

Part II

Willa Cather

CHAPTER I

HER LIFE

By comparison with Edith Wharton's, Willa Sibert Cather's, life was relatively simple. From present evidence one learns that she was born western Virginia, on a farm near Winchester. Her family was of English, Irish and Alsatian extraction. The year of her birth and the status of her family were not given as clearly as those of Edith Wharton. Even after close examination her exact birth year is uncertain. It is recorded variously from 1874 to 1876. Donald Heiney in his Recent American Literature said that it was 1874, yet in his Contemporary Literature he took 1875 while Maxwell Geismar in The Last of the Provincials recorded it as 1876. David Daiches in Willa Cather : A Critical Introduction also mentioned this uncertainty :

Oddly enough, the year of Miss Cather's birth cannot be absolutely determined, since, presumably as a result of an oversight on her parents's part, it seems never to have been reported and was certainly not recorded. The year of her birth was given as 1875 in Who's Who in America until the issue of 1920-1921; when it was changed to 1876. But Mr. W.W. Glass, the Archivist of Winchester, Virginia having thoroughly searched the record decided on the available evidence that 1874 must be the proper date; and this is accepted by Dr. James R. Shively, who has carefully investigated Willa Cather's early years."¹

The status of her family like wise was described groundlessly. Sometimes it was "an established Virginia family," sometimes "a family of farming stock" or else no evidence was given at all. Even though detailed description is given by E. K. Brown and Leon Edel about her great grandfathers and mothers,² little was known about her and her family when they were in Virginia, and little was written in any of her stories. Miss Cather once mentioned it in her novelette, Old Mrs. Harris, that the old woman came from and yearned for Virginia and Virginia is the background of her last novel, Sapphira and the Slake Girl. But that is all there was to it. So it may as well be recorded that in

comparison with Edith Wharton, her childhood was obscure.

The reliable and detailed information about Miss Cather is given from 1883, when Charles Cather, her father was persuaded to join his parents and his brother at a farm near Red Cloud, Nebraska. She was about eight or nine when she was taken to Nebraska and spent the years of her growth among the Bohemians, Scandinavians, Germans and French Canadians of a pioneer environment.³ Dorothy Canfield Fisher in the article, Daughter of the Frontier, wrote that Miss Cather's family went there during the time of great expansion in the West, but soon there came a long period of drought and disaster :

This dismal period full of disappointment and bitterness began when Cather was about twelve ..
..... She lived in the midst of one of the
greatest disillusionments the American pioneer
movement has ever known.⁴

From the quotation above it is clear that Miss Cather must have spent her girlhood days on the Nebraska plains on the open western prairie — which she fully described in her great pioneer novel, My Antonia (1918) that it was a prairie "with its ridges and blowing sea of red grass, its badgers, 'possums, cranes, earth-owls and rattlesnakes."

The Cathers went straight to the farm of Willa Cather's grandfather in Webster County, Nebraska. At that time this county still had the aspect and character of the frontier since the first settlement had been made only fourteen years before in 1870 by a group of settlers led by Silas Garber, whose life story later inspired Miss Cather to write A Lost Lady (1923). The exact spot in Webster County which they headed for was the Virginia colony, in which the Cathers were the leaders and which lay northwest of Red Cloud, the most promising town in Webster County. Long before 1884 they even had a post office called Catherton. Near Catherton there were colonies of Germans, Bohemians, Swedes, Danes, and Swiss and to the north of Catherton there was a settlement of French Canadians holding apart from their neighbors .

Willa Cather's curiosity about these people was great, for one notices that all these foreigners except the Swiss, who lived the farthest from Catherton, later have

important roles in her fiction especially in one of her important novels, My Antonia (1918). The families of native American stock on the contrary had chosen to live in the richer southern parts of the county where the cottonwoods grew more luxuriantly.⁵

Willa Cather cared as much about places as about persons. The unusual significance was that in spite of the fact that the Divide (as the high plains between the Republican and the Blue Valley and between the Blue and the Platte were often called) was "one of the loneliest countries in the world", its vastness had a vigorous natural beauty to which Willa Cather, as a little girl responded with a joy which she later recorded in her fiction especially in her pioneer novels, Pioneers (1913) and My Antonia (1918).

The story in the Virginia colony, however, did not last long. In 1885 the family moved to Red Cloud because her father did not seem to be getting along well with farming on the prairie. He therefore opened an office in Red Cloud where he dealt in loans and mortgages on farm property. He leased a house which remained the family's home until long after Willa Cather left Nebraska for the East.

One characteristic Mrs. Wharton and Willa Cather had in common was : from childhood they were great readers. This most important habit contributed to their growth as writers. There was a story of Miss Cather as a small child in Virginia standing on the footbridge which crossed a stream near her home and reciting Longfellow's poem, "The Bridge". She did not attend school but was taught mainly by her maternal grandmother, Mrs. Virginia Boak, who was well educated. In Virginia Colony, Nebraska, since there were no public-school at hand, Willa Cather still had had no chance to attend school. Therefore when the family moved to Red Cloud, it gave her the advantage of being able to attend school for the first time and had extraordinary fortune in having at least three remarkable teachers, who helped her to appreciate literature, and in addition, a German music teacher who aroused her interest in European life and culture. Besides Willa Cather was fortunate in having certain well-educated neighbors

and acquaintances. From Mr. Wiener and his brilliant French wife, she began to learn French and to wish that she could read German. Also she enjoyed frequenting the 'Wieners' library. In Mr. William Ducker, an English gentleman, Willa Cather found a remarkable supervisor in reading Latin and Greek, the subjects she had begun to study at the state university in Lincoln, Nebraska where she furthered her education after her graduation from the Red Cloud high school in 1890.

In her high-school days Willa Cather had proved herself a talented student. At the same time because of her independent thinking she often offended local opinion either by her speech or writing. This public reaction made her begin to feel that the conventionalism of Red Cloud was a denial of life itself. To the towns people she was a little rebel whose appearance and opinions were altogether strange :

A young girl who dressed like a boy, preferred the conversation of unusual older men to most of the pleasures sought by the other boys and girls of the town and was reputed to hold dangerous opinions about religion as well as to enjoy cutting up animals, was an alien nature in what she was to call a "bitter, dead little Western town". About her, as about Jim Burden (in *My Antonia*), circulated the whisper that there was "something queer" and unsound in so complete a rebel. Willa Cather was under the spell of the Nebraska countryside; and she was under the spell of philosophy, science, history, and the arts. The town was not a place where either spell could work. In 1890 she made a choice between the two kinds of interest which were to divide her being for the rest of her life, and it is recorded with modifications in "Old Mrs. Harris" : she went to Lincoln to complete her preparation for the University of Nebraska.⁶

Miss Cather took a four-year program of study at the University of Nebraska. There she concentrated on English literature, with considerable work in Latin, Greek, and French and courses in German, rhetoric, history, philosophy and journalism. She was not only a brilliant student but the one who took keen interest in campus activities, serving as secretary of the literary society and editor of "The Hesperian," a student magazine to which she contributed verse,

criticism, dialogues, satirical sketches of students, and, above all, her early fiction. One of them, worth mentioning, was "Peter", the episode that was later developed into a suicide sub-theme about Mr. Shimerda in My Antonia. The other one was "Lou the Prophet", an outcome of her life on the Divide. The presentation of Ivar in O Pioneers was said to be akin to Lou, the main protagonist of this story.⁷ Many of the elements in these early stories had already foreshadowed the elements in her novels about Nebraska : there was the deep concern over the plight of the foreign-born in a society, that required them to conform and had no generosity of spirit, and no perception of their troubled frame of mind.

Miss Cather had no intention of becoming a scholar. What she desired from the classics was the experience of great literature and the knowledge of great civilization. Later she learnt to admire Flaubert and was interested in Mérimée, Maupassant, Ibsen and Stevenson. Also, according to Daiches, it was during her college years that she learned to admire William Jennings Bryan whose influence on her later political thinking was to be seen in many of her novels and short stories. The populist movement, arising out of the exhaustion of free land in the West and the increasingly precarious position of the farmer in a competitive industrial economy left a permanent impression on Miss Cather's thinking. It led her to look back on the pioneering days as the period of America's lost glory and to regard commercial and industrial progress with suspicion.⁸

She was often in the houses of interesting Lincoln families. Among them were the daughters of Charles H. Gere of the "State Journal" whose mother she found interesting. Another principal friend was Sarah B. Harris, editor of the Lincoln "Courier". She was especially devoted to Mrs. Emma Tyndale Westermann, who attracted her by the richness and warmth of her nature and the range of her culture. Willa Cather was drawn to these elderly women much as she had been drawn to Mrs. Wiener in Red Cloud. Later Willa Cather was introduced to Mrs. Westermann's brother, Dr. Julius Tyndale, a man of great personality and intellectual force, and as

keenly interested in music and letters as in medicine and science generally. His stories about the literary and musical world of the east coast and his opinions about contemporary movements in the arts became an important element in her growth.

Willa Cather's later years at the university fell in one of the most difficult periods in the history of the state. Its "rapid industrial development," as she says in her essay on Nebraska, "was arrested in the years 1893-1897 by a succession of crop failures and by the financial depression which spread over the whole country at that time." Willa Cather's own family suffered heavily in the years of agricultural failure. Her father had acquired a great deal of land in Webster County, and much of it was heavily mortgaged. A large farm that he had for agriculture was abandoned. A bank with which he had dealings failed. Willa Cather's younger brothers had to teach school to help the family. Willa Cather herself had a chance to help when she was invited to become a regular contributor to the Sunday issues of the "States Journal". The work enabled her to show her early enthusiasms and artistic aims and she also wrote pungent dramatic criticism and pieces of temporary interest.

In 1895 she was graduated and she spent the following year at home in Red Cloud. It was said to be a year of recovery and preparation. At home she gave her father some help in his work. She also tried to renew her friendships with her old acquaintances but some of her older friends were dead, and others had moved away, and among those of her own age she found herself a stranger. She believed that her family and friends were expecting her to be a dazzlingly successful writer, to have stories in some popular journal or to bring out a brilliant novel. She was writing stories but all seemed to be superficial; therefore she began to long to travel to see more of the world. During this time one of her instructors at the University of Nebraska resigned from the university and recommended that she be named in his place. But her age and her sex were against her, so

she was not surprised not to get the position. However she was not long kept idle. During one of her visits to Lincoln she met Charles Axtell, a Pittsburgh businessman, who had been informed of her remarkable experience as a journalist. He consequently offered her a position in the editorial office of the Pittsburgh "Home Monthly", a magazine he was founding.

Before Miss Cather left for Pittsburgh, she met Stephen Crane, "the first man of letters I had ever met in the flesh." She drew from him his literary opinions and an account of how he practised his craft. It was Crane who expressed words that were of the greatest significance for the future art of Willa Cather :

The detail of a thing has to filter through my blood, and then it comes out like a native product.⁹

With this inspiration Willa Cather threw herself into her Pittsburgh life. Here she found freedom to live according to one's aim in life, security, access to the arts, and liberation from the feeling of being an outcast among her own people in Red Cloud. However, she also found that her work at the "Home Monthly" left her no free time to write fiction. She was soon managing editor of the journal in everything but name, with only a stenographer to help her. The hardest thing of all was to hold her tongue and do what she was told to do. She also found her employer rigorously and comically puritan. Therefore while there was a certain achievement and pleasure in some phases of her work she found the journal's conventionality and parochialism increasingly stifling. Thus, she was pleased that the journal was to change hands because it enabled her to resign gracefully in 1897. Soon she was offered a position with the "Daily Leader", the largest evening paper in Pennsylvania. With the "Daily Leader" she found her principal task also uninteresting but at least she did not have to deal with editorial responsibilities and she had a chance to resume the writing of dramatic criticism, which had been the form of journalism she had enjoyed most in Lincoln. She, therefore, worked for this newspaper for four years. During this time she also wrote

for the Nebraska "State Journal", then for the Lincoln "Courier", the New York "Sun", the "Library" founded to foster literary talent, the "Critic", the "Criterion", the "Ladies' Home Journal" and "McClure's."

Even though she was not very satisfied with journalistic work in Pittsburgh, she appreciated Pittsburgh's culture with its museums, concert halls, painting, music, literature and opera. All these things inspired her to write short stories which later appeared in a volume, entitled Youth and the Bright Medusa. "Paul's Case" and "The Sculptor's Funeral" her famous short stories were written during this period. Another important story was "The Passing Show" which was a record of experience and a revelation of Willa Cather's artistic growth.

The increasing acceptance of her work demonstrated that she could finally hope to free herself completely from the demands of newspaper work. Yet she was not sure of her capacity to earn her living as a writer; therefore she applied for a position to teach in the Central High School of Pittsburgh where she taught from 1901 to 1902 and later from 1903 to 1906 at Allegheny High. The teaching work left her some free time for creative writing. She began to write poetry and short stories for various newspapers and periodicals including the "Mc. Clure's Magazine". "April Twilight", a volume of her verse appeared in 1903 and in 1905 about the same time Edith Wharton's The House of Mirth was published, Willa Cather's first volume of stories, The Troll Garden appeared. Miss Cather's early stories must have attracted the virtuoso publisher, S.S. Mc. Clure because he invited her

to join the staff of his magazine. She accepted his invitation and left for New York in 1906 and two years later she was made managing editor of the Mc. Clure's Magazine. Between S. S. McClure and Miss Cather there was a real friendship and until 1912 she remained in his employ. Between 1908-1911, while holding the editorship she traveled a great deal in Europe and became increasingly at home in the European world of art, letters and music. Her stay in New York also acquainted her with the American artistic circle. After some visits in Europe she began to be more interested in the American south-western states where she travelled widely. This region inspired her to write a series of novels based on Spanish-American and French-American history. The Professor's House (1925) had hinted at Miss Cather's growing interest in the history of the Southwest, although, according to Heiney, it presented this history indirectly. Death Comes to the Archbishop (1927) was further evidence. It was treated at first hand and although the main interest was centered on psychological study of the characters, underlying the story was the history of the European, specifically Spanish, influence on the Southwest and the gradual mixing of Spanish, Indian and Anglo-Saxon elements to form modern New Mexico. Her travels also aroused her interest in Canadian history which inspired her to write Shadows on the Rock (1913). Around 1912, having already gained some success as a writer, Miss Cather abandoned editorship completely to devote all her time to independent writing and remained a professional writer until her death in 1947.

In writing her fiction Miss Cather had shown herself a firm believer in the aesthetic movement. For this reason she was also discussed as a disciple of Walter Pater, the leader of the movement in the late eighteen sixties in England. Like Pater, she believed in the doctrine of beautiful sensations for it was the search for beauty that refreshed the soul.¹⁰ Consequently, in the earliest years of her career, she had determined to find the best models and to follow them. As a student she found the fiction of Henry James and Edith Wharton exciting and exemplary :

Henry James and Mrs. Wharton were our most interesting novelists, and most of the younger writers followed their manner, without having their qualifications.¹¹

Henry James, particularly, was, for her, a perfect writer and as she moved East, she determined to find the ideal setting for the art of fiction, as she believed James had understood it. Many critics stated that her first novel, Alexander's Bridge (1912), was strongly influenced by James since the theme of this novel was a testimony of Miss Cather's mixed emotions and the language used was that of an apprentice writer who was very careful to use the right phrase, the correct dramatic balance and the best precision of setting. Miss Cather herself was not favorably impressed by it. She admitted in her short article "My first novels" that the writing of Alexander's Bridge, "was like riding in a park with someone not altogether congenial, to whom you had to be talking all the time."¹² However, although many readers felt that Alexander's Bridge was merely a technical exercise

in novel-writing, it served a good purpose, for later when she wrote her prairie novels, she was able to handle her material successfully.

We are told that through the friendship and advice of Sarah Orne Jewett Miss Cather began to recognize the value of the world she had left behind. Miss Jewett encouraged her to give herself up to the pleasure of recapturing in memory people and places Miss Cather had believed forgotten : to turn to the soil — " Of course one day you will write about your own country. In the meantime, get all you can. One must know the world so well before one can know the parish."¹³ Miss Cather also found in Miss Jewett's regional success, the "beautiful writing," and "the perfection that endures."

Therefore it might be both because of Miss Jewett's encouragement and Miss Cather's dissatisfaction with her first novel that Miss Cather changed her theme completely and produced her first great prairie novel, O Pioneers! which was first published in 1913. Whatever the facts were when Miss Cather returned from Europe soon after the publication of Alexander's Bridge, she went for six months to Arizona and New Mexico and in "My first Novels," in Willa Cather on Writing she wrote :

" The longer I stayed in a country I really did care about, and among people who were a part of the country, the more unnecessary and superficial a book like Alexander's Bridge seemed to me. . . .
When I got back to Pittsburgh I began to write a book entirely for myself; a story about some Scandinavians and Bohemians who had been neighbors of ours when I lived on a ranch in Nebraska, when I was eight or nine years old Here there was no arranging or

inventing'; everything was spontaneous and took its own place, right or wrong."¹⁴

Pioneering in Nebraska was therefore the subject she considered "her own", the kind of subject-matter in which she found herself at home. As she grew more mature, she showed more originality yet she still considered Henry James as her principal mentor, for she reversed one James' major themes, the American in Europe and developed the problem of the European immigrant in American society, especially the frontier society of the West. Miss Cather might have been urged by both Henry James and Miss Jewett, but her prairie novels and the characters in them were like neither James's London nor Miss Jewett's New England since she had had experiences that her two principal mentors had not had. From James Miss Cather seemed to get her interest in structure, in the perfection of sophisticated dialogue and in the use of themes. From Miss Jewett she gained an appreciation of steady concentration upon a thoroughly understood scene which made "beautiful writing". But Miss Jewett's scope was limited : she wrote about New England, the region she knew so well while Willa Cather wrote not only about her own Nebraska but also the Southwest, French Canada and even France.

Miss Cather remained a writer all the rest of her life. Her novel One of Ours (1922), a story about World War I, brought to her a Pulitzer Prize and great popularity. After this she wrote several other novels and novelettes : A Lost Lady (1923), The Professor's House (1925), My Mortal Enemy (1926), Death Comes for the Archbishop (1927), Shadows on the Rock (1931), Lucy Gayheart (1935) and Sapphira and the

the Slave Girl (1940). She also published volumes of short stories : Obscure Destinies (1932), December Night (1933) and The Old Beauty and Others (1948). Besides to clarify her point of view she also wrote some essays. One of them is Not Under Forty (1936) and after her death in 1948 some other interesting essays were published in a volume entitled Willa Cather on Writing (1949).

From the close examination of the lives of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather, one sees that both novelists had quite different backgrounds which ^{are} reflected in their fiction. Their works were valuable contributions to American literature since they portrayed America at the turn of the nineteenth century from different points of view and in superb language : Edith Wharton pictured the decline of the old aristocratic families in New York and Willa Cather, the displacement of the pioneers by the businessmen.

CHAPTER II

Her Early Fiction (1892-1912)

Even though Miss Cather's first novel, Alexander's Bridge, appeared in 1912, Miss Cather had, in fact, begun to write long before she earnestly took up writing as her life career. Her early stories appeared in the "Hesperian", the undergraduate literary periodical of which she herself was an editor; and, later, after her graduation, they appeared also in the newspapers or periodicals she wrote for. The first period of her works, therefore, can be considered as starting from her sophomore year in 1892 and ending in 1912 when her first novel, Alexander's Bridge began appearing in Mc Clure's magazine. As some of her early writings are important for the consideration of her later major works, this chapter is devoted to a brief discussion of some of these early writings.

Miss Cather is best known and admired for her fiction dealing with the pioneers and their fine spirit. But it is strange that during the first stage of her career she saw little good in the pioneer life she was later to admire enthusiastically. The themes and subject matter of her early stories were therefore mostly the pessimistic discussion of life as she had known it on the Divide. At the same time this period was the period that Miss Cather herself was seeking for the artistic beauty she had missed on the Divide. Consequently another equally important dominant theme was the pursuit of the ideal, which for her meant the creation and enjoyment of beauty. Among her college writings, the best known ones were "Peter", "Lou the Prophet" in 1892 and

"The Clemency of the Court" in 1893.

"Peter" is a grim little story, telling of the last days of a Czech immigrant. Peter Sadelack, once a second violinist in the great theatre at Prague, had lost his job as a result of a paralytic stroke. He therefore emigrated to the United States and took up a homestead in south-western Nebraska. In the western plains of America, Peter finds life miserable, he consequently longs for the past and lives only in his memories. His tragic life is made even more miserable by his mean-spirited son, Antone, to the point where Peter commits suicide : Antone has insisted that Peter sell his old violin, for he needs the money, and Peter feels he would rather die than give up his last relic of his earlier and happier life. A flash-back fills in the story of Peter's life in Prague and then return to the present and the suicide scene — the scene which appeared somewhat similarly in the suicide of Mr. Shimerda in My Antonia (1918)¹:

..... He took Antone's shot-gun down from its peg, and loaded it by the moonlight which streamed in through the door. He sat down on the dirt floor, and leaned back against the dirt wall. He heard the wolves howling in the distance, and the night wind screaming as it swept over the snow. Near him he heard the regular breathing of the horses in the dark
..... He held his fiddle under his chin a moment, where it had lain so often, then put it across his knee and broke it through the middle. He pulled off his old boot, held the gun between his knees with the muzzle against his forehead, and pressed the trigger with his toe.²

"Peter", therefore foreshadows much of Miss Cather's later writing about the foreign settlers : the elderly and sensitive immigrants who are unable to adjust to pioneering

life. It also illustrates the interest in the relation of the Old World and the New which runs through her work. The conflict between the generations — older and younger — is also presented and later becomes another important theme in her novels.

"Lou the Prophet" is the outcome of Miss Cather's life on the Divide. It is a story of Lou, a young Danish farmer, who works with a peasant's laboriousness until his spirit is broken by the desertion of the girl he expected to marry, and by the death of his mother. His solitary existence is made even more tragic by misfortune after misfortune until finally his mind snaps after reading the Book of Revelation, so that he goes about the country announcing that the end of the world is at hand. In other words he develops a religious mania, buries himself in solitude, and at the end rushes away across the prairie to avoid the police who have come to remove him to an asylum. Another story, "The Clemency of the Court" is more elaborate. It is about Serge Povolitchky, a Russian who grew up as an orphan on a farm in the western part of Nebraska, he was even more solitary than Lou, since the only creature ever to show him affection was a farm dog. But it happened that the farmer, in a fit of bad temper, hit the dog open with a hatchet and split the dog's head open. Serge, now a young man, kills him in return and as a result is condemned to imprisonment for life. After a long stay in a dark cell, he dies, alone.³

The accounts of the three short stories above reveal that though Miss Cather wrote about the western plain of Nebraska she knew well and the immigrants she was always much

inspired by, she had chosen to write only about the dark and gloomy life of the place and the people. The grimness of these stories is felt and the stories curiously end in calamities : in "Peter" an unbearable life leads to suicide; in "Lou the Prophet" to insanity and religious mania; and in "The Clemency of the Court," to murder. Miss Cather's deep concern over the plight of the foreign-born in a society to which they must conform, — a theme, which preoccupies her when she comes to write her prairie novels — is clear in these three short tales.

In addition to the foregoing three stories, there is another uncollected story, "On the Divide" (1896) which John H. Randall III in his The Landscape and the Looking Glass says is the most violent story of her disgust with the cruelty of the Divide. He is positive that nothing Miss Cather wrote afterward, ever equaled in intensity the loathing here displayed toward the Nebraska land :

Its hero, Canute Canuteson, is a seven-foot Norwegian giant who has led a solitary existence for ten years in a miserable shanty on the plains :
 "He knew by heart every individual clump of bunch grass in the miles of red shaggy prairie that stretched before his cabin. He knew it in all the deceitful loveliness of its early summer, in all the bitter barrenness of its autumn. He had seen it smitten by all the plagues of Egypt. He had seen it parched by drought, and sogged by rain, beaten by hail, and swept by fire, and in the grasshopper years he had seen it eaten as bare and clean as bones that the vultures had left. After the great fires he had seen it stretch for miles and miles, black and smoking as the floor of hell."

So completely are the inhabitants at the mercy of nature that their lives are shattered if she merely breathes upon them roughly. Willa Cather writes :

"Insanity and suicide are very common things on the Divide. They come on like an epidemic in the hot wind season. Those scorching dusty winds

that blow up over the bluffs from Kansas seem to dry up the blood in men's veins as they do the sap in the corn leaves. Whenever the yellow scorch creeps down over the tender inside leaves about the ear, then the coroners prepare for active duty; for the oil of the country is burned out and it does not take long for the flame to eat up the wick. It causes no great sensation there when a Dane is found swinging to his own windmill tower, and most of the Poles after they have become too careless and discouraged to shave themselves keep their razors to cut their throats with."

Even more significant is the effect the Divide has on those it has not killed or driven mad. The description of Canute Canuteson's cabin tells something of the psychological impact which living close to nature has produced :

"The strangest things in the shanty were the wide window-sills. At first glance they looked as though they had been ruthlessly hacked and mutilated with a hatchet, but on closer inspection all the notches and holes in the wood took form and shape. There seems to be a series of pictures. They were, in a rough way, artistic, but the figures were heavy and laboured, as though they had been cut very slowly and with very awkward instruments. There were men plowing with little horned imps sitting on their shoulders and on their horses' heads. There were men praying with a skull hanging over their heads and little demons behind them mocking their attitudes. There were men fighting with big serpents, and skeletons dancing together. All about these pictures were blooming vines and foliage such as never grew in this world, and coiled among the branches of the vines there was always the scaly body of a serpent, and behind every flower there was a serpent's head. It was a veritable Dance of Death by one who had felt its sting. In the wood box lay some boards, and every inch of them was cut up in the same manner. Sometimes the work was very rude and careless, and looked as though the hand of the workman had trembled. It would sometimes have been hard to distinguish the men from their evil genuses but for one fact; the men were always grave and were either toiling or paying, while the devils were always smiling and dancing."

The underlying metaphor used to describe Nebraska is that of hell. Rejection could hardly go further. And the characters of the story also bears out the idea that the characters are damned living in an inferno : maddened with ten years of hard drinking and enforced loneliness, Canute finally kidnaps the girl he is in love with and forces a preacher to marry them. But this is as far as his blind impulse toward human companionship carries him; losing his nerve, he resolves to spend the night on the ground outside his cabin, and when she timidly invites him in, falls prostrate on the snow in front of her door and burst into sobs.⁴

There are two other short stories which echo bitterness and desire to flee from the drabness of the village life and to seek a better world of artistic value. They are "Wagner Matinée" and "The Sculptor's Funeral" both of which appeared in The Troll Garden (1905), her first collection of short stories. Later in 1920, these two stories are also included with some other short stories in the volume entitled Youth and the Bright Medusa (1920).

In "A Wagner Matinée" (1904) Miss Cather has shown again her dissatisfaction with the Divide. She seems to be saying that there is a better world with other values and that is the world of art. It is a story about a middle-aged woman, Aunt Georgiana, who eloped with her lover to the western frontier. She was a music teacher at the Boston Conservatory in the latter sixties. She met Howard Carpenter one summer while visiting a village in the Green Mountains. Later he followed her to Boston. The two fell in love and Georgia followed him to settle in Red Willow County, fifty miles from the railroad and for thirty years she had not been farther than fifty miles from the homestead. Clark, the narrator of the story, grew up under her protection and he was grateful and had a reverential affection for her since she did her best to educate him. During his stay with Aunt Georgiana, Clark noticed that she seldom mentioned music and he understood her reason. After thirty years Aunt Georgiana was summoned to the city to settle a small legacy left to her by a bachelor relative. Clark, who then was working in the city, met her at the station and noticed how ill at ease she was after her long absence. To please her,

Clark took her to a Wagner Matinée. The atmosphere of the old time aroused by the place and music left the poor woman in a deplorable state. The final tragic scene was heart-rending :

The concert was over; the people filed out of the hall chattering and laughing glad to relax and find the living level again, but my kinswoman made no effort to rise. The harpist slipped the green felt cover over his instrument; the flute players shook the water from their mouth-pieces; the men of the orchestra went out one by one, leaving the stage to the chairs and music stands, empty as a winter cornfield.

I spoke to my aunt. She burst into tears and sobbed pleadingly. "I don't want to go, Clark, I don't want to go !"

I understood. For her, just outside the concert hall, lay the black pond with the cattle-tracked bluffs; the tall, unpainted house, with weather-curved boards, naked as a tower; the crook-backed ash seedlings, where the dish-cloths hung to dry; the gaunt moulting turkeys picking up refuse about the kitchen door.

Miss Cather was very much annoyed by the discouragement of her own family and friends in Red Cloud. She realized that because of her dissimilarity and rebellious attitude, they thought there was "something queer" about her. Knowing well the conventionalism of Red Cloud she did not defend herself. But once she set to write stories this feeling that had haunted her for a long time found its outlet in "The Sculptor's Funeral" (1905).

