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THE TWO SELVES: DUALITY IN WILLA CATHER'S PROTAGONISTS AND THEMES.

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THE TWO SELVES: DUALITY IN WILLA CATHER'S PROTAGONISTS AND THEMES

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for The Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate Schools of The Ohio State University and Miami University

By

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[Signatures]

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The Ohio State University
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This study is an attempt to analyze without prejudice the
structure and themes of the novels of Willa Cather. Originally, I had
intended to analyze Cather's utilization of Americans versus her uti­
lization of Europeans in an attempt to understand what significance,
if any, Cather attached to the origins and migrations of her characters.
But I discovered that before I could do so, I had to answer for myself
the very basic questions of her protagonists and themes, questions on
which there is a great deal of critical disagreement. I found, more­
over, that the rich mother-lode of Cather's imagery had not been dis­
covered by her critics, and I began, at any rate, to mine it for its
value in establishing the significances of her characters and themes.

During the time I have spent on this study, I have borrowed
liberally of the time, consideration, interest and generosity of my
friends, colleagues, and teachers. To Dr. Matthew J. Bruccoli of
The Ohio State University I owe a debt of gratitude for his concern
and consultation. And to the English Department of Miami University
I owe a debt of gratitude for their support and good humor. I am espe­
cially grateful to Dr. Spiro Peterson, Dr. John A. Weigel, and Mr.
James G. Denham for their encouragement. Dr. Edgar M. Branch intro­
duced me to Cather and has encouraged my interest with his own. Pro­
fessor Gordon D. Wilson has been my mentor through the most trying
days.

This study culminates eight years of work under Dr. Walter
Havighurst, whose good judgment, sense of humor, critical perspicacity and serene wisdom have shown me scholarship that is not pedantry and criticism that is not petty.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Primarily, literature is a way of exploring the human condition, and each literary genre has a structure, most commonly used by its practitioners, to achieve that exploration. The central and abiding structure of the novel is normally protagonist conflict; that is, most novels are built around a decision or dilemma created by the protagonist's viewing or being exposed to two ways of life or two sets of values and his having to or trying to make a choice. The novel and its protagonist are dynamic, rather than static; they move forward in time usually to the climax of the resolution of the conflict. The novels of Willa Cather are no exceptions to this rule.

The experimentation done by Cather in her writing was not experimentation of conflict. All twelve of her novels present protagonists faced with a choice to make. We will return to a further definition of that choice. The experimentation she did was in movement away from the closely knit and relevant plot to a selection of points of time pertinent to the conflict and the protagonist's reaction to the conflict. To be sure, Alexander's Bridge, O Pioneers!, The Song of the Lark, One of Ours, and Lucy Gayheart have relatively tight plot-control. But four novels, My Antonia, The Professor's House, Death Comes for the Archbishop, and Shadows on the Rock, are almost
totally devoid of plot. It is interesting to note that these last four novels are often rated superior to the first five by Cather's critics.

This particular structure which is based on points of time rather than on a continuum of time lends especial significance to the selected details. Each picture must have relevance to the story as a whole, and no picture can be extraneous. The structure also insists on the emphasis of the novel being placed not on what happened but on how and why and who. It requires from the writer an immaculate manuscript, without any blot of extra detail. At the same time, it requires a critical perception, on the part of the writer, to leave out no necessary detail. It is the furthest from exposition that a prose writer can get; indeed, it carries the same demand for intensity and economy that lyric poetry carries. At its highest form, in *My Antonia* or *Death Comes for the Archbishop* for instance, it differs from lyric poetry only in its greater magnitude and freer style.

From the critic such a structure demands the utmost precision in reading. Particularly it demands that all parts of the novel, all points of time, all images be carefully considered for their individual and partial significance in the novel as a whole. As this type of structure lends itself naturally to imagery, the critic must be prepared to follow the imagery and understand it. Strangely enough, there has not been any full-blown study of Cather's imagery—strangely, because it is so important to her structure.

The broad emphasis of this dissertation is on imagery. None of Cather's twelve novels is without imagery and only two, her first and last, *Alexander's Bridge* and *Sapphire and the Slave Girl*, are not
rich in imagery.

But the imagery is important only insofar as it functions in the novel as a whole and as it aids or hinders the communication of the theme and the conflict. It is perhaps naive to reiterate that the basic conflict of Cather's protagonists is a choice between two worlds or sets of values. That is the basic conflict of most novels, and Cather is a novelist. Yet, this simple iteration presents two major critical problems.

The first is a question of protagonist. In the majority of her novels, Cather's protagonists are easily recognized. Alexander is the protagonist of Alexander's Bridge, Alexandra of O Pioneers!, Thea Kronborg of The Song of the Lark, Claude Wheeler of One of Ours, and so on. These protagonists are easily recognized because they are faced with the conflict. Further, Cather's control of point of view and general control of relevant details always points the novels back to them. However, in five novels, My Ántonia, A Lost Lady, Death Comes for the Archbishop, Shadows on the Rooks, and Sapphire and the Slave Girl, the protagonist is not easily identified. My Ántonia has been the subject of a good deal of critical writing because although Antonia appears, at first, to be the protagonist, she is not the central figure in two of the five sections of the novel; indeed, she does not appear in one at all. A Lost Lady has paragraphs devoted to Miel Herbert's development and is primarily controlled from his point of view, although most critics give the protagonist niche to the lost lady herself, Marian Forrester. Death Comes for the Archbishop, Shadows on the Rook, and Sapphire and the Slave Girl, all, like Ántonia, shift point of view from character to character and seem, in a sense,
to consider theme more important than character, a bad flaw if the theme is a choice to be made by a protagonist.

Obviously, these five novels require some reconsideration concerning the role of the protagonist. If there is no clear-cut protagonist, then these are badly flawed novels and must be judged so. If, on the other hand, Cather has expanded the view of protagonist, or if earlier protagonist-designation has been too hastily done by the critics, then that should be established and the novels reevaluated accordingly.

It will be my contention in this paper that Willa Cather does indeed have twelve novels with clearly drawn protagonists who face their conflicts.

The second major problem to be considered in this paper is the central conflict of Cather's novels. We must ask and answer two questions. What is the nature of the conflict? And, is the conflict the same in all twelve novels?

There is a great deal of critical disagreement as to the nature of the conflict. David Daiches\(^1\) sees the main conflict as that between the Old World and the New World. Primarily, this is an exterior conflict, and the protagonist's resolution is to blend the best qualities of both worlds in himself. However, Daiches is forced away from his thesis in his discussions of *A Lost Lady*, *The Professor's House* and *My Mortal Enemy*, and into a formula that attempts to equate any tradition.

even that of Tom Outland's Cliff Dwellers, with the Old World. The Blooms as well as E.K. Brown see the major conflict as the confrontation of the individual with a mechanised and materialistic society. In a sense, their views are broader statements of Daiches' Old World versus New World. The artist and the priest, both primarily concerned with inner life and nonmonetary values are juxtaposed against the banker, the store keeper, the petty money-grubber. Cather's heroes are, for them, sensitive people naturally drawn to the more valuable life of the artist or priest and faced with a struggle for existence in a basically hostile society. John H. Randall divides the conflict three ways. On the one hand there is the agrarian value, the value of the land which makes heroes. Confronting it is the industrialised society that produces caricatures like Wick Cutter in My Antonia and Bayliss Wheeler in One of Ours. Transcending both is the artist-priest who turns his back on the mechanised world but rise above the insensitivities the land can create.

These views, as stated, present a conflict between the protagonist and the world around him. But there is great evidence that

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2Ibid., pp. 63-73.


the conflict is not the protagonist against his world, but rather the
the protagonist against himself, that it is an inner conflict. E. K.
Brown, in his discussion of My Mortal Enemy states that Myra Henshaw's
conflict is concerned with "the revival in her of a self that, like
St. Peter's early self, found no expression in the values of her
prime." He further states that "Bartley Alexander had been drawn
rather as a theater in which two selves conflicted." Three protag­
onists from three different novels, Myra Henshaw, Godfrey St. Peter,
and Bartley Alexander, are associated with an inner conflict, a conflict
of incompatible selves. Howard Mumford Jones also cites this conflict
of selves in Alexander's Bridge. Concentrating on the role of the
artist in Cather's works, Jones explains: "Again and again, tension
in these tales arises from the conflict between the desire of the
artist to pursue beauty and the necessity of the craftsman, if he is
to live, to make some practical adjustment to the workaday world."

Willa Cather herself re-enforces our understanding of the
conflict as an inner conflict between two selves. In her 1932 Preface
to The Song of the Lark, she describes Thea Kronborg's dilemma as a

6Willa Cather, pp. 249-251.
7Ibid., p. 249.
8Ibid., p. 251.
9Youth and the Bright Medusa, excerpted in James Schroeder,
p. 241.
10Ibid., p. 235.
11Unless otherwise noted, all references to the novels of Willa
Cather are from the Library Edition (13 vols.; Boston: Houghton
reversal of Oscar Wilde’s *Portrait of Dorian Grey*. It is the “harassed, susceptible human creature who comes and goes, subject to colds, brokers, dressmakers, managers. But the free creature, who retains her youth and beauty and warm imagination, is kept shut up in the closet, along with the scores and the wigs” (p. viii). In *Lucy Gayheart*, Cather writes: “Some people’s lives are affected by what happens to their person or their property; but for others fate is what happens to their feelings and their thoughts—that and nothing more” (p. 33). Claude Wheeler, the protagonist of *One of Ours*, divides the people of the world into two classifications: the children of the sun and the children of the moon (pp. 234-235). And in both *One of Ours* and *My Antonia* there is a symbolic twilight confrontation of the sun and the moon.12

The same image, more subtly used, is present throughout *The Song of the Lark*, as blond and sunny Thea Kronborg hails from Moonstone, Colorado, and sits beneath the moonflowers around Mrs. Tellamantez’s door. Hartley Alexander walks the streets of London with “a shadowy companion . . . his own young self”;13 Alexandra Bergson dreams of a phantom lover while she worries about farming. Marian Forrester, in *A Lost Lady*, is both Captain Forrester’s wife and his widow (p. 170). In *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock*, the chaos of the unmade lands of the Southwest and Canada are one part of man, while religion and law are another. In *Lucy Gayheart*, the heroine is confronted by two lovers, the banker Harry Gordon and the artist Clement Sebastian. In *Sapphire and the Slave Girl*, Henry Colbert wonders who is slave and who is free (pp. 107-108).

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12 *One of Ours*, p. 185; *My Antonia*, pp. 321-322.

13 *Alexander’s Bridge*, p. 40.
A very thoughtful dissertation by Sister Peter Damian Charles analyzes this conflict. Sister Charles, acknowledging Claude Wheeler's division of children of the sun and children of the moon, sees the conflict as one between Eros, love, and Thanatos, death. Basing her definitions on Sigmund Freud's works and Martin D'Arey's The Mind and Heart of Love, she establishes Eros as "an affirmation of life," an "aggressive, dominating, self-regarding 'taker' of love" and Thanatos as "the instinct for death," "The passive, submissive, self-effacing 'giver' of love." Certainly Alexander's Bridge presents a passage in support of Sister Charles' interpretation: "Under the moon, under the cold, splendid stars, there were only those two things awake and sleepless: death and love, the rushing river and his burning heart" (p. 116). Her thesis is that love and death must both be accepted for a serene life. She equates love and life. Claude's children of the sun are children of love; his children of the moon, children of death. And she sees a progress in Cather's novels to Death Comes for the Archbishop where Latour, whom she names protagonist, is able to accept both life and death with a serenity then named Agape, or love of God.  

One of the problems of her thesis is that she cannot apply it to two novels, Shadows on the Rock and Sapphire and the Slave Girl. Of Shadows on the Rock, she says it "contains echoes of the love-death conflict, but this concern does not figure centrally." And she sentences Sapphire and the Slave Girl to oblivion because of "its

15 Ibid., p. 273.
16 Ibid., p. 10.
failure to deal seriously with life's basic issues." It seems strange to this writer that a theme almost obsessively dealt with in ten novels should be abandoned in two, especially since the novel written between Shadows and Sapphire, *Lucy Gayheart*, does, according to Sister Charles, employ this central theme.

Willa Cather wrote her twelve novels over a period of about twenty-eight years. During that time, roughly 1912-1940, she witnessed a period of rural peace and growth in America, a war to end all wars, moral and technological revolutions of such intensity that she wrote, in the Preface to *Not Under Forty*, that "the world broke in two in 1922 or thereabout," a depression, and the beginning of the Second World War that put the lie to the "war to end all wars" ideal that the Claude Wheelers had died for. It would be most unrealistic to assume, then, that Cather's ideas did not undergo some element of change during her career as a novelist. Further, although Willa Cather is known primarily as a frontier novelist, a less bitter Hamlin Garland, a daughter of the Middle Border, her novels cover a wide range of people and places. She does, indeed, write about Nebraska. But she also writes about Boston, Colorado, the Southwest, Michigan, Washington, D.C., Quebec and Virginia. She does, indeed, write about artists and priests, and under artists we can include the bridge-builder, Alexander, and the professor, St. Peter; but she also writes about farmers and a soldier and a lawyer and a group of four women, Marian Forrester, Myra Henshawe, Lucy Gayheart, and Sapphira Colbert, who are professionally nothing, whose profession is being—not doing. It is true that some of her pro-

\[17\textbf{Ibid.}, p. 12.\]
tagonists have a great deal in common, but what has Myra Henshaw in common with Thea Kronborg or Antonia Shimarda? What has Godfrey St. Peter in common with Lucy Gayheart?

All of Cather's protagonists have one thing in common—an inner conflict which they must resolve. But all are not successful in resolving it, and, in the last two novels, Lucy Gayheart and Sapphire and the Slave Girl, there are statements that perhaps resolution is not possible or necessary to life. But the very variety of protagonists and circumstances suggests that the conflict is not going to be easily labeled Old World versus New World, or beauty versus necessity, or art versus materialism, or Eros versus Thanatos.

The idea of a second or buried self is not original with Willa Cather. One of its best statements can be found in Matthew Arnold's poem "The Buried Life." In the poem, Arnold states that once in a while "There rises an unspeakable desire / After the knowledge of our buried life." But there is never a statement of what that buried life might be; at his most perceptive moments, man can only glimpse his purpose:

A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast,  
And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again,  
The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain,  
And what we mean, we say, and what we would, we know.  
A man becomes aware of his life's flow,  
And hears its winding murmur; . . .

But Arnold insists, man only "thinks he knows." The buried life, the god- or fate-given purpose of life still remains buried. In another poem, "In Memory to the Author of 'Obermann,'" Arnold writes this quatrain:

18Quoted in full in Appendix A.
Ah! two desires toss about
The poet's feverish blood.
One drives him to the world without,
And one to solitude. 19

In other words, part of man is concerned with the world, with family and fame and fortune, and the other is intellectual or aesthetic or spiritual. It is the same conflict that faces Thomas Carlyle's Diogenes Teufelsdrockh, who sees a world about him, but who is first concerned with answering the question: "Who am I?" It is Hamlet's hesitation. It is Keats' yearning after the nightingale. It is, in short, one of the basic conflicts in all literature, in all of man's existence. And a resolution to the conflict, whether it be Hamlet's acceptance of whatever will happen, "If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come; it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come--the readiness is all," 20 or Teufelsdrockh's more positive statement "Do that duty which lies closest," a resolution to this basic conflict is, in its very nature, a statement of an attitude toward life.

But what if that life changes? Specifically, what if the world the protagonist is facing changes? Or the individual challenging the world? And what if the question is asked and reasked for almost thirty years? It stands to reason that the answer will change. And that is what happens in Cather's novels.

To begin with, Cather's novels can be divided into four groups as follows: I—The Heroic Novels (Alexander's Bridge, O Pioneers!, My Antonia, The Song of the Lark, One of Ours); II—The Bitter Novels


20 V, 11, 213-216.
Religious Novels (Death Comes for the Archbishop, Shadows on the Rock); IV--The Novels of Resignation (Jacy Gayheart, Sapphira and the Slave Girl). The division has been made according to what seems to me to be Cather's resolution or lack of resolution of the main conflict, the protagonist's search for his destiny; the names of the groups--Heroic, Bitter, Religious, Resigned--apply to this resolution.

There are a number of important similarities within each group, and each group differs in important ways from the other three. First of all, this is a chronological ordering; the novels of each group are written together. The Heroic Novels were published from 1912 to 1922; the Bitter from 1923 to 1926; the Religious in 1927 and 1932; the Novels of Resignation in 1935 and 1940. This natural chronology would seem to fit a natural progression in the writer's intellect. The groups also differ in protagonists, environment, conflict, resolution and theme. The protagonists of the Heroic Novels are, indeed, heroic. Bartley Alexander, Alexandra Bergson, Antonia Shimerda and Jim Burden, Thea Kronborg, and Claude Wheeler. They are giants; they dwarf the people around them. The world they confront is a good world. It is a growing world of farmland and wheatfields, bustling cities and busy people. The conflict in these Heroic Novels, then, is a conflict of two opposing forces of good: a healthy animal and a sensitive spirit. It follows that the resolution of these novels, when the conflict is successfully resolved, is a combination of the two forces, which we see in My Antonia, The Song of the Lark, and One of Ours. In Alexander's Bridge and O Pioneers! where the two natures are not resolved, there is tragedy. Their theme is that the individual must
combine his two selves.

The Bitter Novels do not have heroic protagonists. Neil Herbert, Godfrey St. Peter, and Myra Henshawe are struggling characters, feeble figures against the mechanical and cruel but powerful worlds they confront. These novels are resolved in defeat; there is no form of triumph possible to the individual.

The Religious Novels have cultures instead of individuals for protagonists, and these cultures face primitive, unformed worlds. The conflict is one of the imposition of civilization, of order, on chaos and primitivism, and it is a conflict not resolved by any one human being, but by the culture as a whole. These novels are affirmative insofar as the civilizations triumph, and Cather seems to imply that the individual can find his value, his lasting value, not in himself, but in his participation in his culture.

The fourth group of novels, The Novels of Resignation, return to the individual to reexplore his chances for lasting value. The protagonists here are not heroes or failures, just people. The worlds they confront are neither totally good or totally bad. They are just real and human. The two forces are then stripped of any extreme values of good or evil; they just are. And the resolution is that there need not be any resolution for the individual; that life is a process of living in the world, keeping the inner self free from any outward pettiness, and accepting all of life. These novels are almost existential in their insistence on being alive and doing as opposed to not doing anything.

If we must, as I suppose we must, arrive at some final statement that will include all the variations of conflict and theme in these
four groups, we can say Cather was concerned with the measurement of time. The ancient struggle of the mutable to become immutable is the struggle of her protagonists. Man's life is short and his dilemma is that he knows its shortness. How can he expand it beyond itself? How can he assure himself of an existence after his death? There are many answers. In her novels, Willa Cather gives four. It remains a question unanswered because it is finally unanswerable, but it remains a question, the primary conflict of a man's or a culture's existence on this earth. On the one hand, man is driven to make the most of being alive, of his physical nature. On the other, he is driven to subordinate the physical for the immutable. He writes books; he sings opera; he dies for a cause; he builds a bridge or a church or a city, in the hope that after his death some part of him will remain functioning in this world. This is the basic conflict of Willa Cather's novels.

This dissertation is organised chronologically with each of the four groups of novels studied in turn, so that the full scope of Cather's evolution, artistically and thematically, can be seen. Within each group of novels, however, I have tried to work with closer similarities, so that these novels are often taken out of exact chronological order. For instance, the two Religious Novels, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock*, are similar in structure, protagonist, theme and even image; therefore, I have dealt with them simultaneously. Of the Bitter Novels, *A Lost Lady* and *My Mortal Enemy* have a great deal more in common with each other than they have with *The Professor's House*, which is uniquely structured of all Cather's novels. Therefore, I have dealt first with *A Lost Lady* and *My Mortal*
The first group of novels is especially problematic for three reasons. First, the first two novels, *Alexander's Bridge* and *O Pioneers!*, are closely related works. Each deals, as it were, with one side of the thematic coin of the Heroic Novels. These are both tragic works, in which the protagonists are unable to resolve the conflict facing them, a resolution which entails their inability to combine the two sides of their nature. Bartley Alexander deserts the practical or animal side of his nature; Alexandra Bergson never develops the spiritual or poetic side of hers. Unfortunately, perhaps because these are early novels, the two sides of the conflict are never as clearly drawn as we could wish. We can comprehend these novels best in the light of their similarities with the other three novels of this group.

Of the other three novels, *My Antonia* presents its own particular problem, a textual one. There are two editions of the Introduction to the novel. As the Introduction is our major source of information about the adult Jim Burden who narrates the story, and as there is critical controversy concerning Jim's role as one of two protagonists in the book (the other, obviously, being Ántonia Shimerda), it is highly pertinent that we explore both editions and consider the question of protagonist before we begin our analysis of conflict and resolution.

Further, three novels of the group, *My Antonia* along with *The Song of the Lark* and *One of Ours*, share a common image, what I have called the sun-moon image. And an analysis of this central image can establish the meaning of the particular duality of worlds of this group of novels. As mentioned earlier, Claude Wheeler makes an infor-
formative and expository statement about the children of the sun and the children of the moon, and it seems logical to me to begin the analysis of the image and, therefore, the conflict, with his statement.

For these three reasons, I have taken the first five novels out of their strict order of publication. I have dealt first with One of Ours, the most succinct statement of the sun-moon image and the conflict of the Heroic Novels. The image is also central to The Song of the Lark and that is not a problematic book; so I have placed it second. My Ántonia is the other novel in which the sun-moon image appears; I felt, therefore, it should be handled in conjunction with One of Ours and The Song of the Lark. Yet its textual problem requires careful consideration; therefore, I have placed it third, in a section by itself. Alexander's Bridge and O Pioneers! I have placed together at the end of the chapter, believing an analysis of either helps support my interpretation of the other, and that by being placed after the three more substantial, better controlled novels, they will more easily yield a thorough comprehension of their conflict.

I have chosen the Library Edition of Cather's works for my texts for three reasons. First, they are most easily accessible to most readers. Second, subsequent editions of her works have been published from the Library Edition. Of course, in the discussion of My Ántonia, I will also refer to the first edition of 1918. The final reason for the choice of the Library Edition is that it represents Cather's own final editing of the works, and it seems to me that her judgment should be respected whenever possible.  

21Brown, Willa Cather, pp. 316-319.
It is to be hoped that such study of the canon of novels of any one novelist will reap a three-fold harvest. First, of course, it should make our understanding and appreciation of the novels themselves, deeper and greater; otherwise we are achieving nothing but an academic exercise. Second, it should increase our understanding of the novelist at work, at the actual process of structuring a work of art, and of the process of growth or at least change in an artist during his lifetime. And third, it should establish the writer's proficiency and artistry in his craft; it should serve as a vehicle for evaluating the artist's limitations and achievements.

Hopefully, there is a fourth gain—some inkling of how and why the artistic process works. But this last is still mystifying, and the best we can hope for is an inkling.

What this study will not do is agree or disagree with Cather's philosophy. Nor will it attempt to push or prod a Cather novel into a statement of this critic's philosophy. Nor unfortunately, can it claim a definitive exploration of Cather's art. In the first place, it does not deal with her short stories, poems or essays. In the second place, no study of this length over twelve good novels—or even mediocre ones—can be complete.

There are many questions still needing to be answered concerning Cather's work. Textual studies should be made of every emendation she made between editions, especially of *The Song of the Lark*, where the changes are major. Also, many of the images besides the sun-moon image appear in several novels; that warrants investigation. A careful study of her "points of time" structure should be done as well as a study of her use of point of view.
Willa Cather is not easily categorized with other writers. Primarily she stands in the tradition of journalist-writers that includes Jack London and Ernest Hemingway—though she is most often associated with Henry James. She is a careful writer and she is an experimenter. For these reasons she should be carefully studied. The novel, as a form, is not easy to define. This paper seeks to explore Cather's works according to what seems to me the central rule of a novel: a protagonist facing a conflict. But as the genre of the novel is re-defined with each new novel, Cather deserves more serious consideration as to her contributions to the art form as a whole.
CHAPTER II

THE HEROIC NOVELS

Willa Cather's first five novels, *Alexander's Bridge* (1912), *O Pioneers!* (1913), *Song of the Lark* (1915), *My Antonia* (1918), and *One of Ours* (1922), could be divided into two groups, the first two novels having more in common with each other than with the other three. However, there is one important quality that all five of these novels possess in common; it is an heroic protagonist. And it is only in these five novels that we do find an heroic protagonist.

Bartley Alexander, Alexandra Bergson, Thea Kronborg, Antonia Shimerda and Jim Burden, and Claude Wheeler are all of heroic proportions. All five are drawn against the scenery of an awakening prairie; there is a sense of morning newness permeating the five novels and their protagonists. These are not characters who get caught in mundane problems; they are not characters who can be defeated, for even in defeat they will remain powerful influences on the lives of the lesser people about them. They are not characters who compromise, no matter how painful their demands on themselves may be.

Once Cather had written these novels, she seems to have lost her ability to believe in the hero. She creates other heroes, but they are dying or dead, or shadowy fictional characters, and her protagonists become average people.

Interestingly enough, it is these first five novels that rep-
resent Cather's best work. These are the memorable novels; and, for the most part, these are the best constructed, as if the proportions of her hero called out of Cather equal proportions as a writer.

All five novels revolve about a single conflict: the conflict of the buried life. In each of these novels, Cather divides human existence in two. One half of life, one self in each novel, is a living breathing animal life and self, a child of the sun. One half, one self, is a child of the moon, a dreaming, aspiring spiritual creature. The protagonists struggle with these two selves, striving either to bury one permanently or to fuse the two into a new whole. In four novels, the struggle is contained within one creature, Bartley Alexander, Alexandra Bergson, Thea Kronborg, and Claude Wheeler. But in *My Ántonia*, each self is represented by a protagonist: Ántonia Shimerda is the child of the sun, and Jim Burden is the child of the moon.

So that I can utilise to its fullest a significant image that appears in three of them, *One of Ours*, *The Song of the Lark*, and *My Ántonia*. I have chosen to take the heroic novels out of order. In these three books, there figures an image of a twilight confrontation of the sun and the moon. In all three novels, specific values can be placed on the sun and the moon. The sun is the symbol of actual physical daily life. The moon represents artistic and idealistic yearnings. Claude Wheeler and Thea Kronborg are able to bring these two values together in their lives. Ántonia Shimerda and Jim Burden, each representing one set of values, combine the two ways of life in their friendship. The first two novels, *Alexander's Bridge* and *0 Pioneers!* are tragedies, portraying the result of burying either the sun or the moon. But the standards of values in all five novels are the same. On the
one hand, there is the value of fecundity, growth, and natural life. On the other, there is the value of dreams, of abstract creation, of artistry and culture.

The protagonist's inner conflict is one we shall follow throughout Cather's twelve novels. But never again, after the heroic five, will she present values so plainly understood and so difficult to choose between. These novels could as easily be called the novels of youth. They are challenging, even as their protagonists are challenging. They portray man's conflict as a factor of growth and intimate that it can be resolved and that the life created through its resolution is the truly valuable life.

In her novel, One of Ours, Willa Cather describes a meeting between Burden and Antonia Shimerda.

As we walked homeward across the fields, the sun dropped and lay like a great golden globe in the low west. While it hung there, the moon rose in the east, as big as a cart-wheel, pale silver and streaked with rose colour, thin as a bubble or a ghost-moon. For five, perhaps ten minutes, the two luminaries confronted each other across the level land, resting on opposite edges of the world.¹

In her novel, One of Ours, as protagonist Claude Wheeler meets his Bohemian friend Ernest Havel, Cather repeats this singular scene.

The sun was already low. It hung above the stubble, all milky and rosy with the heat, like the image of a sun reflected in grey water. In the east the full moon had just risen, and its thin surface was flushed with pink until it looked exactly like

the setting sun. Except for the place each occupied in the heavens, Claude could not have told which was which. They rested upon opposite rims of the world, two bright shields, and regarded each other—as if they, too, had met by appointment. Claude and Ernest sprang to the ground at the same instant and shook hands, feeling that they had not seen each other for a long while. (p. 185)

A single occurrence of such an arresting scene might be mere chance. But the repetition of the scene in another novel bears looking into. Cather herself criticized her technique in *The Song of the Lark* because she felt she had "told" too much in that novel. She wrote:

> Whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there—that, one might say, is created. It is the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, of the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it, the verbal mood, the emotional aura of the face or the thing or the deed, that gives high quality to the novel or the drama, as well as to poetry itself.²

Walter Havighurst has described Cather's technique as an accumulation of scenes, each bright, carefully drawn and significant to the total experience of the story and the characterization.³ Taking into account, then, Cather's belief in economy of detail and a critical judgment that she indeed exerted such economy, we must accept this repeated scene as important; it is a relevant and significant detail in each novel.

In both cases, the setting is the same, twilight, that brief, infrequent time when sun and moon are both in the sky, when the full moon so reflects the light of the sun that it is difficult to tell


the twin luminaries apart. This confrontation is possible but once a month, and only then in cloudless skies. In both scenes, matching the confrontation of the luminaries is a confrontation of two people; seemingly the pairs are similar. In *Antonia*, it is Jim Burden and Antonia Shimerda who meet; in *One of Ours*, it is Claude Wheeler and Ernest Havel. Jim and Claude are Americans, born and bred; Antonia and Ernest are Bohemians who have emigrated to America. The comparison and contrast go even deeper. Both Jim and Claude have been away to college in Lincoln, and although Jim has gone on to Harvard while Claude has been forced to quit school to run his father's Nebraska farm, they are both, essentially, scholars instead of farmers. Antonia and Ernest, however, are definitely farmers. Jim Burden, returning from Harvard finds Antonia harvesting wheat: "I went down across the fields, and Tony saw me from a long way off. She stood still by her shocks, leaning on her pitchfork, watching me as I came" (p. 319). Claude, home on vacation, from the Temple in Lincoln, prods Ernest into a discussion. He asks, "What are you going to do after a while, Ernest? Do you mean to farm all your life?" And Ernest answers, "Naturally" (p. 62). To Claude's statement that he wishes something to happen besides routine, Ernest retorts, "But what do you expect? What can happen to you except in your own mind?" (p. 63). He goes

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"At new moon the moon comes above the horizon about the same time as the sun, and sets with him, but rises each day about 50 minutes later than on the day previous, and at the end of the first quarter rises at midday and sets at midnight, continuing to lag behind the sun. When full she rises about sunset and sets about sunrise, and at the commencement of her last quarter she rises at midnight and sets at midday." New International Encyclopedia, 1923, XVI, 221.
on to develop a contrast between himself and Claude, the same contrast as that between Antonia and Jim:

'You Americans are always looking for something outside yourselves to warm you up, and it is no way to do. In old countries, where not very much can happen to us, we know that—and we learn to make the most of little things.' (p. 63)

Claude expresses dissatisfaction with "board and clothes and Sundays off," but Ernest laughs:

'It doesn't matter much what I think about it; things are as they are. Nothing is going to reach down from the sky and pick a man up, I guess.' (p. 64)

And from her kitchen Mrs. Wheeler watches the boys:

She smiled as she saw their black figures moving along on the crest of the hill against the golden sky; even at that distance the one looked so adaptable, and the other so unyielding. They were arguing, probably, and probably Claude was on the wrong side. (p. 64)

The question is, which is adaptable and which is unyielding? In the narrower context of the image, which is the sun? Which is the moon? Are we dealing with the basic nature of the Bohemians, of the Americans, or of two individuals?

The question in regard to *My Antonia* is a very complex question because of the portrayal of two main characters, two protagonists. But in *One of Ours*, Ernest Havel only appears briefly. If his culture, the Old World culture, is significant, it is so not only through his portrayal, but also through the portrayals of a number of characters who share Old World backgrounds with him, especially the Ehrlichs, David Gerhardt, the Jouberts and Mademoiselle de Courcy. But there is no doubt that the protagonist is Claude Wheeler, the American, the one who is "ours," who belongs to us.

E.K. Brown sees *One of Ours* as a conflict between the mechan-
isation of twentieth century life and the traditional value of Old World culture.\(^5\) He says:

The army, the war, and France combined to give Claude the youth he had never had. When he has had it, he may die. Indeed, Willa Cather insists it was best he should. \(\text{[His beliefs about the greatness of his own country and of France]}\) would have perished had he seen the postwar world.\(^6\)

David Daiches reads this contrast in a different way. He says:

"... all this is described not in order to interpret America's reaction to the war but in order to show the development of Claude's attitude under the impact of these events."\(^7\) Certainly the emphasis in \textit{One of Ours} is on the character of the protagonist, a dynamic character; that is, a character who undergoes change during the course of the novel.

At the beginning of the novel, Claude is intimidated by his father's sense of humor; he attempts to uphold the honor of his very unhonorable brother Bayliss by challenging Leonard Dawson, who has given Bayliss a black eye for "knocking" a girl behind her back. Claude is even forced by his mother and her religious sentimentality into attending the Temple instead of the university in Lincoln. He is a character pushed and prodded by circumstances, and his own inability to make valid decisions is based on a crippling lack of values. Even when Mr. Royce advises him against marrying his daughter, Enid, Claude is not able to see values. He does not discern the contrast between Enid Royce and Gladys Farmer that Cather makes so clear.


\(^6\)Ibid., p. 225.

to the rest. Gladys Farmer is an intelligent, talented girl, too
good for Bayliss, in love with Claude and determined to ask nothing
from anyone. Cather describes her:

The rosy light made her brown eyes gleam like old copper,
and there was a moody look in them, as if in her mind she
were defying something. (p. 204)

Enid Royce, on the other hand, with her temperance work, her politi-
cking, her vegetarianism, her false piety, her repugnance to sexual
embraces, would have been a suitable mate for dried-up Bayliss. In-
deed, Bayliss is her natural and chosen companion on her excursions
for the temperance movement. Enid will, Cather leaves no room for
doubt, turn into a woman like her mother.

Mrs. Royce had always looked old, even long ago when she
used to come into church with her little girls—a tiny
woman in tiny high-heeled shoes and a big hat with nodding
plumes, her black dress covered with bugles and jet that
glittered and rattled and made her seem hard on the outside,
like an insect. (p. 146)

The contrast is obvious to the reader, but not to Claude. Romantically,
he associates Enid with the sunshine. She had visited him when he was
sick, ugly, despairing. "The sunshine she had let into the room, and
her tranquil, fragrant presence, soothed him" (p. 161). And again:
"... she had come on that afternoon when she entered his drug-
smelling room and let in the sunshine" (p. 164).

But Enid's appearance is deceptive. She marries Claude not
because she loves him—indeed, she seems absolutely incapable of
love—but because Brother Weldon "seemed to think that her marrying
Claude was the one way to reclaim him, and did not hesitate to say
that the most important service devout girls could perform for the
church was to bring promising young men to its support" (p. 203).
Enid is as hard-shelled as her mother; she leaves Claude cold suppers after his long days in the harvest fields and motors around the countryside with the old-maidish Bayliss.

The first two sections of the novel move continually and unremittingly through a series of incidents that place limitation upon limitation on Claude Wheeler. Though his family is wealthy, his father's attitude limits Claude's money and his right to spend money, even to take his good friend Ernest Havel to the hotel for lunch. He is forced to curtail his education and return to the physical life of farming. He marries the wrong girl and finally loses even her frigid embraces to her determination to follow her missionary sister to China. Finally, even the house he has planned and built so carefully and the timber claim he has loved are left behind, as he returns to the Wheeler farmstead and his boyhood room and place in the household. Financially, intellectually, romantically, and sexually, Claude is forced into a narrower and narrower cage. Whatever potential he might have had is thwarted and stifled. Later, in France, upon hearing David Gerhardt play the Amadé violin for Madame Fleury and her children, Claude allows bitter despair to well into his mind.

He was torn between generous admiration, and bitter, bitter envy. What would it mean to be able to do anything as well as that, to have a hand capable of delicacy and precision and power? If he had been taught to do anything at all, he would not be sitting here to-night a wooden thing amongst living people. He felt that a man might have been made of him, but nobody had taken the trouble to do it; tongue-tied, foot-tied, hand-tied. (p. 468)

But the despair lasts only a short time, for Claude has become a new man. Later the same night, awake and listening to the artillery, Claude thinks:
Ideals were not archaic things, beautiful and impotent; they were the real sources of power among men. As long as that was true, and now he knew it was true—he had come all this way to find out—he had no quarrel with Destiny. Nor did he envy David. He would give his own adventure for no man's. On the edge of sleep it seemed to glimmer, like the clear column of the fountain, like the new moon—alluring, half-averted, the bright face of danger. (p. 470)

And, like a man of Destiny, Claude hurries forth to his heroic death in the trenches. He holds the men in the face of what should be an overwhelming number of the enemy. "Something instantaneous happened; he had his men in hand" (p. 507). "... the men behind him had become like rock. That line of faces below, Hicks, Jones, Fuller, Anderson, Oscar ... Their eyes never left him. With these men he could do anything" (p. 507).

And the last thought Cather records from Claude is heroic:

He felt only one thing: that he commanded wonderful men.
When David came up with the supports he might find them dead, but he would find them all there. They were there to stay until they were carried out to buried. They were mortal, but they were unconquerable. (p. 507)

Claude's last thought is one which would be natural in the mind of a Hemingway protagonist. It is quite a distance from the thoughts besetting the caged boy of the first two sections, who moved even within his own family as if he no right, no worth, no destiny. Claude has become the "miracle" described so vividly by Mademoiselle de Courcy:

'I was in Paris on the fourth day of July, when your Marines, just from Belleau Wood, marched for your national fete, and I said to myself as they came on, 'That is a new man!' Such heads they had, so fine there, behind the ears. Such discipline and purpose. Our people laughed and called to them and threw

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8For instance, the fisherman, Santiago, believes: "A man can be destroyed but not defeated." Ernest Hemingway, The Old Man and the Sea (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 103.
them flowers, but they never turned to look . . . eyes straight before. They passed like men of destiny." (p. 437)

This transition of character is, without any doubt, the very heart of the book. It is not a transition based merely upon Claude's sudden exposure to another culture. We can understand it better if we return to the image of the sun and the moon.

To begin with, Claude is definitely associated with the sun. The very first line of the book associates Claude and the sun: "Claude Wheeler opened his eyes before the sun was up. . . ." (p. 3). His younger brother, Ralph, however, pulls the sheet over his face "to shut out the light" (p. 3). Claude is of the sun, but his family is not. Further, Claude is sun-colored. "His eyebrows and long lashes were a pale corn-colour. . . ." (p. 22). His mother looks at her son: "Her eyes were always agreeably employed when they rested upon the sunburned neck and catapult shoulders of her red-headed son" (p. 191). He is associated with the sun, but when he understands his destiny, it gleams like "a new moon" (p. 472). The image suggests a dichotomy in Claude's character.

Section Three, "Sunrise on the Prairie," comprises the climax of the novel, as the third act does in a Shakespearean tragedy. In this section Claude loses Enid to China and joins the army, thereby beginning the process that will end with his heroic death in the trenches of France. It is important that this section is entitled "Sunrise." The two instances of the sun-moon image quoted earlier in this chapter are twilight images, the sun is setting, the moon is rising. But Claude's determination and his action in Section Three are sunrise. The sun will reach the moon in Section Five, the two
orbs will confront each other again, but the sun must rise and shine before the story of Claude Wheeler is over except "where it began" by Lovely Creek. "To two old women who work together in the farm-house, the thought of him is always there, beyond everything else, at the farthest edge of consciousness, like the evening sun on the horizon" (p. 511).

In the previous section, entitled "Enid," the sun has been thoroughly characterised by Cather as it visits the harvest wheatfields of Nebraska. She writes:

Every morning the sun came up a red ball, quickly drank the dew, and started a quivering excitement in all living things. In great harvest seasons, like that one, the heat, the intense light, and the important work in hand draw people together and make them friendly. (p. 178)

And again:

The sun was like a great visiting presence that stimulated and took its due from all animal energy. When it flung wide its cloak and stepped down over the edge of the fields at evening, it left behind it a spent and exhausted world. Horses and men and women grew thin, seethed all day in their own sweat. After supper they dropped over and slept anywhere at all, until the red dawn broke clear in the east again, like the fanfare of trumpets, and nerves and muscles began to quiver with the solar heat. (p. 179)

Primarily, then, the sun represents the animal, the physical, the concrete.

Strangely enough in the section "Sunrise on the Prairie," it is not the sun, but the moon that draws Claude's and our attention. Because of the interpretive significance of this passage, I will quote it at length.

The moon swam up over the bare wheatfields, big and magical, like a great flower. Presently he got some bath-towels, went across the yard to the windmill, took off his clothes, and stepped into the tin horse-tank. The water had been warmed by the sun all afternoon, and was not much cooler than his body.
He stretched himself out in it, and resting his head on the metal rim, lay on his back, looking up at the moon. The sky was a midnight-blue, like warm, deep, blue water, and the moon seemed to lie on it like a water-lily, floating forward with an invisible current. One expected to see its great petals open.

For some reason, Claude began to think about the far-off times and countries it had shone upon. He never thought of the sun as coming from distant lands, or as having taken part in human life in other ages. To him, the sun rotated about the wheatfields. But the moon, somehow, came out of the historic past, and made him think of Egypt and the Pharaohs, Babylon and the hanging gardens. She seemed particularly to have looked down upon the follies and disappointments of men; into the slaves' quarters of old times, into prison windows, and into fortresses where captives languished.

Inside of living people, too, captives languished. Yes, inside of people who walked and worked in the broad sun, there were captives dwelling in darkness—never seen from birth to death. Into those prisons the moon shone, and the prisoners crept to the windows and looked out with mournful eyes at the white globe which betrayed no secrets and comprehended all. . . . Oh, yes, how much Gladys must have to tell this perfect confidant! The people whose hearts were set high needed such intercourse—whose wish was so beautiful that there were no experiences in this world to satisfy it. And these children of the moon, with their unappeased longings and futile dreams, were a finer race than the children of the sun. This conception flooded the boy's heart like a second moonrise, flowed through him indefinite and strong, while he lay deathly still for fear of losing it. (pp. 233-235)

The contrast is set. The sun, as Cather has defined it, rules the physical world. It is animal power. It is concrete. It revolves, in Claude's mind, "about the wheatfields," because food is necessary to its power. The Claude Wheeler who is awake to welcome the sun is physical; he is animal. He is a handsome, strong and healthy boy who definitely reflects the power and personality of the sun. The moon, on the other hand, is abstract. It is related to myth and legend; it has nothing to do with the wheatfields. The moon is a giant flower concerned with dreams, with wishes "so beautiful" that no experiences in the world seem to farmer Claude, to satisfy them, with "unappeased longings and futile dreams." The sun is the physical
presence of a man; the moon is his deepest yearnings. And these two forces vie within Claude as he lies in the horse-tank. His prison is the prison of his environment; his dream is a vague dream of doing something, being something. It is a dream unrealized until France.

David Daiches sees a split in the novel between the first three books, the entrapment of Claude, and the final two books, which he calls "a small war novel in itself." However, I do not believe such a split exists. The first two sections of the novel, "On Lovely Creek" and "Enid," are necessary to the climax in the third section and to the denouement of the final two sections, "The Voyage of the Anchises" and "Bidding the Eagles of the West Fly on."

First of all, Cather develops carefully throughout the novel the theme of destiny, even predestination. During a blizzard early in the novel, Claude goes to the windows to look out. At first he can see nothing.

... then Maahailey must have carried her lamp to the kitchen window beneath, for all at once a broad yellow beam shone out into the choked air, and down it millions of snowflakes hurried like armies, an unceasing progression, moving as close as they could without forming a solid mass. Claude struck the frozen window-frame with his fist, lifted the lowered sash, and thrusting out his head tried to look abroad into the engulfed night. There was a solemnity about a storm of such magnitude; it gave one the feeling of infinity. The myriads of white particles that crossed the rays of lamplight seemed to have a quiet purpose, to be hurrying toward a definite end. A faint purity, like a fragrance almost too fine for human senses, exhaled from they as they clustered about his head and shoulders. (p. 111)

A few pages later, Claude feels again this sense of infinity, only this time it is more clearly associated with himself. It is also, it should be noted, a moon image, an abstract, part of Claude's "un-
appeased longings."

The moon had been up since long before the sun went down, had been hanging pale in the sky most of the afternoon, and now it flooded the snow-terraced land with silver. It was one of those sparkling winter nights when a boy feels that, though the world is very big, he himself is bigger; that under the whole crystalline blue sky there is no one quite so warm and sentient as himself, and that all this magnificence is for him. (p. 121)

The Battle of the Marne, so carefully followed by Claude and his mother, is another step in the destiny Cather draws. "Its name had come to have the purity of an abstract idea. In great sleepy continents, in land-locked harvest towns, in the little islands of the sea, for four days men watched that name as they might stand out at night to watch a comet, or to see a star fall" (p. 195). The abstract idea is a dream, an ideal, a child of the moon. The star has already been associated with Claude; of Maheiley's three prize quilts, the one she designates for Claude, is the one in the pattern of a blazing star (p. 85). After Claude has joined the Army, he walks out under the winter stars.

