness, leaves Sweet Water when Niel is fifteen. Niel does
not treasure the memory of his father, for his father
lacked that solidity of manner which Niel requires in a
father and which his uncle, Judge Fommeroy, possesses to a
degree. Judge Fommeroy also gives Niel entrance to the
Forrester home. The Forresters offer Niel everything he
wishes—protective warmth, ideals and social distinction.
His acceptance of them as parents leads him to regard them
with wide-eyed solemnity and to blind himself to Marian's
active sexuality. Niel has traveled a little; he is able
to compare Marian with other society women. He is also
intelligent. Part of our interest in the novel lies in
how and when he will learn what we have been made to sense

2 Edmund Wilson, "A Lost Lady" (The Shores of Light
[New York, 1952], pp. 41-43), uses the term in his brief
and perceptive review which appeared first in 1924.
from the beginning, and how he will assimilate this knowledge. 3

In the first of the two sections of the novel, the story is told by an omniscient observer with access to five minds. Four of these minds are shown seldom and briefly; Niel's mind is entered often and at length. In the second section, though events are still told in the third person, Niel's mind alone is entered. Thus, in the first section, we are rapidly given information by which to judge the insights of the adolescent Niel. In the second section, because Niel has become a more reliable witness and because we already have a good deal of information about Marian, we no longer require access to any mind but Niel's. Movement from one mind to another is skilfully accomplished as a rule. 4 Here is an example of the way in which the omniscient observer's reflections flow unobtrusively into Niel's:

3 In the first place, Niel's inability to recognize Marian's sexual interest in the men around her is a convincing study in repression. (And only once—p. 152—does Niel appear to recognize that Marian has been conducting a flirtation with himself.) In the second place, Niel's blindness constantly reminds the reader that sex-appeal is too limited a term for Marian's charm. Finally, the reader's impatience with Niel for neglecting his opportunities greatly heightens the impression of Marian's attractiveness.

4 Edmund Wilson, op. cit., pp. 42-43, points out two incidents in which the point of view may be said to cause difficulty. Cather was not completely successful in the first section of the novel in gracefully presenting more information than Niel would know.
Mrs. Ogden was almost unpardonably homely. She had a pear-shaped face, and across her high forehead lay a row of flat, dry curls. Her bluish brown skin was almost the colour of her violet dinner dress. A diamond necklace glittered about her wrinkled throat. Unlike Constance, she seemed thoroughly amiable, but as she talked she tilted her head and "used" her eyes, availing herself of those glances which he had supposed only pretty women indulged in. Probably she had long been surrounded by people to whom she was an important personage, and had acquired the manner of a spoiled darling. Niël thought her rather foolish at first, but in a few moments he had got used to her mannerisms and began to like her.

(pp. 40-41) 5

But many critics have felt that the stylistic polish of the novel insufficiently makes up for its contradictions of well-known historical facts. 6 The novel presents the railroad builders of the West as great-hearted pioneers but I believe that the railroad men in the novel are complicated enough to be convincing and that Willa Cather shows

5 The first sentence is the narrator's wit rather than Niël's. The second and third sentences present observations that are perhaps somewhat more detailed than Niël's. The fifth sentence reminds us of Niël's experience at the dinner-party and suggests his final emotional reaction to Mrs. Ogden. The whole passage is also a negative definition of Marian Forrester's charm.

6 See, for example, Geismar, op. cit., pp. 182-183, and Raymond Thorberg, op. cit., pp. 94-95.
them in a more critical light than is often conceded. I see no reason to doubt Brown's statement that Willa Cather viewed the railroad-builders with unqualified respect; but though a web of complimentary generalities enmeshing these figures is spun by Niel and by the omniscient narrator, we must not overlook the descriptions of specific railroad men. The railroad aristocrats whom we see close at hand--Captain Forrester, Judge Pommeroy and Mr. Ogden--are, at certain moments, weak, ruthless and inflexible. Only Cyrus Dalzell, of whom we see but little, appears as an entirely good man.

The chief flaw in the novel is the ending. The final scene, in which Marian appears through the haze of two narrators, is confusing because it attempts to convey too

7 Brown, op. cit., p. 230.

8 Some strands of this web may be observed on VII, 3, 51, and 102. On page 102, Niel takes over the generalizing function which has hitherto belonged to the narrator.

9 The final reporter on Marian, Ed Elliott, is the least known and the least effective of the reporters in the novel. Cather attempts to give Elliott authority by his success, his choice of occupation and the rather surprising quality of his interest in Marian. This cannot be done in the last three pages of the novel, especially since there has been no preparation for it.

Difficulties of the close of the novel may explain why many critics, including E. K. Brown, have made no comment whatever about the ending. Others have preferred to ignore half of the description of Marian's second husband: see Daiches, op. cit., p. 86 and Kapin, op. cit., p. 71.
much information in too little space. Because the novel is short and the ending is quick and crowded, the reader tends to lean rather heavily on the title and the epigraph from Ophelia ("Come, my coach! / Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, / Good night, good night."), both of which misleadingly suggest ladies not merely lost but lost forever.\textsuperscript{10} Failure in style and structure here tends to blur the plot and weaken the thematic statement.

The concision which helps to mar the ending of the novel is for the most part a virtue in the rendering of background, character, and theme. The fading town and the railroad aristocracy are rendered with an impression of remarkable ease and fulness. The novel contains many forcefully drawn characters: Niel and his uncle, Marian and Captain Forrester, the ugly Ogden and their sulky daughter, the dashing Ellinger, the vicious Ivy Peters. Attitudes toward Mrs. Forrester, the aristocratic siren, appear like a series of widening perspectives one behind another: the narrow-minded and ungenerous townspeople, the somewhat narrow-minded but very generous Niel, the generous but occasionally ruthless railroad aristocrats, and finally the narrator quietly evaluating all of these attitudes.

\textsuperscript{10} There are, of course, obvious parallels between Marian and Ophelia who, deserted by her noble male protectors, has her attractiveness still though it is attractiveness gone awry.
Very different in stylistic consistency, use of detail and point of view from The Song of the Lark, A Lost Lady differs also in that its thematic statement, like its plot, is somewhat obscured by the crowded ending. But thematic likenesses between the two novels are clear. Both novels demonstrate that thematic unity is powerless to compensate for serious flaws. The small but firm strokes of A Lost Lady present themes very close to those of The Song of the Lark: the artist in opposition to the town, her decline and her slow acceptance of an old-fashioned code. Again the development of the artist—this time her long fall and swift rise—is the thematic center of the novel.

II. The Artist in Opposition to the Town

In the eyes of Niel Herbert, Marian Forrester owes much of her attractiveness to her dissociation from the town, and her link with her husband and the railroad aristocrats. The principal setting in the novel symbolizes Marian's position. Captain Forrester is attracted by the flowering marshes near Sweet Water and directly above them he builds his house. Two streams cross the road between his house and the town. While the house is emphatically cut off from the town, it is intimately associated with the railroad; crowning a hill, the Forrester house is the first object visible to entering train-travelers and the last to departing ones. From the railroad aristocracy the
Forresters draw their guests; among them Marian is a star.

Niel first sees Marian as she enters a church, her slippers momentarily visible beneath a swirl of petticoats. He knows at once that she is of a different world. Vaguely he associates her with the gorgeously sinning world of the past, definitely with the glittering world of her guests. She is keenly aware of class differences but too tactful and too powerful to need to proclaim them loudly. The local ladies call on her and receive a pleasant but limited welcome. Her casual encounters with them are cordial and personal; indeed, she is not capable of an impersonal encounter; but her manner, though outwardly very free, has an undercurrent of restraint and dignity.

Her reserve, like her charm, has the apparent simplicity, the artifice and the mysteriousness of art. As Joseph Wood Krutch explains:

The lady, though she did not write nor paint nor act nor sing, was essentially an artist. She was consciously a lady, and she had devoted

11 The time is 1890 when a glimpse of feminine slipper could still excite. The two elements of the situation suggest opposite elements within Marian. (Stendhal, James and Proust—in all of whom Cather was very much interested—are among the many authors who exploit the secular-sacred contrasts of a pretty woman at her devotions.)

12 Her class-consciousness is first shown when she comments to herself on some boys who are entering the Forrester grounds for a picnic. Only here for a brief moment do we go inside Marian's mind.
her vitality to the creation of a person, who was The Lady as a type and as a work of art...

Marian is a less exalted artist than Thea Kronborg, her audience is much smaller, and she suffers artistic defeat graver than any of Thea's. But she brings happiness to people of many kinds, and she is an artist worthy of respect.

Marian is shown little respect by her village. Their opposition to her appears first through Ivy Peters (a town boy, in Marian's language) who enters her house and tries to make himself at home there. Later Marian, speaking of her husband's failing health, warns Niel that the captain must be brought home immediately if he becomes "uncertain" in town. Two subsequent events indicate that Marian's fear of the town has some justification. One day, Marian, dallying in the woods with Ellinger, is observed by Adolph Blum. Had anyone else seen her, the narrator implies, the story of her flirtation would have been repeated and made the worst of. On another occasion, Niel is afraid that the mere name of Ellinger on the town hotel register while Captain Forrester is away will create gossip.

As Niel grows up and Marian grows older, Sweet Water  

13 "The Lady as Artist," The Nation, CXVII (November 28, 1923), 610.
declines. Gentleman farmers move out of the region; railroad kings no longer visit there. In Niel's boyhood the Forresters had commanded at least a grudging respect, however wrongly based, even from such rude fellows as Thaddeus Grimes. Later Ivy Peters is ungrudgingly respected; no enviable style of living makes a barrier between him and his sycophants. Ivy represents the triumph of town values; he is the new king, and his acceptance of adulation from the up-and-coming young men of the town helps to differentiate him sharply from the captain, for whom tributes from the town had little meaning.

Section two of the novel begins with Niel's discovery that Ivy Peters has relieved the captain's poverty by draining and planting the Forrester marshes, which to both Niel and Ivy had been the symbol of useless beauty and generous leisure.14 Niel observes that Ivy is now so frequently at the Forresters' as to be almost a member of the household. Marian, with irony too subtle for Ivy to comprehend and too gentle in tone to have any effect, answers his insolent commands as though granting humble requests.

The older women of Sweet Water soon have their opportunity to crow over Marian. When she indiscreetly telephones Ellinger shortly after his marriage, the local telephone

14 The marshes are also, perhaps, identified with Marian. See pp. 5-6.
girl eagerly reports the news to her friends. The women now can be sure that Marian is merely a person of property and not a lady. When Marian is exhausted by taking care of the captain in his last illness, the telephone operator and her friends get beyond the parlor of the Forrester house. In the course of ministering to the sick, the women investigate every corner of the house and discover that, much as they covet this item and that, the property is not sufficient to give Marian prestige. Nor does it escape their eyes that Marian is drinking too much.

Although the town declines with the luck of the Forresters, it is condemned from the beginning by Niel, by Marian and by the omniscient observer. It is described in the first sentence of the novel as a grey town that is to become greyer; it simply fulfills its possibilities. Again, as in *The Song of the Lark*, there is in the town little respect for excellence; excellence has power with the town only when it is attached to money. Again, the superior inhabitants of the town are biding time there—Niel, George Adams and Ed Elliott must go elsewhere to find play for their talents—or are clearly outsiders like the Forresters and, at the other end of the social scale, the Blum boys with their German hair-cuts and feudal manners.

The end of *A Lost Lady* is a tribute to Marian's power and Sweet Water's emptiness. Both early and late the town would like to ignore or deny her success, or to regard it
as based only on that sexuality which Niel for so long would deny. To Niel, the splendor of her charm, long after he has accepted the ambiguities of her character, is splendor still. For Ed Elliott, earlier a representative of the town at its worst, she has been an even greater influence; she is, apparently, the inspiration of his success. The end of The Song of the Lark shows the dreamers in Thea Kronborg's little town taking heart from her glittering career. The end of A Lost Lady takes place in a Chicago dining-room where Elliott and Niel, two disaffected citizens of Sweet Water, are talking together of Marian; the ending implies that there are no dreamers worthy of the name left in Sweet Water.

III. The Decline of the Artist

No art is without restrictions, yet, like many artists of a more impressive kind, Marian is able to go beyond certain of the apparent restrictions with artistic impunity. Her decline begins when she departs from that concept of the humorous, hearty yet refined lady which her behavior at the beginning of the novel enunciates.

She is not a model of primness. Seeing her as a kind of goddess, the men around her do not think that she chooses to do what is ladylike; rather the ladylike is

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whenever she does. She runs to the door in her dressing-gown to welcome a distinguished visitor; he is flattered by her eagerness and delighted by her disorder. In a conversation with the well-bred George Adams, she speaks of pulling off her stockings, but this young boy also knows that she is a lady and an impressive one. These incidents occur in the first two chapters and set the key for Marian's character.

Not eager to do all that men do, neither is Marian confined by standard notions of the feminine. Chased by a bull, she runs as fast as she can, laughing heartily at her plight. The railroad leaders curse before her rather freely. When Dalzell tells her how much he and his wife miss her, he says, to Marian's delight, "If we had a party, we sat down afterward and wondered what in hell we'd had it for." (p. 97) She expresses openly her interest in the love affairs of her maid. Marian's representation of the lady contains a few earth-tones.

15 Marian resembles Madame de Vionnet in Henry James's The Ambassadors (1903), of whom another character says that when she does a thing, the ugliness somehow goes out of it. For further comparisons of the two women, see Sergeant, op. cit., p. 186.

16 Marian's raciness is also suggested by her frequent association with shades of red. Her parasol is scarlet, her scarves crimson, her earrings garnet; she arranges a bowl of blush roses and stains her fingers with cherries.
While Marian may, on second thought, appear more moral to us and to Neil than she did at first, still her pattern of morality is not conventional. The contrast between her rather improper manner and the propriety Neil assumes her to possess is fascinating to him. He believes that she makes fun of the rules but remains the proper wife of a very proper man. Through the first half of the novel, the reader becomes keenly aware of the facet of her personality which Neil refuses to admit; she finds it as natural to flirt as to eat, and not all of her flirtations are light. When he first hears her talking to some young boys, her tone is friendly, rather worldly and tantalizing. But Neil will not believe that her vivacity is even partly sexual until he gets proof by coming upon her and Frank Ellinger in bed together.17

How is Marian's love affair consonant with her portrait of the lady? In the first place, it is forgivable. She is stranded in a little town, itself in decline, where the best audience for her social charm grows smaller. In a

17 Neil's apparently but not actually coincidental arrival at the Forrester house at this moment is surrounded by circumstances which suggest both his strong sense of Marian's sexuality and his denial of it on the conscious level. He sees Ellinger's name on the hotel register, is awakened next day by noises from the roundhouse ("...the sound of escaping steam for some reason excited him." [VII, 78-79]) and decides to pay Marian an early-morning call. On the way, he picks her a bouquet of flaming-red roses. Neil fancies that when he gives her the roses, "...they would give her a sudden distaste for coarse worldlings like Frank Ellinger." (p. 80)
boudoir scene involving Marian and her husband, just before her first private interview with Ellinger, the narrator strongly implies that, because of the captain's illness, no sexual relations are possible for him.

In the second place, Marian's love affair has as its background the code of the generation before Niels. "Morals were different in those days," the narrator tells us. (p. 45) Then follows a discussion in which manners and morals are wittily fused, a demonstration that if the older generation condoned sexual irregularity, it respected generosity, warmth of heart and the tributes that vice pays to virtue. An enlightening part of Ellinger's history is reviewed. A prostitute once spurned him, her upper-class lover, because he was indecorous enough to go driving with her in broad daylight. (His departure from manners here points to his later unkindness to Marian.) At the same time, Ellinger's devotion to his mother is well known. Ellinger is a "terribly fast young man and a model son"; (p. 46) Marian is a fast woman and a model wife.¹⁸

Finally, the style in which Marian begins her relationship with Ellinger makes it a part of her artistic creation. She conducts her love affair with dignity and careful secrecy, with respect for her husband's pride and the feelings

¹⁸ Marian's husband implies that she is not to be condemned by the double standard. (See p. 11.)
of the people about her, including the peevish Constance. (And as we see the affair beginning, we know that she is frightened by her husband's illness and frightened of being stranded in Sweet Water.) The details of her serious flirtation show, in an episode observed by the reader but not by Niel, that her beauty, her wit and her decorum are undamaged by the relationship. Later when Niel hears Marian and Frank in bed together, Marian's laugh is "a woman's soft laughter; impatient, indulgent, teasing, eager." (p. 81) Niel's reaction here is violent, understandably so in the light of the superficial sophistication given him by his reading, and his unwillingness to admit his own little flirtation with Marian. "It was not a moral scruple she had outraged but an aesthetic ideal." (p. 87) But the quality of the laugh indicates that the aesthetic unity is preserved. Niel's reaction is the youthful priggishness of an insecure son who finds beauty in love affairs
only when they occur in the literature of an earlier
time. That Marian's style is capable of transforming
what might appear to be a sordid love affair, Nieł begins
to understand one day when Captain Forrester takes from
Nieł's hand a letter from Marian to Ellinger which Nieł has
shamefacedly tried to conceal. The handwriting is so
beautiful, says the captain as he holds it out for them
both to see, that there need be no embarrassment about it.
The captain's attitude here also makes Nieł understand
that Marian has not deceived her husband; the captain
knows her too well. Captain Forrester accepts Marian's
love affair with Ellinger in the light of her strong
sexual impulses, her extreme youth (the captain regards
her as little more than a child), and, most important of
all, her intrinsic ladylikeness.

