An Interpretation of The Principal Characters In The Novels of Willa Cather.

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AN INTERPRETATION OF THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS
IN THE NOVELS OF WILLA CATHER

being

A thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the Fort Hays Kansas State College in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Degree of Master of Science

by

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Approved

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to appraise the strength and individualism of the principal characters in the novels of Willa Cather. A few critics -- Hicks, Bloom, and others -- have stated that her characters are only types; nevertheless, they have placed Willa Cather on the list of great American novelists. Since Cather's writing is proving more popular in recent years, the study of the characters in her novels seems to be a timely and worthwhile project for research. For a long time this type of study has been prevalent with scholars of theses, book reviews, and essays. Character interpretation involves philosophy, human relationships, frustrating circumstances, central ambition, attitudes, and other aspects of personality. This thesis gives the opportunity for interpreting the characters as Cather, the writer, and critics understand them. Although some kind of interpretation can be made without knowledge of background, this interpretation is based upon a general understanding of Cather's life, philosophy, attitudes, and influences.

Certain precepts of literary criticism have been followed in this thesis. The writer has studied the characters as living, moving creations. The character's reality depends upon the degree of kinship the reader feels for the character's emotions, circumstances, and condition of soul. In other words, the character's strength
depends upon the degree of feeling that the reader has known and felt, but which has now found expression. In order for an author to make a character as moving to others as it is to her, she must bring before other's eyes the character at a certain period of life and show the influence of environment, the struggle of passions, and the clash of interests as the character develops. The author must mold the trivial incidents and the startling catastrophes in such a logical pattern that the change seems within the realm acceptable to the character. However, life is filled with chances such as death which an important character may meet along with thousands of people in real life. Therefore, it should not be discounted as illogical if a principal character suddenly falls from a bridge, falls through the ice, or drowns. For example, Cather has Alexander fall from a bridge, Lucy fall through the ice, and Claude get killed in the war. Also forceful settings as a background lend much to the strength of a character as shown in *O Pioneers* and *My Antonia*. Antonia and Alexandra would not have such great personalities if it were not for the atmosphere of the prairie.

The source of information used in this research is the reading of Cather's twelve novels and two note-books, *Willa Cather on Writing* and *Not Over Forty*, which give certain opinions that Cather has about her novels and ideas she holds about writing. The bases for interpreting Cather's characters are the noting of critical passages and a few writings by other authors.
Many of the events of Cather's life were episodes that she used in her novels; therefore, a biographical sketch of her life is necessary. Willa Cather, born on December 7, 1873, spent her early childhood in Virginia where the Cathers mainly raised sheep. Willa Cather had a vivid memory of how her father would take her with him, carrying her on his shoulder, when he went to drive the sheep into the fold at night. He had a favorite sheep dog that wore little leather shoes to protect her feet from the sharp rocks. Cather recalled many sad memories when the farm was sold and the family moved to Red Cloud, Nebraska. She always loved nature and every landmark of the countryside was dear to her. Miss Cather remained in Red Cloud until she went to Lincoln, Nebraska, to attend the university. When she spoke of Red Cloud in later years, she said:

It seemed to me if the hot wind that so much of the time blew over it went on and left it behind, forgotten by the rest of the world. I felt that terrible restlessness that comes over young people born in small towns in the middle of the continent; the sense of being cut off from all the great currents of life and thought.1

The people of Red Cloud were not any different from people in other small American towns. But Cather was more interested in them. Red Cloud was the stage for the characters, for the most part, who make up the great gallery in her books. They are the symbols of her understanding of life's values.2 As a young girl, Cather dressed as

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2 Ibid., p. 24.
boy. Preferring the conversation of older men to other pastimes, and enjoying cutting up animals, she was considered "something queer" in Red Cloud, which she was later to call a "bitter, dead little Western town."\(^3\) After graduation from the university, she went to Pittsburgh where she worked on the Home Monthly, the Pittsburgh Leader and for six years was editor of McClure's Magazine. She also held teaching positions in the Pittsburgh schools for four years. After the publishing of her first novel, Alexander's Bridge, she devoted full time to writing and travel. In 1912 she made the first of many trips to the Southwest where she sometimes remained for months, while her eyes gathered settings for her work from landscapes she loved so much. She made her home in New York during her writing years, and it was there she passed away in 1947.

CHAPTER II

PHILOSOPHY, ATTITUDE AND INFLUENCES

In order to understand Cather's characters, it is also necessary to understand her personal philosophy. As Cather seemed consistent in her theories, it was an easy task to notice that many characters held the same basic ideas that she had. Miss Cather gave her attitude towards life by placing many of her own concepts of life in the soul of her characters. Willa Cather liked order; she wanted life to be an arranged garden. The central theme of her own life was "the passionate struggle of a tenacious will."¹ Willa Cather thought that to conquer the world meant to rise above the "small" people who were always whittling greatness down to their own mediocrity.² She always sought to defy the world even in early life when she wore a mannish haircut and unconventional clothes.³ Cather's great revolt was against American materialism which she deplored in nearly all her novels. Having no use for modern civilization with its machines and gadgets, Cather gave her novels properties such as money, machines, furs, and jewelry that cluttered up the lives of the characters.⁴ To find a society whose

¹ Brown, op. cit., p. 335.
² Loc. cit.
⁴ Brown, op. cit., p. 338.
concepts she could accept, she had to go to her childhood memories before the age of fifteen.\textsuperscript{5} Whenever she departed from her early scenes, it was to describe other early traditions that were familiar to her through travel and vision. She never struggled with the history of the front pages, politics, or social events.\textsuperscript{6} Cather declined to join societies, to recommend books or to give to charities except to friends and institutions in Webster county, where she gave much.\textsuperscript{7}

In 1922 she was confirmed in the Protestant Episcopal Church of Red Cloud where she was a member the rest of her life.\textsuperscript{8} However, her entrance into this church did not bring her repose, and she probably did not expect it would.\textsuperscript{9} Many of her works have a religious theme where she may have tried to give her characters a security that she never felt. In works like \textit{Death Comes for the Archbishop} Cather may have been concerned with immortality. From interviews in Red Cloud, the writer feels it might appear that Cather had some lack of faith in religion. She did not think that death was to be feared.\textsuperscript{10}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{5} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{6} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 337.
\textsuperscript{7} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 255.
\textsuperscript{8} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 337.
\textsuperscript{9} \textit{Ibid.}, p. xvi.
\textsuperscript{10} Daiches, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 100.
\end{flushright}
Cather believed that good must triumph over evil, and that the morality of the spirit must defeat opportunism. She had become conscious of life as a struggle and the possibility of failure. Her religious treatment showed her search for stability in the midst of a changing civilization.

In *Not Under Forty* Cather stated "the world broke in two in 1922 or there about." After the First World War Cather thought everything beautiful had been destroyed. This was the beginning of her sharp withdrawal from modern American life that was to grow more acute as she got older and became more bitter. Cather probably realized that her reactions to life were very bitter and she deplored growing old. A special longing echoes in her lines about Shakespeare: "He died before he had tried to grow old, never became a bitter old man wrangling with abstractions or creeds."  

Since Cather was out of sympathy with the world about her, her art depended upon the beauty of her memories. For the rest she depended on what she had observed. If there had been no people within her experience with rich life, she thought as an artist she might as well have lived in an igloo. Even, as she looked about her in the

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years after the First World War, she wondered if there would be much lost if she did elect an igloo.\footnote{\textit{Brown}, op. cit., p. 227.} The most exact statement of her conception of art was this:

The further the world advances the more it becomes evident that an author's only safe course is to cling to the skirts of his art, forsaking all others, and keep unto her as long as they two shall live. An artist should not be vexed by human hobbies or human follies: he should be able to lift himself into the clear firmament of creation where the world is not. He should be among men but not of them, in the world but not of the world. Other men may think and believe and argue, but he must create.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 66.}

However, Cather's irritation with American achievement will be overlooked by lovers of art in recognition of her artistic craftsman­ship in transforming a country and a way of living. Only a few people thought Nebraska was beautiful until Willa Cather wrote about it. Henry Seidel Canby said her theme, "the overflow of vigorous men and women from the Old World into the new country, after one thousand years of stability, was unique."\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 341.} Willa Cather studied the world and then she found she knew the village. Edward Brown has stated that:

of the American artists she was the first who wooed the muse in her particular wild land, and because it was an authentic muse, the art is authentic and pure, almost classical in form, built of the rocklike materials that endure.\footnote{\textit{Loc. cit.}}
Elizabeth Monroe, stating the influence of Cather's works, said:

Her books belong to the literature of revelation, because they reveal the beauty and grace of little things and the indestructible vigor of personality.18

Katherine Anne Porter made the comment:

If you look at her lifetime, you see an army of writers moving in the background and in the middle distance, each one of them having, for one reason or another, influence, power, fame, credit; or sometimes just notoriety, the newspaper sort of fame so loud and sometimes misleading while it lasts. But Willa Cather stood, and stands, in the foreground.19

Stephen Tennant made a very fine statement of her genius:

Her eye, her ear, were tuning-forks, burning-glasses, which caught the minutest refraction or echo of a thought or feeling... She saw into the Room Beyond... She heard a deeper vibration, a kind of composite echo, of all that the writer said, and did not say.20

Besides written praise Cather has received many other honors. In 1934 Miss Cather was the only author with four books on the White House shelves. She was the first woman ever to receive an honorary degree from Princeton, and she received honorary degrees from the Universities of Nebraska, California, Columbia, Yale, Smith, Creighton, and Michigan. She was elected to the American Academy of Arts and


20 Willa Cather, Willa Cather on Writing, op. cit., p. viii.
Letters and received a gold medal from the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and a Mark Twain award.