As he looked up at them he felt more than ever that they must have something to do with the fate of nations, and with the incomprehensible things that were happening in the world. In the ordered universe there must be some mind that read the riddle of this one unhappy planet, that knew what was forming in the dark eclipse of this hour. A question hung in the air; over all this quiet land about him, over him, over his mother . . . . To older men these events were subjects to think and converse about; but to boys like Claude they were life and death, predestination. (pp. 259-260)

And Claude is one of the predestined. His early life, the life in which he was caged, the life in which he made compromise after compromise with his honor, his hopes and dreams, has merely served to prepare him for his destiny.

A good part of Claude's destiny has the characteristics of the sun. Red-haired, sunburned, tall and strong, Claude represents the
very animal power of the new man, the American. Further, there is a
determination about him that Cather repeatedly associates with bronze,
the color of sun, not moon. In Denver, on the steps of the State
Capitol, Claude unwittingly freezes into a picture of power and deter-
mination, so arresting a picture that a stranger stops to stare.

He was a young man standing bareheaded on the long flight of
steps, his fists clenched in an attitude of arrested action--
his sandy hair, his tanned face, his tense figure copper-
coloured in the oblique rays. (p. 137)

The troops, sailing on the Anchises, see the "Goddess of Liberty"
bronzed by the dawn. "... youths were sailing away to die for an
idea, a sentiment, for the mere sound of a phrase... and on their
departure they were making vows to a bronze image in the sea" (p. 307).

A young girl comes upon Claude and David Gerhardt sitting in the pas-
torial solemnity of a French wood. "She had heard voices, but at first
did not see the uniforms that blended with the yellow and brown of the
wood. Then she saw the sun shining on two heads; one square, and amber
in colour—the other reddish-bronze, long and narrow" (p. 456). Here,
definitely, is an echo of Mademoiselle de Courcy's strange observation
about the fineness of the heads of the Americans.

The snow that swirled like an army changes in the last two
sections to an army that swarms like bees. They leave for France:
"The whole superstructure was coated with brown uniforms; they clung
to the boat davits, the winches, the railings and ventilators, like
bees in a swarm" (p. 305). And they return: "The decks are covered
with brown men. They cluster over the super-structure like bees in
swarming time... They are not the same men who went away" (p. 509).

Physically, they are the same men; they have the strength and
stamina of the American. And yet, they are not the same. For the
physical strength in all of them has been welded to an ideal, an ab-
stract, the Marne, France, Paris, liberty, democracy, freedom, "an
idea, a sentiment, the mere sound of a phrase." Claude "awoke every
morning with that sense of freedom and going forward, as if the world
were growing bigger each day and he were growing with it" (p. 348).
And he is growing, as he has been predestined to grow. When Claude's
aviator friend, Victor, dies, killed in a dog-fight over Verdun, a
crude man, ill-mannered and loud, whose mistress is a moon-faced,
middle-aged English woman who signs her photograph "A mon sigle!",
Claude comprehends the triumph of his friend, whom Cather has well-
named Victor.

There was something about that fellow . . . a sort of de-
bauched baby, he was, who went seeking his enemy in the
clouds. What other age could have produced such a figure?
That was one of the things about this war; it took a little
fellow from a little town, gave him an air and a swagger,
a life like a movie-film,—and then a death like the rebel
angels.

A man like Gerhardt, for instance, had always lived in
a more or less rose-coloured world; he belonged over here,
really. How could he know what hard moulds and crusts the
big guns had broken open on the other side of the sea? Who
could ever make him understand how far it was from the
strawberry-bed and the glass cage in the bank, to the sky-
roads over Verdun. (p. 420)

Or how far it is from the wheatfields of Nebraska, from the pietistic
sentimentality of Mrs. Wheeler, from the careless empire-building of
Mr. Wheeler, from the frigid embraces of Enid to the trenches of France,
to the rose window of St. Ouen, to the munificence of the Jouberts
and the graciousness of Mademoiselle de Courcy? Such knowledge is for
Claude and for the men who die with him in the trenches. They are the
ones who have broken out of their cages; they are the men of the disci-
pline of the sun, and the dreams of the moon.

The first two sections of the novel portray Claude's preparation for his heroism. The juxtaposition of the sun image, Claude's own physical being, and his frustrations, his inability to feel at home with the Ehrlichs (those who are worthy of honor), and his inability to accept the Wheeler household as natural to him, the vague dreams that take no direction, this juxtaposition provides the crisis in Claude's life that he resolves by joining the army, by dedicating his physical strength to a country he does not know, a war he has not seen. He has been actually divided for a long time. In the house he built for Enid, he has been one person. In the timber claim, he met "a young man more experienced and interesting than himself, who had not tied himself up with compromises" (p. 240), a young man who is his buried self. Claude is attracted throughout the novel to caves. The mill is one of the first of these caves, "where the water-wheel hung dripping in its dark cave, and quivering streaks of sunlight came in through the cracks to play on the green slime and the spotted jewel-weed growing in the shale" (p. 139). In France:

Madame Joubert had told him about some caves at the other end of the wood, underground chambers where the country people had gone to live in times of great misery, long ago, in the English wars . . . . He had begun to believe that the Americans were a people of shallow emotion. That was the way Gerhardt had put it once; and if it was true, there was no cure for it. Life was so short that it meant nothing at all unless it were continually reinforced by something that endured; unless the shadows of individual existence came and went against a background that held together. (p. 444)

In the cavern-like interior of St. Ouen, "some recollection of old astronomy lessons brushed across his brain—something about stars whose light travels through space for hundreds of years before it reaches the
earth and the human eye. The purple and crimson and peacock-green of this window had been shining quite as long as that before it got to him . . . ." (p. 384). Here is again the star, the star which does not fall at the Marne, the star which Mahaily bestows upon Claude. Claude retreats to the cave; he hides as the earlier French did, from his enemy in deep caverns, but even in the depths of caverns, light reaches him, the sunlight of his physical being and his discipline, the patterned light of a heritage of art and ideas, the moonlight of his dreams. On the crossing, the Marine Usher actually does usher Claude to an understanding of the real job of the American soldier. Usher talks about a visit to the dungeons of Vera Cruz:

'Ve saw all the old instruments of torture; rusty iron cages where a man couldn't lie down or stand up, but had to sit bent over till he grew crooked. It made you feel queer when you came up, to think people had been left to rot away down there, when there was so much sun and water outside. Seems like something used to be the matter with the world.' He said no more, but Claude thought from his serious look that he believed he and his countryman who were pouring overseas would help to change all that. (p. 326)

The captive languishes not only in Claude, but in others throughout the world, in dungeons in Vera Cruz, caverns in France, in Mahaily, in Mrs. Wheeler, in the old German woman who plants gourd vines about the doorway of her restaurant, in the Yoeders, in Gladys Farmer. The captive languishes and whispers his dreams to the moon, and in most cases can do no more.

John H. Randall III says:

Unlike the earlier protagonists, Claude Wheeler is not of the heroic breed; he "feels sure something will happen" and expects stimulation from the outside; Alexandra or Antonia would have made things happen themselves. The reason is there has been nothing in Claude's environment to stimulate heroism; he has neither had the immigrant's experience of crossing the water and passing from one kind
of culture to an entirely different kind, nor has he had to face the precarious struggle for existence on the frontier. When he gets to France and has a chance to prove himself in battle, the result is different.\(^{10}\)

Mr. Randall states that Claude is not heroic, yet he, not Alexandra or Antonia gives his life for an abstraction. *One of Ours* traces the development of Claude to his heroic death, but Cather insists from the very beginning that there is something fine, something unusual, some untapped reservoir of strength and achievement in this young man. The stranger pauses at the sight of Claude posed on the Capitol steps; Mrs. Ehrlich seeks out Claude as her special guest. And though Mrs. Wheeler surmises that in any argument Claude will "probably" be wrong, it is Claude who is unyielding against the sun, just as it is the American soldiers who refuse to look aside at the teasing French.

Ernest Havel has said to Claude that the only things that can happen to anyone is what can happen inside his own mind, that there is no greater power interfering with the course of men's lives. Randall insists Claude is waiting for an outside stimulus. Actually, the picture Cather has drawn is a blend of these two ideas. The war does act as a stimulus, but what it stimulates is the child of the moon, the captive languishing in the dungeon of Claude's own mind.\(^{11}\) And the action resulting is beyond simple action; it is a fusion of the two selves within Claude.

At a grave of an unknown soldier, Claude thinks:


\(^{11}\)E.K. Brown, Willa Cather, p. 224.
Most of the boys who fell in this war were unknown, even to themselves. They were too young. They died and took their secret with them—what they were and what they might have been. The name that stood was La France. (p. 441)

His buddy, Hicks, asks, "The next question is, who put 'em here, and what's the good of it?" (p. 442). What is the difference between the graves marked mort and the graves marked tod? Mahailey has not been able to reconcile the idea that Germans are destroying villages and committing atrocities with the presence of their industrious German neighbors, the Yoeders. David Gerhardt, the Ehrlichs and Big Tannhauser who dies on the way to France muttering, "Hein' arme Mutter," are all Germans, but none of them Claude's enemies. Cather is asking quite pointedly, not how this duplicity can exist, but how war can exist?

David Gerhardt gives the only tentative answer in the entire novel:

'The war was put up to our generation. I don't know what for; the sins of our fathers, probably. Certainly not to make the world safe for Democracy, or any rhetoric of that sort. When I was doing stretcher work, I had to tell myself over and over that nothing would come of it, but that it had to be. Sometimes, though, I think something must . . . . Nothing we expect, but something unforeseen.' He paused and shut his eyes. 'You remember in the old mythology tales how, when the sons of the gods were born, the mothers always died in agony? Maybe it's only Semele I'm thinking of. At any rate, I've sometimes wondered whether young men of our time had to die to bring a new idea into the world . . . something Olympian.' (p. 458)

Certainly, freeing the children of the moon is Olympian. Semele was the mother of Dionysius by Zeus. She pleaded with the god for the sight of him in all his grandeur as the god of lightning; Zeus allowed it. And Semele died of the sight. Dionysius, the origin of comedy and tragedy, is first and foremost associated with individualism freedom, lack of inhibition, a release of the children of the moon that languish inside the dark caves of the human mind.
Claude Wheeler, therefore, when he dies, is a blend, both a child of the sun and a child of the moon. His concrete physical presence, his discipline, his arduous labor, have combined with the ideal like a new moon, the "bright face of danger," and it is significant, I believe, that the Claude Wheeler who holds his men in their position in the trenches, is not himself in the trench, but on the parapet, out in the open, vulnerable but magnificent.

There is no doubt that the final chapter of the novel evidences Cather's disillusionment with the aftermath of the war. The men who had freed the captives within themselves returned to a society which had not and silently and desperately committed suicide. Claude's mother, "thinks those slayers of themselves were all so like him; they were the ones who had hoped extravagantly—who in order to do what they did had to hope extravagantly, and to believe passionately" (p. 513). Yet this last chapter is not wholly pessimistic, because the thought of Claude lingers on Lovely Creek "beyond everything else, at the farthest edge of consciousness, like the evening sun on the horizon." The sun that rose in Section Three has not yet completely set. The melding of sun and moon, that twilight blend, is not yet forgotten. And since Cather has systematically made Claude "Che" of an army of men to whom the same things were happening, there is a lingering hope for the opening of all the dungeons, for the birth of Dionysius through the terrors of the lightning of war.

The entire drama of One of Ours is this drama of the blending

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of the two sides of Claude Wheeler, one side as misunderstood as the French name pronounced "Clod" by Brother Weldon and Enid, a side foreign to his wheatfields, the other a part of the machinery, the automobile and tractors of the Wheelers. So long as "Claude" remains suborned to his family, to the sins of his father, he is an ineffectual individual, who only "rolls along." But once that part of him that is captive, that has made no compromises, is freed, it is able to work for the freeing of other captives, to die for mere rhetoric. Claude is heroic and triumphant; even if his deeds fail to release others, the salvation of himself is quite enough. The physical, the sun, has been necessary to fulfill the abstract, the moon. Claude is mortal, but unconquerable.

Sun, but moon.

The Song of the Lark

In 1915, seven years prior to the publication of One of Ours, Willa Cather published her longest and, in some ways, her most unusual novel, The Song of the Lark. It is the story of the growth and education of a great opera star, Thea Kronborg. It was not one of Cather's favorite works. Her own Preface to the Library Edition of 1937 points out both Cather's dissatisfaction with the book and its major theme. She says:

The chief fault of the book is that it describes a descending curve; the life of a successful artist in the full tide of achievement is not so interesting as the life of a talented young girl 'fighting her way,' as we say. Success is never so interesting as struggle—not even to the successful, not even to the most mercenary forms of ambition. (p. vii)

Ostensibly, then, The Song of the Lark, is the simple Horatio Alger theme of the young American who makes good. But Cather continues in this Preface to outline the conflict which is significantly the same
conflict Claude Wheeler faces, the conflict of two selves struggling for recognition and predominance. Cather writes:

As the gallery of her musical impersonations grows in number and beauty, as that perplexing thing called 'style' (which is a singer's very self) becomes more direct and simple and noble, the Thea Kronborg who is behind the imperishable daughters of music becomes somewhat dry and preoccupied. Her human life is made up of exacting engagements and dull business detail, of shifts to evade an idle, gaping world which is determined that no artist shall ever do his best. Her artistic life is the only one in which she is happy, or free, or even very real. . . . the harassed, susceptible human creature comes and goes, subject to colds, brokers, dressmakers, managers. But the free creature, who retains her youth and beauty and warm imagination, is kept shut up in the closet, along with the scores and the wigs. (p. viii)

Here, without doubt, Cather has stated forthrightly the conflict we have traced within Claude Wheeler. A "human" self and an "artistic" self. And this is the drama of the novel. Cather continues:

The story set out to tell of an artist's awakening and struggle; her floundering escape from a smug, domestic, self-satisfied provincial world of utter ignorance. It should have been content to do that. I should have disregarded conventional design and stopped where my first conception stopped, telling the latter part of the story by suggestion merely. What I cared about, and still care about, was the girl's escape; the play of blind chance, the way in which commonplace occurrences fell together to liberate her from commonness. She seemed wholly at the mercy of accident; but to persons of her vitality and honesty, fortunate accidents will always happen. (pp. viii-ix)

But at this point I would like to quarrel with the artist. It is true that the last section of the novel, that section brusquely entitled "Kronborg," seems stark and pale after the excitement of the earlier sections of the book. But this precisely is what must happen if, as Cather herself acknowledges, Thea has subordinated the "free" self to the closet or the stage.

If Cather had merely been telling the story of one uncomplicated dedicated girl in her rise to artistic triumph on the opera stage, then
to be sure, the story could end when Thea sets off for Germany and what the reader understands to be her ultimate triumph. But that is not the story and Cather would have no right to end the novel at that place. Because Thea Kronborg is not an uncomplicated girl. Thea is a battleground of two selves and the story is not a success story so much as it is the record of that battle of the selves and the results of that battle. Cather herself labels these two halves of Thea's character the "human" and the "free" or "artistic." The final paragraph of her Preface does not, however, throw the proper slant on these two labels, for there Cather declares that the human side is a "smug, domestic, self-satisfied provincial world of utter ignorance." This is only partially true; such a description embraces Thea's rival Lily Fisher and Thea's sister Anna and her brothers Gus and Charley and Thor. But it does not reckon with Mrs. Kronborg, who cannot comprehend her daughter, but who provides some protection from her brothers and sister for Thea as a young girl; it does not reckon with Doctor Archie who knows from first to last in the novel that Thea is beyond his understanding, but who encourages her, who helps her, who loves her; nor does it account for Ray Kennedy who realizes only as he dies that Thea is beyond both his comprehension and his possession. The human side is not so black as Cather intimates seventeen years later; indeed, it is Thea's remembrance of her mother that makes her "artistic" or "free" interpretation of the character Fricka so unusual and so fine that Ottenburg breaks into encomium about it. Doctor Archie witnesses the performance also.

... she had a distinct kind of loveliness for this part, a shining beauty like the light of sunset on distant sails. ... The Fricka of that afternoon was so clear and sunny,
so nobly conceived, that she quite redeemed from shabbiness
the helplessness and unscrupulousness of the gods. (p. 539)

The character of Fricka, as evidenced by the way Thea wears her braids
coiled upon her head, is based on her mother, the mother that is a
part of the human world that Thea must turn her back on for her art,
even to the extent of refusing to go to the bedside of her dying
mother because it means missing her big break.

The "human" self of Thea is not all good; part of it is materialistic and provincial. But part of it is a naturalness and a strength vital to Thea's emergence as not just another opera star, but as a
superb star. Ottenburg describes Thea's unusual abilities for us.

"... that's the high voice we dream of; so pure and yet so warm and human. ... There's the voice itself, so beautiful and individual, and then there's something else; the thing in it which responds to every shade of thought and feeling, spontaneously, almost unconsciously. That colour has to be born in a singer, it can't be acquired; lots of beautiful voices haven't a vestige of it. It's almost like another gift—the rarest of all." (p. 509)

There is the pure voice, and then there is the "something else," which Ottenburg describes as "human." Surely we have here, in his description, the blend of the two sides of Thea's character that Cather herself has delineated for us in the 1932 Preface, the artistic self and the human self, the same two selves we have traced in Claude Wheeler. The human self Claude designated the child of the sun; the artistic, the child of the moon.

The same image, moreover, that we have traced in *One of Ours*
is present in *The Song of the Lark*: the sun-moon image. E.K. Brown observed Cather's use of light throughout the novel; his perception deserves attention and further exploration.
The white and gold colors of the sunlight playing on sand and snow are matched in the appearance of Thea herself. Her beauty has a much finer correspondence with the play of sunlight. It is not a constant thing, like the sensuous fairness of Lena Lingard in My Antonia, or like the steady blond beauty of Alexandra Bergson. It comes and goes as her feelings shift. Just as the canyons in Arizona are like "a grey ghost, an empty, shivering uncertainty" when the sun does not shine, Thea's face is heavy and lifeless when she is balked or worn.

The use of light, repeated and varied with an artistry more resourceful than analysis can mirror, is never painfully obtrusive. Its principal value is not intellectual but emotional: without quite knowing why a sympathetic reader is suffused with warmth as he moves through the story...13

I wholeheartedly agree with Mr. Brown that Cather's artistry in handling the light is beyond the resources of critical analysis; the novel must be read perceptively for the reader to fully understand this play of light. However, for the purpose of this study, it is necessary to attempt some analysis.

Primarily two kinds of light, of colors, are associated with Thea, white and gold, and these correspond to the two sources of light in the novel, the moon and the sun. A third color, blue is dramatically reiterated, and Cather leads us to understand blue is the color of air. Three elements play over the character of Thea Kronborg, sunlight, moonlight, and the currents of air. They represent various aspects of her personality. The sun is her human beingness; the moon is the world of art; the air is the current of life, not just Thea's, but her society's and even the ancient Indian society's.

Most obvious of these images is the sunlight. We first meet her, "a little girl of eleven, wide awake, two yellow braids sticking up on the pillow behind her. Her face was scarlet and her eyes were

13Willa Cather, p. 194.
blazing" (p. 8). Again, "The sunlight was pouring over her shoulders.
. . ." (p. 13). And, "she was holding the almost transparent fruit up in the sunlight. . . ." (p. 16). The girl is a source of questioning and theorizing by the men who try to understand her. The marvelous Professor A. Wunsch tries to capture Thea's essence in an image.

What was it she reminded him of? A yellow flower, full of sunlight, perhaps. No; a thin glass full of sweet-smelling, sparkling Moselle wine. He seemed to see such a glass before him in the arbour, to watch the bubbles rising and breaking, like the silent discharge of energy in the nerves and brain, the rapid florescence in young blood— (p. 38)

But obviously, the image of the Moselle is not accurate enough for Wunsch, for when he leaves Moonstone, he tries again.

It was a face full of light and energy, of the unquestioning hopefulness of first youth. Yes, she was like a flower full of sun, but not the soft German flowers of his childhood. He had it now, the comparison he had absently reached for before; she was like the yellow prickly-pear blossoms that open there in the desert; thornier and sturdier than the maiden flowers he remembered; not so sweet, but wonderful. (p. 122)

Ray Kennedy who had "often told himself that he was 'perfectly foolish about her hair'" (p. 184), prophetically sees her splendour as he dies:

"In the dark he could see her as she would be after a while; in a box at the Tabor Grand in Denver, with diamonds on her neck, and a tiara in her yellow hair, with all the people looking at her through their opera-glasses, and a United States Senator, maybe, talking to her" (p.187).

The Kohlers, listening from their bed while Thea sings with the Mexicans, have a vision of her voice:

How it leapt from among those dusky male voices! How it played in and about and around and over them, like a goldfish darting among creek minnows, like a yellow butterfly soaring above a swarm of dark ones. (p. 296)

Mr. Nathanmeyer, the gracious Jewish patron, seeks an image to describe
the girl. "'Svensk sommar,' he murmured. 'She is like a Swedish summer!'" (p. 351). Mrs. Kronborg, dying without Thea, remembers her daughter: "But the bright ones get away from you. They have their own way to make in the world. Seems like the brighter they are, the farther they go" (p. 492). And Doctor Archie muses about the child he had known in Moonstone: "But wherever his life had touched Thea Kronborg's, there was still a little warmth left, a little sparkle. Their friendship seemed to run over those discontented years like a leafy pattern, still bright and fresh when the other patterns had faded into the dull background" (p. 488).

Thea is a child of the sun, reflecting it not only in her braids and her eyes, but also in her enthusiasms. Returning home to Colorado after her particularly hard year studying under the misanthropist Madison Bowers, Thea watches the prairie roll by the train windows.

The train was crossing the Platte River now, and the sunlight was so intense that it seemed to quiver in little flames on the glittering sandbars, the scrub willows, and the curling, fretted shallows.

Thea felt she was coming back to her own land. She had often heard Mrs. Kronborg say that she 'believed in immigration,' and so did Thea believe in it. This earth seemed to her young and fresh and kindly, a place where refugees from old, sad countries were given another chance. The mere absence of rocks gave the soil a kind of amiability and generosity, and the absence of natural boundaries gave the spirit a wider range. Wire fences might mark the end of a man's pasture, but they could not shut in his thought as mountains and forests can. It was over flat lands like this, stretching out to drink the sun, that the larks sang—and one's heart sang there, too. Thea was glad that this was her country, even if one did not learn to speak elegantly there. It was, somehow, an honest country, and there was a new song in the blue air which had never been sung in the world before. It was hard to tell about it, for it had nothing to do with words; it was like the light of the desert at noon, or the smell of the sagebrush after rain; intangible but powerful. She had the sense of going back to a friendly soil, whose friendship was somehow going to strengthen her; a naive, generous country that gave one its
joyous force, its largehearted, childlike power to love, just as it gave one its coarse, brilliant flowers. (pp. 276-277)

Here, as in *One of Ours*, the sun is native "to the wheatfields." It is a prairie sun, a desert sun, Thea's sun. This is her country and it is a country that sings to her. Its qualities are qualities of amiability, generosity and freedom. She responds to the country as Ray Kennedy does, and she believes, with him, in its dream. Significantly, that dream for Ray Kennedy, Doctor Archie, and a number of other characters, is associated with gold. The money that permits Thea's initial escape from Moonstone comes from a gold mine. Fred Ottenburg's fortune is from the gold of beer and is symbolized by his "yellow" freight cars (p. 409). But the money that sends Thea to Germany to study is borrowed on Doctor Archie's silver mine. Thea is to discover that the sun and the force of the sun is not only gold, it is also fool's gold. And by the end of the novel, able now to judge and evaluate surely, Thea can carelessly break Landry's rare lemon amber elephant (p. 541).

Thea's own brothers and sister cannot understand her; the singer realizes that the "Moonstone kind of people," including her siblings are her "natural enemies" (p. 301). Lily Fisher, Thea's Moonstone singing rival, is as blond as Thea is. The source of her power, her color, is sometimes a misused source. However, gold can provide an escape for Thea from the very atmosphere that love of gold creates, money-grubbing Moonstone. It is important to note that at least at one point Thea herself gives in to the fool's gold. In the Cliff Dwellings, Thea begins to sort her values.

Here everything was simple and definite, as things had been in her childhood. Her mind was like a ragbag into which
she had been frantically thrusting whatever she could grab. And here she must throw this lumber away. The things that were really hers separated themselves from the rest. Her ideas were simplified, became sharper and clearer. She felt united and strong. (p. 380)

It is in the Cliff Dweller's canyon that Thea becomes honest with herself and with her art. Up to that point she has tried to compromise; she has tried to live both for art and for materialism. Throughout the novel Cather reiterates Thea's concern for money. She is poor and money is of practical importance to her. She sings for funerals to make money to sing for art. Through her mother's coaxing, she even yields to Anna's request to sing for a Moonstone funeral. When she visits the canyon she is glad to be released from "the enslaving desire to get on in the world" (p. 309). In Section Five, "Doctor Archie's Venture," when Thea borrows money from Archie rather than Fred, her lover chides her about being "fussy" about money. Thea says, "Sometimes I think that to be really honest, you must have been so poor that you've been tempted to steal" (p. 461). She continues:

'I used to be, when I first went to Chicago and saw all the things in the big stores there. Never anything big, but little things, the kind I'd never seen before, and could never afford. I did take something once, before I knew it.' (p. 461)

She had stolen "a little blue silk bag of orris-root powder," a twenty-five cent vanity. Indeed it is vanity that accounts for most of the misuse of gold and the values it stands for in the novel. Thea's vanity is present in the Christmas recital in Moonstone, when she is "indignant" that she has to play the piano and that Lily Fisher gets away with the combination recital and vocal solo. Thea's hurt pride ruins the Christmas Eve for her; she tosses Ray Kennedy's gift into a drawer; "she was not to be consoled by toys" (p. 81). Doctor Archie's
unfortunate marriage to the woman who bars all sunlight and generosity and amiability from her home is a result of Archie's vain romanticism. Cather describes him as "too romantic to know anything about women, except what he wished them to be" (p. 109). And he refuses to get a divorce because he does not want to disgrace himself by exhibiting his hurt. "Respectability was so necessary to Archie that he was willing to pay a high price for it" (p. 107). Fred Ottenburg's bad marriage—ironically fool's gold because the Ottenburg beer empire, through Fred's culture, is put to good use, while Fred's wife, Edith Beers, is without value—is based on vanity. Fred is encouraged by Edith's snobbery, by her beauty, by her obvious wealth and unconcern for wealth. "... certainly this girl beat anything he had ever been up against" (p. 416). He does not judge wisely and so his own value becomes hobbled by the false value of his wife. It is not Thea alone who is vulnerable to fool's gold. But it is Thea who breaks away from the false values and refuses the compromises.

Significantly, it is in the section most drenched with sunlight that Thea achieves her ultimate dedication, that she learns to judge true value from false, the section entitled "The Ancient People."

This was her old idea: a nest in a high cliff, full of sun. All morning long the sun beat upon her cliff, while the ruins on the opposite side of the canyon were in shadow. In the afternoon, when she had the shade of two hundred feet of rock wall, the ruins on the other side of the gulf stood out in the blazing sunlight. (p. 371)

Again:

By the time she got there, the woolly red-and-grey blankets were saturated with sunlight, and she sometimes fell asleep as soon as she stretched her body on their warm surfaces. She used to wonder at her own inactivity. She could lie there hour after hour in the sun and listen to the strident whirr of the big locusts, and to the light, ironical laughter
of the quaking asps. (p. 372)

And:

She could become a mere receptacle for heat, or become a
colour, like the bright lizards that darted about on the
hot stones outside her door; or she could become a con-
tinuous repetition of sound, like the cicadas. (p. 373)

It is here in the pueblo of the ancient civilization that Thea realizes
her true values; it is here, for instance, that she falls in love with
Fred Ottenburg who more than any other character in the novel, more
than Thea herself, represents the sun.

His short curly beard and yellow hair had reddened in the
sun and wind. The pleasant vigour of his person was always
delightful to her, something to signal to and laugh with in
a world of negative people. With Fred she was never be-
calmed. There was always life in the air, always something
coming and going, a rhythm of feeling and action—stronger
than the natural accord of youth. As she looked at him,
leaning against the sunny wall, she felt a desire to be
frank with him. (p. 392)

Fred, hinting at his bad marriage, says: "I've had my time of think-
ing it would not bore me to be the Apollo of a homey flat..." (p. 393).

But Fred, as an Apollo, as a god, cannot be relegated to a "homey flat."

He is the proper consort of Thea Kronborg, of one with a crown, he
understands her; he encourages her. And their love affair is not
fool's gold. It is not a compromise for either of them; rather, it is
a necessary attraction of two extremely powerful and similar forces.

After Thea has learned of his marriage, Fred explains to her that she
would never have been happy with his German family, or indeed with any
family, for she is destined to live more fully than most women can even
imagine. And when Fred asks her if she regrets the weeks they spent
together, she says: "I'd never give them up" (p. 465). This is Thea's
true love and it lasts through her romances and through the dregs of
Fred's marriage until, finally, we are informed in the last section of the book that Fred and Thea have married.

The second value gained in the canyon of the Cliff Dwellers is an understanding of art. And here the color blue, the currents of air, is most important. In Chicago, Thea stole the blue bag of oorris-root, a cheap vanity, a crude misunderstanding of human values. But here in the canyon she contemplates the blue current of air between the two cliffs that face each other. "The dead city thus had two streets, one set in either cliff, facing each other across the ravine, with a river of blue air between them" (p. 370). Thea watches the swallows who now inhabit the canyon.

Their world was the blue air-river between the cañon walls. In that blue gulf the arrow-shaped birds swam all day long, with only an occasional movement of the wings. The only sad thing about them was their timidity; the way in which they lived their lives between the echoing cliffs and never dared to rise out of the shadow of the cañon walls. As they swam past her door, Thea often felt how easy it would be to dream one's life out in some cleft in the world. (pp. 374-375)

She imagines what it must have been like to be an Indian woman, living in this particular "cleft in the world," carrying her child upon her back, carrying the precious water from the stream below, walking forever the worn path. And in her imagination she pauses to watch the braves entice eagles to the yellow watchtower and there struggle with them. She examines the Indian pottery and the expression of that pottery. And as she bathes in the blue stream in the bottom of the canyon, suddenly the hints of the swallows, the stream, the Indian women with their burdens, the pottery, all come together in the revelation that is the source and statement of Thea's dedication to art and her refusal to compromise.
The stream and the broken pottery: 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 in the Art Institute, 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)

Life is not a blue bag of orris-root; it is a flowing stream of life. This is the source of Thea's artistry. But there is a very deep paradox involved here.

Thea Kronborg has recognized art to be a mere receptacle for life, for the blue stream rushing past her. But the moment that she so recognizes it, that she dedicates herself to it, that moment she becomes the eagle struggling to free itself from the snares of the yellow watchtower and the coppery Indian braves.

Her mind, like her body, was full of warmth, lassitude, physical content. Suddenly an eagle, tawny and of great size, sailed over the cleft in which she lay, across the arch of sky. He dropped for a moment into the gulf between the walls, then wheeled, and mounted until his plumage was so steeped in light that he looked like a golden bird. He swept on, following the course of the cañon a little way and then disappearing beyond the rim. Thea sprang to her feet as if she had been thrown up from the rock by volcanic action. She stood rigid on the edge of the stone shelf, straining her eyes after that strong, tawny flight. O eagle of eagles! Endeavour, achievement, desire, glorious striving of human art! From a cleft in the heart of the world she saluted it... It had come all the way; when men lived in caves, it was there. A vanished race; but along the trails, in the stream, under the spreading cactus, there still glittered in the sun the bits of their frail clay vessels, fragments of their desire. (pp. 398-399)

The sun here, as in _One of Ours_, is a physical sun; it is the actual human strivings that necessitate physical discipline and achievement.

It has been present in Thea from the very beginning when with deter-
mination she pulled the too-heavy Thor in his wagon through the streets of Moonstone. In Chicago, Harsanyi saw it in the determination of the girl to master difficult phrasings on the piano. It is a striving that can be misused; but in the ancient canyon Thea discovers its true value. Paradoxically in order to make of herself a vessel able to sing the songs of America that she has discovered on the prairie and the desert, in order to record her mother who is a swallow that does not venture above the cliffs, Thea herself must soar above the cliffs into the complete sun.

For she, like Claude Wheeler, has been partial to caves and darkness. Her room in Moonstone has been a sunny cave; Ray Kennedy's gold has come out of a hole in the ground; the Cliff Dwellings themselves are caves within a cave. By releasing herself from the normal stream of life, she frees herself to her art and she makes possible a unity within herself of the sun and the moon, of the two sides of her nature, for the two blend in her voice and what she is able to do with it, as she has instinctively known all her life they would blend. "Her voice, more than any other part of her, had to do with that confidence, that sense of wholeness and inner well-being that she had felt at moments ever since she could remember" (p. 272).

She has felt the division within herself, and has felt that that secret self divides her from "the Moonstone kind of people."

She had always believed that by doing all that was required of her by her family, her teachers, her pupils, she kept that part of herself from being caught up on the meshes of common things. . . . It was as if she had an appointment to meet the rest of herself sometimes, somewhere. It was moving to meet her and she was moving to meet it. (p. 272)

She senses the second selves buried within all the truly worthwhile
people about her, within Ray Kennedy, Doctor Archie, Professor Wunsch, and Spanish Johnny. And she conjectures:

What if one's second self could somehow speak to all these second selves? What if one could bring them out as whiskey did Spanish Johnny's? How deep they lay, these second persons, and how little one knew about them... except to guard them fiercely. It was to music, more than to anything else, that these hidden things in people responded. Her mother—even her mother had something of that sort which replied to music. (p. 273)

What Thea does not realize at this point is that the others, Kennedy, Archie, Wunsch, and Spanish Johnny have all made compromises. They have compromised their hidden desires with vanity, with fool's gold. Only Thea refuses to compromise, and because she does, she achieves expression not only of her second self, but of the second selves of all those dear to her.

E.K. Brown stated that there were two colors, gold and white, associated with Thea. The white is the moon. And the significance of the moon in the novel is very great.

First of all, we must deal with a problem. Thea Kronborg comes from Moonstone, Colorado, and she identifies the "Moonstone kind of people" with her natural enemies. But this cannot be understood as a condemnation of Moonstone itself and what it represents. On the one hand, Fred Ottenburg can criticize Thea for using a very stilted phrase. He says:

'It's perfectly good Moonstone, my dear. Like the ready-made clothes that hang in the windows, made to fit everybody and fit nobody, a phrase that can be used on all occasions.' (p. 464)

And Moonstone becomes a representative of smug, provincial, small-town America. But earlier, Fred has lauded Moonstone values.

'That's exactly one of her advantages, Doctor Archie.
Nobody can ever take that away from her, and none of us who came 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)

The seeming ambiguity can be easily resolved. Cather is differentiating between the provincial people on the one hand and the great-hearted people on the other, all of whom collect in Moonstone. On the one hand, there is Anna, indignant that her sister is not aware of her social faux pas in associating with the Mexicans; and on the other hand there are the Mexicans, especially Spanish Johnny, who simply by being a part of Thea's early life help her to rise above the pettiness of her own sister. On the one hand, there is Lily Fisher, who represents the petted, spoiled small-town girl; on the other, there is Thea Kronborg who rises above the pettiness, who soars like an eagle out of the mainstream of life, in order to capture the essence of that life.

Moonstone is a place. It is a town on the desert. But it is also a place of dreams and wishes. A. Wunsch, the music professor who never tells anyone his first name, just his first initial, translates to "a wish." There are the small-town kinds of people in Moonstone, but then there are the others, like Thea, Doctor Archie, Professor Wunsch, and Spanish Johnny who come out in the moonlight, who dream beside their doors, and wander through the moonlit streets. When Doctor Archie travels to New York to give Thea her loan, she tells Fred Ottenburg:

'He brought lots with him besides the flowers. Oh, lots of things! The old Moonstone feelings'--she moved her hand back and forth in the air, fluttering her fingers--
'the feeling of starting out, early in the morning, to take
my lesson.' (p. 448)

And this is an important statement of Thea's part, because the moon
does represent the dream, the wish, the eager beginnings of great
achievements. Nothing is achieved that is not first dreamed of and
wished for.¹⁴

Later, after Thea has achieved her great success, she talks
with Doctor Archie:

'I can't be careless with money. I began the world on six
hundred dollars, and it was the price of a man's life. Ray
Kennedy had worked hard and been sober and denied himself,
and when he died he had six hundred dollars to show for it.
I always measure things by that six hundred dollars, just as
I measure high buildings by the Moonstone standpipe. There
are standards we can't get away from.' (p. 548)

These are the very standards Fred Ottenburg has already commented on,
and he has said they are good standards, especially for an artist.
Certainly they are harsh and real standards. Thea has learned the
value of a man's life and of a man's achievement. She has lived with
the reality of hope in the desert town. She has learned the true
value of things. And she has learned the value of Moonstone; she
says to Archie:

'But you see, when I set out from Moonstone with you, I had
had a rich, romantic past. I have lived a long, eventful
life, and an artist's life, every hour of it.' (p. 552)

Moonstone may be the home of the "Moonstone kind of people," but it
is also the home of the artist.

The question of Moonstone, the paradox of it, is explored
quite early in the novel by Doctor Archie. He asks Thea, "... why

¹⁴Later, in the discussion of A Lost Lady, we will find
Captain Forrester's philosophy an echo of this idea.
are we in Moonstone?" (p. 102). But it is a rhetorical question that he tries to answer himself, and cannot. For Archie, Moonstone seems only to be the "end of the run," a town necessary as a drinking trough for the railroad engine. It exists in a really uninhabitable part of the desert, as a servant, a slave to the railroad, to a mechanical contrivance. He says, "We're all a lot of gamblers without much nerve, playing for small stakes" (p. 103). Moonstone is a fitting place for the men who work on the railroad, but it seems to have nothing to offer to, nothing in common with, people who are not mechanical, people like himself, Thea and, especially, Wunsch. "Why don't those old fellows stay at home? We won't need them for another hundred years. An engine-wiper can get a job, but a piano-player! Such people can't make good" (p. 105). Yet, there is an answer to the paradox; Cather implies as much in a soft scene she has described just prior to this conversation. Archie and Thea are both walking at night. They meet in the moonlight and pause to watch a rabbit.

In the gully below them there was, indeed, a little rabbit with a white spot of a tail, crouching down on the sand, quite motionless. It seemed to be lapping up the moonlight like cream. On the other side of the walk, down in the ditch, there was a patch of tall, rank sunflowers, their shaggy leaves white with dust. The moon stood over the cottonwood grove. (pp. 101-102)

Later when Doctor Archie sends Thea home and to bed, he tells her she will have "to say good night to the moon." But she replies:

'No, I won't. I sleep on the floor now, right in the moonlight. My window come down to the floor, and I can look at the sky all night.' (p. 106)

Thea is the little rabbit lapping the moonlight like cream, but the moonlight for her is Doctor Archie and Professor Wunsch and Spanish Johnny. Why are they all gathered in Moonstone? There would seem
to be here the same statement of predestination we have observed on One of Ours. They are in Moonstone because Thea needs them there, because they can show her a world beyond the "Moonstone kind of people," and in doing so help her aspire to the music that will help them free their second selves. Moonstone and the people who live there are absolutely necessary to Thea's artistry; indeed, they are the beginning of it.

The two flowers most definitely associated with Thea portray the two sides of her character. The first flower is a rose, a red rose with a yellow center. In the dining car of the train crossing the prairie, Thea sees such a rose.

When Thea sat down she looked into her rose and thought it the most beautiful thing in the world; it was wide open, recklessly offering its yellow heart, and there were drops of water on the petals. All the future was in that rose, all that one would like to be. (p. 275)

And she begs such a rose for the dying girl in the daycoach. The heart of the rose is yellow; it is the sun and it is the future.

And before she leaves for Germany, Thea is eager to know the future. She forces "open the petals of the rose with an ardent and rather rude hand" (p. 457). But not every rose gets so much attention from Thea.

The roses she used to see in the florists' shops in Chicago were merely roses. But when she thought of the moonflowers that grew over Mrs. Tellamantes's door, it was as if she had been that vine and had opened up in white flowers every night. (p. 374)

And, indeed, no one who has ever read The Song of the Lark can disassociate Thea from the moon-flooded nights and the moonflowers and the soft romance of the Mexicans. Twice Cather draws the scene, but the haunting loveliness of it permeates the entire novel, like
the perfume of the flower.

The first moonflower scene culminates in Mrs. Tellamantez's explanation, with the help of a conch-shell, of Johnny's madness; we will return to the shell later. Right now, it is important to establish the correspondence of the moonflower with this particular part of Thea's life.

The scene is set:

The summer moon hung full in the sky. For the time being it was the great fact of the world. Beyond the edge of the town the plain was so white that every clump of sage stood out distinct from the sand, and the dunes looked like a shining lake. (p. 51)

Mrs. Tellamantez sits on the doorstep combing and combing her dark hair.

Inside the house, Spanish Johnny is suffering the aftereffects of the strange madness that seizes him and compels him to go off, from town to town and saloon to saloon, playing his mandolin. The color Cather ascribes to Johnny is gold (p. 53). And in the gandydancers' song that Ray Kennedy and Johnny sing later, the refrain goes:

'Pedró, Pedró, swing high, swing low,
And it's allamand left again;
For there's boys that's bold and there's some that's cold,
But the gold boys come from Spain,
Oh, the gold boys come from Spain!' (p. 70)

Spanish Johnny is a gold boy, but within him is hidden the madness; that part of him is moon, and his wife has resigned herself to the madness. Thea leaves off counting the moonflowers and observes the woman combing her hair.

To-night, as she sat with her back to the moon, looking at the moonflowers and Mrs. Tellamantez's sombre face, she was thinking that there was nothing so sad in the world as that kind of patience and resignation. (p. 55)

The patience and resignation should feel sad to Thea, for it is a
burying of a part of a human being, the exact thing that Thea instinctively struggles against all her life. But Gather makes a point of the fact that the Mexican women do resign their music and themselves for their men; they stand in contrast to Thea.

The second Moonflower scene gives to both Thea and the reader comprehension of Johnny's madness. The moon not only draws the group of singers together, it separates them also, each into his own world of dreams, but safe in the shared safety of their music.

The moonlight was so bright that one could see every glance and smile, and the flash of their teeth. The moonflowers over Mrs. Tellamantes's door were wide open and of an unearthly white. The moon itself looked like a great pale flower in the sky. (pp. 291-292)

The faces are "like the white flowers over the door" (p. 292). And "Silvo dropped on his back and lay looking at the moon, under the impression he was still looking at Thea" (p. 292). And as Thea feels, senses, the response of the Mexicans to her singing, she begins to comprehend them and herself.

They turned themselves and all they had over to her. For the moment they cared about nothing in the world but what she was doing. Their faces confronted her—open, eager, unprotected. Mrs. Tellamantes's fateful resignation, Johnny's madness, the adoration of the boy who lay still in the sand; in an instant these things seemed to be within her instead of without, as if they had come from her in the first place. (pp. 292-293)

Thea has not yet been to the Cliff Dwellings, she has not yet learned the secret of the vessel that captures and holds and, indeed, gives form to the life streaming past her; and yet, here, definitely, we have a statement of that philosophy and an understanding of it by Thea. Thea transcends the group singing in the moonlight; she is not one of them, or a part of them; she is all of them. And it is this transcendence
that enables Thea to understand them.

Spanish Johnny has been taken over by the spell of the night and the music.

His eyes seemed twice as large as usual and had lights in them like those the moonlight makes on black, running water. Thea remembered the old stories about his 'spells.' She had never seen him when his madness was on him, but she felt something to-night at her elbow that gave her an idea of what it might be like. For the first time she fully understood the cryptic explanation Mrs. Tellamantez had made to Doctor Archie, long ago. There were the same shells along the walk; she believed she could pick out the very one. There was the same moon up yonder, and panting at her elbow was the same Johnny—fooled by the same old things! (p. 294)

Mrs. Tellamantez had proffered the conch-shell, plucked from the border of the walk, to Doctor Archie.