Marian's function as an artist is to be the attract-
tive wife of a distinguished man, to avoid prosiness, to

19 Judge Pommeroy advises Nieł not to read Don Juan,
Tom Jones and others. (For the full list, see VII, 75-76.)
Nieł is so sexually squeamish that the reader is almost
inclined to approve the judge's censorship.
Although Brown, op. cit., p. 229, regards Nieł as Jim
Burdem (narrator of My Antonia) under another name, I
believe that Nieł's sexual repression and his social inse-
curity—both important aspects of his character—are not to
be found in Jim. I have explained earlier that the handling
of point of view is not altogether successful in this
novel, but the window character is much more effective in A
Lost Lady than is the first person narrator of My Antonia.
Nieł's deficiencies as well as his abilities are turned to
advantage, and his relationship with the heroine raises no
awkward questions.
wear jewels well and to hold her cocktail-glass gracefully, to be always lively and to appear always easy, to be the foil for her husband and the hostess for his guests, to be charming and gay and to make others so. Her eyes, her voice, her laughter and the wit behind them give her the illusion of beauty, an illusion superior to the real thing in that she might be expected to produce it still at the age of ninety. The closing words of the first chapter ("He grew old there--and even she, alas! grew older." [p. 7]) therefore suggest something more than conventional lament for the passing years. She triumphs easily as long as everything goes right, as long as her husband is well and has plenty of money, as long as the atmosphere is pleasing and the people around her can be made charming and gay.

Marian's magical attractiveness and her appearance, inseparably bound together, suffer as everything around her goes wrong. When Captain Forrester loses his money, Marian speaks of her housekeeping to Niel in the prose. Soon Niel is aware that her charm costs her something, and the essence of charm such as hers is that, even when one knows better, it should seem to cost nothing at all. Later, her involvement with Ivy Peters damages her. Her beautiful laughter becomes shrill and nervous in response to Ivy Peters' crude jokes crudely told, and when Niel warns her to take better care of her reputation, her eyes lose their brilliancy and respond with the glaze of hysteria.
When she tells Niel of the dishonest schemes in which Ivy Peters has invested her money, her gestures become awkward with panic. All of the supposedly imperishable aspects of her attractiveness seem to vanish.

Two incidents are milestones along Marian's journey down. One stormy evening, a few hours after Niel has seen in a Denver paper the announcement of Ellinger's marriage to Constance Ogden, Marian appears in Judge Pommeroy's office, her gown soaked in muddy water, her breath smelling of whiskey. She telephones Ellinger and when he tells her that he would rather "play safe" than see her again, she unbraids him in a voice filled with hatred and scorn.

A less violent but more pathetic episode is Marian's party for Ivy Peters and his friends. She cannot wait until after her guests have gone to criticize them to Niel. She knows how her sense of staging has deserted her by leaving the party to return wearing rouge which, on her

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20 The creeks which divide the Forresters' house and grounds from the town have flooded but Marian somehow crosses a broken bridge. Symbolic overtones here need no comment.

21 Marian's furtive sneer at Peters and his friends is perhaps meant to contrast to an earlier description: "She often caricatured people to their faces, and they were not offended, but greatly flattered. Nothing pleased one more than to provoke her laughter." (p. 67)
tired face, looks ridiculous. She fails to put life into the party; she cannot engage them in conversation; one feels that even in her best days, she would have failed with these boors.

Of course in her best days she would have been with another group. In order to escape her situation, to take her place again in the old way in the old society, Marian reluctantly makes concessions to Ivy Peters and his crowd. She permits Ivy to gain a number of holds over her: he is her frequent guest, the real-estate agent for her house and the investor of her dwindling funds. Marian will do anything at all to get money, but to do anything at all is to damage the portrait of the lady beyond hope of full restoration.

Thus Marian appears through much of the novel as a formidable but passive agent, linked with and in part reflecting whatever man is in power, utterly dependent upon money, an appreciative audience, sexual satisfaction and the backing of an honorable husband. In these terms, the novel is a naturalistic one and Marian the inevitable

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22 Kiel makes clear that Marian's reluctance is great although he does not admit it to himself; he describes her choice of alternatives in the melodramatic terms dear to adolescence: "It was what he most held against Mrs. Forrester: that she was not willing to immolate herself, like the widows of all these great men, and die with the pioneer period to which she belonged; that she preferred life on any terms." (p. 168)
product of certain forces. However, the novel is not quite naturalistic. I shall show a little later that Marian's damaging of the portrait is the result of a major error in her judgment, and that, at the very end of the novel, she appears to be successfully molding her environment instead of being simply molded by it. Her art, like all art, is an affair of surfaces. But the artist himself dare not be superficial, and his vision must not falter as Marian's does.

IV. An Old-Fashioned Code

Only a few lines are devoted to Marian Forrester's early history. At the age of nineteen, she had been engaged to a "gaudy young millionaire of the Gold Coast." (p. 164) Shortly before they were to have been married, he had been shot and killed by "the husband of another woman." (p. 164) While the last phrase suggests a motive for murder, there are vague hints that Marian had been involved with the murderer. The subsequent trial and its attendant publicity circled about her. Later, she was taken away until the scandal died down. Apparently, her friends or guardians had the means for this strategic withdrawal. At the very first then, Marian is a passive figure against a wealthy background, her respectability stage-managed by others.
We learn more of Captain Forrester's early history. He had already held positions of responsibility—captain in the Civil War, freight-driver between Nebraska City and Denver, railroad contractor. His first wife had been an unhappy, Puritanical invalid. After her death, he had dreamed of a wife like Marian, of a home near the flowering marshes of Sweet Water, and of railroads spanning the continent; all of his dreams have come true.

The captain's code is very simple. It is perhaps instinctive and, like the code of Kit Carson and Pierre Charron, it is associated with the building up of a new country. Forrester is one of the most refined of pioneers, mannerly, generous, brave, self-sacrificing and absolutely honest. Superficially rather pompous, he is yet humble enough to suggest that his success is due largely to desire and luck:

"Well, then, my philosophy is that what you think of and plan for day by day, in spite of yourself, so to speak—you will get. You will get it more or less. That is, unless you are

23 Kit Carson is a minor character in Death Comes for the Archbishop (1927); Pierre Charron is a leading character in Shadows on the Rock (1940).

24 The narrator's first claim for the captain's honesty (p. 44) seems excessive but is verified by his behavior during the bank crisis. Forrester gives up almost all of his money in order that the depositors may have a hundred cents on the dollar, rather than fifty cents and promises on the dollar.
one of the people who get nothing in this world. There are such people. I have lived too much in mining works and construction camps not to know that."

(p. 54) 25

The captain's love of wild and cultivated nature, his joy in his wife, his achievement as a railroad builder indicate that he is imaginative and appreciates quicksilver qualities unlike his own. He is so wise that others have difficulty in hiding anything from him. But clumsiness, solidity and ponderosity are often ascribed to him. He and his wife select for their home the heaviest furniture they can find; their engravings are heavy without the weight of profundity; 26 the captain's speech has an old-fashioned floridity, 27 and he has an almost excessive respect for ritual and tradition. His formulae of etiquette are rigid, and he is powerless to deal with Ivy Peters. In his days of power,

25 In The Song of the Lark, Cather suggests that good luck always comes to intense and talented persons; in A Lost Lady, bad luck may befall anyone. In The Song of the Lark, the price of improving one's luck is callousness; in A Lost Lady, the price is loss of integrity. The captain and his wife and their very different responses to bad luck embody different aspects of this idea. Pertinent also is Ellinger's habit of making wise but not always scrupulous or brave decisions.

26 Their furniture and furnishings also constitute one of the period notes in the novel.

27 Note in The Song of the Lark Cather's mockery of one of the phrases habitual to the captain ("I value her"). Compare II, 463-464, with VII, 139.
he would have ordered out of sight such an undesirable upstart. Thus Forrester's success depends, to a certain extent, on ruthlessness. 28 To Niel, the captain is one of that vanishing race which could "conquer but could not hold," which could command inferiors but are powerless now that negotiation is necessary.

Both the nineteen-year-old Marian and the forty-four-year-old Captain Forrester whom she has just met, are physically brave, daring and imaginative. What other traits Marian shares with him we do not know. When we see her later, she shares his love of wild and cultivated nature, and his feeling for tradition and ritual (although she is able to make fun of his unvarying formulae). The first real test of the captain's effect on Marian comes just after his death, and the effect is not so great at first as might have been supposed.

The major differences between her husband and Marian are evoked by his grave with its massive stone sundial and rose bush. To his courtly repetition in company she brings lightness, humor and a gentle mockery combined with serious respect. Forrester's endurance of hard times near the end of his life is perhaps all too

28 A degree of ruthlessness is characteristic of the captain's class. Even Niel, devoted as he is to that class, hints that there is some justice to Peters' accusation that the Forresters' fine friends have deserted them in time of need.
placid; Marian, on the other hand, though she sometimes rises to emergencies with spirit, is driven almost to frenzy by a daily grind of work, worry and boredom. To free herself from this life, she does what her husband could not and would not do—she courts Ivy Peters and his friends. And in order to deal with them, she must educate and change them. The awkward way in which she goes about this task, her failure at it, her dishonesty with Niel in describing her motives for doing it, are among the signs of her more general failure.

Except by force of example, Captain Forrester does not appear as an instructor of manners. Only in a very indirect and gentle way has Marian been Niel's instructor in the past. But after her husband's death, she becomes the self-conscious paragon and teacher when her charm depends on giving every appearance of spontaneity. At the same time, she fails to understand that the beauty of the captain's manners sprang not from their adherence to etiquette books but from the strength of his character. Her instruction has unexpectedly comical effects. During her party for the town boys, Niel watches them leap to their feet when Marian enters the room; their rising as though in response to a pistol shot indicates that Marian might better have disregarded their manners. Niel, however, has learned the connection between manners and morals, and at his suggestion Marian tells the boys about the captain's
heroic rescue of her when she had fallen from a cliff. The boys are moved; they show themselves in their best light here. And under the effect of her recital, Marian's charm returns. Her admiration for the captain's bravery restores a glow to her face that had looked rather pinched when she complained to Niels of the boys' gaucheries.

Niels's earlier thought that Marian "would not be herself in straitened circumstances" (p. 83) is correct;²⁹ on the whole, her charm has not the strength to meet and endure adversity. But there are a few indications in the novel that Marian could have fashioned from adversity a new attractiveness. One such indication is her frank confession to Ellinger that she misses the adulation of the great world and is thankful for his amorous attentions. Another indication is a smile that she gives Niels, a beautiful smile but, oddly enough, without archness, showing only tender affection. Perhaps most impressive of these little indications is her conversation with Dalzell in which she bids good-bye to the notion that she may once again be Lady Forrester, the butterfly of society. "In her voice there was the heart-breaking sadness that one sometimes hears in lovely, gentle old songs." (p. 97)

These little incidents prepare the reader for the fact

²⁹ But the novel does not suggest that Marian is so lovely that her sins must be overlooked, an attitude which weakens Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby and which is enthusiastically satirized in Evelyn Waugh's Decline and Fall.
that near the end of her life, Marian is to regain dignity and to control circumstances instead of being controlled by them. (And thus the novel is not quite naturalistic, for Marian is not simply a victim.) She transforms her second husband, banishing his ill temper and stinginess. Her power over him springs from her continuing respect for Captain Forrester and her sharing that respect with his successor:

"After she left Sweet Water, wherever she was, she always sent a cheque to the Grand Army Post every year to have flowers put on Captain Forrester's grave for Decoration Day. Three years ago the Post got a letter from the old Englishman with a draft for the future care of Captain Forrester's grave, 'in memory of my late wife, Marian Forrester Collins.'"

(p. 173)

Near her death, as we glimpse her at the end of the novel, Marian's laugh and her eyes are unchanged and so is her warm friendliness. Only her obviously dyed hair symbolises the qualification of her final victory.

A group of objective correlatives emphasises main themes at the end of the novel. Marian's dyed hair reminds us of the price of her decline as an artist; her husband's memorial to her shows how completely at last she has comprehended her first husband's code; I have pointed out earlier also how the very setting of the end of the novel, in Chicago, keeps before us the warfare between the
town and the sensitive spirit. The last page of A Lost Lady indicates that, even more stringently than The Song of the Lark, it is held together by thematic lines that run from the very beginning to the very end.

In the previous chapters of this study we have seen how Antonia, Archbishop Latour, Thea Kronborg and Marian Forrester avail themselves in various ways of a past, and how Antonia, Latour and Thea delight in the connection of their personal pasts with much larger historical ones.

The main characters in the two books yet to be considered, Myra Henshawe (of My Mortal Enemy) and Godfrey St. Peter (of The Professor's House) are also vitally concerned with the past. Neither person seeks out a past in order to find values; rather, their personal pasts rush upon them whether they will or not. The experience is for both, in part, a destructive one. (This view of her favorite themes is not new for Willa Cather; she had considered it, much less profoundly, in her 1912 Alexander's Bridge.)

My Mortal Enemy states a paradox of character--its chief actor is at once tender and cruel, tyrannical and saintly. The Professor's House, the crown of Willa Cather's work, also combines opposites within its hero, presenting in one man qualities that she had hitherto shown in her pairs of characters--simplicity and complexity, heartiness
and asceticism, civilization and primitivism. Both characters experience religious stirrings which lead them away from that loyalty to persons and ideals which she had strongly praised. The progress of both characters is viewed with great sympathy.

In *My Mortal Enemy*, corruption and saintliness exist side by side, doing battle within a soul. In *The Professor's House*, the corruption of human society—of all human societies of whatever age and place—is set against the purity of a soul which, for all its purity, takes some small part in human corruption.

Myra Henshawe in *My Mortal Enemy* has none of that brave acceptance of inferior circumstances, none of the endurance that mark Willa Cather's pioneers. She is, for a time, an artist at living; her religious concern finally comes to dominate her personality. Godfrey St. Peter, like Archbishop Latour, is an artist, a pioneer and a kind of saint. Godfrey is an artist in his steady aesthetic response to experience; he is a pioneer by virtue of his histories, which are so unusual as to cut him off for years from sympathetic criticism; he is a saint by virtue of the preoccupation that begins to crowd out all others. Successful in their religious seeking, deeply comforted by their perception of the sacredness of nature, (the latter idea more soberly considered in these two novels
than elsewhere in Cather), Myra and Godfrey pay overwhelming prices for the satisfaction of following their strange gods.
In several ways, *My Mortal Enemy* (1926) is unique among Willa Cather's novels. It is her shortest novel, so short that she feared (needlessly, as it turned out) lest her publisher refuse to print it as a separate book. It is her last and most extreme example of tightly restricted form. It uses a single narrator (the least obtrusive of her narrators and window characters) with unbroken consistency and unparalleled skill. Its cast of characters is small and its focus almost exclusively on the heroine, all other characters being sharply subordinated.

A pendant to *The Professor's House* (1923) superscript 1 *My Mortal Enemy* embodies within a single character themes very close to those of the earlier novel. The novels resemble each other also in that they are unusually clear examples of the

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1 Although *The Professor's House* was written before *My Mortal Enemy*, I have reversed the order of the novels in this study because I take *The Professor's House* to be a summary of her themes as well as the high point of her development as a novelist.
démeublé technique.² My Mortal Enemy employs symbols, echoes from point to point, suggestive details, and a rather large number of allusions. The reader must take hints, combine implications, and take unusual care to sense all that has been cut away.³

There are a number of possible reasons why Willa Cather never again made use of tightly restricted form. The price of concision in My Mortal Enemy—great concision combined with the démeublé technique—is abruptness. So abrupt is the novel in effect that its events acquire a violence beyond even that appropriate to the character of the heroine.⁴ In the closing paragraph of the novel, a line from the title scene is repeated; thus the author attempts, too late, to reap one of the benefits of leisurely recounting. Willa Cather may have been aware of this

² While tightly restricted form is often associated with the démeublé (unfurnished) novel, the association is not a necessary one. The démeublé novel avoids mechanical and background detail. Thus though The Professor's House, for example, is apparently loose in form, it offers few details of the two houses which are important in the novel.