It is a bitter story of Harvey Merrick, the great sculptor whose magic words were in his finger tips but whose talent was never appreciated by his own people in Sand City. His mother was a fury who made his life a hell for him when he lived at home. When the story began the sculptor was dead

after having made a great success in Boston. Henry Steavens, his devoted young student, was taking his body home to be buried but he was shocked to see the condition in Merrick's own home which had nothing to satisfy the taste of a great artist. The only acquaintance who understood his master's delicate artist's emotion was Jim Laird, the lawyer, who adored Merrick's genius. Simultaneously Jim detested Merrick's people for their stupidity and ill treatment of the boy. Thus, when important towns people, friends of Merrick's parents, start commenting in front of Merrick's coffin that Old Merrick's sons had not turned out better, Jim burst out in a fury. He makes a biting speech in which he snubs those people with sarcasm, telling them just how small and petty and mean they are. He cursed people like the banker Phelps, who hated Merrick because he could not buy the boy off. The scene made Henry Steavens understand Merrick's quiet bitterness. He felt disgusted with the ignorance of Merrick's people : not noticing the great importance of an artist like Merrick, whose name had made his little town known to the world forever. It made Steavens recall one of Merrick's sculptures :

Once when Merrick returned from a visit home, he brought with him a singularly feeling and suggestive bas-relief of a thin, faded old woman, sitting and sewing something pinned to her knees while a full lipped, full-blooded, little urchin, his trousers held up by a single gallows, stood beside her, impatiently twitching her gown to call her attention to a butterfly he had caught. Steavens, impressed by the tender and delicate modelling and of the thin tired face, had asked him if it were his mother. He remembered the dull flush that had burned up in the sculptor's face.⁶

What is more distressing in "The Sculptor's Funeral" is that even in death the artist cannot escape the harshness and hostility of his home surroundings where he is fated to be remembered as "queer" because he never conformed, and because he fled to unfamiliar worlds undreamed of by his family and friends :

(Laird) There was only one boy ever raised in this

border land between ruffianism and civilization who didn't come to grief, and you hated Harvey Merrick more for winning out than you hated all the other boys who got under the wheels.

So it is in "Wagner Matinée" that one detects the ill feeling of drabness and sordidness of the western land and so it is in "The Sculptor's Funeral" that one sees the drab westerners' complete lack of appreciation of the finer things in life. During Miss Cather's stay in Pittsburgh, she was not quite impressed by the city itself. "That smoke-palled city", she stated in one of her earliest short stories, "enamoured of figures and grimy toil." But she was charmed by the pleasure she got from places like museums, theatres or concert halls :

.... out of its ugliness and slums, its industrial smoke and flame sprang the beautiful things that were the breath of life to Willa Cather7

It is from this impression that Miss Cather wrote "Paul's Case" (1905) in which she drew on many elements of her life in Pittsburgh whose environment she considered intolerable : the commercial and industrial life of a great city.

Paul, the hero of the story, was a student at the Pittsburgh High School. He was considered a problem boy who got on the nerves of all his teachers because of his indescribably insolent air. Nobody understood him. He always showed utter contempt for his teachers and could not bear to have anyone think that he took them seriously. Paul came from an utterly drab, depressing, middle - class section of the city. He lived at a corner of Cordelia Street with his father only because his mother was dead. His father who kept telling him to be like one young man of that section, "a young man with a future", bored him greatly. The only time he felt actually alive was when he was ushering at a concert at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Hall or lingering behind the scenes of a downtown theatre, where he had friends among the cast. As time passed Paul found the school room more repulsive than ever. But as a result of continual

trouble with his teachers, he was deprived of all this; his father took him out of school and put him to work. The manager at Carnegie Hall was told to get another usher, the doorkeeper of the theatre was warned not to admit him.

When all his greatest happiness was cut off like that, Paul felt he had no choice; therefore he stole a thousand dollars of his company's money, took a train to New York, and spent eight days in the greatest luxury he had ever dreamt of at the Waldorf, one of the best New York hotels, filling his room with flowers, drinking champagne with every meal, and dressing himself in the smartest clothes he could buy. On the eighth day he read in the paper that his robbery had been discovered; his father had refunded the money to Paul's employers, who had no intention of persecuting him, while his school announced the hope of having him return. Whereupon Paul went to Newark, followed the track out of town, dismissed his cab, waited for an approaching train, and, at the right moment ran out in front of it.

"Paul's Case" has been the most widely read of Willa Cather's short stories. It is considered her best short story, which shows surprisingly aspects of her experience in Pittsburgh. Miss Cather seemed to resent the drabness of her boarding-house life during her years in Pittsburgh. The neighborhood, where Paul's house is, reflects all this ugliness : evangelical religion and middle-class commercial aspirations combine to make a background which is thoroughly hideous to an aesthete :

It was a highly respectable street, where all the houses were exactly alike, and where business men of moderate means begot and reared large families of children, all of whom went to Sabbath-school and learned the shorter catechism; and were interested in arithmetic; all of whom were as exactly alike as their homes, and of a piece with the monotony in which they lived.⁸

In her description of this part of Paul's life, Miss Cather shows seriously her own condemnation of the ugly environment and therefore sympathizes with Paul :

Paul never went up Cordelia Street without

a shudder of loathing. His home was next to the house of the Cumberland minister. He approached it tonight with the nevertheless sense of defeat, the hopeless feeling of sinking back forever into ugliness and commonness that he had always had when he came home. The moment he turned into Cordelia Street he felt the waters close above his head. After each of these orgies of living he experienced all the physical depression which follows a debauch; the loathing of respectable beds, of common food, of a house permeated by kitchen odours; a shuddering repulsion for the flavorless, colorless mass of every-day existence; a morbid desire for cool things and soft lights and fresh flowers. The nearer he approached the house, the more absolutely unequal Paul felt to the sight of it all; his ugly sleeping chamber; the cold bath-room with the grimy zinc tub, the cracked mirror, the dripping spigots; his father, at the top of the stairs, his hairy legs sticking out from his nightshirt, his feet thrust into carpet slippers.⁹

With this kind of background, it is obvious that Paul's revolt is a protest to secure the good things of life. The flight from ugliness and monotony to beauty and enchantment led Miss Cather to the Pittsburgh's stock company, where every week a new play enabled her to cross that "boundary line beyond which dreams came true and lost illusions live on, forever young."¹⁰ So it is with Paul : when he goes to visit his young friend backstage at the stock company he breathes like a prisoner set free. He, therefore, is the person who exalts the artificial over the natural, but Miss Cather gives a hint as to why this should be so, in commenting on his passion for theatres :

Perhaps it was because, in Paul's world, the natural nearly always wore the guise of ugliness, that a certain element of artificiality seemed to him necessary in beauty. Perhaps it was because his experience of life elsewhere was so full of Sabbath-school picnics, petty economies, wholesome advice as to how to succeed in life, and the unes-sapable odours of cooking, that he found this existence so alluring, these smartly-clad men and women so attractive, that he was moved by these starry apple orchards that bloomed perennially under the lime-light.¹¹

It is then at the theatre and at Carnegie Hall that Paul really lived; the rest was "but a sleep and a forgetting". At Carnegie Hall Miss Cather could hear a famous conductor conduct the symphony orchestra and like Paul felt that some hilarious spirit in her was freed by the first sigh of the instruments :¹²

"... something that struggled there like the Genius in the battle found by the Arab fisherman. "Paul felt" a sudden zest of life; the lights danced before his eyes and the concert hall blazed into unimaginable splendor."¹³

But although Miss Cather's treatment of Paul is sympathetic it also emphasizes the abnormal and perverse. Paul thinks himself greatly superior to his teachers in school and lets them know it; he pays a great deal of attention to dress and always wears a red carnation; his attitude is flippant and contemptuous in the extreme; he goes on irritating people; and he is merely a self-indulgent boy who lacks any real talent. Thus Miss Cather also suggests that Paul is a sick boy, that he is weak and that he is evasive when facing unpleasant realities. The reason for his failure is his continual search for an illusory happiness.

Another important consideration in "Paul's Case", the one which is to play a great part in Miss Cather's later fiction is the role of money. Money is for Paul the means of gratifying all his desires. He fully believes that wealth is the high road to the good life, yet he is contemptuous to the way money usually had to be obtained by middle-class people. This brings up a modern problem : in a commercial society one has to have money, whether one is willing to slave for it or not. It also poses a special problem for the aesthetes : they need money to enjoy the beautiful things they want, yet they are repulsed by the way in which it has to be obtained in the modern world. Miss Cather's later protagonists have to fall this problem. As the story progresses money becomes even more important. When Paul is near the end

of his life he reflects :

He had not a hundred dollars left; and he knew now more than ever, that money was everything, the wall that stood between all he loathed and all he wanted. 14

"Paul's Case" is a remarkable piece of writing. Its subject-matter showing the high devotion to artistic beauty also gives the clue to the link of this story and the earlier stories written at the same period : the rejection of all that is sordid and inartistic. In the previous stories that have already been discussed one notices the violent rejection of Nebraska. In "Paul's Case", Miss Cather generalizes her dislike of the Divide into a contempt for commercialism. She seems to reveal that whether found in a big city, or a small town or on the barren countryside, everything that gives no chance for artistic creativity should be rejected. For this reason all that she dislikes in agrarian life is symbolized in these early stories by the Divide and all that she dislikes in modern life, by Cordelia Street. However, Paul does not really understand the meaning of beauty. For him beauty is synonymous with luxury; therefore one sees that his idea of beauty is superficial and when he knows he is not in a position to command luxuries he solves his problem of frustration by committing suicide. In making Paul end his life like this, one feels that Miss Cather wants to point out that there is danger in the quest for beauty : if one misinterprets the meaning of beauty, one is likely to suffer. In the case of Paul, insanity results from his misinterpretation.

This same notion seems to be presented again in another of her short stories, "A Death in the Desert". In this case Katherine Gaylord, a singer, who misinterprets the meaning of art, finds it impossible to go back to her former dull existence. She had been the devout pupil and admirer of Adriance Hilgarde, the great pianist of the time. His brother and double, Everett Hilgarde was always annoyed by being ^{mistaken} for Adriance. It was when he went to Cheyenne, the

next stop after Colorado station, that he happened to be seen by Katherine who was suffering from a lung disease. Katherine asked her brother Charley to invite Everett to their home in order that she might have one more close remembrance of Adriance. It was not a happy meeting for Everett since he had known her before and had even felt that he was in love with her. It was a torture to be asked to see a woman he loved when that woman was thinking, in seeing him, of somebody else. However, Everett tried his best to please her and even wrote to his brother, asking him to write a few lines to the poor dying soul. He stayed with Katherine until she died partly of ill-health, partly of a broken heart, still yearning for Adriance.

This story is in a way symbolic. Katherine's love for Adriance is in reality the artist's devotion to beauty without which she can no longer exist. She dies yearning for that world that accepts her no more. Yet in desperation she cannot bear returning to her former life. Her fate is summed up by her brother :

"...: She got to Chicago and then to New York, and then to Europe, and got a taste for it all; and now she's dying here like a rat in a hole, out of her own world, and she can't fall back into ours."

There are three other short stories besides "A Death in the Desert" that also show Miss Cather's pursuit of beauty. "Flavia and Her Artists", "The Garden Lodge," and "The Marriage of Phaedra", all have to do with the milieu in which Miss Cather imagined the pursuit of her particular ideal could best be carried on : the world of the wealthy, sophisticated, cosmopolitan, upper class who were sometimes patrons of the arts, and the world of artist themselves.¹⁵ These four short stories and the preceding three : "The Sculptor's Funeral," "A Wagner Matinée," and "Paul's Case" are collected in Miss Cather's first published volume of short stories, The Troll Garden (1905). Later in 1920, four stories from this volume, "The Sculptor's Funeral," "A Wagner Matinée," "Paul's Case" and "A Death in the Desert" were republished

with four new stories in Miss Cather's second volume of short stories, Youth and the Bright Medusa.

Up to the time of the appearance of Alexander's Bridge (1912) one notices that Miss Cather's early fiction can roughly be divided into two categories : stories showing inappreciativeness of the Divide (as seen in "Peter", "Lou the Prophet," "The Clemency of the Court," "On the Divide," "Wagner Matinée" and "The Sculptor's Funeral.") which later broadened to include lack of appreciation of any unworthy environment (as seen in "Paul's Case"); and stories of the pursuit of beauty which had to be carried on in a wealthy or artistic society (as seen in "Paul's Case", "A Death in the Desert" and the other three stories, not at hand). But the themes of her later novels which have made her well-known as a great writer are different. One consequently has to conclude that at this stage of her career, Miss Cather knew that she wanted to write but she did not know for sure what she wanted to write about. She seemed only to have a vague feeling that the artistic life in general was the proper subject matter for a coming writer. This same notion is even felt when she wrote Alexander's Bridge, her first novel, in 1912.

In spite of her western prairie background, Miss Cather had in the earliest years of her career determined to write her fiction with the best style and the highest art and at this first stage she believed that to achieve her purpose was not to write about the common people and their lives as she had known them on the western plains but to concentrate on the more highly educated and cultured people : artists or successful professional people. The language used had to be manipulated with skill: the writer should use the right phrase, give the correct dramatic balance and choose the best precision of setting, etc. Alexander's Bridge is the outcome of this theory. To describe the circumstances under which this novel had been written, Miss Cather wrote some nineteen years after its publication :

The "novel of the soil" had not then come into fashion in this country. The drawing-room

was considered the proper setting for a novel, and the only characters worth reading about were smart people or clever people.¹⁶

Alexander's Bridge is consequently written very carefully. It is a study in the split personality of a successful Boston engineer and bridge designer, Bartley Alexander. When the book opens Alexander is forty two years old and at the height of his career. His wife, Winifred, is beautiful and apparently has all the qualities that a wife of successful man of high society should have. His Boston home is also very much admired for its beauty. Yet, in spite of his professional success, beautiful wife, beautiful home, Alexander finds himself unable to be happy. He misses his youth and the freshness he once had but has no longer. On one trip to London, he meets Hilda Burgoyne, an actress he had known and loved when he was a young man. Wanting to renew his youth and make the most out of life, Alexander renews his friendship with her. Afterwards, each time his business calls him to England, he stops off to see Hilda at her apartment. Meanwhile Alexander is offered a contract to build the great Moorlock bridge in Canada, the longest single-span cantilever bridge in the world. It is in fact the greatest challenge to his professional ability but in spite of the hard work, Alexander is often tortured by his intense longing for his lost youth — a preoccupation with himself which keeps him from supervising the bridge building as carefully as he should. He decides to give Hilda up but cannot bring himself to do so, although he goes to the length of writing her a letter of renunciation. Amidst his struggle with himself the great Moorlock bridge shows signs of strain and starts to buckle. His assistant tries to telegraph him to warn him of the danger and summon him to the place of construction as quickly as possible. But Alexander, who was already on his way, stops off at New York to meet Hilda, who had also come to New York to appear in a play, for the last time. This first telegram therefore never reaches him. Construction on the bridge goes on, and getting the second telegram, Alexander reaches the spot the next day, but it is

too late, for just after he arrives and has given instructions to stop the work, as the workmen are beginning to move off the bridge, the gigantic structure collapses under his feet, killing him and about fifty other workmen.

In some of her early short stories, Miss Cather has already written relentlessly about artists or people of artistic temperament in conflict with their environment because of their search for beauty which is lacking in their environment. They are people like Harvey Merrick in "The Sculptor's Funeral", Paul in "Paul's Case" or Katherine in "A Death in the Desert". Alexander's Bridge is somewhat similar to these stories, the only differences lie in the fact that Alexander is not an artist but a civil engineer and he is not in conflict with his environment but with himself to restore the lost original impulse which, he believes, disappeared with his youth. In trying to gain possession of both the brightness of youth and the success of maturity, Alexander is destroyed. The theme is stated in the first pages when Lucius Wilson, an old professor of his, visits him in Boston and congratulates him on his success. Professor Wilson had always been afraid that Alexander had a weak spot in him and that some day he would collapse under some unusual strain. Having seen Alexander and his **wife** living happily in their beautiful home, he is convinced that his premonition was wrong.

(Wilson) "You've changed. You have decided to leave some birds in the bushes. You used to want them all."¹⁷

But the response he gets from Alexander only makes him doubtful and he always reflects upon it with an uneasiness of mind, but this response reveals to the readers of Alexander's complicated nature :

Alexander's chair creaked. "I still want a good many," he said rather gloomily. "After all, life doesn't offer a man much. You work like the devil and think you're getting on, and suddenly you discover that you have only been getting yourself tied up. A million details drink you dry. Your life keeps going for things you don't want, and all the while you are being built alive into a

social structure you don't care a rap about. I sometimes wonder what sort of chap I'd have been if I hadn't been this sort; I want to go and live out his potentialities, too. I haven't forgotten that there are birds in the bushes."¹⁸

Alexander had always wanted to keep his personal liberty at all costs. He had expected that success would bring him freedom and power; but it had brought only power that was in itself another kind of restraint. He happened to be engaged in public utilities work but he was unwilling to become involved with the public. He found himself living exactly the kind of life he had determined to escape.

Believing that his lost impulse has gone with his successful marriage and constructive work and failing to get it from his devoted wife, Alexander seeks it from Hilda. But in spite of Hilda's genuine love and complete devotion to him, Alexander cannot get back that happy impulse he, as a man of over forty, craves. Alexander's wish to keep himself free implies that he would like very much to remain forever young and free from all responsibility. Miss Cather makes it unmistakably clear that his real love is even not Hilda but his own lost youth :

...he walked shoulder to shoulder with a shadowy companion — not little Hilda Burgoyne, by any means, but someone vastly dearer to him than she had ever been — his own young self.¹⁹

Alexander himself is aware of the danger of his inner conflict and tries his best to overcome it. The struggle seems to be treated symbolically when Miss Cather describes his determination to free himself from Hilda but since he never overcome it he has to face his own death. Thus the destruction of his bridge is an inevitable as that of his own life as Wilson, his old professor, had foreseen in Alexander's life :

It must have been then that your luck began, Bartley, "said Wilson, flicking his cigar ash with his long finger. "It's curious, watching boys," he went on reflectively. "I'm sure I did you justice in the matter of ability. Yet I always used to feel that there was a weak spot where some day strain would tell. Even after you began to climb, I stood

down in the crowd and watched you with — well, not with confidence. The more dazzling the front you presented, the higher your façade rose, the more I expected to see a big crack zigzagging from top to bottom" — he indicated its course in the air with his forefinger — "then a clash and clouds of dust. It was curious. I had such a clear picture of it...20

The characterization of Bartley Alexander is complicated and strange. The subtlety in Alexander's conflict makes one feel that Miss Cather herself worked in vain to vitalize her protagonist, for Alexander does not come to life. Being a beginner Miss Cather puts in Alexander's nature the most complicated conflict, hoping to make him come out victoriously but she does not seem to have succeeded in her aim because of certain defects. First of all, it is hard to understand why a successful man like Alexander should be so discontented with his luxurious lot and so distressed as to seek happiness from his youth which exists no longer. His trying to keep all kinds of happiness with him until his death makes him appear immature and very unrealistic. Another defect is that if Miss Cather aims at making Alexander and Hilda's affair a sin whose punishment lies in the collapse of the bridge and Alexander's death, no logical reason is given. Why should Alexander be killed or have his bridge collapse because of his love affair with Hilda? The cause of Alexander's delay in appearing to save all the destruction is because, the story seems to suggest, his stopping off with Hilda on his way up to Canada on that night of all nights when Alexander had not let his assistant know where he was. But this was not his usual practice. The catastrophe is therefore based on mere coincidence. For this reason this solution is less convincing and weakens the story.

The severest critic of Alexander's Bridge was its own author in later years. Miss Cather herself is not impressed by this first novel of hers. She says :

My first novel, 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....21

She even went on admitting that a book like Alexander's Bridge seems unnecessary and superficial. She still found people who liked this book, at the same time she believed that it was because the book followed the most conventional pattern or because it was laid in London, not because of the content of the book. 22 However after Miss Cather's death one of her friends who knew her well was surprised, on rereading it, to find what power of psychological portraiture it contained.23 Yet up to now there doesn't seem to be any psychological study of this novel.

Judging by the story and Miss Cather's own later aversion to her first published novel, one is forced to conclude that when she was writing it she was still uncertain of herself. This is probably the best judgment for this book since this is the last time she lets us see her uncertainty; it is the last time she expresses her hesitation before her readers. After this book this kind of protagonist is always portrayed as being always above conflict and always right. Her abrupt return to writing her prairie novels is another sure sign that Miss Cather herself realized her failure in writing Alexander's Bridge.

CHAPTER III

HER FICTION FROM 1913-1920

Alexander's Bridge (1912) is Miss Cather's first novel but the author herself does not feel that it is the kind of subject matter in which she finds herself at home. In a preface written in 1922 for a new edition of Alexander's Bridge, Miss Cather confessed that the writer at the beginning of his career, was often more interested in his discoveries about his art than in the homely truths which had been about him from his cradle.¹ The subject she then considered as "her own" was pioneering in Nebraska, the state she knew so well. Soon after the publication of Alexander's Bridge she went for six months to Arizona and New Mexico and from this journey she reflected :

The longer I stayed in a country. I really did care about, and among people who were a part of the country, the more unnecessary and superficial a book like Alexander's Bridge seemed to me. When I got back to Pittsburgh I began to write a book entirely for myself; a story about some Scandinavians and Bohemians who had been neighbours of ours when I lived on a ranch in Nebraska, when, I was eight or nine years old..... 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 the way, on a fine morning, when you felt like riding.²

For this reason O Pioneers ! her first novel of the prairie was written the following year. This sudden shift of the theme is another indication that Miss Cather wrote her first novel as an experiment. At the same time it shows that she is

following the advice of her mentor, Miss Sarah Orne Jewett whose words Miss Cather found most helpful :

One of the few really helpful words I ever heard from an older writer, I had from Sarah Orne Jewett when she said to me, "Of course, one day you will write about your own country. In the meantime get all you can. One must know the world so well before one can know the parish. " 3

To appreciate Miss Cather's pioneer novels, it is essential to know about the region where she has located her chief novels. The region where Miss Cather has chosen to set her prairie novels, O Pioneers! (1913) and my Antonia (1920) is the vast area of Nebraska especially the great prairie area where she herself spent her girlhood. It was a rural pioneer America that disappeared over fifty years ago.

The pioneers are the people thrown together in a new country, the West, where there was perfect equality in a neighbourhood of people who knew little about each other's previous history or ancestry; thus each is lord of the soil which he cultivates. Their ~~homes~~ are log cabins or sod houses, the best the pioneer can expect to have for years. Few are the external decorations which have so much influence in creating a diversity of rank in society. All these circumstances have laid the foundation for the equality of intercourse, simplicity of manners, want of deference, want of reserve, great readiness to make acquaintances and freedom of speech. All there are qualities which one notices among the people of the West. 4

The pioneers have felt the influence of independence of thought and action since their childhood. They are men who can endure anything : they have lived almost without restraint, free as the mountain air and will act according to this principle throughout their life. They possess a spirit of adventurous enterprise: a willingness to go through hardship or danger to accomplish an object. They think nothing of making a long journey, of encountering fatigue, and of enduring all kind of hardship.⁵

Three moments in frontier life created excitement. These were birth, marriage and death. The most important one was marriage because it meant a perpetual partnership of hard-working life of the couples. The new couples started life with only the basic utensils and tools. Their furniture was home-made. While the wives were doing the household work, the husbands were exposing themselves to danger : hunting and bringing in the meat. They also built the houses in which the women were placed for safety. Planting was usually the joint labor of both : they planted, ploughed, and gathered in the corn, ground it into meal, at the hand mill, or pounded it. Women were about as active as men in the conquest of the frontier. They helped to build new homes and experienced untold hardships from lack of comforts and conveniences. They cooked food, kept house, spun yarn, wove clothing materials, made coverlets and knitted socks by the score. Not only did they do the chores of the household, but they helped with work in the fields, acted as

nurse to the sick, and often bore numerous children with no more aid than that of a frightened husband.

Writing of the life of pioneer women, J.L. Mc Connell described the homecoming of a bridal couple thus :

The " happy couple" ride up to the low rail-fence in front ____ the bride springs off without assistance, affectation, or delay. The husband leads away the horse or horses, and the wife enters the dominion, where, thenceforward, she is queen. There is no coyness, no blushing, no pretense or fright or nervousness ____ if you will, no romance _____ for which the husband has reason to be thankful ! The wife knows what her duties are and resolutely goes about performing them. She never dreamed, nor twaddled, about "love in a cottage" or " the sweet communion of congenial souls" (Who never eat anything)! and she is, therefore, not disappointed on discovering that life is actually a serious thing. She never whines about "making her husband happy" _____ but sets firmly and sensibly about making him comfortable. She cooks his dinner, nurses his children, shares his hardship, and encourages his industry. She never complains of having too much work to do, she does not desert her home to make endless visits _____ she borrows no misfortunes, has no imaginary ailments _____ she is, in short, a faithful honest wife. 6

Basically frontier culture was agrarian. Land and farming constituted the principal industry. Even manufacturing centered around the activities of the farm and just as field crops were basic to frontier livelihood, so was livestock. They raised cows to get milk, hogs to produce a marketable amount of meat, sheep to supply wool and soft, pliable leather and fleece for clothing and horses and later mules to use as means of transportation.

Men and women participated ~~together~~ in many forms of frontier amusement and no form of amusement was more popular than the dance. There were many forms of frontier dance.

Cabins were cleared of furniture and the dance went on as long as the callers and fiddlers were sober enough to keep the sets going. Their musical instruments were portable e.g. banjos, guitars and fiddles since importation of the heavier instruments such as the harpsichord, spinet and the harp had to await the opening of roads.

American frontiersmen on the whole were good-natured, some frontiersmen took themselves most seriously — even to believing they were men of destiny — but on the whole the hardships were softened by good nature and courage was kept high by banter and bragging. However, there was occasionally an undertone of self-pity in which the pioneer felt he had been either neglected or discriminated against by the rest of civilization. With strangers the frontiersmen were momentarily shy and took their time in finding out who a stranger was and what he wanted. It was always necessary to exercise great care with strangers because rascals and even criminals were often at large, but once a stranger was taken into a house he was cordially welcomed and plied with endless questions about the world outside. People were often starved for news and new topics of conversation.

It would be a mistake to assume that all frontier influences were purely rural. There were towns even though they were sometimes not larger than country meeting places. As business centres, most of the towns were primarily limited market centers for farm products and livestock. In most

communities, court days attracted farmers to the town, not to attend court alone but to sell and trade also. Merchandising was done principally by itinerants who came with things like textiles, iron and tinware, and miscellaneous goods. They often rented storehouses and established temporary businesses where they exchanged goods for country product and livestock. 7

Before the end of 1862, the age of the railroad was upon the West. The railroad soon had developed the primary pattern of Western commerce and travel. Following the railroad came millions of settlers on the plains and along the mountain and Pacific slopes. The Homestead Act issued in 1862 to give land to a settler on condition that he lived there and cultivated it helped to push people to West. There was the influx of settlers who poured on to the plains after 1865 and even though the plains country was not uniform in its nature, for the most part the pattern of social and economic pioneering, that has already been discussed prevailed all across the region. In moving to the plains, the pioneers had to adjust themselves to new environmental conditions. Almost every basic practice of American pioneering had to be revised once the settlement line reached the plains country. Most early houses on the plains were either "dug-outs" or "sod houses" 8 Much of the plains frontier environment inflicted genuine hardships upon families. Many a wife went West to join her husband and discovered that she and her children would have to live like animals under the ground in a dug-out, or in a crumbling soddy. Some easterners were

driven almost to the point of distraction by the constant blowing of the wind. There was seldom the stillness on the plains which prevailed in heavily wooded country. This continuous blowing was physically and psychologically frustrating. At no place on the frontier did the pioneer move so far away from the materials with which he could make himself comfortable, as he did on the High Plains.

Water was almost as scarce as wood. Not only was it difficult to obtain water for ordinary domestic purposes, but the land often lacked the necessary moisture to produce crops. Wells were dug mostly by hand but in long dry seasons, they often went dry and the families were left without water. Many settlers were forced to desert their homesteads for lack of water. For this reason frontiersmen on the plains were conditioned to dry farming and the most profitable dry farm⁹ field crop was wheat.

Western towns sprang up on the plains as people went westward. A successful town possessed a mill, a boarding house, a post office, a blacksmith shop, a doctor's office, a bank, a weekly newspaper, churches, a school and a railway station.

At times disasters swept over the land. They were either insect invasions, hot winds, the suffocating dust storms of summer or the death-dealing blizzards of winter. When these disasters swept over the land, they left death and poverty in their paths. Many settlers turned back but many

more remained and conquered the country. They endured the final hardships of American pioneering and established an American civilization in a region where extraordinary perseverance and courage were required.¹⁰

Just as there was no precise moment when the great westward movement had its beginning, there was none when it ended. The free land frontier was only considered to be closed technically in 1890. The westward movement involved both physical and spiritual forces. It was a moment of people struggling across the land planting farmsteads, ranches, counties, towns and states. They created folk legends and heroes as they went. There are frontiers to-day, but they are not free land frontiers but spiritually the frontier survives in the American outlook, in the sense of space, and most of all in a basic national confidence in its resourcefulness.¹¹

One factor that contributed to the rapid decline of the frontier is the coming of the Industrial Revolution. Since 1870., economic factors had become quite important and the Industrial Revolution proceeded rapidly. The Revolution brought many significant results to the people as it was summarized in the introduction of American Life in Literature that, " In 1860, the average American was a yeoman farmer; since 1900 he has been an employee. The change carried with it an alteration in the national psychology if not, indeed, in the national character. By the end of the century the

United States was practically the industrial, urban America that we live in today. The machine age had arrived. The years since 1870. have been an age of coal, iron, steel, steam, electricity, of railroads, manufactures, corporations, of invention, applied science, and mass production. With these came a rapidly increasing uniformity of life. By 1914 had come the first airplane, the automobile, the electric railway, the typewriter, the linotype machine, the telephone, the phonograph, the motion picture, and many other machines. When these modern conveniences had once been used, it seemed impossible to live without them. A shift in the population was taking place; the cities were rapidly growing, while in many places the population of small towns and rural districts was declining. 12

One outcome of this great change in the national history was the Populist Movement, begun in 1892. This movement played an important part in all Willa Cather's best work. The Populist Movement brought a long series of agrarian protests against the impact of the Industrial Revolution on rural America at the period of the great demand of Western land. Some of the things the Populists complained about were due to human greed, such as high interest rates on mortgages, abuse of the Homestead Act, and speculation by railroads on government granted lands. Others, such as the fall in farm prices due to the worldwide agricultural depression extending from the eighteen-seventies to the eighteen nineties, were in fact nobody's fault but the Populists.

tended to fix the blame on certain groups of people: Eastern capitalists, Wall Street bankers, the gold crowd. What came out were unending tales in which the Populists played the roles of heroes and victims of circumstances, and the Eastern bankers were the villains. Such was the background of Miss Cather's pioneer stories.