'Listen, doctor. You hear something there? You hear the sea; and yet the sea is very far from here. You have judgement, and you know that. But he is fooled. To him, it is the sea itself. A little thing is big to him.' She bent and placed the shell in the white row, with its fellows. Thea took it up softly and pressed it to her own ear. The sound in it startled her; it was like something calling one. (pp. 56-57)

This idea of something calling does not have a unique appearance in the novel. Throughout the novel there is the echo of promise, something calling far away, promising fulfillment of dreams, and the characters follow. Some seek gold and silver. Some seek understanding and love. Some, of course, are fooled by the absurd promises of social standing and acceptance, or material gain. Thea is the only one who seems to realize that what is calling is buried deep inside of her, a second self, struggling for freedom. The others, like Jasper Flight, the magnificent old desert rat, spend their lives looking for the silver God has buried in the hills. And the farther they travel, the more real the mirage becomes.
... the illusion of the mirage became more instead of less convincing; a shallow silver lake that spread for many miles, a little misty in the sunlight. Here and there one saw reflected the image of a heifer, turned loose to live upon the sparse sand grass. They were magnified to a preposterous height and looked like mammoths, prehistoric beasts standing solitary in the waters that for many thousands of years actually washed over that desert; the mirage itself may be the ghost of that long-vanished sea. (pp. 59-60)

For some, the mirage is not so definite. Ray Kennedy thinks "... he would surely have got in on something: copper, oil, gold, silver, sheep—something" (p. 137). Thea only and quite early recognizes that the treasure is within herself.

She knew, of course, that there was something about her that was different. But it was more like a friendly spirit than like anything that was a part of herself. She brought everything to it, and it answered her; happiness consisted of that backward and forward movement of herself. The something came and went, she never knew how. Sometimes she hunted for it and could not find it; again, she lifted her eyes from a book, or stepped out-of-doors, or wakened in the morning, and it was there—under her cheek, it usually seemed to be, or over her breast—a kind of warm sureness. And when it was there, everything was more interesting and beautiful, even people. When this companion was with her, she could get the most wonderful things out of Spanish Johnny, or Wunsch, or Doctor Archie. (p. 100)

The treasure is within herself, and through music Thea is able to free that treasure, even to confound Spanish Johnny and Doctor Archie.

For Thea Kronborg herself becomes the shell that echoes back the sound of the sea, or, to be more specific, the sounds of the hopes and dreams of people. She comments to Archie:

'... what one really strives for in art is not the sort of thing you are likely to find when you drop in for a performance of opera. What one strives for is so far away, so beautiful'—she lifted her shoulders with a long breath, folded her hands in her lap and sat looking at him with a resignation which made her face noble—'that there's nothing one can say about it.' (p. 551)

One cannot talk about it, one can only achieve it. What Thea strives
for is as nebulous as the sea in the shell, as invisible as the stream of air in the canyon. It is only by making a vessel of herself that she can capture it and give it shape, and so she does. Thea's art is the moon. She has learned to release her captive self by becoming a receptacle for the human experiences, as the shell becomes a receptacle for the sound of the sea, though it is found in the desert far from any sea.

It is inevitable that in her dedication to her art, Thea must ignore and starve much of her that is human. The two selves struggle to the end of the novel, though the artistic self seems to win. Thea looks like a refugee from a war. "It flashed across Doctor Archie that she was running away from the other woman down at the opera house, who had used her so hardly" (p. 505). And Thea, herself, disturbed by Doctor Archie, disturbed by the memories of her sunny Moonstone mornings, of her family and friends and the exhilarating freedom of the wind and the desert, feels morosely that he cannot possibly understand the things she has gained, the artistry and control, that she traded parts of her human self for.

Thea's triumph is not the bold triumph of Claude Wheeler. And yet there is a triumph here, and it is shown through the characters Thea portrays. First there is Fricka, and, as already mentioned, she is a sunny character, based on Thea's own mother. Second, there is Sieglinde, who breaks free.

Seated in the moonlight, the Volsung pair began their loving inspection of each other's beauties, and the music born of murmuring sound passed into her face, as the poet said—and into her body as well. Into one lovely attitude after another the music swept her, love impelled her. And the voice gave out all that was best in it. Like the spring indeed, it blossomed into memories and prophecies, it recounted and it
foretold, as she sang the story of her friendless life, and of how the thing which was truly herself, 'bright as the day, rose to the surface...' (p. 568)

We have then a paradoxical blending of the sun and the moon. Thea's personal self, that self Cather labeled "human," may be subordinated to her artistic self so far as the day to day routine of her life is concerned. But through that artistic life, she gives expression to the human. In other words, Thea leaves the sun, accepting only its striving, to reach the moon, which is her art, and through her art she portrays the children of the sun in all their passionate variety.

The Sun-Moon Image

The danger in dealing with images is the tendency for the critic, no matter how good his intentions may be, to force those images into a pattern that may not exist in the literature with which he is working. Certainly, that danger is present here in my attempt to interpret, to give meaning to the images collected from the novels, One of Ours and The Song of the Lark. But the very nature of an image, especially in the hands of a skilled writer like Willa Cather, is that it repeats ideas and nuances, until subconsciously the reader understands a theme that the writer has only hinted about, that they do, in effect, present a pattern, a pattern of sense detail that colors all the more mechanical or abstract patterns of the book, the plot, the characterizations, and the theme.

It would be false to force a sun-moon, elemental juxtaposition on any of Cather's other works. Even in My Ántonia, the image is used subordinate to others which certainly seem more important. But it would be equally false to ignore in One of Ours and The Song of the
Lark an image that is so fully and so carefully repeated by the author.

There is no doubt that in both novels the image of the sun and the moon serves to symbolize the two natures held within each single protagonist. Further, both protagonists, Claude Wheeler and Thea Kronborg, are aware that one of their natures, or selves, has been subordinated to the other. Both Claude and Thea struggle against this subordination or imprisonment, and both are eventually successful in freeing the captive self. And yet, in both novels, there is also an ending note of despair, the despair that Claude Wheeler could not have returned home to a satisfying life after the war, that he too would have committed suicide, and the despair that Thea Kronborg has somehow become an empty creature, a vessel of the art which allows her to portray rich, warm, human characterizations.

The consensus among Cather's critics is that her characters are involved in a conflict of cultures, the American versus the European, the New World versus the Old World, the mechanistic versus the natural. To be sure, these are the conflicts dwelt upon by Cather's contemporaries, and they are the conflicts explored by Henry James, whom Cather admired and emulated. But it seems to me, in the light of the data of the preceding discussion, that the conflict in which Cather's protagonists are involved is within them, not without. Here we do not have only the picture of the young American tortured by the provincialism of his hometown, seeing ug-


16Brown, Willa Cather.

17Randall, The Landscape and the Looking Glass.
liness all about him, in the land, in the buildings, in the faces of
the people he meets and lives with; nor do we have that young American
bowing subserviently to the masters of another culture, and becoming
cultured and refined even as they. Instead we have two young Americans,
a boy and a girl, who absolutely and unquestionably reflect the health
and heartiness that is America. Claude and Thea are both large people
with hearty natures. Yet they have a natural grace and natural manners.
Both of them, indeed all of Cather's protagonists, love the land; they
are in fact romantic about it; they respond to it, cherish it. And
both of them find people they can like and respond to. It would be
dangerous to rush to too hasty a conclusion that Cather is unmitigat-
ingly damning her culture.

Nevertheless they are both at odds with their cultures. And
it is at this point that the intricacy of their conflict becomes
apparent. For they both belong to their environment. Claude is a
farmer; he does build a house; he marries and tries to settle down.
Thea is obedient to her mother's wish that she sing at the funeral;
she gives piano lessons; she takes care of her brother Thor. Claude
and Thea are very much a part of their cultures.

Yet at the same time, Cather associates them again and again
with caves. It is an image we shall see again in Antonia. A cave
is a secret place, a dark hole where one can hide whatever treasure
he chooses, or where that treasure has been hidden from him. Claude
and Thea retreat to their caves, retreat to a privacy and secrecy,
and there they learn the truth about themselves, that they have both
buried a part of themselves, and that they will be restless until
that second self is liberated. In neither protagonist, however, is
there any wish to discard irrevocably the self that is indigenous to
the culture. To be sure, Thea pushes aside her "human" self while
she is in Europe, but we discover that she regrets that she cannot
take it up again. The truth is neither Claude nor Thea wishes to
turn his back on the "wheatfield" side of him; they just wish to
bring the other side, the dreams, to surface.

The image Cather has used, that image of the sun and the moon,
is a particularly apt image to portray this conflict. Each luminary,
to borrow one of Cather's own terms, is the principle light of its
particular time of day. The sun rules the day; the moon, the night.
Yet there is a time, a twi-light time, before the sun has fully set
or the moon fully risen, when the two lights confront one another—and
night and day rule the skies together. Critic Bernice Slote, citing
Cather's thin volume of poetry, interprets the sun as total creativity.

She writes:

The poems of April Twilights also show how strong in
Willa Cather's imagination and habitual imagery was the
archetypal figure of Apollo, god of the life-giving sun,
of music and beauty. His mythic song is here the sign
of creation, the invocation of magic, the perfection of
beauty.\footnote{Willa Cather and Her First Book,\" reprinted James Schroeter,
Willa Cather and Her Critics (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967),
p. 361.}

But it is not possible to consider Claude's long musings on the children
of the sun and the children of the moon and not to understand that Cather
is establishing two different spheres of different creativities.

Further, the very nature of the two lights suggest interpretation
of them. Ever since men have scanned the skies and asked the meanings
of life, they have differentiated between the sun and the moon. The sun is associated with life, actual, animal life. It makes things grow; it warms the earth. It is a symbol, more than any other, of procreation. But the moon is what men dream of. They count its craters as features in a face, and they make it their own. The moon rules a time of darkness, when corn does not grow, and men do not labor. It is a time, in short, for thoughtfulness, for dreams, for wishes. In a poem entitled "A Summer Night," Matthew Arnold portrays the same human conflict designated by the same sun-moon image. The speaker of the poem tramps a moon-lighted city street, and the moon questions him:

Hast thou then still the old unquiet breast,
Which neither deadens into rest,
Nor ever feels the fiery glow
That whirls the spirit from itself away,
But fluctuates to and fro,
Never by passion quite possessed
And never quite benumbed by the world's sway?  
(11. 27-33)

The moon speaks to the restlessness in man's breast, but, Arnold notes, most men live by the sun. It is significant to note in the next quote that Arnold, too, employs the idea of prison, the idea that the physical body can become a prison for the restless spirit.

For most men in a brazen prison lie,
Where, in the sun's hot eye,
With heads bent o'er their toil, they languidly
Their lives to some unmeaning taskwork give,
Dreaming of nought beyond their prison-wall.
(11. 37-41)

Arnold sees most men enslaved by the sun, by their daily toil. Those that escape the prison fly madly to some unknown goal. The poet uses

19 Full text is given in Appendix A.
an image of a mad helmsman:

With anguished face and flying hair
Grasping the rudder hard,
Still bent to make some port he knows not where,
Still standing for some false, impossible shore.
(ll. 66-69)

The conflict climaxes in the desperate couplet: "Is there no life,
but these alone? / Madman or slave, must man be one?" (ll. 74-75)

But in a calming denouement, the speaker looks at the heavens and
realizes their silent challenge:

But I will rather say that you remain
A world above man's head, to let him see
How boundless might his soul's horizons be,
How vast, yet of what clear transparency!
How it were good to abide there, and breathe free;
How fair a lot to fill
Is left to each man still!
(ll. 86-92)

As we have seen, Cather's use of her image is strikingly
similar to Arnold's. Both Claude and Thea respond to the moonlight;
both live in the sunlight; both have their moon-self languishing in
the prison of their sun-body. Both feel in the stars a call or state­
ment of their destiny. However, Willa Cather's sun is not so dark as
Matthew Arnold's.

The building of America could not be a time of great intel­
lectual interest. Doctor Archie is right when he says an engine-wiper
belongs in Colorado, but a piano teacher does not. So, basically, the
culture Cather is writing about, the culture into which Claude and Thea
are born, is a culture of the sun. A time for pioneers. And the
natural values of Colorado and Nebraska are the values of the sun. At
no point in either novel does Cather demean those values. America
produces healthy crops, and lots of them, and healthy people, and
lots of them. And the song Thea hears unsung is a song of sun on
the prairie and on the desert (pp. 276-277). To be sure, Cather
criticises falsification of the sun's values. A Bayliss, who is
too weak and perhaps too lazy to farm, should not have the right to
call on Gladys Farmer. And Thor Kronborg, for all his great size,
is fit to be nothing but a chauffeur. But because she criticises
falsification does not mean Cather is also criticizing the proper
values of the sun's empire.

Yet there is more to life than eating and sleeping and pro­
creating. And both Claude and Thea are conscious of their second
natures, those buried within them, natures of the moon, that some­
how can give more value to the activities of the sun, for this basi­
cally is what the moon characteristics do. Thea's voice is natural;
it is born in her. It is the moon which inspires her to achieve
something artistic with that voice, instead of simply capitalizing
on it as she sees so many others doing. Claude's integrity and his
bravery are part of the nature instilled in him by his long hard
hours of work. But when he dies, he dies as well for an idea, an
abstraction, La France, and so his dying is not senseless bravery;
it has a purpose and a glory.

The conflict does not go on outside of the protagonists,
though certainly every outer stimulation is used. The conflict goes
on within Claude and Thea. Nor is this conflict limited to them
alone. We shall see that it exists in each of Cather's protagonists,
though only in One of Ours and The Song of the Lark is the sun-moon
image used so extensively.

It is important, however, to state, especially in the light of
Cather's other novels, that both Claude Wheeler and Thea Kronborg are triumphant characters. That is, both Claude and Thea are able to resolve their conflicts successfully. Claude dies a hero's death; Thea achieves artistic triumph. The cynical or perhaps even pessimistic notes that Cather leaves us with are not sufficient to destroy or discolor the achievements of her protagonists, and yet they serve to remind us that Cather realized the shortness of the time when the sun does actually confront the moon. Only a space of minutes and then the orbs glide on, each to rule its own world again. And perhaps she is also intimating what she later expressed with such poignancy in *Lucy Gayheart*, the tragic fact that rarely can such a blend of natures survive, that the exacting world demands one or the other.

*My Ántonia*

Probably more has been written by critics about *My Ántonia* than about any other of Willa Cather's books, and with good reason, for within this novel, the author uses a difficult technique with amazing ease, to produce a book and a character, Antonia, that are unforgettable. There is not really a plot in *My Ántonia*; the book, as stated in the author's Introduction, is meant to be a memoir of Jim Burden, and, indeed, it reads like one. It is a series of pictures, bright and vivid, memorable, interlaced with equally bright, vivid and memorable short stories. The characters exist and have importance not because of what they do, but because of what they are. And the series of pictures of Antonia Shimerda Cusak stay with the reader long after the book is finished. Only in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, does Cather anywhere approach this technique. And there
she is not half so successful.

But the normal critical approach presents difficulties as to the conflict of the novel and the nature of Ántonia, who is usually regarded as the protagonist. David Daiches writes that "the central theme is neither the struggle of the pioneer or the conflict between generations, but the development and self discovery of the heroine."  

Certainly, this is a nebulous theme, and Daiches makes comprehension of it more difficult by continuing: "Her growth, development, and final adjustment is a vast symbolic progress interesting less for what it is than for what it can be made to mean." Daiches explains that Ántonia does not create the character she becomes, but rather that character is created by her environment, an environment, however, that she is not really ever in conflict with. Moreover, he cites the point of view of the novel as one of the main hindrances in understanding this development.

Certainly, the point of view presents problems in any consideration of Ántonia as the protagonist of the novel. For the novel is told from Jim Burden's point of view, and one entire section, "Lena Lingard," is notable for the absence of Ántonia. Another section, "The Pioneer Woman's Story," is another problem, for there Ántonia's story is related through still a further point of view, that of the Widow Steavens, and the effect of this double narration is to push into an almost dreamlike tone what should, according to Daiches' theory, be the climax of Ántonia's development as the earth mother.


21Ibid.
figure, the birth of her first child.

*My* *Antonia* was published in 1918. *The Song of the Lark* was published in 1915, and *One of Ours* in 1922. There were no other novels during these years. It seems highly unlikely that the conflict which is major to the *Lark* and *One of Ours* could have been completely ignored in *Antonia*, which was written midway between the two. Further, we have already established that the twilight image, the confrontation of the sun and the moon, which is so central to the other two novels is indeed reiterated in *Antonia*. And yet, we must agree with Daiches that there is no real conflict within the character of Antonia, or, if there is, it is not one we are privy to by virtue of the very singular point of view. Jim Burden can tell us about Antonia Shimerda Cuzak, but he cannot enter her mind.

I would like to suggest another answer to the problems of protagonist and conflict. John H. Randall, III, writes:

*My* *Antonia* is usually called a novel with a single protagonist—the heroine—and the narrator has been considered relatively unimportant. I would like to suggest a different interpretation, because the role played by Jim Burden seems to me far too important to be merely that of a first-person onlooker who is relating someone else's story... the center of interest shifts back and forth between Jim and Antonia, and the result is best understood as the story of parallel lives.  

Randall uses as evidence for his interpretation the Lena Lingard section of the book and the importance of Jim's reactions to Antonia in "Cuzak's Boys," section five. He concludes:

Although the two lives run parallel and are given almost equally extensive treatment, no doubt is left in the reader's mind that Antonia is the one who has

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achieved the real success. Willa Cather loads the story in Antonia's favor, not only by emphasizing Jim's obvious admiration for her, but by making all the significant action take place in Nebraska; Jim Burden's marriage and Eastern career are mentioned merely in passing.23

The interpretation of parallel but divergent lives running through the novel is, I feel, an accurate interpretation, one that indeed fits the conflict of parallel but diverse selves in Claude Wheeler and Thea Kronborg. Here we have not one, but two protagonists, each representing a separate sphere of activity.

And there is no doubt that Randall is accurate, in his judgment of the success of Antonia and the failure of Jim, according to the later editions of the novel. But there is also no doubt that if the novel is "loaded" in Antonia's favor, then structurally it is badly flawed by the "Lena Lingard" section in which Jim's pursuits are sympathetically portrayed and in which Antonia is hardly mentioned, and in the strange section, "The Pioneer Woman's Story," where we get the second-hand narration of the birth of Antonia's first child. In short, if the novel centers on Antonia, then too much time is spent in it without Antonia. If the novel does deal, as John H. Randall has suggested, with parallel protagonists, then too little time is spent on Jim Burden; the reader is forced to refer to the scanty Introduction for information about the adult Jim. In any case, the critical reader is presented a dilemma.

The dilemma can be solved, however, by a textual comparison of the editions of the novel. In the original 1918 edition, the "Introduction" was approximately twice as long as it was in the 1926

23 Ibid., p. 108.
and subsequent editions. The material halved by Cather from the first edition is, interestingly, all most favorable to Jim Burden.

The function in the novel of the "Introduction" is, obviously to set up a comparison and contrast of Jim and Antonia. In both versions Cather tells us, "More than any other person we remembered, this girl seemed to mean to us the country, the conditions, the whole adventure of our childhood." And in both versions, emphasis is precise in establishing this story of Antonia as one remembered and told by Jim Burden. In fact, in both versions, the "Introduction" moves unhesitatingly to the climax of the titling. Jim's manuscript has no title. First he writes "Antonia." Then he propends the word "My" and is satisfied. The novel is not the story of Antonia; it is the story of Jim Burden's remembrances of Antonia. All perception, all information passes to us through Jim Burden. Nor is Jim an impartial bystander. He is the boy, the student, the middle-aged man who wants Antonia to be anything that a woman can be to a man, but who seems in the 1926 version to be bewildered and awed by her.

The only information given the reader about Jim Burden, that does not come from Jim, is found in the "Introduction." In the 1926 version we learn that Jim is a legal counsel for a Western railway, that he has married a strange woman disliked by the nameless narrator of the "Introduction," that he is romantic, loves the country, and has contributed to its development (though we are not told how), and

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24 A full comparison of the two texts with complete bibliographical information can be found in Appendix B. Unless otherwise noted, simple page references in this section refer to the Library Edition, Vol. 4, published in 1937.
that he has been jotting down notes about Antonia to "amuse" himself on his long cross-country journeys. This is all the information we are given, and obviously, compared to the brilliant picture of Antonia coming up out of the fruit cellar with the whirlwind of children about her, it is a rather weak picture. It is no wonder then that Jim Burden seems to lose the contest with Antonia even before the novel starts.

The problem is that such a weak character must necessarily weaken the novel. Who can believe that a fellow who is only amusing himself on long journeys is going to understand the full power of the character of a woman like Antonia, or further that he would be able to capture the character of the woman who represents his youth, the prairie, the frontier? The Jim Burden who admires and understands Antonia and what she symbolizes cannot be a weak character.

And the Jim Burden of the 1918 version of the novel is not a weak character. Quite the contrary, he is a bustling, energetic man who must contrast strikingly with the aging Antonia at the end of the novel. In the 1918 version, we are told of Jim: "He never seems to me to grow older. His fresh color and sandy hair and quick-changing blue eyes are those of a young man, and his sympathetic, solicitous interest in women is as youthful as it is western and American." Such a description is especially noteworthy as it is the only physical description we ever get of Jim Burden. Further, it shows a growth above and beyond the shy boy who steals a kiss from Antonia and is reprimanded for it, and the still shy student in his first romance, with Lena, to a mature man with a mature attitude toward women.
In the same sense, Jim's marriage is treated more maturely. Instead of simply the narrator's loaded comment about Jim's wife, "... I do not like his wife," the 1918 version gives a capsule sketch of the woman and the history of the marriage.

When Jim was still an obscure young lawyer, struggling to make his way in New York, his career was suddenly advanced by a brilliant marriage. Genevieve Whitney was the only daughter of a distinguished man. Her marriage with young Burden was the subject of sharp comment at the time. It was said she had been brutally jilted by her cousin Rutland Whitney, and that she married this unknown man from the West out of bravado. She was a restless headstrong girl, even then, who liked to astonish her friends. Later, when I knew her, she was always doing something unexpected. She gave one of her town houses for a suffrage headquarters, produced one of her own plays at the Princess Theater, was arrested for picketing during a garment-makers' strike, etc.

This sketch, brief though it may be, is vitally important for the number of correspondences established between Genevieve and Ántonia. In the first place, both are jilted; Genevieve by Rutland, Ántonia by Larry Donovan. Both women then make seemingly pedestrian but successful marriages. Again, there is in Genevieve the same restlessness, self-determination, and, perhaps, stubbornness that is evident in Ántonia in the section entitled "The Hired Girls," when Ántonia, against the wishes of Grandmother Burden and Mrs. Harling, goes to work for the Wick Cutters so that she can continue attending the dances. She is also headstrong in her determination to run away with Larry Donovan. And finally, both Ántonia and Genevieve represent the spirit of growth and progress. Ántonia

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25 E.K. Brown claims this paragraph is completely satiric and, therefore, detracts from Jim's character. *Willa Cather*, pp. 200-201.
obviously represents the settling and peopling of the prairie. Her farm is as much a symbol of the new West as is the whirlwind of children a symbol of the new generation. Genevieve on the other hand, no matter what her enthusiasm for them, is supporting the important causes of the new industrial centers. She supports female equality, strikers' rights, and culture.

A great deal then is lost in Cather's editing from the 1918 to the 1926 versions. Genevieve loses not only her name, but all the personality that makes us believe that Jim Burden would love and marry her. She becomes a useless dilettante, entertaining herself by supporting "a group of young poets and painters of advanced ideas and mediocre ability." Standing alone as it does in the 1926 version, this single trait damns a spoiled woman. However, in the 1918 version, it is one of a list of characteristics and serves more as a rounding trait than a condemning one.

Further, the character of Jim himself takes a beating in the editing. In the 1926 version, he is simply Jim Burden, the nickname connoting an immaturity. In the 1918 version, he is "James Quayle Burden--Jim Burden, as we still call him in the West." He is mature, obviously successful, and yet in the west is familiarly known, has not put on airs. Also, his middle name is noteworthy, for it is a direct and immediate link between him and the West. It means that Jim is not simply an onlooker at the drama of the west; he is rather one of the natural creatures of the west, even as the quail is a prairie creature. Or possibly, Cather was suggesting a parallel between Jim and Bishop William Alfred Quayle, a magnetic leader of the Methodist Church in the Prairie states.
Besides the addition of the physical description, which we have already mentioned, there is in the 1918 version an addition of career information about Jim. Instead of being merely "a legal counsel for a great western railway," with the implication that he is a small frog in a large pond, Jim Burden is a doer, is himself personally responsible for progress. Cather wrote originally:

He is always able to raise capital for new enterprises in Wyoming or Montana, and has helped young men out there to do remarkable things in mines and timber and oil. If a young man with an idea can once get Jim Burden's attention, can manage to accompany him when he goes off into the wilds hunting for lost parks or exploring new canyons, then the money which means action is forthcoming. Jim is still able to lose himself in those big Western dreams. Though he is over forty now, he meets new people and new enterprises with the impulsiveness by which his boyhood friends remember him.

Especially evident in this passage is a contrast between Jim and Antonia. Quite apart from being an onlooker, Jim is an explorer, an adventurer, a pioneer. Beside his actions, Antonia's become sedentary. It is true that she and Anton have carved a farm out of the prairie; it is true that she has had eleven children to help populate that prairie, but, in contrast to Jim, she is a colonist, a settler, not an explorer. Her contribution to life is important. Antonia and her kind develop what has been discovered by the bolder, more restless actions of the Jim Burdens of the world. But Antonia herself is not responsible for any new discoveries, rather she becomes the container and propagator of a culture. This contrast becomes especially meaningful in the section "Cusak's Boys." It is Antonia who has preserved the language and tradition of her ancestors. Her children speak Bohemian; Leo plays the violin that was once Mr. Shimerda's. Jim Burden, on the other hand, promises to take Cusak's.
boys with him on hunting trips. Jim will pass to them the exploring. In short, Antonia represents not only the prairie and its settling, but also the spirit of the cultures that settled there. She has aged, though her eyes are the same, for culture is old, though always youthful. Jim represents the American frontier spirit; he has not aged, for he deals with the continually new.

In the same sense, Jim has not been jotting down notes about Antonia "to amuse" himself. In the 1918 version, he challenges the narrator, who characterizes herself as a woman and a writer, to write Antonia's story, and she returns the challenge. Cather writes:

He rumpled his hair with a quick, excited gesture, which with him often announces a new determination, and I could see that my suggestion took hold of him. "Maybe I will, maybe I will!" he declared. He stared out of the window for a few minutes, and when he turned to me again his eyes had the sudden clearness that comes from something the mind sees.

This is quite different from the 1926 version where Jim promises to show the narrator his manuscript "if it were ever finished." This extraordinary contrast exists to the end of the "Introduction." In the 1918 version Jim "arrives" at the narrator's apartment with "a bulging legal portfolio sheltered under his fur coat." He taps the portfolio "with some pride," and asks to read the narrator's, which consists of only "a few straggling notes." He drinks his tea "all at once" and says, "I didn't arrange or rearrange. I simply wrote down what of herself and myself and other people Antonia's name recalls to me." His parting words are "Read it as soon as you can . . . but don't let it influence your own story."

In contrast, the Jim Burden of the 1926 version is a milque-toast. He simply carries a "legal portfolio"; he asks, "Do you still
want to read it?" and about it he says, "I didn't take the time to
arrange it; I simply wrote down pretty much all that her name recalls
to me."

The titling is the same in both versions. The difference is
that the washed-out Jim Burden of the 1926 version is hardly credible
when he writes "My" before "Antonia." What right has this pale char-
acter to claim possession of Antonia, for Antonia, as we have dis-
cussed, is not simply an interesting character; she is, rather, a
representative of the prairie, the settling of the prairie, and the
cultures brought to that prairie. She can, therefore, properly not
appear in the "Lena Lingard" section, for the university, Gaston
Cleric, and the theater take her place in Jim's life. But the Jim
Burden of the 1918 version is a credible character. He has not written
the story of the life of a woman. He has instead written the story of
the West, and it is his West. His intelligence, his activity, even
his name give him the right to place "My" before "Antonia." Even his
strange wife becomes understandable as she represents in urban centers
what Antonia represents on the prairie.

This duplication, this twinning of character, is evident in
the structure of the novel. My Antonia is divided into five parts,
besides the Introduction. They are: The Shimerdas, The Hired Girls,
Lena Lingard, The Pioneer Woman's Story and Cusak's Boys. They in-
volve a time sequence of about thirty years in the lives of the pro-
tagonists. The first section deals with childhood; the second with
puberty and the problems arising out of growing maturity. Part Three,
Lena Lingard, belongs exclusively to Jim. It is the story of his
intellectual awakening, of the circumstances that make him Jim Burden.
Part Four is, for the most part Antonia's, even though it is told second hand. It is the story of the ultimate maturation of her character as she begins, like Jim, to lead the life that belongs exclusively to her. The two characters confront each other at the end of Part Four, but they are already worlds apart. And they must go their own ways. Part Five, "Cuzak's Boys," shows, not the reuniting of two friends, but rather the amalgamation of the poles of their characters in the persons of Antonia's children.

Their polarities are present in the twilight image.

As we walked homeward across the fields, the sun dropped and lay like a great golden globe in the low west. While it hung there, the moon rose in the east, as big as a cart-wheel, pale silver and streaked with rose colour, thin as a bubble, or a ghost-moon. For five, perhaps ten minutes, the two luminaries confronted each other across the level land, resting on opposite edges of the world. (pp. 321-22)

As the sun and the moon confront each other, meeting congenially for a few moments before they pass on, each to its own sphere, so Jim and Antonia confront each other in this scene. Antonia has come from the fields; Jim, from Harvard. They meet for a few minutes, drawn to the one patch of unclaimed and unclaimable prairie, Mr. Shimerda's grave, where the red grass still grows wild. And then they "reached the edge of the fields, where our ways parted" (p. 322). Like the sun and the moon, Jim and Antonia go off into their respective spheres of influence, and it will be twenty years before the twilight scene is repeated.

The question here, as in One of Ours, is which character is the sun and which the moon. In One of Ours, there is no doubt that Claude, vigorous, stubborn and restless, is, at the moment of his confrontation with Ernest Havel, the sun. He represents the strength and
power of the American prairie. And Ernest Havel, who contends that nothing can happen to a person except in his mind, is represented by the moon, the intangible and abstract sphere of influence. It would be tempting, then, since we are again presented with an American and a bohemian, to allocate the images in the same way, but it would also, I firmly believe, be a too hasty allocation.

In fact, in *My Antonia*, the image is, so to speak, reversed. It is the Bohemian, Antonia, who is represented by the sun, and the American, Jim, who is represented by the moon. In *Antonia*, it is Antonia who personifies the physical powers and virtues of the prairie, and Jim who personifies the nuances of the abstract. When the two protagonists part, they each move into their own environment, each to become a successful and powerful influence on that environment. Antonia becomes the "rich mine of life" (p. 353), Jim remains "able to lose himself in those big Western dreams" (1918, p. xi). Actually, we should not be surprised at the wide divergence of their paths. Cather has carefully related the history of their growth in plot and image.

The two protagonists begin equally new to a new country. They move into time for their initiation into adulthood, represented quite obviously by their equal growing awareness and response to sex. Antonia defies convention in order to attend the dances; she is drawn to her natural sphere which insists, instinctively, that for her sex is more important than civilization, so that she eschews the Burdens' and Harlings' houses to attend the dances. Jim, however, is disgusted with the first results of Antonia's appetite and vigor, the abortive attempt of Wick Cutter to rape the young woman. The next two sections
of the novel, "Lena Lingard" and "The Pioneer Woman's Story," divide between the protagonists. Lena Lingard is the story of Jim's intellectual growth, and here we find that he indeed is aware of his civilization and the conventions of that civilization; he settles down to a life bordering on dream. Antonia's story, to the contrary, is the story of her reaffirming her kinship with the physical, uncerebral part of life; she bears her child alone and without a sound, as a cat might litter. The final section, bringing back together again these opposed protagonists, serves mainly to show how they complement each other.

The images, the sharply vivid pictures, Cather seeds so carefully through the novel give proof of the variety of her protagonists. For although both characters are initially associated with the cave, Antonia remains associated with it; she grows out of it, takes root from that cave, and Cather designates this growth with the image of the tree. Jim, on the other hand, frees himself of the cave. The two images associated with him can be labeled hieroglyphics and movement or freedom.

In the first section, "The Shimerdas," Cather places both her protagonists underground. Antonia lives in a dugout; further, she and her sister Yulka sleep in a second cave within the first. Jim, similarly, spends a great deal of his time in the Burden's kitchen, a cellar. This is the cave image we have seen already in The Song of the Lark and One of Ours. It represents here, as it does in the other novels, the privacy of the mind of the character and also, I believe, the buried qualities particular to that mind and that character. It is significant then to observe the various reactions of the protagonists
to their environment. Jim's reaction is one of excitement. During the severe blizzard, when the Burdens' are forced completely underground, even to tunneling through the snow to do their chores, Jim sees adventure.

The basement kitchen seemed heavenly safe and warm in those days—like a tight little boat in a winter sea. The men were out in the fields all day, husking corn, and when they came in at noon, with long caps pulled down over their ears and their feet in red-lined overshoes, I used to think they were like Arctic explorers. In the afternoons, when grandmother sat upstairs darning, or making husking-gloves, I read 'The Swiss Family Robinson' aloud to her, and I felt that the Swiss family had no advantages over us in the way of an adventurous life. (pp. 65-66)

The boat image will turn up again later, when Jim is older. The Swiss Family Robinson is exchanged for Robinson Crusoe on the night of Mr. Shimerda's suicide, when Jim is alone in the house. And that morning, before Jim has been informed of the suicide, but once he realizes something extraordinary has happened, he gets up with delight. "I looked forward to any new crises." Jim is a romantic. And his life is a constant adventure. Even within the confines of his cave, he seeks and sees adventure. Antonia does not. She likens her cave to a badger hole (p. 75). And Jim likens the Shimerdas' tolerance of Krajikek to the prairie dogs' and brown owls' tolerance of the rattlesnakes that inhabit their holes and feed on their young because "they did not know how to get rid of him" (p. 32). Antonia in her cave is not a prisoner; she is like an animal in her natural burrow. Neither Jim nor Antonia struggles against these early caves. But Jim does look beyond, sees the men who go out from the cave as explorers. Antonia is content within hers. She simply waits for the hibernation, the winter season, to be over. Then, indeed, both chil-
dren come out of the cave, but with a difference; Antonia grows out of hers; her roots never leave it; she becomes the tree growing from the earth.

Early in the novel, Cather establishes the importance of trees on the prairie. First she says: "The little trees were insignificant against the grass. It seemed as if the grass were about to run over them. . . ." (p. 15). And then she says:

Trees were so rare in that country, and they had to make such a hard fight to grow, that we used to feel anxious about them, and visit them as if they were persons. It must have been the scarcity of detail in that tawny landscape that made detail so precious. (p. 29)

Antonia is again and again given the coloring of trees. Her hair and eyes are dark; her arms and legs are brown; her cheeks are plum-colored (pp. 5, 23, 153). Her eyes, especially, are described as "big and warm and full of light, like the sun shining on brown pools in the wood" (p. 23). And in one of the most magnificent of the series of pictures Cather gives us of Antonia, the young woman is definitely associated with a hardy tree. She strides across the fields to talk to Jim.

She wore the boots her father had so thoughtfully taken off before he shot himself, and his old fur cap. Her outgrown cotton dress switched about her calves, over the boot-tops. She kept her sleeves rolled up all day, and her arms and throat were burned as brown as a sailor's. Her neck came up strongly out of her shoulders, like the bole of a tree out of the turf. One sees that draught-horse neck among the peasant women in all old countries. (p. 122)

The greatest treasure the Shimerdas have brought with them from Bohemia, the treasure they vainly attempt to share with the Burdens, comes from the forest of the old country. Before Grandmother Burden throws the mushrooms, "that looked like the shavings of some root," into the fire, Jim takes a bite of one. He reports:
I never forgot the strange taste; though it was many years before I knew that those little brown shavings, which the Shimerdas had brought so far and treasured so jealously, were dried mushrooms. They had been gathered, probably, in some deep Bohemian forest. . . . (p. 79)

And when Antonia reminisces about Bohemia, she poignantly remembers the forest. "My feet remember all the little paths through the woods, and where the big roots stick out to trip you. I ain't never forgot my own country" (p. 238). The Antonia Jim returns to find, after an absence of twenty years, is still like a tree. "Whatever else was gone, Antonia had not lost the fire of life. Her skin, so brown and hardened, had not that look of flabbiness, as if the sap beneath it had been secretly drawn away" (p. 336). She is not lovely any more; her skin is like bark. But the sap is still running high. Her kinship is further noticed in her attitude toward her apple orchard.

Antonia kept stopping to tell me about one tree and another. 'I love them as if they were people,' she said, rubbing her hand over the bark. 'There wasn't a tree here when we first came. We planted every one, and used to carry water for them too--after we'd been working in the fields all day. Anton, he was a city man, and he used to get discouraged. But I couldn't feel so tired that I wouldn't fret about these trees when there was a dry time. They were on my mind like children.' (p. 340)

And Jim states: "There was the deepest peace in that orchard" (p. 341). Like her trees, Antonia's roots go down deeply into the rich soil of Nebraska. Like her trees, she rises strong and hardy on the prairie. She is part of the reason for the change in the face of the prairie: orchards, homes, barns, fields, where once there was only the long red grass. And like her trees, Antonia is fruitful.

The most famous of all descriptions in My Antonia, and justly so, for Cather has combined emotion, artistry and economy in its con-
struction, is the picture of the children exiting from the fruit cellar.

We turned to leave the cave; Antonia and I went up the stairs first, and the children waited. We were standing outside talking, when they all came running up the steps together, big and little, tow heads and gold heads and brown, and flashing little naked legs; a veritable explosion of life out of a dark cave into the sunlight. It made me dizzy for a moment. (pp. 338-339)

There is no doubt that Antonia has become the symbol of the prairie, not just the old wild prairie, but also, very importantly, the new, tilled and fertile, productive prairie. At the end of Section Four, Jim has gazed on the face of the prairie and the face of Antonia.

The old pasture land was now being broken up into wheat-fields and cornfields, the red grass was disappearing, and the whole face of the country was changing... all the human effort that had gone into it was coming back in long, sweeping lines of fertility. The changes seemed beautiful and harmonious to me; it was like watching the growth of a great man or of a great idea. I recognized every tree and sandbank and rugged draw. I found that I remembered the conformation of the land as one remembers the modelling of human faces. (p. 306)

To Antonia he says:

'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. The idea of you is a part of my mind; you influence my likes and dislikes, all my tastes, hundreds of times when I don't realize it. You really are a part of me.' (p. 321)

And as they pause, confronting each other like the sun and the moon, Jim again feels the attraction of the prairie, "the old pull of the earth, the solemn magic that comes out of those fields at nightfall" (p. 322). The section begins with Jim gazing upon the changing face of the prairie; it ends with his gazing upon the changing face of Antonia: "... the closest, realest face, under all the shadows of women's faces, at the very bottom of my memory" (p. 322).

The two images, the tree and the prairie bear a great deal in
common, and a great deal in common with Antonia. The beginnings of all three are inauspicious; the trees are insignificant details of the prairie, that is, overlookable; the prairie is wild and uncultivated, and so is Antonia. But, by the end of the novel, all three have born fruit. Antonia, therefore, symbolizes this very real physical growth. She is not intellectual; she has not grown intellectually; indeed, she has forgotten a great deal of the English Jim once taught her, but her worth, her value, is noted by Jim and by the readers.

All the strong things of her heart came out in her body, that had been so tireless in serving generous emotions.

It was no wonder that her sons stood tall and straight. She was a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races. (p. 353)

Jim would like to be somehow related to Antonia, but because he wishes it does not mean that such a relationship is possible. Yet, paradoxically, Jim's relationship with Antonia is closer than any blood or marriage kinship could ever be, for they are each other's alter egos.

David Daiches suggests the proper interpretation of the character of Jim Burden.

For all her devotion to her father's memory, Mr. Shimerda's mantle does not fall on Antonia, but rather on Jim, who responds to the suggestion of a rich European culture lying behind his melancholy. This is the first of a series of influences that lead him eventually to the university and a professional career in the East, yet in a profound if indirect way it draws him closer to Antonia.

Twice before his death, Mr. Shimerda has paid particular attention to Jim. In the first instance, he asks Jim to teach Antonia English, gazing with an earnestness at the boy who becomes embarrassed because he is "used to being taken for granted by my elders." The second

instance, the memorable Christmas Day, when Mr. Shimerda has knelt before the Burden's Protestant Christmas Tree, Mr. Shimerda looks at Jim "as if he were looking far ahead into the future" (p. 87), and before he leaves he signs the boy with the cross. After his death, the spirit of Mr. Shimerda becomes a friendly companion in the long, solitary and snowy night; Jim thinks about Mr. Shimerda's early life in Bohemia and remembers, "Such vivid pictures came to me that they might have been Mr. Shimerda's memories not yet faded out from the air in which they had haunted him" (p. 102). Jim's valedictory is dedicated to Mr. Shimerda.

Where Antonia is successful in settling, farming, and peopling the prairie, her father is a tragic failure. He simply does not belong on the prairie. He is a man accustomed to the city, to music and culture, to long conversations with good friends. The only part of the prairie that ever, in any sense of the word, belongs to Mr. Shimerda is the plot of his grave, and there the red grass grows, long after the rest is tilled and productive. There, too, Jim feels at home (pp. 319-320). And significantly, after Jim leaves the Cuzak farm to revisit Black Hawk, he searches out another plot of untilled prairie.

I took a long walk north of the town, out into the pastures where the land was so rough that it had never been ploughed up, and the long red grass of early times still grew shaggy over the draws and hillocks. Out there I felt at home again. (pp. 369-370)

The fact of the matter is that neither Jim nor Mr. Shimerda are farmers; they are not comfortable in the work and environment Antonia thrives on. They are dreamers, mystics, and though Mr. Shimerda is forced to a tragic suicide with the knowledge that he has bound himself to his crude and
fertile wife and the crude and fertile prairie, Jim is able to free himself.

From the earliest pages of the novel, Jim is associated with motion, with free motion. The initial trip from Black Hawk to the Burden farmstead cuts off all the relationships and memories and customs the boy has ever been subjected to.

I had the feeling that the world was left behind, that we had got over the edge of it, and were outside man's jurisdiction. . . . I don't think I was homesick. If we never arrived anywhere, it did not matter. Between that earth and that sky I felt erased, blotted out. I did not say my prayers that night; here, I felt what would be would be. (pp. 7-8)

And initially the prairie, uncut and untamed, with the incessant motion of the wind through the grass, represents that same freedom and motion to Jim. "And there was so much motion in it; the whole country seemed, somehow, to be running" (p. 15).

Perhaps the glide of long railway travel was still with me, for more than anything else I felt motion in the landscape; in the fresh, easy-blowing morning wind, and in the earth itself, as if the shaggy grass were a sort of loose hide, and underneath it herds of wild buffalo were galloping, galloping. . . (p. 16)

Jim responds to this sense of freedom.

I wanted to walk straight on through the red grass and over the edge of the world, which could not be very far away. The light air told me that the world ended here: only the ground and sun and sky were left, and if one went a little farther there would be only sun and sky, and one would float off into them, like the tawny hawks which sailed over our heads making slow shadows on the grass. (p. 16)

And:

I could hardly wait to see what lay beyond that cornfield; but there was only red grass like ours, and nothing else, though from the high wagon-seat one could look off a long way. The road ran about like a wild thing, avoiding the deep draws, crossing them where they
were wide and shallow. And all along it, wherever it looped or ran, the sunflowers grew; some of them were as big as little trees, with great rough leaves and many branches which bore dozens of blossoms. They made a gold ribbon across the prairie. (p. 19)

The sunflower-bordered roads become for Jim "the roads to freedom" (p. 29), and when he is forced to give them up when the Burdens move to Black Hawk, the river becomes his symbol of freedom (p. 145). The "tight little boat in a winter sea" changes for Jim into an explorer’s craft. And as Jim leaves his cave, he leaves it for exploration. He and Antonia witness a storm, the description of which is reminiscent of Thomas Hardy’s powers.

Half the sky was chequered with black thunderheads, but all the west was luminous and clear: in the lightning flashes it looked like deep blue water, with the sheen of moonlight on it; and the mottle part of the sky was like marble pavement, like the quay of some splendid seacoast city, doomed to destruction. Great warm splashes of rain fell on our upturned faces. One black cloud, no bigger than a little boat, drifted out into the clear space unattended, and kept moving westward. (p. 139)

The boat is symbolic of Jim, who also keeps moving westward. Jim, who explores new parks and canyons, Jim, who does not settle and found a race, but who is able to understand the significance of the woman who does.

The motion and freedom associated with Jim are not only the motion and freedom of physical exploration; they are also intellectual motion and freedom. Again and again, throughout the novel, Jim is presented with hieroglyphics, with strange patterns drawn in the face of the land and the face of the people, and he tries to understand these as he tries to understand Virgil. We have already commented on his studying of Antonia’s face; when he visits her after the twenty
year separation, he is able to read beneath the physical changes, the greying hair, the wrinkled skin, the toothless mouth, and the sunken chest, to the truth of Antonia, to her immense capacity for human life. The railroad conductor who takes Jim and Jake west wears "rings and pins and badges of the different fraternal orders to which he belonged. Even his cuff-buttons were engraved with hieroglyphics, and he was more inscribed than an Egyptian obelisk" (p. 4). Otto Fuchs appears to Jim like Jesse James, primarily because of his scars.