Cather was widely read in the classics and had a huge interest in music, opera, and theater. Her main contemporary influences were writers such as Henry James, Sarah Jewett, Gustave Flaubert, and Stephen Crane. Willa Cather had a personal talk with Stephen Crane during her college years that had a great significance for her future art. She pondered and cherished for years Stephen Crane's own words: "The detail of a thing has to filter through my blood, and then it comes out like a native product, but it takes forever."\(^{21}\) Her first novel showed the influence of "a sensitive precision" learned from Henry James.\(^{22}\) She felt her first novel was only a literary exercise and accepted the advice of Sarah Jewett, to write about what she knew for her next novel. Some of Miss Jewett's advice was something like Stephen Crane's. She told Cather: "The thing that teases the mind over and over for years, and at last gets itself put down rightly on paper -- whether little or great, it belongs to Literature."\(^{23}\) Speaking in later years, Cather said as much as she admired James she would never reread some of his books while she would never grow weary of Miss Jewett's works. Both, Jewett and Cather, had turned early to an apprenticeship to writing and had taken Flaubert for a master.\(^{24}\) In a sketch Cather spoke of

\(^{21}\) Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

\(^{22}\) Daiches, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

\(^{23}\) Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 1149.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., p. 139.
Flaubert as "one in whom and near whom lay most of one's mental past." 25

This presentation of Cather's philosophy, attitudes, and influences is not complete; but it does give some of the principal theories of and about Cather. Thus, to sum up, Cather had homesickness for an earlier period whereas she was out of sympathy with the world around her because the world loved cheap objects and crushed people of originality. Through the years Cather received high praise as an outstanding novelist and owed a great deal of credit to the works of her contemporaries and their advice that started her writing about the village.

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25 Ibid., p. 61.
CHAPTER III

CLAIMS OF HER FIRST NOVELS

Willa Cather always said, "My first novels are two", *Alexander's Bridge* (1912)\(^1\) and *O Pioneers!* (1913).\(^2\) Concerning her first novel, Cather explains:

... *Alexander's Bridge*, was very like what painters call a studio picture. It was the result of meeting some interesting people in London. Like most young writers, I thought a book should be made out of 'interesting material,' and at that time I found the new more exciting than the familiar. The impressions I tried to communicate on paper were genuine, but they were very shallow...\(^3\)

In the first part of the book Professor Wilson, an observer for Cather, is placed in the environment where Cather's characters are living. To give a rich, well-being atmosphere, Cather writes:

... the wide back windows looked out upon the garden and the sunset and a fine stretch of silver-colored river. A harp-shaped elm stood stripped against the pale colored evening sky, with ragged last year's bird nests in its forks, and through the bare branches the evening star quivered in the misty air. The long brown room breathed the peace of a rich and amply guarded quiet.\(^4\)

\(^1\) The publication date of Cather's novels will be given in this manner.

\(^2\) Willa Cather, *Willa Cather on Writing*, op. cit., p. 91.

\(^3\) *Loc. cit.*

Thus, the library presents the setting for Bartley Alexander's wife and the professor, who has had Bartley as a student, who "caught the wind early, and it has sung in his sails ever since." The professor continues, "He was never introspective. He was simply the most tremendous response to stimulus I have ever known."

The story centers on Bartley Alexander, a middle-age bridge-building engineer, whose two selves, youth and middle-age, have conflict. Bartley's stimulus is provided by his relations with two women, his wife and his mistress, Hilda Burgoyne. All of the characters in the novel's scope are background for Bartley from forty-three until his death a year later.

Since Bartley's thoughts are seldom given, an observer's point of view is about all that is ever known about him. He is physically described as:

... six feet, glowing with strength and cordiality and rugged, blond good looks ... he looked as a tamer of rivers ought to look. Under his tumbled sandy hair his head seemed as hard and powerful 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.

The professor tells Bartley that he has always given him credit for his ability, but has always felt he had a weak spot where some day there would be too much strain. The Professor says, "The more dazzling

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5 Willa Cather, op. cit., p. 9.

6 Ibid., p. 11.
the front you presented, the higher your facade rose, the more I expected to see a big crack zigzagging from top to bottom . . . "7 Since the Professor no longer feels this way, he tells Bartley about it. However, Bartley sets the action for the novel by telling the Professor that life is not very interesting with a million details that make him into a social structure. Bartley tells:

I sometimes wonder what sort of a chap I'd have been if I hadn't been this sort; I want to go and live out his potentialities, too.8 I haven't forgotten that there are birds in the bushes.

The Professor feels that Bartley "had merely closed the door of the engine-room and come up for an airing. The machinery itself was still pounding on."9 The Professor is right for Bartley starts looking for the birds on his next trip to London where he meets Hilda Burgoyne, an Irish actress, whom he had loved in his youth. Bartley did not mind hardships, difficulties, or overwork, but he hates middle-age. Bartley thinks, "How one hid his youth under his coat and hugged it!"10 He probes in his mind that he wants Hilda because she brings back his youth. It's not that he wants, Hilda, but "someone vastly dearer to him than she had ever been -- his own self."11

7 Ibid., p. 16.
8 Loc. cit.
9 Ibid., p. 17.
10 Ibid., p. 42.
11 Ibid., p. 51.
Tortured by his youthful self, Bartley indulges in wine and gambling. In a letter to Hilda he explains:

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 to me. At first he seemed only a pleasure-loving simpleton, of whose company I was ashamed, whom I used to hide under my coat... in London. But now he is strong and sullen, and he is fighting for his life at the cost of mine. No creature ever wanted so much to live.12

Bartley feels that he should tell his wife, but fears he will lose his happiness as he has no desire to marry Hilda. Being very proud of his wife, he feels that she has been the strength for all his accomplishments. The observer says:

When the grandeur and beauty of the world challenged him, 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 everything but energy; the energy of youth which must register itself and cut its name before it passes.13

Bartley misses a message concerning a huge bridge he is building because he is with Hilda. Because the workmen do not hear from Bartley, they keep on working on a bridge that is ready to collapse. When Bartley arrives, he orders the men from the bridge, but not before the bridge gives away sending him to his death. His plunge to death comes during an ideal time for:

12 Ibid., p. 130.
13 Ibid., p. 144.
When a great man dies in his prime there is no surgeon who can say whether he did well; whether or not the future was his, as it seemed to be. The mind that society had come to regard as a powerful and reliable machine, dedicated to its service, may for a long time have been sick within itself and bent upon its own destruction.  

This description gives Bartley's emotional revolt to materialism:

... red foggy darkness, the hungry crowds before the theaters, the hand-organs, the feverish rhythm of the blurred, crowded streets, and feeling of letting himself go with the crowd. He shuddered and looked about him at the poor unconscious companions of his journey, unkept and travel-stained, now doubled in unlovely attitudes, who had come to stand to him for the ugliness he had brought into the world.

Cather attempts a symbolism where the flaw in the bridge represents the weakness in the character of Alexander. She contrasts colors to Alexander's personality. For instance, in youth he likes the smell of lilacs, but later in life he wears a purple smoking jacket and selects red roses. The color has become more explosive and passionate along with the man. As the Professor says the only way to get at Bartley is by means of color.

In many ways Bartley has the aspects of Dreiser's early Hurstwood in Sister Carrie, who has the same struggle for a new life, and the two selves are like Dr. Jekyll. Like Hurstwood, Alexander has worked his way up in the world. As a youth he has worked his way across the ocean on a cattleship, without a dollar in

14 Ibid., p. 166.
15 Ibid., p. 149.
his pocket, to study in Paris. Alexander has grown up on a ranch where there were locoed horses, jackrabbits, and campfires. His physical bigness makes him a Colossus who subdues the rivers by building bridges. Alexander is not a rounded person. As David Daiches says:

Miss Cather seems fascinated, and a little mystified, by her character. Instead of presenting to the reader someone whom, having created, she fully understands, she seems rather to be exploring him along with the reader and to know no more of him than each successive incident in the story reveals. 16

Alexander's personality is very interesting. If Cather had given a broader presentation of Alexander, he would have been a deeper creation.

Comparing the writing of Alexander's Bridge and O Pioneers!, Cather said of O Pioneers!:

Here there was no arranging or 'inventing'; everything was spontaneous and took its own place, right or wrong. This was like taking a ride through a familiar country on a horse that knew the way, on a fine morning when you felt like riding. The other was like riding in a park, with someone not altogether congenial, to whom you had to be talking all the time. Since I wrote this book for myself, I ignored all the situations and accents that were then generally thought to be necessary. 17

O Pioneers! has a theme that Willa Cather was to write about for many years. This was the presentation of Western girls of

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16 Daiches, op. cit., p. 10.

