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LANDSCAPES OF CONSCIOUSNESS:

A STUDY OF MODERN TECHNIQUES IN WILLA CATHER'S A LOST LADY, THE PROFESSOR'S HOUSE, AND DEATH COMES FOR THE ARCHBISHOP

by

MARYBETH McMAHON

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1999

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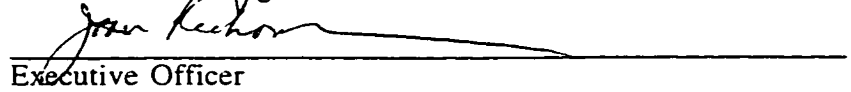
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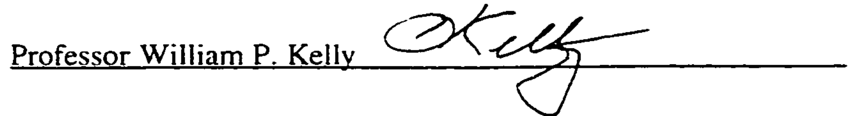

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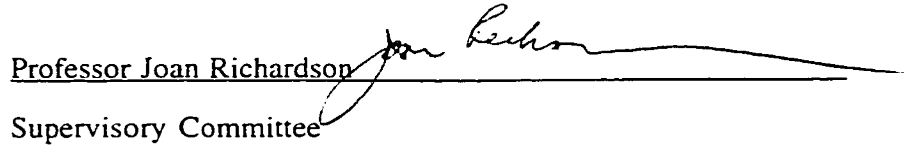

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Contents

Acknowledgements....................iv

Introduction....................1-21

1. A Lost Lady and the Modern Art of Indirection....................22-61

2. Modern Forms and Desert Places in The Professor's House....................62-117

3. Death Comes for the Archbishop and the Miracle of Perception....................118-168

Afterword....................169-171

Selected Bibliography....................172-178

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Introduction

I was the world in which I walked, and what I saw
Or heard or felt came not but from myself;
And there I found myself more truly and more strange.

Wallace Stevens, *Tea at the Palaz of Hoon*

Willa Cather published her first novel at the age of thirty-eight. Her evolution as a writer -- if one measures by the calendar -- was slow, but by 1912, the year of Alexander's Bridge, it was sure. A long apprenticeship as journalist, teacher, editor, and writer of short fiction resulted in the launching of a work far more prodigious than any she had attempted before. That she chose to move beyond the familiar terrain of the short story (the favored genre of local-colorists and of her literary mentor Sarah Orne Jewett) suggests her intention to expand her range and to assume a place in the predominantly male tradition of American writing at the time. By 1922, Cather was at the top of her form as a novelist, surpassing not only Jewett's legacy, but building on that of early modernist writers like Flaubert and Henry James who were also models for her development. Employing modern techniques for exploring and representing interiority while developing her own peculiarly modern, unfurnished method, Cather had in the decade of the 20s truly lit out for her own territory as an artist and achieved her best work with the publication of A Lost Lady, The Professor's House, and Death Comes for the Archbishop. This study offers a look at some of the modern features of Cather's unfurnished method in these three late novels and focuses primarily on style and language. While each of Cather's novels can be seen as in some sense experimental, a brief look at

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the early engagement of her craft is useful in understanding the distinguishing quality of her later development.

In her first novel, Cather boldly employed the genteel trappings of James and Wharton, presenting characters in drawing-room splendor and trans-Atlantic angst. Alexander's Bridge centers on Bartley Alexander, a famous bridge builder, who suffers a fatal split between his "civilized" life as an upper-class Boston husband and respected citizen and his "primitive," youthful attachment to a London actress, Hilda Burgoyne. Bartley's psychical and emotional fracture is dramatically rendered in the strain and then the collapse of one of his bridges which takes him and many others to their death. While it marks an important artistic "first" for Cather, the story did not establish the style, control of language, and aesthetic vision for which she later became known and celebrated. Cather herself noted that her first novel suffered from an unnatural floridness; she told an interviewer in 1921, "I was still more preoccupied with trying to write well than with anything else. It takes a great deal of experience to become natural" (Bohlke 21). Noting the influence of Henry James, the poet Louise Bogan also called Alexander's Bridge a "mis-step," and recorded Cather's assertion that her desire to imitate others and "write beautiful prose about temperamental, ambitious, enchanting people" was "a grave mistake" (Bohlke 115). By 1937, Cather's view of the novel as "unnecessary and superficial" (WCOW 92) was fixed, and she relegated it to a secondary place in Houghton Mifflin's Library Edition of her collected works, beginning volume I with her second novel.[1]

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Alexander's Bridge, with its stiffly drawn cultivated settings in London and Boston and its rather contrived dialogue, may in many ways be the work of a novelist still unsure of her craft, but it dramatizes Cather's "lifelong interest in the doubleness of human personality" (Quirk 105) and offers a useful contrast to the stylistic developments of her later work. Bartley Alexander's struggle to reconcile opposing forces in his nature -- although conventionally rendered in the opposition of two women (wife and young lover) -- presents a theme that Cather explores *un*conventionally and at greater depth in her later novels. Professor Godfrey St. Peter of The Professor's House, to cite a prominent example, experiences a conflict of his social and youthful -- or primitive -- self that generally resembles that of his progenitor, Bartley Alexander.[2] St. Peter's struggle, however, occurs at a level far below the surface drama of Alexander's Bridge. In The Professor's House, Cather dispenses with artificial dramatic situations and replaces them with depictions of internal scenes of psychological conflict. In the novels that follow Alexander's Bridge, Cather set the course for the development of a more subtle, complex, and often indirect method of representing internal struggle.

The key to this development can be discerned in her second novel, O Pioneers! (1913). In O Pioneers!, Cather found a way to employ a material that was more truly her own and to shape it in a manner that was above all "natural." As she noted in the 1922 Preface to Alexander's Bridge, this meant giving up "the building of external stories" and relying instead on an "inner feeling" that would produce in the artist "a deeper excitement than the thrill of novelty or the glitter of the passing show" (xxxiv). Reference here to "the passing show" -- the title of Cather's theater, music, and literary column for the Nebraska newspaper, the *Lincoln Courier* -- surely could not have been casual and suggests her intention. In the course of maturing as a writer, it was necessary to abandon

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the thrilling life of the journalist, to set aside the role of spectator and commentator, and to embrace the less glamorous but more substantial, "deeper" life of the novelist. To produce serious works of art, it was necessary to give up journalism and to abandon imitation in order to possess her own genuine territory or what Cather wryly called "Gopher Prairie."

By creating a story built out of the vital material that lay "at the bottom of . . . consciousness" (AB xxxiv) rather than the artificial "stuff" of stimulating external experience, Cather could at last follow the advice of Sarah Orne Jewett and harness her knowledge of the world to explore her own territory as a writer.[3] Jewett had written her, "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" (AB xxxv). The "parish" Cather would possess was not merely the prairie terrain of Nebraska that came to be so closely associated with her name, but the locality of memory that was the core of her being and the vital center of her art. Reflecting on her early years as a writer, she proclaimed to Elizabeth Sergeant, "Life began for me when I ceased to admire and began to remember" (Sergeant 117). With O Pioneers!, Cather abandoned imitation of other writers (including, most prominently, James and Wharton) and established the act of remembering as requisite to her art.

As her own commentary on her work again and again reveals, the act of remembering was always intimately tied to place, to a compelling, deep-seated physicality. She conceived of remembering -- as she did creating -- as a kind of physical experience. In her short commentary, "My First Novels," Cather described the difference between Alexander's Bridge and O Pioneers! in strikingly physical terms: Writing O Pioneers! "was like taking a ride through a familiar country on a horse that knew the way,

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on a fine morning when you felt like riding. The other was like riding in a park, with someone not altogether congenial to whom you had to be talking all the time" (WCOW 93). The passage is noteworthy as it illustrates an essential metaphor in all of Cather's writing: the "familiar country" or landscape as representative of the familiar, internal terrain of one's being. Movement through or within that terrain depends on one's ability not to coerce but to rely on memory -- "the horse that knew the way."

In another passage descriptive of the writing process, Cather employs a similar metaphoric construction. The mature writer, she notes, depends not on "literary devices," but "on something else -- the thing by which our feet find the road home on a dark night, accounting of themselves for roots and stones which we had never noticed by day" (AB xxxvii). Writing is once again analogous to a physical experience -- finding "the road home on a dark night." However, in this configuration, the thing that allows her to discern the way is more distinctly internal. There is no horse to convey the author; it is memory -- that mysterious, indefinite "something" that is "*the* thing" for Cather -- which enables her to discover the path. The brief excerpt emphasizes what became an essential truth for Cather: it is not vision alone that allows one to see. The process of writing, like the process of finding one's way home, must be guided by the unconscious force of memory. By relying on memory, the writer is able not merely to reconstruct what she sees consciously, "by day," but to employ a kind of "night vision," to see that which she *"had never noticed"* --"the roots and stones" of a more obscure, unconscious realm.

For the writer who knows her "own material," the right road is the natural, remembered road, not the one constructed with mechanical "devices." In O Pioneers!, Cather took to this road and established an enduring aesthetic value for all the novels to follow. The subject matter in which she would find herself "most at home" (AB xxxiii)

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depended on the recovery of memory and the creation of a natural setting or landscape with which to represent and explore it. The greater achievement of her second novel is due at least in part to the fact that Alexandra's story is strongly "built out of its relation to nature and its preservation of memory" (Lee 109). While Alexander's Bridge was a story tainted by artifice, O Pioneers! was to Cather an entirely natural phenomenon. "The story," she told Elizabeth Sergeant, "came up out of the long grasses" (Sergeant 102), a thing at once real and imagined, created and remembered.

Cather's sense of having taken a significant step in her artistic development with O Pioneers! is revealed in an inscription she wrote to her friend Carrie Sherwood in a copy of the book: "This was the first time I walked off on my own feet -- everything before was half real and half an imitation of writers whom I admired. In this one I hit the home pasture and found that I was Yance Sorgeson and not Henry James" (in Woodress 240). Cather's recognition that she is Yance Sorgeson, a Red Cloud farmer, and not Henry James is important, as it points to the single feature that most distinguishes O Pioneers! from Alexander's Bridge: the link between self-possession (knowing who she is) and place (her "home pasture").

For the first time in Cather's novel writing, *place* became an essential element of the story, and landscape, in particular, is transformed into a dramatic force of character. No longer static or contrived, the landscape in O Pioneers!, as Judith Fryer notes, "provides the motive from which the invention is spun out" (208). It is, however, not only "where representation begins," not only "the basis for a story" (Fryer 249); it is the basis for identity. The land in this novel resonates with a vitality and texture not found in Alexander's Bridge primarily because its mysterious transformation is so closely -- and dramatically -- linked to the evolution of the novel's protagonist Alexandra Bergson.

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Alexandra's heroism depends on her ability to respond imaginatively and with a willing acquiescence to the land. Throughout the novel, as critic Tom Quirk notes, the vital impulses of the soil correspond to and inspire the universal impulses of identity (128). As it unfolds with and through the transformation of the land, the story of Alexandra's individual struggle and triumph takes on epic proportions and an evocative power not found in the author's first novel.

In many of Cather's early novels -- particularly O Pioneers! and My Ántonia -- "the great fact *is* the land itself" (OP 37); it is the fundamental basis for her characters' triumph or dissolution, for their rise or fall. This innovative blending of the land's development with individual awakening and discovery is one of Cather's greatest achievements in the early works. Through the land, individual human destiny is attached to a distant past and a yet to be imagined future. The land is not only "the material out which countries are made" (MA 14) but the raw material out of which a self may be forged.

For the protagonists of Cather's early novels, the successful forging of a self depends not on their ability to exert a brute force of will but on their ability to give themselves to and harmonize with the forces around them: "to dissolve into something complete and great" (MA 14). Unlike her literary predecessors in the nineteenth century, Cather creates characters who seek to embrace rather than master space. Alexandra triumphs, for instance, not through domination of the land but through loving cooperation.[4] In one of the most memorable scenes of O Pioneers!, Cather depicts Alexandra, returning from a trip to the farms of the river valley, as a visionary who can foresee that, with patience and care, the untamed land of the Divide will some day flourish. She writes of Alexandra's prescient attitude, "For the first time, perhaps, since

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that land emerged from the waters of geologic ages a human face was set toward it with love and yearning" (OP 37). Alexandra's vision of the land determines her own growth and development, as well as the country's future. "The history of every country," the narrator proclaims further, "begins in the heart of a man or a woman" (OP 38). Heart, not mind or muscle, determines internal and external development.

The fictive process of giving oneself in order to achieve self-possession which Cather presents in O Pioneers! closely resembles her notion of a successful creative process and novel writing itself. She wrote in her brief, introductory essay, "The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett," that if a writer "achieves anything noble, anything enduring, it must be by giving himself absolutely to his material. . . . He fades away into the land and people of his heart" (WCOW 51). Cather claimed this "gift of sympathy" is "the great gift" of the writer as well as of her triumphant characters. As Eudora Welty rightly notes, for Cather, "the heroic life is the artist's as it is the pioneer's. She equated the two" (16). In O Pioneers!, Alexandra is indeed "an artist of the soil" (Quirk 129), as is Ántonia Shimerda in My Ántonia. Thea Kronborg, in The Song of the Lark, while not as explicitly attached to "the soil" (she is not a farmer), also gains self-possession and discovers her artistic vocation through the land during a solo journey to the Southwest. All three protagonists present a version of the artist as she struggles against and triumphs over great odds. In these novels, "the tenacious ownership of the land, the endless search of its possibilities, [becomes] the very poetry of . . . character," and "the need to assert oneself proudly [becomes] a triumphant acceptance of life" (Kazin, On Native Grounds 252). Space -- or that amorphous, untamed, raw material of the land -- is in these early works more often than not "felicitous," as Judith Fryer defines it; it is a liberating space that "frees the imagination" (293). In these novels, Cather's persistent and obsessive aim

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to reconcile "the antithetical claims of art and life" (Quirk 113) in her presentation of the interdependence of character and landscape is more fully realized than in Alexander's Bridge or in the later novels.