In O Pioneers! Miss Cather introduces for the first time her great theme of taming the soil. The great plain of Nebraska is presented at the very beginning of the novel in all its natural hardness and cruelty both of which challenge human beings living in its bosom. Great patience and endeavor are abundantly required to conquer the land. These qualities are shown clearly in the development of the heroine of the story, Alexandra Bergson who is successful in revealing that nature can be reduced to order by the human hand.

The Swedish immigrant, John Bergson, who is hard-working and devoted, has established his family consisting of his wife, one daughter and three sons, on a farm on the Divide/^{near} Hanover, Nebraska. But after eleven long years of hard work on the wild land and in the midst of bad luck that was still hanging over him he dies, trusting that of his children, Alexandra, the eldest and only daughter, would be the one able to lead the family on. Miss Bergson lacks character; consequently, the responsibility for the family falls on Alexandra, the central figure of the novel. Among her three brothers, Lou, Oscar and Emil, the youngest, Emil, is her favorite. Alexandra tries her best to run the household as

well as the farm. She once took her brothers to see Ivar, an old Norwegian horse-doctor who found contentment in solitude but whom many people believed to be crazy. Alexandra believed in his suggestion about animal treatment in spite of his apparent queerness.

Under Alexandra's guidance, within three years her family prospers. Meanwhile she forms a friendship with the restless young Carl Linstrum, but is unable to marry him because of her responsibilities and the hard farm work. However, after the prosperous three years comes another three years of hard times which bring everyone to the brink of despair. Farmers including Carl Linstrum have to give up their land, go to any place that has been proved habitable. They sell or mortgage their land to people from the city who show eagerness to buy the seemingly unpromising land. Alexandra's grown-up brothers, Oscar and Lou, would like to go to their uncle, Otto Bergson who, unlike his brother John, is seeking his fortune in Chicago. Or else Oscar and Lou would like to move to a place down the river, but they cannot overcome Alexandra's strong determination to stay on and meanwhile to use every dollar they can make to buy more and more land. To make sure that she is correct in her decision, Alexandra even inspects the river farms and comes back full of greater hope and faith in the future.

Sixteen years later, Alexandra has complete control of the household affairs. Her mother also dies. After so many years of hard work, now Alexandra is very well established as a rich landowner. Oscar and Lou are all married. Before their

separation, Alexandra has given each certain pieces of land. Emil is a grown-up college graduate who still lives with the sister who takes care of him as if he were her own boy. In her household she has several workmen including Ivar who is quite old and three pretty young Swedish girls whom Alexandra has brought from Sweden to do her housework. Ivar worries that he may be sent to an asylum, but Alexandra promises to do everything in her power to protect him.

Carl Linstrum unexpectedly visits the Divide again. She is pleased to see him again. Since his departure, he has become an engraver, but the work does not satisfy him; therefore he is on his way to try his fortune in the gold fields of Alaska. Alexandra finds that Carl is not so happy as he is pretending to be, and she sympathizes with him. Lou and Oscar are not pleased, for they both want to get the maximum ^{advantage} from Alexandra's property. Alexandra tells Carl that she has sold his former piece of land to Marie Tovesky who eloped with Frank Shabata, a rather violent Bohemian who seems jealous of everybody especially those who contact his wife. Alexandra likes Marie very much, for she finds Marie a very understanding companion. The following morning Carl, taking a walk to the direction of the Shabata's, sees from a distance Marie and Emil hunting ducks. He feels that the two seem to have a close acquaintance. Later Alexandra takes Carl to see Marie whom Carl finds very amiable and pleasant, but whose husband Carl finds sensitive and temperamental. Alexandra later relates to him Marie's story; how she met Frank, a romantic, young, handsome gentleman from Europe when she was only sixteen.

She suddenly fell in love with him; therefore in spite of her father's disapproval she ran away from a convent with him. Marie's father later forgave her and bought for ^{her} Alexandra's land which had once belonged to Carl in order that she and Frank might settle their own. Frank worked hard, but was a failure and found himself dissatisfied with his position.

As Carl has suspected, Emil is deeply in love with Marie and distressed that she can never ^{marry} him. Marie pretends not to know, being afraid that their friendship will come to an end. Meanwhile Oscar and Lou angrily accuse Alexandra of disgracing the family since she has kept Carl in her house for too long. But Alexandra sees clearly that in fact they are afraid they will get nothing from her any more. She is therefore angry and sad and perhaps it is out of sheer loneliness she tells herself that she loves and wants to marry Carl. Oscar's cruel words that she is too old to marry nearly break her heart but they push her a step closer to marrying Carl. However Carl, unable to stand the scandal, leaves for the north at once in spite of Alexandra's frank confession that she is lonely and will marry him if he will have her.

With the departure of Carl, Alexandra is lonely and even more so because Emil also leaves for Mexico to try his fortune. In fact he wants to escape from Marie and is a little annoyed by the scandal about his sister. Alexandra knows nothing of her brother's affectionate feeling toward Marie partly because she loves both of them and partly because, getting old, she is quite obsessed with her loneliness.

After a long absence, Emil comes home a grown-up.

Alexandra is very proud of him. She takes him to the French Church Fair where Emil meets Marie again. It is plain to them now that they fall in love with each other. Yet Marie admits that she ran away with Frank because she loved him. He was then a perfect gentleman, and she still hopes that he will one day become her old Frank. Now she is paying for her past action. Emil sadly asks her to run away with him, but she does not consent although she confesses that she loves him too.

Emil, broken-hearted, prepares to go away to read law in the office of a Swedish lawyer, then enter a law school at Ann Arbor. In the meantime he begins to understand his sister and she is well pleased that Emil often questions her about their father and his dignified life in the old country.

Before Emil leaves, the sudden death of his happy friend, Amédée, makes Emil sadder and on the pretext of saying goodbye to Marie, he drops in at the Shabata's. He can not find her in the house, but in the orchard under the mulberry tree the two lovers fall into each other's arms. Frank comes home only to find an empty house. Mad with jealousy, without realizing what he is doing, he takes his gun into the orchard, and shoots at the two figures silhouetted there. Shocked by his own action and even more shocked when he has learnt that he has killed his wife and Emil, he has but one thought, to save himself; therefore he runs away.

It is Ivar who finds the two lovers clinging to each other lying dead. The incident shocks Alexandra and for three months she is taken care of by Ivar and her Swedish

maid. Later when she recovers, she feels sorry for Frank who is sentenced to ten years imprisonment, for she feels that he is less in the wrong than any of them, including herself, but he is paying the heaviest penalty. She promises Frank to do her best to help him out. Before she returns from her visit to Frank, she gladly learns of Carl's arrival. Carl does not blame either Marie or Emil but makes Alexandra understand their sentiments. Alexandra feels warm-hearted and happy to have Carl home and finally the two decide to get married and devote their lives to the responsibilities of the farm.

O Pioneers! is episodic but its themes can be divided into two principal ones. One is human beings in conflict with the land and another is with love. The first part is chiefly concerned with the struggle of Alexandra Bergson with the land that is both "rich and sombre," "full of strength and harshness" and "containing the growing wheat and the growing weed". The second concerns the tragic love affair between Emil and Marie.

Before Alexandra begins to take her place in the novel, at the beginning of the story Miss Cather presents a secondary theme which often recurs in her prairie novels. the adjustment of the settlers from the old world to frontier life. Thus the reader is at first confronted with the character of John Bergson who doesn't give up his homestead but who dies at the early age of forty-six, before his farm has proved a success. Miss Cather realizes that for the old people, living on their memories of the past, there is no real hope in America. These people consequently hold a somewhat

pessimistic idea of the land as unpromising:

In eleven long years John Bergson had made but little impression upon the wild land he had come to tame. It was still a wild thing that had its ugly moods; and no one knew when they were likely to come, or why. Mischance hung over it. Its Genius was unfriendly to man..... John Bergson had the Old-World belief that land, in itself, is desirable. But this land was an enigma. It was like a horse that no one knows how to break the harness, that runs wild and kicks things to pieces. 13

But to their children of European heritage who are adaptable enough, the open spaces of the American west prove an exciting challenge full of possibilities for a new life. The reason Alexandra is able to tame the land is that she sees in the vast area these potentialities and at once gives her love to the land which seems to bow to her will because it is responsive to her love. Consequently Part I of O Pioneers!, entitled "The Wild Land" has a strength and individuality that carries the novel along with a splendid vigor. Alexandra lives patiently on confident hopes of the future, determining to go forward to a destination she has never seen; yet she knows she will, one day, be happy there. She is like the guardian of the wild land until it yields to the efforts of its tamers. In Part II, "Neighbouring Fields" the reader therefore meets Alexandra as the prosperous owner of much wealthy farm land. The wild land has at last become productives :

It is sixteen years since John Bergson died... Could he rise from beneath it, he would not know the country under which he has been asleep. The shaggy coat of the prairie, which they lifted to make him a bed, has vanished forever. From the Norwegian graveyard one looks out over a vast checker-board, marked off in

squares of wheat and corn; light and dark, dark and light.¹⁴

There are few scenes more gratifying than a spring plowing in that country, where the furrows of a single field often lie a mile in length, and the brown earth, with such a strong, clean smell, and such a power of growth and fertility in it, yields itself eagerly to the plow; rolls away from the shear, not even dimming the brightness of the metal, with a soft, deep sigh of happiness There is something frank and joyous and young in the open face of the country. It gives itself ungrudgingly to the moods of the season, holding nothing back.¹⁵

Having looked at Miss Cather's presentation of Alexandra, her father, and her two brothers, one begins to see what qualities she thinks essential to a pioneer. He must have strength, but strength alone is not enough, for Oscar and Lou have strength. Yet left to their own devices they would get nowhere. He must have imagination, but that alone is also not sufficient. John Bergson was imaginative enough to seek his fortune in the new world but he wore himself out and died without doing more than barely getting out of debt. A pioneer must have both imagination and strength. These are what constitute the clear superiority of Alexandra over her father and brothers.

Part III, "Winter Memories" presents an atmosphere of tension against a background of frozen winter exteriors as if waiting for the tragedy that emerges in the following parts:

Winter has settled down over the Divide again; The season in which Nature recuperates, in which she sinks to sleep between the fruitfulness of autumn and the passion of spring. The birds have gone. The teeming

life that goes on down in the long grass is exterminated. The prairie-dog keeps his hole. The rabbits run shivering from one frozen garden patch to another and are hard put to it to find frost-bitten cabbage-stalks. At night the coyotes roam the wintry waste, howling for food. The variegated fields are all one colour now; the pastures, the stubble, the roads, the sky are the same leaden grey. The hedgerows and trees are scarcely perceptible against the bare earth, whose slaty hue they have taken on. The ground is frozen so hard that it bruises the foot to walk in the roads or in the ploughed fields. It is like an iron country, and the spirit is oppressed by its rigor and melancholy. One could easily believe that in that dead landscape the germs of life and fruitfulness were extinct forever.¹⁵

The drama takes place in the love story of Marie Shabata and Emil Bergson, which ends in tragedy. This second part of the story seems to deal little with Alexandra. Therefore there are always questions about Miss Cather's ulterior motive concerning her novel thus. In The Landscape and the Looking Glass, John H. Randall III has given an interesting point of view. He says:

It is possible to see a very definite relationship between Alexandra's story and that of Emil and Marie. It is this: after exploring the problems of spontaneous emotion in relation to nature and the land, Willa Cather turns to the more complicated problem of spontaneity in relation to other human beings.¹⁶

He fully believes that in describing the fertility and opulence of the land which has finally been domesticated and made friendly to man, Miss Cather uses sexual imagery. There is an association of the land with youth and a statement of the themes of spontaneity, of love, and giving of oneself:

There is something frank and joyous
and young in the open face of the country.
It gives itself ungrudgingly

to the moods of the season, holding nothing back. Like the plains of Lombardy, it seems to rise a little to meet the sun. The air and the earth are curiously mated and intermingled, as if the one were the breath of the others.¹⁷

If Mr. Randall is correct in his interpretation, the love story between Emil and Marie is therefore presented to show how significant spontaneity is in Miss Cather's esteem. The love of this young couple is something which is inevitable because it develops from their characters. Both of them have a talent for living and the sharing of imaginative experience and each one recognizes this quality in the other. Besides drive and enthusiasm similar to Alexandra's, Marie also has other qualities which Alexandra knows herself to lack: an understanding of people, a keen zest for the enjoyment of living, and attractive liveliness. In effect, Marie complements Alexandra. She takes up where Alexandra leaves off. But Marie's spontaneity only causes her destruction and this reveals that Miss Cather is aware of the limitations of spontaneity. The same spontaneity which has made Alexandra successful in taming the wild land, when applied to human relations, has been completely disastrous.

What then is Miss Cather driving at in adding in the second part of this story? She seems to make spontaneity at the same time a most valuable and disgusting characteristic. The great problem is that of achieving a satisfying and successful spontaneity in human relations. Emil and Marie seem to achieve this: the beauty of their feeling for each other is surely better than the unhappiness of Marie's marriage to

Frank Shabata. Thus the natural goodness of human nature seems superior to the restraints long established by civilization. But when moral values are weighed, spontaneity becomes undesirable. Frank Shabata shoots the two lovers, and Alexandra tells him in prison that Emil and Marie were more to blame than he was. Alexandra never does solve this problem, nor does Miss Cather. The only possible conclusion regarding spontaneity seems to be something like this: spontaneity produces diverse results, some of them good, some bad.

The death of Emil and Marie came as a profound shock to Alexandra and while it gave her an insight into human tragedy Alexandra changed completely. As she gets older, she has a desire to be taken away and later the desire becomes transmuted into surrender: a longing to shift her burdens to somebody else and rest, for Alexandra is haunted by something she herself does not understand:

As she grew older, this fancy more often came to her when she was tired than when she was fresh and strong. Sometimes, after she had been in the open all day, overseeing the branding of the cattle or the loading of the pigs, she would come in chilled, take a concoction of spices and warm home-made wine, and go to bed actually aching with fatigue. Then, just before she went to sleep, she had the old sensation of being lifted and carried by a strong being who took from her all bodily weariness.

The further description suggests that the vision Alexandra has is not her sexual desire but the vision of death itself. She is tired of her body, tired of her feelings, and tired of being tired. In effect she is totally desperate and wishes that death would free her from all pain:

As she lay alone in the dark, it occurred to her for the first time that perhaps she was actually tired of life. All the physical operations of life seemed difficult and painful. She longed to be free from her own body which ached and was so heavy. And longing itself was heavy; she yearned to be free of that ... for the first time in her life she saw him, saw him clearly, though the room was dark, and his face was covered. He was standing in the doorway of her room. His white cloak was thrown over his face, and his head was bent a little forward. His shoulders seemed as strong as the foundations of the world. His right arm bared from the elbow, was dark and gleaming, like bronze, and she knew at once that it was the arm of the mightiest of all lovers. She knew at last for whom it was she had waited, and where he would carry her. That, she told herself, was very well. Then she went to sleep.¹⁹

From this one sees that the high spirit in Alexandra that had helped her to conquer the land is declining. For the first time she feels a longing for companionship. Her consenting to marry Carl Linstrum may seem unheroic for such a strong and remarkable woman as Alexandra but at least it brings her safety and peace. And thus the novel ends on a note — is it of triumph or of failure?

When O Pioneers! was completed Miss Cather turned once more to the world of art, making it the subject of several short stories which were later collected under Youth and the Bright Medusa (1920) and of one novel, The Song of the Lark (1915), the only full-length portrait of an artist she ever wrote.

The Song of the Lark is the story of how the daughter of a Swedish Methodist minister in Moonstone, Colorado, became a great opera singer. The first part of the novel is set in Moonstone. The reader first sees Thea Kronborg as an eleven-year old girl being brought out of a serious case of pneumonia by Dr. Howard Archie who is deeply interested in and attracted by Thea. He is one of her "Friends of Childhood" which is the title of the first section of the novel. Another of Thea's childhood friends is her piano teacher, Professor Wunsch, a broken-down German who was once a distinguished musician but is now a drunken failure. Wunsch has drifted from one town to another conscious of his failure and haunted by memories, until he is rescued and temporarily rehabilitated by Fritz Kohler, the town tailor, and his wife, fellow Germans with an affectionate interest in him. During the few years that he lives in Moonstone, before leaving the town after breaking out in a drunken frenzy, he has managed to teach Thea all he knows and at the same time discovers Thea's immense promise. It is the greatest discovery he has had for he has long been embittered by years of teaching provincial American young girls with no musical talent and no musical ambition other

than to play something showy in a pretty dress at a church concert. The professor is also frustrated by life in a new and raw part of the country which knows nothing of art and is deaf to artistic integrity. But in Thea, he at least finds someone to whom he can express something of all this. Being a girl in her ^{early} teens, Thea only half understands what he is talking about, but it helps her to develop her artistic instinct, a quality in her that she knows makes her different from all others in her large family. Thea's relationship with Professor Wunsch and the Kohlers also gives her access to the Old World atmosphere full of old world dreams and memories. Thea finds herself responsive to this Old World atmosphere, as she finds herself responding to the bright and colorful life of the Mexicans, who live in the deserted part of Moonstone. Her relations with the Mexicans, particularly with Spanish Johnny are part of her self-discovery as an artist. Spanish Johnny or Juan Tellementaz is a peculiar character who has the habit of wandering off unpredictably for months during which he lives the life of a minstrel and comes home in a state of utter exhaustion. This part of the story provides some memorable scenes, in particular the description of a dance that took place in a place called the Mexican Town, followed by an informal concert at which Thea sings. The contrast is made intentionally to show the intrinsic love of music of the Mexicans and the pretended appreciation of the Moonstone people in general. The last but not least important among Thea's childhood friends is in the person of Ray Kennedy, a freight

train conductor on the run between Moonstone and Denver who adores Thea and plans to marry her when she is old enough. But Ray is killed in a railroad accident, leaving his life insurance for six hundred dollars in Thea's favor to enable her to take music lessons in Chicago.

The second part of the book, "The Song of the Lark" reveals the story of Thea's stay in Chicago. It is told in convincing detail, with a fine sense of what was going on in Chicago musical circles. Thea is taken in hand by the pianist Andor Harsanyi, who sends her to study with a great voice teacher, Madison Bowers. Here ^{she} first reveals the immense promise of her voice. Her talent develops, but she is discouraged and becomes ill. Bowers has all the qualities which go to make a good teacher except generosity and warmth which Thea finds in Harsanyi. In the third part of the novel, "Stupid Faces", Thea is bored with people like the dull good-natured soprano, Mrs. Priest, or a singer like Miss Darcy who is agreeable but, to Thea, lacks the genius of a singer. At the Bowers, Thea met a wealthy young brewer Fred Ottenturg who is very much interested in her and once, detecting a sign of boredom and illness in Thea, invites her to recuperate on his Arizona ranch. Part Four "The Ancient People" opens with her consent to visit Arizona where for the first time she gets a lesson in what tradition can mean to art. She finds an indigenous American civilization as culturally rich as any Europe has to offer. The rancher with whom she is staying tells her about the civilization of the Ancient People and her artistic insight

is achieved as a result of trying to see life through the cliff-dwellers' eyes. This Arizona vacation marks an important crisis in Thea's life; she finally puts her past behind her and decides to go to Germany to study. The civilization of the Cliff-Dwellers makes her feel that she has a higher obligation to perfect herself as an artist in order to give to the world a better insight into the nature of civilization. Also since she cannot marry the man she loves, Fred Ottenborg, because of his estranged and mentally ill wife, a flight to Germany seems the best solution. Part Five, "Doctor Archie's Venture", therefore, reveals how Thea seeks help from Dr. Archie who has encouraged her from the start and who again advances money for her to study in Germany. In the final section of the book, "Kronborg" the reader sees Thea in the full tide of her success. After ten years of residence in Germany, she becomes a great Wagnerian soprano, and returns in triumph to sing at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. The sudden collapse of the principal soprano gives her the chance to take over the part of Sieglinde in Die Walkure that she has for years been dreaming. During her stay in Germany her parents had died. The only friends from Moonstone who witness her great success are Dr. Archie and Spanish Johnny, her Mexican friend, and from Chicago the Harsyanis and Fred Ottenborg who is awaiting the death of his mentally sick wife to marry her. One meets Thea for the last time when she is about to marry Ottenborg, but she does so as a famous career woman and on the understanding that her main energies are to be devoted to her art.

The novel ends with an "Epilogue" in which the reader returns to Moonstone, where Thea's Aunt Tillie, who has been proud of ^{her} niece since childhood and is the last survivor of her family left in town, is basking in the reflected glory of her niece's success.

In writing The Song of the Lark Miss Cather uses the same sort of themes she always used in her early short stories when she dealt with the artists : the development of an artist from humble beginnings in the western frontier to success and fame in cultivated eastern or European society. This time her artist is a singer, moulded after one well-known American singer Olive Fremstad. It was because Miss Cather was writing an article on "Three American Singers" that she was obliged to interview the three famous singers of the time, of whom was Olive Fremstad. From the record of Miss Lewis, Miss Cather's friend, who had long been her companion, one learns that Miss Cather did not interview the singer when they first met because Olive Fremstad was very tired upon her return from a motor ride. Miss Cather saw her again an hour later when she attended the opera. The significant event took place when Olive Fremstad had to sing the role of the soprano who had suddenly been taken ill and, to the greatest surprise of Miss Cather, she did it wonderfully :

She had gone to Fremstad's apartment. ——— waited ——— Fremstad was away on a motor ride, and there was some delay about getting back. Finally she came in, very tired, and began at once to apologize; but she could scarcely speak ——— her voice was just a husky whisper. She was pale, drawn ——— "Why, she

looked forty years old!" Willa Cather told us. She begged Fremstad not to try to talk — said she would come back for the interview another time, and left.

This was all she had time to tell us before the opera began.

The second act of "Tales of Hoffmann" is of course the Venetian scene. The intermission seemed very long, and the audience got very restless. Finally the manager came out before the curtain. The soprano, he announced, had been taken ill, and would be unable to appear; but Mme. Olive Fremstad had kindly consented to sing in her place. Then the curtain went up — and there, before our astonished eyes, was Fremstad — whom Willa Cather had left an hour before — now a vision of dazzling youth and beauty. She sang that night in a voice so opulent, so effortless, that it seemed as if she were dreaming the music, not singing it.

"But it's impossible," Willa Cather kept saying. "It's impossible."²⁰

This is exactly the part Miss Cather assigned to Thea Kronborg at her critical moment of success, taking the role of Sieglinde in Die Walkure. Miss Cather was so delighted with Olive Fremstad in whom she found an artist of a kind that had always given her deep pleasure. She later learnt that Fremstad had been brought to America from Sweden as a small child. Her childhood in Minnesota had been hard, and she had grown up in a crude new country where there was neither artistic stimulus nor discriminating taste. At the age of twelve she had begun to earn her own living by giving piano lessons. She had to fight her own way towards the intellectual centers of the world. In her early twenties she had studied in Germany and she had just turned thirty when Miss Cather heard her soon after she began to sing at the Metropolitan. In her singing Miss Cather found much brain work lying behind the voice. In effect the qualities

one might hope to find in a great artist who came from the frontier. From this brief biography of Clive Fremstad one would not be mistaken in saying that Olive Fremstad and Thea Kronborg were identical.

To anyone who has seen Red Cloud, a little town not far from the Cather's farm in Nebraska, the town to which Miss Cather's family moved after their short stay on the Nebraska farm, Moonstone will seem familiar. The only difference is that Moonstone lies not among farmlands but in the desert; the beauty of the countryside is a desert beauty. Moonstone also has a Mexican settlement which Red Cloud did not have. This combination of a desert landscape and a Mexican colony seem to be especially prepared for Thea and make her immediately feel at home in Arizona where she develops her full artistic temperament. However, in spite of the rural beauty of Moonstone, Thea is as bored with 'that terror of little towns' as Miss Cather is with her Red Cloud. Both therefore have a fierce struggle in their own way, to escape the drabness of the town to get success and fame. To adorn Thea with artistic success, Miss Cather has to make Thea break away from the smug provincial world in which she grew up. Consequently, the story moves from Moonstone to Chicago, to Arizona, to Germany and finally to New York where Thea reaches her highest aim in life. Though this novel is about the development of an artist, it is at the same time like a book of conversion, not to religion, but to art. And to get it Thea has to abandon every human tie including her family, neighbours,

and the men who love her. Thus art means everything and human ties nothing, Miss Cather seems to say. Thea is fully attracted by art when she goes to a symphony concert, the first one she has been to since her arrival in Chicago. This experience suddenly inspires her with new determination:

As long as she lived that ecstasy was going to be hers. She would live for it, work for it, die for it; but she was going to have it, time after time, height after height. She could hear the crash of the orchestra again, and she rose on the brasses. She would have it, what the trumpets were singing! She would have it, have it, ____ it!

During her stay in Chicago especially at the Bowers and at her apartment Thea does not seem to get along well with the others. Even Mr. Bowers, her voice teacher, was surprised and once asked why she hated others so. From her answer one learns that what she hates is the sum total of all the things that tend to drag her down and keep her from becoming the great artist she wants to be. Her strength to achieve arises from the ruthless force of her will and she means to become a great artist at all costs. Considering the way in which Miss Cather has manipulated the plot, one sees that she even rigs her plot against marriage for Thea. Miss Cather seems to think that close relations with the opposite sex prevent the artist from achieving success. This may be a personal reason since Miss Cather herself remained unmarried all her life. There are four men who are interested in Thea but all of them are placed out of bounds for her in one way or another. Ray Kennedy, who is unsuitable because he lacks education, is killed off in a railroad

wreck; Dr. Archie is made considerably older than Thea and is already married to a shrewish wife; Fred Ottenborg, who is of Thea's age has an affair with her and wants to marry her, but is bound to a wife who is hopelessly insane; and the Swedish singer Nordquist, who also wants to marry her, has a wife who will divorce him only upon presentation of a large amount of money, an offer which Thea indignantly refuses; and Thea herself thinks more of her success than of a marriage tie when she confesses to Dr. Archie that she does not think she knows just what love means.²¹ Thea not only renounces the relationship between men and women before she is successful but Miss Cather even has Thea renounce her love for her mother, the only relative who understands her and gives her much encouragement. When the time comes Thea breaks with her as well as with the rest. Much later in the story, Thea refuses to come home from Germany during Mrs. Kronberg's fatal illness because at that time she was given her first chance to play a major operatic role. For this reason the reader may lose this sympathy for Thea, but it makes him realize Miss Cather's point of view that everything must be sacrificed for the sake of artistic success. She has made Thea one of the most aggressive of her heroines.

But what Miss Cather means by art is questionable. For the sake of art she makes her artist sacrifice everything that ordinary human beings crave, yet she herself has difficulty in explaining what art is. From Professor Wunsch in whom she has a chance once more to reveal the

problem of the people of the Old World adjusting themselves to the New World, Thea half-understandingly learns the meaning of art:

Nothing is far and nothing is near, if one desires. The world is little, people are little, human life is little. There is only one big thing—— desire. And before it, when it is big, all is little. It brought Columbus across the sea in a little boat,

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Later he teaches Thea to trust not only in her own will but also in her own spontaneity and passion:

He pulled himself up from his clumsy stoop and folded his arms. "But it is necessary to know if you know somethings. Somethings cannot be taught. If you not know in the beginning you not know in the end. For a singer there must be something in the inside from the beginning... Something they can learn, oh, yes, may-be! But the secret—— what makes the rose to red, the sky to blue, the man to love....."

23

When Ottenburg curiously asks Harsayani what Thea's secret is in making herself an "explosive force" or a "projecting power", Harsayani immediately replies:

"Her secret? It is every artist's secret", he waved his hand —— passion."24

Yet toward the end of the story, Thea's artistic insight is achieved as a result of trying to see life through the cliff dweller's eyes. The artistic process and everyday living, art and life are closely related. From these people Thea learns about how the Ancient People has developed masonry and pottery far beyond any other crafts:

He explained to her how all their customs and ceremonies and their religion went back to water. The men provided the food, but water was the care of the women. The stupid women carried water for most of their lives; the cleverer ones made the vessels to hold it. Their pottery was their most direct appeal to water, the envelope and sheath of the precious element itself. The strongest Indian need was expressed in those graceful jars, fashioned slowly by hand, without the aid of a wheel.....

One morning, as she was standing upright in the pool, splashing water between her shoulder-blades with a big sponge, something flashed through her mind that made her draw herself up and stand still until the water had quite dried upon her flushed skin. The stream and the broken pottery: what was any art but an effort to make a sheath, a mould in which to imprison for a moment the shining, elusive element which is life itself, — life hurrying past us and running away, too strong to stop, too sweet to lose? The Indian women had held it in their jars. In the sculpture she had seen in the Art Institute, it had been caught in a flash of arrested motion. In singing, one made a vessel of one's throat and nostrils and held it on one's breath, caught the stream in a scale of natural intervals.²⁵

Miss Cather's great attempt to develop her artist and to reveal the significance of art is obvious in The Song of the Lark yet the book is not so successful as it should be. Donald Heiney thinks the main flaw of the novel is that the first half is more interesting than the second, that after Thea wins success Thea becomes a little dull, and the author seems in doubt as to what to do with her,²⁶ and this is quite true. Deiches, criticism is that though the abundance of detail gives the book a peculiar strength and richness, the element of "composition" in the novel is not altogether satisfactory.²⁷ Thea criticism is also reasonable. Since Miss Cather's aim is to explain art, she invents unconvincing situations and makes Thea avoid human relationships as much as possible. Her affair with Fred Ottenborg is a distinct example. Thea is not allowed to marry Fred at the

early stage of her career; therefore Fred is given the role of being around to help but not to interfere with her emotional life. He can marry her only when Thea is completely successful. Another reason is that the reader can hardly sympathize with such a rough and aggressive woman as Thea. This feeling leads one to think that Miss Cather may probably want to suggest that there are only two possible attitudes an audience can take toward an artist: total acceptance or total rejection. If this is her suggestion, then Miss Cather is quite successful for if one takes Thea as an ordinary human being, one can hardly be inspired by her character but if one takes her as an artist who devotes herself totally to acquire that which Miss Cather calls art, one is inclined to forgive her for the flaws in her character.