He looked lively and ferocious, I thought, and as if he had a history. A long scar ran across one cheek and drew the corner of his mouth up in a sinister curl. The top of his left ear was gone, and his skin was brown as an Indian's. Surely this was the face of a desperado. (p. 6)

Language is an important part of this image. Grandfather Burden reads the Scriptures:

'He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom He loved. Selah.' I had no idea what the word meant; perhaps he had not. But, as he uttered it, it became oracular, the most sacred of words. (p. 13)

In Black Hawk when Antonia is discovering the dances and Larry Donovan, Jim is beginning to be able to read the patterns he finds.

The pale, cold light of the winter sunset did not beautify—it was like the light of truth itself. When the smoky clouds hung low in the west and the red sun went down behind them, leaving a pink flush on the snow roofs and the blue drifts, then the wind sprang up afresh, with a kind of bitter song, as if he said: 'This is reality, whether you like it or not. All those frivolities of summer, the light and shadow, the living mask of green that trembled over everything, they were lies, and this is what was underneath. This is the truth.' It was as if we were being punished for loving the loveliness of summer. (p. 173)

Jim realizes that the country girls, Antonia, Tiny, Lena, and the others do not fit the respectability of Black Hawk because they clash with the prescribed pattern: "Their beauty shone out too boldly
against a conventional pattern" (p. 201). And yet, he also recognizes that the conventional pattern is a lifeless ugly thing.

People's speech, their voices, their very glances, became furtive and repressed. Every individual taste, every natural appetite, was bridled by caution. The people asleep in those houses, I thought, tried to live like the mice in their own kitchens; to make no noise, to leave no trace, to slip over the surface of things in the dark. The growing piles of ashes and cinders in the back yards were the only evidence that the wasteful, consuming process of life went on at all. (pp. 219-220)

Ironically, it is Jim, who comprehends the ugliness of the social pattern, who gives into it in Section Three, "The Hired Girls," and Antonia who seems to escape it. Jim says: "Disapprobation hurt me, I found—even that of people whom I did not admire" (p. 228). And because it does, he gives up attending the dances at the Fireman's Hall, and sits at home, with his grandparents, studying Latin. Antonia, on the other hand, chooses this same time to break away from the conventions of Grandmother Burden and Mrs. Harling and go to work in the notorious Wick Cutter's house just so she can be free to attend the dances and be attended by her young men. But paradoxically, it is Antonia, who breaks convention, who fulfills herself within the norms of society, and Jim, who adheres to convention, who becomes the explorer. The solution to the paradox is, I believe, implied in the forms the respective freedoms take. Antonia's freedom is a physical one, and its very nature, sexual expression, and result, an illegitimate child, force Antonia back into society. She becomes determined to give her child advantages she never had (pp. 320-321) and that automatically involves her in human convention.

Jim, on the other hand, trades physical freedom for intellectual freedom, and so he is able to maintain his freedom. The shift is ex-
plicit in a duplication of hieroglyphic images. As a boy, Jim gazes out at his first Nebraska snowfall:

Beyond the pond, on a slope that climbed to the cornfields, there was, faintly marked in the grass, a great circle where the Indians used to ride. . . . whenever one looked at this slope against the setting sun, the circle showed like a pattern in the grass; and this morning, when the first light spray of snow lay over it, it came out with wonderful distinctness, like strokes of Chinese white on canvas. (p. 62)

And years later Gaston Cleric, the "clouded, obscure, elliptical" poet-teacher who so influences Jim, "could bring the drama of antique life before one out of the shadows—white figures against a blue background" (p. 261).

One of the most important groups of images in the novel is that of the Garden of Eden. John H. Randall has established that Nebraska, as described by Cather, is a garden. And Jim's battle with the sluggish and overgrown rattlesnake in prairie dog town is recorded as a battle with the forces of evil. Jim remembers: "He seemed like the ancient, eldest Evil" (p. 47). But later he realizes "it was a mock adventure" (p. 49); he has not succeeded in destroying the renowned Serpent. The Christmas Tree is a curious addition to this image. Jake cuts it, and Otto Fuchs, who looks like a desperado, produces golden images from his trunk to decorate it. It becomes a strange collection of Catholic and Protestant myths.

There was a bleeding heart, in tufts of paper lace; there were the three kings, gorgeously appareled, and the ox and the ass and the shepherds; there was the Baby in the manger, and a group of angels, singing; there were camels and leopards, held by the black slaves of the three kings. Our tree became the talking tree of the fairy tale; legends

27 The Landscape and the Looking Glass, pp. 138-149.
and stories nestled like birds in its branches. Grandmother said it reminded her of the Tree of Knowledge. (p. 83)

And, before this tree, Mr. Shimerda kneels, crosses himself, and prays. Jim says: "There had been nothing strange about the tree before, but now, with some one kneeling before it--images, candles ..." (p. 87). The tree, as an image, has been quite definitely associated with Antonia; we cannot, therefore conscientiously ignore this very moving addition to that image. And this Christmas Tree is called the Tree of Knowledge, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, from which the serpent tempted Eve, and Eve tempted Adam, the cause of man's Fall from the Garden to a life where he must earn his food by the sweat of his brow and his woman must suffer the pains of childbirth. Certainly, such an interpretation fits Antonia. She does learn what good and evil are; she transgresses, and she suffers in childbirth. She is Eve, the founder of all races. Jim has not been able to destroy the evil in the garden; it lurks, waiting for Antonia.

And yet Mr. Shimerda worships before this Tree of Knowledge, and Jim adores Antonia, as indeed every reader does. It is not an adoration of evil; it is rather an adoration of the greatness of her humanity. Antonia is rare and rich because she does fall and from her fall comes her fulfillment. She has lived the human experience with a capacity that neither Jim nor Mr. Shimerda has; they are not so human. In fact, so far as is recorded in the novel, neither of them earns his bread with the sweat of his brow. Mr. Shimerda commits suicide because he cannot face the rigors of the prairie life; Jim becomes a lawyer and an explorer, who does not age and who is not
involved with the griefs and joys of family life.

E.K. Crown suggests that the great flaw of the novel is in the character of the narrator. He claims that Jim becomes a failure because he marries neither Antonia nor Lena Lingard, and in this neglect he commits himself to the prudery of the Black Hawk families who refuse to let their "American" sons marry the hired girls, who are physically—at any rate—superior to the American girls. First of all, I would like to point out that Jim never does have a chance to marry Antonia. When he begs a kiss and gives it with more fervor than a mere friend should, he is reprimanded by Antonia who tells him that he is to get an education and make something of himself. It is also dubious that Jim could have persuaded Lena to even consider marriage. She insists that she is going to remain single all her life, and she in fact does. To be sure, Jim could have pressed his suit for her more vigorously than he does; we can hardly credit him with even the smallest effort. But, I think, there is a simple explanation for Jim's not marrying one of the hired girls. Quite simply, his life does not match theirs. They are creatures concerned with husbands and babies, with physical human relationships. Jim is not such a creature. He has been awakened by knowledge.

Higher up, in the utter clarity of the western slope, the evening star hung like a lamp suspended by silver chains—like the lamp engraved upon the title-page of old Latin texts, which is always appearing in new heavens, and waking new desires in men. (p. 263)

Jim's desire for knowledge is not a desire he could readily share with Antonia or Lena or any of the hired girls whose desires are simpler,
more basic. And Jim is chained to his desire for knowledge.

A marriage between Jim Burden and any of the hired girls would have tragic overtones, even as the marriage of Antonia and Anton Cusak for all its whirlwind of children, has tragic overtones.

One of the most interesting occurrences in the novel is the curious repetition of names. We have Antonia Shimerda, Anton Jelinek and Anton Cusak. As this is not usual to Cather's art and is, indeed, most confusing, it would seem to have a purpose. Obviously, the function of duplicated names is to draw comparisons between those characters who have similar names. Anton Jelinek is a large robust character who proudly wears a "wolfskin" coat made of the skins of coyotes he himself has shot. He appears like a miracle at the Burden household immediately following the death of Mr. Shimerda. He clears a road through the snow, is polite to Grandmother Burden, and in various speeches explains that he is learning English with the children and that he believes, almost superstitiously, in the powers of prayer for the dead and the power of the consecrated host. He is strong, capable of taming his environment, and he is simple and childlike in his faiths. It is Anton Jelinek who comes to the rescue of the Shimerdas.

Shortly before Mr. Shimerda's suicide, the old man has been present at the death of Russian Pavel. During that attendance, he has heard the dying man mutter out the horrifying story of how he and Russian Peter fed the bride to the wolves. David Daiches says of this episode: "This is a remarkable little inset story, but its relation to the novel as a whole is somewhat uncertain." I beg to differ with

Mr. Daiches. Pavel and Peter have not been able to escape their wolves, their past, not even by emigrating half-way around the world. When the story of their deed can no longer run in gossip and rumor before them, they carry it within themselves, becoming their own tormentors. Mr. Shimerda can't outrun his wolves either. His past which unfits him for life on the prairie haunts him until he is driven to suicide.

But Anton Jelinek wears a wolfskin coat. He has slain his wolves, and because he has, he is able to function in his new environment. This is one side of Antonia's character, for she, too, slays her wolves. She does not hide her baby; she is proud of it. She is strong and capable, but withal she has a childlike and believing nature.

Anton Cuzak, on the other hand, is utterly unlike his cousin Jelinek. Jim describes him: "He looked like a humorous philosopher who had hitched up one shoulder under the burdens of life, and gone on his way having a good time when he could" (p. 356). He goes off to the city on a holiday and dances with the girls, and he is surprised when he returns home to find he has so large a family. And yet good times, especially since his marriage to Antonia, have been few and far between for Anton Cuzak, for he has been yoked to a hard life; indeed Cather describes him quite specifically as Antonia's "yoke-mate" who looks sideways at people, not from "duplicit or secretiveness, but merely long habit, as with the horse" (p. 358). Nevertheless, Jim is drawn to the whimsical Cuzak, but he also realizes Cuzak does not belong on the farm. Jim's observations are worth quoting in full:
He was still, as Antonia said, a city man. He liked theatres and lighted streets and music and a game of dominoes after the day's work was over. His sociability was stronger than his acquisitive instinct. He liked to live day by day and night by night, sharing in the excitement of the crowd. —Yet his wife had managed to hold him here on a farm, in one of the loneliest countries in the world.

I could see the little chap, sitting here every evening by the windmill, nursing his pipe and listening to the silence; the wheeze of the pump, the grunting of the pigs, an occasional squawking when the hens were disturbed by a rat. It did rather seem to me that Cusak had been made the instrument of Antonia's special mission. This was a fine life, certainly, but it wasn't the kind of life he had wanted to live. I wondered whether the life that was right for one was ever right for two! (pp. 366-367)

Wheezings, gruntings, squawkings, pigs and rats are not usually considered when the pastoral delights are proclaimed. There is a part of farm life, the loneliness, the backbreaking routine manual labor, the absence of the civilizing frills of the city that can and does brutalize its people. Antonia is not brutalized, nor is Anton. But Antonia is limited and so is the husband she keeps at her side, yoked to her. There is a realism in those two paragraphs that cannot be discounted. Cather is quite definitely establishing Antonia's way of life as one of the possible ways, not the only way, and as a way that has its limitations as well as its virtues.

But it does not seem to me that Anton Cusak exists only in antithesis to Antonia and to Anton Jelinek. Rather, Anton Cusak is an embodiment of that part of Antonia that she has buried, the part that was most like her father. Jim describes the girl who danced that summer in Black Hawk.

When you spun out into 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. She taught me to dance against
and around the hard-and-fast beat of the music. If, in-
stead 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 Antonia's life might have been! (p. 223)

And if Jim had married Antonia or any other of the hired girls, how
different his life would have been; he would have been forced to sub-
ordinate his learning, his intellectual freedom, to the necessities
of the human struggle.

In Claude Wheeler and Thea Kronborg we have two protagonists
who achieve what success they have from a merging of the different
aspects of their personality. In Jim Burden and Antonia Shimerda we
have two protagonists who achieve what success they have in life from
the development of one side of their natures. It is an interesting
comparison because Antonia and Jim, though they have the same begin-
nings, develop the opposite sides of their characters. Jim develops
the intellectual; Antonia the physical or human. And they confront
each other in the next generation, in Antonia's children. Antonia
has taught the children their human virtues and values, Jim will take
them hunting and exploring and so open his freer, more spiritual
world to them.

The most unusual fact about the novel, *My Antonia*, is that
it is the character of Antonia, the child of the sun, who so captures
the imaginations of critics and readers, for it is normal to applaud
most heartily the character who rises above the merely human to the
philosophical, as Jim does. There are, perhaps, a number of reasons
for our wholehearted approval of the character who represents the
flesh, as opposed to the spirit. First, Willa Cather has, without a
doubt, extolled Antonia's virtues. The woman is made appealing and
heroic. Throughout the novel her beauty, her health, her children present a picture that is appealing simply because it is natural. A healthy productive animal is always a source of inspiration. Second, and perhaps more important, the use of Jim Burden as narrator presents some very real difficulties to us. For one, the only picture we get of Jim in the entire novel is in the "Introduction." We are kept in his mind, unable to see him; consequently it is easy to forget that he too with his blondness and his perennial youth is an attractive human being. Of course, if we are working with the contrast between the mental and the physical, as I have attempted to prove we are, then Cather is correct in presenting Antonia's physical virtues as opposed to Jim's mental ones. But it is an unfortunate presentation. It is like comparing a lioness with a chemical formula. Further, Jim is the narrator, and it is easy to forget that the observations and judgments in the book are Jim's and not just Willa Cather's. We tend to berate Jim for his shortsightedness and forget his perceptions. But it is Jim who tells the story of Coronado dying brokenhearted in the wilderness because he has not found his seven cities of gold; and it is Jim who describes the silhouetting of the plow against the sun, the ironical image which suggests that Coronado did not understand that the gold to be found was fertility, grain and children. It is Jim who creates, through his judgments, our dislike of Black Hawk standards; and it is Jim who sees and portrays the virtues of Antonia that we fall in love with. Jim Burden is a very real and important part of the novel; he is not interchangeable or dispensible as E. K. Brown claims. The Antonia we love is first of all Jim's Antonia; he claims her when he writes "My" on the face of his manuscript. It is regrettable that
the nature of the structure of the novel does not allow him his proper credit as a protagonist who matches Antonia.

Perhaps Jim Burden's final observation in My Antonia, and Willa Cather's, is that the life that fits one person rarely fits two. One person's fulfillment is rarely adequate for a second person. In The Song of the Lark and One of Ours, Cather shows the need for an individual's blending the two sides of his character, the human and the intellectual. Yet in both cases, she hints at tragedy following such a blend. In My Antonia, where both protagonists subordinate one side of their character, Jim the human and Antonia the intellectual, we have her most affirmative, triumphant book. Other of her novels, however, show the tragedy of such subordination. Her first two novels especially show the tragedy inherent in the protagonist who denies his second self.

**O Pioneers! and Alexander's Bridge**

At first glance, O Pioneers! would appear to be another, or rather the first, telling of My Antonia. There are many correspondences between Alexandra and Antonia: both are immigrant girls and pioneer women; both are concerned with and seemingly successful in proving the fertility of the prairie; both appear to be surrounded by lesser men. But, despite their similarities, Antonia and Alexandra are fundamentally quite different characters, for Antonia is a fulfilled, essentially triumphant heroine, and Alexandra is a tragic figure.

In titling an article written for The Colophon, Willa Cather

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30 "My First Novels (There Were Two)," *The Colophon*, part 6, no. 4 (June, 1931), p. 21.
herself said of her first novels that "there were two." What she did not say was that the first novels— *Alexander's Bridge* and *O Pioneers!*—are as closely linked as brother and sister. Alexandra Bergson and Bartley Alexander, names echoing each other, their initials— A. B. and B. A.—simply reversals of each other, share equally their characterization. The similarity of names seems to be no accident; E. K. Brown says that the early short story version of *O Pioneers!* was entitled "Alexandra." The similarities of the two Alexanders are numerous. Both are conquerors, true to the name they bear in common. Bartley conquers rivers; Alexandra, the prairie. Both, like Alexander the Great, are youthful conquerors, and both face tragedy that prevents their conquering the world. The tragedy of Bartley, perhaps because it involves his death, is well understood; Alexandra's, on the other hand, has often been overlooked, but she is no less tragic because she does not die. Indeed, she may be more tragic, because she lives to face and understand the absolute wasting of her life, the loss of her friend, her brother, her reason for living, and her sentence to spend the rest of her life with the lesser figures of Oscar and Lou and the passionless marriage to Carl Linstrum.

The full human struggle portrayed in *Thea Kronborg* and *Claude Wheeler* is sheared in half for the double protagonists, Jim and Antonia. Likewise, Bartley Alexander and Alexandra Bergson are the two sides to the coin of human nature. Both Alexanders are faced with the duality of themselves; both cultivate one self of the two lodged in their

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beings and bury the second self; and in both cases, the inability to resolve the struggle between the selves is responsible for the tragic fates of the protagonists. This initial view of Cather's of the primary conflict of the human being is an essentially tragic view. Interestingly, it is the view she returns to, as we shall see later, in the cynical and pessimistic novels of the twenties. Only in her histories is she later able to suggest some sort of reconciliation between the selves, and that later reconciliation is forced at best. Her final novels, *Lucy Gayheart* and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* return to the tragic irreconcilable view. Therefore, in examining Cather's first two novels, the sibling novels, we are examining what we can call her fundamental philosophy of the human conflict.

There are vestiges in both *Alexander's Bridge* and *O Pioneers!* of what developed into the sun-moon image we have already observed; both Alexander and Alexandra are blond; there are scenes of sunsets and moon glows; there are echoes of cornfields and dreams. But the image is not set and is often contradictory. Cather seemed still unsure of her control of images. The duality, therefore, is, perhaps, better understood in these novels if we draw into our discussion Walt Whitman's poem *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking*. That Cather had read and responded to Whitman's poetry is obvious in the exact titling of the novel *O Pioneers!* And in her first two novels

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32 This title, of course, is drawn from Whitman's very popular poem, "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" The only critical reference to this titling that I have been able to find is a parenthetical notation by David Daiches, *Willa Cather: A Critical Introduction*, p. 81. It is difficult to believe that so strong a clue to influences on a novelist could have been so thoroughly disregarded, but that seems to be the case here.
the two selves struggling within the protagonists can be called life and death. In Whitman's poem, the child, fledgling poet, watching beside the nest of the mocking birds while the male croons to his disappeared mate, hears over and over again the word love. Then he turns to the sea, and listening and straining, he makes out in the lisping of the waves, the second word, the "delicious word death."

Which I do not forget,
But fuse the song of my dusky demon and brother,
That he sang to me in the moonlight on Paumanok's gray beach,
With the thousand responsive songs at random,
My own songs awaked from that hour,
And with them the key, the word up from the waves. 33
The words of the sweetest song and all songs. . . .

3artley Alexander is a conqueror of rivers; he builds bridges to span them. When he builds his first bridge and in the process falls in love with Winifred, he cannot sleep, but walks the night.

... because, for the first time since the hills were hung with moonlight, there was a lover in the world.
And always there was the sound of the rushing water underneath, the sound which, more than anything else, meant death; the wearing away of things under the impact of physical forces which men direct but never circumvent or diminish. Then, in the exaltation of love, more than ever it seemed to him to mean death, the only other thing as strong as love. Under the moon, under the cold, splendid stars, there were only those two things awake and sleepless; death and love, the rushing river and his burning heart. (p. 116)

Death and love, the only things strong enough to confront each other.

Mortality and immortality. The river means death because it rushes ever onward and it is a physical abrasive against even so powerful a

Sister Peter Damian Charles also cites this poem in support of her theory of Eros/Thanatos. "Love and Death in the Novels of Willa Cather," p. 6.
figure as Bartley is; it is mortality, the rush against the inevitable ticking of the clock, which Cather mentions. Bartley muses on board the ship to London:

The thing that perturbed him went on as steadily as his pulse, but he was almost unconscious of it. He was submerged in the vast impersonal greyness about him, and at intervals the sidelong roll of the boat measured off time like the ticking of a clock. (p. 73)

The only thing that seems able to stop the clock is love, a kind of immortality. Bartley stands with Hilda Burgoyne, both feeling the passion of the moment: "... and it seemed as if all the clocks in the world had stopped" (p. 58). The Epilogue of the novel is concerned with Bartley's immortality; if he lives on, Cather suggests, he lives on in the dignified grief of his widow and in the tragic loneliness of Hilda Burgoyne.

At the risk of oversimplifying a finely complex character, we can say that these two forces, love and death, contend within Bartley. When we first meet him, he has pretty much given himself over to death. It is an ironic giving over because Bartley's teacher, Lucius Wilson, and his wife, Winifred, both realize that what Bartley represents is the present. Wilson says, "There he is. Away with perspective! No past, no future for Bartley; just the fiery moment. The only moment that ever was or will be in the world!" (p. 10). And at that point Bartley dramatically enters the room. His is a dynamic figure, vigorous, forceful.

There were other bridge-builders in the world, certainly, but it was always Alexander's picture that the Sunday Supplement men wanted, because he looked as a tamer of rivers ought to look. Under his tumbled sandy hair his head seemed as hard and powerfull as a catapult, and his shoulders looked strong enough in themselves to
support a span of any one of his ten great bridges
that cut the air above as many rivers. (p. 10)\textsuperscript{34}

Again and again, throughout the novel, Cather emphasizes the physical
force of this man. We said that he has given himself over to death,
but that is a paradox. Death can only happen to living creatures;
the harder the struggle against death, the more forceful the life. If
Bartley did not struggle against death, he would not be alive. If he
did not build bridges, he could not hope to control the river. If
there were no rivers, he would have no bridges to build. Life and
death, then, mortality, is not a negative characteristic; it is a very
positive one.

The second force, love, is not a characteristic of the present.
Rather, it is both past and future. It is the youth he struggles to
avoid, and it is the buried self that begins to emerge and threatens
Bartley's entire world. He meets it in London, on the steps of the
British Museum, "the ultimate repository of mortality, where all the
dead things in the world were assembled to make one's hour of youth
the more precious" (p. 33). It comes, a memory, down the steps to
accompany Bartley, and it turns into a tragic reality.

He started out upon these walks half-guiltily, with
a curious longing and expectancy which were wholly
gratified by solitude. Solitude, but not solitariness;
for he walked shoulder to shoulder with a shadowy com-
panion—not little Hilda Burgoyne, by any means, but
someone vastly dearer to him than she had ever been—
his own young self, the youth who waited for him upon
the steps of the British Museum that night, and who,
though he had tried to pass so quietly, had known him
and come down and linked an arm in his.

It was not until long afterward that Alexander

\textsuperscript{34}The catapult is also used to describe Claude Wheeler.
One of Ours, p. 191.
learned that for him this youth was the most dangerous of companions. (pp. 39-40)

Youth and love are almost interchangeable so far as this novel is concerned. Bartley and Hilda recapturing their lost passion remember a beggar woman crying bitterly, tragically, longingly, whom they encountered in Paris on their first walk together. Hilda gave the woman lilacs; Bartley, a franc, but Bartley recalls that the beggar woman wanted neither flowers nor francs, "but just our youth." And as they left her, she cried out, in an anguished, awful voice, a blessing on their love (pp. 55-56). It is an altogether haunting episode that irrevocably unites youth and love, a union we will see in O Pioneers! when Emil, filled with the holiness of his love and the passion of his youth, dares to stare unfrightened at Amedée's grave. For youth and love, possess no fear of death; they are beyond death; they are immortal. Neither youth nor love are concerned with the exigencies, with the practicalities of life; they are completely, utterly free from the cobweb of social and familial responsibilities and behaviors.

Bartley is conscious from the first of a buried self, a part of him left behind somewhere. He tells Wilson, "I sometimes wonder what sort of chap I'd have been if I hadn't been this sort; I want to go out and live his potentialities, too" (p. 14). The two selves are represented by the two women in his life. Winifred is like Bartley in her vigor, her vibrancy.

Wilson reflected that he had never before known a woman who had been able, for any considerable while, to support both a personal and an intellectual passion. Sitting behind her, he watched her with perplexed admiration, shading his eyes with his hands. In her dinner dress she looked
even younger than in street clothes, and, for all her composure and self-sufficiency, she seemed to him strangely alert and vibrating, as if in her, too, there were something never altogether at rest. (p. 16)

The life Winifred creates in the Alexander home in Boston is a gracious, comfortable, colorful and appropriate life. Bartley responds to it, is at ease in its comforts. Yet he looks into his wife's face and teases her that she is hard (p. 68). He is restive under the restraints of the Moorlock Bridge and of Winifred's fortune. "He was cramped in every way to a niggardly commission, and was using lighter structural material than he thought proper" (p. 36).

The obligations imposed by his wife's fortune and position were sometimes distracting to a man who followed his profession, and he was expected to be interested in a great many worthy endeavors on her account as well as on his own. His existence was becoming a network of great and little details. He had expected that success would bring him freedom and power; but it had brought only power that was in itself another kind of restraint. (p. 37)

And so he turns from the reality of his life, his mortal existence, with Winifred, to the make-believe world of Hilda Burgoyne.

Hilda is totally unrealistic. She is an actress. She was the passion of his youth, his first love. She is a fey creature, exciting, unusual, most natural in the light comedy roles of MacConnell's Irish plays. Mainhall tells Bartley:

'Of course, Hilda is Irish--the Burgoynes have been stage people for generations--and she has the Irish voice. It's delightful to hear it in a London theatre. That laugh, now, when she doubles over at the hips--who ever heard it out of Galway? . . . She's really MacConnell's poetic motif, you see; makes the whole thing a fairy tale.' (p. 24)

And she lends to one half of Bartley's life at least a fairy tale atmosphere. The youth he has buried, the potentialities he has never had and will never have time to investigate yearn toward the life promised
by Hilda. To her:

"Life seems the strongest and most indestructible thing in the world. Do you really believe that all those people rushing about down there, going to good dinners and clubs, and theatres, will be dead some day, and not care about anything? I don't believe it, and I know I shan't die, ever! You see, I feel too-too powerful!" (p. 43)

This is the immortality, the force and energy of Bartley's youth, passion and imagination. It is the initiative that builds bridges that are to Winifred bridges into the future.

But it is not reconcilable with Bartley's life. The two forces, love and death, cannot be reconciled. The crack in the wall, prophesied by Lucius Wilson, is the division between selves. The horror is that Bartley is aware of the division, is aware that this split within himself, will utterly destroy him, and yet, once he has recognized the buried self, youth and love, once he has let that buried self out of its grave, let it flex its muscles and walk around, he is powerless to reenter it. He writes passionately to Hilda:

I keep remembering locoed horses I used to see on the range when I was a boy. They changed like that. We used to catch them and put them up in the corral, and they developed great cunning. They would pretend to eat their oats like the other horses, but we knew they were always scheming to get back at the loco.

It seems that a man is meant to live only one life in this world. When he tries to live a second, he develops another nature. I feel as if a second man had been grafted into me. At first he seemed only a pleasure-loving simpleton, of whose company I was rather ashamed, and whom I used to hide under my coat when I walked the Embankment, in London. But now he is strong and sullen, and he is fighting for his life at the cost of mine. That is his one activity: to grow strong. No creature ever wanted so much to live. Eventually, I suppose, he will absorb me altogether. (p. 100)

Bartley Alexander is not content with oats; yet he knows the danger of the locoweed.
Cather is intricate in establishing the fact that Bartley's tragedy results from his inability to reconcile his two natures and his failure to jettison either of the natures. Moorlock Bridge is a symbol of imagination overreaching practicality. Bartley tells his assistant, Phil Horton: "... we never were justified in assuming that a scale that was perfectly safe for an ordinary bridge would work with anything of such length. It's all very well on paper, but it remains to be seen whether it can be done in practice" (p. 121). The structure used simply cannot support the span of the bridge. Likewise, Bartley's structure cannot reach from Boston to London, cannot span an ocean. It must crack under the strain. He is not immediately aware of the danger to Moorlock because he has missed Horton's telegram about it. He was, obviously, with Hilda when the telegram arrived. On his way to Canada, he writes a long letter to Winifred telling her about himself and Hilda; this is the letter washed clean by the river, the river which has early been associated with death. But he cannot abandon Winifred and what she stands for. His wife was the woman who had made his life, gratified his pride, given direction to his tastes and habits. The life they led together seemed to him beautiful. Winifred still was, as she had always been, Romance for him, and whenever he was deeply stirred he turned to her. When the grandeur and beauty of the world challenged him—and it challenges even the most self-absorbed people—he always answered with her name. That was his reply to the question put by the mountains and the stars; to all the spiritual aspects of life. In his feeling for his wife there was all the tenderness, all the pride, all the devotion of which he was capable. There was everything but energy; the energy of youth which must register itself and cut its name before it passes. (p. 112)

She is not passion; she is romance, devotion, tenderness, homely comforts. She is the less glamorous aspects of life that have tied
Bartley to practicality, but that he loves and that he can answer the immortal questions with. It is Winifred, Boston, the mortal side of Bartley that sends him out on the span and makes him wait until hopefully the men would be cleared from the bridge, and so it is the living side of Bartley that plunges him, with his bridge, into the river, which is death. But it is also the practical side that makes him struggle to the surface. And when the panic-stricken non-swimmers hug him close and pull him under again, it is Winifred's voice that he imagines urging that he be calm, that if he does not give up, the living weights will die, and he will be free to surface again. But he realizes that if he lives, he must face Winifred and tell her of Hilda. He must because he is unable to control his passion. Yet he knows the cost of his passion to Winifred and he cannot refute what she is to him, and so he lets the men drown him with themselves. Faced with a conflict he cannot resolve, he allows death to resolve it for him.

It is a mortal death, of course, and ironically it achieves his immortality. Men forgive him his error, and his spirit lives on in the grief of his widow. His tragedy has been his inability to reconcile the two selves within him, the practical and the passionate. It is the side of passion that overcomes him and becomes uncontrollable.

In Alexandra Bergson, on the other hand, the passionate self has been so deeply buried, that the practical self brings on her tragedy. *O Pioneers!* is a wonderful book; it is the drama of mere human figures told against a magnificent tapestry of the Nebraska prairie, with a scope unachieved in any other of Cather's novels. There is a Hardyesque quality about this novel that automatically lends to the main characters, and most especially to Alexandra, a dignity and grandeur
Alexandra Bergson is not, like her counterpart Alexander, a dynamic character. The first section of the novel, "The Wild Land," introduces as children four characters who already possess the characteristics that will stain the prairie with blood. Emil is shy, uncertain of himself, and he hides his anguish over his kitten for fear of laughter. Marie is a beautiful flirtatious child fond of pretty things and able to make all men fall in love with her. Carl Linstrum is thin and delicate, over-sensitive, brooding, a failure. And Alexandra is strong, fierce, determined, able to face even the news of death and learn what must be done to reckon with it.

The protagonist of the novel is, of course, Alexandra Bergson, and it would be difficult to equate with her the duality we have found in Cather's other protagonists were it not for her strange dream, or, as Cather calls it, her "fancy."

Sometimes, as she lay thus luxuriously idle, her eyes closed, she used to have an illusion of being lifted up bodily and carried lightly by someone very strong. It was a man, certainly, who carried her, but he was like no man she knew; he was much larger and stronger and swifter, and he carried her as easily as if she were a sheaf of wheat. She never saw him, but, with eyes closed, she could feel that he was yellow like the sunlight, and there was the smell of ripe cornfields about him. She could feel him approach, bend over her and lift her, and then she could feel herself being carried swiftly off across the fields. (pp. 175-176)

But after the luxury of such a daydream, Alexandra Bergson purges her body with cold water and vigorous rubbing. Her brothers, grown and successful because of their sister's drive and determination, complain that she was hard on them. She replies:

'Hard on you? I never meant to be hard. Conditions were hard. Maybe I never would have been very soft, anyhow;
but I certainly didn’t choose to be the kind of girl I was. If you take even a vine and cut it back again and again, it grows hard, like a tree." (p. 145)

The truth is not that Alexandra is hard, but that she is practical. She has faced the problems of the prairie and has solved them. In order to do so, she has turned whatever youth and passion she might have had into the productivity of her farm, and she subdues the dreams within herself in order to provide for Emil an education, opportunities, a way of life beyond what she herself and her two older brother could ever have known. She rebuffs the passionate side of herself as ruthlessly as she snubs the poor traveling salesman who dares to flirt with her (p. 7). She turns her mind to the exigencies of farming the prairie, to the practical problems of mortgage, corn, wheat and hogs. And she is successful in her practical endeavors.

The grandeur of Alexandra Bergson is her triumph over the prairie. Carl Linstrum tells her: "I’ve been away engraving other men’s pictures, and you’ve stayed at home and made your own" (p. 99). The prairie that kills John Bergson as surely as it kills Mr. Shimerda blooms for Alexandra, and the Nebraska Carl Linstrum returns to is, like the Nebraska Jim Burden returns to, a changed face, domesticated, smiling and generous. Furthermore, Alexandra has carried along with her, as Antonia does, those people for whom she is responsible, especially her brothers, Oscar and Lou, and their families, and her brother, Emil. Next door to her is the captivating, ever-young Marie Shabata and not far away is the French community with Amedée and his pretty Angelique and the high, narrow, red-brick Catholic church, where the boys wrestle and play pranks and the girls giggle and hold bazaars.

The second and third sections of the novel, "Neighbouring Fields"
and "Winter Memories," are ironically pastoral, superficially idyllic and subtly creative of an atmosphere of anticipation, for even while the reader glows with Carl Linstrum to the harmony and fruitfulness of the prairie, he is aware of a fundamental hollowness at the center of Alexandra's world.

It is a hollowness present in Alexandra's house, in the family gathering at her table, in her brother, Emil. It is a hollowness concerned with the less mundane side of life, with the comprehension and understanding of the people about her that finally overwhelms Alexandra. Her brothers rightly accuse her of being hard on them; the only brother she has not been hard on is Emil, and that is tragic, because she has allowed him to develop a way of life and thought that she herself can only vaguely imagine and would never give in to.

The hollowness becomes obvious as we see the farm Alexandra has built.

. . . a big white house that stood on a hill, several miles across the fields. There were so many sheds and outbuildings grouped about it that the place looked not unlike a tiny village. A stranger, approaching it, could not help noticing the beauty and fruitfulness of the outlying fields. There was something individual about the great farm, a most unusual trimness and care for detail. . . .

If you go up the hill and enter Alexandra's big house, you will find that it is curiously unfinished and uneven in comfort. One room is papered, carpeted, overfurnished; the next is almost bare. The pleasantest rooms in the house are the kitchen--where Alexandra's three young Swedish girls chatter and cook and pickle and preserve all summer long--and the sitting-room, in which Alexandra has brought together the old homely furniture that the Bergsons used in their first log house, the family portraits, and the few things her mother brought from Sweden. (pp. 72-73)

Cather concludes this description by stating that Alexandra best expresses herself outdoors, that her true house is the farm, and yet
there is a definite comparison implied between the "big white house" and Alexandra with her "gleaming white body which no man on the Divide could have carried very far." The only comfortable rooms in the house are the kitchen, that room closest to the outdoors itself, where the food raised in the soil is prepared for human consumption, and the sitting-room which is a relic of the past and not of Alexandra's doing at all, except as she has collected the parts. The only comfortable rooms in Alexandra's mind are those concerned with the farm and its produce, its basic animal and vegetable existence, and her memories of the past, especially of Sweden. The other rooms of her mind are a hodge-podge of discomfort, fashion, and barrenness, even as the other rooms of her house. Her dining room, we are told, is filled with "highly varnished wood and coloured glass and useless pieces of china" to the extent that it looks like a display window (p. 83).

Alexandra has allowed her personal life to be furnished by her society; she allows Lou and Oscar and their wives to impose themselves and their standards on her; she has given her inner life to them.

There are three very important images, fowl images, which can elucidate Alexandra's hollowness. Ivar, early in the novel, tells of the lost sea gull:

'A big white bird with long wings and pink feet. My! What a voice she had! She came in the afternoon and kept flying about the pond and screaming until dark. She was in trouble of some sort, but I could not understand her. She was going over to the other ocean, maybe, and did not know how far it was. She was afraid of never getting there. She was more mournful than our birds here; she cried in the night. She saw the light from my window and darted to it. Maybe she thought my house was a boat, she was such a wild thing. Next morning, when the sun rose, I went to take her food, but she flew up into the sky and went on her way.' (p. 35)
Hartley Alexander is lost trying to cross from landmass to landmass. Alexandra Bergson is lost trying to cross from ocean to ocean. Hartley is moving freely between two kinds of responsibilities, that to his society and that to his art. Alexandra is caught in a web of responsibilities, trying to move between two freedoms. She discusses these freedoms with Carl Linstrum, saying to him, "I'd rather have had your freedom than my land" (p. 105). He goes on to discuss what he calls the "exorbitant rent" of living without responsibilities, that "freedom so often means that one isn't needed anywhere" (p. 105), that life without ties is a negative sort of freedom. But Alexandra argues:

'And yet I would rather have Emil grow up like that than like his two brothers. We pay a high rent, too, though we pay differently. We grow hard and heavy here. We don't move lightly and easily as you do, and our minds get stiff.' (p. 106)

Alexandra senses, on the one hand, the swift mounting freedom of Thea Kronborg's eagle; that is the freedom she wishes for her brother Emil. On the other hand, there is the placid, sedate freedom of the wild duck, the freedom she wishes for herself.

Under the overhanging willows of the opposite bank there was an inlet where the water was deeper and flowed so slowly that it seemed to sleep in the sun. In this little bay a single wild duck was swimming and diving and preening her feathers, disporting herself very happily in the flickering light and shade. . . . No living thing had ever seemed to Alexandra as beautiful as that wild duck. . . . Years afterward she thought of the duck as still there, swimming and diving all by herself in the sunlight, a kind of enchanted bird that did not know age or change. (pp. 174-175)

One freedom is Jim Burden's to explore and conquer; the other is Antonia's to propagate. One is a driving achieving thing; the other is almost a vegetation. Cather implies, in the last paragraph of the novel, that Alexandra will finally achieve her sort of freedom.
Fortunate country, that is one day to receive hearts like Alexandra's into its bosom, to give them out again in the yellow wheat, in the rustling corn, in the shining eyes of youth! (p. 262)

But at what cost does she achieve her freedom? At the cost of losing the human beings dearest to her and of understanding too late that part of the blame at least is her own blindness.

John Bergson makes an important association for us. He says that Alexandra is much like her grandfather, and Cather editorializes that this is John's way of saying "that she was intelligent" (p.20). We have only a cameo of Grandfather Bergson, but it is a significant cameo. He was a shipbuilder and very successful, until late in life he married disastrously a woman much younger than himself who "warped the probity of a lifetime" (p. 21). He lost not only his own fortune, but also monies entrusted to him by poor men, and died disgraced, leaving only his memory and his character to be inherited. But, Cather says, "when all was said, he had come up from the sea himself, and built up a proud little business with no capital but his own skill and foresight, and had proved himself a man" (p. 21).

Alexandra has come up from the land, has built an estate with "no capital" and only her own "foresight." We stumble on the next line; has she then proved herself a man? Or a woman? She has proved herself a worthy human being; that term can be accepted. But we must return to the analogy. Oscar, Lou, and even the pampered Emil cannot conceive of their sister's love for Carl Linstrum. Marie Shabata, a romantic, does give Alexandra credit for romantic love (p. 151). But Alexandra herself does not see her love for Carl as a romance. She is the woman who has scourged her body after the wanton daydreaming
about the mysterious lover. And she is the woman who at the end of the novel says to her lover, "I think we shall be very happy. I haven't any fears. I think when friends marry, they are safe. We don't suffer like—those young ones" (p.262). There is nothing softly romantic here!

The gull screams, but it is lost between two oceans. It is landlocked like the wild duck that preens itself. But Alexandra does not preen herself. The wild duck is a symbol of a self-love and fulfillment that the woman can never reach, anymore than she can reach the ocean. She is landlocked by duty. The third fowl image explains Alexandra's role. Ivar, prophet and author's spokesman, explains the flight pattern of the wild geese.

'The point of the wedge gets the worst of it; they cut the wind. They can only stand it there a little while--half an hour, maybe. Then they fall back and the wedge splits a little, while the rear ones come up the middle to the front. Then it closes up and they fly on, with a new wedge. They are always changing like that, up in the air. Never any confusion; just like soldiers who have been drilled.' (pp. 37-38)

John H. Randall sees Alexandra's sexlessness as a part of a syndrome evident in Cather's novels that expresses distrust of all sexual relationships. I quarrel deeply and utterly with any notion that Alexandra is neurotically afraid of sexual love. But I agree wholeheartedly with Mr. Randall's observation that O Pioneers! is devoid of warm human relationships. No other of Cather's novels, including the pessimistic novels of the twenties, is so cold. O Pioneers! is a weaving together of human lives that never touch. The web, seen from a distance is an intermingling of lives touching lives, but

35 The Landscape and the Looking Glass, pp. 76-95.
close scrutiny provides a tragic realization of the utter aloneness of Alexandra, of Emil and Marie and Ivar and all the lesser characters. They are wild geese flying, flying, and Alexandra, responding to her training, is the point of their wedge; it is she who cuts the wind.

But she does it not from love, but from duty, from practicality. Her triumph is that she learns to love the land, the element which so warps and batters her. Her tragedy is two-fold. First, that she flies alone although she flies with others; that there is no one who can understand her magnificence of effort and sorrow. And second, that she cannot bequeath to any comrade-in-wings what she has learned in her flight. She tells Carl Linstrum that she cannot bequeath the land to Oscar's and Lou's children anymore than she can bequeath the sunset (p. 262). It belongs to those able to conquer it.

In this inability to will her achievement, Alexandra is a great deal like her grandfather. The question, of course, is posed as to whether or not, Alexandra will like her grandfather waste her fortune and die destitute. This is not a question to be lightly considered; it is, perhaps, the gist of the novel. I suggest two possible answers.

First, Grandfather Bergson's great mistake, as Cather delineates it, was his marriage to a woman of "questionable character, much younger than he, who goaded him into every sort of extravagance" (p. 21). *Pioneers* ends on the understanding between Alexandra and Carl that they will be married. Now Carl is only five years younger than Alexandra, but the age difference when the woman is older than the man, is usually more significant than when the man is older. At least, that is traditionally true in the American society. So, thus
far, the analogy holds. And although Carl Linstrum is not of "ques-
tionable character" morally, there is an extravagance and weakness
about him that also holds with the analogy between Alexandra and her
grandfather. Carl, leaving partly to find his fortune in Alaska and
partly in docile submission to Alexandra's brothers, tells the woman,
"It is your fate to be always surrounded by little men" (p. 153). Com-
pared to Oscar and Lou, of course, Carl is not little. But compared
to Alexandra he is puny. And yet she needs him; she is infatuated
with him as her grandfather was infatuated with the Stockholm woman.
We cannot agree with Alexandra's brothers that she is too old for love
or that the human warmth of a marriage is unimportant to her. And yet,
can we help wishing that someplace, sometime in Alexandra's life she
had indeed encountered a lover as worthy of herself as the strange
dream lover, who may represent death, but who may, just as easily, rep-
resent the life and sex she has been denied? Part of the tragedy of
Alexandra is, as Carl says, that she is surrounded by lesser men. She
has a right to choose one of them, but her choice is so pathetically
limited and we are forced to concede that Carl is the best choice she
can make under the circumstances.

To an almost uncanny degree, Carl Linstrum is a reprise of
Bartley Alexander's Hilda Burgoyne. He is fey. When we first meet him,
we are introduced to a boy whose eyes brood (p. 9). He is the owner of
a magic lantern and his slides represent the Old World, the foreign
world, the Hans Christian Andersen world (p. 15). He and his father are
beaten by the prairie and return to the city where Carl studies engraving,
an art dead before he learns it (p. 104). When he returns to Nebraska,
he feels the loss of the original wildness of the land.
'Now, when I come back to all this milk and honey, I feel like the old German song, "Wo bist du, wo bist du, mein geliebtest Land?"' (pp. 101-102)

When he leaves Nebraska the second time, he leaves on a pipe-dream.

He is going to Alaska to discover gold. Cather editorializes:

His soft lustrous black eyes, his whimsical smile, would be less against him on the Klondike than on the Divide. There are always dreamers on the frontier. (p. 255)

However, we are haunted by the knowledge that the Divide, when it was a frontier, defeated him, defeated him precisely because he was a dreamer.

Alexandra conquered the Divide, and we are told of her that she has little imagination (p. 173). She is not devoid of imagination as Oscar and Lou are (p. 41), but she has buried what imagination she has.

... her life had all been toward the end of making her proficient in what she had undertaken to do. Her personal life, her own realization of herself, was almost a subconscious existence; like an underground river that came to the surface only here and there, at intervals months apart, and then sank again to flow on under her own fields. (p. 173)

Carl Linstrum, then, represents imagination, indeed, represents Alexandra's imagination. But his life is a many-splendoured failure.