That is not to say that the early books are without disturbing conflict or troubling complexity. The novels, as many critics have shown, do upset basic assumptions about gender[5] and depict an often unresolvable sense of fracture, loss, and alienation. What one apprehends overall in the early works is, however, a presiding sense of affirmation, a sense of "exalted serenity" (MA 179). Typically Catherian struggles between "romance and realism, space and confinement, pioneering energy and elegiac memorializing," while not definitively worked out in the early novels, are often resolved in some manner (Lee 10). A quick glance at the endings of the three novels serves to elucidate this view. O Pioneers! concludes on a celebratory note with an invocation to the "Fortunate country, that is one day to receive hearts like Alexandra's into its bosom, to give them out again in the yellow wheat, in the rustling corn, in the shining eyes of youth!" (180). My Ántonia, though tinged with melancholy, ends with Jim Burden's "sense of coming home" to himself, of possessing "the precious," though still "incommunicable past" (238). The epilogue to The Song of the Lark likewise presages rejuvenation, as it reports the life of Tillie, "the last Kronborg left in Moonstone," whose stories have the exalted function of preserving the past and seeding the future, of bringing "to the old, memories, and to the young, dreams" (706). Though by no means unequivocally affirming, the early novels possess a rich triumphal quality that no doubt accounts for their still being the most often read and studied of Cather's works.

In the later novels, serenity gives way to a deeper unease or it is sought in more remote places of the soul. Frequently, the later works are marked by a pronounced

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ambiguity that deepens the reading experience and quickens the fire of critical debate. Questions that invite endless speculation abound. Here is a sampling: Can Marion Forrester, as she is last reported in A Lost Lady, be seen as triumphant? In what sense is she lost? and to whom? How exactly will the Professor "meet the *Berengaria* " and his returning family in The Professor's House? Is his survival a matter of defeat, of failure? And who -- or even what -- is Myra Henshawe's mortal enemy in My Mortal Enemy? The disjunctions and uncertainties that permeate the background of the early works are in the later novels cast into the foreground. As Judith Fryer notes, after My Ántonia, "there is a marked falling away from the union of matter and spirit, of body and memory" (301). In these novels, the fractures inherent in her characters' existence are more boldly drawn, run deeper, and often appear fatal.

The year 1922 is generally seen by critics as the year in which Cather's work shifted into this darker, more internal mode. Her own comment in the Preface to her 1922 collection of essays, Not Under Forty, does much to underscore this identification of the year as an important point of transition. She wrote, in a now oft-quoted statement, "The world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts." In the one-paragraph preface, Cather does not offer much elaboration to define this fatal-sounding phrase, but leaves it to her essays or "sketches" to provide some clue to her meaning. She notes, "the book will have little interest for people under forty years of age," who cannot appreciate what she calls "backwardness." The "backwardness" Cather delineates in the essays is, of course, not a fault but a virtue: the virtue of those whose values are rooted in a world not yet degraded by material pursuits and commercial claims, a world where art is still a supreme value.

Given Cather's increasing disaffection for the modern age and her public declaration to remain one of the backward, it is no surprise that she has been viewed as an

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elegist of the past, nor that her later works are considered a means of working out her salvation, of welding "her world whole again" (Skaggs 10). However, Cather's aesthetic aim after 1922 was not purely restorative. Her later novels do embody a strong, backward-looking, nostalgic strain, but they also present a peculiarly modern aim to discover new forms and to define a new way of expressing. Furthermore, like the Fauve and impressionist painters she admired, Cather was interested not just in presenting a new way of seeing in her art (Sergeant 121), but in capturing and exploring *the process* of seeing itself. No single piece of commentary reveals this interest in modern techniques more thoroughly than Cather's seminal essay, "The Novel Démeublé" in which she sets out her artistic principles.

In the now famous manifesto in Not Under Forty, she states the aim of the novel should be like that of modern painting -- to break away from "mere verisimiltude . . . and to interpret imaginatively the material and social investiture of . . . characters; to present . . . scene by suggestion rather than by enumeration" (NUF 48). She goes on to note that "the higher processes of art are all processes of simplification" and reiterates her reverence for the novelist's ability to create mood and feeling without undue detail or obvious show of labor. Like the French impressionist painters who were concerned with eliciting in the viewer the *feeling* of seeing and like her compatriot F. Scott Fitzgerald, who wanted his audience to read him like Braille, one of Cather's primary concerns was the feeling her novels contained and would exert: she wrote, "Whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there--that, one might say, is created. It is the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, of the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it, the verbal mood, the emotional aura of the fact or the thing or the deed, that gives high quality to the novel or the drama, as well as to poetry itself" (NUF 50).

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This well-known statement, it should be noted, is to some extent descriptive of the novels she had already written, as well as prescriptive of the work she was yet to write. Like Professor St. Peter's scholarly work in The Professor's House, each of Cather's novels can be seen as experiments or "attempts to do something quite different" (22); they embody the author's intention to work out a "process of simplification," to discover a form in which she could capture the experience of "life itself." "What was any art," Cather has her artist protagonist in The Song of the Lark ask,

> 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 (552).

The passage like so many in Cather's novels reflects the writer's aim -- to arrest something in motion, to capture something elusive and transient, to carve out a vessel that could catch "the stream" of life. In novel writing, Cather sought to shape a vessel that would be, like the voice, not simply a static container, but a plastic form that could capture life in motion -- in its "natural intervals." Like the modern painters, she wished to capture a living feeling in her art.

Distinct from Realists like Howells and Dreiser, who achieved this effect through the accumulation of sometimes massive external detail, Cather achieved this rare potency of feeling in her writing through language peculiarly unencumbered, free of bulky detail and obvious linguistic virtuosity. In paring down her prose style, Cather was strongly in agreement with Flaubert, who maintained that "the finest works are those that contain the

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least matter" (Letters: 1830-1857 154). The vivid characters and powerfully evocative landscapes that populate her work appear to be drawn with the minimum of strokes and little flourish. One feels on reading Cather that a "process of simplification" or purifying *has been* employed, but nowhere has complexity or depth of vision been sacrificed.

In the early novels, Cather developed this aesthetic of simplifying and also established memory and landscape as the necessary tools of her expression. In the later novels, she used the techniques she had honed in her early work to explore a greater inwardness and to capture a more elusive atmosphere of the mind. As Hermione Lee points out, gaining a greater depth of expression meant for Cather not just abolishing old ways of seeing, but establishing a new language:

> Cather . . . is trying to invent a fictional language which will be invisible, transparent and as close as possible to what it speaks of. To this end, she excises and eliminates as much as she can, and depends (in her own words) on the force of 'the thing not said' for her effect. This isn't just a matter of making a sophisticated narrative read like the story-tellings of an oral culture. It is a communication (more 'modernist', ambiguous and strange than it looks at first sight) which can find a way into the incommunicable; the silent; the obscure (17).

Cather's increasing fascination with plumbing the obscure reaches of consciousness can to some extent be explained through biographical detail. Certainly by 1922 "or thereabouts," she was struggling with mounting personal losses that no doubt contributed to her sense of the world as broken or no longer whole. She had suffered the loss of her closest friend, Isabelle McClung, to marriage; she witnessed the increasing

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frailty of her parents: she saw the rise of what was to her a detestable materialism in the wake of the first World War; and she saw the transformation and loss of much of the untamed land of her childhood.

While deeply troubling, however, the losses were *not* paralyzing. The year 1922 itself was a remarkably productive year for Cather. That year found her reading the galleys of One of Ours (for which she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize one year later), writing A Lost Lady and "The Novel Démeublé," teaching writing at Breadloaf, and finishing a short story that was to become the Tom Outland section of The Professor's House (Skaggs 46). If her sense of a fractured world was personally debilitating, it was also artistically empowering. The rest of the decade saw her publishing four more novels, completing a fifth, and writing several essays and one of her greatest short stories, "Neighbour Rosicky." Clearly, Cather found in her suffering and disappointment a source for creativity. In this she confirmed the poet Wallace Stevens's recognition that artists "in general do not create in light and warmth alone. They create in darkness and coldness. They create when they are hopeless, in the midst of antagonisms" and even "when their powers are no longer subject to their control" ("Two or Three" 262).

After 1922, Cather became more intensely aware of the increasing antagonisms of her life and made them not cause for paralysis, but the source of some of her finest literary works of art. Three of the four novels Cather wrote and published in the twenties stand as the supreme achievements of her work: A Lost Lady (1923), The Professor's House (1925), and Death Comes for the Archbishop (1927). In these novels, Cather boldly experimented with forms that could more readily capture the complexities of perception and the discontinuities of experience. In the following pages, I will explore and analyze the experimental, modern quality of these novels, focusing primarily on

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innovations in narrative form and landscape Cather used to represent the obscure and often "incommunicable" drama of internal life. As Cather furthered her art of suggestion or indirection in these novels by developing a style dependent on a highly selective, compressed language, close readings of specific passages in the novels and a careful look at language make up the bulk of this study.

That Cather is thought to be eminently readable has always implied that she possesses a kind of crude simplicity or straightforward artlessness, but she is in fact, as Wallace Stevens noted, a writer of great sophistication whose artistry is often concealed or so embedded in the text as to be nearly imperceptible. Stevens wrote to a friend, "you may think she is formless. Nevertheless, we have nothing better than she is. She takes so much pains to conceal her sophistication that it is easy to miss her quality" (Letters 381). In this study, it is my intention to uncover some of Cather's "sophistication" of form and of language -- a sophistication that I believe is particularly modernist in its reliance on absence and suggestion and its emphasis on mood and atmosphere. In the three novels of the twenties which make up my field of examination, Cather experimented with language and form to create novels of great feeling and psychological depth. After 1922, her technical mastery of the "unfurnished" method reached a supreme height. She relied increasingly -- and with subtle ease -- on the effect of the unnamed, of the unspoken to create the atmosphere and mood she saw as essential to a work of art. The distinction of her style during this period rests largely on this quality of the hidden, of the effect which is, as she desired, everywhere present, nowhere named. In these novels, as in her landscape, "we learn from both seeing what is there and realizing what is not there," as Eudora Welty has observed (16). "She always said," Edith Lewis likewise reported, "it was what she left out that counted" (183).

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This insistence on the importance of what is indirectly suggested rather than directly named has become in recent years the focus of much critical attention. Feminist critics, including Ellen Moers, Phyllis Rose, Janis Stout, Hermione Lee, and Judith Fryer, have significantly enlarged the interpretive field of Cather studies by exploring the relation of "the thing not named" to Cather's attachment to women and, in particular, her attempt in her fiction to present women who struggle against the social conventions that restrict them. Many of these critics offer important insight into Cather's alienation from conventional feminine sexuality and its consequences for her work. Other critics view Cather's lesbianism as not only illuminating of the texts but as their definitive feature.[6] As Deborah Carlin notes in her book Cather, Canon, and the Politics of Reading, for these critics "the critical task then becomes one of decoding, uncovering, and recovering what has been unwritten, unmentionable, and unnamed. Yet it also involves a mode of interpretation that reads between and beyond what is literally inscribed on the page, basing its interpretive burden of proof on the life rather than the text" (20). Sharon O'Brien, in her psychoanalytic biography of Cather, associates "the thing not named" with Wilde's "the Love that dare not speak its name" and further suggests that as a covert expression of Cather's love of women, it can be viewed as "the unnamable emotional source of her fiction" (O'Brien 126-27). O'Brien's generalization is problematic not simply because Cather herself repudiated what she called Wilde's "infamy," but mainly because it limits the function of Cather's use of indirection and suggestion. The danger here, as Carlin notes, becomes the temptation to overburden the *un*written text at the risk of overlooking a perhaps greater subtlety of language as well as other prominent and important themes. The critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, for instance, seem to

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reach an interpretive (and linguistic) breaking point as they claim that which Cather "felt to be culturally unsayable" is spoken through "her characters' 'lips of silence'" (212).

Additionally, critics of this method often undermine Cather's later work in which triumphant and achieving women do not form the centerpiece or in which male narrators cannot be easily read as vehicles or "masks" to express the author's erotic attachment to women. As Carlin also points out, Carolyn Heilbrun offers the most salient example of this view. Heilbrun writes, "After My Ántonia, the struggle is over, the imagination has failed in its creation of women, and has shifted to male heroes" (81). The shift is for Heilbrun from imaginative triumph to defeat. The criticism is curious when one considers that though Cather dispenses with clearly triumphant female characters in her later work, she focuses mainly on female protagonists and often explores their struggles with uncontrollable social forces that impede their development. As well as overlooking feminist themes submerged below the surface, Heilbrun's criticism neglects what is central to Cather's work after 1922: her self-conscious experimentation with form, language, and narrative technique (Carlin 22).

In my study, I do not wish to elaborate the specific ways in which a strictly lesbian feminist reading of Cather's work may limit understanding; rather I wish to open up the examination of her unfurnished technique to a closer scrutiny of language. Some of the questions I will take up in the following chapters include the following: How is Cather able to employ simple, relatively unencumbered prose to create what Janet Giltrow and David Stouck call "the reader's experience of the text as sensation" (110)? What exactly allows the reader such an immediate and at times uncomfortable intimacy with her characters? What *precisely* produces such a compelling sense of the landscapes they inhabit? How does she create an "overtone," a "verbal mood," and an "emotional aura" to

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suggest remote realms of experience and feeling? In what way can her method be called modernist? To answer these and other questions, I particularly address techniques of her aesthetic method which can be considered modern, including most prominently her use of landscape to convey various states of consciousness and her manipulation of narrative form and voice to gain a greater depth in her representation of a character's inner life.

Landscape is, in all of Cather 's novels, more than a thrilling pictorial setting; it is very often a transmutation of the soul, the embodiment of a feeling or idea about existence. Reading Cather's landscape, therefore, almost always involves a metaphoric leap, as one sees and feels character along with it. Like "the haunting interiors" of Tolstoy's Moscow houses which Cather admired, scenic details in her novels are similarly "so much a part of the emotions of the people that they are perfectly synthesized; they seem to exist, not so much in the author's mind, as in the emotional penumbra of the characters themselves" (NUF 48). How Cather employs the artifice of a feeling landscape to direct and suggest the themes of her novels and penetrate the "emotional penumbra" of a character's interior life is a central concern of this study.