Between 1916-1920, the years following the publication of The Song of the Lark, Miss Cather turned out a few more short stories in which, as in The Song of the Lark, she attempted to show the meaning of art and its triumph. Later she gathered the best of these new stories together with the ones she considered to be the best in her previous volume, The Troll Garden (1905) and published them in a new volume entitled, Youth and the Bright Medusa (1920). The four stories she chose to reprint from The Troll Garden were "A Wagner Matinée", "The Sculptor's Funeral", "Paul's Case" and "A Death in the Desert". The new stories are four: "Coming Aphrodite!", "The Diamond Mine" (1916), "A Gold Slipper" (1917), and "Scandal" (1919). These four stories all deal with art, and there is an interesting link between the first two as well as the last two.

"Coming Aphrodite" is about a love affair between a young painter and a young girl singer whose artistic points of view are completely different. Don Hedger, a twenty-six-year old painter is spending his time, in the seclusion of an old house on the south side of Washington Square, New York, seeking the life of pure original modern art when Eden Bower dashes into his life. She is about to begin her career as an actress. When she first meets him she likes neither him nor his dog but once she gets to know him she is increasingly attracted by his peculiarities. He also finds her strange but delightful and before they realize it, they are unquestionably in love with each other. Later they are linked more closely by physical desire. Unfortunately their love does not last long. They finally quarrel and break off because Eden Bower wants to use her influence with a highly successful but commercialized painter to help her lover, and Don Hedger makes it clear that neither his pride nor his artistic principles will stand for it. Don leaves the apartment and returns five days later to learn that Eden left the place with her rich chaperon from Chicago to seek fame in Europe. Years later, after a successful career in Paris, Eden Bower returns to New York. From a picture dealer she learns that Don Hedger has also achieved fame, he has had great influence on modern art and is much admired and talked about.

This short story is similar to The Song of the Lark in theme: the success of an artist is based on the rejection of human relations. Don Hedger's separation from Eden Bower

is the thing that makes him succeed in his artistic aim in life. With her; he would have been dragged down and become the kind of painter he was contemptuous of. While he looked down upon public opinion and was always experimenting and careful of his art, Eden, just the opposite, used her art primarily as a vehicle for her personality, and was interested in money, fame and success. The two represent different types of artistic personality, each quite strong in his point of view. In their stories, love plays only a small part. They reject each other and separately proceed successfully in their respective careers. When Eden leaves him, Don never once considers lowering his artistic standards in order to accommodate her. Miss Cather seems to regard their separation lightly. Apparently, like Thea Krönborg, an artist in his early stages must not be hindered in his career. The story seems to insist on self-reliance as if Miss Cather were trying to convince herself. In this story also art is indefinable but a true artist always seeks it:

He (Don Hedger) had never been so deeply wounded; he did not know he could be so hurt. He had told his girl all his secrets. On the roof, in these warm, heavy summer nights, with her hands locked in his, he had been able to explain all his misty ideas about an unborn art the world was waiting for; had been able to explain them better than he had ever done himself. 28

In treatment "Coming Aphrodite" is interestingly related to "The Diamond Mine". The former is about success obtained by the rejection of human ties whereas the latter shows what happens to the artist who does not reject. Cressida Garnet, a famous opera singer is exploited by her

family and by three of her four husbands. At nineteen she runs away with Charley Wilton who is a handsome young chair-master in the church in the Ohio town in which she was born. He is a perfect type of hero of a sentimental novel who picturesquely dies of tuberculosis after their blissful year of marriage, leaving her a son and no alternative except to start on an artistic career. Her second husband, whom she married in Germany, is Ransome McChord who objects to her associating with Miletus Poppas, her accompanist and manager, because he supposes her to be having an affair with Poppas. A divorce results when she has to choose Poppas who is indispensable to her success as a "popular favorite" of the concert stage, even though Poppas has become rich because of her career. Her third marriage is with a poor Bohemian violinist Elasmus Bouchalka whom she picks up in an Italian restaurant in New York out of sympathy for him and his adoration for her. This marriage seems successful enough but Bouchalka is becoming so thoroughly domesticated that he is less willing to accompany her out of the country or even out of the house. But one night she discovers him in bed with the Bohemian maid so she sends him packing in the morning. Her fourth husband Jerome Brown, whom she is about to marry as the story begins, is the worst of all. With him Cressida finds that she is perpetually "investing" to save investments. Jerome is after her purely for her money, since he wants to "make a mark on Wall Street". Her tragic death in the "Titanic" saves her from her miserable past and present.

Cressida's personal life suffers because she is caught between the bourgeois and artistic worlds which can never go together. The only man who can reconcile them is Miletus Poppas. He takes her money but unlike the rest, gives her something in return; he has trained her voice and knows how to get her to make the best use of it. The society in which Cressida lives is represented as parasitic and since Cressida cannot reject it, it endangers her self-fulfillment as an artist and destroys her completely:

When she told me she had put a mortgage on the Tenth Street house, her eyes filled with tears. "Why is it? I have never cared about money, except to make people happy with it, and it has been the curse of my life. It has spoiled all my relations with people..."²⁹

In "A Gold Slipper" (1917), Miss Cather attempts to emphasize again the value of art and in "Scandal" which has the same heroine she shows the injustice bestowed upon an artist by selfish society. Kitty Ayshire, an opera singer, has a long discussion in a Pullman car with a Presbyterian coal dealer named Marshall McKann. Mr. McKann was dragged one night by his wife to a concert when Kitty was singing. He had long had a prejudice against the fashion of attending concerts and did not think very highly of the people who called themselves artists. However he could not help being unconsciously attracted by Kitty Ayshire's unusual dress and curious personality. It happened too that Kitty was herself interested in the boring manner of McKann which was conspicuous to her. Later McKann accidentally helped her to reach a station in time in his carriage and they boarded the same

train. Kitty recognized him and fired at him questions as to why he was displeased with her. She got the first answer which criticized the fake audience and the second was his low opinion of her profession. Kitty defends herself admirably making him see that his prejudice was derived from custom-made ones, — the same ones which she herself is a victim of. She proves to him just how wrong he is in believing artists to be light people and art a frivolous and useless waste of time. His arguments are taken up one by one and finally demolished. After Kitty departs, McKann finds her gold slipper in the hammock above his Pullman berth. From then on McKann is pictured as losing all interest in his work but occasionally taking the gold slipper out of his desk and looking at it.

This short story reveals that Miss Cather seems to go too far in placing a little too exaggerated, artists far above ordinary people and ignoring the latter's comments. The idea of leaving McKann with Kitty's gold slipper is in fact to haunt him with the life of beauty he has missed. In McKann, Miss Cather seems to mock the drab and foolish character of the common people and at the same time she makes Kitty Ayshire the defender of a clan, the artists. The conversation between Kitty and McKann is quite interesting but one cannot help feeling that Miss Cather has already prepared a victory for Kitty who places art beyond the reach of ordinary people but within the reach of artists only.

The other Kitty Ayshire story, "Scandal" is somewhat different. This time Kitty is confined to quarters with laryngitis and is visited by the handsome and admiring

Pierce Tavis. They start to talk about the legends which the public loves to build up around her and, after dealing with several rather romantic stories, they come to the one in which Kitty is the victim. A department store millionaire named Sigmund Stein has given the impression that Kitty is his mistress. He is able to do so because he has found a girl named Ruby Mohr who looks very much like Kitty, and, after taking her out of the factory where she worked, has set her up in an apartment, managing to be seen with her at the opere and at various other public places so that people will think that he and Kitty are intimate. This not only gains him social prestige but also serves as a business asset. Finally when Kitty gets to be well enough to expose his trick, Stein drops Ruby, marries a California heiress, and, through another trick, gets Kitty to come and sing at a reception they hold, where she is stared at and whispered about.

In this short story Miss Cather has shown relentlessly how injustice can be done to artists. Another thing she is obviously concerned with is the increasingly commercial character of the modern big city and the victimization of human beings which is one of its results. The Steins can be seen wherever there is a commercial centre. In this treatment Miss Cather sounds very much like Mrs. Wharton who is also aware of the power of the new less refined generation whose rise from Mrs. Wharton's point of view, puts an end to the old aristocratic class and, for Miss Cather, takes away all that might be considered art.

Kitty's last paragraph in the story shows that Miss Cather, like Mrs. Wharton, realizes the hopeless decline and simultaneous increase in power of the less refined:

"If the Steins want to adapt you into their family circle, they'll get you in the end. That's why I don't feel compassionate about your Ruby. She and I are in the same boat. We are both the victims of circumstance, and in New York so many of the circumstances are Steins."³⁰

In all of the fiction dealing with artists Miss Cather's theme is always "the exceptional individual at war with his environment."³¹ There is a war whenever these artistic protagonists do not have enough freedom for self-realization. They are kept in a sort of environment Miss Cather finds discouraging to artistic development, in places like Nebraska or in little towns of the American Middle West. In effect, her artists, like her, are engaged in a search for a civilization which will allow them to develop their talents to the greatest extent. Miss Cather's own life is a struggle of this sort. From this group of her fiction it is definitely clear to her readers that Miss Cather, in this first period, in searching for a civilization, sees such an environment as existed in the world of art. It is therefore quite natural that the world of art should become one of her important themes.

In 1918 Miss Cather again wrote about pioneering life in Nebraska when she wrote My Antonia. Like The Song of the Lark (1915) which is a full development of an artist from a middle-western town, My Antonia suggests the development and self-discovery of a Bohemian girl,

Antonia Shimerda. We are told that Miss Cather fashioned Antonia after Anna Pavelka, a Bohemian woman whom she had known well when they were girls. When Miss Cather paid a visit to Red Cloud in 1916 she met Anna, surrounded by many children, in a farm on the Divide. The encounter gave Miss Cather a sort of flashback of life on the Divide and it seemed to her that Anna's story ran very close to the central stream of life in Red Cloud and on the Divide, that Anna stood for the triumph of what was vigorous, sound and beautiful in a region people thought very little of. This realization must have been felt deeply by Miss Cather because even before her return to New York, she had already begun to write My Antonia.³²

The story is told in the first person by Jim Burden, a childhood friend of the heroine, who is now a legal counsel for one of the great Western railways. It opens with the arrival of Jim Burden, the narrator, at his grandparents' farm in Nebraska. When he was ten, upon the death of his parents, he was sent there from Virginia. This is quite interesting since Miss Cather, too, had come from Virginia to Nebraska as a child. The Shimerdas arrive from Bohemia at the same time to settle on a crude neighboring farm. Their ill-kept sod house is a sad contrast to the fine wooden house of Jim's grandparents. The Shimerdas are the first Bohemian family to come to that part of the country. Their inability to speak English makes it all the more difficult for them to adjust themselves to the new country in which they are immigrants. Mr. Shimerda who

knows nothing about farming since in the old country he was a skilled workman on tapestries and upholstery materials and a musician, is completely lost in this rough new country. He becomes melancholy, lives in the past, loses the will to adjust, and ends by committing suicide. Mrs. Shimerda, who had hoped for greater opportunities for her son Ambrosch and had thus forced her husband to emigrate to this new world, is less refined and coarser than her husband. She, however, fights her way along until, with the assistance of neighbors, her situation improves. Of all her four children, the only one with a rich personality is Antonia. The Shimerdas are sold bad land and have the hardest struggle during the first year of their farming career. Had it not been for the assistance of the Burdens they would not have survived their first winter in Nebraska. Jim and Antonia are thus thrown together from the beginning. Together they explore the countryside and learn to know and love the Nebraska plains. In this part of the story Miss Cather contrives to bring out different aspects of the Nebraska scene and atmosphere with impressive descriptions.

Mr. Shimerda had hoped to see Antonia get a good American education, but after his death Antonia, like Alexandra in O Pioneers!, is forced to assume the burden of the farm work. Her splendid energy and optimism carry her through this ordeal and she is at her best when struggling against the challenge of the soil. The first section of My Antonia ends with a brilliant summer scene when Antonia and Jim watch an electric storm from the

slanting roof of the Burdens' chicken house.

After three years on the farm Jim and his grandparents wove to the clean, well-planted little prairie town of Black Hawk. Antonia also comes to Black Hawk, being hired by the Harlings, the family who lives nextdoor to the Burdens' new home. This section is therefore curiously switched from the country to town when life in the small prairie town is described to reveal the contrast between country and town life. Here Miss Cather does not want only to show the liveliness and ability of the immigrant daughters through Antonia alone but also through some other daughters of the immigrant farmers, mostly Swedish, in the country round about who, like Antonia, have come into town to get positions as maids and thereby help their families to improve their economic position. Jim and Antonia (Tony) are reunited again to move happily in these humble circles, whose **healthy gaiety** contrasts sharply with the stuffy conventionality of American townspeople. In this section while Antonia is successful in her service, Jim moves on with his schooling before leaving for the University of Nebraska.

In the third section of the novel, one loses sight of Antonia almost completely. This section deals with Jim Burden at the University of Nebraska, his mild affair with Lena Lingard, one of the Swedish farm girls Jim knew, who has come to the city and set up as a dressmaker. It also deals with his studies at Harvard. The center of interest in this section is Jim and his development.

In the fourth section Jim, going home from Harvard for the summer vacation, learns of Antonia's fate. She had fallen in love with Larry Donovan, a railroad conductor and gone off to Denver to marry him but he did not marry her, for, unknown to her, he had already lost his job, and he ran off to Mexico leaving her pregnant. Disillusioned, Antonia went back to the country, subdued but determined to work once again on the land. Jim learns all the details, including the birth of Antonia's baby, from Mrs. Stevens, who rents the Burdens' old farm. He goes out to see Antonia and finds her in the fields, shocking wheat. He finds her thinner and **overworked**: but there is a new kind of strength and Jim wonders how, after so many happenings in her life, she can look so young. Antonia tells him that she would always be miserable in a city. The Nebraska fields where she and Jim ran about as children are the places where she most enjoyed herself. They talk about their childhood and old happiness and Jim concludes that her European inheritance is an important factor in her success in life.

The final section takes place twenty years later, when Jim returns to the scenes of his childhood and visits Antonia. Very soon after his previous visit Jim had heard of her from time to time and learnt that she had married a Bohemian named Cuzak and that they had a large family. Jim was also married but had no children. During these long years he kept thinking of Antonia but dreading what time might have done to her, he kept putting off coming to see her. It is not until he is assured by Lena Lingard of

Antonia's perfect happiness that he decides to see Antonia again. When he visits her, surrounded by a large family, he can see at once that Antonia has found her proper function as a housewife and mother on a Nebraska farm.

My Antonia is the most famous of Miss Cather's prairie novels and is generally considered to be her best. Compared with O Pioneers!, this novel puts much less emphasis on pioneering but focuses more attention on the quality of life on the plains. The earlier book had shown that life on the farm lacks the things essential to civilized existence. But in the later work especially in My Antonia, all that anyone could ever hope for is pictured as being found on a farm. One important characteristic is the affirmation of human ties which Miss Cather denies very strongly in her artist stories and though Alexandra in O Pioneer! finally gets married, it is not until after the book's ending; but in this novel Antonia's great achievement and the chief subject of the book is the founding of a family.

My Antonia has an interesting and rather unusual prologue. In it Miss Cather pretends to meet Jim Burden on the train where they have a long conversation about their past experiences on the Divide. Both find that their conversation often turns to a Bohemian girl they know so well and hence agree that each will set down on paper his impressions of that girl, Antonia. When they meet again, it is Jim who has written something and the remaining part of the book is his manuscript which consists, really, of Antonia's and his parallel stories. Thereafter Miss Cather drops

completely out of the story. But though Miss Cather has told the story through the eyes and the words of Jim Burden, there is considerable autobiography in this novel. She gives to Jim Burden the exact sequence of experience she had had on the Divide, in Red Cloud, (in the story it is Eleck Hawk) where she attended high school after her family had settled after retiring, and later in Lincoln where she attended the state university and lastly in the east where she worked, as Jim Burden does in the novel. One may easily conclude that Jim Burden is definitely Miss Cather herself.

The title of the book leads one to think that it is a novel with a single protagonist—Antonia—and the narrator is relatively unimportant. But once one finishes the book, Jim Burden's part is too completely presented to be considered insignificant. He centers into the story all the time. In the early part of the book the Burden family continually supports the Shimerdas; later on there is a long section in which Jim attends the University of Nebraska and flirts with Lena Lingard when Antonia scarcely appears and even in the last parts of the book where Antonia and Jim appear together, Jim's reactions to events are as important as hers. One sees at once that the center of interest shifts back and forth between Jim and Antonia; therefore if one studies the book as the story of parallel lives, the novel tends to be better understood. Miss Cather herself must have realized this for in giving the novel a title one notices that she does not call it "Antonia" but My Antonia which gives the author wider scope and the chance to treat

the story of a relationship rather than that of an individual.

The principle on which this parallel story is constructed is that of development by contrasts. For in spite of early childhood experiences shared together, Antonia's life and Jim's are radically different. Antonia comes to Nebraska as an immigrant to meet all the hardships including the language barrier, but Jim has no such problems. Antonia's parents are completely inferior to Jim's grandparents as homemakers. The Shimerdas suffer for many years from poverty while the Burdens never have to face this difficulty. As a result Jim can leave home to get the highest education but Antonia is so burdened with farm work that she does not even have time to learn English properly. Finally Jim leaves Nebraska for good to make his home in a large Eastern city where he has an unhappy and childless marriage; Antonia stays on in Nebraska and after being deceived by her first lover succeeds in marrying and in founding a large family of eleven children by the time Jim comes back to visit her twenty years later. When the story ends like this, it suggests definitely that though their lives are almost equally given extensive treatment, it is Antonia who has achieved the real success. This is clearly emphasized by Jim's obvious admiration for Antonia and by the fact that all the significant action takes place in Nebraska: the early years are heavily stressed. Thus from this stress, the reader sees clearly Miss Cather's acute nostalgia.

The characterization of Antonia's father, Mr. Shimerda, shows that Miss Cather is always aware of the older European

civilization which, though a cause of lack of adjustment for the older generation like Mr. Shimerda's contributes to the younger generation's — like Antonia's — success. Antonia's devotion to her father indicates her appreciation of his old world values which Miss Cather finds lacking in Americans:

"He's been dead all these years," Antonia tells Jim, "and yet he is more real to me than almost anybody else. He never goes out of my life. I talk to him and consult him all the time. The older I grow, the better I know him and the more I understand him."³³

Miss Cather's curiosity and admiration of the immigrants who inherit so many of the old world values are great. She was impatient with the lack of curiosity of her family and other native American groups toward these immigrants. In her essay on Nebraska, written more than twenty-five years after she had left for the East she says:

Unfortunately, their American neighbors were seldom open-minded enough to understand the Europeans, or to profit by their older traditions. Our settlers from New England, cautious and convinced of their own superiority, kept themselves isolated as much as possible from the South — from Missouri, Kentucky, the two Virginias — were provincial and utterly without curiosity. They were kind neighbors — lent a hand to help a Swede when he was sick or in trouble. But I am quite sure that Knut Hamsun might have worked a year for any of our Southern farmers, and his employer would never have discovered that there was anything unusual about the Norwegian. A New England settler might have noticed that his chore-boy had a kind of intelligence, but he would have distrusted and stonily disregarded it.³⁴

For this reason, through Jim Burden, the daughters of the immigrant are presented vividly. Their healthy gaiety

is sharply contrasted with the narrow stuffiness of the native Americans:

I can remember a score of these, country girls who were in service in Black Hawk during the few years I lived there, and I can remember something unusual and engaging about each of them. Physically they were almost a race apart, and out-of-door work had given them a vigor which, when they got over their first shyness on coming to town, developed into a positive carriage and freedom of movement,³⁵ and made them conspicuous among Black Hawk women.

Miss Cather even believes that it is the imaginative immigrant and not the stuffy conventional American who is responsible for the country's greatness. This feeling recurs, as here, again and again in her novels:

The daughters of Black Hawk merchants had a confident, unenquiring belief that they were "refined" and that the country girls, who "worked out", were not. The American farmers in our country were quite as hard-pressed as their neighbours from other countries. All alike had come to Nebraska with little capital and no knowledge of the soil they must subdue. All had borrowed money on their land. But no matter in what straits the Pennsylvanian or Virginian found himself, he would not let his daughters go out into service. Unless his girls could teach in a country school, they sat at home in poverty.

The Bohemian and Scandinavian girls could not get positions as teachers, because they had no opportunity to learn the language. Determined to help in the struggle to clear the homestead from debt, they had no alternative but to go into service ... But everyone of them did what she had set out to do, and sent home those hard-earned dollars. The girls I knew were always helping to pay for ploughs and reapers, brood-sows, or steers to fatten.

One result of this family solidarity was that the foreign farmers in our country were the first to become prosperous. After the fathers were out of debt, the daughters married the sons of neighbours — usually of like nationality — and the girls who once worked in Black Hawk kitchens are to-day managing big farms and fine families of their own; their children are better off than the children of the town women they used to serve.

I thought the attitude of the town people toward these girls very stupid. If I told my

schoolmates that Lena Lingard's grandfather was a clergyman, and much respected in Norway, they looked at me blankly. What did it matter? All foreigners were ignorant people who couldn't speak English... they were all Bohemians, all "hired girls".³⁶

The central theme of Miss Cather's My Antonia is the development of both Antonia and Jim, the heroine and hero, by contrasting their lives and destiny. Apart from this the author shows her admiration of the old world through Mr. Shimerda and the daughters of the immigrants. Another problem in My Antonia is the evil and suffering in life, which gives the book emotional depth. It is noticeable that the hard side of life is presented in several inset stories studded here and there through out the novel. From these little stories Miss Cather seems to divide the causes of suffering into three categories: natural evil, man-made evil inflicted by other people and self-inflicted evil, which deprive men of their happiness.

By natural evil one means the cruelty of nature that one meets everywhere on the frontier. The struggle of the Shimerdas against the cold of winter and the hardness of the land is the major example. A minor example is seen in the adventurous story of Jim when he kills a great rattlesnake while roaming the country. On the frontier, one has to pit oneself against natural forces, Miss Cather seems to say, and one either succeeds or fails. Sometimes one proves oneself a man by overcoming natural forces and sometimes it is the forces of nature which triumph over man.

Man-made evil inflicted by other persons is more complicated and suggests a theme of victimization.

The Shimerdas are sold bad land and a deplorable sod house at a high price by their fellow countryman, a Bohemian Krajeck. Another disgusting example is the story of Wick Cutter, the Black Hawk money lender who fastens like a bloodsucker upon the poverty-stricken farmers of the neighborhood. The devilish Wick makes his marriage a hell on earth and as he grows older he continually quarrels with his wife over the disposal of his estate should she survive him. He is afraid that, since they have no children, his property will go to her "people", whom he hates. He finally solves the problem melodramatically by murdering her and then shooting himself an hour later, after firing a shot out the window to insure the presence of witnesses to testify to the fact that he had survived his wife and that therefore any will she might have made would be invalid. A more telling example can be found in Antonia's elopement with a Larry Donovan who calls himself a ladies' man and deserts Antonia within a very short time leaving her pregnant.

Despair or self-inflicted evil which generally has suicide as its logical result is another kind of man-made evil which makes the bitterness of prairie life even more distressing. The best example is the suicide of Mr. Shimerda, the details of which are handled briefly but expressively: when he can stand things no longer, he washes with hot water, dresses in clean clothes, and goes out to the barn where he puts the barrel of a gun in his mouth and pulls the trigger. Another minor example of despair and self-destruction is mentioned in an interesting anecdote, having to do with a tramp who arrives in the Norwegian settlement during harvest

time. He comes up to a crew running a threshing machine and remarks to Antonia, who is one of them:

"The ponds in this country is done got so low a man couldn't drownd himself in one of 'em." 27

After Antonia told him nobodies wanted to drown themselves, but if they did not have rain soon they would have to pump water for the cattle, the tramp offers to help run the threshing machine, and after cutting bands for a few minutes, jumps into the hopper. By the time they get the machine stopped, he is cut to pieces.

The study of My Antonia would be incomplete, if the excellence of rural life were not pointed out since everything in the novel leads up to the final section in which Antonia has become the mistress of a large and fertile farm. Miss Cather's full appreciation of spring, of the fruition of the soil, that spring has brought, is beautifully written:

When spring came, after that hard winter, one could not get enough of the nimble air. Every morning I wakened with a fresh consciousness that winter was over. There were none of the signs of spring for which I used to watch in Virginia, no budding woods or blooming gardens. There was only——spring itself; the throb of it, the light restlessness, the vital scene of it everywhere: in the pale sunshine, and in the warm, high wind—— rising suddenly, sinking suddenly, impulsive and playful like a big puppy that pawed you and then lay down to be petted. If I had been tossed down blindfold on that red prairie, I should have known that it was spring. 38

With July came the brilliant heat which makes the plain of Kansas and Nebraska the best corn country in the world:

It seemed as if we could hear the corn growing in the night, under the stars one caught a faint

crackling in the dewy, heavy-odoured cornfields where the feathered stalk stood so juicy and green... The cornfields were far apart in those times, with miles of wild grazing land between. It took a clear, meditative eye like my grandmother's to foresee that they would enlarge and multiply until they would be, not the Shimerda's cornfields, or Mr. Bushy's but the world's cornfields.....³⁹

But it is not only the land that Miss Cather is celebrating. It is the land with people in it. The final achievement of her heroine is the setting up of a family. When Jim pays her a visit in the final chapter of the novel, Antonia does not disappoint him: she has become old and battered but her vitality is undiminished. Hers is definitely a happy family. It is clear that love is the tie that binds them all together. Antonia is still a child of nature. She has lived on the land and gains her strength from the land. The land under her hand brings forth the rich corn crops and Antonia herself has brought forth large family closely united by ties of love. John H. Randall III has given an interesting comment on Antonia, calling her the ancients' goddess of agriculture:

In the middle of this earthly paradise stand its Eve, the now victorious Antonia. She has triumphed over adversity and over nature; she has wrestled with life and imposed an order on it, her order, just as she has wrestled with life and imposed an order on it, her order, just as she has imposed order on the wilderness of Nebraska by converting part of it into a fruitful farm with a garden at its center. In her double role as founder of a prosperous farm and progenitor of a thriving family she becomes the very symbol of fertility, and reminds us of Demeter or Ceres of old,.....⁴⁰

In spite of the apparent success of My Antonia, it is often said to have one defect: it is studded with many other stories and other incidents that have little to do with

Antonia or Jim. But those stories and incidents are so absorbing that one is likely to overlook the fact that they are not an organic part of the whole. For example these are episodes in this first part of the book that have little if any relation to the story of Antonia's development--the story of the two Russians, Peter and Pavel. Mr. Shimerda, who could understand their language, made friends with them, but soon afterward Pavel died, and on his deathbed he told the terrible story of how as a young man in Russia he had thrown a bride off a sledge to the pursuing wolves in order to save himself from certain death. This is a remarkable little inset story, but its relation to the novel is somewhat uncertain. Should My Antonia be judged as a novel? Jim Burden or Miss Cather herself seems to have answered this question in the introduction to the story:

I didn't take time to arrange it; I simply wrote down pretty much all that her name recalls to me. I suppose it hasn't any form. It hasn't any title either.

For this reason, it is clear that My Antonia should not be considered completely as a novel. It has, of course, a central theme: the development of Antonia from Jim Burden's point of view; but on the whole the book is written purposely to narrate any interesting incident or anything that impressed the author deeply during her childhood in Nebraska. The reader is consequently presented with various accounts of both people and places that have little connection with the central theme of the story. The Harling family, for example, where Antonia works as a hired girl is vividly

described to show the lively atmosphere which suits the taste and gaiety of Antonia:

Except when the father was at home, the Harling house was never quiet. Mrs. Harling and Nina and Antonia made as much noise as a houseful of children, and there was usually somebody at the piano. Julia was the only one who was held down to regular hours of practising, but they all played. When Frances came home at noon, she played until dinner was ready. When Sally got back from school, she sat down in her hat and coat and drummed the plantation melodies that Negro minstrel troupes brought to town. Even Nina played the Swedish Wedding March.

Or consider the writing of this beautiful winter scene:

If I (Jim) loitered on the playground after school, or went to the post-office for the mail and lingered to hear the gossip about the cigar-stand, it would be growing dark by the time I came home. The sun was gone; the frozen streets stretched long and blue before me; the lights were shining pale in kitchen windows, and I could smell the suppers, cooking as I passed. Few people were abroad, and each one of them was hurrying toward a fire. The glowing stoves in the houses were like magnets. When one passed an old man, one could see nothing of his face but a red nose sticking out between a frosted beard and a long plush cap. The young men capered along with their hands in their pockets, and sometimes tried a slide on the icy sidewalk. The children, in their bright hoods and comforters, never walked, but always ran from the moment they left their door, beating their mittens against their sides. When I got as far as the Methodist church, I was about halfway home. I can remember how glad I was when there happened to be a light in the church, and the painted glass window shone out at us as we came along the frozen street. In the winter bleakness a hunger for colour came over people, like the Laplander's craving for fats and sugar. Without knowing why, we used to linger on the sidewalk outside the church when the lamps were lighted early for choir practice or prayer meeting, shivering and talking until our feet were like lumps of ice. The crude reds and greens and blues of that coloured glass held us there. 41

And so interesting are the scenes at the Boys' Home, so lively are the Saturday night dances in the tent set up on

the vacant lot and so moving is the blind Negro pianist playing at the hotel in Black Hawk that the reader becomes absorbed in the story and fascinated by the descriptions. The primary consideration then is not whether My Antonia is or is not a novel, but that it is an extremely effective story.