17 Willa Cather, Willa Cather on Writing, op. cit., p. 93.
pioneering families that triumph over severe hardships and win success. As Cather says:

... it was about old neighbours, once very dear, whom I had almost forgotten. ... I did not in the least expect that other people would see anything in a slow-moving story, without 'action,' 'humour,' or a hero; a story concerned entirely with heavy farming people, with cornfields and pasture lands and pig yards, -- set in Nebraska. ¹⁸

Alexandra Bergson's challenges are a fight against the soil. By her beautiful, rich and radiant love for the land, she is able to tame it. Alexandra is still a girl when her father dies, and she assumes all domestic and financial troubles; she guides her brothers to security that they do not even appreciate because the more material things they have the more they want. Alexandra scarcely has any childhood. Helping her father with the business of the land, Alexandra, at the age of twelve, has no time for a personal life or a realization of herself. She is a girl "who could tell the cost to fatten each steer, and who could guess the weight of a hog before it went on the scales closer than her father." ¹⁹

Since O Pioneers! is a novel about the soil, the settings do much to create atmosphere. O Pioneers! begins when:

... A mist of fine snowflakes was curling and eddying about the cluster of low drab buildings huddled on the grey

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 94.

prairie, under a gray sky. The board sidewalks were gray with trampled snow ... now and then a red or a plaid shawl flashed out of one store into the shelter of another.20

Alexandra is looking to the future, but her little brother, Emil, has become bitter because he feels that men are "too weak to make any mark here, that the land wanted to be let alone, to preserve its own fierce strength, its peculiar, savage kind of beauty, its uninterrupted mournfulness."21 Alexandra is a strong character because she knows how to adapt the past to the future. Scheming to get along in a calm, deliberate manner, Alexandra overcomes the blizzards, the prairie-dogs, rattlesnake bites, crop failures, sickness, death, and mortgages while her neighbors give up the struggle to return east. She presents a pathetic picture as she watches her brothers, old enough to help her, play while she plans:

It was a still, deep-breathing summer night, full of the smell of the hayfields. Sounds of laughter and splashing came up from the pasture, and when the moon rose rapidly above the bare rim of the prairie, the pond glittered like polished metal, and she could see the flash of white bodies as the boys ran about the edge, or jumped into the water. Alexandra watched the shimmering pool dreamily, but eventually her eyes went back to the sorghum patch south of the barn, where she was planning to make her new pig corral.22

Alexandra's relationship with her brothers, Lou and Oscar, is a tragic hardship throughout the scope of the book, but it is

20 Ibid., p. 4.
21 Ibid., p. 15.
22 Ibid., p. 46.
especially pathetic to see them turn from her in the end after she has done everything for them. The break of relationships comes because she sends Emil, her youngest brother to college, and wants to marry Carl Lindstrum late in life. The brothers object to this marriage because Carl has not any property and they feel their sister would look foolish getting married in middle life. Alexandra does not seem in love, but has need for a friend, whom she has never had through the years. Carl understands her while others have always misunderstood her. As Lou and Oscar, the brothers that are money grabbers, see the situation, they say, "Of course, Alexandra ain't much like other women-folks. Maybe it won't make her sore. Maybe she'd as soon be forty as not!" Even Emil, whom she admires very much, feels ashamed of his sister. "It had never occurred to him that his sister was a handsome woman until he was told. He had never thought of her as a woman at all, only a sister." Carl, hearing of the disagreement with the brothers, goes West; and shy Alexandra, to avoid awkward encounters, changes churches.

Alexandra settles back on her prospering, commonplace affairs. "It was because she had so much personality to put into her enterprises and succeeded in putting it into them so completely, that her affairs prospered better than those of her neighbours." Having an

23 Ibid., p. 173.
24 Ibid., p. 235.
25 Ibid., p. 203.
unusual happiness, a satisfaction from life and a tolerance of others, Alexandra recalls her happiest day:

... Emil and Alexandra had taken their lunch out to the bluffs to eat while a single wild duck was swimming and diving. This was the most beautiful living thing Alexandra could recall. Years after she remembered that day as the happiest in her life. Most of Alexandra's happy memories were as impersonal as this one; yet to her they were very personal. Her mind was a white book, with clear writing about weather and beasts and growing things. Not many people would have cared to read it; only a happy few.26

Both, Emil and the country, have become what she hoped. She is proud of her brother, Emil, because he reaches beyond the values of the Divide. Knowing that her brother was made for finer things, Alexandra is afraid that he would get caught in the forces of the land. She reflects:

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 ... was what she had worked for.27

In the chapter, "The White Mulberry Tree," Alexandra is less important than Emil and his tragic love for Marie. Emil returns from college to fall hopelessly in love with a married woman, Marie Tovesky, whom he has first loved as a little child. Finding Marie in her orchard under a mulberry tree, Emil becomes her lover for the first time. Slightly drunk and blindly jealous, Marie's husband finds them and shoots them.

After the news of this tragic death, Alexandra, for the next

26 Ibid., p. 205.
27 Ibid., p. 213.
few months, is in a daze and spends much of her time in the cemetery. Caught out in a terrible rain storm, while at the cemetery, she regains her old self-possession. She says:

After you once get cold clear through, the feeling of the rain on you is sweet. It seems to bring back feelings you have when you were a baby. It carried you back into the dark, before you were born; you can't see things, but they come to you, somehow, and you know them and aren't afraid of them. Maybe it's like that with the dead. If they feel anything at all, it's the old things, before they were born, that comfort people like the feeling of their own bed does when they are little.28

Carl returns to marry Alexandra, who no longer has any reason not to marry him. The book keeps echoing the phrase, she belongs to the land:

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!29

Alexandra's life resembles many people's common experiences so nearly that she seems to have had individual experiences of others. There is a feeling of being inside Alexandra, of knowing and sharing with her. The feeling is carried that she has the same love of a country landmark that she expresses for many others in a different way. The anguish and disillusionment of the pioneers as they work at overwhelming odds for their great country is an inspiration. Because Alexandra Bergson has something in common with people that

28 Ibid., p. 281.
29 Ibid., p. 309.
will enrich thinking, people rise toward a new level. As Edward Brown states, "Never for an instant does she seem in the least unreal; yet when the novel ends she is a personality of more than life-size."30

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30 Brown, op. cit., p. 179.
CHAPTER IV

THE CLAIMS OF THE WEST

The West has a prominent place in Cather's novels. In fact, the town of Red Cloud, Nebraska, is used as the "Sweetwater" of A Lost Lady, the "Frankfort" of One of Ours, the "Haverford" of Lucy Gayheart, the "Moonstone" of Song of the Lark, the "Black Hawk" of My Antonia and the "Hanover" of O Pioneers.¹

The Song of the Lark (1915), is the story in which a person of superior talent, Thea Kronborg, rises from the obscurity of Moonstone, Colorado, and attains distinction as a great opera singer. Thea, one of the many children of a lazy, Swedish Methodist minister is helped to leave Moonstone by three men: Dr. Archie, an unhappily married man, lends money to enable Thea to study; Ray Kennedy, a freight train conductor planning to marry Thea until he is killed in an accident, leaves her his life's sum, six hundred dollars; and Herr Wunsch, a drinking, delightful German pianist, who reveals to Thea her genius for music. Later in Chicago Fred Ottenburg, a musical beer king stays to help her out of difficulties.

Thea, presented at the age of eleven, is lost in her art with an unusual taste for odd friends such as middle aged Mexicans. She appears old for her age, but with beauty, charm, courage, a voice, and an

excellent taste in the classics. Both of her parents realize Thea has a spark of genius. As Mr. Kronborg observes:

Thea was not the marrying kind . . . She's too peppery and too fond of having her own way . . . That kind make good church-workers and missionaries and school teachers, but they don't make good wives. They fret all their energy away like colts . . .

After Thea receives the money from Ray's insurance, the six hundred dollars, she goes to Chicago. The family senses she will come back a different person, and Thea feels that she is leaving her old life behind. However, she feels a certain relief. Everyone in the town is her enemy except Dr. Archie and her brother Thor. Cather places Thea in town instead of in the country because she must suffer "the fear of the tongue, that terror of little towns."

Thea's life in Chicago is the tale of a hard working artist caught in the webs of a city. This is the story of rooming houses, street-cars, all kinds of music teachers, dreams, aching muscles, sadness, and shattered ideas. Thea's life is presented:

... They trampled over her like an army and she felt as if she were bleeding to death under them. She sometimes came home from a late lesson so exhausted that she could eat no supper . . . She used to throw herself upon the bed and lie there in the dark, not thinking, not feeling, but evaporating. That same night, perhaps she would awaken up rested and calm, and as she went over her work in her mind, the passages seemed to become something of themselves, to take a sort of pattern in the darkness.

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4 Ibid., p. 177.
Thea sees a picture in the picture gallery with the name "Song of the Lark" which she says is her picture. During this period of her life, Thea has the feeling that the world is trying to crush her, take her originality, and her feeling for the concert hall. "She would live for it, work for it, die for it; but she was going to have it, time after time, height after height." The feeling of a second person exists in Thea, which she has always kept secret, because she did not want this part of herself caught up in the meshes of common things.

She took it for granted that some day, when she was older, she would know a great deal more about it. It was moving to meet her and she was moving to meet it. That meeting awaited her, just as surely as for the poor girl in the seat behind her. There awaited a hole in the earth, already dug.

Resentful, contemptuous, and moody towards others, Thea feels Chicago is a phenomenon that whirls around her, which she does not understand, until at last she sees it as a whole:

The rich, noisy city, fat with food and drink, is a spent thing; its chief concern is its digestion and its little game of hide-and-seek with the undertaker. Money and office and success are the consolations of impotence. Fortune turns kind to such solid people and lets them suck their 'bone in peace.' She flecks her whip upon flesh that is more alive, upon that stream of hungry boys and girls who tramp the streets of every city, recognizable by their pride and discontent, who are the Future, and who possess the treasure of creative power.