Cather's use of an absence of detail and carefully controlled silences, for instance, to create landscapes that evoke a sense of unlimited psychic space and a sense of the mysterious inner realms of existence points to a modern feature of her unfurnished method -- her innovative use of the blanks on the canvas to deepen her effect. As Eudora Welty reminds us, "what she has given us is of course not the landscape as you or I would see it, but her vision of it; we are looking at a work of art" (4). The embedded "blanks" or silences remind the reader of the process of creation itself and suggest another of Cather's modern preoccupations -- her interest in exploring through landscape the process of creation, of seeing itself. In this Cather drew from modern painters,

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particularly the impressionists, in creating a work that makes us aware that it is conceived "as a process of exploration and discovery as well as of depiction" (Flann 52).

While the landscape reveals Cather's modern preoccupation with the internal life and the process of creation, her innovations in the use of narrative voice illustrate another feature of her modernism. Like James, Flaubert, Mann, and later Woolf and Joyce, Cather was deeply interested in discovering narrative techniques that would allow her greater effectiveness in representing internal perceptions and events. Schopenhauer, in his assessment of the novel, articulated this interest in individual psychology that increasingly came to preoccupy writers of the turn of the century: "The more *inner* and the less *outer* life a novel presents, the higher and nobler will be its purpose . . . Art consists in achieving the maximum of inner motion with the minimum of outer motion; for it is the inner life which is the true object of our interest." Achieving this "inner motion" for Cather depends not only on the deft use of landscape and image to represent internal experience, but on the simultaneous and sophisticated manipulation of narrative form.

Narration of external reality or landscape in Cather's work is often intimately related to subjective perception. Typical of modernist writing, according to David Lodge, is that "the structure of external 'objective' events essential to narrative art in traditional poetics is diminished in scope and scale, or presented selectively and obliquely, in order to make room for introspection, analysis, reflection and reverie" (481). In Cather's later work, she turns her attention from the pioneering action of the earlier novels to depict an action of the mind, and narrative that appears objective often suggests a ruminating, subjective presence. In A Lost Lady, The Professor's House, and Death Comes For the Archbishop, Cather introduces the subjectivity of private experience into her work through the subtle manipulation of narrative voice. In this study, I will look closely at

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passages in the novels that illustrate Cather's innovative use of narrative voice to convey and explore the inner life of her characters.

My chief aim throughout has been to appreciate the many facets of Cather's literary innovations and to bring to the poetry of her language the care and attention that are its supreme due.

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Notes

[1] The critical consensus that O Pioneers! is Cather's *real* first novel persists. Sharon O'Brien, Editor of the Library of America's three-volume collection of Cather's work published in 1987, maintains Cather's arrangement of her work and places her second novel first in the series of novels in the volume entitled Early Novels and Stories.

[2] Many critics and commentators, including Judith Fryer, Tom Quirk, and James Woodress, to name a few, have noted the underlying similarity of Bartley Alexander's and Professor St. Peter's spiritual struggles.

[3] The following abbreviations have been incorporated in parenthetical references to Cather's work throughout my text:

AB - Alexander's Bridge
MA - My Ántonia
NUF - Not Under Forty
OP - O Pioneers!
WCOW - Willa Cather on Writing: Critical Studies on Writing as an Art

[4] See Judith Fryer for useful discussion of how Cather's vision of the land differs from the predominant view of her male literary counterparts in which the soil is envisioned as a feminine force to be subdued and dominated in order that the male may thereon inscribe his own destiny and nature (Fryer 231-260).

[5] Hermione Lee in her book, Double Lives, offers an important view into how Cather overturns "the dominant male critique of female weakness and emotionalism" (13).

[6] Although Cather herself would not use the term, I concur with Sharon O'Brien, Hermione Lee, and others that it appropriately denotes her lifelong romantic attachment to women.

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Chapter 1

A Lost Lady and the Modern Art of Indirection

> Tell all the Truth but tell it slant--
> Success in Circuit lies
>
> Emily Dickinson

In 1922, before completing her sixth novel, A Lost Lady, Cather wrote what has become a seminal statement on her artistic aims and methods, the short essay, "The Novel Démeublé." In it, she stated with a candor that characterizes much of her non-fiction prose,

> How wonderful it would be if we could throw all the furniture out of the window; and along with it, all the meaningless reiterations concerning physical sensations, all the tiresome old patterns, and leave the room as bare as the stage of a Greek theatre, or as that house into which the glory of Pentecost descended; leave the scene bare for the play of emotions, great and little--for the nursery tale, no less than the tragedy, is killed by tasteless amplitude (WCOW 42-3).

The outspoken statement and the essay as a whole take aim primarily at those realist writers whom Cather thought guilty of "overfurnishing" their novels with material details, like Balzac and Dreiser, or of merely "cataloguing" physical sensations, like Zola and D.H. Lawrence, at the expense of eliciting the elemental emotions she considered the foundation of great fiction. A veteran journalist and editor by the age of thirty, Cather clearly distinguished between the every-day information of the journalist and the eternal

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stuff of the artist. She noted, "If the novel is a form of imaginative art, it cannot be at the same time a vivid and brilliant form of journalism. Out of the teeming, gleaming stream of the present it must select the eternal material of art" (WCOW 40).

Exercising a highly skilled selectivity in the creation of the novel meant for Cather unfurnishing it of all unnecessary detail, eradicating what she considered journalistic corruptions and modern superfluities that fattened but did not substantiate the fictional experience. For Cather, verbal excess went along with the material excess of the modern age and its emphasis not on quality but quantity; when excess of detail and observation found its place in the novel, she maintained, it debased the genre and cheapened the literary work. "Is the story of a banker who is unfaithful to his wife and who ruins himself by speculation in trying to gratify the caprices of his mistresses," she asked rhetorically, "at all reinforced by a masterly exposition of banking, our whole system of credits, the methods of the Stock Exchange?" (WCOW 37). Echoing Cather's objections to the realist's art, Virginia Woolf similarly complained that the "materialist" writers "spend immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring" (153). Cather's main objection to the realists' penchant for elaboration was, however, that it destroyed a necessary effect of beauty and clouded the core emotional drama of the novel.[1]

In part, Cather's urge to restore a force of emotional effect and a simplicity of expression akin to that of ancient drama and religious experience appears nostalgic, even elegiac, as many critics have noticed. She keenly wished to reaffirm in her work an earlier belief in the elemental simplicity and power of the novel and to reconfirm a basic, eternal value in art. The elder Dumas, she more than once noted, had "enunciated a great principle when he said that to make a drama, one needed one passion, and four walls"

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(WCOW43). No novel could succeed without a central "passion" or emotional effect. and the best novels, according to Cather. were those with the least cumbersome walls -- that is, those that did not employ a structure or a style that obscured the work's emotional force.

Consequently, the writers whom Cather admired were largely those who preserved both a simplicity of expression and a power of emotion in their work or who were able, like Tolstoy, to make the material things and surroundings of a novel "so much a part of the emotions of the people that they [were] perfectly synthesized" (WCOW 39-40). In the select pantheon of writers she praised, Hawthorne was also eminently worthy of imitation because, Cather noted in "The Novel Démeublé," he had succeeded in creating mood and feeling without employing undue or obstructive detail. In The Scarlet Letter, in particular, Hawthorne succeeded, Cather observed, in creating a great work primarily because "the material investiture of the story is presented as if unconsciously; by the reserved, fastidious hand of an artist, not by the gaudy fingers of a showman or the mechanical industry of a department-store window-dresser" (WCOW 41). As this passage reveals, Cather clearly viewed the earlier artist's virtues of reserve and fastidiousness as antithetical to the sins of an increasingly commercial and industrialized world: gaudiness, ostentation, and mechanistic carelessness. What Cather wished to preserve in the novel was, in part, the value she most associated with an earlier tradition and time -- the value of a finely made work of art of good and enduring quality.

That Cather begrudged the modern age its excesses and "advances" -- in fiction and in society -- is well-known; she made no secret of her detestations, nor did she hide her yearning for an earlier time. However, while the urge to simplify surely came out of Cather's reverence and yearning for an earlier age that valued art over materialism, her

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unfurnished style is not purely nostalgic and, in fact, far more innovative and modern than is commonly recognized. "The Novel Démeublé" repeatedly reveals Cather's innovative impulses and suggests her interest not merely in restoring a purity of style in her fiction but in experimenting with and discovering new patterns or new forms of expression. While conveying a straightforward reverence toward the past, Cather also emphasizes an intention that is more revolutionary than traditional in the essay: "to break away from mere verisimilitude," to follow "the development of modern painting, to interpret imaginatively the material and social investiture of . . . characters; to present . . . scene by suggestion rather than by enumeration" (WCOW 40). Along with her desire to preserve the past, Cather wished in other words to break from it, to forge new modes of expression.

In this aim, Cather is in striking allegiance with the modernist urge to innovate and to simplify that captivated artists as early as the 1850s. Like the modern painters in particular, including the impressionists and Cézanne, Cather developed an art of suggestion that depended, as she was fond of saying, more on "what was left out" than on what was put in. As it did in painting, a highly controlled and suggestive elision could become, Cather discovered, a powerful, innovative component of the work. Through it, she could reach for an articulation of thought and of feeling that went beyond words, an articulation that could be felt below or beneath an uncluttered verbal surface. Not surprisingly, her description of a great work's essential ingredient seems more like a description of an elusive, painterly abstraction:

> Whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there -- that, one might say, is created. It is the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, of the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it, the verbal mood, the emotional

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aura of the fact or the thing or the deed, that gives high quality to the novel of the drama, as well as to poetry itself (NUF 50).

Emphasis here on mood, feeling, overtone, and aura underscores Cather's affinity with those early modernists who sought to capture the submerged or hidden intricacies of experience indirectly through an art highly dependent on tone, nuance, and suggestion. Like Cézanne, who wished the deepest emotions to exude from his painting "like a perfume" (Frye 53), Cather wished the emotion of her work to be sensed and felt rather than seen in the text; she too wished to search for a form that could translate seeing into sensation, to create a design that could embody the emotions of a more inner than outer life.

Cather's well-known statement about the unnamed also suggests the influence of early modernist writers who similarly experimented with representing greater interiority in their fiction through an art not of direct representation but of a highly modulated and carefully crafted indirection. In particular, the statement recalls Flaubert's assertion about an artist's place in a work of art: the artist must be in his work, Flaubert noted, "like God in creation, invisible and all-powerful; he should be everywhere felt, but nowhere seen" (Letters: 1830-1857 230). The Godlike effect Flaubert describes appears strikingly similar to Cézanne's perfume; its presence would be felt, not seen, in the work. While Cather did not adhere strictly to this view of the artist as divine perfume and varied the effect of an authorial presence within her work, her aim to capture an expression that would not be ostentatious or direct but subtle and mysterious -- that would be everywhere felt but nowhere named --bears the strong mark of Flaubert's and the modernist's reliance on indirect representation.

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In his fiction, Flaubert placed a distinctly modern emphasis on mood and nuance over plot and material detail. Finding in the visual arts the language he needed to describe his innovative aim, Flaubert spoke of his art in painterly terms. He noted to the Goncourt brothers, "The story, the plot of a novel is of no interest to me. When I write a novel I aim at rendering a color, a shade" (deGoncourt 58). The trick for Flaubert was, as it came to be for Cather, to render "a color, a shade," using a relatively simple, unencumbered palette to eschew excesses of description that plumped up the plot and the employment of overly dramatic incident to move the narrative.

More important, Flaubert wished to free the novel of external excesses in order to capture a more thoroughly genuine, internal expression; in 1852, he wrote to Louise Colet,

> [W]hat I should like to write. . . is a book about nothing, a book dependent on nothing external, which would be held together by the strength of its style. . . a book which would have almost no subject, or at least in which the subject would be almost invisible. . . . The finest works are those that contain the least matter; the closer expression comes to thought, the closer language comes to coinciding and merging with it, the finer the result (Letters: 1830-1857 154).

What Flaubert initiated along with other early modernists was not only the impulse to purify and unclutter prose fiction, but to bring it closer to the experience and the sensation of thought. With Flaubert and later Henry James, art began to turn -- in a way that has come to define the modern -- "from realism and humanistic representation towards style, technique, and spatial form in pursuit of a deeper penetration of life" (Bradbury 25).

A primary feature of modernism is, in fact, its pronounced emphasis on the subconscious and unconscious dimensions of human thought and action. As it evolved in

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the works of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Gertrude Stein, in particular, modern fiction became dramatically -- and in many instances exclusively -- concerned with the representation of complex and previously obscured psychical states, including introspection, dreaming, reflection, and fantasy. In their novels, these writers came to rely heavily on the characteristic use of limited or multiple points of view and fluidly shifting time sequences to suggest internal experience and perception or what Woolf called "the dark places of psychology" (156). They also frequently abandoned the external, objective reporting of narrative events. While Cather does not quite fit comfortably among these "high" modern writers, she nevertheless belongs to an early phase of modernism in which the innovative techniques they later exploited and developed (e.g., the use of non-chronological time and unreliable, limited narrators) are interwoven with more traditional narrative methods.

One of the problems with identifying Cather as simply "modernist" has been that the term often invokes a too ready comparison of her work with that of later writers who have come to be most closely associated with modernist techniques. As Phyllis Rose observes, "To a critical tradition that has valued complexity, ambiguity, even obscurity, the hard-won simplicities of Cather's art seem merely simple" (136) and distinctly *un*modern. Set beside a modern masterpiece like Ulysses, that is, any Cather novel may appear rather tame stylistically and traditional in form.[2] Yet a closer examination of Cather's apparently simple prose reveals a complexity of effect and depth of vision peculiar to the modern age of which she was a part, a complexity and depth that markedly intensify and distinguish her later work. After the somewhat tentative stylistic experiments of her early pioneering novels, Cather embraced modern elements of discontinuity and uncertainty more earnestly, along with a heightened sense of ambiguity.

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By 1922, when she paused to write "The Novel Démeublé," Cather was not only validating the literary values she had developed in her earlier career as novelist, she was setting forth her participation in a modern tradition that aimed to penetrate inner life more deeply and to experiment further with style, technique, and form. It is no accident that in the same year she made this important statement she was working on her sixth novel, A Lost Lady. More than any other novel she had written up to that time, A Lost Lady exemplifies Cather's innovative stylistic method with its profound reliance on simplicity and suggestion. Many critics agree that it is one of her most sparsely furnished and well-crafted works of art.[3] More boldly than ever before, she resisted the use of a straight or linear chronology and used tone, color, and atmosphere to shape her narrative. Shifts in point of view, often subtle and elusive, as well as a greater reliance on an indirect narrative method also suggest the novel's unassumingly modern character.