⁴ On a later occasion, Cather was to speak with misleading shortness. See Brown, op. cit., p. 303: "In a foreword to Not Under Forty (1936) that was belligerent, and by its brevity seemed even more belligerent than it was, she construed the title as a warning..." And we have seen that the ending of A Lost Lady (1923) is too brief to be clear and forceful.
abruptness; she may consciously have strained at her self-imposed confines; she may have felt that the tightly restricted form was not the proper showcase for her talents; or she may have felt that she had exhausted the possibilities of such a form. In any case, she never used it again, and her next novel, Death Comes for the Archbishop, was to employ a looser form than she had ever attempted.

Like the form, the plot of My Mortal Enemy is very restricted. It traces the life of Myra Driscoll from adolescence to death, concentrating most on two periods—twenty years after her marriage and ten years after that, the last year of her life. Orphaned as a little girl, Myra is brought up by her great-uncle, a crude, money-loving and pious man whom Myra understood, appreciated and, to a great extent, resembled. But Myra falls in love with Oswald Henshawe, the son of one of her great-uncle's enemies. Myra runs off with Oswald, and her uncle dies, keeping his threat to leave her nothing of his vast fortune.

All this Nellie Birdseye, the narrator, has learned from her Aunt Lydia, who has helped Myra to elope. (Myra is the most exciting figure in Nellie's life and Lydia's.) Also from her Aunt Lydia, Nellie learns that Myra and

5 Her great-uncle's enemy is a poor man; her great-uncle is rich. The rich man is in no way threatened, and his continued persecution is the nursing of a grudge. The basis for the grudge is never revealed; the cause of the feud, as in Romeo and Juliet, has ceased to have any reality.
Oswald have been "about as happy as most people" when, Nellie feels, "the very point of their story was that they should be much happier than other people." (p. 250) Visiting her new friends, the Henshawes, in New York City, the provincial Nellie (she comes from the small Illinois town where Myra has been brought up) falls under the spell of Myra's commanding fascination. Nellie observes Myra's interest in the love affairs of her friends, her dutiful visits to the rich families of Oswald's business associates, her capacity for friendship and her love for and insight into her artistic friends—poets, actors, singers. Nellie cannot avoid noticing also Myra's possessiveness, bitterness and bad temper, her demands on her friends and her hunger for riches. Nellie can scarcely believe that these qualities, good and bad, go hand in hand; but almost despite herself, Nellie has shown Myra in these contradictory lights from the beginning. At the end of the first section of the novel, Myra's leaving her husband over a trifling quarrel is a sign of how deep her undesirable qualities run.

Ten years later, Nellie finds Myra and Oswald in a run-down San Francisco hotel. Out of pride, apparently, they are hiding from such friends of theirs as still live; sadder still, Myra's flair for friendship seems gone. Tokens of previous glory, such as their elaborate draperies now streaked and faded, emphasize their pathetic circum-
stances. Myra is partly responsible for their poverty but she is intensely bitter about it, and more and more she turns that bitterness against Oswald. Shortly before her death, Myra repudiates the husband whose devotion to her is stronger than ever. At the same time, Myra's spirituality appears to have increased; the paradox of her nature is visible to the end.

Nellie Birdseye tells this story gracefully; she says little of herself and invites little interest in her own problems. (She never tells us, for example, how she means to escape from the school-teaching which she dislikes but feels compelled to do.) Unlike the narrators of My Antonia and A Lost Lady, Nellie does not present a study of her own development in parallel or contrast to that of her subject. Nellie tells her tale more smoothly than the narrator of these other novels. In My Antonia, Jim Burden must rely on Mrs. Steavens to relate part of Antonia's history, and in A Lost Lady, Willa Cather leaves her window-character for a second one and later introduces still a third unexplained and wraith-like observer. In My Mortal Enemy, Willa Cather draws information from a character other than her narrator,

6 Strictly speaking, A Lost Lady has no narrator. But the function of Niel Herbert, the window-character to whose mind we have principal access in the novel and whose view of the title character is presented (with the exception of a few moments), may profitably be compared with the function of Nellie Birdseye in My Mortal Enemy.
but the author gives not the words of her second source, Nellie’s Aunt Lydia, but her information filtered like all else in the novel through Nellie’s mind. 7

Nellie is sensitive, intelligent, and naïve. So sensitive is she that she is frequently able to suggest more than she knows. Her naiveté never cancels out her other traits nor acts as a drag in her telling of the story. Instead, her ingenuousness serves a positive function, suggesting how far is Myra from the average person—even the average sensitive person.

A simile shows how Willa Cather goes beyond the apparent limitations of her narrator. At one of Myra’s parties a young woman sings “Casta Diva” from Bellini’s Norma.

...the Casta Diva aria, which begins so like the quivering of moonbeams on the water. It was the first air on our old music-box at home...

For many years I associated Mrs. Henshawe with that music, thought of that aria as being mysteriously related to something in her nature that one rarely saw, but nearly always felt; a compelling, passionate over-

7 See Brown, op. cit., pp. 144-145, 251. Though Brown has little to say of management of point of view in My Mortal Enemy, he may be thinking partly of this when he says (p. 251): “Of all Willa Cather’s writings this is the one on which...Jewett’s judgment would have been most rewarding.”

About a Cather story told from the point of view of a male narrator, “On the Gulls’ Road,” McClure’s, XXXII (December, 1908), 145-152, Jewett wrote Cather: “The lover is as well done as he could be when a woman writes in a man’s character,—it must always, I believe, be something of a masquerade....” (Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett, edited by Annie Fields [Boston, 1911], p. 246)
The relation of Myra's personality to the aria loses its mystery as one thinks of the opera and its title character, who leads a cult of virginal priestesses while secretly meeting a lover and bearing him children, the priestess who sins passionately and yet displays great nobility of spirit. Myra's resemblance to that priestess is fully drawn in the course of the novel.

Alone among the novels of this study, My Mortal Enemy possesses a unity which is both simple and flawless. Death Comes for the Archbishop is a perfectly unified book, but it may be only on second or third thought that it reveals itself as such; My Antonia also possesses an elaborate rather than a simple unity and relies rather strongly on themes to bind elements otherwise somewhat distant. Because of failures in motivation and proportion, The Song of the Lark and A Lost Lady are disunified even though both possess thematic unity. My Mortal Enemy, however, with its small cast of characters, almost perfectly straightforward action, constricted plot and consistent and quiet narrator, displays immediately its well-built extra-thematic structure. The thematic structure also is clear and simple: two themes are presented throughout. Both themes are embodied in Myra at whom Nellie gazes. Even when Nellie looks about her
without explicit reference to Myra, Nellie's descriptions recall Myra's nature. The themes are carefully intertwined and there is even a single moment in the story when they are simultaneously evoked, the moment when Myra grabs her crucifix. (We shall return to this moment later.) So clearly, constantly and appropriately are the themes of the novel embodied, that one can scarcely describe plot, narrator or imagery of the novel without clearly suggesting its themes: the ignoble poetry of worldliness and the sublime poetry of the soul.

II. The Poetry of Worldliness

Nellie's infatuation with Myra spills over onto all of Myra's possessions, surroundings and friends. Here, for example, is Nellie's description of Myra's dinner service (one of the rare moments in which Nellie comments ironically on her own naiveté):

Everything in their little apartment seemed to me absolutely individual and unique, even the dinner service; the thick gray plates and the soup tureen painted with birds and big, bright flowers--I was sure there were no others like them in the world.

(p. 259)

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8 See Brown, op. cit., p. 248. I borrow the phrase "the poetry of worldliness" from him. My debt to Brown is greater in my remarks on My Mortal Enemy than elsewhere in this study. His principal discussion of the novel is on pages 247-251 of his critical biography.
As Nellie spends a contentedly lonely afternoon in Madison Square, her description of the place suggests the mixture of wildness and civilization within Myra:

The trees and shrubbery seemed well groomed and sociable, like pleasant people...[Water in the fountain] rose and fell like something taking deep happy breaths; and the sound was musical, seemed to some from the throat of spring. Not far away, on the corner, was an old man selling English violets, each bunch wrapped in oiled paper to protect them from the snow. Here, I felt, winter brought no desolation; it was tamed like a polar bear led on a leash by a beautiful lady.

(p. 257)

Even Madame Modjeska at the Henshawes' New Year's Eve party helps to reveal Myra's combination of worldliness and nobility:

How well I remember [Modjeska's] beautifully modeled hands, with so much humanity in them! They were worldly, indeed, but fashioned for a nobler worldliness than ours; hands to hold a scepter or a chalice--or, by courtesy, a sword.

(p. 275)

Myra's atmosphere is rich, very much so to Nellie. When

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9 At the same party, the old actor with eyebrow-paint slowly spreading down his face is a vaguer symbol suggesting the unavailing pretenses and blasted hopes that pervade the story. But of course his literal significance must not be overlooked. His coming straight from the theater, in his make-up and costume, shows how at home he feels with Myra and how eager he is to be with her.
Nellie first sees her, Myra wears a black velvet gown and a necklace of amethysts. Her clothes and her cutting manner show her insistence upon a high style of living. So does the little quarrel with her husband (also described in the first chapter) when he discovers that she has given his six new shirts to the janitor's boy because she can't bear Oswald in ill-fitting clothes. In New York City, Nellie watches Myra buy for Madame Modjeska's Christmas the most beautiful and most expensive holly tree that the florist provides.

But while Nellie is dazzled by Myra's wealth, Myra regards herself as poor, and for reasons other than esthetic satisfaction, yearns to be rich.

"There, Nellie," she exclaimed, "that's the last woman I'd care to have splashing past me, and me in a hansom cab!"

I glimpsed what seemed to me insane ambition. My aunt was always thanking God that the Henshawes got along as well as they did, and worrying because she felt sure Oswald wasn't saving anything. And here Mrs. Myra was wishing for a carriage—with stables and a house and servants, and all that went with a carriage!

(p. 271)

Nellie observes spite and vengeance in Myra again shortly after this as Myra spends an unhappy afternoon at the theater. Nellie senses that Myra is "accusing, denouncing," (p. 274) and paying no heed to the stage because she happens to have seen a disloyal former friend in the audience. In later years, Myra says of her great-uncle:
"He would help a friend, no matter what it cost him, and over and over again he risked himself to crush an enemy. But he never did ruin himself. Men who hate like that usually have the fist-power to back it up, you'll notice." 

(p. 308)

Myra's marriage to Oswald has robbed her of the fist-power; she has not money enough to act out the vendettas of her imagination.

Myra loves her friends genuinely and yet her choice of artists, rather than rich people, as friends may be somewhat influenced by her hatred of "the nastiness of being poor." Nellie implies in her description of Myra's two types of friends\(^\text{10}\) that Myra likes being the rich benefactress to her artists, as well as paying her way in the coin of intensity and appreciation.

In the second part of the novel, when Nellie finds Myra and Oswald in San Francisco after a space of ten years, Myra is as imperious as ever, her head still one that "would have graced one of the wickedest of the Roman emperors." (p. 292) Now at last genuinely poor, Myra is

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\(^{10}\) Juxtaposition is an effective technique in My Mortal Enemy as in My Antonia. See especially section one, chapter five of My Mortal Enemy, in which a string of incidents presented with a random air, show now one side, now the opposite side of Myra's character. The comparison of Myra with the heroine of Norma comes at the very end of this chapter.
more than ever eager for wealth. She appears to take
almost literally her uncle's statement that "a poor man
stinks and God hates him" (p. 249) when she says that
money would buy her not merely comfort for the terrible
illness which wracks her but also the dignity which she
thinks herself not to possess in her own person:

"Now I'm old and ill and a fright, but
among my own kind I'd still have my
circle; I'd have courtesy from people
of gentle manners..."

(p. 302)

Myra lacks the resignation and endurance which would
ease her fate. Worse still, though her husband is devoted
and self-sacrificing and though all traces of bitterness
observable in him earlier have vanished, she accuses him
of insufficient effort on her behalf. "If I were on my
feet and you laid low, I wouldn't let you be despised and
trampled upon," Myra says to him. (p. 300) Her apology
for this taunt is not comforting:

"No, my poor Oswald, you'll never
stagger far under the bulk of me...
It's been the ruin of us both. We've
destroyed each other. I should have
stayed with my uncle. It was money
I needed. We've thrown our lives
away."

(p. 301)

Later when she and Nellie are alone together, Myra says:

"He's a sentimentalist, always was;
he can look back on the best of those
Finally she holds Oswald to blame for everything that goes wrong. She even presumes that he is the cause of the noises from the floor above. Shortly before she dies, she says to him in Nellie's presence:

"I could bear to suffer...[sic] so many have suffered. But why must it be like this? I have not deserved it. I have been true in friendship; I have faithfully nursed others in sickness...[sic] Why must I die like this, alone with my mortal enemy?"

(p. 321) 11

The horror of this moment Nellie is never quite able to explain away or assimilate. Several years after Myra's death, Nellie cannot wear Myra's jewels given to her by Oswald as a remembrance. The amethysts, traditionally symbolic of love, bring a chill over her heart.

Even in the undoubted piety of her last year Myra is spiritually proud. When Nellie picks up her ivory crucifix, Myra "put out her hand quickly and said 'Give it to me. It

11 Seen against the background of Oswald's devotion which is detailed in the novel, the speech is more shocking in context than out. But the novel also gives preparation for the speech. Myra has said to Nellie, "People can be lovers and enemies at the same time, you know." (p. 314)
means nothing to people who haven't suffered." (p. 318)

III. The Poetry of the Spirit

Throughout the novel Myra possesses a spirituality that is profound and true. She has a great capacity for love and friendship; she shows imaginative sympathy for the sufferings of others; she is deeply preoccupied with sin and injustice; to her final religious concern even her great love of money is subsidiary.

Myra's exceptional friendliness is apparent very early in the novel at the family dinner party which is so much livelier than such gatherings usually are, where Myra remembers all the old jokes and stories that the others have forgotten, and her laugh rings out at frequent intervals. Nellie is soon to see that Myra's gaiety is inspired by more than superficial friendliness:

When she but mentioned the name of someone whom she admired, one got an instant impression that the person must be wonderful...When she liked people she always called them by name a great many times in talking to them, and she enunciated the name...in a penetrating way...this, accompanied by her singularly direct glance, had a curious effect. When she addressed Aunt Lydia...she seemed to be speaking to a person deeper down than the blurred, taken-for-granted image of my aunt that I saw every day...for a moment my aunt became more individual, less matter-of-fact to me.

(p. 273)
Myra's love for Oswald is unmistakable. When Nellie first sees them together, she believes that Oswald's presence gives Myra "a lively personal pleasure," a situation which seems most unusual to Nellie when she thinks of the other marriages she has observed.

Although, as I have said, Myra associates with members of the artistic world for not entirely disinterested reasons, she proves her real love for them by sacrifices: taking care of the son of the Irish actress, comforting the tubercular poetess during her last illness, purchasing masses for the soul of Madame Modjeska when Myra and Oswald are badly in need of money. Much as Myra loves money, she keeps a long glove-full of ten and twenty-dollar gold pieces for masses. As she says, "This is money I keep for unearthly purposes; the needs of this world don't touch it." (p. 312)

Myra has a savage awareness of the fickleness of friendship, the tragic faltering of youth, the probable bitter ending of bright young love, and the pain and sorrow in the world. Nellie, seeing Myra near the end of her life, remembers now that Myra had often in the past veered close to the blasphemy of Job. Nellie says:

I recalled her angry laugh, and how she had always greeted shock or sorrow with that dry chuckle which seemed to say: "Ah-ha, I have one more piece of evidence, one more, against the hideous injustice God permits in this world!" (p. 294)
When Nellie first knows her, Myra's savage awareness is an occasional mood; toward the end it approaches a constant one.

The two visions of nature in the two sections of the novel may be said to mark the stages of Myra's spiritual journey. In section one, nature is tamed, modified or indirectly presented—the dome of a building glowing in gray light, Madison Square as an outdoor drawing-room, birds, beasts and flowers pictured in Myra's apartment. In section two, Myra says that she "lives" on the bitter smell of the sea that sometimes drifts in the window of her hotel-room. Nature is now this bitter smell, and light and dark, and a twisted, solitary tree on a cliff running into the ocean.