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5 Ibid., p. 201.
6 Ibid., p. 216.
7 Ibid., p. 265.
Meeting Fred Ottenburg, who has never wanted anything in his life, Thea accepts a trip to a ranch in Arizona. He is the first of Thea's friends who is young while all her other friends are old. Much as he loves Thea, they cannot marry because Fred already has a wife. Moreover, Thea will accept nothing less than marriage. While in Arizona, Thea explores the ruins of a cave with Ottenburg. She gains a new state of mind here, which makes her stable and eager to find what the change will mean:

Here she could lie for half a day undistracted, holding pleasant and incomplete conceptions in her mind -- almost in her hands. They were scarcely clear enough to be called ideas. They had something to do with fragrance and colour and sound... She had always been a little drudge, hurrying from one task to another -- as if it mattered! And now her power to think seemed converted into a power of sustained sensation... 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... 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 are really hers became sharper and clearer. She felt united and strong.

Refusing money from Fred, but accepting three thousand from Dr. Archie, which Fred promises to pay back if anything ever happens to her, Thea studies music abroad. Later, when Thea becomes famous in opera, Dr. Archie goes to New York to hear her. Thea discusses childhood and old dreams with him. The author says:

Here we must leave Thea Kronborg. From this time on the story of her life is the story of her achievement. The growth of an artist is an intellectual and spiritual development which can scarcely be followed in a personal narrative.

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8 Ibid., p. 316.
To hold a mirror up to Thea is to picture Willa Cather as she appeared. Cather looks down though her memory to write Thea's early life but she ends the book on a flat note because the struggle is over when Thea achieves success. The first part of the book presents a lively, warm, loveable character in her native setting; but when she goes to Chicago, she becomes a colorless and rather shallow. The Song of the Lark is rather symbolic of a bird yearning for spring as Thea yearns for success. Thea is protected from money burdens by others and left to flutter and to train her voice. With the aspects of a light, feathery creature, Thea has considerable spark and determination. Admirable for her enthusiasm for living, Thea has an "awful lot of life." The childhood of Thea's is very interesting, but her success story is a dull disappointment. Her success in her career is overwhelming while true success, happiness, is not really achieved. Adult characteristics are very few in Thea's childish character. In the preface to The Song of the Lark, Cather says:

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.  

Brown states:

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9 Ibid., p. 480.
10 Ibid., preface.
But what Willa Cather forgot to mention was that Thea had been uncommon and endowed with great inner resources, which ultimately lead her to "free possession" of herself. ¹¹

My Antonia (1918) is another story of pioneering life which is very much like O Pioneers! Antonia is a Bohemian girl whose family come from the old country to settle on the open prairies of Nebraska. Jim Burden, Antonia's friend and the narrator of the story, follows Antonia Shimerda's life from the farm during childhood, to the city where she finds heartbreak, and back to the farm where she finds peace. The most beautiful aspect of the story is its simplicity with no complicated characters. It has the air and warmth of new plowed earth.

Miss Cather thought to be original in writing, the writer has to find his own way. She states of My Antonia:

My Antonia, for instance, is just the other side of the rug, the pattern that is supposed not to count in a story. In it there is no love affair, no courtship, no marriage, no broken heart, no struggle for success. I knew I'd ruin my material if I put it in the usual fictional pattern. I just used it the way I thought absolutely true. ¹²

Jim and Antonia spend many happy hours on the prairie while he teaches her English. Then Mr. Shimerda, Antonia's father, broken and beaten by the prairie, shoots himself. After his death, Antonia shoulders her father's share of the field work. Jim's

¹¹ Brown, op. cit., p. 335.
grandparents, too old to keep up their farm, move to the town of Black Hawk. Jim's grandmother arranges for Antonia to come into town as a hired girl. Jim goes away to college where he hears that Antonia is engaged to be married to a man named Larry Donovan. Years later Jim returns to learn that Antonia has been deceived by Larry. She has returned to her family to work again in the fields until her baby is born. Going to visit Antonia, Jim finds the same lovely girl he has always known. He tells Antonia how much a part of him she is and how sorry he is to leave her again. Twenty years later Jim returns to Black Hawk and drives to the farm where Antonia lives. He finds Antonia has married well at last and the place swarming with children of all ages.

Antonia is a child that has a burning desire for an education and a nice living, but she makes the most of her situation. She is a pathetic picture as she returns from the field:

When the sun was dropping low, Antonia came up the big south draw with her team ... I (Jim) ran out and met her as she brought her horses up to the windmill to water them. 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.\(^{13}\)

As a hired girl, Antonia meets the reproaches of the city girls. The Bohemian girls are unable to get other positions because they have no opportunity to learn the English language. Jim informs Antonia of

many things. One afternoon he tells her about Coronado and "how he
died in the wilderness, of a broken heart." This story is told
during a beautiful prairie scene:

Presently we saw a curious thing: There were no clouds, the sun was
going down in a limpid, gold-washed sky. Just as the lower edge of the red disk rested on the high fields against the horizon, a great black figure suddenly appeared on the face of the sun. We sprang to our feet, straining our eyes toward it. In a moment we realized what it was. On some upland farm, a plough had been left standing in the field. The sun was sinking just behind it. Magnified across the distance by the horizontal light, it stood out against the sun, was exactly contained within the circle of the disk; the handles, the tongue, the share--black against the molten red. There it was, heroic in size, a picture writing on the sun.

The fields below us were dark, the sky was growing pale, and that forgotten plough had sunk back to its own littleness somewhere on the prairie.

Antonia is an eager, moral character whose life must be the
rough and crude lot of everyday drudgery. A sweet, natural nature of the western prairies, Antonia loves her baby "from the first as dearly as if she'd had a ring on her finger, and was never ashamed of it." She tells Jim:

I'd always be miserable in a city. I'd die of lonesomeness. I like to be where I know every stack and tree, and where all the ground is friendly. I want to live and die here. Father Kelly says everybody's put into this world for something, and I know what I've got to do. I'm

14 Ibid., p. 214.
15 Ibid., p. 245.
16 Ibid., p. 318.
going to see that my little girl has a better chance than ever I had. I'm going to take care of that girl, Jim.\textsuperscript{17}

Jim is a little shocked to find Antonia has aged so much when he returns after twenty years. Her teeth are nearly gone, but he says:

I know so many women who have kept all the things that she had lost but whose inner glow has faded. 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.\textsuperscript{18}

Against the background: "the wheeze of the pump, the grunting of the pigs, an occasional squawking when the hens were disturbed by a rat, Antonia's husband, raised in the city, tells how lonely he gets for the city:

At first I near go crazy with lonesomeness, he said frankly, 'but my woman is got such a warm heart. She always make it as good for me as she could. Now it ain't so bad; I can begin to have some fun with my boy! . . .\textsuperscript{19}

As he is leaving town, Jim says that Antonia and he have shared "together the precious, the incommunicable past."\textsuperscript{20} Having conquered the prairie is a greater triumph for Antonia than her success at the end of the book.

Cather made the statement on \textit{My Antonia}: "The best thing I've done is \textit{My Antonia}. I feel I've made a contribution to American letters with that book."\textsuperscript{21} In placing \textit{My Antonia} as her

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 321.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 336.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 367.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 372.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Bennett, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 203.
\end{itemize}
best book, Cather is a good critic. Antonia possesses the laughter and inner core of pioneer spirit. She is a spirited, sensitive person who leads a patient, hard working life. There is a homely beauty in Antonia's deep love for pleasant people and pleasant places. She is a rich, naive picture of an original and delightful character on a rough frontier.

Unlike Antonia, Claude in One of Ours does not find himself until he is able to escape from all phases of Nebraska life. One of Ours (1922) won the Pulitzer prize and was considered Miss Cather best work at that time. This is the story of Claude Wheeler caught in the routine of life. His father and brother Bayliss are always in an endless circle buying more land and machinery while his mother comprehends so very little of life that Claude is unable to talk to her about even the simple affairs of living. Before he is destroyed on the prairie, he escapes by death on the battlefield.

The frustration of Claude with his father's manner is shown in this scene:

His father knew he hated to drive the mules to town, and knew how he hated to go anywhere with Dan and Jerry. As for the hides, they were the skins of four steers that had perished . . . But today, when he wanted to go to Frankfort clean and care-free, he must take these stinking hides and two coarse-mouthed men, and drive a pair of mules that always brayed and balked and behaved ridiculously in a crowd. Probably his father had looked out of the window and seen him washing the car, and had put this up.22

"In the Wheeler family a new thrasher or a new automobile was ordered without a question, but it was considered extravagant to go to a hotel for dinner." An older brother is allowed to have a business in town because he is not strong like Claude. Coming to believe that the things and people he most dislikes are the ones that are to shape his destiny, Claude has a dread of "easy compromises, and he is terribly afraid of being fooled."24

Forced to go to a denominational college when he wants to go to the university, Claude thinks, "The men who made it were like the men who taught it. The noblest could be damned, according to their theory, while almost any mean-spirited parasite could be saved by faith."25 Although he would have said he was a Christian, Claude was little concerned with religion. Claude wonders about death:

He used to lie awake in the dark, plotting against death, trying to devise some plan of escaping it, angrily wishing he had never been born. Was there no way out of the world but this? When he thought of the millions of lonely creatures rotting away under ground, life seemed nothing but a trap that caught people for one horrible end . . . And yet he sometimes felt sure that he, Claude Wheeler, would escape; that he would actually invent some clever shift to save himself from dissolution.26

23 Ibid., p. 10.
24 Ibid., p. 34.
25 Ibid., p. 50.
26 Loc. cit.
Put on the home farm in place of being allowed to return to college while his father manages other farms, he ponders:

It was strange that in all the centuries the world had been going, the question of property had not been better adjusted. The people who had it were slaves to it, and the people who didn't have it were slaves to them.27

Thinking he is in love with Enid Royce, Claude marries her only to find that she is more interested in the Prohibitionist cause than in her home. She goes to China in order to look after an ill missionary sister and Claude returns to his parents' house.