Two questions are raised by this marriage. First, will Alexandra be forced to further subjugate her imaginative life in order to help Carl sustain his in a hostile frontier environment? And second, if a marriage with Carl Linstrum would bring out more of Alexandra's buried self, wouldn't this cause the failure of the practical self, thus completing the analogy between Alexandra and her grandfather? Tune in tomorrow. The second alternative seems decidedly the one Cather is promoting; the entire last chapter is a statement of Alexandra's need
to fill the hollow at the center of her life, to fill the empty house, even at the cost of the farm. And Cather's choice of Carl Linstrum as Alexandra's prospective marriage partner appears to be an underlining of the fact that the farm means nothing without a well-furnished house, that success is empty without a well-filled heart. But if this is so, and I propose that it is, Cather is really sentimentalizing in her last paragraph, because Alexandra is not yet ready to give to the earth the proper ingredients of fertility. She has achieved a great deal, but she has failed utterly and her failure is emphasized in the grave of her brother. This is one possible answer to the question posed by the analogy between Alexandra and her grandfather. It is an answer involving the projection of the characters beyond the end of the novel.

The second answer is contained within the novel. It is reiterated several times. As Carl prepares to leave Nebraska the first time, Alexandra says:

'Now I shall have nobody but Emil. But he is my boy, and he is tenderhearted.' (p. 47)

'He shall do whatever he wants to,' Alexandra declared warmly. 'He is going to have a chance, a whole chance; that's what I've worked for.' (p. 100)

Yes, she told herself, it had been worth while; both Emil and the country had become what she had hoped. Out of her father's children there was one who was fit to cope with the world, who had not been tied to the plough, and who had a personality apart from the soil. And that, she reflected, was what she had worked for. She felt well satisfied with her life. (p. 181)

She felt no anxiety about Emil. She had always believed in him, as she had believed in the land. (p. 202)

Again and again Alexandra acknowledges that she has devoted her life
to her youngest brother, Emil. Thanks to her efforts, he is not "tied
to the plough"; instead he has an education; he has been freed from
the land and is "fit to cope with the world." In the context of the
total novel, these pronouncements take on the same ironic twist as
Alexandra's partings words to Carl: "... you are going where you
will have many friends, and will find the work you were meant to do" (p. 46). Carl finds no friends and finds no work. Emil is tied to
the land in a very real way; he is buried beneath it. In a sense,
he has been defeated by it even as his father, John Bergson, was. The
romance between Emil and Marie would never have been possible had Frank
Shabata, Marie's husband, not been so brutalized by the land that his
attitude sent Marie looking elsewhere for love. Further, Alexandra
herself, completely insensitive to the growing attraction between her
two dearest people, unwittingly blows the embers to a glowing fire.

One of the most ironic and poignant statements in the entire
novel is Alexandra's comment to Carl: "... I want ahead and built
this house. I really built it for Emil" (p. 100). But the house is
incomplete. Substantial on the outside, it is grotesquely empty in-
side. Emil's heritage is like the house. He is outwardly, super-
ficially, substantial. But Alexandra has not given him goals or
direction. She has divorced him from the land; he is free as Carl
is free. But the freedom is a negative freedom. He is not fit to
cut the wind in the wedge of wild geese. He is fit only to wear the
costume of a Mexican vaquero and tease Angelique, Amédée's sweet
wife. But he is uncertain about his own future and his own desires.
His sister has been forced into the Carlylean philosophy: "Do that
duty which lies closest," and through her adherence to that philosophy,
doing her duty to the land as her father has made her promise, she has achieved greatness. But for Emil, caught in the ultimate freedom of no responsibility, there is no duty lying close enough to him to be his. Therefore, his ultimate freedom, the romance with Marie Shabata, is a freedom that can only lead to destruction.

Played as a foil against the romance of Emil and Marie, is the love and marriage of Amédée and Angelique. The romance of the French couple is a natural and joyful experience. They alone, of all the characters, are not wild geese fighting the wind; they are nested birds, and Angelique gives birth to the first child. Amédée, proud of his living symbol of manhood, goes to his fields, despite a pain in his side, to run his new header. His friend watches him.

Emil felt a new thrill of admiration for his friend, and with it the old pang of envy at the way in which Amédée could do with his might what his hand found to do, and feel that, whatever it was, it was the most important thing in the world. (p. 206)

Amédée dies from a ruptured and ignored appendix. And yet his death, while sorrowful, is not the utter waste that Emil's is. Amédée's triumph is expressed in great part by Cather's interesting picture of the French Church:

The Church has always held that life is for the living. On Saturday, while half the village of Sainte-Agnès was mourning for Amédée and preparing the funeral black for his burial on Monday, the other half was busy with white dresses and white vests for the great confirmation service to-morrow, when the bishop was to confirm a class of one hundred boys and girls. Father Duschesne divided his time between the living and the dead. (p. 212)

And Amédée’s French friends are able to accept his death with greater alacrity than Emil is.

They kept repeating that Amédée had always been a good
boy, glancing toward the red-brick church which had played so large a part in Amédée's life, had been the scene of his most serious moments and of his happiest hours. He had played and wrestled and courted under its shadow. Only three weeks ago he had proudly carried his baby there to be christened. They could not doubt that that invisible arm was still about Amédée; that through the Church on earth he had passed to the Church triumphant, the goal of hopes and faith of so many hundred years. (p. 213)

In part, we encounter here what was to develop into Cather's most profoundly inspirational book, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, an understanding and compulsion toward the Roman Catholic Church and its ability to handle the dichotomy of man's existence. But, in part, we also find a strict and protestant Puritanism in the contrast between Emil and Amédée. Earlier in the novel, Emil thinks a parable that is applicable here:

He liked to see and to think about Amédée's sunny, natural, happy love. . . . It seemed strange that now he should have to hide the thing that Amédée was so proud of, that the feeling which gave one of them such happiness should bring the other such despair. It was like that when Alexandra tested her seed-corn in the spring he mused. From two ears that had grown side by side, the grains of one shot up joyfully into the light, projecting themselves into the future, and the grains from the other lay still in the earth and rotted; and nobody knew why. (pp. 138-139)

Emil does not profess to know why his love is rotten and Amédée's is fruitful, but Cather suggests an answer. Amédée's love is lawful, honest, and, therefore, though Amédée dies, there is left Angelique and a son. Emil's love is based on corruption, not simply the fact that it is sinful in a Puritan sense, but that it is actually based on Marie's unhappiness, on Alexandra's lack of empathy, on Emil's aimlessness, and on Frank's brutality.

Frank Shabata, is, undoubtedly, one of the most interesting characters in *O Pioneers!* He is a mid-western Duke of Ferrara, a
Browning personality, whose wife is a "Last Duchess." Frank was originally, Marie remembers, a handsome, gay, carefree lad, romantic enough to carry off the prettiest girl on the Divide. But his marriage has made him bestial, not because he doesn't love Marie; indeed, he loves her too much. But because he does love her. Frank wants to be able to provide her with conveniences, comforts and luxuries. Because he cannot, he is horribly bitter, and his bitterness is expressed in his anger over any of Marie's self-created happinesses.

He had tried to make her life ugly. He had refused to share any of the little pleasures she was so plucky about making for herself. She could be gay about the least thing in the world; but she must be gay! (p. 226)

So he suspects and rightfully that her happiness comes from some source other than himself, and his brooding, suspicious anger makes him ready to kill.

Marie Shabata is likewise to blame for the tragedy. From childhood she is beautiful and flirtatious and collects the hearts around her. And she is also a romantic caught in the practicalities of the prairie. She moves, as she must, in a social world, but she is unable to keep concealed from Emil her feelings for him although she recognizes their danger.

Marie is a little pagan. A Druid. A tree-worshipper. She tells Emil she is a good Catholic, but she goes on to say she could worship trees, if there was nothing else (p. 130).

'I like trees because they seem more resigned to the way they have to live than other things do. I feel as if this tree knows everything I ever think of when I sit here. When I come back to it, I never have to remind it of anything; I begin just where I left off.' (p. 130)

The tree she is referring to is the white mulberry, under which Frank
kills her and Emil. But the character most fully associated with trees is not Marie, it is Alexandra who portrayed herself when she said that a vine cut back again and again becomes hard like a tree (p. 145). Further, we have noted repeatedly in the images and descriptions of Alexandra her association with white. She, therefore, is the white mulberry tree that shelters the deadly romance of Emil and Marie. But she does not shelter it wittingly, and that, of course, is the great tragedy.

If Alexandra had had much imagination she might have guessed what was going on in Marie's mind, and she would have seen long before what was going on in Emil's. But that, as Emil himself had more than once reflected, was Alexandra's blind side, and her life had not been the kind to sharpen her vision. (p. 173)

The responsibility for the tragedy of *O Pioneers!* rests firmly on Alexandra's shoulders.

Crazy Ivar, that marvelous character, explains to the hired girl that he goes barefoot even in winter because, after a thorough search of the Scriptures, he can find no Biblical law restricting feet. His feet are free members; they can walk through filth if they please; they are easily washed. But the other members of his body as well as his senses are under strong strictures. There is so much mischief they can do and they are not so easily cleansed. It is a lesson Alexandra might have heeded. She has granted Emil total freedom, without strictures; she has blindly believed in him and in Marie. And yet she is not able to comprehend him or Marie. She cannot fathom that their relationship to each other is any different than their relationships to herself.

To return, then, to the analogy between Alexandra and her grandfather, we find that in wedding her dreams to Emil, she has, in
a sense, found a consort younger than herself, and far more extravagant. Further, because of her belief in Emil, she has already, by the end of the novel, dissipated her true wealth, Emil and Marie. She has been infatuated with the promise of Emil, so infatuated that she has not examined his motives of his true character. And she is left with only Carl Linstrum, the palest, most unpromising of the three people she loves best. Nothing is left of Emil and Marie except Frank Shabata, caged finally with his "unhappy temperament" (p. 221), and Alexandra has no more reason to conquer the prairie. There is left to her only a "safe" and probably childless marriage.

Alexandra Bergson is not tragic because of her actions. She is tragic because of the split in her personality. The crack in the wall of Bartley Alexander kills only himself; Alexandra's dichotomy kills those she loves.

She is triumphant; she does conquer the prairie. And for one brief moment as Emil hurries to his final, fatal tryst with Marie, he achieves the flight of the eagle for Alexandra, he is able to overcome any mortal ties (pp. 217-218). But Cather nevertheless ends the novel in darkness and despair, despite the lilt of the final paragraph, and she, therefore, would seem to suggest that the immortality of "unnatural" love, of hidden love, is not the true achievement, cannot end in anything other than death. It is Alexandra, not Emil, who is heroic. It is the practicality of Alexandra, as of Amédée, that argues most forcefully against the lovely and sinister relationship between Emil and Marie. Alexandra's failure is not due to improper motives or selfish emotion; Emil's is. Alexandra's tragedy is due to her incompleteness.
Bartley Alexander dies because he is unable to reconcile himself to a choice between the selves warring in him and he realizes that the selves cannot exist together, that they must war because they are diametrical opposites. Alexandra Bergson, though she recognizes that she has been to blame for not understanding the people about her, does not seem to appreciate fully the significance of her buried self. Especially, the presence of Carl Linstrum at the end of the novel, while it suggests Alexandra’s future attempt to express both sides of her nature, the dutiful and the romantic, softens the final statement against Alexandra. Carl tells her she is triumphant (p. 256) and that she has lost Emil and Marie because "They were both the best you had here" (p. 256), an obvious suggestion that some pagan god has demanded from the pioneers the sacrifice of human blood to insure the fertility of the land. But this seems also to be Cather’s attempt to soften our judgment against Alexandra. Implicit in the details of Alexandra’s journey to see Frank Shabata in jail is the connotation that Alexandra herself is responsible for the deaths and the imprisonment; she has been blind to the passionate natures about her even while she has helped fuel the fires of passion. Carl’s statement is necessary, structurally, if we are to accept the final paragraph which eulogizes Alexandra; yet the final paragraph is unnecessary. It reads like Cather’s eleventh hour attempt to assure her heroine an heroic stature, but Alexandra is already heroic, tragically heroic.

Alexandra is heroic. In her fall, she is heroic. There is no need to suggest some happy ending to her life. She, as Bartley

36Daiches, Willa Cather: A Critical Introduction, p. 27.
Alexander, fails to piece together the dichotomy of her soul. But in her failure, as in Bartley's, there is greatness enough to assure her heroic stature.

These sibling novels, Alexander's Bridge and O Pioneers!, present their heroes in dilemma. Both protagonists, Bartley and Alexandra, hold within them, a dichotomy of selves. For both it is the dichotomy of the practical versus the passionate. In both cases, it is the passionate that destroys them. But the methods of destruction are diametrically opposed to one another. Bartley Alexander fails because he forgets about the practical and woos the passionate until finally he is forced to make an impossible choice between them and choose, instead the third alternative, death. Alexandra's failure stems from her refusal or inability to release her own passionate and buried self. Because she does not understand passion in herself, she cannot understand it in others, although, ironically, it is precisely because Emil and Marie are passionate that she loves them. They die because Alexandra cannot comprehend the passion she is drawn to, and their deaths make her practical work, the farm, the conquering of the land, of no further importance to her.

Summary

As we have seen in earlier chapters, the cynicism of these first two novels gives way to the complete triumph of My Antonia and the almost complete triumphs of The Song of the Lark and One of Ours. It is almost as if Cather experimented in those three novels with ways possible to achieve a unification of personality, a merging of the two selves. She seems to find some answer in the artistic creation of
Thea Kronborg and the patriotic heroism of Claude Wheeler. Yet opera stars and dying heroes are not common characters, and in her next three novels she portrays a more prosaic type of person. Marian Forrester is the wife of a pioneer, not herself a pioneer; Godfrey St. Peter is a professor; Myra Henshawe is simply a woman who seeks fulfillment. It is, perhaps, a significant observation of Cather's views of life that these prosaic people are thrown back into the tragedy of irreconcilability of the first two novels. It is only fair to remember that both *The Song of the Lark* and *One of Ours* end on pessimistic notes. Thea achieves an amalgamation of selves, but only on stage; off stage she is hardly more than a shell. Claude Wheeler’s death, at the epiphany of the merging of his sun and moon, saves him, Cather intimates, a suicide when he finds he will not be able to return home to a land of robots. Yet, *The Song of the Lark* and *One of Ours* are basically optimistic. The first two novels were not, though they were heroic; perhaps Bartley Alexander and Alexandra Bergson are the most heroic of Cather’s creations. Even in failure they achieve, something that does not happen in the novels of the twenties, the bitter ones.
CHAPTER III

THE BITTER NOVELS

The three novels published by Cather in the mid-twenties, A Lost Lady (1923), The Professor's House (1925), and My Mortal Enemy (1926), are bitter novels, every bit as bitter, as black, as Shakespeare's dark comedies. Cather said that something broke in two about 1920, something in the world snapped, and whether or not it actually did, it did for her. For Willa Cather, civilization had changed, a way of life, or rather a promised, possible way of life had disappeared. She looked into the empty teacup and saw dregs instead of fortune-telling leaves, and her novels report what she saw.

The heroic character was dead, or dying, or submissive, and her protagonist became confused and bitter, unable to understand or be heroic. It is, I believe, quite significant that for these three novels the protagonist is not the hero, not the conqueror. The heroes are Tom Outland in The Professor's House, Oswald Henshawe in My Mortal Enemy, and Captain Daniel Forrester in A Lost Lady. They are not the protagonists. Napoleon Godfrey St. Peter, professor, is the protagonist of The Professor's House, a man who bears the names of three heroes, but has no call to be heroic and is not. Myra Henshawe is the protagonist of My Mortal Enemy; the only heroism of hers that we are allowed to see is her way of meeting death. Beyond that, she is a cruel, selfish,
and foolish woman whose only moment of heroism is remembered and related by her husband, Oswald. *A Lost Lady* is not clear as to protagonist; it has been the practice of critics to see Marian Forrester, Captain Forrester's wife, as the protagonist; I would like to present a case for Niel Herbert. At any rate, the hero, Captain Forrester is definitely not the protagonist.

Besides the shift of hero from the central role in the novel, and the corresponding weakening of the character of the protagonist, there is a definite weakening of Cather's performance as a novelist. The peculiar structure of *The Professor's House*, as well, I believe, as a professor-protagonist, has drawn a great deal of attention to the novel. The story of Godfrey St. Peter is the frame for the air-washed story of Tom Outland. And the experiment is unusual enough to warrant comment; however, it is not a successful experiment, partly because the details of St. Peter's life are given so succinctly that Cather is guilty of moralizing. This briefness of narrative is also the main quality of the other two bitter novels, *A Lost Lady* and *My Mortal Enemy*. It is as if Cather suddenly became too weary of the world to sustain her effort long enough to build a novel, a moving, evolving structure, and instead fall from narration to exposition. In these three novels she tells us what she wants us to see; she elucidates what she believes we must believe; she almost preaches. It is to her credit as a writer that these books are not dull; they are not. But in comparison with her other "happening" works, they are a great disappointment; they prove she was not able in this period to rise above her own malaise, her own personality.

It is possible that the loss of the hero protagonist was, in
itself, sufficient cause for this exceptional weakening of Cather's execution. She builds her novels not on stories, but on people, and when the people are weak or cruel or unformed as are Godfrey St. Peter and Myra Henshawe and Niel Herbert, then her novel is inherently weak; its raison d'être is weak.

The two spheres of influence are still evident, however, in these novels, are still the main conflict of the protagonists. Interestingly enough, however, these spheres are no longer as great, as equally beneficent, as they are in the heroic novels. In fact in these three novels, there is only one sphere that is great; it is the self-dedicatory sphere, the artistic or intellectual sphere. The other sphere, the sphere that once produced an Antonia Shimerda, is, in the bitter novels, a crass, animalistic, materialistic sphere. And it not only stands juxtaposed to the purity of the intellect and art; it stands as the mortal enemy of man's quest beyond the animal. It is an extremely destructive force, and it is, in all three novels, able to destroy. There is no harmony in these novels, except the remembered harmony of Tom Outland; there is only bitter enmity, confusion and defeat.

A Lost Lady and My Mortal Enemy

Although The Professor's House (1925) was published between A Lost Lady (1923) and My Mortal Enemy (1926), the stories of Marian Forrester and Myra Henshawe bear a remarkable resemblance. In fact, they are the same story. They simply have different focuses. Both are stories of middle-aged women torn between the inability of their romantic husbands to provide security for them and the practical, if
crude, security available in a great deal of money. Marian Forrester and Myra Henshawe are women who have lived too long; born into times when it was possible to have some kind of feudal power and be gracious in that power, they have survived into times of the rawest kind of democracy, when the lowliest, most objectionable human creatures can intrude into their gracious worlds, like bulls into china shops. They are not democratic women, indeed, Cather, in sympathizing with them seems herself not to have been democratic. They represent the world of gentility, and that seems to suggest a world of classes, the educated leisure class and the boorish working class. They are holdovers from a delicate world that died in 1916 with Henry James and in 1918 with the doughboys. And that, of course, is their tragedy, that they have lived too long.

The two novels, however, do not have the same focus. Neither woman is seen through her own eyes. A Lost Lady is told primarily in third person limited with the focus on Niel Herbert; there are a number of shifts of point of view which will be commented on later. My Mortal Enemy is told by a first person observer, Nellie Birdseye, whose first name is questionably close to Niel. Nellie, narrator of My Mortal Enemy, does not really become a rounded character for us. She gives us necessary information; and she is a sensitive and involved observer, but, as we shall see, it is really Myra and Oswald Henshawe who make the majority of our value judgments. Nellie seems, in fact, utterly untouched by the events she reports. She is a static character. Niel Herbert, on the other hand, sometime observer of Marian Forrester, is directly involved in the story of A Lost Lady. What happens has a direct effect on him. And it is he, finally, who makes the value judg-
In other words, Cather found two stories in one. On the one hand she tells us the story of the woman caught between two such different worlds with the emphasis on the woman, Myra Henshawe, and her story. On the other hand, she tells the story of the effect a Marian Forrester has on a sensitive and intelligent young adult, Niel Herbert. In *My Mortal Enemy*, the whole concern is Myra's tragedy. In *A Lost Lady*, the emphasis is on Niel's education through his involvement with Marian's tragedy. The novels represent an important and valid retelling of a story, making it more unfortunate that Willa Cather did not do a better job of writing.

*A Lost Lady* seems to be the story of Marian Forrester. Most critics grant it to her. Married to a man a good deal older than herself, she is forced to watch her world collapse with his. Daniel Forrester has been a railroad contractor, a great pioneer, but, by the time the novel begins, he is already old and old-fashioned. His value seems to be that he is able to provide a gracious social world for his wife, Marian. But when a bank he has supported fails, and he heroically strips himself of his fortune to return to the working men their hard-earned savings, he impoverishes Marian as well as himself. Niel Herbert and the reader watch Marian grow more and more desperate in her struggle to retain some part of her gracious lost world and to escape from the boredom and boorishness of the Midwest and the estate on Sweet Water, until finally she confuses the means to the end, the money necessary for escape, with the end, the escape, and after her husband's death, turns to the coarse but successful Ivy Peters.

But Marian Forrester is never really in conflict. Rather, she
is a very predictable character. Cather’s point of view shifts, early in the novel, to a view of Marian and Frank Ellinger as they escape from the Ogden girl’s jealousy and watchfulness into the woods to "gather pine boughs." Another shift and we are inside the mind of Adolph Blum as he watches Frank and Marian return to her cutter without the pine boughs, and there is no remorse or regret in the scene; there is simply a candid portrayal of the aftermath of sexual ecstasy. It is not, then, surprising to the reader when Niel overhears the mingling laughter of Frank Ellinger and Marian Forrester emerging from her bedroom in the dawn, or even when Ivy Peters so nonchalantly closes his hands over her breasts in what she reacts to as a usual embrace. Indeed, the only thing surprising about Marian Forrester’s story is that Ed Elliott can report to Niel ten years later that she has married a wealthy Englishman, who, no matter how questionable his character may be, and it is not very questionable, is still able to provide the particular wealthy and social circle Marian wants so desperately. We are left at the end of the novel with the distinct feeling that Cather has not been utterly true to her character, that she has manipulated the denouement away from the total fall into coarseness that Marian seems doomed for. For even at the height of her marriage to Daniel Forrester, Marian is involved in extra-marital affairs. She is wild; she is loose; she is, indeed, a social tramp.

In the well-intentioned, if unnecessary, epilogue, Niel Herbert differentiates between two Marian Forrester's:

It was years before Niel could think of her without chagrin. But eventually, after she had drifted out of his ken, when he did not know if Daniel Forrester's widow were living or dead, Daniel Forrester's wife
returned to him, a bright, impersonal memory.¹

There are two Marian Forresters, the wife of Daniel, and the widow. Niel Herbert sees two. One, Daniel Forrester's wife is a gay, gracious lady, able to charm Niel and his uncle, able to bring a gracious way of life, a courteous, gentle way of life to Sweet Water. The other, the widow, is a cold creature, intent on having the money to live the way she has become accustomed to, and seemingly unaware that her manner of grasping money, through becoming a consort for Ivy Peters, denies the very courtesy she seeks. But these two Marian Forresters are not a source of conflict within the bosom of Marian, or if they are, it is a conflict we never see. Rather, they are the source of conflict within Niel Herbert as he attempts to reconcile wife and widow. It is a conflict only partially resolved, but Niel's struggle with it is his education.

In order to understand what Marian Forrester, wife, is, we have first to understand what Captain Daniel Forrester is. Cather furnishes us with two images. Daniel is a mountain. And he is a tree.

Marian Forrester tells Niel about a fall the Captain had taken, not because of ice, but because he had drunk too much and was unsteady. She says: "I still shiver to think of it. To me, it was as if one of the mountains had fallen down" (p. 37). Cather describes his solidity: "His repose was like that of a mountain" (p. 44). He speaks with "the impressiveness of inscriptions cut into stone" (p. 50). It is a naturally drawn image, for Marian met Daniel Forrester in the Sierra

Nevadas. She had been on a reckless climbing holiday with a young man, Fred Harney, when they both fell from a ledge. Harney was killed, but Marian was caught in a pine tree to be rescued by a party led by Captain Forrester. It was the Captain who carried her down the most difficult parts of the mountain trail, and in his arms she felt less pain and more security than she did in the arms of any of the others.

'I could feel his heart pump and his muscles strain,' she said, 'when he balanced himself and me on the rocks. I knew that if we fell, we'd go together; he would never drop me.' (pp. 163-164)

When Ed Elliott comments that she must know the mountains by heart, she shakes her head: "It would take a lifetime to do that, Ed, more than a lifetime. The Sierras—there's no end to them, and they're magnificent" (p. 161). Her comment fits Niel's impression of Captain Forrester; it would take more than a lifetime to know the great man by heart because he is so magnificent.

When he first saw Sweet Water, Daniel Forrester cut a willow stake and planted it to claim his land. He returned to find "it had rooted and grown into a tree" (p. 50). And the tree is representative, like the mountain, of his natural and magnificent strength. It was a tree that caught Marian Forrester in her plunge from the ledge (p. 162); it was Captain Forrester who caught her in her plunge of wildness and brought her to a safety in his arms. His very name—Forrester—suggests one who knows trees. And in his dying, he perceptibly changes into a mountain or a tree. His face begins to lose its human characteristics. Niel observes: "His face was fatter and smoother; as if the features were running into each other, as when a wax face melts in the heat" (p. 104). And when he returns inside, after hours of watching the sundial shadow creep about the face of the stone in
his garden, he shows how much he has become the strength he represents.

He leaned upon two canes, lifting his feet slowly and putting them down firmly and carefully. He looked like an old tree walking. (p. 110)

Primarily, what the two images represent is a strength, a grandeur, a magnificence beyond the normal experience of normal human beings. Captain Daniel Forrester and men like him, men like Cyrus Dalzell and Judge Pommeroy, are not merely men. They are larger than life. They are pioneers; they are legends; they are Olympians. Cather eulogizes:

The Old West had been settled by dreamers, great-hearted adventurers who were unpractical to the point of magnificence; a courteous brotherhood, strong in attack, but weak in defence, who could conquer but could not hold. (p. 102)

Forrester's own philosophy, to which we will return later, is one of dreaming (pp. 50-51).

Strangely enough, however, it is not as pioneers that we remember Forrester and his comrades. We do not glimpse them in their pioneering role. For us, and perhaps for Cather as well, we see them in the full flush of their success, not their trials, of their accomplishments, not their beginnings. And then, of course, we see their fall. But these great American pioneers are never, in any way, representatives of that great American ideal, democracy.

Rather, it is a feudal age that Niel so cherishes, that allows a Marian Forrester to exist at all. These men are superior to the general run of mankind, and they make no attempt to be, or behave as if they were, equal. One of the tragedies, of course, occurs when Captain Forrester is no longer able to put Ivy Peters in his place as an inferior, and must bow his head humbly before the boor (p. 115). For Captain Forrester is a legendary figure. He is Robin Hood. Again, his own name implies his connection with the great English outlaw. But
It is Marian who provides the key, for Captain Forrester calls her Maidy (pp. 45, 83). Niel observes:

... that often when Mrs. Forrester was about her work, the Captain would call to her, 'Maidy, Maidy,' and she would reply, 'Yes, Mr. Forrester,' from wherever she happened to be, but without coming to him—as if she knew that when he called to her in that tone he was not asking for anything. He wanted to know if she were near, perhaps; or, perhaps, he merely liked to call her name and hear her answer. (pp. 138-139)

She is Maid Marian, and he is Robin Hood, a legend, a generous man who creates his own justice. A creature held-over from another age. Cather's descriptions of Daniel Forrester are never personal, intimate descriptions. Instead, they have about them an aura of reserve, as if she dealt with something greater than could be described. He is an historical fact, a feudal lord in his own castle.

Captain Forrester still made a commanding figure at the head of his own table, with his napkin tucked under his chin and the work of carving well in hand. ... He was a man who did not vary his formulae or his manners. He was no more mobile than his countenance. (p. 44)

The napkin tucked under his chin should be comical or ludicrous, but it is not; it is simply a manner now archaic. He looks over his land and to Niel, his expression seems to say, "A man's home is his castle" (p. 69).

He is a man of honor, for his manners, his way of life, depend on courtesy, gentility, on a man's word representing that man. Judge Pommeroy explains to Marian why her husband has impoverished himself for the workmen who trusted him.

'That was what a man of honour was bound to do, Mrs. Forrester. With five of the directors backing down, he had either to lose his name or save it. The depositors had put their savings into that bank because
Captain Forrester was president. To men with no capital
but their back and their two hands, his name meant safety.'
(p. 86)

Marian's own courtesy and gentility is based on her husband's.
She is able to create a gracious home where even a young bachelor like
Niel can appreciate the atmosphere (p. 65). Her behavior is the be-
behavior of one who knows she is superior and safe in her superiority.
She always mocks other women when she talks about them (p. 33). She
is, at first, able to control Ivy Peters simply by her own imperiousness
(p. 22). She can afford to be gracious to the lowliest of her subjects,
the Blum brothers, while she commands Niel's attendance in a lighter,
more familiar tone, as he is closer to her station, being as he is the
nephew of Judge Pommeroy.

Rheingold and Adolph Blum are present in several scenes, and
as Cather slips often from Niel's point of view, we are able to see
the Blums and their thoughts as Cather's commentary on the position of
the aristocratic class that Marian lives in. First we are told:

The Blum brothers regarded her humbly from under
their pale, chewed-off hair, as one of the rich and
great of the world. They realized, more than their
companions, that such a fortunate and privileged
class was an axiomatic fact in the social order. (p. 14)

And when Niel is carried to the Forrester home with his broken arm,
the Blums, unlike Ivy Peters who tries to insinuate himself into the
very heart of the home, wait humbly "outside the kitchen door" (p. 21).
It is Adolph who observes the tryst between Marian Forrester and Frank
Ellinger. Cather writes from Adolph's point of view:

He had never seen her before when her mocking eyes and
lively manner were not between her and all the world.
If it had been Thad Crimes who lay behind that log,
now, or Ivy Peters?
But with Adolph Blum her secrets were safe. His
mind was feudal; the rich and the fortunate were also the privileged. These warm-blooded, quick-breathing people took chances—followed impulses only dimly understandable to a boy who was wet and weather-chapped all the year; who waded in mud fishing for cat, or lay in the marsh waiting for wild duck. Mrs. Forrester had never been too haughty to smile at him when he came to the back door with his fish. She had never haggled about the price. She treated him like a human being. His little chats with her, her nod and smile when she passed him on the street, were among the pleasantest things he had to remember. She bought game of him in the closed season, and didn't give him away. (pp. 63-64)

The discrepancy between Daniel Forrester's wife and Daniel Forrester's widow is well seen in the feudal mind of Adolph Blum. He will not give her away because "the rich and fortunate were also the privileged." He will, in fact, with his brother, send her yellow roses on the day of her husband's funeral; her actions do not change his view of her, which is perhaps an explanation for Marian's breaking down and weeping at the sight of the roses (p. 142). Niel Herbert, in a parallel scene, after overhearing the mingled laughs of Marian and Frank flings away his roses into a mudhole; he cannot accept such privileges for her (p. 81).

Daniel Forrester himself has taken advantage of his wealth. Cather says: "He could afford to humor his fancies" (p. 5). And Niel, contemplating the practicality of Ivy Peters looks back on the pioneers who could afford to be wasteful.

Now all the vast territory they had won was to be at the mercy of men like Ivy Peters, who had never dared anything, never risked anything. They would drink up the mirage, dispel the morning freshness, root out the great brooding spirit of freedom, the generous, easy life of the great land-holders. The space, the colour, the princely carelessness of the pioneer they would destroy and cut up into profitable bits, as the match factory splinters the primeval forest. (p. 102)
Again Captain Forrester is a tree, but here he faces the logger, Ivy Peters, whose very name, of course, Ivy, suggests his parasitic quality. The Captain has not drained the marsh, has not cut the timber. He loves "those unproductive meadows for their idleness and silvery beauty" (p. 102)

And it is obvious that he loves Marian for the same aesthetic reasons. First, he is blind neither to what she was before he rescued her, or what she is during the winter seasons. Niel accepts from the Captain a letter to mail from Marian to Frank Ellinger. Cather writes:

Neil had often wondered just how much the Captain knew. Now, as he went down the hill, he felt sure that he knew everything; more than anyone else; all there was to know about Marian Forrester. (p. 112)

And again:

The longer Niel was with Captain Forrester in those peaceful closing days of his life, the more he felt that the Captain knew his wife better even than she knew herself; and that, knowing her, he— to use one of his own expressions— valued her. (p. 139)

How much he values her is shown quite clearly by her jewels.

Niel liked to see the firelight sparkle on her earrings, long pendants of garnet and seed-pearls in the shape of fleur-de-lys. . . . Captain Forrester, although he had given her handsomer ones, liked to see her wear these because they had been his mother's. It gratified him to have his wife wear jewels; it meant something to him. (p. 36)

What Maidy's wearing of jewels means to the Captain is explicitly told by Cather:

Her husband had archaic ideas about jewels; a man bought them for his wife in acknowledgement of things he could not gracefully utter. They must be costly; they must show that he was able to buy them, and that she was worthy to wear them. (pp. 47, 48)

Captain Forrester knows what his wife is, knows all about her, and still judges her worthy to wear the costliest jewels he can find, judges her
worthy to wear his mother's jewels. It is difficult, to say the least, to understand exactly Forrester's judgment in this case, especially since we never, in any of the point of view shifts, enter his mind.

But there are two clues to help us. First, Niel Herbert is angry with Marian after he discovers her affair with Frank Ellinger, not for moral, but for aesthetic reasons (p. 82). And second, the Captain who has a habit of thinking of his wife as being very young, even Niel's age (p. 71), is himself able to sit for days contemplating the movement of time across the face of the sandstone pillar. Captain Forrester is quite able to impoverish himself for his inferiors. Further, it is Judge Pommeroy and not the Captain who pronounces the judgment against those directors unwilling to help him make the bank's promises good.

The Captain remains, through the totality of the novel, far above any of the pettinesses of average human beings. He attains a magnificence that is superhuman. He becomes an Olympian, a god, who has merely chosen to mingle with men. As such, certainly, he would not, could not judge the mortal failures of his wife.

Cather's first portrait of the Captain gives him god-like qualities:

His clumsy dignity covered a deep nature, and a conscience that had never been juggled with. His repose was like that of a mountain. When he laid his fleshy, thick-fingered hand upon a frantic horse, an hysterical woman, an Irish workman out for blood, he brought them peace; something they could not resist. That had been the secret of his management of men. His sanity asked nothing, claimed nothing; it was so simple that it brought a hush over distracted creatures. (pp. 44-45)

His very touch is a benediction. And he is totally self-sufficient, complete unto himself. Surely these are the attributes of a god.

Further, he does not simply toast, he invokes:
'Happy days!'

It was the toast he always drank at dinner, the invocation he was sure to utter when he took a glass of whiskey with an old friend. Whoever had heard him say it once, liked to hear him say it again. Nobody else could utter those two words as he did, with such gravity and high courtesy. It seemed a solemn moment, seemed to knock at the door of Fate; behind which all days happy and otherwise, were hidden. Neil drank his wine with a pleasant shiver, thinking that nothing else made life seem so precarious, the future so cryptic and unfathomable, as that brief toast uttered by the massive man, 'Happy days!' (pp. 46-47)

And finally the all-important sundial is, according to Captain Forrester himself, "A pillar, such as they had in Bible times. It's from the Garden of the Gods" (p. 103). And it is the pillar that Marian will have inscribed and placed on the grave of this strange, magnificent man whose old-fashioned courtesy is phrased and modulated in a voice like an inscription in stone. And, in fact, a tombstone is unnecessary. After his death, it is the Captain, not his lady, that seems reality to Neil (p. 169). It is the Captain who does not die, who is immortal. It is Maid Marian who is forced to live after her god has died, after Robin Hood has disappeared in the forest, who irrevocably falters.

From the very beginning of the novel, the color black is associated with Marian Forrester. Her hair is so black, it is blue-black. Her clothing is black. And to get to her party, Judge Pommeroy hires a "funeral coach" (p. 53). Marian is mortal and is associated with the color of mortality, with black. Ironically, as the Captain dies, it is Marian who develops the black circles under her eyes (p. 127) for it is she as Maid Marian who will truly die.

The novel opens with a group of boys picnicking on the Forrester property. Their innocent enjoyment is wounded by the appearance of Ivy
Peters, who slings a stone at a woodpecker, hits and stuns it, and then, opening a devilish collection of knives and scalpels, that he just happens to be carrying with him, slits the eyes of the woodpecker and releases the blinded bird into the air.

There was something wild and desperate about the way the darkened creature beat its wings in the branches, whirling in the sunlight and never seeing it, always thrusting its head up and shaking it, as a bird does when it is drinking. Presently it managed to get its feet on the same limb where it had been struck, and seemed to recognize that perch. As if it had learned something by its bruises, it pecked and crept its way along the branch and disappeared into its own hole. (p. 20)

This act of wanton brutality is often associated with Ivy Peter's treatment of Marian Forrester. Marian is the darkened bird, especially after the death of her husband. She is the creature wild and desperate, in search of light, in search of protection.

But I believe it should also be mentioned that the Captain is the character associated with the trees. He is the one who provides protection for his creatures; and it is Marian Forrester who proclaims to Niel that she must "get out of this hole" (pp. 120-121). She allows Ivy Peters to invest her money in some underhanded scheme that steals land from the Indians at a profit to the speculators, while it is the Captain who has in his voice "the lonely, defiant note that is so often heard in the voices of old Indians" (p. 51). Marian feels trapped in a dying tree, and though she is blind, she struggles for freedom.

The Captain understands his wife, but we have little proof

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that his wife understands the Captain. He is a mountain to her, and it would take more than a lifetime to understand a mountain. All Marian can comprehend is the superficial, and that, to her, is money. She tells Niel, "Money is a very important thing. Realize that in the beginning; face it, and don't be ridiculous in the end, like so many of us" (p. 108). Her mind holds the same feudal confusion as does the mind of Adolph Blum. The rich are the privileged, according to Adolph and according to Marian. Life demands wealth, especially gracious life demands wealth. But this is a confusion. It is the Captain, who sees the rich as the obligated, who gives his money to keep his word, who is morally correct.

To return to an earlier point of our discussion, at no point in the novel is Marian Forrester moral. She lives in a freedom from society and its mores and gets away with it because she is the wife of Daniel Forrester, whose wealth and position and very person shelter her. Once he is dead, her protection is gone. Once she allowed Frank Ellinger to contaminate the sanctity of Forrester's home. Now:

Ivy Peters came in at the door, walked up behind her, and unconcernedly put both arms around her, his hands meeting over her breast. She did not move, did not look up, but went on rolling out pastry. (pp. 168-169)

She has become a "common woman" (p. 169). Daniel Forrester has given his wife jewels because she is worthy of them, but although she removes them before she goes to Frank one evening in her house (p. 55), she forgets to remove her ring—most significantly--on the next afternoon when she and Frank go for pine boughs (p. 61). She is not worthy of her husband's jewelry.

Niel Herbert turns away from Ivy Peters' common woman, yet he wishes to call up "the shade of the young Mrs. Forrester" (p. 170).
He loses contact with Daniel Forrester's widow, but he never forgets Daniel Forrester's wife.

Niel is an interesting character; his name, echoing the word "kneel," signifies his youthful worship at an idealistic altar, the altar of Marian Forrester. Edward and Lillian Bloom state that "Because Niel insists on viewing Mrs. Forrester as a beautiful abstraction, he conjures up the sacrificial image that would perpetuate for him an adored essence." He is a boy struggling to raise himself above the "fragile eggshell" (p. 24) of his father's house, where Cousin Sadie indifferently cleans house, and where "no people of consequence live" (p. 24), and where his father is a failure (p. 25). There are only two relatives of value in Niel's life. One, of course, is Judge Pommeroy, who, as we have discussed, is a member of Daniel Forrester's circle of courtly gentlemen. The other is Niel's mother.

Niel was proud, like his mother; she died when he was five years old. She had hated the West, and used haughtily to tell her neighbours that she would never think of living anywhere but in Fayette County, Kentucky; that they had only come to Sweet Water to make investments and to 'turn the crown into the pound.' By that phrase she was still remembered, poor lady. (p. 25)

It is hard to know exactly how seriously to take Cather at this point. For one thing, Mrs. Herbert is exhibiting exactly the same snobbery we have seen in Marian Forrester. And second, because of the inconstant point of view it is difficult to judge whether this is an editorial comment by the author or whether this is Niel Herbert's own understanding of his mother. It is best, I believe, to take this as an ironic

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comment by Cather and as a decided point of view shift, because Niel is not at this early stage of the novel yet able to judge so validly the circumstances and consequences of false pride.

There is, at first, total acceptance by Niel of nonconventional behavior, even as he accepts the "Heroïdes", "the great world that had plunged and glittered and sumptuously sinned" (p. 76). He is interested in Frank Ellinger, "the hero of many ambiguous stories" (p. 42), who is "a terribly fast young man and a model son. That combination pleased the taste of the time" (p. 46). And though he senses evil in Frank, he accepts whole-heartedly, at first, Marian Forrester's similar reputation.

He rather liked the stories, even the spiteful ones, about the gay life she led in Colorado, and the young men she kept dangling about her every winter. He sometimes thought of the life she might have been living ever since he had known her—and the one she had chosen to live. From that disparity, he believed, came the subtlest thrill of her fascination. She mocked outrageously at the proprieties she observed, and inherited the magic of contradiction. (p. 74)

Then he is faced with the fact that Marian Forrester only seems to observe the proprieties, that she is, in fact, having an affair with Ellinger, and he lunges away from the window and flings his morning bouquet of roses into the mudhole. It is important that Niel has, on this morning, approached his saint Marian through the sanctity of the morning, "... before men and their activities had spoiled it, while the morning was still unsullied, like a gift, handed down from the heroic ages" (p. 80). And the roses he has cut are ironically of a color that must fade "like ecstasy" (p. 80). Niel has approached the altar and has seen the clay feet of the idol.

Yet through the ensuing trouble and dying of the Captain,
Niel attempts to serve Marian with the same devotion, to see her through the same eyes as before. He becomes angry at Ivy's insolence, at his neglect to carry heavy pails for Marian, or doff his cap for her, and especially at his telling her an excessively naughty story. But he does not seem to understand, even after Marian tells him, that she is willing to put up with Ivy and his behavior in order to have him invest money for her in the crooked Indian-land deals. Even after she curtly takes her business away from Judge Pommeroy and gives it all to Ivy Peters, Niel does not understand her nature. It takes a second shock to convince him that the widow Marian is not the same as the wife Marian, the shock of Ivy Peters' careless intimacy. Early in the novel we are told that Ivy Peters has poisoned Judge Pommeroy's "friendly water spaniel" (p. 16). Now Niel tells himself: "If he had not had the nature of a spaniel... he would never have gone back after the first time. It took two doses to cure him" (p. 169).

Niel is not choosing between Captain Forrester and Marian. Rather, he is choosing between two conceptions of Marian Forrester.

From the beginning, he has sensed the truth. Cather writes:

... it was as Captain Forrester's wife that she most interested Niel, and it was in her relation to her husband that he most admired her. Given her other charming attributes, her comprehension of a man like the railroad-builder, her loyalty to him, stamped her more than anything else. That he felt, was quality; something that could never become worn or shabby; steel of Damascus. (p. 74)

And after he knows about her and Frank Ellinger, he wonders:

What did she do with all her exquisiteness when she was with a man like Ellinger? Where did she put it away? And having put it away, how could she recover herself, and give one--give even him--the sense of tempered steel, a blade that could fence with anyone and never break? (p. 95)
The secret, of course, is that Marian Forrester is either what Daniel Forrester sees or what Ivy Peters sees. She is not, to Niel, a woman, so much as she is an idea. Perhaps in some very real way, she represents the spirit of the land, a heroic spirit when seen by a hero, but a common thing when a common man aspires. Niel's education is a realization of this fact of relativity, this proof of Captain Forrester's philosophy.

The Captain says:

'... 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... because a thing that is dreamed of in the way I mean is already an accomplished fact. All our great West has been developed from such dreams; the homesteader's and the prospector's and the contractor's. We dreamed the railroads across the mountains, just as I dreamed my place on the Sweet Water. All these things will be everyday facts to the coming generations, but to us--' (pp. 50-51)

Marian Forrester, wife, is the dream of an heroic man. Marian Forrester, widow, is the everyday fact of an Ivy Peters who blinds the woodpecker, and poisons the spaniel, who drains the marshland and who steals land from the Indians. This is the great fact of the book. But there is no true resolution to Niel's conflict, for Marian Forrester ceases to exist for him. The widow he loses contact with; the wife he remembers with nostalgia. The question is whether or not Niel Herbert is able to dream any kind of a Marian Forrester; it is an unanswered question.