In describing the aim of the novel, Cather herself stressed its innovative quality. She explained to an interviewer in 1925 that she wished to create "*not a conventional* character study" inside a sweeping narrative [my emphasis], but "a portrait like a thin miniature painted on ivory" (Bohlke 77). The declaration further suggests the modern intention of writers like Flaubert and Henry James to render a look and to employ a style as delicate and subtle as that of the painter. However, Cather's insistence on the small (even minute) canvas and the "thin" palette points to the particular innovation of her unfurnished stylistic aim. She did not choose, as James did, to "build large in fine embossed vaults and painted arches" (Preface, Portrait 11), but to reduce and to simplify the verbal surface.[4] The force and elegance of her spectacularly unfurnished prose lies not in its enumerative bulk but in the persistent power of the unnamed and the unspoken. Much as it does in a Cézanne painting, luminosity and intensity come from a mysterious

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place within the work, not from the accumulation of detail or the cataloguing of observations and sensations. In A Lost Lady, Cather creates a protagonist, Marian Forrester, who appears much like Madame Cézanne in many of Cézanne's portraits of her: she appears more like a mysterious, shifting light than a steady object viewed in clear focus; to observe her is to become aware of her captivating elusiveness. As socialite, wife, lover, and friend, Marian Forrester flickers tantalizingly in and out of view. The source of her mysterious vitality -- and the novel's -- is frequently difficult to track as it lies in the individual and changing manner in which she is seen and represented.

In part, Cather used her unfurnished, painterly method with its art of suggestion to represent the often strange and oblique power of memory. As with her earlier work, she perceived A Lost Lady as an outgrowth of remembered experience and sought to reproduce its peculiar, unspoken, emotional potency. The novel's central portrait of Marian Forrester is based on a prominent Red Cloud neighbor Cather had known and loved in her youth, Lyra Garber, wife of the governor and well-known builder of the State of Nebraska, Silas Garber. Cather pointed out in a discussion of the novel's genesis that the main challenge of the book "was to get her [Lyra Garber], not like a standardized heroine in fiction but as she really was" (Bohlke 77). In representing Mrs. Garber, the author wished to capture above all *a feeling* about her. What moved Cather as a child was not Mrs. Garber's character, she emphasized, but "her lovely hair and her laugh which made me happy clear down to my toes" (Bohlke 77). The quality of the feeling Mrs. Garber inspired was all important both to the memory and the novel based on that memory: "There was no fun in it unless I could get her just as I remembered her and produce the effect she had on me and the many others who knew her" (Bohlke 77). Once again for Cather, verisimilitude (getting Lyra Garber "as she really was" and "just as"

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Cather remembered her) depended not on "cataloguing a great number of material objects. . . mechanical processes," or "sensations" (WCOW 37), as it did for Zola and the so-called "slice of life" writers; rather it depended on producing an all-important aura of emotion that sprang from a hidden, pre-verbal source akin to memory.

In emphasizing the "effect" of Mrs. Garber in A Lost Lady, Cather was strongly in alliance with an early modern tradition that pronounced the importance of capturing and eliciting emotion in a work of art. While Sharon O'Brien singles out the role of emotion in Cather's artistic statements as an outstanding -- and female -- innovation distinct from male artists like Henry James, emotional effect was of prime importance for James and a number of other male artists as well. James noted, for instance, the significance of feeling in a work of art in "The Art of Fiction": "As people feel life, so they will feel the art that is most closely related to it" (58). The impressionist painters also wished, as Monet stated, to create art that was foremost the expression of what was "personally deeply felt" (Shiff 108). And Flaubert too noted his concern that the reader "feel almost *physically*" that which the artist reproduces (Letters:1830-1857 154). What distinguishes emotion in Cather's conception of the novel is not its appearance but the degree of emphasis placed on it, for Cather stresses beyond Flaubert and James the "emotional aura" necessary for a work of art and sees it as a requirement for all good writing: "Nothing was really worth while that did not cut pretty deep" (Kingdom 409). Emotional impact was, Cather maintained, requisite for and central to any work of art of real merit or distinction.

In her writing, Cather wished to use her unfurnished method not only to elicit emotion, but to do so in a new and innovative way. To produce in A Lost Lady an emotional effect that had the impact of felt, remembered experience, Cather relied on the

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subtle manipulation of landscape and point of view -- two mainstays of her modern style and unfurnished, indirect method. In this chapter, I will examine how Cather employs landscape and shifting points of view to create a sense of the hidden or submerged intensity of internal experience in both the novel's characters and in the reader. Much like the impressionists, Cather was interested in rendering "not the landscape, but the sensation produced by the landscape" (Shiff 20). Using her pared-down language like thin, brushstrokes (on what often seems like a partially-filled canvas), she composed external scenes that repeatedly suggest the hidden intricacies and obscure silences of internal existence. Like Cézanne, who claimed "Nature is on the inside," she carved landscape scenes in order to represent and explore interiority. To chart the source of the complex and potent impressions left by the landscapes in A Lost Lady, however, it is necessary to examine the narrative point of view closely, for what is seen in the novel strongly depends on how it is seen and by whom.

In using point of view to deepen the coveted emotional effect of her novel, Cather surely owed a debt to earlier modernists, particularly Flaubert and Henry James, who were among the first to experiment with protagonist-narrator relationships in order to create "fictional minds with previously unparalleled depth and complexity" (Cohn 26). Flaubert, most notably in Madame Bovary, developed a narrative technique -- *style indirect libre* -- in which an objective third person narrator reproduces or mimics the protagonist's thoughts and feelings as he reports them. James frequently experimented with point of view and the use of subsidiary characters or "agents" to illuminate the main themes of his novels and deepen the representation of consciousness (e.g., Henrietta Stackpole, Maria Gostrey). Like both of her predecessors, Cather employed a narrative observer who could indirectly intensify her subject. In A Lost Lady, Niel Herbert, as

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primary viewer of and respondent to Marian Forrester, acts very much like a Flaubertian observer and Jamesian voyeur within the narrative. Cather's own description of the construction of the novel's narrative point of view suggests Niel's role as "a unique instrument" for observation and recalls in particular James's grand metaphor -- the "house of fiction," with its innumerable windows and "apertures" through which a posted observer looks out over the human scene (James, Preface Portrait 7): "I had," Cather noted, "to have something for Marian Forrester's charm to work on, and so I created . . . Niel"; "he isn't a character at all; he is just a peephole into that world. . . . he is only a point of view" (Bohlke 77). In the tradition of Flaubert and James, Niel is foremost a vehicle for observation that could be both unobtrusive and revelatory.

Although Niel presides as main observer in the novel, point of view is not stationary, nor is it lodged in the subjective first person with Niel steering the narrative exclusively. Cather instead chose a third person narrative with subtly shifting points of view. Like Flaubert and James, she rejected the vociferous first person narrator in order to attain greater depth and range in the representation of character. Her initial struggle with point of view in A Lost Lady and her own stated reasons for selecting the third over the first person emphasize this desire to broaden the novel's perspective and deepen its emotional effect.

Early in the five months it took to write A Lost Lady, Cather wrote "with some fervor" in the first person. She quickly discovered, however, that speaking "as the boy himself" severely limited the picture and diffused the "emotional aura" she wished to create. "You can't talk about beauty for pages and pages," she observed; "You have to have something for it to hit, and the boy [as object rather than subject] answered that purpose" (Bohlke 78). She stated further that given a prominent voice, Niel Herbert, "a

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youngster . . . would get too fussed up over the story. He would have to have a certain love theme, and in his telling the bank failure in Denver would be made a great deal of. and so it would end in being a conventional story" (Bohlke 78). What would make the story unconventional, in other words, was not *what* was rendered (a woman's fall from grace and a young boy's troubled infatuation with her), but *how* it was rendered. not what was in the story, but what was left out of it. As James and Flaubert had discovered before her, "the more conspicuous and idiosyncratic the narrator, the less apt he is to reveal the depth of his characters' psyches or, for that matter, to create psyches that have depth to reveal" (Cohn 25). While the psyche itself would not become a great theme for Cather until her next book, The Professor's House, Cather achieved a stunning representation of what she called "pure sensation" in A Lost Lady in part through her masterful handling of the third person point of view.

By submerging Niel's presence, as well as "the love theme," below the narratorial surface, Cather deepened the effect of the hidden and troublesome quality of Niel's emotion. Niel's attachment to Marian Forrester, undeclared but repeatedly suggested throughout the novel, works like Poe's tell-tale heart -- beating all the more loudly and furiously because it cannot be seen. In addition, while objectifying Niel's enraptured position, the third person point of view opens to the reader the limitations and delusions of his perspective. Niel is frequently the central aperture through which we see Marian Forrester, but because that window is shared by the authorial narrator, we are able to apprehend not a singleness of effect but a double vision; we see what Niel sees and what he does not see. When Cather claimed that Niel was "only a point of view," "a peephole" into another world, she was surely understating the importance of his function in the novel and obscuring the peculiarly modernist effect his voice created. For it is through

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Niel, as he is revealed by and merges with the third person narrator, that we are able both to feel deeply and to apprehend the paradoxes inherent in those feelings.[5]

As in all of her unfurnished work, Cather achieved in A Lost Lady a highly resonant internal effect through the minimum of outward strokes. An examination of the novel's opening chapter reveals how subtle shifts in narrative voice, along with highly concentrated descriptions of the physical scene, intensify the story's myriad emotional effects and create a sense of internal motion beneath the narrative surface. Initially, the narrative reads with the simple, familiar grace of a children's story: "Thirty or forty years ago, in one of those grey towns along the Burlington railroad, which are so much greyer to-day than they were then, there was a house well known from Omaha to Denver for its hospitality and for a certain charm of atmosphere" (3). Here in the opening sentence of the novel, an objective third person narrator invokes what seems a straightforward, conventional rhythm of remembrance, a kind of "once upon a time" complacency. The line, however, is deceptively simple, as distanced observation mingles with subjective experience to create a complex atmosphere of loss that presides over the whole novel. The simple stroke of grey, for instance, as it turns in the sentence illustrates a typically modern *and* typically Catherian effect: the subtle shift from neutrality to subjectivity. At first it seems merely to mark an external condition -- the grey indistinctness of the "towns along the Burlington" -- but when it is repeated in the phrase "which are so much greyer to-day than they were," it invokes a more emphatically personal note: perhaps one of remorse, but certainly of loss. The narrator, though not clearly identifiable, appears intimately tied to the scene he relates, and the hidden pulse of his attachment intensifies both his subject and the reading experience. The stroke of grey thus works in a painterly

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fashion highlighting for the viewer the subjective quality implicit in both observation and artifice.

Details that follow in the extraordinarily rich first paragraph emphasize further the narrator's dual role as distanced memorializer and as personal witness to the past. He positions not only the town and its well known house but suggests his presence on the scene "thirty or forty years ago." Reporting a time when the railroad occupied a central place in the West's development, the narrator particularizes its importance through specific details that have the heft and feel of subjective experience. Cather writes.

> In those days it was enough to say of a man that he was "connected with the Burlington." There were the directors, vice-presidents, superintendents, whose names we all knew; and their younger brothers or nephews were auditors, freight agents, departmental assistants. Everyone "connected" with the Road, even the large cattle- and grain-shippers, had annual passes; they and their families rode about over the line a great deal. There were then two distinct social strata in the prairie States; the homesteaders and hand-workers who were there to make a living, and the bankers and gentlemen ranchers who came from the Atlantic seaboard to invest money and to "develop our great West," as they used to tell us (3).

Central to the passage is the idea of connection. The proliferation of vernacular phrases and plain, folksy language (akin to the native New England parlance that makes the speakers of Frost's poems so recognizable) suggests the narrator is a native of the land of which he speaks and lends an unprepossessing vivacity to the prose. "It was enough to say of a man," "connected to the Burlington," "the Road," "over the line," and "our great West" read as local expressions familiar to an insider. The phrases not only connect the

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narrator to the scene, but the reader as well. Many of them, especially those offset in quotation marks, appear as *spoken* expressions; consequently, we read *and* hear both the voice of the narrator and voices farther back in time. Even at this early stage, the narrative's effect is curiously double; it presents a coolly controlled, objective, storybook surface, the pulse of the subjective beats beneath it.

The highly aural and colloquial language of the first paragraph fosters not only a sense of the narrator's connection to the world he describes, but his separation from it. The pronouns "we" and "us" which locate the narrator as part of the remembered scene also distinguish him from the sophisticated upper class he admires. The names of the railroad aristocrats which the speaker notes "we all knew," and the stories which he recalls the bankers and gentlemen ranchers "used to tell us" reveal him primarily as listener and spectator, not "connected" colleague. While mention of the many titles of railroad positions in the paragraph (there are no fewer than eight, from grain-shippers to directors) reinforces the narrator's fascination and admiration for those "connected to the Burlington," it also reveals his ironic removal from those who possess them. The railroad which brings prestige and privilege to those "connected" with it also creates social fracture or two disconnected classes: the homesteaders and hand-workers "who were there to make a living" and the bankers and gentlemen ranchers, there to make a profit. The subjective-sounding yet "artfully disembodied" narration, as John Hollander terms it, allows us to glimpse the characteristically double nature of the narrator's experience: his glorification of westward expansion (the railroad) and some of its hidden complexities or "by-products" -- in particular, the erosion incurred by the land and the disconnectedness of its people in the wake of the developers and profiteers.

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Careful selection of language and manipulation of point of view draw us into the imagined past, but the description of the landscape in the opening chapter sharply intensifies our participation in the narrative. In the novel's first extended description of landscape, Cather instructs the reader to feel and to see landscape as a feature both of memory and the imagination. She writes,

> To approach Captain Forrester's property, you had first to get over a wide, sandy creek which flowed along the eastern edge of the town. Crossing this by the foot-bridge or the ford, you entered the Captain's private lane, bordered by Lombardy poplars, with wide meadows lying on either side. Just at the foot of the hill on which the house sat, one crossed a second creek by the stout wooden road-bridge. This stream traced artless loops and curves through the broad meadows that were half pasture land, half marsh (4).