The war of 1914 breaks, sending the people of the prairie to search for maps and read their newspapers. To Claude this is the cause he has been waiting to relieve him. He makes a good, honest American soldier and on the battlefields of France he begins to find himself:

He was having his youth in France. He knew that nothing like this would ever come again . . . Life had after all turned out well for him, and everything had a noble significance. The nervous tension in which he had lived for years now seemed incredible to him.28

Claude had always thought the world was controlled by ugly, selfish men like his brother Bayliss, but the sounding of guns taught him that men were willing to die for an idea:

Now he knew the future of the world was safe; the careful planners would never be able to put it into a straight-jacket, -- cunning and prudence would never have it to

27 Ibid., p. 80.
28 Ibid., p. 411.
themselves... 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... He would give his own adventure for no man's. On the fountain, like the new moon, -- alluring, half-averted, the bright face of danger.  

Shortly after this, Claude is killed in battle. The war is his escape which he believes is a glorious cause. Mrs. Wheeler, reading Claude's letters, knows that:

He believed his country better than it is, and France better than any country can ever be... She would have dreaded the awakening, -- she sometimes even doubts whether he could have borne at all that last, desolating disappointment. One by one the heroes of that war... quietly die by their own hand. Some do it in obscure lodging houses, some in their office... Some slip over a vessel's side and disappear into the sea... She feels as if God had saved him from some horrible suffering, some horrible end. For as she reads, she thinks those slayers of themselves were all so like him; they were the ones who had hoped extravagantly,... And they found they had hoped and believed too much. But one she knew, who could ill bear disillusion... safe, safe.  

Brown states:

The world in which Claude grew up needed to be a dull world; what Willa Cather wished to show was how a boy who had an exceptional nature, but no exceptional gift or strength of will, was undergoing a slow strangulation of intellect and feeling until the war provided an escape from Nebraska.

Confused, Claude is a hard character to explain. He sought in

29 Ibid., p. 420.
30 Ibid., p. 459.
31 Brown, op. cit., p. 218.
his own mind what he really felt and he did not know. A gifted and sensitive personality, Claude is frustrated until he reaches France. In order for Claude to be happy, he must be released from the world. At the last of the novel, Claude's escape presents a feeling of kindness, peacefulness, and contentment.

Following the theme of personal frustration used in *One of Ours*, Cather wrote *A Lost Lady* (1923). Miss Lewis describes the chief problems Willa Cather found in writing the *Lost Lady*:

Although *A Lost Lady* has been regarded by many critics as the most perfect in form of all her novels, Willa Cather had, at the start, more trouble with it than with any of the others... Her difficulty in the case of *A Lost Lady* arose largely, I think, from the fact that Mrs. Forrester was more a direct portrait than any of her other characters except Antonia; and although Mrs. Garber, from whom Mrs. Forrester was drawn, and her husband, Governor Garber, were both dead, some of their relatives were alive and might be (and indeed, were) offended. Probably because of this, she at first set the scene of her story in Colorado, and wrote it at some length in this setting. But she found it would not work. Her memories of Mrs. Garber, and of the Barber place were among the strongest, most enduring impressions of her childhood; a whole ambiance of thought and feeling surrounded them, and she could not transfer them to an artificial climate. So she started the story anew, writing of things just as she remembered them.32

Miss Cather said of her own character:

*A Lost Lady* was a woman I loved very much in my childhood. Now the problem was to get her not like a standardized heroine in fiction, but as she really was, and not to care about anything else in the story except that one character. And there

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is nothing but that portrait. Everything else is subordinate. I didn't try to make a character study, but just a portrait like a thin miniature painted on ivory. A character study of Mrs. Forrester would have been very different. I wasn't interested in her character when I was little, but in her lovely hair and her laugh which made me happy clear down to my toes...33

The story is placed at Sweet Water, a stopping off place for railroad officials riding through the prairie states along the Burlington line. Captain Forrester likes to have everyone meet his charming wife. Her manner is one of friendliness to railroad presidents as well as the village boys like Niel Herbert, who is observer for Cather in the story. Niel often goes to the Forrester's along with his uncle, Judge Pommeroy, to play cards. One winter the Forresters stay in Sweet Water all winter because they cannot afford to live at a fashionable resort as in previous years. Mrs. Forrester reveals to Niel how much she misses the excitement and glamour of former winters. She mocks the life of quiet domesticity in which she and the Captain are living. Since Marion Forrester is twenty-five years younger than her husband, she misses the lights and drinks of the city. Even the little boys realize that Mrs. Forrester is a very special kind of person, that she is different from the other townswomen and that "Whatever Mrs. Forrester chooses to do is 'lady-like' because she did it."34 To Neil, Mrs. Forrester was a glittering personality:

33 Bennett, op. cit., p. 70.
34 Ibid., p. 34.
If she merely bowed to you, merely looked at you, it constituted a personal relation. Something about her took hold of one in a flash; one became acutely conscious of her, of her fragility and grace, of her mouth which could say so much without words; of her eyes, lively, laughing; intimate, nearly always a little mocking.35

Nieł liked to see the firelight sparkle on her earrings, long pendants of garnets and seed-pearls in the shape of fleurs-de-lys.36

(Nieł) never found one so attractive and distinguished as Mrs. Forrester. Compared with her, other women were heavy and dull; even the pretty ones seemed lifeless, -- they had not that something in their glance that made one's blood tingle. And never elsewhere had he heard anything like her inviting, musical laugh, that was like the distant measure of dance music, heard through opening and shutting doors.37

While the Captain is in Denver on business, a Frank Ellinger arrives for a visit. One morning as Nieł bends to place a bouquet of wild roses on the sill of Mrs. Forrester's house:

He hears within a woman's soft laughter; impatient, indulgent, teasing, eager. Then another laugh, very different, a man's. And it was fat and lazy, -- ended in something like a yawn.38

The first illusion of Nieł's life is shattered:

35 Ibid., p. 35.
36 Ibid., p. 40.
37 Ibid., p. 42.
38 Ibid., p. 86.
Grace, variety, the lovely voice, the sparkle of fun and fancy in those dark eyes; all this was nothing. It was not a moral scruple she had outraged, but an aesthetic ideal. Beautiful women, whose beauty meant more than it said . . . was their brilliancy always fed by something coarse and concealed? 39

Having to satisfy some creditors in Denver, the Captain returns a poor man. Shortly afterwards, the Captain has a stroke. Niel realizes that Mrs. Forrester is facing her new life with terror which she tries to hide for her husband's sake. One night Mrs. Forrester calls Frank Ellinger from Niel's office to compliment him on his marriage, but before Niel can cut the wires, she screams reproaches; thus, causing the telephone operator to start a town scandal about Marian Forrester.

After Captain Forrester's death Mrs. Forrester begins to entertain questionable young men from the town. At her urging Niel goes to one party, but he is disgusted with the cheap manners of both hostess and guests. He leaves Sweet Water and years later when he returns to visit Mrs. Forrester she tells him:

Perhaps people think I've settled down to grow old gracefully, but I've not. I feel such a power to live in me, Niel . . . it's grown by being held back. 40

I wanted to see whether I had anything left worth saving. And I have, I tell you! 41

39 Ibid., p. 87.
40 Ibid., p. 125.
41 Loc. cit.
A long time later a friend tells Niel that the lost lady has gone to California where she has married a rich Englishman. She has dyed her hair and dressed expensively in an effort to keep her youth.

Mrs. Forrester possesses much self-reliance; because of this she is able to be a lost lady and still keep her own personality. She seems to captivate everyone with her charm. Marian contradicts her environment with a reckless courage and a weakness that would pull most beautiful women down, but she is able to provide at last the lively atmosphere she desires. Mrs. Forrester's portrait is an intense color development. With a few strokes Cather is able to show the marks of life molding this woman. It is interesting to notice that Niel regards Mrs. Forrester as a "lost lady," although he never ceases to admire her beauty and charm, which sets her apart from the commonplace neighbors. As much as her conduct is disreputable, Mrs. Forrester's kindness and liveliness are very heart warming traits.

Turning again to an artist, Cather wrote about Lucy Gayheart, the musician, however, Lucy has not the talent or scope of Thea. Lucy Gayheart (1935) is the story of an attractive Nebraskan girl who goes to Chicago to study music and falls in love with a singer for whom she is temporary accompanist. Her love for this singer causes her to refuse an offer of marriage from Harry Gordon, the wealthiest young man in her home town. The love for the singer is shattered when the singer drowns as a result of a boating accident in Europe. Harry, because he has been roughly refused, marries a girl he does
not love. When Lucy returns to her home, she tries to be friendly with Harry; but he snubs her in order to prevent showing that he still loves her. Lucy, while out on a trip to the river to skate, is refused a ride by Harry. This makes her angry and she goes out on the ice without noticing that the river has changed currents since she went away years before. Catching her skate in an old tree root when the ice gives away, she is unable to prevent drowning.