But the stark and bitter vision of nature is not without comfort: Myra says of the cliff where she likes to sit and look out over the water:

"I'd love to see this place at dawn... That is always such a forgiving time. When that first cold, bright streak comes over the water, it's as if all our sins were pardoned; as if the sky leaned over the earth and kissed it and gave it absolution."

(p. 300) 12

12 Shortly thereafter Myra implies that she herself is a sinner. One finds very little evidence elsewhere that she possesses anything like pious humility. Her descriptions of herself as greedy and selfish seem to be attacks on her husband rather than genuine confessions.
"Light and silence: they heal all one's wounds--all but one, and that is healed by dark and silence...." (p. 300)

From her vision of nature and from her renewed religion which is inseparable from that vision, Myra derives the strength to endure her life and to ritualize her death. It is the latter achievement on which Nellie comments. Unknown to anyone, Myra rises from her death-bed, and has a cabman drive her to her cliff. Here she pays him from her hoard of gold-pieces and against his better judgment (Myra exerts her old charm for the last time), persuades him to leave her alone in this deserted spot. When Oswald reports that Myra is missing, Nellie guesses where she has gone but decides to remain silent.

It seemed to me that she ought to be allowed to meet the inevitable end in the way she chose. A yearning strong enough to lift that ailing body and drag it out into the world again should have its way. (p. 325)

And Nellie believes that Myra received the blessing she desired:

There was every reason to believe she had lived to see the dawn. While we watched beside her, waiting for the undertaker...I told Oswald what she had said to me about longing to behold the morning break over the sea, and it comforted him. (p. 326)
Although Myra's ritualization of her own death is to Nellie the most impressive of her achievements, may we not be more impressed by her endurance of her life? Both Myra and Oswald suggest that she is considering suicide during her last year.\textsuperscript{13} She is frantically impatient with poverty, she has in old age (this is her expression though she is fifty-three) lost everything, even the power to love, and she claims the suicide's flower for her own. Oswald, in fear of her suicide, says what we have reason to believe: "She hasn't an ounce of endurance but she has enough desperate courage for a regiment." (p. 303)

While Myra turns to nature as a source of values, the personal past returns upon her whether she will or no, as it returns upon Bartley Alexander in \textit{Alexander's Bridge} (1912) and Godfrey St. Peter in \textit{The Professor's House} (1925). Myra has always resembled the great-uncle who forbade her marriage; in her last year, she has his ferocity, his crudity, his piety. Spiritually she allies

\textsuperscript{13} Myra's name for her favorite spot, "Gloucester's cliff," points to her suicidal desire and presumably refers to \textit{King Lear}, IV, i, 76:

\begin{quote}
There is a cliff, whose high and bending head
Looks fearfully in the confined deep.
Bring me but to the very brim of it,
And I'll repair the misery thou dost bear
with something rich about me. From that place
I shall no leading need.
\end{quote}

\textit{Lear}'s affinity for the wild and twisted aspects of nature resembles Myra's and there are other likenesses between the two works, such as the contrast of fidelity to betrayal.

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herself with him and his Catholicism. Were he still alive, she would go to him and beg forgiveness. Like Alexander’s and St. Peter’s, her acceptance of her personal past involves a rejection of the present. Unlike the two men, she not only rejects the present and all of its commitments, including her commitment to her husband, but she does so with grim satisfaction. "I feel his savagery strengthen in me," (p. 303) she says of her great uncle.

She had...one of those divided natures that sometimes turn on themselves and what they have cherished, that hate where they love, and find in betrayal itself an ultimate truth...  

So says Edith Lewis of Myra Henshawe. Myra, we are made to feel, arrives at ultimate truth; she is a twisted saint who makes terrible demands on those around

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14 Of his piety we know little. Myra’s last days are evidently supposed to tell us of it. Her great-uncle’s magnificent funeral reminds us that he left a great deal of money to the Church and, seen through Nellie’s wide eyes, appears a high example of worldly glory.

15 Edith Lewis, Willa Cather Living: A Personal Record (New York, 1953), p. 165, seems to be paraphrasing the novel (XI, 321). See also Cather’s description of the divided nature of the artist (Thea Kronborg), II, 467-468.
Myra's husband is saintly too for he returns his wife's betrayal with "unwavering constancy." Could mere sentimentality of which Myra accuses him have sustained him through seven years of straitened circumstances with her? Though Myra has great desperate courage and by a great effort of will is able to summon the endurance which her situation requires, Oswald, the secular saint of the novel, has the endurance for a long-drawn war.

Myra's statement, "In religion seeking is finding," (p. 320) shows how active and exalted her concept of religion is. The circumstances of this utterance, her holding an imaginary argument with Father Fay, draw it into contrast with the early scene in which she, preoccupied by vengeance, cannot concentrate on a play. Thus the intensity of her religious concern is emphasized. But if Myra is a saint, she is a saint of a special kind. Father Fay's description of her as "like one of the saints of the early Church" is perhaps best defined by Willa Cather herself in her only other references to the early Church:

16 The short story, "'A Death in the Desert,'" which first appeared in The Troll Garden (New York, 1905) and is not in the Library Edition, shows that the artist may make terrible demands on those around him. Its title, from the Browning poem, shows Cather's early awareness of the difficulties that the saint may cause. Taken together, The Song of the Lark and My Mortal Enemy express Cather's view that the passion of the artist and that of the religious must take first place beyond any human tie. But Cather makes no attempt to mask or minimize the suffering which this rank entails.
The daughter of heathnesse and the early church she was; doomed to torturing visions and scourgings, and the wranglings of soul with flesh.

Nothing short of death itself could make an absolutely sure convert of Kundry. There were many such stubborn struggles in the early days of the Church; they are to be found even in the lives of the saints.

The wilfulness of Myra's own struggling soul is visible to the end of her life and beyond. For though she dies with a crucifix in her hand, she meets death on her own terms and in what she regards as the holiest setting.

After her death, Oswald discovers that her will demands her cremation—in defiance of the Church to which she has finally returned.\(^{18}\)

\(^{17}\) The first quotation is from "The Marriage of Phaedra," a story from The Troll Garden (1905). The second is from "Three American Singers: Louise Homer, Geraldine Farrar, Olive Fremstad," McClure's, XLII (December, 1913), 47. The section of this article from which I have quoted describes an interpretation of Olive Fremstad's. A number of Myra Henshawe's elements, including her final, devotional view of nature, are suggested by Cather's further remarks on Kundry.

\(^{18}\) I believe I am correctly reading Nellie's implication here. Her words are:

Although she had returned so ardently to the faith of her childhood, Myra Henshawe never changed the clause in her will which requested that her body should be cremated...

(p. 327)

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The themes of the novel balance; in the first section, we ask how a woman who gives herself so warmly and freely to her friends can yet be so selfish and vengeful; in the second section, we ask how a woman so disloyal and cruel can yet be a saint. Myra is an exceptional, even a freakish, person. But the angels and devils warring for possession of her soul present an eternal human paradox. My Mortal Enemy dramatizes but does not resolve this paradox.
Chapter Two: The Professor's House

I. Introduction: Form and Themes

The Professor's House (1925) is the most richly symbolic of Willa Cather's novels, and its symbolic structure is well executed. Like My Mortal Enemy, The Professor's House is at once a very compact and a démeuble novel. Yet in The Professor's House concision never results in awkwardness nor abruptness; the narration appears leisurely. Echoes here and there within the story help to give an air of spaciousness to this novel which, although not especially long (282 pages), deals with a wide span of years, a great many events, and a large cast of characters, fourteen of whom may be regarded as major. Carefully articulated details, suggestions and allusions help the novel to yield new meanings to the reader.

Perhaps because The Professor's House is the most concentrated of Willa Cather's novels, it has puzzled critics. E. K. Brown suggests that there is more in the novel than he understands. He concludes:

Not by any answers it proposes, but by the problems it elaborates, and by the atmosphere in which they are enveloped, 
The Professor's House is a religious
one passes from a record of happenings to the achievement of startling and satisfying form and then to the suggestion of essential feeling about final issues.

Like Brown, Maxwell Geismar stresses the religious aspect of the novel and suggests that it will not stand alone:

In the sequence of Cather's novels, however, there is no doubt that The Professor's House is a novel of death and rebirth--of a spiritual purging and regeneration, and of that second coming which, formalized in the central rituals of religion, is actually a part of the deepest experience of man.

Leon Edel also believes that the novel will not stand alone; he regards it as a document whose chief use is to provide, in combination with the facts of Willa Cather's life, a diagnosis of her psychic difficulties. I believe with Brown and Geismar that the novel deals with religious experience, but I shall try to show that the novel is self-contained and complete.

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3 Leon Edel, Literary Biography: The Alexander Lectures, 1955-1956 (London, 1957), pp. 51-80. Edel's long explanation of The Professor's House is, I find to my astonishment, of questionable value. Since Edel is a prominent critic with claims as a Cather expert--he completed Brown's excellent biography of Cather after Brown's death--and since
Edel believes that no reason is given in the novel for St. Peter's despair. The facts that St. Peter's wife and daughter are engaging in very conspicuous consumption, that his younger daughter suddenly becomes very envious, that a trusted colleague suddenly reveals a lack of integrity, that St. Peter is mourning a friend, and that he has finished the writing of his histories--these facts are regarded as constituting an inadequate cause of despair. The reader must therefore explain St. Peter's "infantile" behavior as a desire to inhabit a womb and, free of siblings, to receive attention from a mother-figure. Thus the reader may see behind the professor's eccentricity of withdrawing to a secluded part of the house to write his histories and occasionally having his lunch brought to him there. In Edel's words: "The professor withdraws from his family and at the same time makes demands on it, for care, food, attention. There is decidedly something infantile here..." (p. 69)

Edel does not deal with the fact that St. Peter bestows a good deal of care and attention on his family (The Professor's House, pp. 21, 83), nor does Edel take into account practical reasons behind many writers' preference for seclusion and long stretches of uninterrupted time.

Tom's behavior, according to Edel, shows a similar infantilism. In Edel's reading of the novel, when Tom returns from Washington to find that his friend has sold the excavated pots (female symbols), Tom writes a diary, in Edel's words, "...a record of his narcissistic-infantile paradise, the paradise of life in the womb, of possessing the mother physically, in a notebook which he carefully secretes in a tower." (p. 69) Edel's reading of the novel is faulty here. Tom's diary, a list of facts, is written before he leaves for Washington and is not placed in a tower. After Tom's return from Washington, he has no interest in his diary. (The Professor's House, pp. 209, 211, 250, 259, 260)

Edel then turns to Cather herself in order to view the infantile rejection-fantasy of The Professor's House in terms of its projector. Edel finds that Cather suffered from feelings of displacement and rejection, that she sought a womb, and a mother undistracted by other children. As a child, Cather liked to escape to the dark Wiener living-room and to receive attention from the childless Mrs. Wiener. E. K. Brown's biography confirms that such was Cather's habit; Brown also mentions, as Edel does not, that during this period the attic bedroom which Cather shared with her brothers was a favorite retreat. (Brown, p. 32)
When Cather lived in Lincoln, Nebraska, she took refuge from her drab furnished room by visiting the Westermann home and enjoying the company of Mrs. Westermann. Edel mentions the six Westermann children, all living at home; perhaps we are to presume that Cather's desire for an exclusive mother had temporarily vanished.

Much later, Cather moved into a New York hotel and, intending to stay for a few days, remained for a few years. Edel explains her procrastination by remarking that the hotel fed her, mothered her and spared her from going out to make herself a home. But Edith Lewis, whom Edel appears to regard as a reliable biographer, says that while registered at this hotel, Cather spent most of her time traveling for pleasure and on family business. See Lewis, Willa Cather Living (New York, 1953), p. 152.

According to Edel, Cather suffered most when her motherly friend, Isabelle McClung, married Jan Hambourg. In Isabelle McClung, Edel goes on to say, Cather had at last found the exclusive mother whom she needed. Brown's biography indicates that Miss McClung was indeed motherly in her attitude toward Cather. Miss McClung installed her in the McClung home (where Cather had an attic study resembling the professor's, even to the dress forms) and included her warmly in her circle of friends.

But after Miss McClung's marriage, Cather "now had to share Isabelle with Jan—as she had had to share her mother with her brothers; as the professor, though he dislikes it, must share Rosamond with Louie; and as Outland shares his caves and pottery with Roddy only to lose them." (p. 77) Edel goes on to say that Cather's feeling that she had been rejected was irrational but real, and that "In The Professor's House Miss Cather had so identified herself with the professor that she could not supply any 'rejection motif' for his dejection." (p. 77)

On these points Edel raises questions that he does not answer. If Edel has evidence that Cather resented having to share her mother with her brothers, he does not offer it. There is no evidence in the novel that St. Peter resents having to share Rosamond with Louie, though there is evidence that St. Peter resents having to share Louie with Rosamond. (The Professor's House, section one, Chaps. XIV and XVI) If Cather identified herself with the professor, and Isabelle McClung Hambourg with Rosamond, was Cather then concerned with finding a child rather than a mother? If the vitriolic portrait of Rosamond at all resembles Isabelle McClung Hambourg, would the friendship between the two women have survived publication of the novel? It appears likely that Edel has confused the characters of Rosamond and Kathleen; if he has confused them, his whole theory may have to be remodelled or discarded.
There are many other baffling statements in Edel’s critique. Lillian, he says, "feels that her husband, in his withdrawal from the entire family, does not recognize how materially its fortunes are being altered by Louie Marsellus’s business acumen." (p. 62) Except for its reference to withdrawal, I believe that this statement has no meaning in connection with the novel. Edel describes Tom’s behavior in Washington as "neurotic." (p. 71) I can find no evidence that the adjective is correct; nor can Dr. E. N. Barker of the Psychology Department of the Ohio State University, who has studied the novel as a favor to me.

In this brief discussion of Edel’s critique, I have made no attempt to list all of the strengths and weaknesses of his position. I believe, however, that his errors are sufficiently plentiful and serious to undermine his theory about the meaning of the novel. I am not certain that Edel’s critique is valueless. The study of the relationship between a writer’s life and his work can, of course, be worthwhile, and Edel’s essay may be useful to some later study of Cather’s work in the light of her biography.
Two contrasting stories are united in The Professor's House. The two stories may be regarded as separate; indeed, "Tom Outland's Story," the second of the three sections of the novel, has often been printed separately. Yet The Professor's House achieves a more readily comprehensible unity than My Antonia and avoids the disturbing improbability which mars The Song of the Lark. Many strong and graceful links join the parts of The Professor's House into an impressive whole.

The over-arching story of the novel deals with the St. Peter family. Into their lives Tom Outland drifts to remain for a half-dozen years. Mrs. St. Peter finds him worth polishing; for Professor St. Peter, he provides an intellectual re-awakening. Later, Outland becomes engaged to the professor's older daughter, Rosamond. He discovers the "Outland Vacuum," patents it, makes his will, goes off to war in France and loses his life there. When the novel opens, Tom has been dead for several years; Rosamond, now married to Louie Marsellus, is wealthy; Louie has marketed Tom's discovery at enormous profit. St. Peter has won for his historical writings a prize large enough to build
a grand new house. But new riches and the ghost of Outland lead to bitterness in the family. St. Peter is the peacemaker; he causes no trouble, except for his refusal to leave the old house and move into the new one.

The third section of the novel, in which few actors appear, deals with St. Peter's thoughts: disillusionments, renunciations and the re-birth of his boyhood personality (rather similar to Outland's). As he lies in his old attic study, in anguished review of his new feelings, conscious of betraying his family by his rejection of them, his unreliable old stove begins to asphyxiate him, and he makes no attempt to save himself until he has almost choked to death. After this experience, he resolves to live on without striving hopes, accepting the presence of death in

4 St. Peter's enormous prize, five thousand pounds, is but one of the important details which indicate Cather's failure to describe accurately the academic community; another such detail is the group of old graduates who, when a rival tries to take St. Peter's department from him, "...dropped their various businesses and professions for a few days, and came up to the capital in dozens and saved his place for him." (p. 50) Furthermore, the three professors (the over-civilized and profound St. Peter, the over-civilized and shallow Langtry, the under-civilized and profound Crane) are stereotypes of the college novel. On the other hand, Cather's descriptions of the process of teaching, the problems of teachers, and the eternal warfare within and among departments and individuals are accurate and essential.

5 His first name is Godfrey; its meaning, peace of God, is appropriate throughout and especially so at the end. It is significant also that he has dropped the name Napoleon which is legally his. His last name suggests that he is a rock on which religions are built. (Other names in the novel also reward analysis.)
the universe, confident that his family will be too taken up with their own concerns to notice his increased detachment from them.