The passage appears typically straightforward -- its complexity masked by its easy-reading surface. A series of simple, yet tactile and vivid adjectives give the scene its descriptive force, while also contributing to its immediate accessibility. Words like "sandy" and "wooden" allow the reader to sense texture, while "wide," "stout," and "broad" suggest size and shape. A profusion of nouns denoting easily visualized, concrete items in the landscape (i.e., creek, foot-bridge, ford, house, stream, poplars, meadows) further enhances the picture's vividness. Simple yet highly descriptive language allows the reader to see the scene, while the careful arrangement of that language creates a multiplicity of other effects.

Foremost is the sense of motion in the passage. In a gesture common to the modernist painters, Cather eschewed conventional landscapes which "invited the eye along a path. . . that one might follow in a clearly determined direction" (Shiff 122). As

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landscape frequently does in the work of Cézanne, Cather's landscape offers "multiple and competing possibilities for movement" (Shiff 122-23). In Cézanne's landscape painting, "Pines and Rocks," for example, the competing images of the rocks and trees draw the eye inward along parallel but dual paths; a single, direct line of vision is thus deterred. In the above landscape scene in A Lost Lady, our vision is similarly divided. To approach the Forrester house, one could, we are told, cross the first stream by the footbridge *or* the ford. Neither path is exclusive, and for a moment our imagined movement is complicated by this simple option. Yet more than the presentation of alternate paths, juxtaposed images serve to intensify the division of our awareness. For instance, the Lombardy poplars, ordered and commanding the private lane, contrast visually with the meandering second stream and the broad, uncultivated meadows. Rather than a single, determined line of vision, a panorama with images of varying compass and form is opened to us. The scene excites the reader, as do Cézanne's landscapes, for its dynamic movement and lack of inertness.

Like many of Cather's most important landscapes, this one not only refuses stasis, it resonates with movement symbolic of both external and internal experience. Active verbs abound and suggest a physical world in motion: the creek "flowed"; trees "bordered" the lane; the stream "traced" its way. Yet this motion exists only in so far as it is perceived and recollected by the narrator, whose carefully crafted language suggests the movement and the rhythm of remembrance. Sentences in the passage, the first three of which contain subordinate clauses, flow with the pulsing charge of memory. Particularities of size, shape, and texture create a certain momentum of the remembering consciousness, each sensate detail propelling the next to fill out the scene, as if the narrator were in the very act of recollection. In addition, the accretion of detail again

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suggests familiarity with the scene: a narrator who has traveled the path many times, one who knows well just how "wide" the sandy creek is," just when to expect to see "the Lombardy poplars," one whose eyes have more than once traced the "artless loops and curves" of the second stream. Here, through the accumulation of vivid details and delicately inter-connecting sentences, the reader gains a sense of the landscape's motion along with a sense of the shaping force of memory.

Perhaps one of Cather's greatest achievements in the novel is the fact that we both witness the narrator's memory in motion and experience it. At every step, the words compel the reader to engage the scene on a deeper, more intimate level. Employing a shift in perspective so unobtrusive its modern quality is easy to overlook, Cather subtly transformed the narrative's point of view to incorporate the reader. The pronouns "we" and "us" (which formerly distanced the reader in the novel's opening paragraph) give way without any apparent or visible shift in point of view to the pronouns "you" and "one" in the above passage. While these pronouns are used interchangeably to signify the indefinite third person, the repetition of "you" nevertheless invites the reader to read them as second person pronouns used in direct address. Narrator-reader distance is thus diminished as we are included in the action. To read "You had first to get over . . . you entered . . . you crossed" is to participate imaginatively in the motion described, to feel we are taking steps and leaps along with the narrator on the journey to the Forrester place. The earlier broad view is thus telescoped, and we move closer into the scene. We do so, however, almost unawares; the pronoun shift is so subtle, so unobtrusive, we hardly notice our movement inward; it occurs the way remembering does, the function of an unseen, hidden impulse.

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Cather frequently moves the narrative from the narrator's omniscience to the limited points of view of particular characters, but part of what makes Cather's fiction and particularly her landscapes so evocative is that those limited points of view often include the reader as perceiver and, in one of the novel's most stunning effects, as *creator*. We participate not only in the act of remembering in the passage, but in the process of creating the novel as well. We approach the Forrester house and feel we remember the way, *as* we enter the novel; description of physical transportation smoothly parallels our imagined transport into, and construction of, another time, place, and experience. Our public stance as distanced reader diminishes as the narrator moves us up the "private lane." Landscape comes, therefore, to represent the narrator's, as well as the reader's internal experience -- the crossings, bridges, loops, and curves all part of an intricate mental movement into the past and into the novel. In summary, we engage landscape and spatial form as memory, and memory, in the ultimate Catherian effect, as creation.

***

The first landscape scene is also important because it sets up our attachment to a setting that accumulates meaning throughout A Lost Lady. Central to Cather's creation of emotional effect in the novel is her use of what Susan Rosowski calls incremental repetition, and perhaps no setting is more often repeated than the path to the Forresters', as we witness Niel Herbert in scene after scene going up and coming down the lane. As Rosowski points out, "By repetition, things become familiar: they appear, then reappear, with each reappearance bringing forward the accumulated associations of their past" (122). Almost all of the carefully identified particulars of the approach to the Forrester place -- the meadow, stream, creek, bridge, and poplars -- become integral parts of the

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drama to unfold. When, for example, later in the novel, Marian Forrester's passionate outrage at her former paramour's marriage cannot be contained, the overflowing streams at the Forrester place during a torrential rainstorm become emblematic of her turmoil. When Niel Herbert's affection for Marian Forrester appears most forbidding, the poplars that line the Captain's private lane appear "like sentinels" guarding an unattainable treasure. Throughout A Lost Lady, elements of the landscape become active parts of the human drama. We feel their significance when they are repeated, however, because Cather has so carefully manipulated our *initial* response to them, because she has so carefully invoked our participation in the landscape scene.

By moving us into the scene and up the lane to the Forrester place, Cather also moves us closer to experiencing the Forresters themselves -- most especially, the novel's focal character, Marian Forrester. In fact, Cather so successfully insinuates the reader's presence in this early landscape scene that when, in the paragraph that immediately follows, the narrator relates how Captain Forrester used to fetch visitors and convey them to the house, it is nearly impossible not to feel that we too are included in his open-air "*democrat* wagon" (my emphasis), that we too are bounding nimbly up the front steps to greet (in her first appearance in the novel) Mrs. Forrester. The profusion of sensual detail describing Mrs. Forrester -- "the gay challenge in her eyes," her elegant déshabille, her "long black hair rippling over her shoulders" (4-5) -- quickens the hearts of Forrester's visitors and accelerates narrative movement. In a flurry of colorfully excited motions, Mrs. Forrester appears as an animating force, stimulating, we are told, even "the hardest and coldest" of the Captain's friends *and*, I would guess, engaging the romantic propensities of even the most obdurate reader. The narrative, subtly and swiftly moving, here serves more than a single, expository function; it establishes a perspective the reader

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is invited to adopt. And we find ourselves compelled by the two animating forces of the novel: social class and sexuality. We participate in wishing to feel superior, like the select and prominent visitors to the Forrester Place, and we are "charmed" by Marian Forrester long before we recognize or question either of those responses.

Manipulation of point of view is central to the way in which we respond to the novel's main characters and come to question those responses. The primary vehicle of that manipulation in the novel is Niel Herbert, the local Sweet Water youth and nephew of the town's prominent Judge Pommeroy, who orbits the Forrester place at first adoringly and then with increasing ambivalence. The third person point of view which blends with and shifts away from Niel's view allows us both to feel his perceptions and simultaneously to question them. While Part I focuses primarily on Niel's experiences and perceptions, the tidal motion of the third person narrative as it moves into and away from his voice allows one to feel the complexity of vision and experience beneath and beyond the simple surface of the prose. Reader involvement is again manipulated by Cather through these subtle shifts in perspective and the highly concentrated, poetic language she employs to create them. While in this chapter I focus primarily on incidents that reveal the complexity and unreliability of Niel's view, it is important to recognize that Cather also engages the perspective of characters other than Niel in the novel. Many critics have noted the narrative's adoption of Adolph Blum's perspective as Marian Forrester and her lover Frank Ellinger are espied after their tryst in the winter woods, but more often overlooked is the capacity of the narrative to adopt the perspective of other characters, including Mrs. Forrester herself.

As point of view shifts in the novel, a pattern of narrative movement can be discerned. Chapter two of Part I is worth close scrutiny, as it offers an example of how

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Cather manipulates the narrative to transform point of view, invoke a subjective experience within the objective narrative, and intensify emotional effect. The chapter begins with the memorializing voice of the omniscient storyteller recounting "a summer morning long ago, when Mrs. Forrester was still a young woman, and Sweet Water was a town of which great things were expected" (6). The long view and distanced tone are quickly telescoped as the particular occasion of a boys' picnic and fishing excursion at the Forresters' is narrated, and Niel Herbert's particular experiences and perceptions are then relayed. The pattern of movement fits that which Rosowski identifies as endemic to A Lost Lady -- a movement from omniscience to "a specific episode, to one character within the episode, and finally, to the episode as it is being processed in that character's mind" (126). This pattern of movement acts as a kind of undertow, pulling the reader inward, into an intensity of emotion and experience that is felt but not readily perceived. While this movement often functions over the course of a single chapter or chapters, what many critics including Rosowski neglect to mention is the fact that it can also be identified in a single paragraph in which an incident or gesture, rather than an episode, moves us closer to a single character's perceptions.

The second chapter's first paragraph offers a fine example of a single paragraph turning unobtrusively from an objective, distanced report to subjective perception. After the narrator outlines the general time and place of the episode, the narrative turns quickly from the broad to the specific view. We move in a kind of cinematic swoop from a certain distanced height to focus on a single character caught in her everyday activities. We see Marian Forrester "standing in the deep bay window of her parlour arranging old-fashioned blush roses in a glass bowl" (6); we watch her from what seems a voyeur-like position outside the bay window. But our position shifts as Mrs. Forrester glances up and *out of*

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her window to see "a group of little boys coming along the driveway." We witness her actions from a much closer stance, not from the outside, but from inside her parlour. Then, as we are given a report of what she sees, the narrative seems not merely to follow her eye, but suddenly to adopt an angle of vision that could be hers. The phrase, "she knew most of them," followed by an introduction of the motley crew of Sweet Water boys allows the reader to experience the introduction *as if* Mrs. Forrester were relaying it. By employing words and descriptions that she might use were she narrating or simply identifying the boys to herself as she looked out of the window, Cather allows us to feel Marian Forrester's observing presence indirectly in the narrative. Mention of the boys' social class and their individual social graces particularly emphasizes this effect: Niel Herbert is identified as Judge Pommeroy's "handsome" nephew, and "polite George Adams" as the "son of a gentleman rancher from Lowell, Massachusetts" and a mother who was "particular" about manners. The other boys are introduced as just that -- "the others," a second tier group, who were "just little boys from the town": "rough little Thad Grimes," "the butcher's red-headed son," Ed Elliott whose father "kept a shoe store" and was the "Don Juan of the lower world of Sweet Water," and the raggedy Blum boys, sons of the German tailor, "from whom she sometimes bought game or catfish." While the reader experiences the sense of Mrs. Forrester's discriminating presence in the narrative, we are not limited to her view. In fact, the careful distinctions within a social hierarchy also suggest Niel's perspective, for we learn later that he is said to be "superior" and possesses "a critical habit of mind" (17). Without limiting her narrative to a specific point of view, Cather is able to suggest a peculiarly modern multiplicity of thought and feeling that pulses beneath the text and engages the reader almost unconsciously.

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As the narrative moves to detail the specific activities of the boys, it is once again the landscape that gives the reader a sense of the characters' inner existence -- in this case of a group of twelve-year-olds' ebullience and freedom. The scene Cather details is peculiarly -- and typically -- undramatic, yet it gives the impression not only of something visually captivating, but of something deeply felt -- a summer morning's beauty and a ripeness and a fullness of life:

> They had behaved like wild creatures all morning; shouting from the breezy bluffs, dashing down into the silvery marsh through the dewy cobwebs that glistened on the tall weeds, wishing among the pale tan cattails, wading in the sandy creek bed, chasing a striped water snake from the old willow stump where he was sunning himself, cutting sling-shot crotches, throwing themselves on their stomachs to drink at the cool spring that flowed out from under a bank into a thatch of dark watercress (7).

The breezy bluffs, silvery marsh, dewy cobwebs, tall weeds, pale tan cattails, and sandy creek bed all suggest the outdoor scene on a particular day as well as the spirit of splendid youthfulness the boys possess. In their wild physical activity, captured in the profusion of exuberant participles (dashing, swishing, wading, chasing, cutting, throwing, and splashing), the boys seem to embody the perfect wildness of summer that exists in the Forresters' undeveloped grove. What makes the scene so compelling is the complete grafting of the external scene to the boys' internal condition. Their world of pure sensation appears one with the physical vibrance of summer. Indeed, the natural splendor of the summer marsh and grove appears inseparable from the boys' unspoiled innocence and natural fervor. Here again, the blending of internal and external scene recalls one of the most striking innovations of impressionist painting, the tendency to integrate

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figures and landscape. As art historian Jack Flam points out, in many of Renoir's outdoor scenes, the figures appear so much a part of the landscape, they "seem to be made of virtually the same substance as the foliage" (Flam 51). Many similar small dabs of paint applied throughout the painting remind the viewer, in fact, that both figure and landscape are part of a shared atmosphere or mutual interaction.