Cather does not place a character in the story as her observer and presents the story as a flashback;

In Haverford on the Platte the townspeople still talk of Lucy Gayheart. They do not talk of her a great deal, to be sure; life goes on and we live in the present. But when they do mention her name it is with a gentle glow in the face or voice... 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.¹²

Lucy is like Thea in some respects: she goes to Chicago to study music, but Lucy has no ambition to succeed only just to make money; both girls have a jealous family and Lucy seems to respect her home town in early life much more than Thea does.

Of Lucy's character Cather says:

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.¹³

³³ Ibid., p. 4.
Life seemed to lie very near the surface in her. She had that singular brightness of young beauty: flower gardens have it for the first few hours after sunrise.  

Realizing the limits of Lucy's music, her music teacher tries to protect her by suggesting that the profession has too many disappointments and that the best life is in the little town with a family. Lucy replies:

You think so because you live in a city. Family life is pretty deadly. It's being planted in the earth, like one of your parrots there. I'd rather be pulled up and thrown away.

The scenes in Chicago and Lucy's love for the singer are very unreal appearing. Cather lacks the touch of portraying love. Harry Gordon is an interesting character and in most ways overshadows Lucy in their scenes together.

The conclusion, where Harry Gordon, now a man of over fifty, meditates over the footsteps in the concrete that Lucy had made some thirty-five years before, is sentimental but not wildly or inappropriately so.

Lucy seems to develop very little, but drifts along on outside circumstances. Cather's strong characters are patterned after real people; therefore, the last leaf in Lucy Gayheart may explain the shallow conception of Lucy:

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Ibid., p. 5.

Ibid., p. 134.

Daiches, op. cit., p. 132.
The characters and situations in this work are wholly fictional and imaginary, and do not portray and are not intended to portray any actual persons or parties.\textsuperscript{47}

From \textit{O Pioneers!} to \textit{A Lost Lady} Cather presents the rise and decline of the West.\textsuperscript{48} The success of early characters like Antonia may be compared with the disillusionment found in Claude and Mrs. Forrester.

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\textsuperscript{47} Cather, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 232.
\textsuperscript{48} Daiches, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 86.
\end{flushright}
CHAPTER V

THE CLAIMS OF HISTORY

Willa Cather opposes modern society and its commercial values so much that she begins to leave her western background and starts to reach further back to historical material. For example, the Tom Outland story in Professor's House is a move to the old Southwest.

The Professor's House (1925) is a study of middle aged, professor Godfrey St. Peter's conflicting thoughts concerning his family, his history research and his life interwoven with a story of Tom Outland, a past student of the Professor's.

Tom Outland, an orphan from New Mexico, discovers a cliff city with beautiful pottery. While Tom is trying to get officials of the Smithsonian Institution to excavate the cave, his partner sells the pottery and places the money on deposit for Tom. Tom's fury leads to the parting of the friends and the entrance of Tom into the Professor's University, where he becomes a brilliant physicist, who invents the Outland vacuum, which is an aid to aviation. Joining the French Foreign Legion, Tom gets killed. He leaves everything he owns in a will to Rosamond, the eldest of the Professor's two daughters. Tom is dead when the novel opens and is a shadow on the lives of the Professor's household.

Cather said about the writing of The Professor's House:

... I wished to try two experiments in form. The first is the device often used by the early French and Spanish novelists; that of inserting the Nouvelle into the Roman. (her Tom Outland's)
story) ... old and modern Dutch paintings. In many of them the scene presented was a living-room warmly furnished, or a kitchen full of food and coppers. But in most of the interiors, whether drawing-room or kitchen, there was a square window, open, through which one saw the masts of ships, or a stretch of grey sea. The feeling of the sea that one got ... was remarkable.

In my book I tried to make Professor St. Peter's house rather overcrowded and stuffy with new things; American proprieties, clothes, furs, petty ambitions, quivering jealousies -- until one got rather stifled. Then I wanted to open the square window and let in the fresh air that blew off the Blue Mesa, and the fine disregard of trivialities which was in Tom Outland's face and in his behaviour. 1

The first book gives glimpses of the Professor's family, which includes his wife, two daughters and two son-in-laws. The girls have a tension if not a hate between them because of Rosamond's wealth. The Professor's wife is jealous of the Professor's affection for Tom Outland and his historical research because she thinks these divide her from her husband. The first of the story finds the Professor left alone in the attic study of his old home while his family has moved to a new house. The Professor even refuses to have some old dress forms moved because he does not want anything changed in his study. Professor St. Peter finds the passing years bring little satisfaction and considerable frustration and suppression of soul. The Professor says, "Life doesn't turn out for any of us as we plan." 2 He is an

1 Willa Cather, Willa Cather on Writing, op. cit., pp. 31-32.
intelligent, sensitive, restless man caught in a conventional world.

The expensive conventional house of the wife's, the old run down, rented house of the Professor's adult life, and the modern Norwegian country house filled with imported furniture of the daughter's show the change and aspect of the world. In Alexander Porterfield's essay he states:

It is by a scrutiny of the approach to houses that the deeper meaning in the novel will disclose itself, and by the same token clarify the beautiful relation among the three parts in which it is arranged.3

The first part shows the Professor not wishing to live in his new house, the second part is the primitive life of the Cliff-Dwellers and part three shows that he can no longer prolong his life in his old attic study. "Between the life of Middle Western college town and the life of the cliff dwellers' village the common quality is simply that both end in death."4

In one of the Professor's lectures he realizes how perfect his world could be if everything had a religious basis. He tells:

As long as every man and woman who crowded into the cathedrals on Easter Sunday was a principal in a gorgeous drama with God, glittering angels on one side and the shadows of evil coming and going on the other, life was a rich thing. The king and the beggar had the same chance at miracles and great temptations and revelations. And that's what makes men happy, believing in the mystery and importance of their own little individual lives. It makes us

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3 Brown, op. cit., p. 243.
4 Ibid., p. 246.
happy to surround our creature needs and bodily instincts with as much pomp and circumstance as possible. Art and religion ... have given man the only happiness he has ever had.\(^5\)

After the entire story of Tom, the Professor ponders what Tom would have done in such a material world and a world of success that he escapes by an early death. He pictures Tom:

What changes would have come in his blue eye, in his fine long hand with the backspringing thumb, which had never handled things that were not the symbols of ideas? A hand like that, had he lived, must have been put to other uses. His fellow scientists, his wife, the town and State, would have required many duties of it. It would have had to write thousands of useless letters, frame thousands of false excuses. It would have had to 'manage' a great deal of money, to be the instrument of a woman who would grow always more exacting. He had escaped all that. He had made something new in the world -- and the rewards, the meaningless conventional gestures, he had left to others.\(^6\)

Like Alexander, St. Peter returns to graft his adolescent days to his later life. His life seems unchanged by the passions, experiences, pursuits and intellectual activities of a man that has made a name in the world. He rather grows from his family while they are gone on a trip to France. When he hears the family is returning home, he feels he can not live with them any longer. Thinking about their return, he falls asleep in his study. He realizes that a storm has come up and blown the stove out and the window shut, but he makes no effort to open the window. A friend happens along to prevent his death from the gas stove. Even though he had felt no will to resist the accident, he

\(^5\) Ibid., p. 247.

\(^6\) Willa Cather, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 261.
regards suicide as a "grave social misdemeanour." 7

Theoretically he knew that life is possible, may be even
pleasant, without joy, without passionate griefs. But it
had never occurred to him that he might have to live like
that.

Into Professor St. Peter Willa Cather pours her sorrow at the
decline of so many of the values she cherishes. 9 Even the students
the Professor has are a common lot, which he no longer feels like
helping. St. Peter is a kind, industrious, old gentleman with a
proud, sharp manner. His discontent with life among depressing circum-
stances is an anguished picture of American life.

Much of the same method is used in Cather's next novel as was
used in A Lost Lady and is later to be used in Sapphira and the Slave
Girl. My Mortal Enemy (1926) is a story of an attractive, willful woman
in a glamorous New York setting. Willa Cather shows Myra Henshawe at
two points — as a mature worldly woman and ten years later as a cold,
bitter person facing death. Myra is pictured both times by a western
girl, Nellie Birdseye, who is impressed by Myra's dress, manner and
friends. Ten years later she has lost everything, but her husband's
devotion, which she does not want. She gives up a fortune from her
uncle, a Catholic, who disproves of her Protestant marriage to
Oswald Henshawe. Giving up a money background of jewels, riding

7 Ibid., p. 282.
8 Loc. cit.
9 Brown, op. cit., p. 239.
horses, garden parties and hired painters, Myra marries a poor Harvard graduate who has just a small salary. Placed in New York with many charming friends and quite a splendid environment Mrs. Henshawe is given a selfish, scornful attitude. Her moods are set off by an angry laugh which interrupts many natural descriptions in this manner:

Here (New York) I felt, winter brought no desolation; it was tamed, like a polar bear led on a leash by a beautiful lady. About the square the pale blue shadows grew denser and drew closer. The street lamps flashed out all along the avenue, and soft lights began to twinkle in the tall buildings while it was yet day -- violet buildings, just a little denser in substance and colour than the violet sky. While I was gazing up at them I heard a laugh close beside me, and Mrs. Henshawe's arm slipped through mine.  