"Tom Outland's Story," the memory of which helps St. Peter to his new enlightenment, is the second section of the novel. Tom and his friend, Rodney Blake, climb the supposedly unassailable Blue Mesa in New Mexico and discover a group of cliff-cities. Tom then visits Washington, D. C., in hopes of getting reimbursement for his and Blake's labor and money—they have done a good deal of excavation—and, more important still, in hopes of interesting the government in thorough excavation. But Tom soon finds that the Smithsonian authorities prefer bowls from Crete to similar ones from an unknown American cliff-city and are interested in little beyond expense-account European trips for themselves. (Like the professors of the first section of the novel, the Smithsonian officials are very nearly stereotypes.) When Tom returns to the mesa, he finds that Blake has sold the artifacts of the cliff-city to a German collector and banked the money in Tom's name. Heartsick and angry, Tom tells Blake for the first time that these objects meant more to him than money. A long and bitter quarrel ensues, and Blake leaves. After Blake's departure, Tom's happiness is at its peak, and he feels that he at last understands the mesa and its civilization. With a heartlessness which frightens him, he easily puts
the absent Blake out of his mind and plunges into the joy of studying the *Aeneid* and the splendors of the landscape. (The landscape now, as during his first experience of the mesa, means most to him.) But a few years later, Tom is deeply concerned with his betrayal of Blake whom he has never seen since their quarrel.

"Tom Outland's Story," an apparent interruption in the novel, is tied to the other two sections by a number of cords. First, Outland's story in the second section of the novel is of great importance to St. Peter, the hero of sections one and three. (Compare a similar combination of parts in *Willa Cather's 1913* *Pioneers.* ) We shall see how Tom's story also serves to measure the characters in sections one and three of the novel. Finally, Willa Cather creates a system of echoing ideas, situations and phrases; the second section of the novel recalls the first section and prefigures the third. The idea of substitute relationships carries through sections one and two as Lillian appears almost as a kind of wife to her sons-in-law and Blake appears as father to Tom. Section two begins with the series of accidents that delayed Tom's college career; section three begins with St. Peter's thoughts about the role of accident in his own life. All three sections of the novel begin with the subject of money; all three end with the subject of betrayal. Tom's cliff city bears a
number of resemblances to the professor's attic study.6
There are many smaller echoes as well. Virginia Ward in
Washington tells Tom that "People will do anything for a
good lunch." (p. 227) In the previous section, the writer,
speaking for St. Peter, asks, "When was a professor known
to refuse a good dinner?" (p. 90) There are about forty
of these echoes, and even for the reader who misses most
of them, the firm stitching of the novel is impressive.7

Another aspect of the construction of the novel em­
phasizes St. Peter's final decision about his family. The
first section proposes a series of questions. We are made
to wonder, for example, whether Kathleen will overcome her
jealousy of her sister, whether Louie will succeed in
joining the Arts and Letters Club from which Scott McGregor
has blackballed him, whether the seamstress will be repaid
(by the Marselluses and others) money she lost through
foolish investment. That not a single one of these
questions, in all of which St. Peter has been involved, is

6 For a full description of these resemblances, see
John Hinz, "'A Lost Lady' and 'The Professor's House,'"
Virginia Quarterly Review, XXXIX (Winter, 1953), 70-85.
Hinz's article includes some strained comparisons and must
be cautiously read. His statement that St. Peter is
based on Anatole France's M. Bergeret (in Le Mannequin
d'Osier, 1897) is mistaken. The two men are only very
superficially alike.

7 E. K. Brown, op. cit., pp. 242-245, explains how a
concern with various types of houses and what they stand
for helps to unify the novel.
raised in the third section of the novel demonstrates St. Peter's final response to his society: withdrawal.

Points of view in the novel also provide emphases and subtleties. In section one, the point of view is, for the most part, the third person with access to the professor's mind. Eight short passages display the thoughts of others and conversations conducted out of the professor's hearing. These passages suggest that the professor's increasing sadness and disgust are reactions to real situations, not mere phantasms of discontent and self-preoccupied middle-age; indeed, two of these passages show us that conditions are worse than St. Peter knows and remind us that he is inclined to be generous and unsuspecting.

Section two is told in the first person by Tom Outland; passages before and after Tom's story indicate that St. Peter's mind reconstructs and relives this story. The double point of view is pertinent here; for St. Peter's incorporation of Tom's final "religious experience" on the mesa is central to the novel. Section three, like section one, is in the third person; here is access to St. Peter's mind only; other characters scarcely appear; the sole concern is St. Peter's spiritual re-organization and his acceptance of the sacrifice involved.

"A turquoise set in dull silver" is the epigraph of the novel, suggesting the opposed ideas of true value
and money, which are central to the story. The epigraph also suggests the principal moods. Sections one and three of the novel are dull silver; section two, dominated by resplendent beauty is the turquoise. The likeness of the epigraph to the moods of the novel cannot be pressed too far; alternation of the drab and the beautiful may also be observed within sections of the novel. The greyness of sections one and three is alleviated by St. Peter's happy memories and his vision of nature. The beauty of section two is qualified by Outland's unhappy stay in Washington.

Two themes that I have mentioned before in connection with the other novels, love for the land and for the past, appear in The Professor's House, their colorations and proportions altered. Love for the land refers here to nature itself; the past is at once the most personal (St. Peter's childhood near Lake Michigan) and the most universal (childhood itself). Whereas The Song of the Lark deals with the development of the artist at the expense of the human being, The Professor's House deals with the growth of the human being at the expense of the artist and the social man. St. Peter's growth is incomplete when the novel ends, but a crisis has passed, and indications are that its issue is to be fortunate. Themes in this novel present a conflict: the corruption of society against the progress of the soul. The latter theme is as fully drama-
tized as the first and is made to take on a very wide meaning. Both themes are embodied in a host of symbols through simple and dignified language.

Not only do the echoes of phrase, incident and emotion that I have mentioned earlier help to bind the novel together; there are larger echoes as well. Sections one and three dramatize the progress of St. Peter's soul. Sections one and two dramatize the corruption of society. But section two, although ostensibly about adventures that befall Outland before he met the professor, also acquaints us with St. Peter:

...the episode, while seemingly breaking the structural unity of the book... strengthens it... rounding off... the professor's portrait, making us acquainted with the Tom Outland in him, the adventurer, the explorer and resuscitator of the past, the man in love with the obscure, the beautifully human origins of the race...

Furthermore, Tom's rejection of society at the end of the second section parallels the professor's more complete and complicated rejection at the end of the third section, and Tom's great happiness parallels the professor's mellower joy. Themes of the novel are interwoven as successfully as they are embodied.

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8 René Rapin, Willa Cather (New York, 1930), p. 76.
II. The Corruption of Society

The corruption of society around St. Peter is shown in his country, his town, his college and his family. The novel contains a few references to the new institution of prohibition and the chain of hypocrisies which it forges.9 The town in which St. Peter lives is mean-spirited: year after year, St. Peter's neighbors resent his useless and unconventionally beautiful French garden. The social life of the town is described as "anxious." The college tends more and more to cheapen standards in order to "get results" and please taxpayers. Lack of integrity appears on the campus itself in the ugly jerry-built physics laboratory; the original plans of this building Professors St. Peter and Crane worked in vain to have put into effect. A feud between Professors St. Peter and Langtry shows how the elevation of superficial personal charm and the careless definition of disciplines have harmed the college. But the main representatives of corrupt society are the members of St. Peter's envious, bickering family. They, rather than the other forms of society, are illuminated in section one of the novel, "The Family."

For twenty years, St. Peter has opposed Langtry with his striving for popularity, his high value on "polish"

9 Vili, 102-103, 266, 280.
and his unclear definitions of history and literature. The fight has become bitter: "During St. Peter's second Sabbatical year in Spain, Horace and his uncle together nearly got his department away from him." (p. 50) St. Peter believes that he himself has been petty in the course of this feud, and he hopes to end it by showing Langtry his friendliness in a trivial conversation. St. Peter's attempt fails, and he wonders why.

What was the use of keeping up the feud? They had both come there young men, fighting for their places and their lives; now they were not very young any more; they would neither of them, probably, ever hold a better position. Couldn't Langtry see it was a draw, that they had both been beaten? (pp. 51-52)

This incident shows more clearly than any other that St. Peter despite his devilish eyebrows is a Mephistopheles in reverse, unable to take a properly cynical view of man. The completion of St. Peter's histories means for him that one of the great joys of life is over; the award of a prize for them means that he is no longer a joyously struggling pioneer. But the books and the prize, as well as St. Peter's new house and his newly-rich daughter, can scarcely symbolize defeat to the worldly Professor Langtry, and the reader is not surprised when Langtry excuses himself from St. Peter with cold politeness. His pretext for leaving is
that he must go to church. (Thus one function of the church in the modern world is to preserve the letter behind which violations of the spirit may hide.)

10 Does Cather mean to imply that the modern world is uniquely corrupt? I believe that she does not. When she came to prepare The Professor's House for the Library Edition, she demanded that one paragraph be dropped from the first edition. The paragraph is as follows:

To this day St. Peter regretted that he had never got that vacation in Paris with Tom Outland. He had wanted to re-visit certain spots with him: to go with him some autumn morning to the Luxembourg Gardens, when the yellow horse-chestnuts were bright and bitter after rain; to stand with him before the monument to Delacroix and watch the sun gleam on the bronze figures—time bearing away the youth who was struggling to snatch his palm—or was it to lay a palm? Not that it mattered. It might have mattered to Tom, had not chance, in one great catastrophe, swept away all youth and all palms, and almost Time itself.

(first edition, p. 260)

This paragraph suggesting a unique corruption in World War I mars the otherwise admirable balance of the novel which finds destructive war in every era and which points out corruption within good, and goodness within corruption.

E. K. Brown, op. cit., pp. 242-246, in his description of contrasting civilizations, old and new, makes many just observations but fails to take into account elements of beauty in modern life symbolized by Appelhoff's house, the Capitol in Washington and the Washington Monument. The monument is described in such a way as to recall both the tower of the cliff-dwellers and the mesa itself (VIII, 45, 222, 232).
In sharp contrast to Langtry is St. Peter's old friend, Professor Crane of the physics department. Crane is in many ways the antithesis of science, as St. Peter describes it to his class. Not in Crane's laboratory do the sins of the world vanish. Indeed, Crane is bound to the Baptist prejudices of his youth. Wine, music, dancing and beautiful women he regards as sinful; residence in Germany has done nothing to polish away these prejudices. Nor is comfort one of the purposes of science, as Crane sees it. The Outland Vacuum may have revolutionized aviation and added to the convenience of the world, but to Crane its scientific interest is small—it is a mere application which adds little to the body of knowledge. Crane's home and his laboratory demonstrate that he has "...no feeling for comfort of any kind." (p. 139) His beautiful hands, resembling those of a violinist, suggest that artists and scientists are not opposed.

"He doesn't care about anything but the extent of space...whatever poor Crane can find out about space is more good to him than all the money the Marselluses will ever have..." St. Peter says to Kathleen. (pp. 81-82) For with all his narrowness and the striking ugliness of himself, his wife, and his home, Crane for years has been remarkable for his integrity. (The pine trees around the laboratory where he works suggest than an unusual purity attaches to this site, as to Tom's mesa and the Lake
Michigan of St. Peter's childhood and middle age.) Giving himself unsparingly to his students and to his private research (which, because it is "impractical," has won him disrespect from many persons at his college), fighting for the honest construction of a building, choosing ideals rather than promotion when the choice presents itself, Crane has been St. Peter's cherished friend through all the years when different intellectual interests and opposed tastes might have separated them. But in the end, Crane yields to various pressures; in a long scene, Mrs. Crane hysterically announces these pressures--impoverished daughters teaching in the ward school, and income vanishing as Crane's health fails and he requires one operation after another. Crane is almost as envious as Kathleen, St. Peter's younger daughter. Crane's feeling is less that he has an indisputable right to a share in the Outland fortune than that the Marselluses do not have such a right and that therefore he, Crane, may as well have some of that money. To St. Peter, Crane's fall from grace is worse than Kathleen's. A law of life is that children grow up, grow away from parents and change perhaps for the worse; in whatever bitter spirit St. Peter accepts this law, he does accept it. But Crane's uncompromising integrity too had been a law of life, and the failure of that integrity, under whatever pressure, suggests a natural order violated:
The university, his new house, his old house, everything around him, seemed insupportable, as the boat on which he is imprisoned seems to a sea-sick man.... all the stars might become like that; a boat on which one could travel no longer, from which one could no longer look up and confront those bright rings or revolutions.

(p. 146)

What would Outland say of Crane's losing sight of his own aspirations? Outland's reaction, St. Peter fancies, would be generous; Outland might quote, "My fortunes have corrupted honest men." (p. 146) This dream reveals its dreamer; St. Peter's assumption of Tom's generosity suggests his own.

Of all the designing women in the novel, Rosamond Marsellus, St. Peter's older daughter, is the most designing. An imposing figure at the least, in the professor's attic study she appears too large for the room. She is her mother's second self, with the same fastidious tastes, limited mentality and quick instincts, but Rosamond has been over-indulged (by Lillian herself) as Lillian had not, and Rosamond is less shrewd and more harsh than her mother. St. Peter says that Rosamond once had generous impulses and pretty fancies, but his memories of her childhood give us no evidence of this. When Rosamond and Kathleen were children discussing Blake's solicitude for Tom, Rosamond found selfish reasons for Blake's behavior. Rosamond's character, like her mother's, has hardened since Marsellus
offered her the fascinations of power. She has little interest in the search for Blake (demanded by Outland's will), and, unlike her husband, rejects all less definite claims on the Marsellus pocket-book.

Much is told about Rosamond by the turquoise bracelet which, unknown to her husband, had been a gift from Tom Outland. Four characters talk of this bracelet, but it never appears; presumably Rosamond has put it out of sight. It resembles one of the small sums of money which she no longer cares to have mentioned. The bracelet represents also Rosamond's life with Tom which she would prefer to forget as she would prefer to forget her debt of gratitude to him. This obligation cannot be dismissed, and her husband does not wish to dismiss it, just as he does not forget the bracelet. But the debt makes Rosamond insecure enough to ask for her father's reassurance. The bracelet also stands for Rosamond's lack of understanding of the Tom of the mesa; it follows that she does not understand her father. Calling on him in his old attic study, she remarks that it is not a "fitting" place for him (not fitting for the father of a community leader?), and she tries to gain his approval, first by flirtatiousness and then by an offer of money. She fancies that his sentimental remarks about the old dress-forms are sarcastic. She does not guess that St. Peter is horrified by the "faultless purchasing manner" which she displays
in the Chicago furniture stores; she tries to persuade him to accompany her to France by telling him that she needs him to help her shop. When he refuses, she is unforgiving. Affectionate letters come to St. Peter from the travelers in France, from Lillian and Louie, but never from Rosamond.

As the novel begins, Louie Marsellus, Rosamond's husband, appears as chief representative of social corruption. An electrical engineer, largely a salesman of other men's ideas, genial, extroverted, "well-adjusted," he appears as E. K. Brown calls him, "a born front-office man." Louie has that concern for triviality that Tom Outland had lacked. (Outland felt that a man who interests himself in his wife's clothes is "rather contemptible"; Louie selects all of his wife's furs, frocks and jewels.) Tom was reserved about his deepest feelings; Louie's deepest feelings are seldom far from the surface. Louie has marketed Tom's discovery and married his fiancée; furthermore, Louie eagerly keeps alive the memory of the young inventor whom he never met; in this way, Louie unwittingly insures that odious comparisons will be made.

St. Peter comes to respect Louie more and more. At the beginning of the novel, St. Peter is understandably incensed because Louie tasteless flashes the light of Outland's glory upon himself by naming his new Norwegian manor house "Outland," and referring to his wife, Rosamond, as "virtually Outland's widow." But St. Peter soon
realizes that Louie's understanding of others is deep, his warmth genuine, his chivalry almost unfailing. Louie's is not the "chivalry of the cinema" as Lillian calls Tom's; it is based on unsparking appraisal. Louie calls his wife "naughty" and "unreasonable" when she plainly deserves both adjectives; at the same moment he shows her protective love.