_A Lost Lady_ is a strangely inconstant and ultimately disappointing novel. It suffers from its lack of a hero. None of its characters have a sense of excitement or discovery about them. Ivy Peters is too despicable in a mean way to hold our sympathies. Niel Herbert, the protagonist, is a shallow and undeveloped character. Marian
Forrester is not character so much as idea, and Daniel is not character at all; he is legend. The shifting, drifting point of view further obscures the impact of the novel and takes away from Cather one of a novelist's most useful tools, discovery through point of view. Nevertheless, *A Lost Lady*, flawed though it may be, is a gripping story. The wealth and consistency of its images and the strong stability of the character of Daniel Forrester weave a poignancy the reader cannot easily forget, a poignancy especially worthy of note considering the lack of contest between the values of the novel. And the consistency of its melancholy tone earns it David Daiches' high praise as "one of the most perfectly modulated of Willa Cather's novels."

The dichotomy of protagonist is evident in this novel. Marian Forrester serves as a sort of screen for Niel Herbert upon which he can see the two values he leans toward played out. There is really, however, no contest between values in this novel. Captain Forrester stands for the only positive values, values of noblesse oblige and gentility and aesthetics. Ivy Peters and his values are drawn as crassly as Wick Cutter in *My Antonia*. Practicality has become greed and cruelty. Further, the protagonist, while he may make some mental selection of values in *A Lost Lady*, has little to do with the running out of the story. Cather leaves no doubt that the Ivy Peters of the world are taking over the Forresters and slowly strangling them, that the false values are subduing the true.

Despite the similarity of their names, Nellie of *My Mortal Enemy*, the first person narrator, is not a Niel. In the first place,
she is not the protagonist; she is simply the observer and reporter. In the second place, although she is an intelligent and sensitive young woman, she is not really involved in making any value judgments. It is Oswald Henshawe who must finally tell the narrator of the true value of Molly Driscoll, a value Nellie Birdseye—despite the connotations of her last name—has never really seen.

This novella is, to reiterate, a retelling of A Lost Lady. Myra Henshawe is faced with the same dilemma that faces Marian Forrester. The security and protection of the heroic John Driscoll are gone, and Myra is forced to live a life apart from wealth and the graciousness wealth can provide. There are four notable shifts in the story, however. First of all, the story focuses on Myra herself, not on an observer of her, and is concerned with her own personal struggle for values. It is problematic why Cather, in the face of this shift, chose to use a first person narrator other than her protagonist. To be sure, Nellie can report Myra's words, and more important, she can report Oswald's words after Myra's death. But we are denied the very heart of the conflict, Myra's own mind. As Daiches says, "... in My Mortal Enemy the change from adventurous generosity to bitter resentment is the product of poisons working within the character, and these we are never allowed to see." The second shift from A Lost Lady is a shift in time. A Lost Lady begins with Marian's enjoying the protection of the Captain, proceeds through her losing of it, and ends with her facing a life without that protection. My Mortal Enemy begins long after Myra has turned her back on John Driscoll's protection and

\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 73.}\]
is the story of her coping with a life without that protection. In effect, it is a continuation of _A Lost Lady_.

The third shift between the two novels is of utmost importance to us. In _A Lost Lady_, Marian Forrester loses the Captain, through outside chance and through death; she is a victim of circumstances, an interesting point in the light of the fact that Niel Herbert and not herself is the protagonist. In _My Mortal Enemy_, Myra Henshawe has chosen her life; circumstances have served to provide her with that choice, but she has made her own decision. And finally, in _A Lost Lady_ there is no doubt as to the extremity of the two choices. Daniel Forrester is an Olympian; Ivy Peters is a boor. But in _My Mortal Enemy_, there are two worthwhile characters to choose between, John Driscoll and Oswald Henshawe.

*Myra Molly Driscoll Henshawe is as various as her name. On the one hand, she is Molly Driscoll, Irish, Catholic, rich, wild, stubborn, impassioned. On the other, she is Myra Henshawe, social, shrewd, aesthetic, romantic. The two sides of her nature are represented by the two men in her life, John Driscoll, her uncle, and Oswald Henshawe, her husband, and though John Driscoll is dead by the time the story begins, he is, nevertheless, a strong force in her life.*

*Nellie's Aunt Lydia relates the scene, many years earlier, when Molly Driscoll walked out of her uncle's house to become Myra Henshawe, the wife of Oswald, and Nellie, wandering past the old house, which is now, thanks to John Driscoll's temper, stubbornness, and Last Will and Testament, a convent, muses about the place:*

*I thought of the place as being under a spell, like*
the Sleeping Beauty's palace; it had been in a trance, or lain in its flowers like a beautiful corpse, ever since that winter night when Love went out of the gates and gave the dare to Fate. (p. 250)

John Driscoll, angry that his niece was in love with a German free-thinker, threatened to cut her off without a penny of his great fortune if she married Henshawe and then made good his threat, turning the house into a convent and leaving money for a Chicago home for destitute women with the stipulation that should his niece turn up at the institution—should she become destitute—she was to "be received into the institution, kept without charge, and paid an allowance of ten dollars a week for pocket money until the time of her death" (p. 308). Myra comments to Nellie that her uncle knew she would die before she'd claim that allowance, and that she can appreciate his stubbornness.

Yet John Driscoll is not penurious. He is generous; his is a life of great wealth. But more important, John Driscoll represents not Fate, but Faith, the Roman Catholic faith. Nellie is extraordinarily impressed by his funeral.

When the pallbearers arrived, Driscoll did not come to the church; the church went to him. The bishop and clergy went down the nave and met that great black coffin at the door, preceded by the cross and boys swinging cloudy censers, followed by the choir chanting to the organ. They surrounded, they received, they seemed to assimilate into the body of the church, the body of old John Driscoll. They bore it up to the high altar on a river of colour and incense and organ-tone; they claimed it and enclosed it.

... I thought of John Driscoll as having escaped the end of all flesh; it was as if he had been translated, with no dark conclusion to the pageant, no 'night of the grave' about which our Protestant preachers talked. From the freshness of roses and lilies, from the glory of the high altar, he had gone straight to the greater glory, through smoking censers and candles and stars. (p. 251)
Above and beyond the considerations of Cather's increased interest in the Roman Catholic faith, an interest that was to produce, immediately after *My Mortal Enemy* (1926), *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), and *Shadows on the Rock* (1932), her two Catholic novels, we should see here in the description of John Driscoll's funeral the same suggestion of immortality we observed in her descriptions of Daniel Forrester. Neither of these men dies. Nor does their influence die.

After Myra's death, Oswald talks to Nellie about her. He says:

> 'These last years it had seemed to me that I was nursing the mother of the girl who ran away with me. Nothing ever took that girl from me. She was a wild, lovely creature, Nellie. I wish you could have seen her then.'

(p. 328)

But the Myra who dies is not a "wild, lovely creature." She herself gives the best description of herself:

> 'I am a greedy, selfish, worldly woman; I wanted success and a place in the world. Now I'm old and ill and a fright, but among my own kind I'd still have my circles; I'd have courtesy from people of gentle manners....' (p. 302)

Oswald Henshawe is, himself, an interesting character. Nellie and her Aunt Lydia are drawn to him because of his seeming selflessness, and yet there is the mystery of the topaz cuff-links and Myra's jealousy which seem to hint at some infidelity on Oswald's part.

Nellie says about him:

> I wondered... at the contradiction in his face: the strong bones and the curiously shaped eyes without any fire in them. I felt that his life had not suited him; that he possessed some kind of courage and force which slept, which in another sort of world might have asserted themselves brilliantly. I thought he ought to have been a soldier or an explorer. (p. 281)

And he is, indeed, a sort of soldier. Nellie sees him after Myra's death:
... standing exactly as he stood behind Modjeska's chair in the moonlight on that New Year's Eve, standing like a statue, or a sentinel, I had said then, not knowing what it was I felt in his attitude; but now I knew it meant indestructible constancy... almost indestructible youth. (p. 328)

Myra calls Oswald "a sentimentalist" (p. 314), but Nellie judging without passion sees him rather as a sentinel, ever true to Myra or, rather, to Molly, to the girl who ran away with him. But there is more to Oswald than his constancy; there is his lack of success, indeed, his failure. Even in Part One of the book, when the Henshawes are living in comfort and style in New York City, they live in Madison Square, a neighborhood half commercial and half residential (p. 256), and Myra becomes green with envy when she and Nellie, driving in a rented hansom cab, are passed by a woman she feels her inferior driving in her own buggy (p. 271). She gives the coachman too large a tip and tells Nellie, "it's very nasty, being poor" (p. 271). And in Part Two of the novella, Oswald is only a poorly-paid clerical figure.

Yet, Oswald represents a very real power in Myra's life. He represents the spirit of love and romance. It is as his wife that Myra Henshawe visits the tubercular poetess, whose conversation so charms Nellie (pp. 271-272). And it is as his wife that Myra entertains the magnificent Madame Modjeska on that memorable New Year's Eve. Modjeska is not an ordinary figure. Nellie describes her:

When the other guests began to arrive, and Myra was called away, she sat by the fire in a high-backed chair, her head resting lightly on her hand, her beautiful face half in shadow. How well I remember those long, 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 sceptre, or a chalice—or, by courtesy, a sword. (p. 275)
The opera star sings the *Casta Diva* aria; its effect on the principle characters is significant.

I remember Oswald, standing like a statue behind Madame Modjeska's chair, and Myra, crouching low beside the singer, her head in both hands, while the song grew and blossomed like a great emotion. (p. 277)

Myra is completely enthralled by the aria; she gives in to its great emotion; she crouches at the feet of the artist in total and abject submission. Oswald stands guard over her, a sentinel, a soldier, protecting, guarding her in her most vulnerable moment.

It becomes obvious then that Myra is afforded a sort of protection by each of the two men in her life. The immediate question is: exactly what does each of the men represent? It is tempting to find here the choices we have found in *My Antonia* and *The Song of the Lark*, daily practicality versus poetic immortality. But, as we have seen, these choices evolve in *A Lost Lady*, where daily practicality becomes crass materialism, and poetic immortality becomes a medieval code of honor. Similarly in *My Mortal Enemy*, the values have changed. Oswald Henshawe certainly could represent an aesthetic value; but John Driscoll is not simple practicality, nor is he materialism. It is the scene of Driscoll's funeral which gives to him the same aura of immortality that we have seen in Daniel Forrester in *A Lost Lady* and that we see in *My Mortal Enemy* in Oswald Henshawe; if anything Henshawe ages more than Driscoll does, and that cannot be true if Henshawe represents the aesthetic value, which by its very nature is immortal.

It is important to this discussion, I believe, to notice that Myra Henshawe as she approaches death returns as much as she can to
her uncle's faith. She counsels with Father Fay; she clings to the ebony and ivory crucifix; her language is salted with Roman Catholic terminology.

'I'd love to see this place at dawn,' Myra said suddenly. '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. You know how the great sinners always came home to die in some religious house, and the abbot or the abbess went out and received them with a kiss?' (p. 300)

And yet when she dies, she drags herself to 'Gloucester's Cliff' to see the forgiving dawn, instead of calling for the forgiveness of Extreme Unction; she dies grasping the cross, but in an almost pagan attitude of sun-worship; and instead of being buried in hallowed ground to await the resurrection of the dead, she is, in obedience to her will, cremated and her ashes scattered in the sea.

The dichotomy of this character is not a dichotomy between flesh and spirit or practicality and poetry or honor and infamy. It is a dichotomy of faiths. On the one hand, Myra Henshawe is the wife of a free-thinker, who bears allegiances to no creed but the aesthetic. On the other, she is Molly Driscoll, "The Irish Washerwoman" (p. 258), and fully devoted to the Roman Catholic creed.

Before she dies, Myra cries out in agony: "Why must I die like this, alone with my mortal enemy" (p. 321). Nellie searches her own mind trying to understand the full import of Myra's words. They seem to be uttered against Oswald and all that he stands for.

Oswald was sitting on the sofa, his face shaded by his hand. I looked at him in affright, but he did not move or shudder. I felt my hands grow cold and my forehead grow moist with dread. I had never heard a human voice utter such a terrible judgment upon all one hopes for. As I sat on through the night, after Oswald had
gone to catch a few hours of sleep, I grew calmer; I began to understand a little what she meant, to sense how it was with her. Violent natures like hers sometimes turn against themselves... against themselves and all their idolatries. (p. 321)

Myra has not turned against Oswald; she has turned against that part of herself that made him all important to her, that made her adore him, worship him enough to turn her back on what her uncle and his faith meant to her. And, yet, she cannot fully repudiate him. She admits that she has made life unhappy (p. 314), but she is not able to turn her back on the poetry, the music, the romance that is Oswald. Paradoxically, Cather makes Myra's two religions mutually dependent. John Driscoll has the money necessary to support the graceful life that Oswald Henshawe introduces his wife to. But at the same time, John Driscoll's faith demands in sacrifice the freedom available in Oswald Henshawe's freethinking world.

Myra is caught in a dilemma. She is not able to solve it. It grows in her like the malignant cancer, and it destroys her on Gloucester's Cliff.

The very phrase "Gloucester's Cliff," which Myra herself uses twice (p. 299, 312), is a disturbing one. Nellie describes the cliff as "a bare headland, with only one old twisted tree upon it, and the sea beneath" (p. 299). In *King Lear*, it is Edgar who describes the cliff for his blinded father, Gloucester.

How fearful
And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low!
The crows and choughs that wing the midway air
Show scarce so gross as beetles. Half-way down
Hangs one that gathers samphire—dreadful trade!
I think he seems no bigger than his head.
The fishermen that walk upon the beach
Appear like mice; and yond tall anchoring bark
Diminish'd to her cock; her cock, a buoy
Almost too small for sight. The murmuring surge
That on th' unnumb'red idle pebble chafes
Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more;
Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight
Topple down headlong. 6

The problem is that the cliff from which Gloucester supposedly hurls himself is non-existent, or rather it exists only in Edgar's poetry. It is a fiction designed to convince the blind old man that miracles will intercede to preserve his life. What is its relation to Lyra then? Is Lyra or Cather implying that Oswald's faith or Driscoll's is a fictitious miracle, the mere poetic creation of human love? Or is Lyra's entire dilemma a fiction. She is a quixotic character, on the one hand, quoting Richard II and Heine (pp. 309, 306-7), and on the other breaking into the brogue of a shanty Irishwoman and refusing to understand Nellie's support of Oswald (p. 315). The richness of her character and the flexibility of her mind argues, therefore, that she herself is implying something when she nicknames the headland "Gloucester's Cliff," that this is not Cather's comment on the character, but Lyra's own comment on herself.

I must confess I do not have a provable interpretation. I can only suggest, that Lyra, knowing Lear quite well, is naming her own blindness. She, like Gloucester, has loved the wrong child. She has nursed in her bosom the venomous free-thinker, and the cliff would, therefore, represent her fall back to Edgar, to Roman Catholicism, to the true faith. But if that is a valid interpretation, then Willa Cather has erred in having Lyra die outside her religion; perhaps it is ignorance on Cather's part that allows her to substitute the

6Shakespeare King Lear IV. vi. 11-24.
Sacrament of Communion for the Last Rites. I am not sure.

The novella *My Mortal Enemy* is the story of a woman torn between two faiths, unable to free either completely or bury either completely. But it is not a well-told story. Part of the confusion is undoubtedly caused by the distance of the narrator, really a rather unimportant and unmemorable young lady. Part of the confusion stems from the excessive "talkiness" of the book; Cather seems so intent on telling us what she wants us to know that she neglects the development of characters and actions that would convey her theme better. And, perhaps, part of the confusion is Cather's own.

Both *A Lost Lady* and *My Mortal Enemy* are melodramatic books, dealing with the downfall of a beautiful and gracious woman. Both stories are seen through youthful eyes. Neither novel provides a valid resolution to the dichotomy of the protagonists. Niel Herbert, admitting the good of Daniel Forrester and the evil of Ivy Peters, is forced also to accept the dying of the good, and the surviving practicality of the evil. Myra Henshawe's resolution is an obscured one, her values, propped into the pigeon-holes of Roman Catholicism and free-thinking, are not mutually distinctive and her motivations are non-existent. Cather tried the same story twice in these works; she varied protagonist and time; but neither novel successfully resolves the conflict.

**The Professor's House**

Napoleon Godfrey St. Peter, the professor, is the protagonist of *The Professor's House*. He faces the conflict of his own dual nature, of his buried self, his Solomon Valley youth, confronting his social,
Henry Atkins' family gathering is certainly a strange one, but it is no stranger than Professor St. Peter's. St. Peter has a wife, two daughters, two sons-in-law, Tom Outland, and his Spanish Adventurers, a congregation every bit as improbable as the Atkins'. Yet, as the Atkins family gathers about Henry's memory table, so the Professor's family gathers about him for the novel *The Professor's House*.

This seventh novel of Willa Cather's is one of the most interesting, structurally, of all her works. It is a novel containing a novella, the story of St. Peter containing the story of Tom Outland. And it is, I feel, the most bitter, the most unredemptive of all her novels.

*The Professor's House* is a tantalizing work. Complex in organization, ambiguous in its statement, it tempts the critic to interpret, to fit and refit the events of St. Peter's life into an interpretation. It is a veritable whirlpool of dualities. St. Peter is

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Elizabeth Moorhead, in *These Too Were Here: Louise Homer and Willa Cather*, reprinted James Schroeter, *Willa Cather and Her Critics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 112, quotes Cather on the structure of *The Professor's House*. "But to me it was an interesting experiment. I really got the idea from a Dutch painting: a rich warm interior—and through an open window the sea, blue, very much alive, with light wind on the water."
caught in the swirling ideas and symbols. Unfortunately, the dualities finally begin contradicting themselves.

There are, first of all, two houses. There is the ugly house the St. Peters have lived in while the professor wrote his books; there is the new house he cannot bring himself to move to, the house paid for by the Spanish adventurers. Within the old house, there are two studies, the "show study," "a sham," with "roomy shelves" and "a proper desk" where the professor writes letters, and the "dark den" with its "walnut table" and unshielded lightbulb, where the professor wrote his saga of the Spanish adventurers (p. 9). There are two daughters, Kathleen, who is artistic and has done several water-color studies of her father (p. 6), is described by her husband, Scott, as "the real one" (p. 105), is insensitive enough to exhibit prejudice against her Jewish brother-in-law, Louis Marsellus (p. 79) and petty enough to turn actually green with envy of her sister's wealth (p. 80). Rosamond, the insensitive daughter, could on the one hand be woman enough to be betrothed to Tom Outland, and on the other marries Louis Marsellus whose crime, besides his Jewishness, is his success in turning the Outland invention into cold cash. The Professor pictures Rosamond's "cruel upper lip and scornful half-closed eyes" (p. 84). There are, of course, two sons-in-law. St. Peter casts them in a pageant.

He posed his two sons-in-law in a tapestry-hung tent, for a conference between Richard Plantagenet and the Saladin, before the walls of Jerusalem. Marsellus, in a green dressing-gown and turban, was seated at a table with a chart, his hands extended in reasonable, patient argument. The Plantagenet was standing, his plumed helmet in his hand, his square yellow head haughtily erect, his unthoughtful brows fiercely frowning, his lip curled and his fresh face full of arrogance. (p. 68)
Louis Marsellus is the reasonable man, the practical man, the man who made a fortune from Outland's vacuum, and who is insensitive enough to name his new house "Outland" and to create in it a "memorial" to Outland, complete with a preservation of his books and laboratory apparatus (pp. 36-37). Scott Maegregor is, to his father-in-law, a more sympathetic character (p. 67). He is a writer, caught writing daily sentimental poems for the newspaper for a living. "Scott had early picked himself out to do something very fine, and he felt that he was wasting his life and his talents... His disappointed vanity ate away at his vitals like the Spartan boy's wolf..." (pp. 67-68). And yet, despite his natural sympathy for Scott, it is to Louis the professor responds: "Louis, you are magnanimous and magnificent!" (p. 166) The sons-in-law cannot be categorized, then, except in one respect. They are both inferior to Tom Outland. He is opposite them, their polarity.

But Tom Outland, himself, is a dual character. His first appearance is symbolic of his duality.

The next thing [the professor] observed was the strong line of contrast below the young man's sandy hair—the very fair forehead which had been protected by his hat, and the reddish-brown of his face, which had evidently been exposed to a stronger sun than the spring sun of Hamilton. (p. 107)

His is a nature equally gifted in science and in the humanities. He is the best student of two men: Godfrey St. Peter, whose name so obviously represents history and religion, and Professor Crane, whose name is mechanical enough to represent science. Further, Tom leaves behind him two legacies: the Outland vacuum, a scientific discovery, and his notebook, a statement about the nature of his society. Most
important in the notebook is the contrast of two cities, Washington, D.C., and the Cliff City, and these two cities present another duality. Washington, the capitol, is a city of bureaucrats. Tom hastens away from it:

I had no plans. I wanted nothing but to get back to the mesa and live a free life and breathe free air, and never, never again to see hundreds of little black-coated men pouring out of white buildings. (p. 235)

The Washingtonians are slaves, so far as Tom is concerned, insects caught in the pettiness of "trying to keep up appearances" (p. 230), and they lose badly in the contrast with the Cliff City Dwellers.

Father Duchene tells Tom and his friend, Roddy Blake:

'I am inclined to think that your tribe were a superior people. Perhaps they were not so when they first came upon this mesa, but in an orderly and secure life they developed considerably the arts of peace. There is evidence on every hand that they lived for something more than food and shelter. They had an appreciation of comfort, and went even further than that. . . . There is unquestionably a distinct feeling for design. . . .'' (pp. 216-217)

One city is caught in the whirl of pettiness; the other lost despite, or perhaps because of, its artistry.

Professor St. Peter is also a dual character, although where Tom Outland seems able to handle his duality, the professor and the reader can only confront his.

His son-in-law, Louis Marsellus, tells St. Peter he has created two sets of children, his daughters and his sons, his "splendid Spanish-adventurer sons" (p. 161). And these two sets of children would seem to represent a natural procreation, because Cather tells us St. Peter has had two loves in his life. However, any attempt to reconcile St. Peter's two loves and his two sets of children is abortive. Cather writes:
He had had two romances: one of the heart, which had filled his life for many years, and a second one of the mind—of the imagination. Just when the morning brightness of the world was wearing off for him, along came Outland and brought him a second kind of youth. (p. 256)

Cather should, logically, be speaking here of Louise and history. But according to this quote, St. Peter has three sets of children: his daughters, his Spanish adventurer sons, and Tom Outland. And according to the duality of his work, St. Peter is mostly concerned with those children not biologically his. His work is of two natures. He writes, of course, the volumes about the Spanish adventurers, and he busies himself prefacing an edition of Tom Outland's journals. Cather would seem to be implying, then, that St. Peter's true life is an intellectual one. And yet she writes:

All the while he had been working so fiercely at his eight big volumes, he was not insensible to the domestic drama that went on beneath him. His mind had played delightedly with all those incidents. Just as, when Queen Mathilda was doing the long tapestry now shown at Bayeux—working her chronicle of the deeds of knights and heroes—alongside the big pattern of dramatic action she and her women carried the little playful pattern of birds and beasts that are a story in themselves; so to him, the most important chapters of his history were interwoven with personal memories. (pp. 95-96)

It would seem that Cather is asking us to equate the Spanish adventurers with his marriage and family life; that all of these be taken as products of the heart. However, Cather makes clear that the history is a thing apart from and incompatible with St. Peter's family life. The professor retreats to his "dark den" and puts up with all sorts of inconveniences rather than to journey into the house below.

On that perilous journey down through the human house he might lose his mood, his enthusiasm, even his temper. So when the lamp was empty—and that usually occurred when he was in the middle of a most important passage—
he jammed an eyeshade on his forehead and worked by the glare of that tormenting pear-shaped bulb, sticking out of the wall on a short curved neck just about four feet above his table. It was hard on eyes even as good as his. But once at his desk, he didn't dare quit it. (p. 21)

If the "human" world can impose itself on, interfere with the creation of the Spanish adventurers, decidedly an imaginative world, then the two are not the same, and Cather has given St. Peter three romances, not just two: his family, his adventurers, and Tom Outland.

The long expository passages in the last third of the novel represent, to this writer, Cather's eleventh hour attempt to bring this swirl of duality and multiplicity under reins. But it is not a successful attempt. If anything, it adds to the confusion.

In a throw-back to her first novel, Alexander's Bridge, Cather introduces a further buried self of Professor St. Peter, namely, his youth, the boy he was in Solomon Valley. According to these pages, the St. Peter who left Solomon Valley had the more active mind; the youth who remained behind "was not a scholar. He was a primitive" (p. 262). But at the same time, the scholar was the "social man, the lover" (p. 262). "His histories, he was convinced had no more to do with his original ego than his daughters had; they were the result of the high pressure of manhood" (p. 262). Again, this would seem to equate the daughters and the Spanish adventurers. If this is what Cather means to do, then certainly she has cluttered her novel with unnecessary dualities. There is no reason for two studies, for the professor should have felt no conflict until the advent of Outland and his journal and the professor's daydreams. The professor should not be torn between the two houses, for neither house should represent anything more than his family. In other words, the dichotomy in the
professor’s life is not present in Hamilton; he has left his youth in Solomon Valley—obviously a statement of wisdom—and does not walk shoulder to shoulder with that youth again until the summer he reads Tom Outland’s journal. And yet, the first third of the novel is a compilation of dualities; the daughters, the sons-in-laws, Tom Outland himself, St. Peter and Crane, Plantagenet and Salladin.

Again Cather besieges us with interpretation.

The Professor knew, of course, that adolescence grafted a new creature into the original one, and that the complexion of a man’s life was largely determined by how well or ill his original self and his nature as modified by sex rubbed on together.

What he had not known was that, at a given time, that first nature could return to a man, unchanged by all the pursuits and passions and experiences of his life; untouched even by the tastes and intellectual activities which have been strong enough to give him distinction among his fellows. . . . He did not regret his life, but he was indifferent to it. It seemed to him like the life of another person. (pp. 264-265)

There are two natures to man, Cather suggests, the natural, that of the child, and the sexual, that of the adult. And yet, there is a contradiction here. For the child is a primitive (p. 262), according to Cather.

He was only interested in earth and woods and water. Wherever sun sunned and rain rained and snow snowed, wherever life sprouted and decayed 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 was solitary and must always be so; he had never married, never been a father. He was earth and would return to earth. (pp. 262-263)

Cather is obviously trying to differentiate between the life force and the sexual force, but this is a logical, theoretical and biological impossibility, as Cather herself subconsciously proves when she makes
the outstanding symbol of the Cliff City an outstanding phallic symbol:
"The tower was the fine thing that held all the jumble of houses together and made them mean something. It was red in colour, even on that grey day" (p. 198). It is the sexual force that builds civilizations; further, this sexual force is irrevocably associated with the professor who is as red as the tower. He wears a cap when he swims:

This one was vermilion, and was like a continuation of his flesh—his arms and back were burned a deep terracotta from a summer in the lake. His head and powerful reaching arms made a strong red pattern against the purple blue of the water. (p. 55)

The professor is, then, the red tower. He symbolizes the sexual force that collects houses, the dwellings of people, about him. Professor St. Peter gathers about him a family as strange as the Atkins, a civilization as desolate as the Cliff City. Yet, Cather has cited the Cliff Dwellers as the possessors of the same kind of natural, primitive wisdom that the youth St. Peter left in Solomon Valley has. But this is not a social, not a procreative wisdom. Then what are we to do with the red tower in the Cliff City?

Tom Outland describes the building of a cavern:

whenever the surface rock is much harder than the rock beneath it, the softer stone begins to crack and crumble with weather just at the line where it meets the hard rim-rock. It goes on crumbling and falling away, and in time this washout grows to be a spacious cavern. The Cliff City sat in an unusually large cavern. (pp. 201-202)

St. Peter's surface rock has not crumbled; his buried self, the boy in Solomon Valley, has. And within the cavity thus created in his own personality, St. Peter has built a city, surrounding a fine red tower. This city, however, is the peopleless remains of a once great civilization.
I knew at once that I had come upon the city of some extinct civilization, hidden away in this inaccessible mesa for centuries, preserved in the dry air and almost perpetual sunlight like a fly in amber... (p. 199)

It has the qualities of "silence and stillness and repose--immortal repose" (p. 198) and "the calmness of eternity" (pp. 198-199). Obviously immortality and infinity cannot be part of St. Peter's real family, of Lillian, of Kathleen and Rosamond, Scott and Louis, so Cather must be referring to St. Peter's historical creation, also a creation of his adulthood, of, as Cather puts it, "the high pressure of young manhood" (p. 262), a form of sexual sublimation. And this city is held in contrast to Washington, D.C., to the real civilization about St. Peter, the civilization that does not understand his artistic achievement, that would purchase a cliff-dweller's pottery for use as an ashtray (p. 224), that would turn Tom Outland's memory into a memorial.

But here again, we are faced with contradiction, because we cannot erase from the novel Cather's statement that the Cliff-Dwellers possessed the same kind of wisdom possessed by the boy in Solomon Valley. It is almost as if Cather did not remember well enough what she had already said, for St. Peter, at the beginning of the novel, is caught in a conflict between two selves, the social self and the artistic. The introduction of the youth, on top of the original conflict, is totally confusing.

Tom Outland holds the same sort of position in this novel that Marian Forrester does in A Lost Lady. He himself is in conflict; there is a duality to his character. Though where Marian Forrester is forced

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to resolve her conflict unfortunately, Tom is not; he, like Claude Wheeler, is saved by a timely and heroic war death the problems of trying to handle a dual nature in his society. But like Marian Forrester, Tom's conflict, what there is of it, is unimportant. What is important is Tom himself, not as a character, but as an idea. In the face of Rosamond and Louis' commercializing of Tom, Kathleen says to her father, "... and now he's all turned out in chemicals and dollars and cents, hasn't he. But not for you and me! Our Tom is much nicer than theirs" (p. 127).

He is a contradiction, a contrast between the mind protected by his civilization, his education, and the natural man, bronzed by the sun (p. 107). Lillian says after Tom has given the girls the turquoise and herself a piece of ancient pottery:

'Well, this is something new in students, Godfrey. We ask a poor perspiring tramp boy to lunch, to save his pennies, and he departs leaving princely gifts.' (p. 116)

He represents the total human being.

To write of his scientific work would be comparatively easy. But that was not all the story; his was a many-sided mind, though a simple and straightforward personality.

... he was not altogether consistent. As an investigator he was clear-sighted and hardheaded, but in personal relations he was apt to be exaggerated and quixotic. He idealized the people he loved and paid his devoir to the ideal rather than to the individual, so that his behaviour was sometimes a little too exalted for the circumstances—'chivalry of the cinema,' Lillian used to say. (pp. 167-168)

He is the most brilliant student of St. Peter, on the one hand, and Crane, on the other. His is a nature both human and scientific. In a very real sense, he is St. Peter's alter ego, combining the best of both selves; yet in another sense, he is the ideal, the goal St. Peter never quite reaches, because Tom's combination of selves is not a
conflict, but simply a fact. In this latter sense, Tom discovers not only a scientific vacuum, but, indeed, leaves a human vacuum behind him when he dies. And nature abhors a vacuum, someone said once.
The sons-in-law, the daughters, the wife of St. Peter, all these are unable to fill the vacuum Tom has left. Not one of the family left behind is complete enough to take Tom's place, although each of the characters exhibits duality in his personality. The sons-in-law are especially important. Scott, forced to be practical, feels the wolf of the aesthetic "gnawing at his vitals" (pp. 67-68), and Louis, the practical, materialistic Jew, has the leisure to be gracious and wins from St. Peter the compliments "magnanimous and magnificent" (p. 166).

A good deal of the confusion and ambiguity of *The Professor's House* stems from Cather's vision, in this particular novel, of the two sides of her character. Here we do not have love versus death, or the practical versus the poetic, except in rather vague terms. The confrontation in this novel is Art versus Nature. Unfortunately, Cather seems unable to define her terms and both terms possess several connotations.

Nature, for instance, can mean either the natural world, a world untouched by education or society, the world, to an extent, of the Solomon Valley boy, but only to an extent, because this nature also suggests procreation, the adult view of the world, as well as orientation, the child's view. On the other hand, nature, juxtaposed to art, implies science. The nature interests of Tom Outland, for example, are scientific interests. The character who represents the polarity of St. Peter's humanistic studies is Crane, a scientist.

In the same manner, we are confronted with two interpretations
of art. Certainly St. Peter is an artist. Quite early in the novel we are told that he has created a French garden in Hamilton (p. 7) and that this very garden serves to wall out his neighbors (p. 6). He creates the pageant scene of Plantagenet and Saladin. Cather writes:

> It struck him that the seasons sometimes gained 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 was no selection. (p. 69)

Besides the obvious error in Cather's statement, for Nature does indeed select, Cather herself contradicts this statement, or rather St. Peter does, as he lounges on the boat watching the Spanish Sierra Nevadas.

> St. Peter lay looking up at them from a little boat riding low in the purple water, and the design of his book unfolded in the air above him, just as definitely as the mountain ranges themselves. And the design was sound. (p. 101)

Obviously, Cather is implying that the mountains which no human hand has arranged have a natural design akin to the artistic design St. Peter will use in his history. And Tom Outland, to further emphasize a natural design and artistry, says, about the turquoises he gives to St. Peter's daughters:

> "Turquoises, just the way they come out of the mine, before the jewelers have tampered with them and made them look green. The Indians like them this way." (p. 115)

Cather has confused art and artifact. She uses the term art in some instances to mean beauty, but sometimes she uses it to mean craft, to mean "tampering" instead of "selection."

But we should not be too strident in our criticism of Cather's confusion for the complexity of human response to art and to nature is a complexity unresolved and perhaps unresolvable. Indeed, both Cather and St. Peter struggle throughout the novel to make sense of this basic
The long exposition in the last third of the novel is evidence of the writer's and the protagonist's search for true values. That that exposition contradicts itself is unfortunate, but more unfortunate is the fact that Cather felt such exposition was necessary. The introduction of the Solomon Valley child and St. Peter's comprehension of the result of the addition of sexuality to the innocent nature of the child is perhaps a suggestion of solution rather than solution itself. Cather seems, at first to be putting forth the Romantic belief in the child coming from heaven trailing streams of glory. But she slips from the Romanticism to Puritanism. The Original Sin is not that St. Peter ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but that he became a sexual being. Sex is, thereby, damned irrevocably. There is no comment on good or evil sex, it is simply puberty that condemns the human being to fall from grace. And the suggestion is that St. Peter faces an irreconcilable conflict: his adulthood versus his memories of the innocence of his childhood.

The "window structure" of the novel could conceivably aid Cather; it is a bold experiment. Unfortunately it does not aid her. It breaks the novel twice, and though the story it tells, Tom Outland's exploration of the Cliff City, is fascinating, it obviously does not serve to explain St. Peter. Tom Outland is presented as St. Peter's alter ego, a statement of what the professor could be if he could reconcile his two selves. But the fact remains that Cather felt it necessary to add the long expository passages in the last third of the

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9 See, for instance, William Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality."
of the book, after Tom's story, in order to explain the professor. She seems, therefore, to feel that the story of the Cliff Dwellers is not sufficiently clear; in that case, perhaps she should have dropped it completely and concentrated further detail on the professor's life.

The Professor's House is not, therefore, a successful novel. Whenever a novelist must explain his work, he proves that his work is not totally communicating on its own merits. Every novel has exposition, but exposition that moralizes and contradicts the facts of the story is, obviously, a forced interpretation by the writer. Cather is exceptional in her ability to communicate without exposition; *Antonia* is a superb example of her control over narrative detail. And there is almost no exposition in *Antonia*. The Professor's House contradicts Cather's own talent.

And yet the total pessimism of the novel is communicated. The reader is left with the terrifying picture of Mother Eve, the mummy found by Tom and Roddy, probably caught in an act of adultery (p. 221) and punished by death. She plunges to the bottom of the canyon to haunt it:

> Her mouth was open as if she were screaming, and her face through all those years, had kept a look of terrible agony. (p. 212)

Her face retains the look of agony, not as a mother, but as an adulteress. She does not scream in birth, but in sin and death. St. Peter is not Adam; he is the promise of salvation, the one who holds the keys to the gates of heaven. But there is no salvation for him in this life or in any other, nor is he a saint, martyred for his beliefs, because he has no beliefs. If, indeed, he represents Cather's picture
of salvation, we can only conclude that she saw none. She said, "The
world broke in two. . . ." and The Professor's House is the ultimate
statement of that world, not merely broken in two, but dashed into
so many pieces that all the king's horses and all the king's men. . .

Summary

A Lost Lady, The Professor's House, and My Mortal Enemy are
Cather's bitter novels. They are also her weakest novels. They are
also the only novels she wrote that focus on married couples. Perhaps
these characteristics depend on one another.

In My Antonia, Jim Burden says: "I wondered whether the life
that was right for one was ever right for two!" (p. 367) But in the
heroic novels, Cather concentrates specifically on the character de­
termined to find his right way of life. We read Bartley Alexander's
story, not Winifred's; Antonia's, not Anton's; Thea's, not Fred's.
In fact, in each of these cases, we are not even concerned, except
for Jim's momentary wondering, about the lives of the spouses. In
the bitter novels, Cather's protagonists are not heroic. We focus on
Marian Forrester, not Daniel; on Myra Henshawe, not Oswald. And though
Godfrey St. Peter is a husband who strives to establish his way of life
as opposed to his wife's; nevertheless, Tom Outland, not St. Peter, is
the heroic figure in the novel, and St. Peter is caught in a family
trap that does not allow him heroic freedoms.

These three novels seem to represent a sudden realization on
Cather's part that most people do not go singly through life, that,
indeed, most people are involved in a marriage situation that, by its
very nature, lessens the individual's freedom in making his life suit
his own desires. Perhaps, as John H. Randall implies, these novels are simply the bitter outpourings of a frustrated old maid. But, perhaps, there is a less myopic interpretation of Cather's bitterness.

In all of her novels she is searching for a formula that would allow any given human being complete investigation and fulfillment of his multifaceted nature. And in all of her novels, with the possible exception of *My Antonia*, she senses an inevitable fall, a failure by the individual, no matter how exceptional, to fully realize his nature. Passion, including sexual passion, is in the heroic novels a possible route to fulfillment, as it is for Antonia. But in these bitter novels, Cather becomes aware that the potential of the child is always present; it is the adult who fails, never the child. Myra Henshawe and Godfrey St. Peter are most complete as children. Cather, therefore, is investigating a possible solution to that dilemma, that it is, perhaps, puberty, sexuality and the conjugal bonds that restrain the individual. That she did not accept this solution past the three novels is evident in *Lucy Gayheart* and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* and *Shadows on the Rock*. But the solution is appealing enough to her, that she turns in her next two novels to a religious investigation, in particular an investigation of Roman Catholicism, the very religion that praises and practices celibacy.

It is unfortunate that the bitter novels are not artistically sound. Had they been, they might have provided a sounder analysis of their thesis. But the exposition, as well as the shoppiness and point of view confusion, obscure the communication of event and force Cather

10 *The Landscape and the Looking Glass.*
to moralize. Perhaps it was Cather's very pessimism that thwarted her artistic effort.
Willa Cather wrote about people, and her people were heroes. But suddenly in the 1920's, she could no longer convincingly draw an heroic human character. Small wonder then, that for her next two novels, she turned to a giant, to an unfailing, infallible hero, to the hero of the greatest magnitude and mystery, to civilization itself, to the New World. *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) and *Shadows on the Rock* (1932) are normally referred to as Cather's Catholic novels, a sort of revivist period for her when she renewed or sought to renew her faith in man's purpose on earth. It is true that these two novels are religious novels; but they are not Catholic novels. Roman Catholicism only plays a role in them; in each novel it is one of the two choices available to man. In *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, religion is juxtaposed to sensuality; in *Shadows on the Rock* it is juxtaposed to law. In neither novel is the conflict presented to a single human being; rather, in both works, the conflict is a drama enacted on the surface of the land, against the backdrop of the sky, by an entire population. The human beings are actors in the drama, to be sure, but no one of them decides the fate of this civilization, this New World, rather the fate is decided by the total people and by the land itself, by its very physical and spiritual qualities and by its reception of the Europeans who come bearing the new faith and law and sensuality.
The religious novels are well-written books. Fundamentally, they are a return to a technique Cather used so well in *My Antonia*, and then never really used well again. They are a collection of vignettes, of anecdotes, of descriptions and conversations and just enough fragments of a plot to hold the whole fabric together. They are a montage of color and movement. Especially is this true in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* where the fundamental image is one of motion.

But more than just technique, these two works are a return to the quiet control of the heroic novels. The hysteria of the bitter novels, the hastiness and carelessness, are put aside, and Cather is once again a master at her craft. The dichotomy of the world is still present. But once again Cather is able to take a sober, calculated look at it and at the men and elements that create it.

*Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock*

Both novels continue Cather's exploration of the basic dichotomy of man.

On the one hand, man is physical; on the other he is spiritual. Archbishop Father Jean Latour again and again encounters the physical, sensual side of man's nature. John H. Randall, in comments about the passages in *The Archbishop* relating to the mysterious case to which Jacinto leads Father Latour out of the blizzard, says:

One need not be a Freudian to sense that there is something quite peculiar in Willa Cather's handling of this episode. Lover of tradition, as she was, she nevertheless veered away from that part of the Indian tradition that had to do with the fertility cult. The most vital part of Indian religious ceremonies, which exerted such a fascination over D.H. Lawrence and others, she has her protagonist regard with
distrust and fear.¹

First of all, I would argue that Latour is not the protagonist, however prominent his role in the novel; he is, rather, the representative of a particular part of a particular culture which is being fostered on a population. Second, I do not feel Cather has "veered away" from the obvious meaning of the episode.

Looking up, the Bishop saw a peculiar formation in the rocks; two rounded edges, one directly over the other, with a mouth-like opening between. They suggested two great stone lips, slightly parted and thrust outward.²

The Bishop is forced to climb "through the orifice, into the throat of the cave" (p. 144), and he watches while Jacinto seals off an inner passage, placing stones in "the mouth of the orifice" (p. 149). This image, coupled with the suggestion that the inner cave contains some huge serpent used in primitive religious rites, leaves no room to doubt that Cather is building a sexual image. And it is proper that the priest, a man consecrated to a religion that holds chastity and, indeed, celibacy, as a high form of purity would feel, as Latour does, a repugnance about entering such a place.

Other equally physical images are established to the same end, the investigation of the physical side of mankind. Padre Martínez, a powerful man, who has "an altogether compelling personality, a disturbing, mysterious magnetic power" (p. 174), lives an admittedly uncivilized life, surrounded by serving-women, young and old—and by


large yellow cats with full soft fur..." (p. 167). Certainly, no animal represents as well as a cat the totally physical life. Martínez's student, Trinidad Lucero, "gave the impression of being always stupefied by one form of sensual disturbance or another" (p. 168). Father Lucero, Trinidad's uncle, is a miser, hoarding even the gold Martínez gives him to say masses for his soul, and his long awaited dying words are the scandalous: "Comete tu cola, Martínez, comete tu cola!" (p. 198) Doña Isabella, a charming woman, is guilty of vanity; she does not want to tell her true age (p. 222). Buck Scales is a thief and a murderer. Fray Baltazar is a glutton. And the gold rush at Pike's Peak is symbolic of greed. In short, the Bishop journeys through his diocese and finds evidences on every side of the Seven Deadly Sins and their effects.

The physical body is not pure and virtuous; the Archbishop, who never falters, desires to create a spiritual well-being, but that he cannot do without first diagnosing the illness.

That there is, indeed, a life beyond the physical is apparent all around the Archbishop. He is surrounded by cultures and creeds, the primitive and sometimes idolatrous Christianity of the Mexicans and the various expressions of the Indians, including even the serpent cave. In Shadows on the Rock, it is the dying Count de Frontenac who expresses the universality of belief in a spiritual life.

He would die here, in this room, and his spirit would go before God to be judged. He believed this, because he had been taught it in childhood, and because he knew there was something in himself and in other men that this world did not explain. Even the Indians had to make a story to account for something in their lives that did not come out of their appetites; conceptions of courage, duty, honour. The Indians had these, in their own fashion. These ideas came from some unknown source, and they were not the least part of life. (p. 286)
There is a second kind of dichotomy in these two novels; it is the variance between the practical and the intellectual. Father Joseph Vaillant is a practical man. His bishop and friend is building a Cathedral, and is determined to have it of Midi-Romanesque style. Father Joseph, the practical man, does not comprehend the intellectual Latour's wish to create in a particular manner.

... Father Vaillant was still... wondering why a poor missionary Bishop should care so much about a building. He himself was eager to have the Cathedral begun; but whether it was Midi-Romanesque or Ohio German in style, seemed to him of little consequence. (p. 284)

The practical man is he who gets things done. The intellectual is he who orders things. The one stipulation made on the qualifications of the new American bishop is that "He must be a man to whom order is necessary—as dear as life" (p. 9). And that is the main reason Latour is chosen for the post.