Cather achieves this fusion of figure and landscape through language as highly evocative and as carefully applied as the impressionist's individual brushstrokes. In the brief paragraphs she uses to describe the marsh and the boys' activity there, words and phrases create a curious integration of boys and nature. To read them is to be aware of a single, shared atmosphere -- a blending of the fecundity of summer with the natural stirrings of a more internal sensation. Following the description of the boys activity at the marsh is another vivid example of this technique: Cather writes, "The wild roses were wide open and brilliant, the blue-eyed grass was in purple flower, and the silvery milkweed was just coming on. Birds and butterflies darted everywhere" (7). The passage's first, long sentence, with its many nouns laden with adjectives indicating vibrant color ("purple," "blue-eyed") and unfettered sensuality ("wild," "open"), captures a Wordsworthian "splendor in the grass." Full to bursting, the sentence suggests the wide-eyed wonder and the breathless ecstacy of youth while the short, simple sentence that follows with its childlike cadence invokes the innocence of early observation. By juxtaposing the long and short sentence, Cather modulates the passage's rhythm in an almost musical fashion and suggests a hidden, pulsing effusiveness (much like a butterfly's ribboned flight) that deepens the scene's potency. The simple description of the summer landscape captivates the reader, as landscape does throughout Cather's fiction, because its

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visual splendor suggests far more than a sense of place; it captures an essential experience of existence -- in this case, the rhythm and "the glory of the hour" that is youth.

The vibrance of nature and in particular the blossoming roses are also closely associated with Marian Forrester throughout A Lost Lady and forecast her presence in the next scene. Into this atmosphere of youth she comes, "a white figure" moving through flickering shadows, her "blue-black hair shining in the sun" (8). She appears "light and confidential," "drifting along the edge of the grove," a vision or a figure out of the boys' dreams. Like a figure in an impressionist painting, Marian Forrester appears not as a clearly defined form, but one whose observed image is translated by feelings (Clark 19). Once again, a simple, yet highly poetic language suggests a hidden, internal sensation or subjectivity. Although not specifically assigned to his point of view, the incident could easily be from Niel's perspective. That he is the one to notice "the white figure" and to command a respectful silence of the boys when Mrs. Forrester approaches strongly suggests that his perspective steers the narrative. Niel's perspective is noteworthy because it suggests the problematic way in which Marian Forrester is viewed in the novel, as a dream vision or goddess stepping forth in a kind of paradise, an object of worship and adoration.

A more pronounced turn into Niel's view occurs, however, after Niel is felled by the machinations of this Eden's own snake, Ivy Peters. The local town thug comes upon the boys' picnic and exhibits his flair for cruelty by blinding a female woodpecker and setting it back into the air, where "the darkened creature beat its wings in the branches, whirling in the sunlight and never seeing it" (12). The brutal act presages Ivy's later manipulation of Marian and his mutilating or draining of the Forresters' marsh, the novel's shimmering symbol of innocence and beauty. After Niel falls from a tree in an attempt to

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capture and kill the wounded bird and "put it out of its misery," he is carried into Mrs. Forrester's house. His removal inside signals the movement of the narrative into his observing consciousness, and his perceiving presence becomes even more apparent in the text:

> Niel opened his eyes and looked wonderingly about the big, half-darkened room, full of heavy, old-fashioned walnut furniture. He was lying on a white bed with ruffled pillow shams, and Mrs. Forrester was kneeling beside him, bathing his forehead with cologne [. . .] He was in pain, but he felt weak and contented. The room was cool and dusky and quiet. At his house everything was horrid when one was sick. . . . What soft fingers Mrs. Forrester had, and what a lovely lady she was. Inside the lace ruffle of her dress he saw her white throat rising and falling so quickly. [. . .] The little boy was thinking that he would probably never be in so nice a place again. [. . .] Mrs. Forrester ran her fingers through his black hair and lightly kissed him on the forehead. Oh, how sweet, how sweet she smelled! (13-14)

As he awakens to "look wonderingly" about the room, the narrative adopts Niel's angle of vision and begins to simulate the momentum of his observing consciousness, bringing the reader closer to his sensate experience. Feeling is primary in all that Niel regards as each of the objects he observes evokes a tactile pleasantness. The profusion of adjectives -- heavy, walnut, white, ruffled, cool, dusky, quiet, soft, sweet -- captures Niel's primary mode of awareness: sensation. Thought not only upsets Niel's contentment but breaks narrative continuity: the thought of how horrid his own house was when one was sick prompts the ellipses that disperse the narrative, reveal the unendurable contrast of his home and that of Mrs. Forrester, and suggest Niel's unsteady consciousness after the fall.

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As if the narrative were itself a sensate embodiment of Niel, it fades away to inarticulateness (ellipses) and is revived, as Niel is, by Mrs. Forrester's comforting touch.

The sense of Niel's presence as perceiver becomes even more acute in the subsequent line, "What soft fingers Mrs. Forrester had, and what a lovely lady she was." The phrase can no longer be assigned solely to the narrator but adopts a tone and language that suggest Niel in silent dialogue with himself. In her study, Narrative Modes of Representing Consciousness in Fiction, Dorrit Cohn identifies this technique as narrated monologue, a term she uses to denote the instance when an author imitates the language a character uses when he talks to himself and casts "that language into the grammar the narrator uses in talking about him" (105). By using narrated monologue, Cather is able to merge two normally distinct voices or linguistic currents (Cohn 105) and to intensify the reader's sense of the subjectivity of Niel's private experience in the text. As Cohn points out, by not fencing off private thoughts or monologues in quotation marks, the author implicates the narrator and the reader in the feeling or thought expressed (123). This technique, perfected by Flaubert in his *style indirect libre*, is central to the emotional effect Cather wished to reproduce in A Lost Lady. By imperceptibly weaving the thoughts and reactions of individual characters into "the neutral-objective report of actions, scenes, and spoken words" (Cohn 115), Cather intensifies the reader's experience of the book. She could, therefore, achieve what Flaubert had accomplished before her: "to transport oneself *into* the characters, not draw them to oneself" (in Cohn 114/my emphasis). The final phrase in the above passage offers another example of the technique: "Oh, how sweet, how sweet she smelled!" suggests Niel speaking to himself, swooning not so much from pain as from pleasure. By blending his subjective perception, in this case his childlike ecstacy, with the objective narrative, Cather allows the reader to

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participate in Niel's experience of Marian Forrester as pure sensation, as "an excitement that came and went" (16).

Passages throughout the novel capture Niel's observing consciousness in motion and move the reader -- sometimes through direct address -- closer to his experience of Mrs. Forrester's "bewitching" effect:

> If she merely bowed to you, merely looked at you, it constituted a personal relation. Something about her took hold of one in a flash; one became acutely conscious of her, of her fragility and grace, of her mouth which could say so much without words, of her eyes, lively, laughing , intimate, nearly always a little mocking (18).

Here the shifting pronouns, "you" and "one," suggest the blending of objective narrative and personal address, once again implicating the reader in the feelings expressed. Like Mrs. Forrester's intriguing ability to "say so much without words," Cather's narrative possesses a power to engage the reader beyond what is immediately apparent on the page.

Narrated monologue frequently serves to pull the reader into sympathy with Niel's view, but as the novel progresses, it also creates an effect of ironic dissonance, and the reader is left to question the reliability of Niel's perceptions. After driving Mrs. Forrester home from town early in the novel, for example, Niel's passionate exultation is captured in his energetic departure (his "plunging down the hill" from the house) and in "the streak of red sunset" he observes. The objective narrative reporting his movement gives way to a more subjective text as Niel contemplates Marian's uncommon attractiveness -- "that something in [her] glance that made one's blood tingle" (21) -- and recollects the first time he ever saw her. Without any apparent transition, the narrative

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slips into narrated monologue or what feels like Niel's internal, unspoken rhapsodizing over his early memory of Mrs. Forrester. Each detail of her dress and carriage (the "puffs and ruffles" of her black silk dress, her "foamy white petticoats," and light step) characteristically registers Niel's sexual attraction and stimulation both in the past and in the present moment of remembrance.

When, however, at the conclusion of Niel's recollection, the narrative again moves away from narrated monologue to report Niel's observation of the landscape, the effect is one of striking dissonance. Cather writes, "Niel paused for a moment at the end of the lane to look up at the last skeleton poplar in the long row; just above its pointed tip hung the hollow, silver winter moon" (22). After his flushed adoration, the image of a skeletal tree and a hollow moon give the reader a jolt and his experience an unmistakable thinness or air of insubstantiality. Unlike the "streak of red sunset" that seems to resonate sympathetically with the boy's passion (the tingling in his blood) earlier, the skeletal tree and hollow winter moon seem to disperse it sharply and to counter the heat of his emotion with the stillness and coldness of death. What is so striking about the scene is that Niel himself is the perceiver of the images but not the apprehendor of their significance. We see him looking, but not seeing with the privileged understanding that Cather affords us through the images. The moment is startling in its intense yet subtle revelation of character. In one simple stroke, Cather uses the landscape in a peculiarly modern, indirect way to signal deeper, perhaps unconscious perceptions in Niel and to jar the reader away from a possibly passive acceptance of his view. To read the landscape is to question the potentially hollow and skeletal nature of Niel's passionate attachment to Mrs. Forrester.

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Another scene that evokes an even more troubling sense of the limitations of Niel's understanding of Mrs. Forrester and of his own feelings for her occurs in Part One, chapter six. After a three-day snow storm, Niel makes his way to the Forrester Place with their mail in chivalric fashion -- cutting his way through thirty inches of snow and whirling drifts to get to the house. Although Captain Forrester confesses it has been lonesome, Niel is slow to understand why Marian Forrester smelled of spirits: "Was she ill . . . or merely so bored that she had been trying to dull herself?" (40) Any comprehension of a more complicated suffering appears beyond him. The disparity between what he thinks and feels at this moment and what the narrative allows us to sense becomes even sharper with the description of the landscape as Niel and Marian escape from the house:

> They slipped quietly out of the front door into the cold air which tasted of new-fallen snow. A clear arc of blue and rose colour painted the west, over the buried town. When they reached the rounded breast of the hill, blown almost bare, Mrs. Forrester stood still and drew in deep breaths, looking down over the drifted meadows and the stiff, blue poplars (42).

The scene appears imbued with Niel's excitement, of the "high sense of elation" he is wont to experience in the presence of Marian Forrester. The two "slip" out of the house like lovers making a clandestine escape. The landscape seems to swell in sensuous forms and sensations: "The clear arc of blue and rose," "the rounded breast of the hill," Mrs. Forrester's deep breaths over the drifted meadows, "the stiff blue poplars" all suggest Niel's sexual arousal without the author directly articulating it. To read the passage is to be swept into the physical scene *and* the heightened sensation.

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When Marian cries out unexpectedly, "Oh, but it is bleak!" her words sharply arrest the narrative and any impulse the reader may have to adopt Niel's romantic stance. Her voice registers not just "fear, unmistakable fright" but a pronounced contrast with Niel's passion. Clearly, Marian does not see the landscape the way we have just been invited to perceive it -- as passion's swelling terrain, but as a bleak and frightful emblem of her terrible isolation. It is at this point through subtle indirection that we again must question how Marian is being seen. Niel's attempts to comfort her under "the new moon" he so energetically points out, his annoyance at her rebuff of his courtly advances, and pain at the intrusive thought of "a third person" (Marian's lover, Frank Ellinger) whose shoulders he finds "objectionably broad" (43) provide the clues to our understanding. A short meditation of Niel's attitude ends the chapter and stunningly reveals not just what he thinks but what he thinks he thinks: he states, "curiously enough, it was as Captain Forrester's wife that [Mrs. Forrester] most interested [him] . . . it was in her relation to her husband that he most admired her" (43). The contemplation in its entirety reads as a retreat from, not an exploration of, Niel's feelings. That he measures Marian foremost in relation to men is clear, but what he omits is his own desire to be a defining man in Marian's life. By viewing Marian as "steel of Damascus," the pure goddess/wife, he protects himself from recognizing his own unwieldy desire to possess her; his impulses are motivated not by a sense of "affection and guardianship" (46) as he thinks, but by a desire that bears more than a slim resemblance to that harbored by Marian's wolfish paramour, Frank Ellinger. What Niel thinks must be placed in the context of both the dialogue and action that surrounds it but especially of the landscape that breathes a deeper truth and suggests the paradox of mental vision.

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Throughout A Lost Lady, landscape works in conjunction with the shifting third person point of view to capture characters in the very act of perceiving and often to suggest even those aspects of their character they could not themselves express. One of the novel's most turbulent landscape scenes suggests further the disturbing quality of Niel's feelings for Marian Forrester *and* his inability to confront or to accept his sexual self. After learning of Frank Ellinger's recent marriage, Niel starts out "in his rubber coat" for the Forrester place in a raging July thunderstorm to be with Mrs. Forrester:

> When he reached the first creek, he found that the foot-bridge had been washed out from the far bank and lay obliquely in the stream, battered at by the yellow current which might at any moment carry it away. One could not cross the ford without a horse. He looked irresolutely across the submerged bottom lands. The house was dark, no light in the parlour windows. The rain was beginning to fall again. Perhaps she had rather be alone tonight. He would go over tomorrow (71).

The torrential rain, battering current, and flooded land presage Marian Forrester's passionate fury and jealous rage at Ellinger's betrayal which overflows later in the chapter, but the scene also suggests the torrent that is sexuality itself -- filled with its submerged urges and swelling dangers. Cather once again invites us via the landscape to glimpse the inner lives of her characters. When we learn later that Mrs. Forrester has braved the stormy night and fearlessly forded the stream *without* a horse via the unsteady foot bridge, the report of her action (even more dramatic because it is unseen in the narrative) implies that Niel's view of the uncrossable stream is unreliable; furthermore, her impassioned and intrepid act suggests that Niel's inability to cross the flooded bottom land might have more to do with an internal, not external obstacle. Mrs. Forrester possesses a passion to express her sexual self -- a "power to live" -- that Niel does not or

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perhaps cannot possess. Ultimately, his retreat from the Forrester place suggests his retreat from his own turbid feelings and submerged sexuality. Marian is willing to risk danger and cross the unsteady foot-bridge in order to express herself. Niel only stands in cowardly dumbness before the "*yellow* current" (my emphasis) and then retreats to a private, "distracting disorder" in a cold office littered with sheet-iron and marred by a curiously faulty flue that further suggests his impotence.