Gratitude, love and devotion are Louie's principal traits, as they were Tom Outland's. Louie announces that he and Kosamond draw their wealth, not from his own talents but from Outland's genius which had given Outland himself, as Louie says, "nothing but death and glory." Louie's conversion of his new house into a kind of museum of Outland objects is motivated partly by a desire to bathe in the reflected splendor of the Outland name, partly by a desire to memorialize a man to whom he owes much and for whose personality he has a natural affinity. The best indications of this affinity are neither his marriage to Kosamond, the Outland museum, nor his speech to St. Peter, "I never think of him as a rival...I think of him as a brother, an adored and gifted brother." (p. 161) We may

11 At first Louie appears to be a simple caricature drawn by an anti-Semitic hand; rather gradually, the sketch becomes a full portrait, and Louie is revealed as a complicated and admirable person. The handling of Louie's character resembles the presentation of Nigger Jim in Huckleberry Finn. Other broad likenesses of both style and content suggest that the Clemens novel may have been at the back of Cather's mind.
discount this speech as having a concocted ring. But Louie has Tom's bright blue eyes, his outlandishness (he is not only a stranger in town but a Jew), his versatility and his occasional failures of etiquette. Louie is instantly struck by the beauty of Tom's old purple blanket (Louie is wearing a purple jacket when he first sees the blanket); earlier he has remarked, in a tone the unconsciousness of which the writer is at pains to point out, the beauty of the simple turquoise bracelet. Like Outland on the mesa, Marsellus is an alien in a strange territory who, at considerable trouble to himself avails himself of its richest objects which do not clearly belong to any one person. And so he wins the resentment of the natives.12

Among those filled with resentment is Kathleen, younger daughter of St. Peter. She believes that Rosamond has mourned insufficiently and married Louie with undue haste. The marketing of Tom's discovery, the building of the Marselluses' elaborate home, "Outland," and the high living of the Marselluses—all these appear to Kathleen as the wrong memorial to the Tom she knew. In a private conversation with her husband, she discloses that she had been in love with Tom; presumably she knows how gracefully she would have walked in Rosamond's shoes.

12 Marsellus suggests Marcellus of the Aeneid; through the Aeneid character as well as through Tom, Marsellus is associated with a young man of great promise who died young. (Aeneid, VI, 860-886)
And yet Kathleen is deeply understanding. She is careful of her father's precious solitude, just as she was in childhood. She understands her father better than her mother and sister do; she has been told that his study is dirty, but it appears clean and "fitting" to her. Her intellectuality, like her father's, is contrasted to the instinctiveness of Lillian and Rosamond. Unlike Rosamond and Lillian, Kathleen clings to a brilliant vision of Tom. (Lillian knows nothing of Tom's experience on the mesa, Rosamond apparently knows nothing but a child's version "without shadows," Kathleen a bit more.) Later, when the professor faces the fact that his relationship with his family is over, he knows that there will still be moments when Kathleen will come to him.

There is some evidence, then, of Kathleen's attractiveness, but for the most part the Kathleen shown in the action of the novel is mean, her meanness qualified only by her somewhat hysterical insecurity. When she was a

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13 Contrast the ways in which Kathleen and Rosamond make their entrances into their father's old study. When Kathleen arrives, she stands outside of the door and says, "May I interrupt for a moment, Papa?" (p. 121) Rosamond knocks but before receiving an answer walks in and says, "Am I interrupting something important, Papa?" (p. 53)

14 Kathleen's understanding of her father's virtues is symbolized by her ability to paint his picture and no one else's; her appreciation of his mind is shown by her ability to point out just that part of his head from which its greatest handsomeness derives.
child, her interpretations of other people were generous, and there is a moving example of the way in which the child Kathleen sacrificed her own comfort for her father's. But now it is her father, so fond of her as to identify himself with her, who observes that her face is disfigured by envy, who reproves her Jew-baiting, and who reminds her that Professor Crane's investigation of space must not be scorned for lack of practical results. One scene suggests that Kathleen's husband resembles Tom as the professor believes that Rosamond would have made him—"The instrument of a woman who would grow always more exacting." (p. 259)

St. Peter finds Scott McGregor, Kathleen's husband, honest and likable. But a large element in Scott is spite. Offended when Lillian pays more attention to her other son-in-law than to him, put off by Rosamond's queenliness, Scott is deliberately boorish in order to pay them back. Furthermore, since Louie too floridly champions the dead Outland, and since Louie is, in general, too flashily successful, Scott blackballs him from the exclusive little Arts and Letters Club. Scott's manifestations of warm feeling toward St. Peter, toward the seamstress Augusta, toward Outland's memory are all colored by his awareness of how these manifestations can be used to hurt others. His last statement about Tom—"Sometimes I think he was just a...glittering idea" (p. 106)—seems wounding when we consider that he makes it to St. Peter, yet it takes courage
for Scott to say this to himself or anyone else, and it stands as sole witness of his honesty. Scott's disposition is envious as well as spiteful. He attaches a high value to money and comfort; his prose poems (those admittedly insincere, admittedly dreadful and financially profitable items he writes for the newspapers) testify obliquely to his materialistic desires; yet he fancies himself too good for his job, and is so aware of himself as a writer possessed of every necessary quality except the time to write, that he cannot discuss current novels without bitterness. One wonders whether Scott will some day accuse his wife of having thwarted his career; her desire to keep his nose to the money-making grindstone has already shown itself. Scott McGregor is small by the side of Professors Crane and St. Peter, who have managed to lead double lives without whining at the cost.

Except for St. Peter himself, his wife Lillian is the most complex and fully developed character in the novel. For many years she has been the chief intellectual companion of her husband, and her resentment of Outland is based partly on the fact that he replaces her in this capacity. Her loves and hates, her husband believes, were sometimes disproportionate; thus is prepared the intensity with which she retreats into the past, comforting her sons-in-law and scheming for them as though she were a wife to them both. She is not an intellectual; her husband believes that she

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has not a mind, but highly developed tastes, sure instincts and shrewdness. There is ample evidence of the sureness of her instincts. She sometimes sees a little of the truth, as when she says that Tom is not straightforward, and that whatever he will not tell of his life cannot be entirely to his credit. (He is indeed ashamed of having cast off his friend Blake, a shame that Lillian with her gift for convenient personal disloyalties, could hardly comprehend.)

She sees the mean truth, as when she cheerfully remarks that the professors at a hotel banquet were envious of her husband and his wealthy son-in-law. On some occasions, her vision is almost large enough, as when she senses hostility under St. Peter's cheerful silence at the first dinner party, or later when she sees (perhaps before the reader does) St. Peter's withdrawal from his family. Again, her remark that St. Peter's wisdom, rather than his love of ideas, has come between him and his family is impressive in the light of later events. Never once in the novel does she see enough to draw her into complete sympathy with her husband; yet almost never is she wrong.

Lillian is a social being, and she becomes more and actively so while St. Peter goes in the other direction, beyond concern with the careful management of friendships. She has such a sure sense of what one owes to people that St. Peter is willing to accept her judgment about his debts. Flirting mildly with her sons-in-law, comforting
them, and scheming for them, she enters the social world of the college town, and will probably succeed, even with the difficulties presented by a flashy Jewish son-in-law, a very flashy daughter and a too-retiring husband. Her manners and manoeuvres are successful; she really does possess the "distinction" that her sons-in-law respect in her. But social activity of itself is suspect in the novel, and Lillian's engagement in it is clearly not motivated by easy conviviality.

Although Lillian's plaster-like skin and cruel upper lip are real (they are the only aspects of her that Kathleen can transfer to canvas), and although Lillian's husband and her first son-in-law are slightly afraid of her, she is not a wholly unsympathetic character. Her beauty and charm are as real as her ferocity and coldness; her shrewishness and her snobbery are never dull or loud. Her older daughter's new riches have made Lillian eager for power, and her ambitions disqualify her as a companion for St. Peter in his new turning from the world and passive contemplation of profound simplicities, but his previous thirty years with her have been happy. And she does not, St. Peter learns to his surprise, blind herself to the disintegration of their marriage. For a moment, she weeps for their lost happiness; she has lost control, and is not, as St. Peter says, "doing her duty," not manipulating him or anyone else toward some clear end. Later, there is another moment when she ceases
to lecture St. Peter and tries merely to understand and sympathize with the new phase which, she realizes more clearly than he, he is entering.

There is some saintliness in St. Peter. His gentle reproof to Scott when Scott wishes to criticize Louie is remarkably sweet-tempered. More remarkable still is his dry acceptance of Lillian's criticism of his classroom lecture, a criticism which reveals her failure to understand his primary motive for teaching. Rarely he does lose his temper, and after his shopping tour with Rosamond, his remarks have an acid bite. How unusual this nastiness is we may prove by examining his other reactions in the novel and by observing what solicitousness this instance occasions in Lillian. Shortly before this shopping trip, Professor and Mrs. Crane have made their claim to him for part of the Outland money. His daughter Rosamond is not generous enough to honor the Cranes' request; she does not offer to pay St. Peter's Chicago expenses; her mind is taken up with acquiring new property. As St. Peter watches her rude and hungry buying spree, he is led, perhaps, to meditate on the truth of what the Cranes have pointed out to him—that his own credit has been improved by the Marsellus fortune. Thus is destroyed his cinema-chivalry notion that his friendship with Tom is absolutely unconnected with money. Thus does St. Peter share in the general corruption.

I have written of the nation, the town, the college
and the family as they display themselves behind St. Peter's shoulders. I shall turn now to Tom Outland and the four societies behind him: the railroaders, the friends on the mesa, Washington, D. C. and the cliff-dwellers. The opening of Tom's story describes railroad men in New Mexico. The atmosphere is refreshing after the constricting ostentatiousness of the previous section of the novel; the scene is the back room of a saloon with whitewashed walls and a singing canary. But the saloon is the Ruby Light; its gambling room is illegal. There are compromises into which the scrupulous Tom is drawn; an ugly action is taking place at the moment.

Rodney Blake is winning a large jack pot. The other players are resentful. Blake is a new man on the trains, and he has violated decorum by neglecting to wash, shave and dress before coming to the gambling room. There is no doubt that Blake has a right to his winnings; there is little doubt, according to the perceptive Tom, that someone will try to rob him. Tom follows Blake and protects his money. On this basis—a money basis—the friendship of Tom and Blake begins.

The small society that we see next is, at least for a while, an uncorrupted society—earnest Tom Outland, the

15 An indecorous stranger arousing resentment by taking the jack pot echoes Marsellus' taking the Outland fortune.
civilized and good-tempered Henry Atkins; the protective and unconvincingly cynical Blake; and outside, but connected to this little group, the friendly and forgiving cattle foreman, Rapp; the generous liveryman, Hook, in the town of Tarpin; and the other well-disposed Tarpin merchants.

Henry Atkins is the cook for Tom and Rodney when they are herding cattle near the Blue Mesa. He happily agrees to work for them without wages when they give up their job to begin systematic exploration of the cliff city. Henry's name (the h beginning one name, the vowel the other, and the resemblance of the whole to Tommy Atkins) suggests the caricature English soldier, and he is that caricature at its most pleasant. He has a sense of ritual, family and tradition. He is sporting. He takes the blame for the fact that drink is his weakness; he gives blame on no occasion at all. Tom says:

I used to wonder how anyone so innocent and defenceless had managed to get along at all, to keep alive for nearly seventy years in as hard a world as this. Anybody could take advantage of him. He held no grudge against any of the people who had misused him.

(p. 194)

Only insanity could take Henry's gameness from him, and he dies insane. His child-like enthusiasm for the cliff-dwellings is the death of him; he scrambles heedlessly up to a new "rew-in" and is bitten on the forehead by a
snake. His death two hours later begins the close of the Edenic mesa experience.

Rodney Blake has a calm and sarcastic expression which Tom is quick to see through; just beneath it is an unshakeable honesty. He is utterly scornful of polish and decorum. A long history of being "double-crossed" is powerless to make him cynical; Gulliver's Travels is his favorite book but though he reads it over and over, he is apparently never convinced by it. Blake's disposition is warm, fatherly, selfless and thoughtlessly generous. When Blake wakes up in the morning to find that Tom has saved his large gambling take, he immediately offers Tom half of it. After his first description of Blake, Tom says little about him in his account of the adventures they share.

When Tom sets off for Washington, the two men say a fervent, almost wordless good-bye and do not even decide the exact purpose of Tom's trip. There is an unspoken communion between the two men: after Blake sells the artifacts of the

16 Blake belongs in Cather's gallery of minor Western heroes; they are tough-faced, kind-hearted, hard-working, always out of pocket and often sad. In the same gallery are Ray Kennedy (The Song of the Lark, 1915) and Jake and Otto (My Antonia, 1918). To be placed elsewhere is Pierre Charron (Shadows on the Rock, 1931). Though an inventive outdoor man, Pierre is assured, magnificent and triumphant. And he gets the girl.
mesa, Tom discovers how imperfect that communion is.17

Washington, as Tom sees it, is a waste land like St. Peter's college town. The government workers pouring out of office-buildings in the evenings are slaves who ought to be free. Mr. and Mrs. Bixby, with whom Tom boards, are forever angling for fancy invitations and forever trying to push into a higher social class. Tom says of Mr. Bixby:

Every cab, every party, was more than they could afford. If he lost an umbrella, it was a real misfortune. He wasn't lazy, he wasn't a fool, and he meant to be honest; but he was intimidated by that miserable sort of departmental life.

(p. 231)

The lives of Smithsonian Institution officials should be above the grinding pettiness of the Bixbys, as the lives of St. Peter's colleagues should be above those of the townspeople. But the officials of the Smithsonian are Bixbys with higher incomes and larger demands. Tom must take the director's secretary to lunch at an expensive restaurant in order to get an appointment with the director. When that

17 Allusions in this part of the novel— to the execution of the anarchists in Chicago, to the Dreyfus case, to the writings of Caesar, and Robinson Crusoe—serve as reminders that every society, of whatever size, in whatever era, has been corrupt. Gulliver's Travels is given especially prominent mention; not only does this book make the same point but its thematic structure, a denunciation of one society after another, resembles that of The Professor's House.
appointment is made, it does no good.

I soon found that the Director and all his staff had one interest which dwarfed every other...an International Exposition of some sort in Europe the following summer, and they were all pulling strings to get...appointments that would pay their expenses abroad, and give them a salary in addition. There was, indeed, a bill before Congress for appropriations for the Smithsonian; but there was also a bill for Exposition appropriations, and that was the one they were really pushing....in the end it came to nothing. Dr. Ripley told me he was sorry, but the sum Congress had allowed the Smithsonian wouldn't cover an expedition to the Southwest.

(p. 233) 16

In defeat Tom returns from Washington to discover that Rodney has sold to a German collector the artifacts they had dug up on the mesa. Tom learns about this transaction from Bill Hook, the livery-man in Tarpin; from him Tom also learns that the good will of the townspeople for the adventurers on the mesa has vanished:

"You see, Tom, folks weren't bothered none about that mesa so long as you fellows were playing Robinson Crusoe out there, digging up curios. But when it leaked out that Blake had got a lot of money for your stuff, then they began to feel jealous—said them ruins didn't belong to Blake

18 The ugly sounds of this passage with its crowd of clickety-click endings (-actor, -ational, -ition, -ation, -ation, -onian and so on) is, I take it, a matching of sound and sense.
more than to anybody else....people are always like that when money changes hands...."

(p. 235)

Hook himself is not "jealous." A good deal of money has come to him for putting the artifacts into wooden cases.

When Tom arrives on the mesa, he accuses Blake of having betrayed his country and his class:

"But I never thought of selling them, because they weren't mine to sell--nor yours! They belonged to this country, to the State, and to all the people. They belonged to boys like you and me, that have no other ancestors to inherit from..."

(p. 241)

Here are demonstrated the dangers of reserve about one's deepest feelings, that reserve which Tom and St. Peter believe in. Blake replies:

"You might have given me some of this Fourth-of-July talk a little earlier ...I didn't know you valued that stuff any different than anything else a fellow might run on to: a gold mine or a pocket of turquoise."

(p. 244)

The four thousand dollars from the sale Blake has banked in Tom's name; Blake does not wish to split the money until Tom has had his college education. But Tom refuses at the moment to pay any heed to Blake's motives. When the sounds of Blake's descent have died away, Tom begins to be aware of
his own disloyalty: "Then the silence closed in. I went to sleep that night hoping I would never waken." (p. 247) Later, St. Peter's feelings about his own disloyalty are to make him also wish to sleep forever.

By his own light, Blake is wrong. If the objects of the mesa belonged to him and Tom, then he ought to have consulted Tom before selling them. We must also presume that Blake, with his passion for reading newspapers, saw Tom's advertisements asking him to return and that his failure to do so was a deliberate and cruel punishment of Tom. The reader may see how Blake was in the wrong, but Tom never points it out. Tom does point out his own misdeeds. Blake was easily discouraged and yet Tom wrote him despairing letters from Washington. Tom sees the bank-book with his own name on it; therefore, he cannot doubt for a moment that Blake is telling the truth about having deposited all the money in Tom's name. But Tom has no word of thanks for Blake's kindness. In the end, Tom comes to feel that the objects they had dug up on the mesa were not the important souvenir of the place. That souvenir Blake did not sell; it could not be sold nor could it be put into a museum any more easily than St. Peter's memory of Tom could be put into Marsellus' Outland museum. Tom comes to feel that his quarrel with Blake has been about nothing at all.