When Nellie asks if Myra's marriage is happy, the answer comes, "Happy? Oh, yes! As happy as most people." However, marriage is seldom happy to Cather and most of her happy characters are single. Proud, jealous Myra is an insecure person. She seems ashamed of her husband's job while a little encouragement might have caused him to go ahead. Myra is not fitted to the lot that fate gives her. Looking at Myra's beautiful hands, Nellie thinks, "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."

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11 Ibid., p. 25.

12 Ibid., p. 58.
Ten years later Nellie visits a west coast city to find the Henshawes located in a wretchedly built hotel. Refusing to let Oswald accept a lower position when his company had been reorganized, Myra is the cause for their situation. She has become hateful, sometimes locking Oswald out of their apartment for days. He, knowing how ill she is, waits upon her with tender care and pays little attention to the sharp, biting things she says to him. He serves her tea with her silver tea things of the New York days to make her feel less shabby.

Myra explains to Nellie:

It's a great pity, isn't it, Nellie, to reach out a grudging hand and try to spoil the past for any one? Yes, it's a great cruelty. But I can't help it. He's a sentimentalist, always was; he can look back on the best of those days when we were young and loved each other, and make himself believe it was all like that. It wasn't. I was always a grasping, worldly woman; I was never satisfied. All the same in age, when the flowers are so few, it's a great unkindness to destroy any that are left in a man's heart. But I'm made so. People can be lovers and enemies at the same time... Perhaps I can't forgive him for the harm I did him.¹³

In Myra's illness she turns to her church, from which she believes Oswald has separated her. She hides money for mass to be said for the souls of her dead friends. In the last state of her illness Myra is alone with Oswald when Nellie hears her say, "Why must I die like this, alone with my mortal enemy?"¹⁴

¹³ Ibid., p. 105.
¹⁴ Ibid., p. 112.
After her death, Oswald tells Nellie, "I'd rather have been clawed by her, as she used to say, than petted by any other women I've ever known." Myra had requested that her body be cremated "in some lonely and unfrequented place in the mountains, or in the sea."

The turn of Myra to religion is unusual because she has none of the kindness, charity, or humility association with a religious spirit; but it becomes plain that a worldly woman has passed out of worldliness into preoccupation with primary realities. Myra's degeneration of character makes her a study of a woman that has within her the power that destroys her. Selfish, dominating Myra has a cruel, bitter taste for life because she thought life had cheated her of her possessions. Her lack of understanding for her husband shows that she knew the fault was within her, but blames it on him. This is a searching study of a cold temperament.

Writing with touches of history, Cather at last moves into a complete historical novel in Death Comes for the Archbishop (1927). This story is about two French priests who ride into New Mexico to claim it for God.

Cather uses as her source for Death Comes for the Archbishop, The Life of the Right Reverend Joseph P. Machebeuf, by William Joseph Howlett, a priest who had worked with Father Machebeuf in Denver. Cather writes:

15 Ibid., p. 121.
16 Ibid., p. 119.
17 Brown, op. cit., p. 250.
The book is an admirable piece of work, revealing as much about Father Lamy as about Father Machebeuf, since the two men were so closely associated from early youth. Father Howlett had gone to France and got his information about Father Machebeuf's youth. . . . At last I found out what I wanted to know about how the country and the people of New Mexico seemed to those first missionary priests of New Mexico . . . Of course, many of the incidents I used were experiences of my own, but in these letters I learned how experiences very similar to them affected Father Machebeuf and Father Lamy.18

Two priests, Bishop Latour and Father Vaillant, recreates the lives of Bishop Lamy and Father Machebeuf, two priests of the Vicariate of New Mexico during the second half of the nineteenth century. Bishop Latour is scholarly and urbane; Father Vaillant is energetic and persuasive. When the Fathers arrive, the Mexican priests refuse to recognize their authority. Having no choice, Father Latour rides three thousand miles into Mexico to secure the necessary papers. By the time he returns, Father Vaillant has won over the inhabitants from enmity and has set up residence in an old adobe house. The one great ambition of Bishop Latour's is to build a cathedral in Santa Fe. In this project he is assisted by the Mexican rancheros. The Fathers are called to many missionary journeys in all kinds of weathers. They are separated when gold is discovered at Pike's Peak and Father Vaillant goes to Colorado to spend the rest of his life doing good works. Father Vaillant becomes the first Bishop of Colorado, and Bishop Latour is made an archbishop. After

18 Willa Cather, Willa Cather on Writing, op. cit., pp. 8-9.
many years of service, Father Vaillant dies and Father Latour retires to a country estate near Santa Fe. When Father Latour knows that his time has come to die, he asks to be near his cathedral. On the last day of his life the church is filled with people who come to pray for him. He dies in the still twilight as the cathedral bell, tolling in the early darkness, carries to the waiting countryside the news that at last death has come for Father Latour.

Father Joseph Vaillant's physical aspects are given:

... though one of the first things a stranger decided upon meeting Father Joseph was that the Lord had made few uglier men. He was short, skinny, bow-legged from a life on horseback, and his countenance had little to recommend it but kindliness and vivacity. He looked old, though he was then about forty. His skin was hardened and seemed by exposure to weather in a bitter climate, his neck scrawny and wrinkled like an old man's. A bold, blunt-tipped nose, positive chin, a very large mouth, -- the lips thick and succulent but never loose, never relaxed, always stiffened by effort or working with excitement. His hair, sunburned to the shade of dry hay, had originally been tow-coloured; ... his eyes were nearsighted, and of such a pale, watery blue as to be unimpressive. There was certainly nothing in his outer case to suggest the fierceness and fortitude and fire of the man, and yet even the thick-blooded Mexican half-breeds knew his quality at once ... everybody believed in Father Vaillant -- homely, real, persistent, with the driving power of a dozen men in his poorly built body. 19

Cather dearly loved her story of Father Joseph Vaillant. Warm and sympathetic towards Father Vaillant, Cather gives him picturesque goodness. Cather says:

... he was the most truly spiritual ... though he was so passionately attached to many of the things of this world

Father Joseph's relish for good wine might have been a fault in another man. But always frail in body, he seemed to need some quick physical stimulant to support his sudden flights of purpose and imagination. Time and again the Bishop had seen a good dinner, a bottle of claret, transformed into spiritual energy under his very eyes.  

Many authors have found Death Comes for the Archbishop, a spiritual study. Monroe states "No more complete study of the spiritual life is to be found in modern American fiction than this quiet narrative." Willa Cather combines the biography of Father Machebeuf, the many short incidents of Mexican life, and the story of the spiritual life in Death Comes for the Archbishop. Both priests are studies of spiritual life as it is reflected on the lives of poor people, who are supposed to achieve a more beautiful perception because of the kind, faithful Fathers. However, some people will find the Fathers were not so kind when they think of the way the poor people are driven to provide money for a Cathedral. Cather depicts a very authentic picture of the two priests.

About her next historical novel, Shadows on the Rock (1931) Cather wrote:

I tried . . . to state the mood and the viewpoint in the title. To me the rock of Quebec is not only a stronghold on which strange figures have for a little time cast a shadow in the sun; it is the curious endurance of a kind of culture,

20 Ibid., p. 228.
21 Monroe, op. cit., p. 233.
narrow but definite. There another age persists. There, among the country people and the nuns, I caught something new to me; a kind of feeling about life and human fate that I could not accept, wholly, but which I could not but admire... I took the incomplete air and tried to give it what would correspond to a sympathetic musical setting; tried to develop it into a prose composition not too conclusive, not too definite: a series of pictures remembered rather than experiences... .

The story is about Euclide Auclair, his thirteen year old daughter Cecile, and his patron Count de Frontenas. They have all come from Paris to Canada to live. Cather gives in detail the customs, habits, and routine of people in Quebec at the end of the seventeenth century. Life on the Rock depends on the arrival of ships from France with provisions each year. Euclide Auclair, an apothecary in Quebec, looks towards the day when the king will recall his Count. However, as time passes the Count calls Euclide to warn him that the king's request for his return will never come. Auclair sees that his patient can not live through the winter. The death of the Count is a great blow to the Auclairs, for security seems to have gone with his death. Thinking about returning to France that year, they have not even laid in a proper supply of food for the winter. Fortunately for them, Pierre Charron, an old friend who is an excellent hunter, arrives in Quebec with an offer of help. Later he marries Cecile. Charron has not the authority of documents and seals which the Count has had to protect them, but he has his knowledge of the woods and the people, which is as good or better in the

22 Willa Cather, Willa Cather on Writing, op. cit., p. 15.
The character, Cecile, is the most outstanding in *Shadows on the Rock*. She is the fantasy princess who makes the chores of a pioneering life a delightful pleasure. Her job is to prepare the food with very great care and change the bed sheets every two weeks in a very orderly and gracious manner. Before her mother's death, she is told that routine makes the French a very civilized people. Pious, innocent Cecile grows up in a well-ordered sphere of loving kindliness and cleanliness. Youthful Cecile is a very kind child who gets shoes for Jacques, a neglected little boy, inquires if the soldiers have gotten rid of their colds, and tells Jacques stories about saints in a sweet, wistful manner. When Jacques says a naughty word, Cecile responds:

Now I am going to do what the Sisters at the convent do when a child says anything naughty. Come into the kitchen, and I will wash your mouth out with soap. It is the only way to make your mouth clean.