CHAPTER IV
HER FICTION FROM 1922 - 1926

In her novels and short stories dealing with artists, Miss Cather has already made a bitter criticism of the prairie culture: it cannot understand the artistic soul; thus the artists rebel against or reject their drab prairie life. The theme of rejection is also treated in One of Ours but this time it is the rejection of the modern world in the form of a small town that grows up on the margin of the great farm settlements. In O Pioneers! and My Antonia there is at least the primitive strength that compensates for the defect of the prairie but in the modern small town there are only smugness and commercial shrewdness. If there is contentment, it is only with material things that Miss Cather always looks upon. Therefore in writing this novel Miss Cather depicts the decline of the pioneering age.

A nineteen-year-old Nebraskan, Claude Wheeler, son of a rich farmer, feels that his environment is unsatisfactory. His father is jolly and easy-going but to Claude, he is severe and insensitive. His brother Bayliss is a materialistic farm-machinery salesman who seems to Claude the personification of all that is sordid and dismal in the world. The only people in his family whom Claude loves are his understanding and sympathetic mother and the illiterate but cheerful and wise hired woman, Mahailey. Claude never gets along well with his father whose jokes he finds unbearable. Being a sensitive boy he gets pleasure from good manners and sensible conversation and can hardly forgive anybody or anything that is presented in an ugly form. He always wants his father to be the most dignified man in the community in which Mr. Wheeler is certainly already the handsomest and most intelligent man, but his father considers Claude's sensitiveness a sign of snobbish pride so he often purposely outrages Claude to harden him. Claude's younger brother, Ralph, is docile, quiet but full of mischief and always escapes trouble. His mother is good-natured and kind but she is so old-fashioned, so trusting and childlike, so faithful by nature and so ignorant of

life that it is hopeless to argue with her. Claude wants to go to State University where he believes he will find a more aesthetic environment, but he can never make his family understand his desire and temperament. At home Claude has an Austrian friend, Ernest Havel, who is free-thinking, realistic and practical. Because of his family's objection Claude has to continue his studies in Lincoln at Temple College which is dominated by narrow-minded preachers, but he tries, without his family's knowing it, to take a history course at State University. During this time he gets to know Julius Erlich, a German student, who takes him home to meet his clever mother. In the Erlich home, Claude finds much satisfaction and is thrilled by its atmosphere of freedom and independence. There he can speak freely, a thing he can never do at home.

Coming home once during the vacation, Claude finds his house all the more unbearable. He excitedly tells his mother about the Erlichs, but she is more interested in hearing about the dull, pious Chapins whom Claude is lodging with. At college Claude was once attracted by a girl, Miss Millmore, but soon found her too kind-hearted. Claude is doing well in his studies when he is called back to manage the affairs of the farm since Mr. Wheeler and Ralph happen to get another farm in Colorado and have to work there most of the time. This necessitates his giving up the only stimulating contact he had made during his college days, his friendship with the cultivated and artistic Erlich family.

When Claude is put in charge of the farm, he works hard so that he will not have any time to grow restless. He is glad to be so tired at night that he cannot think. But however hard he works in the spring and summer, the inactivity of the winter brings back his restlessness. Once he visits Lincoln and the Erlichs over Thanksgiving, but the visit only renews all his old discontent. Claude knows, and everybody else knows, seemingly, that there is something wrong with him and he is unable to conceal his discontent. His father thinks he is one of those visionary fellows who make unnecessary difficulties for themselves and other

people. His mother thinks that the trouble with him is that he has not found his Saviour. Bayliss believes that Claude is a moral rebel. His neighbours like him, but they laugh at him and say it is a good thing his father is well off. Meanwhile the materialistic Bayliss is running around with Gladys Farmer, Claude's old high school friend. Gladys is a poor school teacher whose love of the arts makes her the best musician in town. She also has a habit of spending more money on pretty clothes and concerts than her neighbors think she has a right to. Claude is not satisfied with the courtship of Bayliss and Gladys. He knows that Bayliss has nothing to offer Gladys except his money. He senses that Gladys and he have similar values which are certainly quite incomprehensible to Bayliss. Therefore Claude resents Gladys's acceptance of Bayliss' attentions.

Though Claude tries in every way to accept his lot, he finds no outlet for his frustration; so he persuades himself that he is in love with the religious Enid Royce. Enid is a daughter of a wealthy miller, Mr. Jason Royce, who has succeeded in bringing up only two daughters out of five. Enid's elder sister, Caroline, has gone to China as a missionary. Mrs. Royce is preoccupied with vegetarianism and always gives the family meagre meals. In general, the people think the mill house damp and unwholesome. Enid seems to be more like other people. She is lively and beautiful. Before proposing to Enid, Claude first approaches her father. Mr. Royce, after warning Claude, consents to the marriage, hoping that Claude will help to decrease the missionary motives in Enid. The one who is most sorry to hear of Claude's marriage to Enid is Gladys. She has hoped to see Claude, with his aesthetic sensitivity, rise above all others in the town but his marriage to Enid will put an end to this hope since, knowing Enid well, Gladys knows Enid has nothing to offer Claude in cultivating his sensibility. What follows is as bad as Gladys has foreseen. Claude makes the mistake of marrying Enid who is excessively religious and who is more interested in prohibition work and entertaining preachers than she is in her husband. Their

honeymoon is tragically strange: Enid pushes Claude out of their train compartment on their wedding night because she says she has eaten too much cold salad and is indisposed. After marriage she spends most of her time traveling around the countryside attending meetings of the Anti-Saloon League, leaving her husband to get his own meals and neglecting him generally. Finally she leaves him for an indefinite period to nurse her sick missionary sister in China and Claude goes back to live with his family.

There is no sign of sorrow when Enid departs, but Claude goes on with his quest for values which he can never find at home. The First World War helps him to make up his mind more easily. When America finally enters the war, Claude enlists, and after his training, goes over to France with a commission. He has a feeling that the war has finally thrown down the restricting walls of his environment, and he leaves for Europe in a spirit of high adventure. Before he leaves, he visits Gladys for the last time and finally admits his fears about her and Bayliss, but Gladys does not think that she will ever be able to marry Bayliss because she has always admired Claude and cannot disappoint ^{him}. Moreover, Gladys realizes her own nature; marriage to Bayliss would be uninspiring.

Claude has not been long in France before he meets a character who plays the part of the Erlichs or Gladys in the earlier part of the novel. This is Lieutenant David Gerhardt, an American who studied the violin in Paris before the war. Gerhardt introduces Claude to islands of French civilization in the midst of the confusion and destruction of war. Claude feels that he at last has found the kind of life he has been constantly searching for. This part of the story is full of incidents and variety; the scenes alternate between the front battle line, the French countryside, and the homes of French families, all of which help to indicate Claude's development. But at the end of the story both Claude and Gerhardt are killed while serving in the front line. Mrs. Wheeler receives the news of her son's death sadly, but she knows that Claude died happily:

... for him the call was clear, the cause was glorious. Never a doubt stained his bright faith. ... how fully he must have found his life before he could let himself go so far — he, who was so afraid of being fooled! He died believing his own country better than it is, and France better than any country can ever be. And those were beautiful beliefs to die with. Perhaps it was as well to see that vision, and then to see no more.¹

In "Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle", Miss Cather has interestingly written about the turning point of the pioneers:

In Nebraska, as in so many other states, we must face the fact that the splendid story of the pioneers is finished, and that no new story worthy to take its place has yet begun. The generation that subdued the wild land and broke up the virgin prairie is passing, but it is still there, a group of rugged figures in the background which inspire respect, compel admiration. With these old men and women the attainment of material prosperity was a moral victory, because it was wrung from hard conditions, was the result of a struggle that tested character. They can look out over those broad stretches of fertility and say: "We made this, with our backs and hands." The sons, the generation now in middle life, were reared amid hardships, and it is perhaps natural that they should be very much interested in material comfort, in buying whatever is expensive and ugly. Their fathers came into a wilderness and had to make everything, had to be as ingenious as shipwrecked sailors. The generation now in the driver's seat hates to make anything, wants to live and die in an automobile, scudding past those acres where the old men used to follow the long corn-rows up and down. They want to buy everything ready-made: clothes, food, education, music, pleasure. Will the third generation — the full-blooded, joyous one just coming over the hill -- will it be fooled? Will it believe that to live easily is to live happily?²

This is Willa Cather's picture of the changed Middle West in which her brand new protagonist finds himself in One of Ours. It is a country in which the agrarian dream is destroyed because man values the artificial products of the machine above the natural products of the soil. In effect, Miss Cather believes that with the approach of the machine age, man sacrifices beauty to novelty.

The general tone of Middle Western society in Claude's day is symbolized by his brother, Bayliss Wheeler. Miss Cather seems to make him the successor of the pioneer settlers of the previous novels. He is not strong enough to deal with heavy farm work, moves into town and opens a business there, devoting his life to buying and selling rather than to producing. His only interest in life is making money. During the early part of the First World War, he shows himself a pacifist and thinks that America should not have any part in the war, but would find it more profitable to be a by-stander. He is always contemptuous toward learning and art and all the finer things in life. He does not see any importance in his brother's yearning to go to State University and once when he hears of Julius Erlich who wants to go to Europe to do graduate work, he contemptuously asks if it is because of Julius's poor health. Bayliss seems to stand for everything Miss Cather dislikes in the modern commercial generation: the single-minded greed, the desire for money-making only.

Miss Cather also sees the Middle West as yielding to the slowly advancing blight of the machine. She believed that machinery pushed aside many tangibles and intangibles representing social ritual, education and culture:

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.³

Nearly every time Claude went into the cellar (which was filled with machinery junked by the Wheeler household), he made a desperate resolve to clear the place out some day, reflecting bitterly that the money this wreckage cost would have put a boy through college decently.⁴

And she not only objects to the farmer's spending money on machines and machine-made articles but also objects to the unfairness of the exchange of the farmer's products of the best quality for machine-made articles of poor quality:

The farmer raised and took to market things with an intrinsic value; wheat and corn as good as

could be grown anywhere in the world, hogs and cattle that were the best of their kind. In return he got manufactured articles of poor quality: showy furniture that went to pieces, carpets and draperies that faded, clothes that made a handsome man look like a clown. Most of his money was paid out for machinery, — and that, too, went to pieces. A steam thrasher didn't last long; a horse outlived three automobiles.⁵

Sometimes, through Claude Wheeler, one senses Miss Cather's anger with people who have been so blinded by the new materials that they completely forget the value of some old practices that mean much to the spirit:

Claude felt sure that when he was a little boy and all the neighbors were poor, they and their houses and farms had more individuality. The farmers took time then to plant fine cottonwood groves on their places, and to set osage orange hedges along the borders of their fields. Now these trees were all being cut down and grubbed up. Just why, nobody knew; they impoverished the land ... they made the snow drift ... nobody had them any more. With prosperity came a kind of callousness; everybody wanted to destroy the old things they used to take pride in. The orchards, which had been nursed and tended so carefully twenty years ago, were now left to die of neglect. It was less trouble to run into town in an automobile and buy fruit than it was to raise it.

The people themselves had changed. He could remember when all the farmers in this community were friendly toward each other, now they were continually having lawsuits. Their sons were either stingy, or extravagant and lazy, and they were always stirring up trouble. Evidently, it took more intelligence to spend money than to make it.⁶

Caught in this kind of community, Claude realizes that imaginative and aesthetic growth is impossible. His quest must therefore be continued since he feels that something is missing from his life. Thus he has to depart for Europe where he expects to find the finer ^{things} in life. Here the novel is broken into the second part and Miss Cather is able to bring in the impact of the First World War on the people of her generation. The War also served as a means to enable Claude to find the value in the French culture and countryside he has long searched for.

The First World War came as a profound shock to Miss Cather just as it had to Mrs. Wharton. At first she could not believe the German atrocities and this is seen in One of Ours when the Wheelers cannot reconcile the atrocity stories they have heard about Belgium's invasion by Germany with their peace-loving and industrious German neighbors. Claude reflects:

He had always been taught that the German people were pre-eminent in the virtues Americans most admire; a month ago he would have said they had all the ideals a decent American boy would fight for. The invasion of Belgium was contradictory to the German character as he knew it in his friends and neighbors. He still cherished the hope that there had been some great mistake; that this splendid people would apologize and right itself with the world.⁷

But as the novel develops the Middle Westerners are gradually aware of the European war and its impact on the lives of people in America. They come to believe that not only their economic welfare but their civilization itself is at stake.

It should be noticed that in painting army life, Miss Cather has to use second-hand information which makes the novel less interesting. She has to compensate for this defect with the description of French culture and the French countryside. To do this she has to produce one interesting character, David Gerhardt, who introduces Claude for the first time to music, French culture and the beauties of French provincial life. By this device Miss Cather can take her protagonist back to the main theme of the story because it is through the things introduced by David that Claude finds what he has missed. He has, at last, found in France what he has always missed in Nebraska. Thus his death, following right after the discovery, seems a natural sacrifice. If Frederick J. Hoffman is right in his interpretation, it is also a logical conclusion of the story:

If one must die, death should have meaning; it should be suffered not as a leave-taking from things one despises but as a sacrifice for things one loves.⁸

Is Hoffman's interpretation too far-fetched? Could it be simply that Claude could never have returned to Nebraska? He once said that he would like to continue to live in France which offered him an ideal life, but he himself knew that this was impossible. To return home would mean to go back to the former life he had run away from. So, it is better to die having had a glimpse of the best life has to offer than to live a long life of frustration. If this interpretation is correct, this novel, therefore, has a happy ending.

Miss Cather made One of Ours a sort of prelude to reveal the decline of the pioneers as seen in a town at the edge of the farming area. In A Lost Lady the pioneers are destroyed completely by the materialistic newcomers belonging to the third generation, next to Alexandra in O Pioneers or Antonia in My Antonia. A Lost Lady is the story of Marian Forrester as seen largely through the eyes of Niel Herbert who has known her since his boyhood. When Niel first knew her, she was the wife of Captain Daniel Forrester, a famous railroad man, a contractor who had built hundreds of miles of road for the Burlington railroad company. His house at Sweet Water, one of the towns along the Burlington railroad, was very famous and well known for its hospitality and for a certain charm of atmosphere. The Forrester place is made even warmer by the charming, good-natured Mrs. Forrester who was twenty-five years younger than her husband. The Captain met her by accident: he rescued her when she was being chased by a new bull. He was attracted by her liveliness and after the marriage in California, brought her to the Sweet Water home where they were famous for their gracious hospitality. Niel got involved with Mrs. Forrester the first time when he, at the age of twelve, with a group of boys, asked for permission to picnic in the marsh of the Forrester's compound. Their pleasant picnic was spoiled by the intrusion of a cruel and arrogant nineteen-year-old, Ivy Peters, who boasted that he and Mrs. Forrester were equal so there was no need to be afraid of her. Later, to the boy's horror, he split the eyes of a live woodpecker with his tiny razor blade and let it fly with a corkscrew

motion until it finally caught on the limb of a tree. Niel could not stand this. He meant to go up the tree to get the poor creature and kill it to put it out of its misery, but in doing so he had an accident. Ivy Peters, yearning to see the Forrester place, carried Niel who was unconscious to Mrs. Forrester. Mrs. Forrester knew Niel well because he was the nephew of Judge Pommeroy, the Captain's lawyer, and a friend of all the great men who visited the Forresters. Niel worshipped his uncle because he was bored with the drab environment of his own home.

As years went by the town of Sweet Water declined. Successive crop failures had broken the spirit of the farmers. Many of the people, including Niel's father, who had come to seek a fortune in the west, went back to the east but Niel stayed on to read law in the office of his uncle. It was not because he liked this profession very much but because he loved to live in a pleasanter environment. With his uncle, he grew into a fine but rather reserved young man, intending to remain a bachelor like his uncle. Meanwhile things did not go well with Captain Forrester. He had an accident which forced him to quit his work as a roadbuilder. His place, with the changing of the town, became less popular. The Forresters still went away for the winter, but each year the period of their absence grew shorter. Niel still had high respect and deep admiration for Mrs. Forrester. One day she asked him to dinner to help her entertain Constance Ogden, a young lady of nineteen, whom Niel found not at all interesting. He was, instead, interested in another guest, the notorious Frank Ellinger, a bachelor of forty whose devotion to his mother helped to restore his good reputation. Niel could not decide whether he liked the man or not. To him, Frank Ellinger seemed cheerful but there was something in his manner that made Niel distrust him. Niel's distrust of Frank Ellinger was better founded than he knew because the scene between Mrs. Forrester and Ellinger was accidentally witnessed by Adolph Blum when the two went on a sleigh ride together, but Blum was so thrilled by Mrs. Forrester's perpetually kind treatment of him that he was willing to

keep it a secret. The close contact between Judge Pommeroy and the Captain gave Niel a chance to know Mrs. Forrester better, and he was increasingly impressed by her. Yet he began to suspect that it must be very lonesome for her to live with an old husband whose failing health demanded her constant attention. It was not long before Niel discovered that when the Captain was away from Sweet Water, suddenly summoned by a threat of bankruptcy, she had sought happiness in her affair with Ellinger. Because of his high sense of honor, the Captain is left with nothing except his house at Sweet Water. The incident caused him to have a stroke. During his illness Mrs. Forrester proved herself a good wife and after three weeks the Captain recovered, but his health was worse than it had been. He had a sort of paralysis that made it difficult for him to speak clearly, so he avoided talking even more than was his habit. That same year Niel left for Boston to study architecture.

Two years later Niel came home for a visit. The first acquaintance he met was Ivy Peters who boasted of his business success. Niel learnt that he was even renting the Forrester meadow-land which was very dear to the Captain for its idleness and silvery beauty. The encounter made Niel sad. He thought of the sweat of the old pioneers who had conquered the land only for the sake of the opportunists like Ivy Peters.

Niel paid a visit to Captain Forrester and Mrs. Forrester. The Captain had grown heavier and weaker but Mrs. Forrester, to Niel, remained lively and charming. Before he left, the Captain asked him to post some letters, among them a letter written to Ellinger by Mrs. Forrester. During his stay in Sweet Water, Niel was often irritated to see how impolitely Ivy Peters seemed to behave towards Mrs. Forrester, but he was almost shocked to learn from Mrs. Forrester herself that she was depending on Ivy Peters because he was cunningly clever in his business. She had him invest her little sum of money for her even though she knew that Ivy was a crooked businessman. She talked of the

youth and vitality that still existed in her, hoping that one day she would be able to be as free as in the old days. From what he learnt, Niel was worried for her. Late one night Mrs. Forrester in her hottest temper asked Niel to put through for her a long distance call to Ellinger because she learnt that Ellinger was getting married to Constance Ogden. Being afraid of the scandal that might result if the listening telephone operator heard Mrs. Forrester's tirade, Niel cut the telephone wire. However the scandal traveled from place to place that Mrs. Forrester had made a call to Mr. Ellinger in the middle of the night. For this reason when the Captain had another stroke, the unkind neighbors put the complete blame on Mrs. Forrester. These horrible people were even delighted to have a chance to pry over the Captain's house, on the pretext of paying a visit to the sick Captain. They found out, with delight, what a miserable condition the Forresters were in. Niel had to stay on, even though it meant that he missed a year at college, and help put a stop to this cruelty: he had a boy do the housework for the Forresters and he himself pushed out all visitors, saying that the doctor required quiet for the patient. The Captain was grateful to Niel and recovered for a while, but died a few months later. After the Captain's death, there was a great change in Mrs. Forrester and her place. Once Niel met the wealthy Mr. Orville Ogden who was apparently charmed by Mrs. Forrester and wanted to help her, but he learnt with great surprise that Mrs. Forrester had taken her business away from Judge Pommeroy and handed it over to Ivy Peters, a new lawyer. The intimacy between Ivy Peters and Mrs. Forrester was already causing the gossip about them to grow even stronger. Niel could not stand this and once even spoke to Mrs. Forrester about it, but in return she showed indifference and even admitted that she loved the company of the young. Niel also noticed when he was once invited to dine at her house with Ivy Peters and his friends that she played the role of a charming hostess less successfully. Niel left Sweet Water with weary contempt for Mrs. Forrester. He was sad that Mrs. Forrester was not

willing to immolate herself, like the widows of all the great men, and die with the pioneer period to which she belonged. He heard more and more of her misfortune that at last Ivy Peters bought the house and she went to California. **However** Niel could not help thinking of her during her best days. He was somewhat, after years of chagrin, grateful that she as the wife of Captain Forrester was the one who had introduced him to the beauty of life he could never have found by himself. Niel was therefore happy to learn from one of the Sweet Water boys who met her in South America, that she got married again to a wealthy Englishman, a good man though quarrelsome and stingy at times, and that she died honorably.

A Lost Lady is a wonderfully written short novel, the central theme of which is clear from the beginning to the end. The degeneration of Mrs. Forrester is artfully linked to the background theme of the decline of the pioneering West. The town of Sweet Water, Colorado, is first presented with hopes for its future as an important and expanding town on the Burlington Railroad. The prospect of the town is symbolically compared with the prosperous period of the Forrester place. Moreover, the decline of Sweet Water provides an effective background for the story of Mrs. Forrester, the lost lady:

All this while the town of Sweet Water was changing. Its future no longer looked bright. Successive crop failures had broken the spirit of the farmers.... The Forresters now had fewer visitors. The Burlington was "drawing in its horns," as people said, and the railroad officials were not stopping off at Sweet Water so often, — were more inclined to hurry past a town where they had sunk money that would never come back.⁹

The characterization of Mrs. Forrester is remarkably well done. The reader is confronted with a lady whose character is quite ambiguous. She appears both the epitome of aristocratic grace, kindness, and understanding, and at the same time a vulgarian who will do anything — deceive her husband, flirt with coarse and unprincipled young men —

to get some excitement out of life. Her relations with her husband were ideal. He was devoted to her in an old-fashioned, courtly way and she behaved to him with tenderness and understanding. It is this quality in her that wins Niel's unending admiration for her:

Curiously enough, it was as Captain Forrester's wife that she most interested Niel, and it was in her relation to her husband that he most admired her. Given her other charming attributes, her comprehension of a man like the railroad-builder, her loyalty to him, stamped her more than anything else. That, he felt, was quality; something that could never become worn or shabby;... 10

It is interesting but rather cruel of Miss Cather to make Niel discover the vulgar side of Mrs. Forrester who had already become his idol. Niel is horrified and outraged, coming up one summer morning to lay a bunch of roses on Mrs. Forrester's bedroom window sill, to discover that Ellinger is spending a night with her while the Captain is away. He feels bitterly that he has lost one of the most beautiful things in his life and he is deeply hurt:

"Lilies that fester," he muttered, "lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds."
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? Was that their secret? 11

But in spite of the discovery, Niel, like Adolph Blum who had previously witnessed Mrs. Forrester's scandalous tryst in the woods with Ellinger, cannot bring himself to look down upon Mrs. Forrester. On the contrary, he continues to be fascinated by the lady's charm and vitality, but at the same time sadly watches the decline of Mrs. Forrester. When he returns to Sweet Water two years later, he is forced to see the downfall of the Forresters: they have sadly declined in style of living and Ivy Peters has become increasingly influential with Mrs. Forrester. Here Miss Cather reveals

her regret of the past pioneer period that was supplanted by the coming of the new materialistic generation, the Ivy Peters of modern America:

The Old West had been settled by dreamers, great-hearted adventurers who were unpractical to the point of magnificence; a courteous brotherhood, strong in attack but weak in defence, who could conquer but could not hold. Now all the vast territory they had won was to be at the mercy of men like Ivy Peters, who had never dared anything, never risked anything. They would drink up the mirage, dispel the morning freshness, root out the great brooding spirit of freedom, the generous, easy life of the great land-holders. The space, the colour, the princely carelessness of the pioneer they would destroy and cut up into profitable bits, as the match factory splinters the primeval forest. All the way from the Missouri to the mountains this generation of shrewd young men, trained to petty economies by hard times, would do exactly what Ivy Peters had done when he drained the Forrester marsh. 12

It is Ivy Peters and his kind who remain in the West and to whom the generous people of the old time have to turn in the same manner as Mrs. Forrester who turns to him in her desperate attempt to restore her fortunes. Ivy shows the urge to degrade everything which is not himself and bring it down to his level. His renting of the Forrester's meadow and his attempt to drain the marsh constitute his means of destroying the old aristocratic atmosphere^{which} he is never able to attain. Niel reflects on this as he listens to Ivy Peters:

He felt that Ivy had drained the marsh quite as much to spite him and Mrs. Forrester as to reclaim the land. Moreover, he seemed to know that until this moment Ivy himself had not realized how much that consideration weighed upon him. ... By draining the marsh Ivy had obliterated a few acres of something he hated, though he could not name it, and had asserted his power over the people who had loved those unproductive meadows for their idleness and silvery beauty. 13

The part displayed by Ivy Peters reveals relentlessly Miss Cather's verdict on the modern world. With the coming of the industrial age and of the new generation, she seems to point out, the good times were over and would never come again.

In some way Mrs. Forrester's story is bound up with "the end of the road-making West." The town of Sweet Water did not become what it should have become. Captain Forrester, the symbol of the pioneering dream, is unable to get more success because his prosperous career is cut short by the accident, hence he is unable to provide for his wife the atmosphere of liveliness which she was born for. The future has to be put in the hands of people like Ivy Peters and the generous heroic characters like Captain Forrester are destined to retire from the scene stoically. Since the progress of America from then on depends on people like Ivy Peters, it is to them the Mrs. Forresters have to turn. It is a desperate choice but it is unavoidable. Niels reflects upon this fact but he cannot help feeling sad when he passes this final judgment:

This was the very end of the road-making West; the men who had put plains and mountains under the iron harness were old; some were poor, and even the successful ones were hunting for rest and a brief reprieve from death. It was already gone, that age; nothing could ever bring it back. The taste and smell and song of it, the visions those men had seen in the air and followed, — these he had caught in a kind of afterglow in their own faces, — and this would always be his.¹⁴

Miss Cather's impatience about the modern materialistic world of the nineteen hundreds is felt in One of Ours. This impatience has grown almost to a feeling of disgust in A Lost Lady. When Miss Cather writes her novel The Professor's House in 1925 one consequently senses a tone of regret of the glory of the past that she so much admired. Her protagonist, Professor Godfrey St. Peter, is a picture of a middle-aged man wrestling with his own sensitivities and restlessness. Into him Miss Cather pours her grief at the decline of so many of the values she cherishes. From her critical biography one is told that from 1923 to 1927 Miss Cather had interestingly shrunk from various activities. She declined to join societies, no matter who asked her, no matter what their aim; she declined to recommend books, and

wrote a review so rarely that she could decently avoid pressures to be nice and helpful. Instead of working charities she gave as if from a bottomless purse to old friends fallen on hard times, or institutions in Webster County. If a letter appeared useless, she did not write it; and instead of a false excuse she preferred a frank explanation, which usually saved her from repetition of a request she could not grant or an invitation she could not accept.¹⁵ In effect she, like Professor St. Peter, lived in her own world. Still discontented, she sought her happiness by retiring into the past. Thus, The Professor's House is curiously divided into three parts. The first of the three consists of the Professor's reflections on everyday things in his family such as houses, clothes, and jewels. The second, in the form of a diary which the Professor is editing, tells of Tom Outland's discovery of the cliff dwellings of the Southwest on the mysterious Blue Mesa. The third records the Professor's growing disillusionment with his personal life and that of his community; its climax occurs when the Professor is nearly killed by the leaky gas stove but is rescued and revived by his family's seamstress. The middle section is a story in itself, which at first does not seem to have much connection with the other two sections but which at second glance is vital to the central meaning of the book. The Professor's House is a story of Professor Godfrey St. Peter, a middle-aged historian at a university in Hamilton, a midwestern town. He is completely devoted to his studies in the Spanish period in American history. For fifteen years he has been working on his "Spanish Adventurers in North America" and when it is completed he gets a sum of money which enables him to get the larger and more modern house his wife demands. He himself insists on continuing to study in the attic of the old house, where he feels comfortable with his books and mementos. He finds little satisfaction in family life. Lillian, or Mrs. St. Peter, his wife, he finds, has changed a great deal. He used to be interested in her wise judgment about people and art but since she has grown older,

she has grown more worldly and her complete satisfaction with her two sons-in-law, whom the Professor finds less interesting, disappoints him. Louie Marsellus, the husband of his elder daughter, Rosamond, Professor St. Peter finds pushing and aggressive in spite of his generosity. Scott McGregor, Kathleen's journalist husband, he finds less intelligent than his younger daughter Kathleen. However he has tried his best to play the role of father-in-law. His dissatisfaction with his two sons-in-law comes partly from his comparison of the two men with his most brilliant student, Tom Outland, who once, before his death in the World War, was Rosamond's fiancé. Professor St. Peter has never encountered such a remarkable student as Tom Outland, the young man from New Mexico, in whom the professor sees himself when he was young: a Kansas boy who is primitive, wise and solitary. Tom Outland has entered and remained in his life through a series of the strangest and most fascinating experiences the Professor has ever had. Tom's coming to him is strange and unforgettable: one day an unusual young man broke into his garden and asked to see him because the Professor was the only person whose writings Tom knew to be reliable. The professor learnt that this boy from New Mexico lacked sufficient preparation to continue in college in spite of his thorough understanding of Latin which he had learnt by studying with a Belgian father down in Mexico. With the professor's advice, Tom was able to catch up within a very short time with mathematics and sciences he had never learnt before. Later in the college, Tom proved the most talented student and after his graduation, he became a brilliant physicist working with Professor Crane. Shortly before he went to war, he had discovered a gas device which later revolutionized aviation. The patent for this invention came by Tom's own will into the hands of his fiancée, Rosamond, and when Rosamond married, her husband, an engineer, became rich on the patent. The Marselluses have their house named "Outland" which annoys the Professor because he regarded Tom so highly. The wealth of Rosamond and her husband and Rosamond's showy

appearance irritates Kathleen, who used to love her sister dearly, for she thinks Rosamond and Louie do not deserve that big fortune from Tom's genius and perseverance. At least certain parts of the fortune, Kathleen thinks, should go to their father who had given Tom so much encouragement. For this reason, the two sisters are not on good terms. This depresses their father even more. The professor is therefore neither interested in his wife who is always very infatuated with her sons-in-law, especially with Louie, nor in his daughters' affairs. He becomes increasingly introspective and once when asked by the Marselluses and his wife to join them on a summer vacation in Paris, he even refuses, using his work as a pretext. Being left alone in his old house, he recalls the strange and magnificent story of Tom who had related his old life as a cowhand in New Mexico. The story of Tom is adventurous and is told in splendid language to make the Professor visualize Tom's old life and his experiences. As a cowhand in New Mexico, Tom had discovered, with his companion Roddy Blake, an untouched cliff village inhabited by Indians in prehistoric times. The discovery fired Tom's imagination and gave him the deepest feeling of respect for the older generation. Tom realized the highest significance of his discovery and at the same time the ignorance of his companion and himself of archaeology; therefore the two friends decided to report their important discovery to the authorities in Washington. Tom went on the mission, leaving Blake to watch over the cliff village, but he was extremely disappointed and hurt to be ignored by the officials in Washington. When his mission was a failure, he returned to the cliff village and to his rage found that Blake had sold the relics they had dug up to a German trader who hurried out of the country. Blake meant well; he sold those things in order that Tom might have a sufficient sum of money for the education which Blake thought necessary for Tom's future. But he did not understand that the cliff village and its belongings, to Tom, were national property that should belong to everyone in the country. Tom's irritation made Blake so extremely

sorry that he parted from Tom forever. Tom was sorry, too, and even more sorry to realize that his nationally important discovery had come to nothing at all. After taking up Latin with a Belgian priest, Father Duchene, he headed for Hamilton and sought out Professor St. Peter.