After Tom leaves the mesa, he becomes a child of this world. He is aware that there may be money in his physics
experiments. Rather than go to Europe with St. Peter, he attends to the formalities of his patent. He becomes engaged to Rosamond and sees nothing but her beauty. Making out his will, he excludes from it any mention of Professor Crane, without whom Tom, a sloppy experimenter, might never have known that he had made a discovery. Tom also clearly takes his place in the general corruption. (Henry Atkins is perhaps the only character to escape the taint. As St. Peter says of Tom, Atkins dies in time. But Atkins' alcoholism is the sign of his weakness, and his good humor can be preserved only if he remains on the mesa, away from drink.)

The society of cliff-dwellers resembles Tom Outland; one can say little of it except that it has come and departed leaving princely gifts. Among these is the mummy of a young woman, a great wound in her side, her face distended by the effort of a shout. This mummy announces that there is evil among the cliff-dwellers too, perhaps the very envy and jealousy that exist in the St. Peter family. The adventurers call this corpse "Mother Eve"; Father Duchene confirms their notion that she was involved in sin:

He...said she was well named. He didn't believe her death could throw any light on the destruction of her people. "I seem to smell," he said slyly, "a personal tragedy. Perhaps when the tribe went down to the summer camp, our lady
was sick and would not go. Perhaps her husband thought it worth while to return unannounced from the farms some night, and found her in improper company. The young man may have escaped. In primitive society the husband is allowed to punish an unfaithful wife with death."

(p. 221)

Outland is fond of this symbol of human wrong and limitation as St. Peter is fond of his dress-forms. (Of the professor's attachment I shall have more to say later.) It is perhaps the beginning in Tom of a recognition which St. Peter is to experience--that all society is wrong and that one's best hope lies in withdrawal. The cliff-dwellers themselves achieved great superiority to the wandering tribes around them by means of their isolation;\(^\text{19}\) engaging in war away from their rock brought the end of their civilization.

III. The Conversion

The apparently relaxed, meandering tone of the opening chapter of \textit{The Professor's House} announces symbols of

\(^{19}\) Cather has historical support for this statement as for many others in this section of the novel. At the same time, she does not hesitate to go against the facts where it suits her purpose to do so. See G. Nordenskiöld, \textit{The Cliff Dwellers of the Mesa Verde...}, translated by D. Lloyd Morgan (Stockholm, 1893), p. 76. Nordenskiöld's book is recommended by Cather. (\textit{Willa Cather On Writing}, p. 32) Persons interested in comparing her account of the mesa with his will find of special pertinence the following pages in Nordenskiöld: 5, 10, 19, 43, 59, 74, 76, 81, 93, 121, 170.
the novel and compactly reveals much of Godfrey St. Peter's
color and his past. The first chapter gives indica-
tions of St. Peter before and after the change that comes
over him and of several problems that are raised by that
change. St. Peter appears as the active, positive thinker,
deeply involved with his family, his teaching and his
research, mourning the death of Tom Outland, the end of his
own history-writing and the growing materialism of his
family. Yet St. Peter's desire to remain in the old house
is, in part, the sign of his feeling of separation from his
wife and from family concerns. His lingering in his French
garden, his gazing out of his square attic window to the
beloved Lake Michigan of his youth, are the signs of his
love of nature and a coming ability to accept passivity
and dreams. On the one hand, St. Peter sentimentally
clings to elements in the past that have gone forever; on
the other, he eagerly seeks the truth, however painful it
may prove to be.

His recently completed historical work, Spanish Adven-
turers in North America, and the circumstances of its
writing give us important clues to his character. Willa
Cather makes no attempt to describe the meticulousness of
the historian.20 We must presume that St. Peter has this

20 St. Peter's meticulousness is unmentioned, and
Tom's messiness as an experimenter is emphasized (p. 141),
but we may agree with Jacques Barson that the meticulousness
of the historian and the careful patience of the scientist
have been praised too highly and too often. See Barson,
Teacher in America (Boston, 1945), pp. 98, 107.
quality; his announced qualities are those of the adventurer or pioneer--ingenuity, imagination, bravery and loyalty. He has learned to know the foreign setting of his Spanish adventurers. On his limited money, he has made the necessary trips to Spain, Old Mexico and New Mexico; he has availed himself of Outland's deep knowledge of the New Mexican countryside. Only after their completion have his volumes been approved by his associates in his little college and in the great world; he has dared to write in an unapproved style; he has been undaunted by years of critical neglect and misunderstanding. He has been true to his original plan and his peculiar method through all the years necessary to the completion of his eight volumes. Yet during his research and writing, he has given himself generously to his students and his family. He has never given his students warmed-over wares, and he has devoted three evenings a week to his wife and daughters.

Part of St. Peter's desire to remain in the old house is a game of playing that nothing is changed; part is not. He is sentimental about the house: here he made and cared for his French garden, wrote Spanish Adventurers in North America, and enjoyed his friendships with his daughters and Outland. St. Peter also does not want to get used to a new work-room. (And if he is eccentric in feeling this way, he suffers from a very common eccentricity.) Finally, the
house is suggestive of death; it is described as having ash-colored paint and a narrow sagging front porch.\textsuperscript{21} For an unhappy new state of affairs, death is a simile; the relationship between himself and his family is now over. He tells Augusta, the family seamstress, that though he will keep his study in the old house, he would not like the neighbors to think that he and his wife have separated. "He must plunge in like a man, and get used to the feeling that under that under his workroom there was a dead, empty house." (p. 8)

Also indicative of St. Peter's sentimentality and its opposite are the dress-forms in his dingy old attic study which he has, all these years, shared with Augusta. One of these forms is used for fitting his wife's dresses; the other was used for his daughters'. The forms suggest the days when he and his wife were in love and when his daughters were running off to parties. They are strange works of art, goddesses brooding over his histories, part of his superstitious writing equipment. But his musings about them now in the empty house suggest St. Peter's changing view of the persons they represent:

\begin{quote}
Though this figure [the form used for his wife] looked so ample and billowy
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{21} The same observation may be made of an earlier version of this section of the novel; "...color of ashes;--with dark brown trimmings..." (See The Professor's House, frontispiece, a facsimile of a manuscript page.)
(as if you might lay your head upon its deep-breathing softness and rest safe forever), if you touched it you suffered a severe shock, no matter how many times you had touched it before. It presented the most unsympathetic surface imaginable.

[The second form, used for Rosamond's and Kathleen's dresses] seemed just on the point of tripping downstairs or, on tiptoe, waiting for the waltz to begin. At times the wire lady was most convincing in her pose of light behaviour, but she never fooled St. Peter.

These are the three women: Lillian is softly colored and ruthless; the two girls are not at all light women; we see them scratching and scrambling to get the best for themselves.

Godfrey's friendship with Augusta and his movement away from his wife show his willingness to face the future and all of its less pleasant aspects. Augusta, with her heavy, clumsy, sure hands, her thick grey hair, her sad acceptance of life— in particular, her acceptance of her own life which has not turned out as she would have wished—is in contrast to St. Peter's wife with her beautiful, cultivated hands, her elegant coiffure of silver threads.

22 I have corrected what I take to be a typographical error. In the second quotation, the Library Edition (as opposed to the first edition) reads: "...tripping downstairs. or, on tiptoe,..."
tucked unobtrusively among the gold, and her "youth" restored by large new struggles for power. But there are several indications of St. Peter's retreat from the present and the future. He thinks nostalgically of Tom Outland. He tries to "evade the unpleasant effects of change by tarrying among the autumn flowers" (p. 8), an attempt which he immediately denounces as unmanly. There is not a perfect balance of opposites in this first chapter. The emphasis is on St. Peter's backward glances, and at the very end of the chapter is his wish that he might have again the joy of writing his histories.

The remaining chapters in the first section of the novel show the hatred and envy between St. Peter's daughters and their husbands, Lillian's machinations to get her sons-in-law ahead, faculty quarrels and other embitterments. The first section ends quietly as St. Peter, alone in his old house after the family has left for the summer, begins to reminisce about Tom Outland.

In section two of the novel, St. Peter lives through Tom's account of his friendship with Blake, their discovery of the cliff-dwellings, Tom's visit to Washington and his final quarrel with Blake. Tom tells his friend Father Duchene about this quarrel and is assured that Blake will come back. Tom advertises for Blake in various newspapers, and returns to the mesa as Father Duchene suggests.

Now occurs Tom's deepest experience of the mesa. In
neither the literal nor the metaphorical sense does Tom any longer wish to get anything out of the mesa; for the first time, Tom understands all of it and possesses it. Here is his final description of the cliff city:

When I look into the "Aeneid" now, I can always see two pictures: the one on the page, and another behind that: blue and purple rocks and yellow-green piñons with flat tops, little clustered houses clinging together for protection, a rude tower rising in their midst, rising strong, with calmness and courage—behind it a dark grotto, in its depths a crystal spring.

(p. 251)

Historical eras fuse as Tom meditates on the essence of mankind. The tower is a symbol of aspiration; it is the most beautiful object of the cliff city, giving beauty and significance to the other buildings; Father Duchene's speculation that the tower was used for star-gazing (the cliff-dwellers, like Professor Crane, were concerned with the extent of space) makes the tower also a symbol of the fusion of art and science. Most of all, the rocks and piñons at the beginning of this description, the grotto and the spring at the end emphasize the union of this people with nature; Tom's final, climactic description of the cliff city harks back to two of his previous statements.

23 Medical instruments on the mesa form another symbol of science in the ancient world. As far as I know, no medical instruments were found by actual excavators of Mesa Verde.
Here is Tom's first vision of the cliff city:

That village sat looking down into the cahnon with the calmness of eternity. The falling snow-flakes, sprinkling the pifions, gave it a special kind of solemnity....

(pp. 198-199)

Here is what Tom thought a little later:

...the really splendid thing about our city, the thing that made it delightful to work there, and must have made it delightful to live there, was the setting....A people who had the hardihood to build there, and who lived day after day looking down upon such grandeur, who came and went by those hazardous trails, must have been, as we often told each other, a fine people...

(pp. 210-211)

Early and late in the novel, the mesa is identified with the forces of nature at their most intense. The sudden height of the mesa and the plain surrounding it emphasize each other. The sun strikes the mesa first in the morning, and leaves it last in the evening. "The heavenly bodies look so much more remote from the bottom of a deep cahnon than they do from the level." (p. 248) The volume of thunder seems to be doubled by the mesa; lightning is so violent there that Tom and Blake are at first afraid lest the brush be fired. The air of the mesa is of startling purity, even compared with that just on the other side of the river. The sunlight is violent.
Up there alone, a close neighbor to the sun, I seemed to get the solar energy in some direct way. And at night, when I watched it drop down behind the edge of the plain below me, I used to feel that I couldn't have borne another hour of that consuming light, that I was full to the brim, and needed dark and sleep.

(p. 250)

With nature in its most extreme forms Tom becomes united, his powers are freed and he experiences happiness.

When Tom first discovers the cliff city, sleeping its eternal sleep in the snow, he is tempted to walk away and tell no one, not even Blake. But Tom does tell, he and Blake and Henry Atkins explore, excavate and classify, and the mesa is "for" something. Tom hopes that there will be recognition for himself and his friends, reimbursement for the money they have spent, a bonus for their discovery, and further excavation and preservation of art-objects by the government. But now, after his government has failed him, after he has violently rejected Blake's suggestion that everything comes to money in the end, while he tides up the ruins (from the mess that the collector had made in packing) "to wait another hundred years, maybe, for the right explorer," (p. 250) the mesa and its cliff-dwellings become his:

The excitement of my first discovery was a very pale feeling compared to this one. For me the mesa was no longer an adventure, but a religious emotion. I had read of filial piety in the Latin poets, and I knew that was what I felt for this place. It had formerly been
mixed up with other motives; but now that they were gone, I had my happiness unalloyed.

(p. 249)

But Tom goes on to say that he has thought more and more of his betrayal of Blake since he has left the mesa, and he believes that he has not long to live. A rhapsodic religious emotion, a feeling of having committed a personal betrayal, a fear that one's (deserved) death is soon to come: we shall notice this same combination of elements in St. Peter's experience.

To see what changes occur to St. Peter in the third section of the novel, let us review some of his feelings as they are described in section one. Running through the opening chapters is St. Peter's mourning for Tom. We see it in Lillian's remark that he has no enthusiasm for the role of father-in-law because he did not get the son-in-law he wanted; in St. Peter's remark that Kosamond and her husband have everything that Tom ought to have had; in his eagerness to talk with Kathleen about the Tom of the mesa; indirectly in his wish that he could somehow, by whatever violent method, have kept his daughters forever little girls with charming fancies and generous ideas. We sense his mourning in the eighth chapter where Tom is not mentioned but where the sight of St. Peter seated in his snug hotel bedroom happily watching a snowstorm over Lake Michigan recalls Tom looking out over the plain from his
cliff-house. Most poignantly we see it in his attempt to
revive Tom Outland within himself that begins after Scott
McGregor's statement, "Sometimes I think Tom was just a...
glittering idea." (p. 106) St. Peter's attempt reaches
its climax in his re-living of Tom's mesa experience.

St. Peter's share in the life around him is active.
His wife and daughter Rosamond are not content to live
their lives while he lives his; they require his approval.
Louie Marsellus too is eager that St. Peter shall approve
of and participate in the family activities. Kathleen and
her husband demand St. Peter's active sympathy; Kathleen
accuses St. Peter of having been unwilling to work to save
Tom's good name from the Marsellus's vulgarities. Scott
is insensitive enough to expect St. Peter to comfort him
in his resentment of Louie. Mrs. Crane, although she has
already instituted a suit against the Marselluses for
money she believes her husband should have received from
the Outland patent, comes to St. Peter's old study to tell
him fully of her grievance. "There are some things the
law don't cover," she says in explanation of her visit.
(p. 134) St. Peter's quiet warmth of manner is conveyed
more through the parasitism of others than through any
outright description of him. That he is the sort of man
in whom others confide is emphasized by the fact that aside
from Father Duchene he is the only person to have heard
"Tom Outland's Story." (Though Kathleen's shadowless
version has apparently been enriched by her adult
imagination.)

The novel stresses one other quality in him: a
tendency toward the over-civilized. It is symbolized by
the great elegance of his wife— one presumes that she is
far and away the most polished woman in her community— his
connoisseurship of food, wine and music, his love of method-
ized nature and his French garden. A scene in the new house
shows his penchant for the fusion of nature and art:

The drawing-room was full of autumn
flowers, dahlia sand... goldenrod. The
red-gold sunlight lay in bright puddles
on the thick blue carpet, made hazy
aureoles about the stuffed blue
chairs. ... It struck him that the
seasons sometimes gain by being brought
into the house, just as they gain by
being brought into painting, and into
poetry. The hand, fastidious and bold,
which selected and placed— it was that
which made the difference. In Nature
there is no selection.

(p. 69)

St. Peter's French garden is one of the more complex
symbols in the novel. On the one hand, it is highly arti-
ficial and civilised. On the other hand, there is much
about it that suggests the simple and "unmodified" St.
Peter; it is not directed to any end but pleasure, and it
is not a part of the social St. Peter. The neighbors
cannot become reconciled to a garden which serves no
useful purpose and has gravel where grass should be.
St. Peter's mourning for Tom, his active involvement with his family, and his love of the civilized are disappearing, and the third section of the novel shows the end of their disappearance. First, St. Peter's mourning ends. He has incorporated Tom's personality into his own, and he now sees the compensations of Tom's death:

He couldn't see Tom building "Outland," or becoming a public-spirited citizen of Hamilton. What change would have come in ...his fine long hand with the back-springing thumb, which had never handled things that were not the symbols of ideas? A hand like that, had he lived, must have been put to other uses. His fellow-scientists, his wife, the town and State, would have required many duties of it. It would have had to write thousands of useless letters, frame thousands of false excuses. It would have had to "manage" a great deal of money, to be the instrument of a woman who would grow always more exacting. He had escaped all that. He had made something new in the world—and the rewards, the meaningless conventional gestures, he had left to others.