A very religious girl as a result of her mother's early training:

Cecile had always taken it for granted that the Kingdom of Heaven looked exactly like this (the church) 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;

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just as the statues of the saints and of the Holy Family were portraits... it was very comforting... to know just what Heaven looked like, -- strong and unassailable, wherever it was set among the stars. 25

The first time Cecile ever leaves home is to visit a very poor family on the Ile d'Orleans with Pierre. She becomes homesick, but also grows up over night when she realizes how beautiful her life is. Cecile is supposed to sleep with four of the little girls in the family:

... they told her they only wore night-gowns in winter. When they kicked off their moccasins, they did not stop to wash their legs, which were splashed with the mud of the marsh and bloody from mosquito bites. One candle did not give much light, but Cecile saw that they must have gone to bed unwashed for many nights in these same sheets... She felt that she could not possibly lie down in that bed. 26

Cecile is a very likable character, but a little too perfect. "Sweet colored" and affectionate she appears a little unnatural.

After writing about the childhood of Cecile, Cather next wrote about her childhood in Virginia in Sapphire and the Slave Girl (1940). The epilogue of the story gives one of Cather's experiences, which she used as a basis for the novel:

A story had been repeated again and again to Willa Cather as a part of the district lore -- of the flight of a beautiful young mulatto slave... How this girl was to return after a quarter century of being away from the valley. Her meeting with her mother took place in Mrs. Cather's room at Willowsdale, where Willa Cather lay in bed convalescing; it took place there because Mrs. Cather, knowing how much it would mean to the child to look on, arranged that it should. 27

25 Ibid., p. 65.
26 Ibid., p. 191
27 Brown, op. cit., p. 19.
The central figure in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* is a cold and rather repellent character. The setting is the Virginia of 1856, just before the outbreak of the Civil War. Sapphira Dodderidge Colbert, a daughter of an aristocratic family, marries a rather poor man and settles on some of her property in Back Creek, Virginia, where her husband becomes a miller. Later in life, where the story opens, Sapphira suffers from dropsy and since her husband spends his nights alone down at the mill, she is aroused by gossip that a slave girl, Nancy, and her husband are associated intimately. To put an end to the affair, which does not exist, she invites her husband's nephew for the purpose of seducing Nancy. Sapphira's daughter, Rachel, who is a kind widow lady, helps Nancy escape to Canada. Sapphira's physical disability is an excuse for her bitter and hateful way:

The mistress had dropsy and was unable to walk. She could still stand erect to receive visitors: her dresses touched the floor and concealed the deformity of her feet and ankles. She was four years older than her husband — and hated it. This dropsical affliction was all the more cruel in that she had been a very active woman, and had managed the farm as zealously as her husband managed his mill.

There is always a certain formality between Mrs. Colbert and her daughter. For instance, when Rachel first enters the story, she goes into her mother's room during her dressing hour, "when it was

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understood she did not welcome visits from any one." Rachel believes slavery to be wrong. "How she hated her mother's voice in sarcastic reprimand to the servants! And she hated it in contemptuous indulgence." Sapphira, knowing Rachel must have helped Nancy escape, forbids her daughter in the house after Nancy's escape and does not invite her back until a few months before her own death. However, Rachel knows "her mother hated to be overreached or outwitted." Sapphira rather likes her husband's nephew because "he has a dash of impudence." She thinks rather well of him because "he treated her as if she were not an old woman and an invalid." Rachel, Nancy, and many of the slaves play an important part in Sapphira and the Slave Girl. However, "It is Sapphira herself, the cold, proud, aristocratic mistress of the house, who emerges ... as the real heroine of the novel." Cather is out of sympathy with Sapphira, as Brown states:

31 Ibid., p. 137.
32 Ibid., p. 246.
33 Ibid., p. 153.
34 Ibid., p. 156.
35 Geismar, op. cit., p. 216.
It was because she was wholly the slaveowner that Sapphira formed the nasty and petty design that produces the central situation in the book, as it is by their attitudes to slavery that the other characters respond to this design.36

Jealous, contriving Sapphira keeps up appearances, not because she enjoys it, but because her southern rearing makes her think it proper to do so. She plots the ruin of a slave girl because she thinks people are talking, is sharp with the slaves because they expect her to show authority and forbids her daughter to come home because she is proud. Sapphira's character is surrounded somewhat by mystery. Cather protects her characters from complete analysis in such statements as these:

Characters can be almost dehumanized by a laboratory study of the behaviour of their bodily organs under sensory stimuli -- can be reduced, indeed, to mere animal pulp.37

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If a writer's attitude toward his characters and his scene is as vulgar as a showman's, as mercenary as an auctioneer's, vulgar and meretricious will his product for ever remain.38

36 Brown, op. cit., p. 314.
37 Willa Cather, Willa Cather on Writing, op. cit., p. 42.
38 Ibid., p. 57.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Now that all of Cather's novels have been examined, certain general conclusions may be made. In Cather's twelve novels it is interesting to notice the large range of characters about whom she writes: pioneers, bridge builders, singers, soldiers, society women, professors, students, priests, children, slaves, old women, musicians and many others. Although her principal characters show a wide range of physical and mental attributes, they all have a spark of Cather's philosophy. A dominant aspect of many characters is their inability to fit into American life. Many of her characters have an artistic point of view which causes them to be in conflict with their families and neighbors. They have a burning desire for a fuller life than their environment offers them.

Cather's characters are all very keen-witted and intelligent. Life for them is a struggle against others and against themselves with the exception of the two priests in Death Comes for the Archbishop and Cecile in Shadows on the Rock. Moreover, with the exception of these three, all her principal characters feel that they are outcasts from society. They are, for the most part, simple people with a simple story to tell. Cather makes death a desired release whenever a character's independence and originality are gone. There are only two principal characters who enter into illicit sex relationships knowingly, but few of Cather's characters find much
happiness in marriage.

Miss Cather's characters have been criticized as superficial, but Cather's intention, as she states, is merely to present them and let them live their stories rather than to analyze them or comment on their actions. Her conception of character is sound, for man is a whole being and as such should not be dissected from the inside, but observed from the outside as people in real life.

Cather's principal characters show development by either growth or deterioration. The reader's attention is always forced on the characters, one principal character usually, rather than on the intrigues of the story. The inward struggles and emotions are forcefully presented throughout. However, exception must be taken in the following books: In *Shadows on the Rock* the actions of the character are so forced that perfect Cecile seems surrounded by a halo of unbelief; *Lucy Gayheart* does not develop in her environment, but is carried along by outside circumstances; *Alexander's Bridge* needs more situations in which to react in order to bring his character into a blooming personality. However, all three novels are interesting reading and *Shadows on the Rock* is an especially delightful story. It would seem that Antonia, Thea, and Alexandra are Cather's strongest characters. They are the ones that have the most universal appeal. There are thousands of Thea's and Antonia's living in this world in comparison to, say, the priests in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. 
Throughout her novels there is one person who stands out—Willa Cather. Each novel adds a little toward understanding this woman and her convictions as she presents her philosophy in the lives of these characters. Cather's shrewd ability was to select objects. In the words of Samuel Johnson on great authors:

To cull from the mass of mankind those individuals upon which the attention ought most to be employed; as a diamond, though it cannot be made, may be polished by art, and placed in such situations as to display that luster which before was buried among common stones.

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Novels


Critical Volumes

Books


**Magazines**


Red Cloud was the "Black Hawk" of *My Antonia*, the "Hanover" of *O Pioneers!* the "Sweet Water" of *A Lost Lady*, "Frankford" of *One of Ours* and the "Haverford" of *Lucy Gayheart*. 
Annie Pavelka of Bladen, Nebraska, now eighty-four, was Willa Cather's inspiration for *My Antonia*. 
Red Cloud, a thriving railroad town in early days, has the Burlington depot a mile from the town. Cather used the depot as a setting in such novels as *My Antonia* and *One of Ours*. 
Willa Cather's first home in Red Cloud was used in *My Antonia* and *Song of the Lark*.
The Miner home was the "Harling" place in *My Antonia*. Carrie Miner Sherwood, whom the writer interviewed, was "Frances Harling" of the book.
The second Cather home in Red Cloud was purchased by Willa's father after she left home. It remained the family home until Mrs. Cather's death in 1931 and is now used as the Red Cloud Hospital.
This is the small Protestant Episcopal Church where Cather was a member from 1922 until her death. Willa and her brother gave two of the six stained glass windows in the church.
The rippling, fretting Republican River, which appears in this picture, is sometimes a raging, violent river. Cather loved the high bluffs and the sandbars so characteristic of the Republican, which appears in almost all of her books.
The setting for Shadows on the Rock is Apothecary Euclide Auclair's house in Lower Town of Old Quebec, Canada.
Rev. John B. Lamy, first Archbishop of New Mexico, is immortalized in Willa Cather's book, Death Comes for the Archbishop.
The private chapel of Archbishop Lamy is located on the grounds of Bishop's Lodge, a guest ranch north of Santa Fe, New Mexico. Archbishop Lamy built the cathedral in Santa Fe in the 1860's.
Willa Cather is a literary genius, who brought world fame to Nebraska and who gave polished art to the world.