The more Professor St. Peter thought about Tom's story, the more depressed he became. He feels indifferent to everyone and everything. He is bored even by the presence of the loyal, affectionate and religious seamstress, Augusta, whom he previously had always found pleasant company. The depression is so great that once when he was resting in his old study and the gas was accidentally blown out by the wind, he made no move to turn it off. He narrowly escapes death and is rescued only through the loyalty of Augusta who happens to find him. This crisis and his gratitude to and great admiration for Augusta reconcile him to continued existence, and he faces everything from then on with a kind of optimistic stoicism.

The Professor's House is an interesting study of a man whose conflict is within himself. It contains little external action, since most of what happens seems to take place within the mind of the chief protagonist. The Professor, at the age of fifty-two — the same age as the author — suddenly realizes that he will not live forever, that he cannot hope for more happiness in the future, that he ought to seek any happiness there is from the present. But in spite of the resolution, he finds himself dissatisfied with the very things from which in the past he had derived intense enjoyment — his family or his work. In other words neither human relations nor creative endeavor have any power to charm him now. He seems to be suffering from emotional confusion, old age, and lack of sympathy not only with his own family but also with the changing society of which he is forced to be a member. The postwar students at the small Midwestern college where he has taught since before the end of the last century are now seemingly a common lot. The young professors are utilitarian, political-minded, and mostly self-centered. The programs have been controlled by the state legislature

and the college, from the community's point of view, is like a trade school. It seems to the Professor that little is left for academic encouragement. The members of his family — his charming wife and active daughters and sons-in-law — are quite happy and adopt easily to the changing everyday life but the Professor, regretfully finds them shallow. Professor St. Peter is, in fact, tired of everything and desires to break away from all kinds of responsibilities and limitations which, he believes, destroy the making of a superior individual. The Professor's frustration is lessened only when he recalls Tom Outland, his unusually brilliant student from the Southwest, who, by his vigor and spirit, has brought to the Professor a kind of second youth. Tom's adventures among the Cliff-Dwellings and his remarkable life make the Professor even more appreciative of the beauty and the value of the American past. The profound impression the past makes on the Professor parallels Miss Cather's feeling. She has admirably presented the past civilization she herself felt intensely on her visit to Arizona in the spring of 1912. When she saw the ruins of the Cliff-Dwellers in Walnut Canyon, Arizona, Miss Cather found something that was not only extremely simple and extremely beautiful but extremely old. The discovery was a lengthening of one's past as an American, especially if one were an American from the West. It is this valuable past that is skilfully set into the life of the Professor. Miss Cather made clear her reason for including the story of Tom Outland when she wrote:

Just before I began the book I had seen, in Paris, an exhibition of 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 through those square windows was remarkable, and gave me a sense of the fleets of Dutch ships that ply quietly on all the waters of the globe — to Java etc.

In my book I tried to make the Professor St. Peter's house rather overcrowded and stuffy with new things; American properties, 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.¹⁶

And the life of Tom Outland and his Blue Mesa is written, Miss Cather admits, after the story of Dick Wetherall, the discoverer of the Cliff-Dwellings in Mesa Verde, Colorado, which Miss Cather visited in 1915 and with which she fell in love:

... The Blue Mesa (The Mesa Verde) actually was discovered by a young cow puncher in just this way. The great explorer Nordenskjöld wrote a scientific book about this discovery, and I myself had the good fortune to hear the story of it from a very old man, brother of Dick Wetherall. Dick Wetherall as a young boy forded Mancos river and rode into the Mesa after lost cattle. I followed the real story very closely in Tom Outland's narrative.¹⁷

The Professor and Tom are linked to each other by their appreciation of history, the kind of history which is conceived as a series of past human adventures, the implications of which reverberate excitingly into the present. Tom's joy in discovering and investigating Cliff City is the same kind of joy that the Professor found in writing his "Spanish Adventurers in North America." It is by identifying himself with Tom that the Professor comes to write vigorously and successfully the latter volumes of his book. From Tom, the Professor detects the values in the Blue Mesa, the marvellous characteristics of which lie in its composition and purpose. Tom's description of the Blue Mesa is impressive:

I wish I could tell you what I saw there, just as I saw it, on that first morning, through a veil of lightly falling snow. Far up above me, a thousand feet or so, set in a great cavern in the

face of the cliff, I saw a little city of stone, asleep. It was as still as sculpture. ... It all hung together, seemed to have a kind of composition: pale little houses of stone nestling close to one another, perched on top of each other, with flat roofs, narrow windows, straight walls, and in the middle of the group, a round tower.

It was beautifully proportioned, that tower, swelling out to a larger girth a little above the base, then growing slender again. There was something symmetrical and powerful about the swell of the masonry. The tower was the fine thing that held all the jumble of houses together and made them mean something. It was red in color, even on that grey day. In sunlight it was the color of winter oak-leaves. A fringe of cedars grew along the edge of the cavern, like a garden. They were the only living things. Such silence and stillness and repose — immortal repose. That village sat looking down into the canyon with the calmness of eternity. The falling snow-flakes, sprinkling the piñons, gave it a special kind of solemnity. I can't describe it. It was more like sculpture than anything else. I knew at once I had come upon the city of some extinct civilization, hidden away in this inaccessible mesa for centuries, preserved in the dry air and almost perpetual sunlight like a fly in amber, guarded by the cliffs and the river and the desert.¹⁸

From Father Duchene, his clerical friend in the Southwest, Tom learns of the priceless value of the everyday household utensils he and his friend, Roddy Blake, discover. He comes to the conclusion that the people who produced those things had managed to an extraordinary degree to combine the beautiful with the useful; that they had made of their everyday lives something which approached the order and harmony of a work of art. The Cliff-Dwellers had subsequently lived the life which is hard to find in this modern world. Tom comes to love the place and has such high respect for it that he regards it as a holy place. For this reason he is contemptuous of the officials of the Smithsonian Institution who show no interest at all in American antiquities, since their minds are completely preoccupied with the chances of being sent abroad to European expositions. He was furious with Roddy who, with good intention for Tom, had sold the relics of the Cliff city to a German archaeologist:

"But I never thought of selling them, because they were not mine to sell — nor yours! They belong to this country, to the State, and to all the people. They belonged to boys like you and me, that have no other ancestors to inherit from. You've gone and sold them to a country that's got plenty of relics of its own. You've gone and sold your country's secrets... I'm not so poor that I have to sell the pots and pans that belonged to my poor grandmothers a thousand years ago... There never was any question of money with me, where this mesa and its people were concerned. They were something that had been preserved through ages by a miracle, and handed on to you and me, two poor cow-punchers, rough and ignorant, but I thought we were men enough to keep a trust.¹⁹

And after Roddy has left him and Tom is all alone on the mesa, he says:

I remember these things, because, in a sense, that was the first night I was ever really on the mesa at all — the first night that all of me was there. This was the first time I ever saw it as a whole. It all came together in my understanding, as a series of experiments do when you begin to see where they are leading. Something had happened in me that made it possible for me to co-ordinate and simplify, and that process, going on in my mind brought with it great happiness. It was possession. The excitement of my first discovery was a very pale feeling compared to this one. For me the mesa was no longer an adventure, but a religious emotion. I had read of filial piety in the Latin poets, and I knew that was what I felt for this place. It had formerly been mixed up with other motives; but now that they were gone, I had my happiness unalloyed.²⁰

By responding to the Blue Mesa in this way, Tom comes to appreciate the values of civilization. It is for this reason that he eventually comes to Hamilton College to get an education.

The death of Tom Outland is a great loss to Professor St. Peter who continues to live in chaos, frustration and sterility in the present. He can no longer enjoy teaching because of his dull audience. He can no longer enjoy his family for he feels that his wife has become too worldly, too anxious to get the most out of occasions and people,

and one of his daughters is married to a man he finds disagreeable because he has made the family wealthy by exploiting an invention of Tom Outland's. He can no longer enjoy the society in which he lives because it is mostly interested in cheap material things. Worst of all he can no longer enjoy himself: the things that once were his inspiration are now meaningless. The Professor has become so indifferent that he no longer has the wish to live:

He could remember a time when the loneliness of death had terrified him, when the idea of it was insupportable. He used to feel that if his wife could but lie in the same coffin with him, his body would not be so insensible that the nearness of hers would not give it comfort. But now he thought of aternal solitude with gratefulness; as a release from every obligation, from every form of effort. It was the Truth.²¹

This very reflection consequently almost leads him to commit suicide when he is dozing one stormy night, half-conscious of the fatality that may happen because of his neglect to shut the window and to turn the gas off. It is Augusta, the practical, unimaginitive, kind and loyal seamstress who comes to his rescue. Augusta seems to shake him out of his dream and sitting quietly with her, the Professor finally discovers his mistake and at last decides to face life with a new attitude -- an attitude he knows nobody but himself will understand:

... Perhaps the mistake was merely in an attitude of mind. He had never learned to live without sherry. Theoretically he knew that life is possible, maybe even pleasant, without joy, without passionate griefs. But it had never occurred to him that he might have to live like that.²²

With this change of attitude, he is able to face the arrival of the "Berengana," bringing Lillian, Rosamond and Louie Marsellus back across the Atlantic:

His temporary release from consciousness seemed to have been beneficial. He had let something go — and it was gone: something very precious, that he could not consciously have relinquished, probably. He doubted whether his family would ever realize that he was not the same man they had said good-bye to; they would be too happily preoccupied with their own affairs. If his apathy hurt them, they could not possibly be so much hurt as he had been already. At least he felt the ground under his feet. He thought he knew where he was, and that he could face with fortitude the Berengaria and the future.²³

Miss Cather's next novel was the brief and curious My Mortal Enemy, published in 1926. In it Miss Cather has drawn a picture of a woman who surprisingly deteriorates from a charming, brilliant and generous person to a resentful, discontented and restless one. It is difficult to understand what Miss Cather's ulterior motive in writing this short novel was because the story is to a certain degree different from all her previous novels. There is only one similarity, one must admit, between this story and The Professor's House, the novel preceding it, the protagonists of both novels reject the present and regret the past especially their youth, yet the reasons for the rejection are not at all similar.

My Mortal Enemy is a study of a woman's inner conflicts as related by a girl, a generation her junior. Nellie Birdseye, the girl, has since her childhood been inspired by the story of Myra Henshawe and her runaway marriage which took place long before Nellie, at fifteen, comes to know the woman herself. Nellie finds the story of Mrs. Henshawe told to her by her Aunt Lydia, one of Mrs. Henshawe's good friends, most challenging and unusual: Myra Henshawe, formerly Myra Driscoll, the only niece and heir apparent of a rich and pious Catholic, old John Driscoll, ran away with Oswald Henshawe, son of a German girl of good family, and an Ulster Protestant whom John detested. For this reason she was cut off without a penny by her uncle. The first encounter with Myra Henshawe and her husband leaves Nellie with a feeling of awe. She finds Myra difficult to understand:

at times she can be very sweet and friendly, at times she seems to Nellie sharp and cynical. Her husband, Oswald Henshawe, Nellie finds pleasant and friendly especially in giving his whole attention to a young person.

Soon Nellie has a chance to accompany Aunt Lydia to New York for the Christmas holidays. This time Nellie becomes better acquainted with Myra, and as a result, even more interested in her than before. She is struck by the refinements of Myra's dress, the distinction of her speech, her imperial manner, the devotion of her husband, the charm of her apartment, the interest of her friends, among them an actor, a young poetess, and Madame Modjeska, a renowned actress of the time. Yet at moments when there is not enough money or when her husband's devotion, extreme as it is, does not satisfy her, Myra becomes another person to Nellie. She is rough, hard-hearted and sneering. Consequently, Myra appears to Nellie a complex character whose temper varies: she can be the kindest and tenderest person imaginable to the sick, the helpless and to inferiors but at the same time she can be mean to the unfaithful and most envious of the superiors. For this reason before their departure Nellie and her aunt witness with regret a furious quarrel during which Myra accuses Oswald of telling her a lie and then abruptly leaves him for Pittsburgh.

Ten years later after having heard very little about them and their misfortune, Nellie comes across the Henshawes again in a West-coast city. Things have gone so badly with them that they are forced to live in a miserable hotel on the west coast. When the company re-organized, Oswald lost his promising position in New York, and left for San Francisco. When Nellie meets him he has a humble position, poorly paid, with the city traction company. Myra has lost almost all that has given to her life the appearance and atmosphere of enviable achievement: she has drifted out of the path of her friends; her beloved Madame Modjeska is dead; her money is gone and worst of all, she is incurably ill, partially paralyzed, and has to be taken care of by Oswald. She is sincerely glad to see Nellie and Nellie tries

her best to render services but she finds Myra very bitter about her ill luck and in spite of Oswald's devotion, she is hard on him. She regrets running away from her rich uncle and confesses frankly that she has always been a greedy, selfish and worldly woman who wanted success and a place in the world, thus she has never really been happy. Nellie also finds that sometimes the recollection of old times and good old poetry cheer her up and she goes back to the Catholic church she formerly broke away from. However physical suffering and strong emotion take hold of her and so torment her that on the last day of her life she flees to die under a cedar tree facing the sea with an ebony crucifix in her hands. After Myra's death, Oswald leaves for Alaska which he had long wanted to visit and there he dies several years later.

In an article written for the "New Republic" in 1922, Miss Cather called My Mortal Enemy "the novel démenblé," the novel stripped of its superfluous furnishings. One notices therefore that the author concentrates mostly on her main protagonist Myra and tries to leave out as many details as possible. This she had never done in any of her previous novels. And moreover, all that Miss Cather cares to do with Myra is done quickly, by showing her at two points — as a mature worldly woman and ten years later face to face with death. Her childhood and youth are sketched in a retrospect and her first picture is drawn by a young provincial girl who is under the spell of her worldliness. After the interval of ten years, the second picture of Myra is drawn by the same person who in spite of maturity and sympathy is puzzled by Myra's new phase. This study of the degeneration of a character, however, lacks conviction because Miss Cather does not care to give adequate information about Myra before the change set in. The reader is allowed only to see a woman who rebels against her situation and as her appreciation of her unmarried years increases, she becomes irritable, mean and bitter.

In The Professor's House, at least one is made to realize that the Professor runs away from his present because

he is tired of a society which has become too worldly and in living again in the past he has, like Tom Outland, a feeling of reverence for it. The past to him has become something like a religion in which he finds his solitude. Those who just glance through the story of Myra Henshawe are inclined to think that in rejecting her Protestant husband Myra seeks her former church: she seriously goes back to the faith of her childhood -- Catholicism. But her attitude toward religion is strange. She fully believes that in religion seeking is finding: which may be right but while seeking she has been behaving badly toward her devoted husband. She even accuses him of being her mortal enemy. Her death with a crucifix in her hand seems consequently a poor show since one doubts whether she really understands the meaning of religion. For this reason to say that this novel has religious overtones is a rather shallow estimate.

On second reading one cannot help feeling that, unfortunately, strong passion is the quality one should cherish. The description of John Driscoll, Myra's uncle, gives a picture of a rich, capricious, arbitrary and tyrannical old man whose distinguishing characteristics are heralded by his niece in her old age:

My uncle was a very unusual man. Did they ever tell you much about him at home? Yes, he had violent prejudices; but that's rather good to remember in these days when so few people have any real passions; either of love or hate. He would help a friend, no matter what it cost him, and over and over again he risked ruining himself to crush an enemy.²⁴

And in turning against her husband Myra seems to be acting the same role John Driscoll acted in disowning her; both involve the cold, selfish rejection of a human tie for reasons which are purely selfish. Miss Cather has tried to show this similarity in character when she has Myra say:

As we grow old we become more and more the stuff our forbears put into us. I can feel his savagery strengthen in me. We think we are so

individual and so misunderstood when we are young; but the nature our strain of blood carries is inside there, waiting, like our skeleton.²⁵

And worse than the exaltation of passion is the brute glorification of the power of money. Oswald's crime in his wife's eyes is, not taking her away from her family, but becoming poor. It is a dismal picture Miss Cather paints when she has Myra say:

It's been the ruin of us both. We've destroyed each other. I should have stayed with my uncle. It was money I needed. We've thrown our lives away.²⁶

Miss Cather even goes so far as to remark scornfully^{that} the power of wealth corrupts even the church itself. It is as if the rich can buy their way into heaven. In describing old John Driscoll's funeral, Nellie says:

...I myself could remember his funeral — remember it very vividly — though I was not more than six years old when it happened. I sat with my parents in the front of the gallery, at the back of the church that the old man had enlarged and enriched during the latter days of his life. The high altar blazed with hundreds of candles, the choir was entirely filled by the masses of flowers. The bishop was there; and a flock of priests in gorgeous vestments. When the pall-bearers arrived, Driscoll did not come to the church; the church went to him. The bishop and clergy went down the nave and met that great black coffin at the door, preceded by the cross and boys swinging cloudy censers, followed by the choir chanting to the organ. They surrounded, they received, they seemed to assimilate into the body of the church, the body of old John Driscoll. They bore it up to the high altar on a river of colour and incense and organ-tone; they claimed it and enclosed it.

In after years, when I went to other funerals, stark and grim enough, I thought of John Driscoll as having escaped the end of all flesh; it was as if he had been translated, with no dark conclusion to the pageant, no "night of the grave" about which our Protestant preachers talked. From the freshness of roses and lilies, from the glory of the high altar, he had gone

straight to the greater glory, through smoking censers and candles and stars.²⁷

To sum up, like Professor Godfrey St. Peter, Myra Henshawe is seeking an escape. The Professor, who can find no way out of his problems, finally searches for it by passively seeking death. Myra, who is unable to solve her problems, attempts to escape by refusing to accept the consequences of her actions and by blaming everyone but herself for the way her life has turned out. In particular, she thinks that if she had money she could buy that peace of mind. She does not realize that it is her own frustrated self that is making her miserable. The climax of the story comes when Myra, on her sickbed, laments cruelly:

... Why must I die like this, alone with my mortal enemy?²⁸

Myra has no idea that her passions have hurt other people. Since bad luck is on her she only thinks that they have hurt her. In dying she is as self-centered and selfish as she was in living. She leaves life without having begun to understand it. The characterization of Myra Henshawe is the most complicated of Miss Cather's protagonists. It seems as if Miss Cather were angry at something beyond her power to control, consequently she paints a picture of an extremely frustrated woman who tortures herself because she can find no way out. My Mortal Enemy is therefore the strangest of her books. It is the strangest of her books and its violent heroine is unforgettable.

CHAPTER V

HER FICTION FROM 1927-1940

There are reasons for saying that as Miss Cather grew older she became resentful and less happy. Her discontent was not sudden but had been developing for some time. **Bitterly** resenting this change in the direction she turned her back on her contemporaries and rejected the present as much as she felt the present rejected her. In the last twenty years or so of her life the present seemed so odious to her that she tried in every possible way to draw away from it. E.K. Brown in writing a critical biography of Miss Cather says :

One cannot help but feel that in the years after 1931. Willa Cather was erecting walls behind which she carried on a life that was essentially inward — retrospective, creative, and speculative. One main reason for her withdrawal was undoubtedly a decline in physical energy..... Besides the failure in energy, her withdrawal was induced by what Harvey Newbranch, her friend from college times, describes as a **slow spreading of the virus of pessimism**. She was out of sympathy with the world about her.

Elizabeth Sergeant, another of her friends, also writes :

My happiest moments with Willa Cather were still those when her own spring, now often frozen over in talk by fame, or busyness, or just taciturnity, broke through and I found, gushing up in her, that old sense of intimacy between herself and her material, that freshness of heart and intense enthusiasm that I had first known in her. In her maturity, these elements were often buried deep below the surface.

About Miss Cather's almost complete lack of interest in contemporary artistic movements, Miss Sergeant says :

.....At heart, she was deeply aware of post-war life and literary currents, bewildering and new; and did not conceal from her friends her round aversion for the strong, disillusioned young talents that rushed the literary seas, as if they alone possessed the rights of navigation. 3

While she was withdrawing more and more from the life of the present was increasing, the loss of her home and the deaths of her parents saddened her and quickened her retreat. First the house on Bank Street, in Greenwich Village, New York was torn down to give place to a more modern apartment building. In this house she and her companion Edith Lewis, who had shared her life for forty years, lived for fourteen years from 1913 to 1927. Being forced to move out, Miss Cather:

.... felt like a turtle that was losing its shell. The psychic pain of stripping off this protective integument was unbearable; she was exposed and miserable. 4

Even more upsetting was the death of her father in March 1928. "His death was shattering to Willa," writes Miss Sergeant, and E.K. Brown remarks: "The death of Charles Cather was not only the loss of a father; it meant the breakup of what Willa Cather had always continued to think of as her home, the household in Red Cloud. " 5 Moreover less than three years later she lost her mother. After all three losses, a marked change took place in Miss Cather's outlook. She was overwhelmed by an intense desire for privacy and seclusion and one notices that ⁱⁿ the writings of her final years she has found an escape. She takes her

reader in Death Comes for the Archbishop (1927), to nineteenth-century New Mexico, and in Shadows on the Rock (1931), to seventeenth-century Quebec. These two Catholic novels are evidence that Miss Cather has escaped from the America of her day to the America of the more remote past. The remaining novels and short stories reveal her nostalgia for the life of the Midwest and even of Virginia her first home which she had previously never had enough interest in to draw a picture of. The Middle Western group includes the three stories published in Olescure Destinies (1932) and one novel, Lucy Gayheart (1935). The story having to do with Virginia is her last novel, Sapphira and the Slave Girl (1940).

In writing Death Comes for the Archbishop Miss Cather is drawing on her own memories of travel in the South-west in 1912, some fifteen years before the publication of the book. From her letter to the editor of "The Commonwealth" who had asked her to give a short account of how she happened to write this novel, one learns that she spent a considerable time there, traveling slowly by wagon, carrying a camp outfit and having plenty of time for reflection. She learned a great deal about the history and traditions of New Mexico from Father Haltermann, a Belgian priest, at Santa Cruz, New Mexico. From this journey, Miss Cather reflects:

The longer I stayed in the Southwest, the more I felt that the story of the Catholic Church in that country was the most interesting of all its stories. The old mission churches, even those which were abandoned and in ruins, had a moving reality about them; the hand-carved beams and joists, the utterly unconventional frescoes, the countless fanciful figures

of the saints, no two of them alike, seemed a direct expression of some very real and lively human feeling. They were all fresh, individual, first hand. Almost every one of those many remote little adobe churches in the mountains or in the desert had something lovely that was its own. In lonely, sombre Villages in the mountains the church decorations were sombre, the martyrdoms bloodier, the grief of the virgin more agonized, the figure of Death more terrifying. In warm, gentle valleys everything about the churches was milder. I used to wish there were some written account of the old times when those churches were built; but I soon felt that no record of them could be as real as they are themselves. They are their own story....
.....

Miss Cather revisited New Mexico and Arizona many times after her first trip there. In the summer of 1925, accompanied by Edith Lewis, she stayed for months in New Mexico, making Santa Fe her center. She became ever more interested in the story of the Church and the Spanish missionaries, especially Archbishop Lamy, the first Bishop of New Mexico. While she was in Santa Fe she came upon a book printed years before on a country press at Pueblo, Colorado: The Life of the Right Reverend Joseph P. Machebeuf by William Joseph Howlett, a priest who had worked with Father Machebeuf in Denver. Miss Cather said that the book was an admirable piece of work, revealing as much about Father Lamy as about Father Machebeuf, since the two men had been closely associated from early youth. Father Howlett had even gone to France and got his information about Father Machebeuf's youth from his sister, Philomène who gave him her letters from Father Machebeuf, telling all the little details of his life in New Mexico. In this book Miss Cather had found the kind of background she was looking for.

There are two main protagonists in her novel. The Archbishop Jean Marie Latour of the novel is definitely Archbishop Lamy and Father Joseph Vaillant, friend and helper of Father Latour, takes without any question after Father Machebeuf.

The novel opens with a prologue at Rome in 1848. Three cardinals and a missionary bishop from America are discussing the founding of an Apostolic Vicarate in New Mexico, a region recently annexed to the United States. The Bishop urges consideration of Jean Marie Latour for this new position. He is a Frenchman, at present a parish priest working on the shores of Lake Ontario, a man suitable by character and intelligence to undertake the task of reviving a Catholic faith in a part of the world which had been evangelized by the Franciscan Fathers in 1500 but where now the old mission churches are in ruins. There are a few priests who are lax and ignorant; deep religious teaching is not available to the people.

After the prologue the reader meets Father Latour, now Vicar Apostolic of New Mexico, for the first time as a horseman on his way through lonely and barren country to find the Bishop of Durango to clarify his position. Before he reaches his destination an incident takes place to illustrate the hardships, excitement and rewards of the life that is waiting for him in the future he is lost but unexpectedly finds a hospitable village of a Mexican settlement where the Catholic faith still lingers though no priest has been there for generations. Here he celebrates Mass, performs marriages

and baptisms and hears confessions before proceeding on his way.

It takes Father Latour a long time and a long journey before he gets the documents that define his vicarate and before he settles himself with Father Vaillant in Santa Fe. Before he gets the documents he has had trouble with a powerful old native priest, Father Martinez of Taos, who has ridden over from his parish expressly to receive the new Vicar and to drive him away. At Santa Fe, Father Latour begins to learn the nature of the Mexicans ——— their combination of humour, cunning, indolence, and generosity. Father Vaillant with his warmth, energy, and genuine love of people, can meet them on their own ground with immense success; Father Latour meets them with dignity rather than familiarity and is successful in a different way, especially with the Indians. All along the background of old mission churches, simple piety and superstition is presented to Father Latour. He also detects Mexican and Indian doubt of the new American civilization of which they are now supposed to be a part. In their extensive journeys the two priests perform a great number of services. But the diocese of Father Latour is so great that it is still an unrecognizable mystery to him. He is therefore eager to go abroad in it, to know his people, to go westward among the old isolated Indian missions. Thus he and Father Vaillant set out for Santa Domingo, "breeder of horses"; Isleta, "whitened with gypsum," Laguna, "of wild pastures," and finally "cloud-set" Acoma.

These visits bring them into conflict with the old

Mexican priests who, have long been isolated from European Catholicism but have developed their own type of Catholicism in which local superstitions play a large part. One of them is Padre (Father) Gallegos, a genial, poker-playing, whisky-drinking priest, belonging to an important Mexican family, and his popularity is enormous. However Father Latour cannot help feeling that for all their moral laxity their religion has a picturesque and lively quality. He also feels that a priest like Padre Gallegos who, although ten years older than he can dance for five nights running is easier to handle than Padre Martinez of Taos. Martinez had stirred up a revolt of the Taos Indians five years before, when the American Governor and other white men were murdered but he had escaped punishment and even managed to make a large profit from the whole affair. He is a man of tremendous strength and dangerous will. In dealing with Padre Martinez, Father Latour has shown his remarkable ability. Realizing the deep-rooted influence of Martinez among the Mexicans, he ignores Martinez's drunken display of power and even his scandalous affair with a woman while he himself goes to Rome to select four suitable priests whom he sends to Taos immediately. He manages to make Martinez leave the church but allows him to perform Mass. When this compromise is at an end because of the open war between Martinez and the priests he sends, he supports the new priest so Martinez and his friend, Father Lucero, of Arroyo Hondo, mutiny and organize a schismatic church of their own. When Bishop Latour can no longer remain deaf to the rebellion he exhorts the two priests to renounce their heresy and

soon strips them of the rights and privileges of the priesthood. Woven into the story are several epitomes which are interesting and help to make one see how the two priests win the love and admiration of the natives. One of them is the story of the widow of a rich Mexican ranchero who, persuaded by Bishop Latour, tells in court the bitter truth of her real age to prove her right to her inheritance from her husband. Another is the story of an ill-treated slave finding her way to the church one night a few weeks before Christmas and there meeting the Bishop, who blesses and comforts her.