'The French missionaries have a sense of proportional and rational adjustment. They are always trying to discover the logical relation of things. It is a passion with them.' (p. 10)

In Shadows, Cather explains, through the character of the apothecary, Euclide Auclair, what the particular value of intellectualism, of mental order, is.

... though he was a creature of habit and derived an actual pleasure from doing things exactly as he had always done them, his mind was free. He could not shut his eyes to the wrongs that went on about him, or keep from brooding about them. (p. 36)

The intellectual man, by ordering his world, creates a freedom from worldly things; he gains the time and atmosphere necessary for building a culture.

Spirituality, intellectuality, practicality, these are the
abstracts; yet as Cather sees them, they take on forms. Particularly they take on the forms of various kinds of order. In both books, Cather presents the trauma of a world without order. Bishop Latour finds himself traveling through a geometrical nightmare:

... flattened cones, they were, more the shape of Mexican ovens than haycocks—yes, exactly the shape of Mexican ovens, red as brickdust, and naked of vegetation except for small juniper trees. And the junipers, too, were the shape of Mexican ovens. Every conical hill was spotted with smaller cones of juniper, a uniform yellowish-green, as the hills were a uniform red. The hills thrust out of the ground so thickly that they seemed to be pushing each other, elbowing each other aside, tipping each other over. (p. 20)

And later:

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

In Shadows:

On the opposite shore of the river, just across from the proud rock of Quebec, the black pine forest came down to the water's edge; and on the west, behind the town, the forest stretched no living man knew how far. That was the dead, sealed world of the vegetable kingdom, an uncharted continent choked with interlocking trees, living, dead, half-dead, their roots in bogs and swamps, strangling each other in a slow agony, that had lasted for centuries. The forest was suffocation, annihilation; there European man was quickly swallowed up in silence, distance, mould, black mud, and the stinging swarms of insect life that bred in it. (p. 7)

In a significant passage, Bishop Latour notes that the Indians make no attempt to change the face of the land; in fact, they do just the opposite; they adjust to the land; they build and live to harmonize with, blend into the land, to vanish into it and leave no traces of
themselves (pp. 271-273). He has ample proof of their ability to do just that when he visits the rock of Acoma, for there he feels he is saying mass, not for people, but for a "tribe of ancient rock-turtles" (p. 117).

Before him, on the grey floor, in the grey light, a group of bright shawls and blankets, some fifty or sixty silent faces; above and behind them the grey walls. He felt as if he were celebrating Mass at the bottom of the sea, for antediluvian creatures; for types of life so old, so hardened, so shut within their shells, that the sacrifice on Calvary could hardly reach back so far. Those shell-like backs behind him might be saved by baptism and divine grace, as undeveloped infants are, but hardly through any experience of their own, he thought. When he blessed them and sent them away, it was with a sense of inadequacy and spiritual defeat. (p. 115)

And Jack Scales looks like a serpent (p. 77). The land, itself, in both novels seems to be without direction, without order. And such geometrical, vegetable, reptilian disorder suggests both dread and death.

And yet, there is order. It comes from two directions. There is the natural, divine order and there is man's imposition of order. The first, the divine order, is subtly presented in both novels, but in both novels it is represented primarily by motion. In Death Comes for the Archbishop the divine order is represented by the motion of the sky and the water. In the Freudianly symbolic cave, the Bishop hears a constant rumbling sound and asks his guide about it; it is not the sound of the serpent; it comes from beneath the floor of the cave. It is the sound of a mighty underground river. A number of times in the novel, reference is made to an underground stream (cf. p. 35); it is a source of life. Meanwhile, overhead, there is a constant motion of light and air.
The sky was as full of motion and change as the desert beneath it was monotonous and still—and there was so much sky, more than at sea, more than anywhere else in the world. The plain was there, under one's feet, but what one saw when one looked about was that brilliant blue world of stinging air and moving cloud. Even the mountains were mere anthills 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)

The sky is motion; it is change. While the desert floor breeds creatures like itself, the sky changes and moves. One of its peculiar properties is the way it duplicates the land beneath it.

One thing which struck him at once was that every mesa was duplicated by a cloud mesa, like a reflection, which lay motionless above it or moved slowly up from behind it. These cloud formations seemed to be always there, however hot and blue the sky. Sometimes there were flat terraces, ledges of vapour; sometimes they were dome-shaped, or fantastic, like the tops of silvery pagodas, rising one above another, as if an Oriental city lay directly behind the rock. The great tables of granite set down in an empty plain were inconceivable without their attendant clouds, which were a part of them, as the smoke is part of the censer, or the foam of the wave. (p. 109)

Obviously, the sky and its clouds are representative of the spirit, while the mesas, the rocks and the plains are the flesh. Neither can exist without the other, for the spirit finds its outward expression in the flesh, and the flesh that does not respond to the spirit becomes pure animal.

In Shadows, the element of divine order is the river. It is by the river that man can escape from or avoid the fetid primeval forest (p. 7). And it is the river which gives resonance on All Soul's Day to the bell Bishop Laval so tyrannically tolls: "... only damp vapours from the river to make sound more intense and startling, to give it overtones and singular reverberations" (p. 110). It is
the river, no longer buried, but sometimes frozen, sometimes flowing, at the foot of the rock, that has the properties of life, that actually breathes (p. 201)

Actually, however, man's own ordering of his world is more important in these novels than God's. E. K. Brown says of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*: "... what Willa Cather was trying to tell was the story of man's capacity to establish dominion over the immutable."³ It is the intellectual man who imposes order on his world; the European is contrasted with the Indians in both novels, and in both novels he is a higher form of life because he is an ordering agent. His order is not always good. In *Shadows*, there is a definite condemnation of the ordering force of law as it exists in Europe, where it leads to the execution and torture of the innocent, where it is used for the protection of property over and against what is its highest goal, the protection of the freedoms of the individual. But opposed to European Law, and Pierre Charron's condemnation of laws that deny man freedom in his own environment (p. 219), there is juxtaposed the Count de Frontenac, who is a protector, a secular father for Auclair and the other inhabitants of Quebec, who does not use the law against them anymore than Bishop Laval uses the Church laws against them. So law, one of man's ways of ordering his universe, can be both good and evil.

The intellectual man also imposes the order of culture on his world. In *The Archbishop*, the culinary and gardening details represent that culture, well used in the cases of Father Latour and especially Father Joseph, who can get up from a feast that would make other men

sleepy and turn the meal into physical energy enough for ten or twelve hours of work (p. 263), and evilly used by Fray Baltazar, who enslaves his parishioners to make them carry water for his garden and who cares more for his sauce than for the life of the Indian who serves it (p. 126). It is also a sense of culture that produces the particularly beautiful cathedral in Santa Fe. In Shadows, it is Auclair, his wife and his daughter, especially, who represent culture, but the bowl of glass fruit in de Frontenac's study and the parrot are also kinds of culture.

Culture, law and religion are intangibles, and man does not live by intangibles. Therefore, throughout these novels, Cather carefully builds the tangible symbols of the intangible ideals. In both novels, of course, culture is partially represented by the culinary arts. Less this seem too mundane, Cather awards to Cécile, in Shadows, a realization of just what home-keeping means. Earlier, in the cobbler's shop, we have been told Cécile is fascinated by tools (p. 95). Now, after her visit to the ill-kempt house of the Hanois, she realizes that she herself has tools to work with.

These coppers, big and little, these brooms and clouts and brushes, were tools; and with them one made, not shoes or cabinetwork, but life itself. One made a climate within a climate; one made the days—the complexion, the special flavour, the special happiness of each day as it passed; one made life. (p. 230)

Critics have accused Cather of falling from the glory of an Antonia to the mundaneness of Cécile Auclair; quite the contrary. The glory of Antonia is the glory of Cécile. The fruit cellar of the Nebraska prairie, the preserving of Alexandra's household, these things evolve quite naturally under Cather's hand to the grandeur of Father Joseph's

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soup (p. 44). For what Cather is saying, quite simply, is that without these least symbols of a culture, one cannot have the great symbols. Without the soups there can be no cathedrals; and she is right. It is altogether fitting that Auclair and Latour, men who read the classics, who long for the intelligent and intellectual society of France, appreciate the amount of tradition that goes into what is called homemaking. The very artifacts in these two worlds represent cultures. For Jean Latour, the silver candlesticks are very important (p. 40). To Cécile Auclair, the Count de Frontenac's bowl of glass fruit (p. 69). And, concerning the fruit, Cather makes a very interesting statement. de Frontenac explains to the girl that the glass fruit looks alive because it is hollow, and Cécile answers: "It is much lovelier than real fruit" (p. 70). She and Jacques admire the parrot because it can talk. It is, in reality, a very drab bird, but it is beautiful to the children because it is unnatural (p. 256). In other words, man's artifacts, although they seem to copy nature, go beyond nature and, therefore, they are more beautiful. The paradox is easily resolved. The vegetable kingdom is raw and strangling; it is without order. As man orders it, he gives it beauty, not because he makes it artificial, but because he brings it closer to the ideal of divine order.

Religion, especially the Roman Catholic church, is significant in these novels, because it brings the activities of man closer to divine order. Two important religious images play throughout both novels. One is the image of the rock; the other is the image of the miracle; finally, the two come together in one.

The landscapes of both novels are predominantly landscapes of rocks. We have already quoted several pertinent passages from The
Archbishop. It is significant that the Indian rite that is so repugnant to Bishop Latour has its home inside a rock. His own churches are built on rock, and his cathedral is built of rock, of golden rock. The rock is a natural refuge in the Southwest; more peaceful tribes of Indians long ago fled to the tops of rocks to build their pueblos, thus to escape the marauding bands of plains Indians (p. 111). Latour muses:

The rock, when one came to think of it, was the utmost expression of human need; even mere feeling yearned for it; it was the highest comparison of loyalty in love and friendship. Christ Himself had used that comparison for the disciple to whom He gave the keys of His Church. And the Hebrews of the Old Testament, always being carried captive into foreign lands—their rock was an idea of God, the only thing their conquerors could not take away from them.

Already the Bishop had observed in Indian life a strange literalness, often shocking and disconcerting . . . They actually lived upon their Rock; were born into it and died upon it. There was an element of exaggeration in anything so simple! (p. 112)

Shadows on the Rock in its title establishes the significance of the image. Quebec is a town built on a rock, "a grey rock in the Canadian wilderness" (p. 4). At one point Quebec is compared to other points of rock in the St. Lawrence. First Quebec itself is described:

The punctual bell and the stern old Bishop who rang it began an orderly procession of activities and held life together on the rock, though the winds lashed it and the billows of snow drove over it. (p. 123)

Later Father Hector reminisces:

He recalled certain naked islands in the Gulf of the St. Lawrence; mere ledges of rock standing up a little out of the sea, where the sea birds came every year to lay their eggs and rear their young in the caves and hollows; where they screamed and flocked together and made a clamour, while the winds howled around them, and the spray beat over them. This headland was scarcely more than that; a crag where for some reason human beings built themselves nests in the rock and held fast. (p. 201)

Why, Father Hector wonders, do human beings seek that particular rock, Quebec? And Willa Cather furnishes the answer. In the winter, "Quebec seemed shrunk to a mere group of shivering spires; the whole rock looked like one great white church, above the frozen river" (p. 159).

And on the summer morning, "When the sun came up over the Île d'Orléans, the rock of Kebec stood gleaming above the river like an altar with many candles, or like a holy city in an old legend, shriven, sinless, washed in gold" (p. 197). Quebec itself, the city on the rock, symbolizes man's quest for faith. The five vessels, the first of the summer, stand at the foot of the rock.

Worn, battered old travellers they looked. It brought tears to the eyes to think how faithful they were, and how much they had endured and overcome in the years they had been beating back and forth between Canada and the Old World. . . . On bad voyages they retraced their distance three and five times over, out-tiring the elements by their patience, and then drove forward again—toward Kebec. Sometimes they went south of Newfoundland to enter the Gulf, sometimes they came south of Labrador and through the straits of Belle Île; always making for this rock in the St. Lawrence. Cecile wondered how they could ever find it—a goal so tiny out of an approach so vast. (pp. 240-241)

But find it they do. They find the rock, Peter, the disciple who is the cornerstone of the Roman Catholic church, and Pierre Charron, whose name is French for Peter. De Frontenac believes that there is something to man besides his appetites; all men in these novels be-
lieve that, even the most immobile of Latour's crustacean Indians; and it is that quality, that idea of soul or immortality or idealism or mind or what have you that is the rock; the rock represents man's faith.

So does the miracle represent man's faith; but where the rock symbolizes generic faith, the miracle is individual faith. In each novel, there is one principal who believes whole-heartedly in miracles, and one who is cynical about them. Father Joseph and Cécile believe in miracles; Bishop Latour and Euclide Auclair are the cynics. Latour recalls "...his dear Joseph must always have the miracle very direct and spectacular, not with Nature, but against it" (p. 33). Cécile tells the Mother Superior not to explicate the miracle of Mother Catherine de Saint-Augustin (p. 45). Cécile is disappointed when she finds that her cynical father does not believe in the miraculous cure performed by the medicine created from Father Brebeuf's bones (p. 149). And Father Joseph argues with his friend, "Doctrine is well enough for the wise, Jean; but the miracle is something we can hold in our hands and love" (p. 57).

It is on this whole question of the definition of miracles that the conflicts of the two novels can be best illustrated. As we said before, the protagonists of the books are not single individuals. They are the land and, quite specifically, the entire population on that land. In *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, the protagonist is Latour's entire southwestern diocese and all the people it contains; it is the French priests, the Americans, the Mexicans, the Indians. In *Shadows on the Rock*, it is Quebec and all her French immigrants, old and young.
Bishop Ferrand, the missionary who pleads for Latour's appointment to the newly created bishopric of New Mexico, warns his colleagues about the reality of the land.

'The desert down there has a peculiar horror; I do not mean thirst, nor Indian massacres which are frequent. The very floor of the world is cracked open into countless canons and arrcyos, fissures in the earth which are sometimes ten feet deep, sometimes a thousand. Up and down these stony chasms the traveller and his mules clamber as best they can. It is impossible to go far in any direction without crossing them. (p. 8)

The reality of the bishopric is Buck Scales and the frightened Magdalena (pp. 73-89); it is the old bondswoman, shivering in the snow, whose Protestant owners will not let her attend mass (p. 252); it is Padre Martinez and his yellow cats (p. 167); it is the Acoma rock turtles.

The reality of Quebec? "A heavy snowfall in December meant that winter had come--the deepest reality of Canadian life" (p. 115)

Contrasted to the world of realities is the world of the religious. Bishop Latour, saddened by the departure of Father Joseph for the gold fields, rides home weary and homesick for France.

But when he entered 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. He sat down before his desk, deep in reflection. It was just this solitariness of love in which a priest's life could be like his Master's. It was not a solitude of atrophy, of negation, but of perpetual flowering. (pp. 296-297)

In Quebec it is the nuns who suffer least when the last ship sails for France and leaves the Canadians to their precarious existence on the wintry rock.

Courageous these Sisters were, accepting good and ill fortune with high spirit--with humour, even. They never vulgarly exaggerated hardship and dangers. They
Cather's parenthetical statement, "the world of the mind (which for each of us is the only world)," is a significant one. The religious, like Jeanne Le Ber the recluse of Ville-Marie, create their own world and their own religious reality. William Wordsworth wrote:

Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room;  
And hermits are contented with their cells;  
And students with their pensive citadels;  
Maids at the wheel, the weaver at his loom,  
Sit blithe and happy; bees that soar for bloom,  
High as the highest Peak of Furness-fells,  
Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells;  
in truth the prison unto which we doom  
Ourselves no prison is. . . .  

And Hamlet tells his schoolfellows Rosencrantz and Guildenstern:

"O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams." 7 Blinker, the extorturer, lives in his cave and has bad dreams; he is unable to escape the horror of what he has been (p. 188). Cecile, who has no guilty conscience, has good dreams. She, like so many of the people of Quebec and of the Southwest, creates a world of miracles.

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7 Shakespeare Hamlet II. ii. 253-255.
It was like walking in a dream. One could not see the people one passed, or the river, or one's own house. Not even the winter snows gave one such a feeling of being cut off from everything and living in a world of twilight and miracles. (p. 72)

She and Jacques enter the dark cold Cathedral and gaze at the ornate altar:

Cécile had always taken it for granted that the Kingdom of Heaven looked exactly like this from the outside and was surrounded by just such walls; that this altar was a reproduction of it, made in France by people who knew; just as the statues of the saints and of the Holy Family were portraits. She had taught Jacques to believe the same thing, and it was very comforting to them both to know just what Heaven looked like—strong and unassailable, wherever it was set among the stars. (p. 76)

The two children are especially fond of Saint Bimond because his picture in Cécile's book of the lives of the saints looks just like Jacques (p. 100). To Jacques, who is more materialistic because of his utter poverty, Cécile's silver cup is an image.

He had never had anything of his own except his toy beaver—and now he would have his shoes, made just for him. But to have a little cup, with your name on it... even if you died; it would still be there, with your name.

More than the shop with all the white jars and mysterious implements, more than the carpet and curtains and the red sofa, that cup fixed Cécile as born to security and privilege. (p. 102)

For Cécile it is the count's bowl of glass fruit that is prettier than real fruit. For everyone in Quebec it is the miracle of the two angels who come to fix the spinning wheel of Jeanne Le Ber, the recluse. About that story, Cather writes:

Wherever it went, it brought pleasure, as if the recluse herself had sent to all those families whom she did not know some living beauty—a blooming rose tree, or a shapely fruit tree in fruit. Indeed, she sent them an incomparable gift. In the long evenings, when the family had told over their tales of the Indian massacres and lost hunters and the almost human intelligence of the beaver, someone would
speak the name of Jeanne Le Ber, and it again gave out fragrance. (p. 160)

Franchette, the woodsman who suffers a rupture, expresses the ultimate dream and miracle.

'It's a funny thing,' he went on. 'A man sits here by the warm fire, where he can hear the bell ring for Mass every morning and smell bread baked fresh every day, and all that happened out there in the woods seems like a dream. Yet here I am, no good any more' (p. 170)

What happened in the woods, the accident to his brother-in-law, the long trek for the priest, the six days of blizzard and starvation and wandering, the rupture, these are, in fact, the cruel realities. But the civilization built on the rock, the civilization represented on the one hand by the bell, the symbol of religion, and on the other hand by the bread, the symbol of life, makes the woods seem like a dream. Jeanne Le Ber is a stony faced woman with a hollow voice who has entombed herself as a living sacrifice; but the very mention of her name means fragrance, fruits, and flowers.

Similarly, in Death Comes for the Archbishop, it is the miracle which becomes more real than reality. The reality of hospitality, for instance, is Buck Scales and his murders; but the miracle of Father Junipero Serra (pp. 323 ff.), the miracle of the hospitality of the Holy Family itself, is far more real; it outweighs Scales' ugliness. Bishop Latour is drawn to the crudely carved saints images native to his bishopric, and he understands that the personal devotion of the Mexicans to these images is not unnatural.

Here in his own church in Santa Fe there was one of these nursery Virgins, a little wooden figure, very old and very dear to the people. . . . She was a little wooden figure, about three feet high, very stately in bearing, with a beautiful though rather severe Spanish face. She
had a rich wardrobe; a chest full of robes and laces, gold and silver diadems. The women loved to sew for her and the silversmiths to make her chains and brooches. 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 to Her, and the great architects had built Cathedrals for Her. Long before Her years on earth, in the long twilight between the Fall and the Redemption, the pagan sculptors were always trying to achieve the image of a goddess who should yet be a woman. (pp. 297-298)

Finally, Latour understands the significance of the miracle, of the image, as Father Joseph has already tried to explain it to him: "Ah, he thought, for one who cannot read—or think—the Image, the physical form of Love!" (p. 254) And once he understands, he proceeds to build his Cathedral which combines earth and sky, man and God. In Shadows on the Rock, it is the author, herself, who explains the significance of the miracle:

The people have loved miracles for so many hundred years, not as proof or evidence, but because they are the actual flowering of desire. In them the vague worship and devotion of the simple-hearted assumes a form. From being a shapeless longing, it becomes a beautiful image; a dumb rapture becomes a melody that can be remembered and repeated; and the experience of a moment, which might have been a lost ecstasy, is made an actual possession and can be bequeathed to another. (p. 160)

The most perfect form is, of course, the form of Christ. Latour, considering the miracle of Father Junipero Serra, reflects:

There is always something charming in the idea of greatness returning to simplicity—the queen making hay among the country girls—but how much more endearing was the belief that They, after so many centuries of history and glory, should return to play Their first parts, in the persons of a humble Mexican family, the lowliest of the lowly, the poorest of the poor—in a wilderness at the
end of the world, where the angels could hardly find
Them! (pp. 327-328)

The image of Christ can be misused. The student, Trinidad Lucero, who allows his sensual nature to exaggerate his behavior in the annual reenactment of Christ's passion, so misuses the image of Christ (p. 179). Jacinto, listening at the inner mouth of the cave supposedly to catch the sound of the enormous serpent, stands in a shockingly Christ-like pose (p. 152). But the juniper before which Bishop Latour says his rosary and trades his worldly thoughts of his own physical discomfort for spiritual thoughts of his Lord's passion is a proper symbol of Christ (p. 21). The juniper is not used to satisfy a misdirected pride or religion; it is used to alleviate worldly pain through spiritual contemplation.

In Shadows on the Rock, it is the marvelous character Bishop Laval who imitates one of Christ's acts, the washing of the disciples' feet. He has found the boy, Jacques, half-clad and crying, on the snowy steps of the rich episcopal palace built by his misguided successor Bishop Saint-Vallier. Laval carries the child to his own impoverished rooms, where the boy awakes and sees the fire and the basin of water.

Beside it knelt a very large old man with big eyes and a great drooping nose and a little black cap on his head, and he was rubbing Jacques's feet and legs very softly with a towel. They were all alone, then, just the two of them, and the fire was bright enough to see clearly. What he remembered particularly was that this old man, after he had dried him like this, bent down and took his foot in his hand and kissed it; first the one foot, then the other. (p. 86)

The bishop is paying homage to what for him is a representation of the Infant Saviour (p. 88), and a reminder to him that he is straying from
his duties. Laval, probably more than any other character in the two novels has lived a divided life. The first thirty six years of his life were spent learning to subject his will to the will of the church; the second thirty six teaching his flock to subject their wills to his, which is, of course, the same as saying the Church's (p. 88-89). He is an irascible, tyrannical old man who rings the bell for early mass himself, punctually at four every morning, but who proverbially has a heart of gold and impoverishes himself for the Church and his flock. He is a wonderful creation.

The conflict within the Church in Shadows on the Rock between Laval and Saint-Vallier is, in reality, a minor conflict. Saint-Vallier is too hasty, we are told. He loves change for the sake of change; he is not in tune with the Canadian church and his predecessor. Yet, whatever damage he does besides making the old Bishop come out of retirement and spending too much money, is not discussed, nor need it be. For when all is said and done, Saint-Vallier after his imprisonment in England and his almost-imprisonment in France, returns to Quebec, more like Laval than Laval himself, quiet, penitent, impoverished. His worldly vanity has vanished.

It is the new Saint-Vallier who explains to Auclair what has happened to the world.

'Monsieur,' began the Bishop sadly, 'we are in the beginning of a new century, but periods do not always correspond with centuries. At home the old age is dying, out the new is still hidden.' (p. 322)

Saint-Vallier's words echo the thoughts of the dying Archbishop Jean Latour:

During those last weeks of the Bishop's life he thought very little about death; it was the Past he
was leaving. The future would take care of itself.
(p. 336)

Both the Archbishop, whose dearest friend, Father Joseph is dead, who finds France a place of exile, but his American Southwest not yet formed, only in the morning of its life, and Euclide Auclair, who feels with the death of Count de Frontenac the death of his way of life, who finds Quebec an exile from his native France, are caught in the world of Matthew Arnold's "The Grande Chartreuse."

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,
with nowhere yet to rest my head
Like these, on earth I wait forlorn.
Their faith, my tears, the world deride--
I come to shed them at their side.

The idea of two worlds, one dying, one being born, is a far more positive idea than Cather expressed in the first three novels of the 1920's, where the protagonists are caught in one world being torn in half, in chaos. In these two religious novels, Cather expresses a faith that the new world will be born. Father Joseph and Cécile Auclair are, in many ways, the statements of that faith.

Father Joseph, that ugly man with such great devotion, is not, like his friend, the Bishop, content with sitting at home waiting for the world to be made right, or even with building through their friendship a safe world where the two priests can have some sort of security. Instead, he is eager to be off, to Arizona, to Colorado, to be a missionary. Ill, injured, never quite strong physically, Father Joseph has the innate spirituality to cover thousands of miles by mule and wagon, to go even into the mining fields with his portable sanctuary.

Cécile Auclair at first feels the same desperation and despair her father does when de Frontenac dies. But the same evening, with Pierre Charron reentering their house and their lives, she switches her allegiance and her faith to this new image of security, to this new rock, and she sleeps in peace.

Her last thoughts before she sank into forgetfulness were of a friend, devoted and fearless, here in the house with them, as if he were one of themselves. He had not a throne behind him, like the Count . . . , not the authority of a parchment and seal. But he had authority, and a power which came from knowledge of the country and its people; from knowledge and from a kind of passion. His daring and his pride seemed to her even more splendid than Count Frontenac's. (p. 310)

To reiterate, there is not a single human protagonist in either novel. In order to understand the total experience of the civilization, we must listen and observe all the characters. They are religious and secular, good and evil, old and young, despairing and hopeful. What they have in common is their experience in a New World helping to create a new civilization.

In both novels, there is a decided resolution, a heart-warming fact after the utter hopelessness of the bitter novels. In Death Comes for the Archbishop, the resolution is the Cathedral; in Shadows on the Rock, it is Pierre Charron.

The cathedral is at once symbolic of earthly life and of heavenly aspiration; it is a solidly built church, part of the very ground it stands on. And yet, it is movement, and it reaches upward, toward heaven.

From the end of the street where the Bishop's buggy stood, the tawny church seemed to start directly out of those rose-coloured hills—with a purpose so strong that it was like action. Seen from this distance, the Cathedral lay against the pine-slashed slopes as
against a curtain. When Bernard drove slowly nearer, the backbone of the hills sank gradually, and the towers rose clear into the blue air, while the body of the church still lay against the mountain. (p. 315)

Pierre Charron embodies the Old world and the New. 9

To both Auclair and Madame Auclair, Pierre Charron had seemed the type they had come so far to find; more than anyone else he realized the romantic picture of the free Frenchman of the great forests which they had formed at home on the bank of the Seine. He had the good manners of the Old World, the dash and daring of the New. He was proud, he was vain, he was relentless when he hated, and quickly prejudiced; but he had the old ideals of clan-loyalty, and in friendship he never counted the cost. His goods and his life were at the disposal of the man he loved or the leader he admired. Though his figure was still boyish, his face was full of experience and sagacity; a fine bold nose, a restless, rather mischievous mouth, white teeth, very strong and even, sparkling hazel eyes with a kind of living flash in them, like the sunbeams on the bright rapids upon which he was so skillful. (p. 200)

Pierre has all the freedom of the New world from the bitter laws of the Old, where law protects property instead of the individual, but the good things of the old, sagacity and loyalty, are also a part of him. He, like the Cathedral, unites in his form the hope of the future, reality hinged to towers of aspiration.

Summary

In both religious novels, Willa Cather has used a people, a culture, for her protagonist. Nevertheless, these gargantuan protagonists are faced with the same type of conflict her individual human protagonists face. The world is divided in two, and man must either choose between the ways of living, or try to combine them.

Archbishop Latour and the two Auclairs, Euclide and Cecile, serve as measurements of the ability of their civilizations to combine two ways of life into a third, new, and successful way. The drama and success of Claude Jheeler and Thea Kronborg is here reiterated. And in both novels, the combination is successful.

The Southwest territory is divided between the spirit and the flesh. The flesh predominates as Buck Scales and Padre Martinez indicate. But the spirit is not dead; it is simply buried; it rests in the stories of the miracles, in the bell found after so many years, in the images carved so carefully and preserved so lovingly. The two priests do not bring a new way of life to the southwest; they simply act as catalysts, enabling the people to rediscover the spiritual, to bring the spiritual out of the sensuous cave of the serpent and resurrect in the Cathedral, which stands firmly on the ground, a symbol of physical life, and yet reaches upward into the clouds, the symbol of the spirit.

The civilization of Quebec is a revitalization of European civilization. The traditional European forms and institutions are present. De Frontenac is the law, the system of patronage and protection; Laval is the religious, the system of worship and charity. In Europe, as the tales of Bichet and the Blinker evidence, the law and religion are two distinct traditions which do not merge. But in Quebec, where man is forced to face the harsh reality of the chaotic forest and the killing cold, he falls back on these two traditions and he remolds them so that they work for him as a human being, and not against him. Pierre Charron is law, religion, and the new world, the combination of traditional forms of belief and behavior with man
in his natural state, man facing a natural reality.

Both of these books are optimistic. Both resolve the problem of the duality. Perhaps the fact that Cather was able to find this conflict and a resolution of it in historical material prepared the way for her acceptance of the conflict in modern life and the modern man's inability to fully resolve it, her point of view in her last two novels. Certainly these two novels seem to have given their author a wider perspective of life and some hopefulness. Their message can be summed up in a paragraph from *Shadows on the Rock*:

> when an adventurer carries his gods with him into a remote and savage country, the colony he founds will, from the beginning, have graces, traditions, riches of the mind and spirit. Its history will shine with bright incidents, slight, perhaps, but precious, as in life itself, where the great matters are often as worthless as astronomical distances, and the trifles dear as the heart's blood. (pp. 114-115)
CHAPTER V

THE NOVELS OF RESIGNATION

Willa Cather's last two novels, Lucy Gayheart (1935) and Sapphira and the Slave Girl (1940), are novels of resignation. The protagonists, Lucy and Sapphira, face dualities which are unresolved and unresolvable, but the bitterness of the early twenties novels is gone, instead there is merely a mellowed acceptance, que sera sera.

Sapphira is a book of old age, and it is not a well-written book. But Lucy Gayheart, just for a moment, for a brief 200-odd pages, has flashes of the style and joyousness and heroism of the heroic novels. At first glance, Lucy seems indeed to be an heroic protagonist; the reader remembers the light footprints of a running girl. But her author does not allow her to be heroic; Cather resigns Lucy to the bottom of the river, to a needless, wasteful death that does not occur, as Claude Wheeler's does, at that point in her life when she has solved her dualities, but rather before she has solved them; not at the instance of fulfillment, but before it. In fact, although Lucy aspires to a fulfillment, Cather makes it plain throughout the novel that the polarities cannot be reconciled.

And in Sapphira, the author makes no attempt to reconcile the polarities of freedom and responsibility, master and slave. Rather, she establishes the polarities and is satisfied.

There is no bitterness in these novels, but neither is there
the optimism suggested in the religious novels. For the last times Cather turns to her view of divided mankind, but these times she only investigates it and presents it without solution, without triumph, but also without tragedy. Her protagonists are both women, and while one is very young and the other is very old, they possess in common the strength of their personalities and the dignity of their deaths.

**Lucy Gayheart**

At first reading, Lucy Gayheart seems to be a throwback to Cather's heroic protagonists. She looks like Antonia Shimerda:

> There was something in her nature that was like her movements, something direct and unhesitating and joyous, and in her golden-brown eyes. They were not gentle brown eyes, but flashed with gold sparks like that Colorado stone we call the tiger-eye. Her skin was rather dark, and the colour in her lips and cheeks was like the red of dark peonies—deep, velvety. (pp. 4-5)

And she moves like Thea Kronborg, quickly, determinedly:

> They still see her as a slight figure always in motion; dancing or skating, or walking swiftly with intense direction, like a bird flying home. (p. 3)

And she has the passion for life that Antonia and Thea have. As Thea is associated with an eagle, Lucy is associated with a gull, which, if it does not soar as majestically, flies as freely. She is the "bird flying home" (p. 3); she wishes the freedom of the gull:

> If only one could lose one's life and one's body and be nothing but one's desire; if the rest could melt away, and that could float with the gulls out yonder where the blue and green were changing! (p. 105)

And Harry Gordon remembers the day of Lucy's funeral: "It was like a bird being shot down when it rises in its morning flight toward the sun." (p. 209)

But Lucy Gayheart is not an Antonia or a Thea. Her moment of
fulfillment, her one month "when she lived under a golden canopy among spring flowers, while the March winds and rain threatened outside the window" (p. 120) is not a true fulfillment; it is not a solution to her polarities; it is not molded by her character. Rather, her one moment of fulfillment is akin to that of Paul in Cather's short story "Paul's Case." Like Paul, she steals her moment from reality instead of creating a reality that will give her a true fulfillment. Her triumph is like Paul's hot-house flowers, completely out of place in cold and snow, and her world, like Paul's, is a world of cold and snow.

A strange kind of life she had been leading. For two hours, five days of the week, she was alone with Sebastian, shut away from the rest of the world. It was as if they were on the lonely spur of a mountain, enveloped by mist. They saw no one but Giuseppe, heard no one; the city below was blotted out. Then, after eleven-thirty, the city began poking in its fingers. The telephone began to buzz, and she heard him build up the rest of his day and his evening. At about twelve she got into the elevator and dropped down into Chicago again. (pp. 76-77)

Here is no reality. Antonia's children are real; Thea's canyon is real; Lucy's mountain spur is a dream.

Lucy faces a duality of her own person. That her duality is best symbolized in the two men in her life, Clement Sebastian and Harry Gordon, who also each possess a hidden side, is a complexity not entirely forgivable, but is perhaps also a reality Cather found herself unable to deny, that most people, including sister Pauline, possess dual natures. Nevertheless, Lucy's duality is real. She is attracted to both Sebastian and Gordon, the first a romantic attraction, the second more physical.

She is a small-town, Mid-western girl who, like so many of Cather's characters, walks the streets at night looking at the moon
and wishing for it (p. 138). She feels, sees, and acknowledges a call of destiny.

In the darkening sky she had seen the first star come out; it brought her heart into her throat. That point of silver spoke to her like a signal, released another kind of life and feeling which did not belong here. It overpowered her. With a mere thought she had reached that star and it had answered, recognition had flashed between. Something knew, then in the unknowing waste; something had always known, forever! That joy of saluting what is far above one was an eternal thing, not merely something that had happened to her ignorance and her foolish heart. (pp. 11-12)

And when she hears Sebastian sing, she recognizes her star; he, Sebastian, is the level to which she aspires:

In your light I stand without fear, O august stars! I salute your eternity. That was the feeling. Lucy had never heard anything sung with such elevation of style. In its calmness and serenity there was a kind of large enlightenment, like daybreak. (p. 30)

In Haverford, Lucy has gazed at the moon from the bottom of a well (p. 139), but Sebastian has the power to create the moon:

... it was like moonlight pouring down on the narrow street of an old German town. With every phrase the picture deepened—moonlight, intense and calm, sleeping on old human houses; and somewhere a lonely black cloud in the night sky. So manche Nacht in alter Zeit? (p. 30)

And for a while, for a brief spring, Lucy Gayheart does, to the limit her youth and position enable her, partake of the wonders of her star-gazing and can believe in "an invisible inviolable world" (p. 106).

But after Clement Sebastian's death, Lucy comes to a realization:

You couldn't, after all, live above your level: with good luck you might, for a few breaths, hold yourself up in that more vital air, but you dropped back, down, down into flatness, and it was worse than if you had never been out of it. (p. 120)
No matter how sweet the hours she spends with Sebastian, Lucy must finally, inevitably get in the elevator and drop back down into the streets of Chicago, or of Haverford, and that is the reality of her life. This is not to say she cannot seek another Sebastian, after the singer's death; she can and, in fact, as she realizes, she must, because Sebastian to her is not a man; he is a passion; he is, in fact, life itself, idealized life if you please, but life.

She tried to feel at peace and to breathe more slowly, but every nerve was quivering with a long-forgotten restlessness. How often she had run out on a spring morning, into the orchard, down the street, in pursuit of something she could not see, but knew! It was there, in the breeze, in the sun; it hid behind the blooming apple boughs, raced before through the neighbours' gardens, but she could never catch up with it. Clement Sebastian had made the fugitive gleam an actual possession. With him she had learned that those flashes of promise could come true, that they could be the important things in one's life. He had never told her so; he was, in his own person, the door and the way to that knowledge. (p. 186)

Cather allows Lucy to see the truth and to define it. After all these years, she returns to the picture of the omnipresent lover that in *O Pioneers!* appears to Alexandra in her daydreams and seems somehow akin to death; but here, in *Lucy Gayheart*, Cather allows no such interpretation. With supreme economy she interprets for us, unmistakably, this central idea. The supreme lover is not death; he is life.

What if—what if Life itself were the sweetheart? It was like a lover waiting for her in distant cities—across the sea; drawing her, enticing her, weaving a spell over her. (p. 187)

Lucy Gayheart is a character in love with life, and the two men in her life, Harry Gordon and Clement Sebastian, are attractive to her for the life they possess.

Color imagery is supremely important in this novel. There are
three predominate colors in Cather's code here: grey, green and red.

Grey, in *Lucy Gayheart*, is the color of tedium, of flatness. Predominately it is the color of Haverford: "... the town and all the country round were the color of cement" (p. 192). And, as Lucy goes to her death:

The country looked very dreary, certainly. If only the sun would break through! But it made a mere glassy white spot in the low sky. In that cold light even the fresh snow looked grey, and the frozen weeds sticking up through it. In the draws, between the low hills, thickets of wild-plum bushes were black against the drifts; they should have been thatched with yesterday's snow, but to-day's sharp wind had stripped them bare. (p. 198)

Haverford and the countryside around it is not the teeming prairie of Cather's heroic novels. It is a dull, bleak, lifeless, soulless place. But so are the streets of Chicago.

The dirty streets, as she crossed the town through sleet and snow, were like narrow rivers, shut in by grey cliffs where the light was always changing, and she herself was a twig or a leaf swept along on the current. (p. 77)

There is, in fact, no indication in this novel that the place, whether Haverford or Chicago, makes the difference to Lucy of tedium or vitality. It is Lucy who makes the difference. She likes the grey of Chicago because "The dark, stormy mornings made the warmth and quiet toward which she hurried seem all the richer" (p. 77). And, in Haverford, after she realizes that Life is the lover and was not drowned with Sebastian, the landscape changes color.

One thing she watched for, every afternoon. Long before sunset an unaccountable pink glow appeared in the eastern sky, about half-way between the zenith and the horizon. It was not a cloud, it had not the depth of a reflection: it was thin and bright like the colour on a postcard. On sunny afternoons it was sure to be there, a pink
rouge on the hard blue cheek of sky. From her window she could watch this colour come above the tall, wide-spreading cottonwood trees of the town park, where her father led the band concerts in the summer. Did that pink flush use to come there, in the days when she was running up and down these sidewalks, or was it a new habit the light had taken on? (p. 191)

The pink glow is Lucy's new hope. It is Lucy herself who colors the sky. Throughout the novel, she is associated with the color red. The first time Harry Gordon sees her, she is wearing "a skin-tight red jersey" (p. 20), and the first time we see her she is wearing a "crimson scarf," the ends of which trail behind her "like two slender crimson wings" (p. 8). In Chicago, she wears a hat with a perky red feather, that Sebastian waits by his window to see coming down the grey wintry streets (p. 51). She is associated with fire, a self-generating fire.

In the city you had plenty of room to be lonely, no one noticed, she reflected. And if you were burning yourself up, so was everyone else; you weren't smoldering alone on the edge of the prairie. (p. 63)

Sebastian says about her: "I love young ardour, young fire." And she is associated with roses, rare roses that grow even in the winter.

The thing to do was to make an overcoat of the cold; to feel oneself warm and awake at the heart of it, one's blood coursing unchilled in an air where roses froze instantly. (p. 38)

Red is the color of passion, and it is Lucy's color. Significantly both of the men she loves are also associated with that color.

In the opening scene of the novel, Lucy and Harry skate past the others, outdistancing and outlasting them. And they share the fire and rose-color of the sunset. But the sunset ends and the rose gives way to grey.

The black tangle of willows on the island made a thicket like a thorn hedge, and the knotty, twisted, slow-growing scrub-oaks with flat tops took on a bronze glimmer in that
intense oblique light which seemed to be setting them on fire... The interlacing twigs threw off red light like incandescent wires, and the snow underneath was rose-colour... The round red sun was falling like a heavy weight; it touched the horizon line and sent quivering fans of red and gold over the wide country. For a moment Lucy and Harry Gordon were sitting in a stream of blinding light; it burned on their skates and on the flask and metal cup. Their faces became so brilliant that they looked at each other and laughed. In an instant the light was gone; the frozen stream and snowmasked prairie land became violet, under the blue-green sky. Wherever one looked, there was nothing but flat country and low hills, all violet and grey. Lucy gave a long sigh. (pp. 9-10)

Harry Gordon is a handsome, vital, vigorous man; he is ruddy. But he hides his ruddiness beneath new grey suits (p. 99). Harry Gordon is a passionate man, but he hides his passion behind the banker's facade, behind the pettiness and tedium of Haverford. He wants to marry Lucy because she is an expression of his buried self (p. 109), because he is not able to live as a passionate man; he is every bit as concerned about appearances as is Lucy's sister Pauline who hides her jealousy of Lucy beneath a pride in Lucy (pp. 170-171). But when Lucy tells him that she loves Sebastian, the veneer cracks, and in a fit of passion against Lucy, he marries Harriet Arkwright who kills the roses: "Whatever she spoke of, she divested of charm. If she thanked him for his gorgeous roses, her tone deflowered the roses" (p. 22).

Harry Gordon is attracted to Lucy because she is passionate; ironically it is her very passion for life, as she expresses it in her love for Sebastian, that sends Harry into his uncomfortable marriage with Harriet, whose name suggests she is a diminutive Harry, a lesser Harry, a Harry without passion. It is not Harry's passion, however,
that so infuriates Lucy that she begins to skate on thin ice. It is rather his total indifference. After she returns to Haverford after Sebastian's death, she seeks out her former lover, hoping not for liaison, but merely for some understanding from him. His approach to her is not malicious; it is worse, it is cold (p. 151). And when he refuses to give her a ride in his sleigh, he seems to "look at her through glasses" (p. 200). It is this very indifference that blinds Lucy. Once before, in Chicago, at dinner with him, Lucy has been so enraged by his cold, mechanical facade that she has been blinded with a passionate fury: "She did not see his face, her eyes were blind as if she were looking into a furnace" (p. 113). Like Myra Henshawe in My Mortal Enemy, Lucy has two outlets for her passion, love and hate. Her love for Harry Gordon and his buried self turns into the destructive force of hatred when she is forced to deal with his mechanical grey facade. Her tragedy is that her hatred is self-destructive; the passion that can seek and emulate a star, a Clement Sebastian, can also destroy her, because it blinds her to danger.

Clement Sebastian is also associated with red. The predominant color of his studio is red (p. 41), and the blankets on his bed are rose-colored (p. 46). He watches for the red feather on Lucy's hat, and he delights in her fire. Lucy has seen him on the steps of the art museum, and the picture she retains of him, is the picture of a bronze image:

She thought of the steps leading down from the art museum as perpetually flooded with orange-red sunlight; they had been like that one stormy November afternoon when Sebastian came out of the building at five o'clock and stopped beside one of the bronze lions to turn up the collar of his overcoat, light a cigarette, and look vaguely up and down the avenue before he hailed a cab and drove away. (p. 25)
But Sebastian and his passion are destroyed, drowned by James Mookford, whose name suggests the very falseness of his appearance. Mookford's hair is red, but it is a false red. Cather says: "His copper-red hair fitted his head so snugly that it might have been a well-made wig" (p. 57).

The predominate color of James Mookford is green, envy. During his almost unbelievably conceited conversation with Lucy, he shoots her "a green glance" (p. 59). And Lucy thinks:

He looked as if he were made up for the stage, yet there he sat in perfectly conventional clothes, except for a green silk shirt and green necktie. (p. 60)

Sebastian drowns trying to save the life of his crippled accompanist, but Lucy's nightmare of the tragedy is strangely focused.

There had been nights when she lost consciousness only to drop into an ice-cold lake and struggle to free a drowning man from a white thing that clung to him. His eyes were always shut as if he were already dead; but the green eyes of the other, behind his shoulder, were open, full of terror and greed. (p. 150)

Sebastian, for all his passion, is surrounded by greed, greed personified by James Mookford and shadowed by Sebastian's wife, and it is their greed that destroys him, for Cather is careful to draw Sebastian as a character as unfulfilled, finally, as either Harry Gordon or Lucy Gayheart, and a character as destructive to Lucy as Harry Gordon.

Fundamentally, what Sebastian destroys is Lucy's ability to be content with Haverford and Harry Gordon.