The rest of the chapter is made up of breathless narrative bursts that suggest Niel's tense and excited position as observer, as well as the furious underlying tension between his wish to possess and to save Marian Forrester from her position as fallen woman. When he finally acts in the scene and cuts the phone wire, so that Marian will not be overheard screaming her outrage at her former lover by the town's gossipy operator, the narrative swiftly adopts Niel's thought language and emphasizes his view of himself as knight in shining armor. Cather writes, "For once he had been quick enough; he had saved her" (75). After the scene's extended external action and turmoil, the line turns abruptly inward as it reports Niel's internal and unspoken expression of self-congratulation. The reader is for a moment compelled to accept his view -- that he had, by cutting the phone wire, "saved" Marian Forrester. But even this apparent moment of self-assurance proves untrustworthy, as the brief episode that follows to end the chapter extinguishes Niel's vision of himself as savior and indirectly suggests the unreliability of Niel's perception.

The chapter's final scene depicts Niel returning to town in the early morning after spending the night at the Forresters to watch over the ailing Captain; as he makes his way through the sleeping town, he sees "the short, plump figure of Mrs. Beasley like a boiled pudding sewed up in a blue kimono" waddling away from the door of her neighbour

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Molly Tucker, whom she has just told "the story of her exciting night" (76). The cutting and incisive description of Mrs. Beasley, while not specifically assigned to Niel, reads like personal invective or the stinging insults Niel would use to describe to himself the disconcerting appearance of one who cruelly subverts both Mrs. Forrester's reputation in the town *and* his cherished fantasy of Mrs. Forrester as love object. Mrs. Beasley, having already unfurled gossip's flag to her neighbor Molly Tucker, violates not only Mrs. Forrester's privacy but destroys Niel's vision of himself as savior. That Niel might on some deeper, unspoken level recognize this subversion is suggested by the vehemence of the language Cather uses to describe the offending Mrs. Beasley; the harsh images ("boiled," "sewed up") suggest Niel's wish to retaliate against the person who has not only caused Mrs. Forrester harm, but who has injured his pride and exposed the feebleness of his self-image.

As a whole the scene illustrates the modern manner in which meaning is relayed -- through a characteristic indirectness. In this instance multiple meanings are suggested not through the direct report of Niel's experience but through the indirect and sometimes evasive pulse of his thought felt beneath the narrative surface and through the mediating image of the landscape. Description of the flooded land at the Forrester place during the storm indirectly suggests Niel's unmanageably turbulent feelings for Marian, as well as the irrepressible nature of Mrs. Forrester's sexuality, while the use of narrated monologue allows us indirectly to apprehend and to experience Niel's perceptions and their limitations. Both techniques allow Cather to do more with less, to create a narrative that perpetually suggests more than it directly imprints on the page.

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This resistance to direct narrative is perhaps the central feature of Cather's modernism -- a feature shared by early modernists like Flaubert and James and by the proponents of the so-called New Painting or impressionism, who were interested in presenting previously hidden, internal landscapes.[6] Throughout A Lost Lady, prose of extreme simplicity and clarity belies the complexity of vision beneath it. As in an impressionist painting, what appears straightforward and objective takes on a strikingly subjective, internal cast the more one examines it. Surface appearances repeatedly give way to underlying uncertainties or hidden truths. By shifting the point of view of the narrative and using landscape to represent effectively an atmosphere of the mind, Cather moves away from traditional realist representation and subtly re-envisions the novel. In A Lost Lady, the nineteenth century novel of adultery in particular is reformulated. In place of fixed moral certainties, Cather indirectly suggests the *un*certain and subjective nature of feeling and perception. As the novel progresses, Niel's unconscious or more inchoate feelings for Marian Forrester (particularly those of a sexual nature) become unspoken, dramatic elements of the narrative. Rather than determining our understanding of the novel's central figure, Niel's feelings as they pulse unobtrusively through the narrative intensify Marian's mysteriousness and complexity. While on the one hand, we might be tempted to see Marian, as Niel does in most of the book's second part, as a fallen and "common woman," Cather opens up the unique possibility for us to question this judgment and to see it in the context of Niel's -- and our own -- limited and not altogether accurate vision.[7] With the minimum of interpretive guidance in A Lost Lady, the reader enters Niel's and other characters' peculiarly sensate world only to recognize the uncertainties within that world from the place of privileged intimacy and contact Cather allows us. In her next novel, The Professor's House, Cather further hones her

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unfurnished style and applies the modernist device of indirection to a far deeper exploration of internal uncertainty and psychical disturbance.

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Notes

1 In 1898, Cather had claimed in a column for the Pittsburgh Leader that Zola had "described, analyzed and catalogued every color, scent, sound, sensation" without ever creating "one effect of absolute beauty" (World and Parish, vol.II 594).

2 Jane Lilienfeld, for example, finds that Cather's style is not in itself modern or experimental, as it features "traditional fictional forms--supple prose that deliberately calls no attention to itself, an omniscient author, and seemingly realistic characters and narratives" (49). Lilienfeld does, however, locate what she calls Cather's "female modernism" in the way in which the author thematically "encodes women's complicated economic, social, and sexual relations by subverting that most traditional of genres, seemingly realistic American regional fiction" (52). That this 'subversion' may be the result of stylistic innovations rooted in the predominantly male modernist tradition that preceded Cather is, I think, mistakenly dismissed by Lilienfeld.

3 Among the many critics who laud Cather's sixth novel for its style and form, JoAnn Middleton notes A Lost Lady "is structurally perfect" (88), while Susan Rosowski calls it Cather's "best example" of the unfurnished type (Voyage 114). Perhaps most memorably, Truman Capote declared it -- in a conversation with the author herself -- a "perfect" work of art (in Woodress 495). David Daiches stands out in the critical field for his lone condemnation; in his essay, "The Claims of History," he calls the novel "a small-scale affair" and "rough-hewn" work (39).

4 A close reader of James, Cather may have been choosing language (e.g., "thin" and "miniature") that directly challenged James's intention "to build large" in *his* novel portrait, Portrait of a Lady, as well as his assertion in the Preface to the New York Edition that "thinness" was a particular danger of his subject -- "a certain young woman affronting her destiny" -- to be avoided "tooth and nail" (15).

5 It has generally been recognized that Cather's novel portrait of Marian Forrester influenced F. Scott Fitzgerald in his creation of Daisy Buchanan in The Great Gatsby. (Fitzgerald himself confessed in a letter to Cather that he feared he had plagiarized.) However, it is more likely that Cather's innovative use of point of view in the novel had a more profound influence on Fitzgerald's creation of Nick Carraway. Although Gatsby is written in the first -- not third -- person, Nick Carraway's limited vision works dramatically, as Niel's does, to allow the reader to see the paradoxical doubleness of experience and perception.

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[6] As early as the 1860s, Manet's paintings, most notably *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, disturbed viewers and critics alike for their refusal to present a clear and "readable" narrative subject and for their unfamiliarly subjective quality.

[7] Nancy Morrow notes in her essay on A Lost Lady and the nineteenth century novel of adultery that Niel is not concerned with the moral implications of Marian's adulterous affair with Frank Ellinger and that this lack of concern distinguishes the novel from earlier adultery novels. While I agree with Morrow that Niel's response to the affair primarily concerns her violation of an aesthetic, not moral ideal, there is at least on two occasions a decidedly moral tone in Niel's unspoken judgment of Marian which we as readers come to question.

After Captain Forrester returns from the Denver bank failure and is praised for his generosity and integrity by Judge Pomeroy, Marian responds to the Judge with some passion *while looking at Niel*: "You were quite right, Judge. I wouldn't for the world have had him do otherwise for me. He would never hold up his head again. You see, I know him." As she said this she looked at Niel, on the other side of the room, and her glance was like a delicate and very dignified rebuke to some discourtesy, -- though he was not conscious of having shown any. (51) Coming as it does just after Niel's shattering discovery of Marian's adultery, the scene suggests that Niel, who uncharacteristically neither addresses nor comforts Marian on this distressing occasion, betrays a sense of hardened judgment in his features -- a "discourtesy" that Marian not only sees but rejects. What distinguishes Cather's novel is not only that moral repudiation of adultery is not directly relayed (here it is suggested in Niel's unspoken and even unconscious actions), but that it appears curiously irrelevant.

Another moment that suggests Niel's moral discomfort with Marian's adultery comes when he tries to hide Marian's letter to Ellinger from the Captain. The Captain not only displays his knowledge of Marian's relations with Ellinger through his outspoken admiration of her handwriting, but, in an extraordinary moment unusual in the adultery novel, the cuckolded husband reveals his total acceptance of his adulterous wife. Again, Niel's unspoken moral condemnation proves irrelevant.

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Chapter 2

Modern Forms and Desert Places in The Professor's House

I have it in me so much nearer home
To scare myself with my own desert places.

Robert Frost, *Desert Places*

In her seventh novel, The Professor's House (1925), Cather continued to experiment with modern forms of expression that would allow her greater range and depth in the representation of consciousness. Beyond the aim of A Lost Lady to construct a living portrait whose character a reader could feel, Cather creates in The Professor's House a more complex psychological portrait of a character whose hidden, desert places form the focus of the book. Built around the melancholy ruminations of a protagonist who discovers an existence tainted by sadness and loss, the novel illustrates what Virginia Woolf describes as the modernist's particular interest in "the dark places of psychology" (156). Perhaps in acknowledgment of the novel's dark undercurrent, Cather called it "a nasty, grim little tale" (in Woodress 367), but she also described it -- in an inscription to the poet Robert Frost as "a letting go with the heart" (Sergeant 225). The seemingly contradictory statements are instructive. To a far greater extent than she had in the earlier work, Cather "let go" in the novel, casting much of her personal life's despair and disappointment at middle age into the fictional experience of the Professor.[1] More important for my study, however, Cather continued to let go of narrative convention in

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The Professor's House in order to probe the human heart more deeply -- even into the grimmer, nastier recesses of existence.

The novel centers on the experiences and memories of Godfrey St. Peter, the domestically alienated and inwardly isolated professor who is experiencing a mysterious "diminution of ardour" both intellectually and spiritually in late mid-life. The author of eight volumes on the history of the Spanish Adventurers in North America, the Professor at age 52 has won high acclaim for his work and remuneration enough to allow him and his family greater material comfort. At the novel's opening, he is seen reluctantly facing a move into a new house which the prize money for his latest book has enabled him to build. With his best work behind him, the Professor appears in a state of disenchantment over his recent success, of grief from the loss of his brightest student and friend, Tom Outland, and of disillusion over his family's growing materialism. Caught between a distasteful present and a stimulating but lost past, the Professor is depicted in a state of brooding introspection. Like most Cather protagonists, he is a pioneer of the spirit; however, unlike protagonists in the early novels who rise to meet near-epic challenges (e.g., Alexandra Bergson, Antonia Shimerda, Thea Kronborg), the Professor is a reluctant explorer whose journey involves not an ascent but a descent into himself. Part of the book's fascination is that it depicts not just the Professor's willing though discomfiting self-scrutiny, but the more mysterious and unconscious excavations of his identity.

In presenting the complexities of the Professor's inner life, Cather wished the form of the novel as well as its style and content to play an important role. At the time of its composition, she told Elizabeth Sergeant that form, in particular, was to assume greater significance in this novel than it had in her previous work (Sergeant 213). Although, as Sergeant pointed out, Cather was not ostentatiously modern or *dans le mouvement*, her

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persistent experimentation with new forms that could represent interiority suggests her on-going debt to Flaubert, as well as her unlikely alliance with modernist writers of the period. Alternating in voice and subject matter, and eschewing the chronological ordering of events, The Professor's House comprises three disparate sections that create a modern rhythm as each alternates in theme and tone: Book I, "The Family," a third person narrative deals primarily with the Professor's social and domestic relations; Book II, "Tom Outland's Story," is a first person narrative told by Outland but recollected by the Professor; and Book III, "The Professor," returns to the third person narrative and focuses largely on the internal thoughts and experiences of St. Peter. In a manner now familiar to students of modernism, the three-tiered form breaks the constraints of a strictly "linear" narrative to convey more sharply the disjunctions of modern existence. The form's dramatic shifts in time, place, and atmosphere serve to illustrate and intensify contrasting elements of the Professor's consciousness while mimicking the characteristically non-linear movement of mind, memory, and experience. Like Flaubert, Cather wished the psychological workings of the novel to be felt in, and beneath, the form not in a manner distinct from it (Letters: 1830-1857 207). Her interest in weaving together form and substance likewise suggests James's notion that the idea of a novel and its form are "the needle and the thread" of novel-making -- two inextricable ingredients ("Art" 60). In using form to represent *and* to simulate mental action in The Professor's House, Cather embraced a peculiarly modern aim.

The novel's innovative form was, in fact, a complicating factor for early critics of the book. Many bristled at its strangeness, often finding it awkward or too abstract. Leon Edel, for example, questioned whether the "two inconclusive fragments" on the Professor stitched to a third on Outland could even be called a novel. Edith Lewis noted

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in her memoir of Cather that, although the form of The Professor's House no longer seemed strange to a contemporary audience in 1953, it was seen as quite peculiar in 1925, the year of its publication. Cather was, in fact, repeatedly prodded to explain the purpose and meaning of the form, pausing to elaborate only when the questioner. Pat Knopf, the son of her publisher and friend Alfred Knopf, interested her (Woodress 370).

In response to his queries, Cather wrote a short explanation about the novel's structure which further elucidates her modernist concerns and interest in experimentation. She noted that in The Professor's House, she wished to attempt "two experiments in form": the first to insert the *Nouvelle* into the *Roman* and the second "something akin to the arrangement followed in sonatas in which the academic sonata form was handled somewhat freely" (WCOW 30-31). Like the sonata, the novel would be made up of three parts alternating in tone and emphasis. Sergeant noted that even though she discarded the idea, Cather had even considered assigning the novel's sections musical directives (e.g., Book I - *molto moderato*; Book II - *molto appassionata*). In fashioning her literary work after the sonata, Cather wished -- as did many modernists -- to attune her prose to an elastic cadence and to capture a poetic expression as full-bodied and suggestive as music. Her central aim continued to be the central aim of her unfurnished method: to create through language an articulation of experience that could reach beyond language, to communicate a feeling or idea upon the page without naming it there. The novel's distinctively disjunctive form accomplished for Cather a kind of musical eloquence, each of the sections providing a resonance that could be achieved through juxtaposition and contrast, as well as through thematic and symbolic continuity.