In roaming his diocese, the Bishop comes upon a yellow rock in a ridge high above the Rio Grande valley. Thus begins his ambition to build a cathedral, but it is not until his old age that his ambition is realized. Meanwhile there arrives news of the appalling situation in the camps under Pike's Peak to which the Colorado gold rush has drawn thousands of people to liveadrift in a lawless society without spiritual guidance; it is essential to send Father Vaillant who thus sets out on his final and most arduous mission. The two devoted priests who have come to love one another deeply because of their similar religious ambitions, have to separate. In Colorado, Father Vaillant in recognition of his hardships and perseverance becomes the Bishop of Colorado and there he dies in his seventies amid universal mourning. Meanwhile Bishop Latour has become an Archbishop. He stays until his death in Santa Fe instead of returning to his native Auvergne in France. It is in Santa Fe that he wants to pass the years

of his retirement and preparation for death. His family ties are less powerful than the atmosphere of New Mexico. The Southwestern air in the early morning at Santa Fe communicates to him a conviction of eternal youth, of energy, of spiritual growth. And it is here that the Archbishop dies and is mourned by the people, including his native Indian friends, all of whom, on his last day, come to pray for him in the Cathedral he has built and where after his death his body lies in state before the high altar.

In a letter to the editor of "The Commonweal" Miss Cather writes:

As a human being, I had the pleasure of paying an old debt of gratitude to the valiant men whose life and work had given me so many hours of pleasant reflection in far-away places where certain unavoidable accidents and physical discomforts gave me a feeling of close kinship with them.⁷

And in a review of Death Comes for the Archbishop, Michael Williams praises the book for its sympathetic and understanding treatment of Catholicism:

Her book is a wonderful proof of the power of the true artists to penetrate and understand and to express things not part of the equipment of the artist as a person. Miss Cather is not a Catholic yet certainly no Catholic American writer that I know of has ever written so many pages so steeped in spiritual knowledge and understanding of Catholic motives and so sympathetically illustrative of the wonder and beauty of Catholic mysteries, as she has done in this book.⁸

Obviously Death Comes for the Archbishop deals with Catholic subject matter. For this reason many people

have assumed that it is primarily didactic. But certain incidents show that Miss Cather did not intend to make her book primarily religious. She simply aimed at recreating a period in the history of the Southwest. Her two priests are very human; they are even somewhat worldly. There is an episode in which Father Vaillant makes things so uncomfortable for a rich ranchero, Manuel Lujon that the latter is forced to give him two beautiful white mules. Once returning from a missionary journey, Father Vaillant stopped at Manuel's place. He still has a long way to journey but his horse is in the worst condition so the religious Manuel offers him Contento one of his two beautiful mules which Father Vaillant gladly and immediately accepts:

"Father Vaillant," he (Manuel) burst out in a slightly oratorical manner, "you have made my house right with Heaven, and you charge me very little. I will do something nice for you; I will give you Contento for a present, and I hope to be particularly remembered in your prayers."

Springing to the ground, Father Vaillant threw his arms about his host. "Manuelito!" he cried, "for this darling mule I think I could almost pray you into Heaven!"⁹

But the following morning Father Vaillant returns the mule to its owner saying he cannot accept it since the Bishop's horse is little better than his own old one. It will be inappropriate for him to go about on beautiful Contento while his bishop rides a common hack. So the good Manuel asks him to choose one of his horses instead, but again Father Vaillant will not have it, saying:

"No, no," said Father Vaillant decidedly. "Having seen these mules, I want nothing else. They are the color of pearls, really! I will raise the price of marriage until I

can buy this pair from you. A missionary must depend upon his mount for companionship in his lonely life. I want a mule that can look at me like a Christian, as you said of these."¹⁰

And when Manuel looks uneasy, Father Vaillant turns to him with vehemence:

"If I were a rich ranchero, like you, Manuel, I would do a splendid thing; I would furnish the two mounts that are to carry the word of God about this heathen country, and then I would say to myself: There go my Bishop and my Vicario, on my beautiful cream-coloured mules."¹¹

The ranchero finally gives in with a mournful smile. Here is one example that makes one feel that Miss Cather has made her religious protagonist appear worldly since what Father Vaillant has done is to maneuver the Mexican into a position where he can't say no. It is hard not to make one feel that what Father Vaillant has done is a sign of worldly desire in the form of religious need, for he does not need a beautiful mule to carry him on his missions. What he really needs is a sturdy one.

In fact Father Vaillant is a good missionary but he sometimes acts more like a layman than a religious leader. Miss Cather often shows his interest in material things in which a priest who has taken a vow of poverty should not be interested. Catholicism is subsequently seen not in the light of religion but rather as a civilized way of life. When gold is discovered under Pike's Peak and Father Vaillant travels to Denver to become priest on the new frontier of Colorado, he is shocked at the stupid, unnecessary discomforts found in mining camps but he sees a

great future for the Church in Colorado and decides to get as much money as he can from his own people, the Mexicans!

Once again among his own people, as he still called them, Father Joseph opened his campaign, and the poor Mexicans began taking dollars out of their shirts and boots (favorite places for carrying money) to pay for windows in the Denver Church. His petitions did not stop with windows — indeed, they only began there. He told the sympathetic women of Santa Fe and Albuquerque about all the stupid, unnecessary discomforts of his life in Denver; discomforts that amounted to improprieties. It was a part of the Wild West attitude to despise the decencies of life. He told them how glad he was to sleep in good Mexican beds once more. In Denver he lay on a mattress stuffed with straw; a French priest who was visiting him had pulled out a long stem of hay that stuck through the thin ticking, and called it an American feather. His dining table was made of planks covered with oilcloth. He had no linen at all; neither sheets nor serviettes, and he used his worn-out shirts for face towels. ... There was no butter, no milk, no eggs, no fruit. He lived on dough and cured hog meat.

Within a few weeks after his arrival, six feather-beds were sent to the Bishop's house for Father Vaillant; dozens of linen sheets, embroidered pillow-cases and table-cloths and napkins; strings of chili and boxes of beans and dried fruit. The little settlement of Chimayo sent a roll of their finest blankets.¹²

And the more ambitious he is to build a church in Colorado, the farther he is from a picture of a priest:

And Father Vaillant had not been content to be a mere missionary priest. He became a promoter. ... While he was still so poor that he could not have a rectory or ordinary comfort to live in, he began buying up great tracts of land for the Church. He was able to buy a great deal of land for very little money, but that little had to be borrowed from banks at a ruinous rate of interest. He borrowed money to build schools and convents, and the interest on his debts ate him up. He made long begging trips through Ohio and Pennsylvania and Canada to raise money to pay this interest, which grew like a rolling snowball. He formed a land company, went abroad and floated bonds in

France to raise money, and dishonest brokers brought reproach upon his name:

When he was nearly seventy, with one leg four inches shorter than the other, Father Vaillant, then first Bishop of Colorado, was summoned to Rome to explain his complicated finances before the Papal court, — and he had very hard work to satisfy the Cardinals.¹³

As for Bishop Latour, he is far from dealing with material things as in the case of Father Vaillant but the way Miss Cather describes him, one cannot help feeling that he never really was suited to this position:

But Jean, who was at ease in any society and always the flower of courtesy, could not form new ties. It had always been so. He was like that even as a boy; gracious to everyone, but known to a very few. To man's wisdom it would have seemed that a priest with Father Latour's exceptional qualities would have been better placed in some part of the world where scholarship, a handsome person, and delicate preceptions all have their effect; and that a man of much rougher type would have served God well enough as the first Bishop of New Mexico. Doubtless Bishop Latour's successors would be men of a different fibre. But God had reasons, Father Vaillant devoutly believed. Perhaps it pleased Him to grace the beginning of a new era and a vast new diocese by a fine personality. And perhaps, after all, something would remain through the years to come; some ideal, or memory, or legend.¹⁴

Moreover the Bishop so often indulges in a natural longing for family relationships that it seems as if he were regretting his priesthood:

He was forty-seven years old, and he had been a missionary in the New World for twenty years — ten of them in New Mexico. If he were a parish priest at home, there would be nephews coming to him for help in their Latin or a bit of pocket-money; nieces to run into his garden and bring their sewing and keep an eye on his housekeeping. All the way home he indulged in such reflections as any bachelor nearing fifty might have.¹⁵

The scene on the old Archbishop's deathbed is also curiously written:

He continued to murmur, to move his hands a little, and Magdalena thought he was trying to ask for something, or to tell them something. But in reality the Bishop was not there at all; he was standing in a tip-tilted green field among his native mountains, and he was trying to give consolation to a young man who was being torn in two before his eyes by the desire to go and the necessity to stay. He was trying to forge a new Will in that devout and exhausted priest ... 16

From this long discussion one has reason to believe that Miss Cather is not interested primarily in Catholicism as a religion; but with her recurrent and long descriptions of native scenery or traditions and the beauty of religious idols or services, one feels that she is trying to paint the Southwest with its landscape and local color and that time she regards the Church with all its ceremonies and rituals as primarily an object of beauty. All these descriptions which run throughout the book are beautifully written:

In all his travels the Bishop had seen no country like this. From the flat red sea of sand rose great rock mesas, generally Gothic in outline, resembling vast cathedrals. They were not crowded together in disorder, but placed in wide spaces, long vistas between ... Ever afterward the Bishop remembered his first ride to Acoma as his introduction to the mesa country. One thing which struck him at once was that every mesa was duplicated by a cloud mesa, like a reflection, which lay motionless above it or moved slowly up from behind it. These cloud formations seemed to be always there, however hot and blue the sky. Sometimes they were flat terraces, ledges of vapour; sometimes they were dome-shaped, or fantastic, like the tops of silvery pagodas, rising one above another, as if an oriental city lay directly behind the rock. The great tables of granite set

down in an empty plain were inconceivable without their attendant clouds, which were a part of them, as the smoke is part of the censer, or the foam of the wave.¹⁷

About the natives in general, one is told of their many interesting stories or their unusual practices especially concerning Catholicism. At Taos with Padre Martinez, he is cordially welcomed by the natives:

When the Bishop dismounted to enter the church, the women threw their shawls on the dusty pathway for him to walk upon, and as he passed through the kneeling congregation, men and women snatched for his hand to kiss the Episcopal ring. In his own country all this would have been highly distasteful to Jean Marie Latour. Here these demonstrations seemed a part of the high color that was in landscape and gardens, in the flaming cactus and the gaudily decorated altars, — in the agonized Christs and dolorous Virgins and the very human figures of the saints. He had already learned that with this people religion was necessarily theatrical.¹⁸

In describing the little wooden image of the Virgin in the church at Santa Fe, one feels that this idol of worship is nothing but a piece of artistic sculpture since Miss Cather describes it as an artist fascinated by a fine piece of art. The description does not have a religious tone:

Here in his own church in Santa Fe there was one of these nursery virgins, a little wooden figure, very old and very dear to the people. De Vargas, when he recaptured the city for Spain two hundred years ago, had vowed a yearly procession in her honor, and it was still one of the most solemn events of the Christian year in Santa Fé. She was a little wooden figure, about three feet high, very stately in bearing with a beautiful though rather severe Spanish face. She had a rich wardrobe; a chest full of robes and laces, and gold and silver diadems. The women loved to sew for her and the silversmiths to make her chains and brooches.

Father Latour had delighted her wardrobe keepers when he told them he did not believe the Queen of England or the Empress of France had so many costumes. She was their doll and their queen, something to fondle and something to adore, as Mary's Son must have been to Her.¹⁹

Miss Cather always associates Catholicism with beauty. This is evident when one recalls her description of how Father Latour comes to build himself a cathedral:

Bishop Latour had one very keen worldly ambition; to build in Santa Fe a cathedral which would be worthy of a setting naturally beautiful. As he cherished this wish and meditated upon it, he came to feel that such a building might be a continuation of himself and his purpose, a physical body full of his aspirations after he had passed from the scene.²⁰

Death Comes for the Archbishop may have some defects but on the whole it is a great novel. The author herself shows her full satisfaction with this book, for she said that writing this book was like a happy vacation from life, a return to childhood, to early memories. After the terrible agonies she had gone through in her life and in writing The Professor's House and My Mortal Enemy, this novel was a real vacation:

The writing of it took only a few months, because the book had all been lived many times before it was written, and the happy mood in which I began it never paled. It was like going back and playing the early composers after a surfeit of modern music.²¹

Shadows on the Rock (1931) and Death Comes for the Archbishop have many points of similarity. But this time her story is laid in Quebec, Canada, instead of New Mexico. Here again Miss Cather bases her story on a series of historical incidents in the late seventeenth and early

eighteenth century. The novel is therefore episodic in structure and explores the quality of the French civilization which had developed there. In her letter to Governor Wilbur Cross of Connecticut in acknowledgement of his appreciative review of the book, Miss Cather has made clear her purpose in writing this novel:

I tried, as you say, to state the mood and the viewpoint in the title. To me the rock of Quebec is not only a stronghold on which many strange figures have for a little time cast a shadow in the sun; it is the curious endurance of a kind of culture, 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. It is hard to state that feeling in language; it was more like an old song, incomplete but uncorrupted, than like a legend. . . . I took the complete 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 experienced; a kind of thinking, a mental complexion inherited, left over from the past, lacking in robustness and full of pious resignation.²²

From E. K. Brown's study of the life of Miss Cather one learns that she had long admired and been preoccupied with the literature, arts, and history of France. At the University of Nebraska she read constantly the works of the nineteenth-century novelists and she came to some sense of the European life and feeling. From her friend Dorothy Canfield, who had passed much of her childhood in Paris, and her mother who was devoted to France, Miss Cather got a more intimate understanding of what it meant to be French. When she visited France in 1902, especially at Avignon, she

came under the spell of a France that was older than any of her literary or artistic cults, the France from which the ancien régime in Canada derived. In the same letter quoted previously Miss Cather says:

An orderly little French household that went on trying to live decently, just as ants begin to rebuild when you kick their house down, interests me more than Indian raids or the wild life in the forests. And, as you seem to recognize, once having adopted a tone so definite, once having taken your seat in the close air by the apothecary's fire, you can't explode into military glory, any more than you can pour champagne into a salad dressing. . . . And really, a new society begins with the salad dressing more than with the destruction of Indian villages. Those people brought a kind of French culture there and somehow kept it alive on that rock, sheltered it and tended it and on occasion died for it, as if it really were a sacred fire -- and all this temperately and shrewdly, with emotion always tempered by good sense.²³

In book one entitled "The Apothecary" the story centers about the widowed apothecary Euclide Auclair and his daughter Cécile. Auclair came to Quebec eight years before the story began at the request of his landlord the Count de Frontenac. In his childhood, he was very much attached to and impressed by Count de Frontenac, who at that time was an important figure, though not very popular with his colleagues, among French politicians. At first he practised his profession as an apothecary in a little shop on the Quai des Célestins in Paris where his father and grandfather had lived. Auclair believed in his own theory about how to treat patients. He was considered old-fashioned and was not popular. It was only the Count de Frontenac who realized Auclair's devotion to his profession and gave him

his patronage. Because of the Count, Auclair considered Canada as a possible refuge. When Count de Frontenac was appointed the Governor General of Canada, at the age of seventy, he had asked Auclair to come with him. With a little push from his wife, he consented to come with the Count to Canada where he became the Count's private apothecary. At that time little Cécile was only four years old.

His wife accompanied him and during her lifetime in Canada, she did her best to maintain in her house and the apothecary's shop the French atmosphere. The shop became a famous refuge for most French colonists living in Quebec. Unfortunately Madame Auclair died of a lung disease a few years after they settled in Canada, leaving Cécile, her only child with her father. Cécile was trained by her mother to keep the same type of atmosphere in the house. She was kind-hearted and religious. Cécile, a girl twelve years old, was no doubt thrown back and forth between the French and Canadian culture and civilization.

Book two, "Cécile and Jacques" reveals the admirable relationship of Cécile and Jacques Gaux, a miserable boy of six whose mother was a prostitute and whose father deserted him to go back to France. Cécile had a deep sympathy for this poor little boy because in spite of his poor environments, Jacques proved himself to be a good-natured boy of good character. Cécile, who had maternal instinct, tried in every possible way to educate and support him in spite of the jealousy and annoyance of Toinette Gaux, Jacques' mother. She once begged the Count to provide Jacques with a pair of shoes which were so dear that she could not get

them for Jacques. She also knitted a pair of socks. It is no wonder that Jacques felt deeply indebted to her.

The book also shows that Cécile was a pious girl. She was interested in the stories, told to her by her father or the nuns who were her teachers, of all the martyrs and saints and even tried to spare her knowledge of the Divinity to Jacques. One observes how deeply Cécile felt for Canada. She was proud of the land and felt a stranger to France, her real mother-land. She disapproved of certain kings for their cruelty in forcing certain laws on the people. One story showing cruelty is the story of Bichet, an old lodger of Cécile's grandfather who was hanged in France because of a trivial theft. She had no wish to live in a world where such cruelties were practised. Here in Quebec she felt at home and had a lot of acquaintances, all of whom she was willing to help if she could. In effect she was the spirit of Canada. Her religious observances rendered on all occasions as on the "All Souls' Day" or the decoration of the "Holy Family" showed that she was deeply religious.

Together with the story of Cécile and Jacques, certain parts show the religious devotion of men like Old Bishop Laval and the sisters who came to Canada willingly and who were eternally happy in serving. The reader finds that one of the solid foundations of Canada was its solemn preservation of Catholicism.

Book three, "The Long Winter" brought to Auclair's house various stories of devotion, miracles and miseries. The book is divided into parts. Each part tells the story

of different persons who got involved in one way or another with Auclair or Cécile. Once during this long winter the new Bishop, Monseigneur de Saint-Vallier himself came to Auclair's shop. This was unusual. He inquired after old Bishop de Laval's health in a manner which left to Auclair an even stronger dislike of de Saint-Vallier. To Auclair, the new Bishop was ungrateful to the old Bishop who had supported his appointment as the new Bishop. He was arrogant, corrupted and did everything mostly for his own advantage. Cécile related to her father how Reverend Mother Juschereau de Saint-Ignace of the Hôtel Dieu Foundation converted an English sailor whom she had cured but Auclair strongly disagreed with the nun in her treatment. Later Cécile listened with delight to the miracle that happened to the recluse Jeanne Le Ber, rich heiress of Jacques Le Ber, the richest merchant of Montreal, who found her contentment in seclusion. She served God by retiring completely to her cell. The miracle was that she announced that she saw two angels coming to repair her broken spinning wheel in her cell. The miracle touched most people who knew her well because of her complete dedication to God. That same winter two men came to see Auclair. One was Antoine Frichette, a woodsman suffering from a serious rupture. From him Auclair and Cécile learnt of his adventure with his brother-in-law, Michael Proulx who died in the Candian wilderness. Another was Father Hector Saint-Cyr, a very dear old friend of Auclair who had been a professor of rhetoric but subsequently devoted his life

to God's service, remaining a missionary among the Indians in Canada. He had chosen this way of life because he was very much impressed by a martyr, Father Noël Chabanel for whom he wished to give his special reverence. The last story of misery Cécile learnt was the story of Blinker, a poor misshapen fellow to whom Cécile often gave food. Blinker told his miserable story that had tortured him for years. He had been forced to become a torturer in the King's prison at Rouen. Deep in his heart he was tormented especially when he learned that some of his victims were innocent. He could find no peace in his soul and, therefore, emigrated to this new land, but his recollections still tormented him. Having heard Blinker's story Auclair was hoping to help him. Near the end of a long winter Cécile was taken ill. When she was recovering she was especially delighted by the coming once again of spring.

The title of book four was given the name of Pierre Charron, an orphaned son of a quite well-to-do fur trader. When his parents died, Jacques Le Ber, the rich Montreal merchant took Pierre into his business to train him in the fur business. He had been in love with Jeanne Le Ber and seemed to have the best chance of all her suitors. He was extremely sad when Jeanne became a recluse. Disappointment had driven him into the woods, and since then had grown accustomed to adventure. Auclair and his wife, when alive, liked him very much and so did their daughter. During his visit to the Auclairs, Cécile had a chance to row in a canoe with him to Ile d'Orléans and spend two nights with the Harnois family, but the dirtiness and disorder of the family made Cécile feel sick and she even had to beg Pierre to take her home quickly.

Spring brought back "The Ships from France". Everybody was overjoyed with messages and the merchandise the ships had brought. Cécile began to think of the possibility of her father's taking her back to Paris that summer with the Count. She was not at all willing to leave for France which she felt was a foreign land. She was worried even about Jacques, the little boy to whom she had given so much support,

but old Bishop Laval had promised her to take care of the boy. Meanwhile in book six, "The Dying Count", Count de Frontenac was annoyed that he did not receive a letter summoning him back to France to fill a post worthy of his past services. He understood right away the King's determination to let him end his life in Canada in spite of all his loyal services to the King and France. However, being a strong-willed person, the Count prepared for the end of his life in Canada. He knew fully that he was going to die soon so he made a will. He offered Auclair a chance to go back to France with the ship, but Auclair refused : he was willing to serve the Count to the end of his days. In a few months the Count died and his death left Auclair sad and miserable. He felt that there was no longer any warmth left in his heart. Cécile was sorry for the Count, who was to her the symbol of heroism but she had Pierre Charron to help make up for her loss for she constantly grew more confident in Pierre's authority, daring and pride.

In the epilogue, fifteen years after the death of Count de Frontenac, Monseigneur de Saint-Vallier returned to Quebec after an absence of thirteen years. Auclair found him completely changed for the better. Nine years before Saint-Vallier was on his way back to Canada after one of his long absences, when his ship was captured by the English, taken to London, and sold at auction. The Bishop himself was declared a prisoner of war and was kept until the French King should ransom him. Unfortunately politics intervened : King Louis had lately seized and imprisoned a German Dean of the Cathedral of Liege. The German Emperor was much offended, and asked Queen Anne of England not to release the Bishop until King Louis released his prisoner. So Saint-Vallier remained a prisoner in England for five years until King Louis released the Dean of the Cathedral of Liege. Still, Saint-Vallier was not allowed to return to his diocese in Canada because during his captivity, his enemies in Quebec and Montreal reported the truth about his unpopularity in Canada so the King of France kept him almost as long as the Queen of England had. The period of detention in France

had sobered and saddened the wilful Bishop. For the first time he realized that he had not taken the wise course with the Canadian colonists. It was through the aid of a friend in the royal court that the King finally permitted him to sail back to his diocese. The Bishop had become so humble that his old acquaintances forgave his old mistake. Hearing from the Bishop what had been going on in France with the coming of the new generation, Auclair was glad that he had remained where nothing changed. Cécile married Pierre Charron and had four children. Jacques Gaux became a seaman like his father but whenever he came to Quebec, he stayed with old Auclair in Cécile's old chamber to serve the old man.

In her prairie novels Miss Cather has attempted to make a study of the effect of the transplantation of European culture to American soil. The dominant theme of Shadows on the Rock shows that she was again making a similar attempt. The only difference lies in the fact that while the soil of the prairie novels is Nebraska, the soil of Shadows on the Rock is Quebec, Canada : the main theme of the novel is the formation of a new civilization which although of French origin, being markedly altered by the new soil into which it has been transplanted, is typically Canadian :

When an adventurer carries his gods with him into a remote and savage country, the colony he found, will from the beginning, have graces, traditions, riches of the mind and spirit. Its history will shine with bright incidents; slight, perhaps, but precious, as in life itself, where the great matters are often as worthless as astronomical distances, and the trifles dear as the heart's blood.²⁴

Perhaps because the trifles are as dear as the heart's blood, one therefore is presented with a diversity of incidents and lives of the people, all of which go to make up French Canada. As the narrative develops, one comes across the details of the apothecary's earlier and present life; observes Cécile's development into a Canadian, learns the history and character of Count de Frontenac, the old soldier who served his country nobly but met with indifference and the ingratitude

of his King and died at last in virtual exile at Quebec; becomes acquainted with devoted old Bishop Laval and his unpopular successor, Bishop Saint Vallier; and is fascinated by stories and legends of the devoted nuns and martyrs. The focus is of course on Cécile, a true Canadian, who grows up on the rock of Quebec and regards it as the only place which she can really call home. She however appreciates and enjoys the French bourgeois comfort of her father's house and is disgusted with the coarseness of life she finds when she pays a visit to a more primitive settlement. Thus she comes to appreciate the value of French culture on the rock of Quebec, and its connection with the countryside around : the river, the woods; the colorful autumns and the majestic, cold winters. When she learns of the possibility of her leaving Canada for good she is upset. But when a final decision is made, she is overjoyed — nothing is pleasanter than to stay with her father forever in the land she has come to love. The apothecary himself, having heard of changes and threatened dangers in the French political scene, thanks God that he did not return to France and thinks with satisfaction of Canada's isolation from Europe :

While he was closing his shop and changing his coat to go up to his daughter's house, he thought over much that his visitor had told him, and he believed that he was indeed fortunate to spend his old age here where nothing changed; to watch his grandse grow up in a country where the death of the Kings, the probable evils of a long regency, evils of a long regency, would never touch them.²⁵

But it does not mean that Canada, as a new Civilization, is hostile to France. Its difference merely lies in the fact

that being transplanted to new soil, its civilization naturally differs from the old. This makes it typically Canadian, a characteristic of which Cécile is very proud. Canada cannot possibly keep pace with contemporary France because every winter it is completely cut off from the mother country. The novel interestingly begins with the departure of ships from France later in October of 1697 which means that the people on the rock of Quebec will not hear from their relatives or friends until following summer. With the departure of the ships, Canada is left by itself to the changing seasons which play an important part in the lives of the people, to the background of adventure and exploration and to its natural scenery and its domestic interior decoration. To render its atmosphere Miss Cather is again active at producing long descriptive passages in vivid and picturesque prose :

Auclair thought this rock set town like nothing so much as one of those little artificial mountains which were made in the churches at home to present a theatric scene of the Nativity; cardboard mountains, broken up into cliffs and ledges and hollows to accommodate groups of figures on their way to the manger; angels and shepherds and horse-men and camels, set on peaks, sheltered in grottoes, clustered about the base. here very much such a mountainrock, cunningly built over with churches, convents, fortifications, gardens, following the natural irregularities of the headland on which they stood; some high, some low, some thrust up on a spur, some nestling in a hollow, some sprawling unevenly along a declivity. The Château Saint-Louis, grey stone with steep dormer roofs, on the very edge of the cliff overlooking the river, sat level; but just beside it the convent and church of the Récollet friars ran downhill, as if it were sliding backwards. To landward in a low, well-sheltered spot, lay the Convent of the Ursulines lower still stood the massive foundation of the Jesuits, facing the Cathedral. Immediately behind the Cathedral the

cliff ran up sheer again, shot out into a jutting spur, and there, high in the blue air, between heaven and earth, rose old Bishops Laval's Seminary. Beneath it the rock fell away in a succession of terraces like a circular staircase; on one of these was the new Bishop's new Palace, its gardens on the terrace below.

 Not one building on the rock was on the same level with any other, — and two hundred feet below them all was the Lower Town, crowded along the narrow strip of beach between the river's edge and the perpendicular face of the cliff. The Lower town was so directly underneath the Upper Town that one could stand on the terrace of the Château Saint-Louis and throw a stone down into the narrow streets below.

 These heavy grey buildings, monasteries and churches, steep-pitched and dormered, with spires and slated roofs, were roughly Norman Gothic in effect. They were made by people from the north of France who knew no other way of building. The settlement looked like something cut off from one of the ruder towns of Normandy or Brittany, and brought over.

 On the opposite shore of the river, just across from the proud rock of Quebec, the black pine forest came down to the water's edge; and on the west, behind the town, the forest stretched no living man knew how far. That was the dead, sealed world of the vegetable kingdom, an unchartered continent choked with interlocking trees, living, dead, half dead, their roots in bogs and swamps, strangling each other in a slow agony that had lasted for centuries. The forest was suffocation, annihilation, there European man quickly swallowed up in silence, distance, mould, black mud, and the stinging swarms of insect life that bred in it. The only avenue of escape was along the river. The river was the one thing that lived, moved, glittered, changed, — a highway along which men could travel, taste the sun and open air, feel freedom, join their fellows, reach the open sea reach the world, even! 26

It is here that one is plunged into the heavy ecclesiastical atmosphere and into the hostility of the wilderness. Woven into this background are appropriate stories about saints and martyrs and adventures. Combining these stories Miss Cather does justice to the life of Quebec since she successfully makes one realize both the power of the Church and the danger of nature which were important factors in this remote French colony.

The characters in the novel are clearly and vividly drawn but they are not very human. They are like samples of the outstanding personalities in early French Canada. Cécile Auclair is very much like the heroines in Miss Cather's prairie novels : Alexandra Bergson of O Pioneers! and Antonia Shimerda of My Antonia because she is presented to us like the Mother of the Canadian soil, a true Canadian who loves everything belonging to Canada. Like Alexandra and Antonia, her kindness and generosity are showered on all who need them. Her father the apothecary Euclide Auclair, the old rugged but saintly old Bishop de Laval and the noble but disillusioned old Count de Frontenac represent the spirit of the old generation when honor and loyalty were highly esteemed while de Saint-Vallier is of the courtier type who at last is sorry to lose the pride and dignity of the old order and goodness. The devoted Father Hector Saint-Cyr is a typical martyr while Pierre Charron, whom Cécile eventually marries, is of an adventurous spirit. They ^{are} especially ~~when~~ ^{delighted} the ships return to their motherland, but the sisters are all the time in high spirits because of their willingness to serve God in this far away land.