It was as if that song were to have some effect upon her own life. She tried to forget it, but it was inescapable. It was with her, like an evil omen; she could not get it out of her mind. For weeks afterward it kept singing itself over in her brain. Her forebodings on that first night had not been mistaken; Sebastian had already destroyed a good deal for her. Some people's lives are affected by what happens to their person or their property;
but for others fate is what happens to their feelings and their thoughts—that and nothing more. (p. 33)

The song has revealed a part of life to Lucy:

It was a discovery about life, a revelation of love as a tragic force, not a melting mood, of a passion that drowns like black water. As she sat listening to this man, the outside world seemed to her dark and terrifying, full of fears and dangers that had never come close to her until now. (p. 31)

"A passion that drowns like black water," the tragic deaths of both Sebastian and Lucy are foretold in his song, passion killed on the one hand by the green of envy and on the other by the grey of pettiness.

Clement Sebastian, to reiterate, is an unfulfilled character. Like Godfrey St. Peter, he believes that what is missing from his life is the child's innocent wisdom and companionship with the world.

Nothing had ever made Sebastian admit to himself that his youth was forever and irrevocably gone. He had clung to a secret belief that he would pick it up again, somewhere. This was a time of temporary lassitude and disillusion, but his old feeling about life would come back; he would turn a corner and confront it. He would waken some morning and step out the man he used to be. Now, all in a moment, it came over him that when people spoke of their dear youth they were not using a figure of speech. The thing he was looking for had gone out into the wide air, like a volatile essence, and he was staring into an empty jar. (p. 79)

And:

He had missed the deepest of all companionships, a relation with the earth itself, with a countryside and a people. That relationship, he knew, cannot be gone after and found; it must be long and deliberate, unconscious. It must, indeed, be a way of living. (p. 80)

He expects to walk past a library and, like Bartley Alexander, sense his youth walk down the steps and join him. He yearns for the earth-
soul of an Antonia, or for the canyon experiences of Thea Kronborg or Tom Outland. In a very real sense, his relationship with Lucy is an attempt to regain his youth and, through her more natural, physical reaction to life, to experience that earth-soul wisdom (p. 82).

Something beautiful and serene came from his heart into hers; wisdom and sadness. If he took her secret, he gave her his in return; that he had renounced life. Nobody would ever share his life again. But he had unclouded faith in the old and lovely dreams of man; that he would teach her and share with her. (p. 89)

But unlike the characters in Cather's other novels, Sebastian is neither destroyed nor sustained by Lucy. He is sustained by nothing; he has renounced life before he ever meets her, as St. Peter renounces life; and he is destroyed by an outside force, Mockford's greed and terror of life.

Further, Cather peruses Sebastian's wish for a companionship with the earth in a very logical, realistic way. Lucy has experienced that way of life that Sebastian longs for; it is not a way of life that brings the Solomon Valley wisdom; it brings sadness to Harry Gordon, and a kind of quiet knowledge, but it does not stop him from foreclosing on mortgages. In fact, Cather makes it clear in Part III, that if Harry Gordon has softened at all, if he has gained any wisdom, it is not the land and the people, but Lucy Gayheart and the imprint of her flying footsteps, which have been the cause. Lucy herself argues against Sebastian's longing: "Family life in a little town is pretty deadly. It's being planted in the earth, like one of your own carrots there. I'd rather be pulled up and thrown away" (p. 137). In a very real way Lucy is planted, in a grave. But here we find no paean to her life and death like we find in O Pioneers! when from
Alexandra's bones will spring new life, a romanticism that echoes Walt Whitman's "I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love, / If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles . . . ."¹ That romanticism is gone. Lucy does not grow again. She dies once and for all, and her death is a loss, not a gain. The entire dialogue between Sebastian's longings for the earth-soul and Lucy's longings for the star, for the life of Henry Thoreau or the life of Thea Kronborg is once again reminiscent of Jim Burden's comment that the life good for one is rarely good for two, and also of the dialogue between Alexandra Bergson and Carl Linstrum of the advantages of city versus country. The resolution in *Lucy Gayheart* is a stark unromanticized resolution. Neither life is completely fulfilling, for each life contains within itself elements destructive to it. Sebastian is drowned by the parasite who, of necessity, attaches himself to the man of accomplishments; Lucy is drowned by the coldness of a small town and a man who cannot comprehend her wishing to be different, her seeking for something beyond them.

*Cather is no longer fooled, nor does she allow her characters to be fooled, by the greener grass on the other side of the fence. She explores both sides and finds neither a utopia. And the message of the novel, strangely enough, is voiced by neither of her main characters, but rather by an old woman, Mrs. Ramsay, who tells Lucy in a paraphrase of Waller: "Life is short; gather roses while you may."* She says:

"Nothing really matters but living. Get all you can out

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of it. I'm an old woman, and I know. Accomplishments are the ornaments of life, they come second. Sometimes people disappoint us, and sometimes we disappoint ourselves; but the thing is, to go right on living.' (p. 167)

And one wonders if it is not Cather herself, who, now about sixty-two years old, was beginning to bring her entire life under the scrutiny and judgment of ultimate insight. That she realizes no woman as young as Lucy could take such advice is evident. Lucy arrives at Mrs. Ramsay's idea; she sees the lover as life and she senses a world waiting to be discovered. But she is not able to overcome what she is. She must react in fury to Harry Gordon; she must blind herself with destructive anger, because she is young and, therefore, she is passionate, and hate is as much passion as love.

So in the end Lucy courts death instead of life, not because she chooses to, but because she can do no other. Clement Sebastian represents the life of aspiration and accomplishment, a life destructible through parasites. Harry Gordon represents the life of the land, a life destructible through pettiness. The reds disappear, pulled into black by the forces of green and grey. Lucy, who is so alive that "Life seemed to lie very near the surface in her" (p. 5), is not drowned by life, but by the hidden trap of her life: "The sunken tree that had caught Lucy's skate still held her there; she had not been swept on by the current" (p. 204). And all that is left is the crimson scarf on the ice (p. 203).

_Lucy Gayheart_ is a highly successful novel. Intense and economical, it explores not only its protagonist, Lucy, but also the two men who represent her two sides. Like other Cather protagonists, Lucy is caught in a dilemma, forced to choose between two ways of life.
However, in cold reality, both ways are stifling. Harry Gordon is a conceited, hardened character; Clement Sebastian is a character who has renounced life, the very thing Lucy represents. In a very real way both men need her and seek her out because she represents the half of them that is missing. For Harry, she is passion and aspiration; for Clement she is youth and life. But she cannot complete their lives and they cannot complete hers. Each of the three characters turns in his own dilemma; each finds through his nature his own ultimate destruction. Lucy does not choose either man; she cannot; she is not free of herself.

_Sapphira and the Slave Girl_

The final novel, _Sapphira and the Slave Girl_, presents, once more, the question of protagonist. There are several candidates in this novel, Sapphira Dodderidge Colbert, her husband Henry, her daughter Rachel Blake, and the slave girl, Nancy. All four characters are caught in the central conflict of the novel; Henry and Rachel both change and soften as characters. None of the characters seems to hold the center of the stage throughout the book. Perhaps part of the problem stems from the quality of the novel; _Sapphira_ is not a good novel. It is loose; the pace is really too slow; it is moralizing; and the epilogue, "Nancy's Return," introduces a new first person narrator and her mother, unnecessary and confusing characters.

The conflict of the novel has the same structure we have observed in the first eleven books. There are two ways of life, and the characters are faced with both. The ways of life are master and slave. The novel is an investigation of freedom. For that reason, I propose that
the title establishes the protagonists, not one, but two. The master is Sapphira. The slave girl, however, is many characters, Nancy, Bluebell, Till, Jezebel, Samson, Tap, and the others. Henry, his daughter Rachel, the minister Fairhead, as well as the late epilogue narrator and her mother are characters who stand outside the real dilemma, uncommitted in personality to either side, although their actions serve to break down, or try to break down, the polarity.

The main image, the only real image, in the novel is the "Double S." Cather describes it:

The road followed the ravine, climbing all the way, until at the 'Double S' it swung out in four great loops round hills of solid rock; rock which the destroying armament of modern road-building has not succeeded in blasting away. (pp. 167-168)

This is not a comment about modern machinery destroying natural beauty; it is a comment about modern culture's ability to revise traditional ways of behavior. The Double S is a statement of a way of life, a way which establishes some people as masters and some as slaves, but that is, in fact, a double slavery. Henry Colbert searches his Bible for the reasons for or against slavery.

Nowhere in his Bible had he ever been able to find a clear condemnation of slavery. There were injunctions of kindness to slaves, mercy and tolerance. Remember them in bonds as bound with them. Yes, but nowhere did his Bible say that there should be no one in bonds, no one at all.—And Henry had often asked himself, were we not all in bonds? If Lizzie, the cook, was in bonds to Sapphira, was she not equally in bonds to Lizzie? (pp. 107-108)

If Lizzie and Bluebell, Nancy and Till are at the mercy of Sapphira's tempers and cynicism, Sapphira herself, crippled and confined to the wheelchair, confined to the place so aptly named Back Creek, confined to her role as the justice and mercy of her slaves, Sapphira herself
is at the mercy of her slaves.

Rachel, who is perhaps the freest character in the novel as she is the least self-centered, fights against slavery to the extent that she participates in Nancy's escape. Yet Rachel is in many ways the most bound creature. Cather states that while she was in Washington, the wife of exciting Michael Blake, she was completely devoted to her husband and her son (p. 139). After their deaths, she returns to Back Creek and there becomes the willing servant of anyone of the mountain people who needs her. Sapphira muses about her daughter's self-abnegation and extreme generosity:

"Usually she was called out to some bare mountain cabin where she got nothing but thanks, and likely as not had to take along milk and eggs and her own sheets for the poor creature who was sick. Rachel was poor, and it was not much use to give her things. Whatever she had she took where it was needed most. . . . (p. 36)"

The paradox present in Rachel is, indeed, the central conflict of the novel. Where the freest creature, Rachel, or the most powerful, Sapphira, is in fact a slave to circumstances, the least free creatures, those who bear the names of slaves, are freest of circumstances.

Henry Colbert has offered his head miller, Sampson, his freedom. But Sampson does not want freedom.

Sampson did not interrupt; he stood in his manly, responsible way, listening intently to his master. But when it was his turn to speak, he broke down. This was his home. Here he knew everybody. He didn't want to go out among strangers. Besides Belle, his wife, was a slack worker, and his children were little. He could never keep them in a city as well off as they were here. (p. 106)"

Legal freedom is not freedom for Sampson; it is rather the bonds of responsibilities he does not have to face in his legal slave status. After Sapphira's death, Henry frees all the slaves. Till recounts
the stories of three of them to Nancy. The story of Lizzie, the cook, and her lazy daughter Bluebell is comical. The two women refused to accept their freedom until they were actually driven by their ex-master, Colbert, into town to the new job he had secured for them. (p. 279)

But the story of Tap is not funny. Cather says: "'Poor Tap' he was always called now. People said he hadn't been able to stand his freedom" (p. 280). He runs wild and drinks too much and winds up killing a man in a drunken brawl and being hanged for his crime. "Mrs. Blake and Till always said it was a Yankee jury that hanged him; a Southern jury would have known there was no real bad in Tap" (p. 281). That last comment by Cather is significant; she isn't arguing for slavery, rather she is stating that the Southerner would understand that Tap's drunkenness is an inebriation of freedom as much as alcohol, because freedom is a frightening, enslaving thing.

Nancy, daughter of black Till and a white Colbert, is symbolic of the human state. She is the target of Sapphira's suspicion, jealousy and cruel manipulation, yet she fears her freedom and never, in fact, totally wins it. Sapphira has spoiled the girl until suddenly she begins to suspect that Nancy means more to Henry Colbert than she should; she suspects her husband of infidelity. Her jealousy reaches an insane pitch the day of Jezebel's funeral when she sees master and slave girl speaking together. With the perception of Isabella Archer in Henry James' *Portrait of a Lady*, Sapphira surmises from the postures of the two that all is not as it should be.

Behind the dark cedars just outside the stone wall, her husband and Nancy stood in deep conversation. The girl was in an attitude of dejection, her head hanging down, her hands clasped together, and the Master, whatever he
was saying, was speaking very earnestly, with affectionate solicitude. Sapphira had put her handkerchief to her eyes, afraid that her face might show her indignation. Never before had she seen him expose himself like that. Whatever he was pressing upon that girl, he was not speaking as master to servant; there was nothing to suggest that special sort of kindliness permissible under such circumstances. He was not uttering condolences. It was personal. He had forgotten himself. (pp. 100-101)

So Sapphira sends for the roué, Martin Colbert, and takes pains to plant Nancy in his roving path, sending the girl into the woods and making her sleep in the hall where she is alone and defenseless against the male interests of the thoroughly despicable Martin. But Nancy fights for her freedom. She runs to Rachel; she begs Jefferson to take her place in the hall; she screams until Sampson rescues her from the cherry tree; she even uses Sapphira herself for protection. However, once Rachel and Fairhead and Henry have committed themselves to Nancy's freedom, indeed once she is on her way to that freedom, she tries to renege.

"Oh, Miss Blake, please mam, take me home! I can't go off amongst strangers. It's too hard. Let me go back an' try to do better. I don't mind Miss Sapphy scoldin'. Why, she brought me up, and now she's sick an' sufferin'. Look at her pore feet. I ought-a borne it better. Miss Blake, please mam, I want to go home to the mill an' my own folks." (pp. 230-231)

In fact, she never really does achieve complete freedom. She escapes to Canada and marries, obviously of her free will, with no mistress to marry her to a eunuch, as Sapphira married her mother, Till, to Jefferson. But she goes from one service to another. The returned Nancy explains that her mistress, whom she now calls "Madam," is in England, and that's why Nancy is free to travel (p. 275). And she speaks to the epilogue's first person narrator's mother "with deference" (p. 275), and when the household goes to dinner, there are two
sittings for it, the first for the whites, and second for the blacks.

Nancy is not an heroic figure. Cather says: "She had... presence" (p. 275). But presence is only a part of human life and Cather does not convince us, really, that Nancy has done anything more than simply mature.

The two characters with the truest presence are Sapphira and Jezebel. They are parallel characters in many ways.

In all of Cather's novels, despite her myriad of immigrant figures, she describes the actual arrival of only one immigrant, Jezebel. After Sapphira visits the death-bed of the ancient woman who has shrunken to a "lean old grey monkey" (p. 84), Cather flashes back to Jezebel's capture, trip to America, and early slave life. The picture is not one of despair. Jezebel is not a character we feel sorry for. She was a tall, beautiful woman who belonged to a "fierce cannibal people" (p. 89), and her fierceness matches her heritage. Whipped for her part in a fight, she bites through the second mate's thumb. The Captain has her brought before him: "Her naked back was seamed with welts and bloody cuts, but she carried herself with proud indifference, and there was no plea for mercy in her eyes" (p. 91). Her pride and beauty win her a partial freedom; she is chained on deck. And the new world challenges her at first glimpse: "Jezebel... regarded the water line of the city with lively curiosity, quite different from the hopeless indifference of the faces of her fellow captives" (p. 92). There is an innate freedom about Jezebel. No matter what her legal status, her challenge of life gives her the aura of freedom. Fairhead's sermon over her grave causes Henry Colbert some consterna-

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had in her slave state become a Christian, definitely a long step away from cannibalism and had, therefore, gained all the promises of heaven (p. 99). Henry muses:

Jezebel's life, as Mr. Fairhead had summed it up, seemed a strange instance of predestination. For her, certainly, her capture had been a deliverance. Yet he hated the whole system of slavery. (p. 105)

If slavery is a deliverance to Jezebel, is freedom a condemnation for Sapphira? It would seem so.

Sapphira Dodderidge who was born in Loudoun County into an aristocracy of taste and wealth confines herself to nursing her invalid father, but out of duty, not love, while her two younger sisters marry. And when her father dies, Sapphira marries Henry Colbert, a miller, the son of an immigrant, a hard-working, rather unimaginative, definitely unfashionable man and the two of them move back to Back Creek, Virginia (pp. 21-26). Her motives for the marriage are never explained; there is some hint that she felt she was getting old, but it is only a hint. And from the time of her marriage she is bound to Henry and to Back Creek, away from the life and the people and the culture that she finds stimulating. Cather does not narrate Sapphira's death; instead she lets us know what it will be like by having Henry Colbert suddenly understand that his wife expects to die soon.

He had never understood his wife very well, but he had always been proud of her. When she was young, she was fearless and independent, she held her head high and made this Mill House a place where town folks liked to come. After she was old and ill she never lowered her flag; not even now when she knew the end was not far off. He had seen strong men quail and whimper at the approach of death. He, himself, dreaded it. But as he leaned against her chair with his face hidden, he knew how it would be with her; she would make her death easy for everyone, because she would meet it
with that composure which he had sometimes called heartlessness, but which now seemed to him strength. As long as she was conscious, she would be mistress of the situation and of herself. (p. 261)

And Till relates that Sapphira died alone, with the tea things gleaming in the window before her (p. 285).

Sapphira is a woman who never loses control of herself; she remains mistress of every occasion, even when the occasion plots against her. She does not lose her dignity when she learns Nancy is gone and understands Rachel has helped her escape. She does not accuse her husband, even while she suspects him. Her action in bringing Martin Colbert to Back Creek to set him upon Nancy is not, by any stretch of the imagination, a deed with which we can sympathise. Nor is it meant to be. It is the same sort of manipulation of people's lives that Sapphira engaged in when she married Till to Jefferson, a eunuch, because she did not want to lose her housekeeper to pregnancy. But this same manipulation produces a score of good deeds that even Rachel must acknowledge.

There was her singular indulgence with Tansy Dave, her real affection for Till and old Jezebel, her patience with Sampson's lazy wife. Even now, from her chair, she took some part in all the celebrations that darkies love. (p. 216)

Sapphira lives in a world half slave, half free. She does not choose between the two ways of life. She lives the way to which she has been born, even as Jezebel does. But she is aware of the dichotomy of her life.

'Bluebell is a lazy, lying nigger as ever was, but I've found her smart enough to look out for herself. I doubt whether Martin would so demean himself, but it's no affair of mine.' Sapphira laughed softly. It was almost as good as a play, she was thinking; the way,
whenever she and her husband were thinking of Nancy, they invariably talked about Bluebell. (p. 196)

And:

It looked like candles shining in a little playhouse, Till said, and there was the tea-table out there too, all set like for company. When Till peeped in at the door, she would find the Mistress looking out at this little scene; often she was smiling. Till really believed Miss Sapphy saw spirits out there, spirits of the young folks who used to come to Chestnut Hill. (p. 285)

The ante-bellum Virginia life is like a play. The characters have their parts and say their lines, but it is only a play, a make-believe. Henry Colbert despair at trying to figure out the seeming shiftlessness of the poor whites in the area (pp. 45-46). He complains to Fairhead that the whites will not work with the blacks. "It's the one thing they've got to feel important about—that they're white," Fairhead sighs. (p. 77) And Henry prays for escaping Nancy:

She was to go out from the dark lethargy of the cared-for and irresponsible; to make her own way in this world where nobody is altogether free, and the best that can happen to you is to walk your own way and be responsible to God only. Sapphira's darkies were better cared for, better fed and better clothed, than the poor whites in the mountains. Yet what ragged, shag-haired, squirrel shooting mountain man would change places with Sampson, his trusted head miller? (pp. 223-224)

The whites don't want to be mixed, even in work, with the blacks; the blacks don't want the responsibilities that necessarily accompany freedom. Over and over again, the slaves talk about knowing their place, and such knowledge is important to them. And when the mountain people talk of the Double S, the looped road that symbolizes their own enslavement as well as that of the Negroes, they linger over it.

When the countryman mentioned the place in speech, if
it were but to say, 'I'd jist got as fur as the Double e-S-S,' their voices took on something slow and dreamy, as if recalling the place itself; the shade, the unstained loveliness, the pleasant feeling one had there. (p. 168)

The front of Sapphira's home is orderly, full of gardens planted by Sapphira and Jezebel working together, and walks; the back of the estate is orderly only on Sundays (pp. 19-20). The front is a manor; the back is a "helter-skelter" of slave cottages. The stage and the stagehands.

There are two worlds, but the protagonists do not really challenge them. As with Nancy, each character is half white, half black, half free and half slave. And the resolution? It is a simple one.

On the one side were the family graves, with marble headstones. On the other side was the slaves' graveyard, with slate headstones bearing single names: 'Dolly,' 'Thomas,' 'Manuel,' and so on.

The mounds of masters and servants alike were covered with thick mats of myrtle. (p. 98)

Rachel and Nancy struggle to put the same headstones on both sets of graves. But we are left with the distinct impression that the headstone really makes no difference. The myrtle is the true indicator of equality. We are reminded of Mrs. Ramsay's advice, in Lucy Gayheart, that accomplishments are only ornaments, that living is what is important, and Sapphira and Jezebel live full if not always virtuous lives. The goal Henry Colbert sets for Nancy, the goal of being free and walking her own way, responsible only to God, is just not a possibility. It is a dream, an ideal, but not a reality. And Henry finally must admit to Sapphira that "sometimes keeping people in their place is being good to them" (p. 262). That is not an heroic statement, nor,
do I think, did Cather mean it to be. It is a statement of resignation, a statement that all people cannot or will not take on the responsibility and enslavement of their own freedom

Summary

Cather's last two novels, despite the five years that separate their publication, both arrive at the same conclusion. They present variations on the same conflict we have traced in her earlier ten novels, a duality, a breaking apart of worlds. But here, for the first time, there is neither condemnation of one of the dual worlds, nor is there optimism that the two worlds can meld into a transcendent existence.

There are young people in both novels; Lucy Gayheart is the protagonist of the novel named for her, and Rachel and Nanoy play important roles in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. But these novels do not belong to youth. They are the novels of a woman who feels she is old, who feels she can no longer challenge the world. The faltering prose of *Sapphira*, the last novel, is perhaps the result of age, perhaps the result of pain and frustration that kept Cather from working as she once did. But the resignation of the novels is not necessarily a fault in them.

It seems to me that for the first time in her life, Cather was able to take a long quiet look at life. She is no longer caught in the midst of life's conflicts; rather she has a comprehensive view of its passions and problems, certainly a more comprehensive view than she ever had while she herself was reacting to life's passions and trying to solve its problems. The view is a quiet view; it is not heroic.
Neither is it bitter or belligerent. And the two works that express this view are thoughtful works.

Willa Cather sees no final solution to the duality she has spent her life investigating. She sees only that people live with inner conflict and then they die, and that is the whole of life. If there is nothing particularly heroic about living, neither is there anything particularly frightening or heroic about dying. The religious ecstasy is gone.
The canon of Willa Cather's twelve novels, analyzed according to their central structural elements, conflict and protagonist, provides a remarkable insight into the changing philosophy of the novelist.

Man against Time has, perhaps, been literature's predominant conflict since men began to guess that all things man-created, all institutions, religions, beliefs, civilizations can and do and will pass, all things except one, except man's yearning not to pass, man's desire to be immortal, man's prayer to remain past Time itself. Immortality, once a changing civilization undermines religious beliefs, becomes the province of the statesman, the builder, the artist. Each man strives to leave behind not Ozymandias' statue but Keats' Grecian urn.

Willa Cather's protagonists in her Heroic Novels strive to create some kind of immortality for themselves, and, according to the novelist, they are for the most part successful. Alexander leaves his bridges; Alexandra the fertile farmland; Jim and Antonia create a whole new way of life between them; Thea Kronborg, as artist, transcends mere human existence; and Claude Wheeler helps create the idea of a better world—even if that idea fails. These six protagonists are heroic; they are larger than life. They stand, like Ulysses, far
taller than the lesser men about them.

Jean Guiget, quoting from Virginia Woolf's *A Writer's Diary*, and commenting on the quote, could be speaking of Willa Cather's first five novels.

I should say about *The Hours* and my discovery: how I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters: I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth. The idea is that the caves shall connect and each comes to daylight at the present moment.

These caves, evidently, are the whole of this buried life: "... the depths of that leaf-enumbered forest, the soul..." explored by the unconstrained consciousness of the heroes. They lost themselves in it in time, to find themselves in timelessness, abandoning their outward appearance, the surface they represent to people and to things...1

Cather too uses caves, as we have seen, caves in which the immortal, spiritual and poetic self of the protagonist frets like a prisoner in a dungeon. One part of her characters move and work in the world. The other part languishes—away from sunlight, gazing and dreaming on the moon. Once the protagonist recognizes his buried self, as Claude and Thea do, and strives to explore the cave and grow out of it into the sunlight, the conflict can be resolved. It is interesting to note the progress made by the protagonists. Bartley Alexander is afraid of his buried self; he struggles to keep it subordinate and in the struggle he makes a monster of it, a killer that will deny Bartley Winifred if he is denied Hilda. Alexandra Bergson is not aware of her buried life except as she scrubs away from her body any

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memories of her phantom lover, and because she is unaware, she dooms her brother and Marie to death and Frank Shabata to life-in-death in prison. The two protagonists of My Antonia do conflict with one another. Jim is angry with Antonia for the Wick Cutter episode and for her susceptibility to Larry Donovan. But because they are two people they can move away from each other, like the sun and the moon, each gracing in his own way the world he lights. And by the time of their reunion, enough years have passed that neither Jim nor Antonia can wish to destroy the other. Consequently, they complement each other and contribute to the future of Cusack's boys.

It is only with the characters of Thea Kronborg and Claude Wheeler that Cather places the sun-moon conflict within the consciousness of her single protagonist as a division of two good and equally powerful forces. Both Thea and Claude have the awareness of the poet Matthew Arnold crying "Is there no life, but these alone? / Madman or slave, must man be one?" Their resolutions of the conflict, therefore, are the most positive, and they are the most dynamic characters. Bartley Alexander is the only protagonist of the other three novels who changes, and his change is a decay, a crumbling away, a splitting in two. Thea Kronborg and Claude Wheeler, on the other hand, change positively, taking consciously the two selves and creating a more valuable third self. Thea creates the characters she portrays. Claude creates the heroic soldier, the new man.

The conflict of the Heroic Novels, as we have stated, is a conflict between two equally good forces. One is the force of the power-

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2"A Summer Night," The Poems of Matthew Arnold (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1965), ll. 74-75. See Appendix A for full text.
ful animal; one the force of the sensitive spirit. No human being
can exist if these forces, striving within him, are not resolved.
Even giants like Bartley and Alexandra can be killed or maimed by
neglecting one half of themselves. But this juxtaposition of two
equally good forces presented a problem to Cather. It was a problem
she had thought about before; she even wrote a sonnet about it.

PARADOX

I knew them both upon Miranda's isle,
Which is of youth a sea-bound seigniory:
Misshapen Caliban, so seeming vile,
And Ariel, proud prince of minstrelsy,
Who did forsake the sunset for my tower
And like a star above my slumber burned.
The night was held in silver chains by power
Of melody, in which all longings yearned—
Star-grasping youth in one wild strain expressed,
Tender as dawn, insistent as the tide:
The heart of night and summer stood confessed.
I rose aglow and flung the lattice wide—
Ah, jest of art, what mockery and pang!
Alack, it was poor Caliban who sang.3

Here in Shakespeare's Ariel and Caliban Cather found the very duality
of man that became the central conflict of her novel. Ariel, pure
spirit; Caliban, brute. And strangely in My Antonia especially, her
own work jested and mocked. For although Antonia is not brute, still
she is not spirit. She is an animal, a magnificent, healthy, fertile
animal. It is Jim Burden who is spirit. It is Jim Burden who repre-
sents the highest efforts of man. But it is Antonia we love. It is
Antonia we remember.

Of the two forces, the physical and spiritual, it is the physical
that is more appealing to us in art—and perhaps in life—because it is

3 Alexander's Bridge & April Twilight
the physical we can see and adore, can hold and cherish.

Perhaps because her heroic protagonists were too much alive in a very physical way, were too beautiful, Cather chose for her Bitter Novels lesser people. Both the professor and Myra Henshawe are middle-aged, becoming old, and although St. Peter is described as a tall, very red man, we remember him as the professor cramped in his ill-ventilated garrett with a shade on his forehead. And Niel Herbert is a mere boy whom we never really see. There are no beautiful people in these books. Those who were heroic, Daniel Forrester, Tom Outland, Molly Driscoll, are dead or dying. The protagonists become primarily spirit or mind, and they wrestle to resolve a mental quarrel.

And once the protagonists and the conflicts become mental, it is easy for Cather to redefine the physical from mere animal to bestiality. So Ivy Peters is a brute, maiming the woodpecker, and Myra Henshawe is tormented by the people who trample like cattle in the apartment over hers. Godfrey St. Peter, too, reduces his conflict to one against his animal nature, his sexuality, and in the wandering third part of The Professor's House, he or Cather, attempts to attach the blame for his crumbling world on adult sexuality. Only the child is whole; the adult prostitutes himself the moment his sexuality gives to him the responsibilities of providing for his adult life, for his wife and children.

Marian Forrester, who in many ways is a cultured Antonia, falls to the brute level of Ivy Peters because of animal passions, as well as materialistic grasping. And it is in A Lost Lady that we can best see Cather's shift, for it is the best novel of this period. The character, Marian Forrester, who has the ability to become important, does not.
She is utterly controlled by the powers of her world. As long as
the predominant power is Daniel Forrester, she is a good woman. But
when Ivy Peters becomes predominant, she acts like a slut.

In no one of these three novels, A Lost Lady, The Professor's
House, or My Mortal Enemy, is there a conflict between two equally re­
spectable forces. And in no one of these three novels has the protag­
onist any control over his destiny or over the conflict of forces that
faces him. Neil Herbert and Godfrey St. Peter are not functional crea­
tures; they do not act. They simply observe the wasting of a way of
life. Myra Henshawe comes the closest to functioning in her world;
she strives to reenter her uncle's Catholicism. But she fails because
her realization comes too late. Driscoll is dead and Myra can only
jump from Gloucester's phantom cliff.

The drama of these novels then takes place in the mind of the
character. In the Heroic Novels, Cather focuses her lens on the total
being struggling in the world. Now, in the Bitter Novels, she draws
the lens back, until it focuses on thoughts, rather than people. The
resolution or climax of all three works is simply a realization that
the world is split in two and that the protagonist is unable to splice
it back together.

The total pessimism of the Bitter Novels is antithetical to
art. When problems cannot be solved, it ceases to be sane to keep
trying. Perhaps that very fact made Cather draw her camera lens still
further back, away from the heroes who had become non-heroes, who would
do nothing in or for their worlds, back to the artist herself. For the
Religious Novels are centered in an omniscient point of view that not
only explores a particular time and place and person, but all other
times and places and persons associated with it, past and present.

His omniscience, plus the perspective available in historical material, plus the nature of the Roman Catholic Church, the primary institution of these novels—a nature centered on the whole rather than any one individual—combined give Cather a less vulnerable, less fallible protagonist, a whole civilization.

The central figure of Death Comes for the Archbishop is, of course, Jean Latour, just as Cecile A douclair is the central figure of Shadows on the Rock. However, Latour and Cecile are only central figures. They are the best representatives of what is going on in their civilizations, but they are by no means the only representatives. The conflict of these novels, for one thing, is much larger than any single character. Heroines like Antonia and Alexandra were unable to establish a civilization on the prairie by themselves. Antonia is helped by Jim, and Alexandra fails precisely because she is not helped by Carl Linstrum. And the imagery of the two Religious Novels, the rock, the river, the saints, the order and chaos, expressly establishes a whole civilization in conflict with the primitive land.

It is precisely this shift of protagonist that effects the new shift in conflict. One man cannot be successful in his struggle for immortality or immutability; Cather has proved that in the Bitter Novels. But a whole civilization? Might not a whole civilization succeed where one man fails? And if again there is a chance for success, then there is no reason for mutability to be associated with such dark animal forces. The conflict becomes one of order versus chaos, and man becomes a builder who strives in church and law to establish an order such as God, if there is a God, would have established. The rocks and the
vegetation and even the huge legendary serpent of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* become adversaries, not conquerors. Man's sins, except for the singular character of Buck Scales, become leanings toward chaos, foibles of a human nature that is not totally mind or spirit, and not, as they are in the Bitter Novels, maliciousness.

The final shift is a shift to resignation. Cather looks at two civilizations—early twentieth century and Ante-bellum. Obviously, she does not find final order in either. And yet when she refocuses on single human protagonists, though never as closely as she did in her first eight novels, she is able to draw sympathetic characters, characters who will die without having achieved any great thing, but characters who are good because they have searched. The ordering of *Lucy Gayheart* and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* is the small ordering of the lives of the protagonists, although Sapphira does affect more people than Lucy does because she is the mistress of a moderate estate and the slaves especially are under her authority.

Willa Cather has moved in her novels from an optimistic statement that an individual can and must achieve some good for his world to a statement that the individual is destined to be utterly defeated to a statement that a civilization can succeed if the individual cannot to a final resignation to simply trying. The concept of the two selves, which includes the idea of the buried self or life, gradually expands until the individual human drama becomes the drama of mankind and then is brought back to the single individual level. It has nuances that change in all the novels. But primarily what we have been surveying is the chain of being that places man halfway between the angels and the apes and dares him to ascend toward the angels. It is the central
conflict of man because it is self-destructive to try to abandon either mind or body and yet the two are not compatible.

The buried self is not simply the property of the artist or priest or yearning youth. It belongs to all men to some degree. Physically, superficially in some cases, man is involved in the world. He is a living animal tied down by his physical being to the grandness and pettiness of physical life. As Cather sensed and tried to define in the Bitter Novels, it is man's sexuality that most definitely ties him down to his animal responsibilities, for it is his sexuality that joins him most certainly to another human being. The child can dream and plan and cry for the moon, but the adult must face the realities of a world that knows the moon is not for the asking. It is significant that the Religious Novels are centered around a celibate priest, Jean Latour, and the child, Cécile Auclair. These two novels are positive, are hopeful. The Novels of Resignation, on the other hand, in which the wise old women are right in knowing achievement is impossible, only living is possible, are novels of sexually mature and involved heroines.

The buried self actually does not change from novel to novel. It is always that part of man striving to attain immutability or immortality. What changes is the environment of the buried self, the environment that encourages or precludes its development and success. What changes, also, is the depth to which Cather explores the buried self. The Heroic Novels, strangely enough, explore the buried self to the greatest depth. Cather explores the development of Jim Burden, Thea Kronborg and Claude Wheeler from their first recognition of a purpose beyond the physical to their final ability to utilize their
yearnings purposefully. The Bitter Novels manage to turn the concept of the buried self into one half of an idea, and despite St. Peter's extensive musings on the subject, and the symbolic figures of Molly Driscoll, Tom Outland, and Marian Forrester, the entire conflict is too abstract for clarity. The Religious Novels present a tableau, a stylization of conflict and character, and similarly a stylization of the buried self. The stylization is necessary, perhaps, for we are dealing here with a total civilization and it is the collective buried self that must be presented. In the Novels of Resignation, as Mrs. Ramsay and Sapphira Colbert know, it is life that counts. Lucy Gayheart discovers that her real lover is life. And life is first and foremost animal. So the buried self becomes not so important as Lucy's and Jezebel's sheer animal exuberance. It is as if Cather realized that her least-living creations were Jim Burden and Godfrey St. Peter, two totally mental beings. Paradoxically, it is Caliban who speaks poetry to man, not Ariel. And in her final novels Willa Cather seems to accept the justice of Caliban's poetry, seems to accept the life-force of a Caliban over and above the abstractions of an Ariel, who, after all, has little actually in common with mutable man.

Willa Cather's theme is an important theme, one of universal significance. But it is not theme alone which makes her twelve novels worth reading. As this paper has shown, the major strength of Willa Cather's writing is her amazingly subtle yet strong use of imagery.

Artistically, Cather is not consistent. Her most satisfying novels are *O Pioneers!* and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, though *My Antonia* is delightful to read because of the character of Antonia Shimerda. But *O Pioneers!* and *Death Comes for the Archbishop* are
steady, careful works that do not disappoint or create critical ques-
tions. It is interesting to note that the styles of these two novels vary considerably.  
*O Pioneers!* is a traditional novel, conforming for the most part to developing a plot line and the characters along that line. *Death Comes for the Archbishop* is a splicing together of moments and scenes and stories that has really no plot and no thorough characterization. Yet both novels are successful.

Her least satisfying novels are *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, *The Song of the Lark*, and *The Professor's House*. *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* may fail because the writer was failing, because she was tired and ill. However, both *Sapphira* and *The Professor's House* suffer from the same problem, a diffusion of parts; as Yeats would say, "Things fall apart; the center cannot hold." These two novels, framed even as are *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *My Antonia*, are a splicing together of stories and details, not according to plot, but according to the artist's control and communication of theme. The problem is that the splicing is not so well done. The central pivot of character is gone; St. Peter is too weak a character, too lightly, impressionistically done; Sapphira is a diffused character, with the multiple protagonists and points of view clouding her development. *The Song of the Lark*, on the other hand, is a traditionally drawn novel, faithfully adhering to plot; its problem is simply that it goes on too long. It is not, as Cather suggested, that she followed Thea past the logical end of the novel, but rather that she included too many details, too much plot, that were not necessary to the execution of her story.

What we are saying, then, is that Willa Cather is a versatile writer, equally able at traditional form and at experimental. And that
her greatest triumphs and failures do not coincide with the structure she was using at that point. Her use of imagery is an important key to her success as a writer.

There is imagery in all of Willa Cather's novels; indeed, an understanding of her imagery is, in every novel, an understanding of her theme and of her characters. The Heroic Novels and The Religious Novels make the best use of imagery. It is replete in those novels. And, taken as a whole, these are the best novels she wrote. The imagery of the Bitter Novels is another matter. A Lost Lady, the most successful of the three, makes the best use of imagery, but The Professor's House is muddled simply because the imagery, on which we must depend for explication, is itself muddled. And My Mortal Enemy is pared so thin that only vestiges of possible images, the soldier for instance, remain.

Cather's imagery, at its best, is subtly introduced and masterfully developed. Her novels do not demand recognition of imagery, as do, for instance, the novels of Virginia Woolf. But the trees and hieroglyphics of My Antonia, the fowls of O Pioneers!, the gods of A Lost Lady, the colors of Lucy Gayheart, the sun and moon of The Song of the Lark, My Antonia, and One of Ours, these images are significant to the total movement and comprehension of the novels. Two factors make Cather's imagery important. First, the images are always drawn from the natural surroundings of the character. The moonflowers and seashell belong in Mrs. Tellamantez's yard; Cather does not have to create them. The Double S in Sapphira and the Slave Girl is a part of the landscape. Trees on a prairie are naturally as rare and as wonderful as Antonia Shimerda. Second, the images are, for the most
part, consistently used. Cather not only does not shift their significance within any one novel, she also does not shift their significance across novels.

What we are saying, then, about Cather is that she does not manufacture details or their significance. Instead, she is a most careful observer of the actual and she finds significance in the actual. She does not use a prairie image in a city or a city image in the prairie. She does not contrive improbabilities. This fidelity to actuality becomes especially praise-worthy when we realize that many of her novels are located in prairie country, country without excessive or unusually natural detail. This adherence to and exploration of fact is also, of course, the reason her characters are so believable. Cather does not concoct; she is true to her material. She simply has an artist's ability to explore that material and find its meaning. Brownings' Fra Lippo said:

... we're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
And so they are better, painted--better to us,
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;
God uses us to help each other so,
Lending our minds out.¹

And certainly, this high ideal and the praise for being faithful to it belong to Willa Cather.

There is, however, one criticism about Cather's novels that we cannot overlook. It is the problem of her endings. Willa Cather is unfortunately consistent in providing afterthoughts and epilogues that needlessly wrap up the story and interject an unwanted and unwarranted

editorial opinion. In *Alexander's Bridge*, Professor Wilson and Hilda Burgoyne bring each other up to date on their and Winifred's grief and establish Bartley as living on in his maiden bridge. The last paragraph of *O Pioneers!* editorially looks forward Whitmanesquely to Alexandra's death when her physical being will contribute to the next generation of idealistic young men and women who will love the prairie as she does. *The Song of the Lark*’s ending is weak insofar as it establishes Thea and Fred's marriage, an improbable circumstance depending on the death of his mad wife and coinciding with Doctor Archie's freedom thanks to the timely death of his wife. *One of Ours* leaves the scene of Claude's triumph and returns to the prairie and an editorial comment that his death was the best thing that could happen to him because there will be no new world, and he probably would have committed suicide faced again with the old. *A Lost Lady* skips a few years to find Marian Forrester still alive and married to her Englishman and allows Niel Herbert editorially to reinforce what the novel has already communicated, that Marian's behavior has depended not on herself, but on the man she belongs to. *The Professor's House* ends with St. Peter's rescue by Augusta and his sudden decision to continue living and his equally sudden recognition that somehow Augusta with her God has a strength he does not have, yet needs. The ending of *My Mortal Enemy* is a scramble on the parts of Oswald Henshawe and the novelist to place before the reader a loving picture of Molly Driscoll. *Shadows on the Rock* dips into the future to show Cécile and Pierre happily married and the Bishop Saint-Vallier chastened and taught by long years of imprisonment that really Laval was right. The conclusion of *Lucy Gayheart*, which necessitates a shift in focus from
Lucy to Harry Gordon, introduces Harry's conflict and growth too late and too slickly. The epilogue of *Sapphire and the Slave Girl* introduces two totally new characters, the narrator and her mother, and attempts to tie up the loose ends of the story in a what-happened-then fashion. Only *My Antonia* and *Death Comes for the Archbishop* move naturally to a conclusion and then stop.

Obviously, these endings are a statement of the seriousness with which Cather approached her themes. They are a statement of an overanxiousness on the writer's part that she be understood. They also suggest a lack of confidence in the ability of her writing to communicate her theme. It is an unfortunate lack of confidence, for in many cases, the endings of the novels mar otherwise great books, like *O Pioneers!* and *One of Ours*.

Cather is not, then, a perfect writer, nor, probably, even a great one. Certainly she had the ability to be great. Her imagery is drawn with the lyrical delicacy of a poet. Thematically as well as structurally important, its appropriateness to the characters and settings it helps define is the mark of a sensitive and perceptive artist. Her wonderful epic heroes, Alexandra, Antonia, Thea, and the others standing against the sun and the moon, are drawn with firm bold lines and colors and resist any flaws of the novels to diminish them. They are memorable heroes and heroines, memorable beyond the consummate execution of the novels. Further, Cather was a flexible writer, eager and willing to experiment, who can teach new novelists that plot is not the skeleton of the novel, but rather that conflict is. She moved with incredible ease from a plot-based structure, like that found in *O Pioneers!* to a spot-of-time structure, like that utilized in *My*
Antonia. And she developed the spot-of-time structure to its fullest
expression in Death Comes for the Archbishop. Her major theme, man's
struggle for immutability, is a major theme of classical literature.

But she faltered; she erred. She seems not to have trusted her
own talent. Time after time, she weakens a great novel by forcing on
it a conclusion not appropriate. And so she is only a very good writ­
er who has given the world twelve intelligent and enjoyable novels.
They are intelligent novels; they show the control and perception of
an intelligent artist behind them. They are enjoyable: the heroes she
created are greater than the novels they find their homes in. Perhaps
the flaws stem simply from the fact that Cather lived in a changing
world, that she was sensitive to the changes of that world, and that
she wanted very much to be able to present her readers with answers
to the puzzles of that changing world. Her entire cast of creative
characters, the artists and priests, Alexander, Alexandra, Jim Burden,
Thea, Godfrey St. Peter, Jean Latour, Cécile Auclair, and Sapphira
Colbert, are engaged in ordering the world for those about them, in
making it simpler for others to understand the world. This, undoubtedly,
is how Cather saw her role as novelist. She wanted the order she saw
to be understood, even if she, the artist, had to manipulate obviously
the conclusions of her novels.

In the canon of Willa Cather's novels, we read the progression
of the lifetime of a sensitive, questioning human being who struggled
to find answers to the oldest of man's questions: what is he? and what
is his purpose on this earth? and what control has he over his destiny?
The fact that Cather did not have and propound one set answer to these
questions is evidence of her perception of a rapidly changing world,
and, perhaps, also evidence of her own span of life. She moves from the challenge and heroism of youth, when the world can be molded and man can be god, to a sweet, if sad, resignation to the limitations of any one human being in changing the world. The bitterness and frustration apparent in those novels that mark the period of her life when she discovered every man has feet of clay is laved away in the larger perceptions of her historical novels when she placed the individual back in his culture, understanding that cultures and civilizations are larger than any one man's genius or evil, and that the evolutionary progress of man as he orders his world is not dependent on any one individual.

The captives languishing in the dungeons, the buried selves caught in physical flesh, can never step into the sunlight wholly free. But in the end, Cather seems to realize that while the attempt to free the slaves is heroic, it can never fully succeed, because the responsibilities of freedom are overwhelming. What would man do if his buried self were free? He would have to live up to his aspirations. He would have to grasp the moon and reach for the stars--he would have to take on the responsibilities of being a god.