(p. 258-259)

St. Peter's ardor for his family is also over. He is now wise enough to see the folly of attempts at reform. There is no evidence that Kathleen's envy of her sister is to be banished by frank talks with her father. Rosamond's queenliness also shows no signs of disappearing, and she has apparently resolved to have little more to do with St. Peter.
He could not live with his family again—
even with Lillian. Especially not with
Lillian. Her nature was intense and
positive... If her character were reduced
to an heraldic device, it would be a hand
(a beautiful hand) holding flaming
arrows—the shafts of her violent loves
and hates, her clear-cut ambitions.
(pp. 272-273)

And in section three of the novel, there is no mention of
the French garden which plays an important part in section
one. St. Peter is apparently no longer interested in his
little work of art; instead, he focuses chiefly on his
undeveloped triangular plot at the lake, on rain and sun,
on the elements of nature unsubjected to the controlling
and selecting hand.

The lakeside plot and the old house are associated
with the solitude which St. Peter now more than ever
requires. His new, wise passivity, his gift for daydreams,
becomes for him the most precious of his activities. But
there are hints that his new life creates undercurrents of
guilt. These first appear when St. Peter consults his
doctor because of a feeling that he has not long to live.
The doctor advises St. Peter to think about traveling,
and two possibilities occur to St. Peter: Paris, which he
had planned to visit with Outland, and the Southwest, which
he and Outland had visited together. Travel is the cure
traditionally proposed for patients who have fallen in
love with the wrong persons, and it is perhaps associated
in St. Peter's mind with his falling out of love with his family. In any case, as St. Peter considers his alternatives for travel he refers to Notre Dame in Paris as the "Rock of Ages"\(^{24}\) and rejects it in favor of the untamed vistas of Outland's country which have helped men to forget chagrin. St. Peter's guilt before the conflict of his new needs and his family involvement is more explicit in this passage:

Their generous letters [Lillian's and Louie's] written when there were so many pleasant things to do, certainly deserved more than one reading. He used to carry them out to the lake to read them over again. After coming out of the water, he would lie in the sand, holding them in his hand, but somehow never taking his eyes off the pine trees, appliquéd against the blue water, and their ripe yellow cones, dripping with gum and clustering on the pointed tips like a mass of golden bees in swarming-time. Usually he carried his letters home unread.  

(p. 267)

In the penultimate chapter, the conflict reaches a climax; St. Peter receives a letter from Lillian informing him that they are to be home again in five days:

\(^{24}\) All five stanzas of Augustus Toplady's hymn, "Rock of Ages" are guilt-ridden. St. Peter's rejection of Notre Dame in favor of Outland's country is a rejection of institutional religion; but Outland's mesa is not opposed to Notre Dame here (as one might expect) because the mesa suggests unchanging solidity and St. Peter's religion is based on appreciation of flux in the universe.
Loyalty has always meant much to St. Peter. The lack of it he has quietly condemned in his wife. ("...friendship was not a matter of habit with her. And when she was through with anyone, she of course found reasons for her fickleness." [p. 168]) The presence of it he has admired in Tom. Perhaps the most impressive aspect of Tom's story is his rejection of Blake's materialism and Tom's last understanding of the mesa. But to St. Peter, Tom's story is one of defeat through disloyalty, and St. Peter respects Tom because he has not yet grown "old" enough to stop being ashamed of that disloyalty. Circumstances have altered in St. Peter's family—as they had been altered by Blake's sale of the mesa objects—but for St. Peter as for Tom, one may not find reasons for disloyalty. Though the reader may find that St. Peter's family have betrayed him, and though St. Peter may talk of certain aspects of this betrayal, he never sums it up and never uses it as a rationale.

St. Peter's new religion is intimately connected with his absorption of Tom's final experience of the mesa, with
his absorption of Tom's final experience of the mesa, with the cessation of his mourning for Tom, and with the discovery of an old personality within himself:

All his life his mind had behaved in a positive fashion. When he was not at work, or being actively amused, he went to sleep. He had no twilight stage. But now he enjoyed this half-awake loafing with his brain as if it were a new sense...He found he could lie on his sandspit by the lake for hours and watch the seven motionless pines drink up the sun. In the evening, after dinner, he could sit idle and watch the stars with the same immobility...Tom Outland had not come back again through the garden door...but another boy had: the boy the Professor had long ago left behind him in Kansas...the original, unmodified Godfrey St. Peter.

(pp. 260-261)

With wife and daughters and histories, this unmodified St. Peter has nothing to do. His new religion is simple; it may even be called instinctive for it comes to him, and the conflict of loyalties which it raises is solved by an unconscious process. But it is "instinctive" within a special context. Lillian and Rosamond are, after all, the most instinctive creatures in the story--St. Peter has remarked that Lillian has only instincts--and yet they would, I believe, be less able to understand St. Peter's state than would the more intellectual Kathleen and Scott. St. Peter's type of instinctiveness follows personal
cultivation and intellectual involvement.25

St. Peter's state is concerned with endings and begin-
nings, with the elemental facts of man's existence; as
such, it is tinged with sadness:

The Kansas boy who had come back to
St. Peter was not a scholar. He was a
primitive. He was only interested in
earth and woods and water. Wherever sun
sunned and rain rained and snow snowed,
wherever life sprouted and decayed, places
were all alike to him. He was not nearly
so cultivated as Tom's old cliff-dwellers
must have been—and yet he was terribly
wise. He seemed to be at the root of the
matter; Desire under all desires, Truth
under all truths. He seemed to know,
among other things, that...he had never
married, never been a father. He was
earth, and would return to earth. When
white clouds blew over the lake like
bellying sails, when the seven pine
trees turned red in the declining sun,
he felt satisfaction and said to himself
merely, "That is right." Coming upon a
curly root that thrust itself across his
path, he said, "That is it." When the
maple leaves along the street began to
to turn yellow and waxy, and were soft to
the touch—like the skin on old faces—he said, "That is true; it is time." All
these recognitions gave him a kind of sad
pleasure.

(pp. 262-263) 26

25 See Cather, Literary Encounters, Vol. XII, passim.
A paradox analogous to St. Peter's spirituality is found
in Cather's definition of the artist. The artist must
find, not make, his style and his subject. At the same
time, Cather warns the artist against simply pouring out
his heart.

26 The cycle of nature is, in part, a consolation for
corruption in the human world. This is prefigured early in
the novel (p. 48) in St. Peter's remark to his enemy,
Langtry, that the trees have improved over the years and
the students have declined in quality.
"Satisfaction" and "pleasure" here where we might expect nouns more in keeping with the rhapsodic tone of the rest of the passage serve not merely as reminders that the contemplation of storms, obstructions and endings has imparted sadness to St. Peter. He has renounced the ardor of his old self, that dynamic ardor behind his love for Lillian, his family, his pupils and his histories. A part of his new happiness is a Lucretian calm more likely to withstand whatever further blows fate may have in store. Finally, St. Peter's sadness springs from an intuition that he has not long to live, and indeed the worldly St. Peter is dying. The language of his thought suggests death and rebirth:

The feeling that he was near the conclusion of his life was an instinctive conviction, such as we have when we waken in the dark and know at once that it is near morning; or when we are walking across the country and suddenly know that we are near the sea.

(pp. 266-267)

The process of St. Peter's rebirth is completed by a brush with death. He lets his inefficient old stove go out and his square window blow shut. In the storm outside, the

27 Lucretius is a favorite author, perhaps the favorite author of St. Peter and Tom (VIII, 172), and many aspects of St. Peter's religion are Lucretian: his preference for quiet, passive pleasures; his eschewal of wealth, honor and public life; his concept of death as release from pain. Sketches of Lucretius' life also present likenesses to St. Peter.
pine trees near the physics building grow black as cypresses. Only when he experiences a feeling of strangulation does he bestir himself to leave the gas-filled room.

Augusta saves his live by dragging him from the room, and in her presence St. Peter finds that the end of his family relationships is now as real to him as an autumn leaf. At last he accepts the death of passion, "...something very precious, that he could not consciously have relinquished, probably." (p. 281) The curious position of the word "probably" may cast doubt on the preciousness, and the last sentence of the novel is this: "He thought he knew where he was, and that he could face with fortitude the Berengaria and the future." The reader, remembering his "desire under all desires" can have little doubt of his resources.

The professor's house symbolizes his view of existence. It is absolutely bare, except for the study at the top. In that study all of the scholarly work has been finished. The square window gives a glimpse of lake and sky and the pines about the physics laboratory. Augusta too is important in defining St. Peter's view. With Augusta he feels the bond of friendship, which he had observed in the first chapter of the novel, strengthened to kinship. For him, she represents the realm of the matter-of-fact, the calm acceptance of death and the "bloomless side of life." Bound up in her religion and
therefore somewhat distant in attitude, she is at the same
time companionable. She is kind without passion, demand-
ingness or sentimentality. She moves soberly with simple
truths toward death.

Yet we must not assume that weakness of will prevents
St. Peter from accepting her church-going religion.\(^{28}\) In
the first place, St. Peter's will is not so weak as he
appears to believe; he did, after all, fight against his
death by asphyxiation. In the second place, Augusta's
simplicity is not altogether unmixed with simple minded-
ness.\(^{29}\) To her the Magnificat is a song written by the
Virgin Mary, and the professor, whom she likes a great
deal, cannot possibly mean what he says if he makes a
criticism of her church. In defiance of expert advice,
she invests her savings in the same enterprise as do the
other people in her church and thus loses all of her money.\(^{30}\)

\(^{28}\) Elizabeth Monroe, The Novel and Society: A
Critical Study of the Modern Novel (Chapel Hill, 1941),
p. 236, does assume this.

\(^{29}\) The friendship between St. Peter and Augusta may
be compared to that between Pierre Bezukhov and Karatayev
in Tolstoi's War and Peace (1866), a favorite novel of
Cather's. But Karatayev's extremely skillful use of a
large variety of proverbs shows a mental ingenuity which
Augusta does not possess. (See War and Peace, section
twelve, Ch. xiii.)

\(^{30}\) The situation recalls the hilarious description of
the Musical Banks in Samuel Butler's Erewhon, or Over the
Range (1872), Ch. XV. As far as I know, Cather was not
acquainted with Erewhon.
Early in the novel, St. Peter is shown lecturing to a class on the pointlessness of modern science and the glories of medieval religion. This lecture must not be taken at face value. Lillian, with her blindness to her husband’s motives in teaching, terms it "thinking aloud," but the professor suggests that it was designed to provoke his brightest student. In the course of this lecture, St. Peter remarks:

And that’s what makes men happy, believing in the mystery and importance of their own little individual lives. It makes us happy to surround our creature needs and bodily instincts with as much pomp and circumstance as possible.

(p. 63)

Here and elsewhere in the lecture, St. Peter suggests that religion is a beautiful deception produced by man to make man happy. But the stupid, comforting-loving "science" (in the same lecture) cannot be taken as having to do with Professor Crane’s dedicated, painstaking and painful search for theoretical reality; in the same way, "religion" has little connection with St. Peter’s immediate and poetic apprehension of birth, change and decay in the world.

All but one of Willa Cather’s novels point clearly to a body of fact drawn from her life, the lives of her friends, or research. The Professor’s House is the one
exception. Therefore, Leon Edel's suggestion that the novel is autobiography in disguise appears reasonable. I have pointed out how Edel's poor grasp of the novel and of the events of the author's life weakens his Freudian explanation, and I believe that such an explanation is unnecessary for comprehension of the novel. Nonetheless, a satisfactory autobiographical exposition would have value for students of the novelist's life and might also enhance appreciation of the novel.

But a number of other analyses are useful. René Rapin's short essay on The Professor's House, uses quotations interestingly and contains fruitful hints. His rather effusive description of St. Peter, for example, accurately places that character within the moral scheme of the story:

An ideal figure? An idealized one rather, handsomer, more superbly harmoniously alive than most of us, a brother of Milton's Adam or Dürer's, yet one of us all the same.

(p. 75)

Maxwell Geismar's reading of the novel is somewhat crude and misleading, and his interpretation incomplete,

31 Willa Cather (New York, 1930), pp. 72-77.

32 See Geismar, op. cit., pp. 1d5, 187. He remarks flatly that Tom's "friends" of the mesa deceive him and that St. Peter attempts suicide.

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but his intuition that the novel deals with a religious process is correct. Furthermore, a number of his sketchy suggestions for approaching the novel are worthy of development.

Raymond Thorberg believes that the novel is disunified, and his statement that the two Toms of the novel, the Tom of the mesa and the later one of the Outland Vacuum, help to create disunity overlooks the theme of moral corruption which pervades the novel. At the same time, Thorberg makes a number of valuable judgments, among them his praise for its balance of tone and idea.

More definitely than other critics, E. K. Brown states the themes of the novel, which he sees as (1) St. Peter's preparation for death, and (2) the contrast of civilizations, with emphasis on condemnation of modern American civilization. Brown's statement is perhaps too limited to embrace all the events of the novel, and his analysis concentrates too exclusively on the professor. Still, my debt to Brown is, once more, very great. Though he leaves much unexplained, most of his remarks are sound and suggestive. His description of rhythm in this novel is vital to full understanding. My own remarks on this aspect of the novel are suggested by his definition of rhythm and his application of it.

In every respect, *The Professor's House* is Willa Cather's best novel. It is so partly because of that balance which Brown slights. Free from excessive emotion in tone, containing no flaws in characterization, the novel possesses a large and vivid gallery of characters lighted from various sides. In structure, the novel is exceptional. Willa Cather had used the story-with-a-story in a number of other works, attempting to create unity from violently contrasted and subtly related episodes. In this novel, the separate stories are beautifully connected by echoes from part to part, echoes in setting and situation, phraseology and meaning. Nowhere else does the author display such riches in a little room. The subject of civilization on a rock, shown in several works, is in this novel invested with its greatest beauty, complexity and significance.

Much of the beauty of the novel springs from its masterly handling of theme. Theme is powerless to connect satisfyingly parts of a novel otherwise unconnected (as

34 See the short story, "Coming, Aphrodite" (from *Youth and the Bright Medusa*) and the following novels: *O Pioneers*, *My Antonia*, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, *Shadows on the Rock* and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*.

My Antonia tends to show) and cannot compensate for violations of literary probability (The Song of the Lark) or for stylistic lapses (A Lost Lady). But when extra-thematic elements of a novel are very well handled, as they are in The Professor's House, then the effective statement, embodiment and interweaving of themes to form a unified structure adds immeasurably to the force and beauty of a novel.

As a pair of novels, My Mortal Enemy and The Professor's House show, even more surely than Death Comes for the Archbishop and A Lost Lady, that Willa Cather could embody themes with equal success in the free and the constricted points of view. My Mortal Enemy and The Professor's House also show that she could handle with equal success the small and the large cast of characters, the rich crowd or the suggestive sparsity of events.

Technical daring is evident in both novels. The speed of My Mortal Enemy is even greater than that of A Lost Lady. In addition, My Mortal Enemy overlaps ten years. The handling of such a leap constitutes a test of an author's ability to create a solid, believable atmosphere; Willa Cather passes the test. The Professor's House is the most variously, gracefully, and firmly knit of the novels.

In both novels, characters and attitudes are developed through symbolic props, utterances, and actions. More extensive use of symbol in these novels than in others
results in greater succinctness and greater depth.

Technically, both novels are excellent. The very constricted point of view in My Mortal Enemy--confined to one narrator and a very limited one--manages to suggest far more than it says; the plot is clear, straightforward and strong; the persons are few and lively; the contrasting themes of the novels are strongly presented and even, at one moment, combined in a single action.

The Professor's House is unique in Willa Cather's work in that it contains not only two separate but linked stories, but two different points of view as well. But the two stories are linked by theme plot, and a host of minor echoes, and the two points of view are linked in that the first person narration of the second section seems to be a recollection by the chief window character of sections one and three. An unconventional and yet satisfying unity results.

Of course the leading characters are related to the thematic depth of these two novels. One may guess that the character led her to a profound theme (as seems to have been the case with My Mortal Enemy), or one may speculate that ideas led her to create a profound character (as may have been the case with The Professor's House, about which no description of the inception exists). But there is no simple explanation of how authors "get ideas" for novels.
Between a fictional character and the ideas which he stands for or expresses, there may be but a theoretical distinction, and the more effective is the character in all ways, the more theoretical such a distinction may appear.
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IV. "My Antonia." (1918)
V. "One of Ours." (1922)
VI. "Youth and the Bright Medusa." (1920)
VII. "A Lost Lady." (1923)
VIII. "The Professor's House." (1925)
IX. "Death Comes for the Archbishop." (1927)
X. "Shadows on the Rock." (1931)
XI. "Lucy Gayheart and My Mortal Enemy." (1935 and 1926)
XII. *Obscure Destinies* and *Literary Encounters.* (1932 and 1936)
XIII. "Sapphira and the Slave Girl." (1940)


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