With its careful fitting of character to environment, the display of nostalgia and adjustment, the mingling of old and new loyalties of the early settlers, Shadows on The Rock is a very successful novel. Though less famous than its predecessor, Death Comes for the Archbishop, it is a work of art. Miss Cather herself stated that she had made an honest try and got a great deal of pleasure out of it.

After her novels concerned with catholicism Miss Cather turned her mind back to childhood experiences in a collection of short stories entitled Obscure Destinies published in 1932. This collection contained three stories: "Neighbor Rosicky" written in 1928, "Old Mrs. Harris," and "Two Friends" both written in 1931. These stories are like a re-visit to the Middle West and West, but the themes are completely different from what she has attempted to do in O Pioneers!, The Song of the Lark or My Antonia: they deal no longer with pioneer spirit or the tower of the hard land or with the artistic spirit in revolt with the drab environment of the Western town but focus on the importance of human relations which, in the novels of her early period, she has so much denied. These three short stories were written within between the period when she lost her parents. "Neighbor Rosicky" especially was written during the final months of Charles Cather's illness. Therefore whatever the cause, one is inclined to think that this parental loss has probably affected her to a nostalgic return to her Nebraska memories and other recollections of her childhood. One interesting observation is that the tone of these three stories is rather tragic since

the first two stories and in the death of the main protagonists, the last in the death of a friendship. Moreover one cannot help feeling that there is a sign of exhaustion in the author who when writing these stories was already beginning to grow old.

In "Neighbour Rosicky" Miss Cather describes the last days and death of a pioneer farmer as a symbol of the passing of the pioneer spirit. It is about Anton Rosicky an old Czech farmer who at the end of his life feels he has fully enjoyed his pioneer life to the full and has nothing to regret. He goes to a doctor, the narrator of the story, who from his childhood has long admired and appreciated Rosicky and his happy family and learns that he has a bad heart, an ailment that causes his death the following spring. But, to the doctor's surprise, Rosicky does not show any sign of worry about his condition. He feels he has had a good life, and is satisfied. He has had a happy family in a well-managed home with an understanding wife and six good-hearted sons and a daughter. Unlike their neighbors they are not money-minded; they are comfortably out of debt, but they are not wealthy. They have learnt to love country life. Rosicky in his youth had experienced both happiness and misery in big cities in three countries : aside from village and farm life in his native Czechoslovakia he has been to London where he lived miserably and to New York where he was quite comfortable. But finally he decides to spend the rest of his life on a farm. If Rosicky has any real worry, it concerns his American daughter-in-law, Polly. He is worried that she will not be

happy at having married into a foreign family. But because of his kindness and affection, he finally succeeds in drawing out the good characteristics in Polly and makes her feel friendly towards every Rosicky before his death which is partly caused . . . by his ignoring the doctor's advice not to drive himself with work of any kind.

The life of Rosicky well describes happy attitude toward life. He was a contented man. Moreover, Miss Cather, in her old age, was positive that happiness and contentment are found not in the city, but in the country. Rosicky always has a vivid memory of the day he made the decision to leave New York :

Rosicky, the old Rosicky, could remember as if it were yesterday the day when the young Rosicky found out what was the matter with him. It was on a Fourth of July afternoon, and he was sitting in Park Place in the sun. The lower part of New York was empty. Wall Street, Liberty Street, Broadway, all empty. So much stone and asphalt with nothing going on, so many empty windows. The emptiness was intense, like the stillness in a great factory when the machinery stops and the belts and bands cease running. It was too great a change, it took all the strength out of one.

Those blank buildings, without the stream of life poring through them, were like empty jails. It struck young Rosicky that this was the trouble with big cities; they built you in from the earth itself, cemented you away from any contact with the ground. You lived in an unnatural world, like the fish in an aquarium, who were probably much more comfortable than they ever were in the sea.

 After that Fourth of July day in Park Place, the desire to return to the country never left him. To work on another man's farm would be all he asked; to see the sun rise and set and to plant things and watch them grow. He was a very simple man. He was like a tree that has not many roots, but one tap-root that goes down deep.²⁷

Once settled in the country, Rosicky is fully happy. Having had experiences of misery in a city like in London where once he was forced to beg for money to buy food, he does not mind the hardship of a farm life. As Rosicky muses on the fate of his children that even they have to live a hard life on the country, it is better than anything the city has to offer; Miss Cather has shown her definite view of the superiority of country life:

They would have to work hard on the farm, and probably they would never do much more than make a living. But if he could think of them as staying here on the land he wouldn't have to fear any great unkindness for them. Hardships, certainly; it was a hardship to have the wheat freeze in the ground when seed was so high; and to have to sell your stock because you had no food. But there would be other years when everything came along right, and you caught up. And what you had was your own.²⁸

On the contrary the city life Miss Cather records is almost all meanness. She especially notes the hostility of city people. She seems to forget that once she has painted mean characters who came from the country — characters like selfish Krajeck who cheated the Shimerdas and the greedy money lender Wick Cutter in My Antonia or mean and cunning Ivy Peters in A Lost Lady. She seems to think, in "Neighbour Rosicky," that the only place for virtuous and honest people is the country while the place for the crooked is the city. She says that in the country :

-----You didn't have to choose between bosses and strikers, and go wrong either way. You didn't have to do with dishonest and cruel people. They were the only things in his experience he had found terrifying and horrible; the look in the eyes of a dishonest and crafty man, of a scheming and rapacious woman.

In the country, if you had a mean neighbor, you could keep off his land and make him keep off yours. But in the city, all the foulness and misery and brutality of your neighbors was part of your life. The worst things he had come upon in his journey through the world were human, — depraved and poisonous specimens of man. To this day he could recall certain terrible faces in the London streets. There were mean people everywhere, to be sure, even in their own country town here. But they weren't tempered, hardened, sharpened, like the treacherous people in cities who live by grinding or cheating or poisoning their fellow-men. --- It seemed to Rosicky that for good, honest boys like his, the worst they could do on the farm was better than the best they would be likely to do in the city. If he'd had a mean boy, now, one who was crooked and sharp and tried to put anything over on his brothers, then town would be the place for him. What Rosicky really hoped for his boys was that they could get through the world without ever knowing much about the cruelty of human beings. "Their mother and me ain't prepared them for that," he sometimes said to himself. 29

Rosicky's death is peaceful because he is prepared for it all the time : death can claim him any time it wants to. Rosicky's life, as the doctor reflects, seems complete and beautiful. Even the graveyard is undearthlike :

For the first time it struck Doctor Ed that this was really a beautiful graveyard. He thought of city cemeteries; acres of shrubbery and heavy stone, so arranged and lonely and unlike anything in the living world. Cities of the dead, indeed; cities of the forgotten, of the "put away". But this was open and free, this little square of long grass which the wind forever stirred. Nothing but the sky overhead, and the many colored fields running on until they met that sky. The horses worked here in summer; the neighbors passed on their way to town; and over yonder, in the cornfield, Rosicky's own cattle would be eating fodder as winter came on. --- Nothing could be more right for a man who had helped to do the work of great cities and had always longed for the open country and had got to it at last. 30

Of the three, the second story entitled "Old Mrs. Harris" is the longest. It is the study of a southern family who have

moved to a small town in the West. In the family, besides the Templetons, comprising Mr. Hillary and Mrs. Victoria Templeton and their five children, there comes along Grandma, Mrs. Harris, who interests their new neighbor, the Rosens, most. Mrs. Rosen has a feeling that the family, especially Victoria, Grandma Harris' own daughter, are not being fair in their treatment of their elder. She feels that Victoria has ill used her old mother, assigning the poor old woman too much household work. Mrs. Rosen has long planned to call on Mrs. Harris sometime when she can find her alone, with no intervention of the handsome Victoria who finds no pleasure in discovering that any outside interest or special present should come into the house for anyone but herself. This time Mrs. Rosen sees Victoria leave, then runs over with a pot of coffee and some cake to ask old Mrs. Harris to join her in her afternoon coffee. But to her surprise and disturbance, Mrs. Harris does not respond to her entertainment and even appears uncomfortable in receiving a visitor without the supervision of Victoria. Mrs. Rosen observes also with resentment that old Mrs. Harris is kept in a hideous, cluttered room while the parlour is neat and comfortable. As the two ladies talk, the cat comes in, and Mrs. Rosen notices how affectionately Mrs. Harris treats it; then the grandchildren come home from school, and an atmosphere of cheerful affection breaks in. Mrs. Rosen finds that her preconception is wrong and that her sympathy for the old lady is useless since Mrs. Harris seems very contented with her position in the family even though it sometimes includes the dirty work. Yet Victoria

does not seem to be aware of her behavior toward her mother. She takes the old lady's service for granted and if she once suspects her neighbor's indignation, all will be over because in spite of her good heart, she is terribly proud and cannot bear the least criticism. Old Mrs. Harris also does not in the least regard herself as ill-used, and, to Mrs. Rosen's surprise, everybody in the family is courteous and well-behaved. Mrs. Rosen also finds Vickie, Mrs. Harris' eldest grandchild, Victoria's daughter, a care-free and good-natured girl of fifteen. The girl is working for a scholarship and often comes to the Rosen's house to read and to receive encouragement in her educational ambitions. Both Mrs. Rosen and her husband who "didn't mind keeping a clothing-store in a little Western town, so long as he had a great deal of time to read philosophy", are quite fond of Vickie. As for Victoria, in spite of her resentment of Victoria's treatment of her old mother, Mrs. Rosen cannot help admiring her smartness in relation to people outside her own family. To Mrs. Rosen, Victoria is an attractive woman. There is something warm and genuine about her. She isn't in the least willowy or languishing, as Mrs. Rosen has usually found Southern ladies to be. She is high-spirited and direct; a trifle imperious, but with a shade of diffidence, too, as if she were trying to adjust herself to a new group of people and to do the right thing. The condition of the Templeton's family is rather discouraging. From Mrs. Harris's reflections one learns the previous history of the Templetons. In Tennessee, the

Templetons lived comfortably in Grandma's own house. Being a widow with a married daughter, Mrs. Harris accepted the southern convention submissively : she kept in the background, considering herself an old woman, wearing full-gathered black dresses and a black bonnet and finally became a housekeeper. She accepted this estate unprotestingly, almost gratefully. The Templetons' troubles began when Mr. Templeton's aunt died and left him a few thousand dollars, and he got the idea of bettering himself. Thinking that his boys would have a better chance in the West, he went, first alone, to Colorado where he got a good position with a mining company. He was actually doing quite well, but when the altitude of that mountain town brought sickness into his family that Hillary Templeton lost his courage and came north to the flat, sunny, semi-arid country town, Skyline, to work for an irrigation project. But so far things have not gone well with him. For this reason even when Vickie gets a scholarship to a college, Hillary and Victoria cannot provide her with a sum of three hundred dollars which Vickie has to take along to put her through the year. The problem is solved privately by Mrs. Harris who, emerging for the first time as an independent individual, arranges with the Rosens for a loan to Vickie of the necessary money. Mrs. Rosen is especially more pleased to be able to help, in fact not Vickie but the old lady, to take the worry off Mrs. Harris' mind. It is the first time that each sees and appreciates the other more clearly, and Mrs. Harris can at last understand and respond to Mrs. Rosen's affection. Meanwhile confusion reigns in the Templeton house-

hold. Victoria discovers that she is pregnant again and is depressed. Mr. Templeton goes off on a business trip. Mrs. Harris is taken by her last illness. Vickie learns the good news, unaware whom she has to thank for it. Grandma is left alone with the younger grandchildren, the two twins, with whom she has achieved a perfect relationship. That night she loses consciousness and soon passes away quietly.

"Old Mrs. Harris" has unmistakably for its heroine, not a high-spirited young girl, but a self-effacing grandmother who is the center of attention and receives all sympathy. In the eyes of her new neighbors in the West, the old woman lives for others only. The only other adult in the family who pays any attention to Mrs. Harris is the hired girl Fanny who rubs her feet for her when the circulation gets poor. For the rest, all of them are half indifferent to her and take her services for granted. The Westerners think the old woman accepts her own lot heroically and stoically, but they never understand that what the old lady does is the principle of the Southerners : old Mrs. Harris would have been terribly distressed if there were no longer a facade of respectability for which she herself would be willing to slave :

To be sure, Mrs. Harris, and the other women of her age who managed their daughter's house, kept in the background; but it was their own background, and they ruled it jealously. They left the front porch and the parlor to the young married couple and their young friends; the old women spent most of their lives in the kitchen and pantries and back dining-room. But there they ordered life to their own taste, entertained their friends, dispensed charity, and heard the troubles of the poor31

She believed that somebody ought to be in the parlor, and somebody in the kitchen. She wouldn't for the world have had Victoria go about every morning in a short gingham dress, with bare arms, and a dust-cap on her head to hide the curling-kids as these brisk housekeepers did. To Mrs. Harris that would have meant real poverty, coming down in the world so far that one could no longer keep up appearances. ----- she certainly valued respectability above personal comfort, and she could go on a good way yet if they always had a cool pleasant parlor, with Victoria properly dressed to receive visitors. To keep Victoria different from these "ordinary" women meant everything to Mrs. Harris. 32

Another sign of Mrs. Harris's superiority is her acceptance of pain and hard work as an inescapable condition of life :

Sometimes, in the morning, if her feet ached more than usual, Mrs. Harris felt a little low ... She would hang up her towel with a sigh and go into the kitchen, feeling that it was hard to make a start. But the moment she heard the children running down the uncarpeted back stairs, she forgot to be low. Indeed, she ceased to be an individual, an old woman with aching feet; she became part of group, became a relationship. She was drunk up into their freshness when they burst in upon her, telling her about their dreams, explaining their troubles with buttons and shoe-laces and underwear shrunk too small. The tired, solitary old woman Grandmother had been at daybreak vanished; suddenly the morning seemed as important to her as it did to the children, and the morning ahead stretched out sunshiny, important. 33

"Old Mrs. Harris" is the first sign of Miss Cather's renewed interest in the South of her childhood in Virginia which she later used in her last novel, Sapphira and the Slave Girl. The picture she paints involves a sense of clannishness — The Tompletons and even old Mrs. Harris hate to have outsiders mess into their affairs, even though it means sympathy and help. They also have excessive admiration for superficial qualities : respectability and the keep-

ing up of appearances are far more important to them than anything else, and the Templeton children have a great admiration for their mother's good looks. But most serious and perhaps worst of all is the young southerners failure to realize the importance of their elders and the elders even help to promote this attitude. Whatever the impulse is, Miss Cather seems to regret that she had not seen the value of her forbears sooner. "Old Mrs. Harris" is therefore her tribute to the elders whom she had neglected nearly all her lifetime. A note of regret is curiously echoed in the last paragraph of the story :

Thus Mrs. Harris slipped out of the Templeton's story; but Victoria and Vickie had still to go on, to follow the long road that leads through things unguessed at and unforeseeable. When they are old, they will come closer and closer to Grandma Harris. They will think a great deal about her, and remember things they never noticed; and their lot will be more or less like hers. They will regret that they heeded her so little; but they, too, will look into the eager, unseeing eyes of young people and feel themselves alone. They will say to themselves : "I was heartless, because I was young and strong and wanted things so much. But now I know."³⁴

"Two Friends," the shortest and final story in Obscure Destinies, tells about two friends as seen through the eyes of a young admirer who lives "in a little wooden town in a shallow Kansas river valley." Mr. R.E. Dillon is a prosperous banker and store owner and Mr. J.H. Trueman is a big cattleman, but in spite of their differences in background and temperament there is a deep understanding and affection between them. They usually spend their summer evenings sitting side by side in arm-chairs on the wooden sidewalk

outside the banker's store. Therefore the young narrator is able to overhear their interesting talk, the subjects of which vary a great deal and reveal their intelligence and good background. They always take trips together, dress better than the other men in town and are equally polite. The main difference between these two friends is their political views. Mr. Dillon is a Democrat while Mr. Trueman is a Republican. At first each man seems to enjoy having his party ridiculed, taking it as a joke. Unfortunately the wonderful friendship of the two gentlemen who have been admirable companions for over ten years finally falls apart owing to this political difference. Dillon goes to Chicago at the time when the Democratic convention first nominates William Jennings Bryan, and he comes back full of enthusiasm for Bryan. Trueman, who is contemptuous of Bryan, cannot conceal his contempt. Thus Bryan drives the two friends apart. And finally when Trueman withdraws his money from Dillon's bank, their friendship comes to a definite end. Dillon is even more bitter when Bryan loses the campaign. He feels as if Mr. Trueman had had a part in the affair. Dillon becomes sarcastic and sharp but he dies suddenly soon afterwards. Nobody knows whether the death of Dillon is a blow to Trueman, for he immediately departs for San Francisco. When he comes back it is only to sell all his property to an unknown rancher. He then again leaves for good for San Francisco where he dies nine years later.

"The Two Friends" leaves the reader with an impression of regret for lost human relationships. At this stage Miss

Cather was preoccupied with a feeling that the public had rejected her. She was like a stranger. The world had changed, but she had not. Nostalgically she writes, revealing how deeply she feels this loss:

The breaking-up of that friendship between two men who scarcely noticed my existence was a real loss to me, and has ever since been a regret. More than once in southern countries where there is a smell of dust and dryness in the air and the nights are intense, I have come upon a stretch of dusty white road drinking up the moonlight beside a blind wall, and have felt a sudden sadness. Perhaps it was not until the next morning that I knew why, — and then only because I had dreamed of Mr. Dillon or Mr. Trueman in my sleep. When that old scar is occasionally touched by chance, it rouses the old uneasiness; the feeling of something broken that could so easily have been mended; of something delightful that was senselessly wasted, of a truth that was accidentally distorted — one of the truths we want to keep.³⁵

Miss Cather's pleasure ⁱⁿ recapturing former times is fully seen again in her last novel, Sapphira and the Slave Girl, published in 1940. In it she presented the quality of life in Northern Virginia in the time when her grandmothers were young women. In fact she had long intended to make a novel from her recollections of Virginia and from the stories about even the earlier time she had heard from the older members of her family or their friends. She once promised her father that she would do so, but it was long before she set out to do what she had promised. When she at last decided to write this novel probably it was due to the loss of her parents and her own approach to old age. It is quite natural that in old age a person often gets pleasure from her memories of her childhood incidents or from the stories of former days. Miss

Cather even went down to Virginia in the early spring of 1938 and stayed for some weeks at Winchester, to walk over the old ground and renew her sense of what it had meant to live there. The visit enabled her to visualize the scene of her novel, which was supposed to have taken place in 1856.

As the title suggests, the novel turns upon slavery. Sapphira was the daughter of a wealthy and aristocratic Pennsylvania family of English descent. She was formerly Sapphira Dodderidge of Loudoun County, who, to the surprise of everyone married Henry Colbert, member of a humble family of Flemish millers. Perhaps to avoid the curious comment of her aristocratic peers, she moved away from her native county and settled on some property she owned in Back Creek, Virginia, when her husband became the local miller. She went back home to pay visits once in a while but often without her husband. Tensions between husband and wife built up, partly resulting from the difference in social backgrounds, partly from the different principles by which they lived. Their main conflict was their concept of slavery : Sapphira began her married life with a score of slaves while her husband detested the idea of keeping slaves. Out of their marriage were born three daughters. One of them was rebellious Rachael, later Mrs. Blake, who took so much after her father, especially in her abhorrence of slavery, that she was not her mother's favorite and Sapphira was glad that Rachael married, at seventeen, thirty-year old Michael Blake, a young district representative, who took Rachael to Washington after the marriage. But after a brilliant and happy period with her husband in Washington,

Rachael returned with her two young daughters to live in Back Creek following the sudden death from yellow fever of her husband and only son. Knowing his daughter well, Mr. Colbert had a new house built by the main street for Rachael and her daughters. Being completely different from her vivid and authoritative mother, Rachael led a life of quiet charity, acting as nurse and comforter to the poor and sick of the district.

The novel really began about twenty-five years after the marriage of Sapphira who was then past fifty and the powerful mistress of the house. Although they had been only married for a long time, they lived like strangers — she slept at the manor; he, at the mill house. She was unfortunately afflicted with dropsy and because for four years she was unable to get out of a wheelchair alone, Sapphira's suspicions were easily aroused. Overhearing the scandalous remark Lizzie, her jealous and thoughtless cook, the mistress of the house became extremely jealous of Nancy, the young yellow slave girl whose mother, Till, was Sapphira's housekeeper. Since Nancy's duty was to keep Henry's room down at the mill for him, Sapphira thought that Nancy and her husband were having an affair. Thus Sapphira with no evidence at all, set out to ruin the girl. At first she meant to sell Nancy to one of her rich friends, but Henry objected strongly. His protest made Sapphira even more suspicious. But in fact Henry only had a gentle paternal feeling for Nancy who responded to his kindness and she would have been willing to set Nancy free, not to enslave her any more. Fury drove Sapphira to pursue her plan even more cold-bloodedly. She invited Henry's notorious young nephew Martin Colbert, the worst rake in the country to visit them and then took every opportunity possible to throw Nancy in Martin's way. Beyond endurance because of being chased day and night by Martin, Nancy finally appealed to Rachael who never approved of her mother's slaveholding. With the assistance of her friend, an abolitionist who was then the postmistress of the town, Rachael helped Nancy escape to Canada by the Underground Railroad. Before Nancy's departure, Rachael saw her father

to ask him for the money needed to help Nancy escape. But, although Henry was firmly convinced that slavery was wrong, he did not think he had the right to interfere with his wife's personal property. Therefore Henry asked his daughter to take the money from his coat which he would leave hanging overnight by an open window. One interesting thing was the attitude of Nancy's mother. Till knew everything, even the danger of her own daughter, but she did not lift a finger to help her daughter. Trained in Loudoun County, she accepted the institution of slavery as a matter of fact; but after Nancy's escape her gratitude to Rachael lasted as long as life.

Sapphira was extremely hurt. She knew well Rachael's part in Nancy's escape; but the only thing she could do was to send a severe letter asking her daughter to pay her no more visits.

In spite of her kindness and charity, Fate did not seem to be on Rachael's side. During autumn a great misfortune befell poor Rachael again. Her two little daughters were seriously ill with diphtheria and one of them died with this terrible disease. The death of the child, however, brought one good result to Rachael. Having heard of the great misfortune Sapphira softened. She finally asked Henry to invite Rachael to return to live with the family. Sapphira subsequently was surrounded by her husband, daughter and grandchild once more before she died in 1858. Henry survived his wife for five years. He saw the beginning of the Civil War, and confidently expected to see the end of it, but he met his death in the haying season of 1863, when he was working in the fields with the few negroes who begged to stay on at the Mill Farm after Henry had freed all his wife's slaves. The epilogue told about Nancy's return twenty-five years later, to visit her mother, her beloved Mrs. Rachael Blake and her friends including Miss Cather's parents and Willa Cather herself at the age of five.

When compared with Miss Cather's other novels, Sapphira and the Slave Girl is unique in its content. Miss Cather has tried her best to draw a picture of a little society in conditions that had vanished forever and this attempt makes her novel a study of manners. She has also shown her great

interest in slavery and in the people branded as slaves. Thus a part of the novel which has nothing to do with the main theme tells interestingly the story of old Jezebel, Nancy, the slave girl's grandmother. From old Jezebel's life story one learns how slaves were shipped from Africa, how they were tamed and domesticated, and how loyal they were to their masters. Nowadays such a story seems cruel and unbearable but it is interesting to notice that in using slavery as her theme, Miss Cather only makes it fall appropriately into the scene of her novel ^{of} the south at the time before the Civil War. She does not show the severe treatment that the slaves are generally thought of as suffering. On the contrary she seems to make us feel that slaves were well protected and cared for. Sapphira Colbert, in spite of her slaveholding and autocratic temperament, takes good care of her slaves :

When the darkies were sick, she doctored them, sent linen for the new babies and had them brought for her to see as soon as the mother was up and about.³⁶

And even the slaves themselves seem to be most willing to remain in their own position. Till's loyalty to her mistress is striking :

After Nancy and the children were gone, Mrs. Blake sat down to watch over the pans of browning coffee. She understood why Nancy did not go to Till for advice and protection. Till had been a Dodderidge before ever she was Nancy's mother. In Till's mind her first duty was to her mistress
... Anything that made trouble between her and the Mistress would wreck the order of the household.³⁷

Being offered freedom, the slaves are not willing to go away from their masters. Henry Colbert, who detested the system of slavery once tried to free Sampson, his prospective head mill-hand but only found that his attempt and sympathy met no response :

Colbert trusted Sampson's judgment, and believed he could get a place for him among the Quaker mills in Philadelphia. He had considered buying Sampson from Sapphira and sending him to Pennsylvania a free man.

Three years ago he had called Sampson into his

room one night and proposed this plan to him. Sampson did not interrupt; he stood in his manly, responsible way, listening intently to his master. But when it was his turn to speak, he broke down. This was his home. Here he knew everybody. He didn't want to go out among strangers. Whatever had put such a notion in Mister Henry's head? Wasn't he real smart about his work?38

At the same time Miss Cather has also shown that to some people, however well-treated the slaves are, the idea of it is completely inhuman and wrong. In this novel, this concept is shown clearly through Henry Colbert and his daughter Rachael, but by comparison Rachael is the stronger. She is strong in her principles and works for them unhesitatingly. She is always considered rebellious in her attitude by her mother or even by the slaves themselves :

It was the owning that was wrong, the relation itself, no matter how convenient and agreeable it might be for master or servant. She had always known it was wrong. It was the thing that made her unhappy at home, and came between her and her mother. How she hated her mother's voice in sarcastic reprimand to the servants! And she hated it in contemptuous indulgence At home, she knew that all the servants were fond of her mother, in good or ill humour, and that they were not fond of her. She was not at all what the darkies thought a young lady should be.39

The idea of slavery perplexes Henry Colbert. Being a devout Christian he seeks the answer in the book of the Lord, but none of the scriptures seems to satisfy him. Yet, like his daughter, he knows it is wrong :

Behind the square of candlelight down there, the miller, in his mill clothes, was sitting with his Bible open on the table before him, but he was no longer reading. Jezebel's life, as Mr. Fairhead had summed it up, seemed a strange instance of predestination. For her, certainly, deliverance. Yet he hated the whole system of slavery. His father had never owned a slave. The Quakers who came down from Pennsylvania believed that slavery would one day be abolished. In the North there were many people who called themselves abolishers Whenever he went to Winchester, he called upon a wise old Quaker. This man, though now seventy, firmly believed that in his own life time he would see one of those great designs accomplished; that

Lord had already chosen his heralds and His captains, and a morning would break when all the black slaves would be free.⁴⁰

For this reason the conflict takes place between Sapphira on the one hand and her husband and daughter on the other. The conflict becomes even more intense when Sapphira, abusing her position as mistress of her establishment, inflicts grievous wrong on Nancy by forcing the girl into the most dangerous circumstances. Her deed is terribly cruel, even in the eyes of her own daughter :

Mrs. Colbert had turned on Nancy; that was well known. Now she had the worst rake in the country staying in her house, and she was sending the girl up into the woods alone, after giving him fair warning. Did her mother really want to ruin Nancy? Could her spite go so far as that?

Rachael Blake closed her eyes and leaned her head and arms forward on her dresser top. She had known her mother to show great kindness to her servants, and, sometimes, cold cruelty. But she had never known her to do anything quite so ugly as this, if Nancy's tale were true.⁴¹

Rachael, therefore, does not hesitate to help Nancy escape. When Nancy comes to her for the second time seeking protection she realized how meanly her mother is acting towards the poor girl. She knows that she has hurt her mother terribly but she is the kind of person, who when she once knows that she is right, is determined to act. Sapphira knows her daughter well. Her final letter to her own daughter is short but full of hatred :

Mistress Blake is kindly requested to make no further visits at the Mill House.

Sapphira Doddridge Colbert 42

Sapphira and the Slave Girl would have been a more forceful and successful novel had Miss Cather not ended it in a compromising tone. Until the flight of Nancy, the conflict in the novel is successfully presented. But when Miss Cather adds on the part of reconciliation between mother and daughter, she seems to make Sapphira the center of admiration. Now it is, strangely enough, the mother who forgives

the daughter instead of the other way round. The conflict that Miss Cather has set up from the beginning of the story at once collapses undramatically. Even Henry who has formerly been on his daughter's side comes to admire Sapphira. One therefore can hardly avoid feeling that in twisting the story like this, Miss Cather is all for autocracy :

After this long silence, in which he seemed to know that she followed his thoughts, he lifted his head, still holding fast to her hands, and spoke falteringly. "Yes, dear wife, do let us have Rachael here. You are a kind woman to think of it. You are good to a great many folks, Sapphy."

"Not so good as Rachael, with her basket!" She turned it off lightly, tweaking his ear.

"There are different ways of being good to folks," the miller held out stubbornly, as if this idea had just come to him and he was not to be teased into letting go of it. "Sometimes keeping people in their place is being good to them."⁴³

However interesting the novel is, it is unfortunate to say that as a work of art it is a failure. Its flaw is that the book simply will not hold together. But one has to admire Miss Cather's attempt, clearly seen in this book, to record as many as possible of the details of her earliest childhood at the closing time of her life. One notices that for all her novels from the first up to the one previous to Sapphire and the Slave Girl, Miss Cather drew experiences from all parts of her life but she almost completely omitted references to her early childhood. This she recorded only in her last novel. Thus Sapphira and the Slave Girl completes the portrait of the novelist herself.