It is worth noting here that the word 'experiment' which Cather uses to describe the creative challenges she set herself in The Professor's House refers not to the scientific

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analogies the word denoted for earlier writers, specifically Zola, but to purely aesthetic and non-scientific correspondences. Where Zola sought through his experimental naturalism to scientize and systematize realism (Bradbury 7), Cather looked to fashion a novel inspired by innovations occurring in the other arts.

Music was not, however, the only art Cather wished to emulate in The Professor's House; to explain the novel's arrangement further, she once again summoned the familiarly modern alliance of writing and painting. She noted that she had just seen an exhibition in Paris of old and modern Dutch paintings which particularly influenced her conception of the novel's form. She observed,

> In many of. . . [the paintings] 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 Professor St. Peter's house rather overcrowded and stuffy with new things . . .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 (WCOW 31-32).

She wished, in other words, to use the frame within a frame form to present a scene separate from but simultaneous with the main scene of the novel, one that could broaden the range of vision and feeling while amplifying, not limiting, its intensity. Given this

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model, the Outland section can be viewed as both distinct from the Professor's domestic scene and coincident to it. Like the seascape out the window, the Outland section with its burst of outdoor light and energy offers a stirring contrast to the Professor's stuffy indoor setting and diminished vitality. As did Cézanne, Cather used contrasting scenes or "juxtaposed hues" for effect (Shiff 121), achieving a greater intensity or luminosity through striking oppositions within a single work. In The Professor's House, St. Peter's small study becomes all the more cluttered and claustrophobic because it is set next to the wind-swept, open-air beauty of the mesa that Outland discovers.

In the Dutch painting Cather observed, however, the dual scenes suggest many more possibilities for interpretation. Light filtered indoors through a window may suggest not only the particulars of the contrasting outdoor setting (the season, time of day, etc.) but may serve to elucidate the internal mood or psychological drama of the main subject of the painting. What comes in through the window may suggest both the external and the internal life of the character pictured in the main scene. Boundaries and frames may obliterate separation even as they maintain it. By inserting the first person Outland section into the third person narrative, Cather accomplishes what painting had centuries earlier -- the creation of external and internal scenes with fluid boundaries. Outland's story, which I will examine more closely later in this chapter, suggests a life apart from *and* a part of the Professor's observing consciousness. Form, like style, thus functions to represent the inner life -- the real subject of The Professor's House.

The third person narrative voice of the first section of The Professor's House, "The Family," offers another kind of boundary that is also crossed and dissolved. Much as she had done in A Lost Lady, Cather employs a narrator who remains anonymous but who frequently merges with the consciousness he narrates. Following Flaubert and

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Henry James, Cather attains greater depth in her portrayal of her characters' psyches by removing the audible intrusions of a narrator. By articulating the Professor's thoughts and adopting his angle of vision in a third person narrative, or using what Dorrit Cohn terms psycho-narration, Cather extends her narrative reach to present even those parts of the Professor's inner life that are unconscious or obscure.[2] In addition, Cather evokes the motion of the Professor's inner life by frequently using narrated monologue or that form which adopts the rhythm and language of the Professor's thought and imitates the language the Professor uses when he talks to himself.[3] By blending the Professor's voice and the narrative voice, Cather creates a sense of the Professor's subjective presence beneath the objective narrative surface. Throughout The Professor's House, inner and outer boundaries are thus crossed through the subtle shifts and transformations of the third person narrative.

From its first paragraph, the novel sets forth for the reader the importance of subtle narrative shifts and the essential way in which external scene is tied to subjective perception.

> The moving was over and done. Professor St. Peter was alone in the dismantled house where he had lived ever since his marriage, where he had worked out his career and brought up his two daughters. It was almost as ugly as it is possible for a house to be; square, three stories in height, painted the colour of ashes--the front porch just too narrow for comfort, with a slanting floor and sagging steps. As he walked slowly about the empty, echoing rooms on that bright September morning, the Professor regarded thoughtfully the needless inconveniences he had put up with for so long; the stairs that were too steep, the halls that were too

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> cramped, the awkward oak mantles with thick round posts crowned by bumptious wooden balls, over green-tiled fire-places (3).

The initial narration appears objective, distanced, yet it swiftly moves closer to the Professor's angle of vision. The brief summary of the Professor's life and general characteristics of the old house in the first three sentences give way to closer revelations of scene and character. As the Professor's physical movement is tied to his reflection ("As he walked . . . the Professor regarded thoughtfully"), the narration begins to simulate the momentum of his observing consciousness. The list of "inconveniences" appears in a language similar to the narrator's (who notes the front porch was "just too narrow for comfort") but here is identifiable as the Professor's; "regarded thoughtfully" thus works like a hinge that swings the narrative away from the anonymous narrator into the mind of the Professor. We thus learn to read what is narrated as closely linked to what is "regarded" and thought by the Professor.

In the paragraph that follows, the Professor's subjective perception merges with objective third person narration so smoothly that the directives "he saw" and "he thought" are unnecessary:

> Certain wobbly stair treads, certain creaky boards in the upstairs hall, had made him wince many times a day for twenty-odd years--and they still creaked and wobbled. He had a deft hand with tools, he could easily have fixed them, but there were always so many things to fix, and there was not time enough to go round (3).

Though not directly articulated, the Professor's observing consciousness becomes palpable as the narrative moves from external observation (object) to narrated monologue (thought). The final sentence with its four clauses in rapid succession imitates the movement of the Professor's reflections and the language of his internal expression. The

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final phrases can no longer be assigned solely to the narrator but adopt a tone that suggests the Professor in silent dialogue with himself. "There was not time enough to go round" reads both as the report of an external narrator *and* as the internal lament of the Professor.

By omitting visible signals to mark internal shifts in the narrative (e.g., he thought, "there was not time enough to go round"), Cather creates a smooth verbal surface beneath which we sense the undulating motion of the Professor's thought. As in the above passage, the narrative throughout the first section, "The Family," frequently moves in quick succession from the report of the Professor's action to physical detail that sets the scene to a series of recollections and reflections that reveal the Professor's internal life but are not obviously assigned to his point of view. The narrative *appears* objective but *feels* subjective. What looks like a report of reality on closer scrutiny appears to suggest the hidden workings of consciousness or to reveal the subtleties of the Professor's angst. Cather is able to suggest the intensity of subjective perception in her work because she has achieved a narrative form that can command it: this modern feature is -- and has been -- easy to overlook as it is cloaked by a prose of seeming simplicity and clarity.

Another passage from Chapter One provides an even sharper example of the unassuming but certain motion of the narrative toward introspection and the subjectivity of experience. Following the Professor's movement "up to the bath-room on the second floor," an array of physical details defines the scene; the "painted tin tub," the old dripping taps, the window that "could only be coaxed up and down by wriggling" and the ill-fitting linen closet doors serve to depict the setting's rather ordinary concreteness, its objective physicality. We feel the Professor's presence, however, in the verbs "coaxed" and "wriggling" and then move even closer to him as the narrative shifts inward:

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> He had sympathized with his daughters' dissatisfaction, though he could never quite agree with them that the bath should be the most attractive room in the house. He had spent the happiest years of his youth in a house at Versailles where it distinctly was not, and he had known many charming people who had no bath at all. However, as his wife said: "If your country has contributed one thing, at least, to civilization, why not have it?" Many a night, after blowing out his study lamp, he had leaped into that tub, clad in his pajamas, to give it another coat of some one of the many paints that were advertised to behave like porcelain, and didn't (4).

Physical detail dissolves into a stream of associations and memories which mimics the movement of the Professor's thought. Frequent repetition of the third person pronoun with perfect tense verbs (e.g., "he had sympathized . . . he had spent . . . he had known") creates the rhythm of the Professor's remembering consciousness while linking disparate thoughts and scenes. The movement of the Professor's thought in the passage imitates the problematic movement of his life in the book as a whole -- from external physical detail to the troubling inner truths that lie beneath them. External, domestic objects (the bath's obvious imperfections) suggest personal, domestic associations that reveal not harmony but disjunction ("he could never quite agree with" his daughters' estimate of the importance of the bath). Here the reader's movement through the physical scene is contingent on the Professor's mental movement. While we certainly are not aware of any instruction, we learn to read or rather feel the Professor's domestic and psychological landscape as one.

As if to counter the pain these thoughts evoke, the remembrance of another house, remote in time and place, surfaces. Memories of the Versailles house, where he lived in

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his youth with people whose lack of concern for material splendor he happily shared, removes the Professor from the disturbing concerns of his adult life and his family. This recollection, embedded in the center of the paragraph, draws the Professor and the reader inward and away from disturbing external reality. It thereby serves a dual function, allowing the Professor to recover an earlier time and to escape the painful present while offering the reader a glimpse of a submerged part of the Professor's consciousness, his longing for an earlier time. Memory serves to broaden our understanding of the Professor's character (his past life), while the narrative, by suggesting the Professor's remembering presence, illustrates the motive for the recollection (his wish to escape the present). The multi-layered character of Cather's prose suggests its modernness, as does the fact that the recollection, while objectively relayed, is embued with the subjective cast of the Professor's remembering consciousness. The comfort of this remembrance like youth itself cannot be sustained, however, and thought of his wife intervenes. The intrusiveness of her voice is dramatized visually and verbally by the sudden appearance of a quotation that reads more like a loud bark: "'If your country has contributed one thing, at least, to civilization, why not have it?'" Her disturbing need for material "conveniences" is so imposing we learn that the Professor has tried again and again to satisfy it. Like the paints that promised "to behave like porcelain" and didn't, the Professor cannot successfully adhere to his wife's concerns and values. Cather masterfully suggests the futility of his efforts through not only the paint image but also through the sudden dispersal of his thoughts.

At this point, Cather's narrative shifts abruptly away from the Professor's interior. Narrated monologue and its simulation of the movement of the Professor's consciousness gives way to a distanced authorial narrative and the description of the

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Professor's physical constitution and ancestral background. This abrupt shift seems to mark appropriately the point at which the Professor's thoughts become penumbral: it is as if his thoughts of his wife and his own failure to mend their domestic fractures has stifled further internal expression. Cather's retreat from an interior view allows us to sense the Professor temporarily lost in thought.

The shift away from the internal is achieved as the two paragraphs that follow focus almost entirely on the Professor's exterior, how he looks, not what he thinks or feels. The temporarily distanced and effaced narrator reports in detail on the Professor's appearance, offering a close inspection of his athletic body, his build, and his facial features. Perspective is not limited but ranges from that of an intimate relation, familiar with the sight of the Professor in pyjamas, to that of an acquaintance who finds his looks distinctly Spanish, to his students who associate his "wicked-looking eyebrows" with Mephistopheles, to the Professor's daughter Kathleen, who has "done several successful sketches of" his fine head. Even as the details determine a vivid picture of the Professor, Cather stresses that that picture is ultimately enigmatic. The Professor, whose head "was high, polished, hard as bronze . . . more like a statue's . . . than a man's," appears much like a work of art, resistant to fixed interpretation. Even an external view of him, Cather reminds us, depends on a highly variable and subjective experience of the viewer.

While expanding our view of the Professor and reminding us of the artistic nature of the frame through which we see him, the two paragraph description of his physical appearance also serves another function. It allows the reader to feel the passage of time in which the Professor occupies himself with further brooding. While the reader learns details of how others see the Professor, his intimate thoughts seem to be occurring out of earshot. We *feel* the Professor's presence in the old house even as the narrative has

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temporarily abandoned the interior psychological scene. That we feel a character's presence, that we experience a duration of time based on that presence without its being directly articulated in the text is a singular achievement of the modern writer.

When Cather returns to the Professor on the particular occasion of his visit to his old house, we see him looking out of "one of the dismantled windows." The Professor's post at the window recalls Henry James's posted observer at one of the innumerable windows in the house of fiction,[4] an observing consciousness looking out upon the human scene. As it does for James on innumerable occasions throughout his novels, the Professor's stationary position at the window illustrates his *active* thought. Cather does not allow us, however, to see into the Professor's thoughts at this moment, but the intensity of his mental discomfort is revealed in his hurried motion to escape the old house when he sees the "cheerful sight" of his garden. The scene, painted in a single-sentence paragraph, epitomizes Cather's artistic economy: "From one of the dismantled windows the Professor happened to look out into his back garden, and at that cheerful sight he went quickly downstairs and escaped from the dusty air and brutal light of the empty rooms" (5). Because Cather so successfully grafts external physical detail to internal action, we understand that it is not simply the "dusty air and brutal light of the empty rooms" (5) the Professor so anxiously escapes but the harsh "light" of his own ruminations.

Narrative shifts from external to internal scene work effectively in "The Family" to bring the reader closer to the motion of St. Peter's thought and feeling but, as the above passage suggests, they work in conjunction with metaphoric representations of inner life that are essential components of Cather's work. "House" as metaphor for the mind, the most prominent and complex metaphor of the novel, is established early as our

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introduction to the Professor's old house parallels our introduction to the Professor and is neatly tied to shifts in narrative tone. We move beyond the facade of the house *as* we move beyond the surface of the Professor's life *and as* the distanced third person narrator moves closer to the Professor's own perceptions. Narration of external reality is thus tied to representation of the internal scene from the moment we step into the novel and St. Peter enters the house. We enter St. Peter's consciousness room by room, each part of the house introducing us through memory and association to another part of his character. Along with sophisticated narrative shifts, physical detail serves as another medium through which the Professor's inner life unfolds and as the symbolic representation of that life. "Dead, empty," and "the colour of ashes," the Professor's old house quickly becomes an emblem of his own fallen spirit or "diminution of ardour" (5). That images and landscapes throughout the novel contribute to the creation of the psychological portrait of the Professor does not in itself suggest the novel's modern quality; however, the pervasiveness of their use and their particular connections to subtle narrative transformations are innovative. Nearly every house, room, landscape, or view in the novel acquires a meaning distinct from its importance as setting. In fact, our understanding of the novel depends on our ability to translate images in terms of their psychological importance, to comprehend the unnamed through the seen.

Here again Cather follows countless examples of her predecessor Henry James. Most notably in The Portrait of a Lady, James maps out a series of houses that represent the culture, heritage, or psychological state of their inhabitants from the paradisal but soon to be abandoned Gardencourt of the novel's opening to the dark and massive "fortress" Isabel Archer occupies with the husband who loathes and controls her later in the book. Cather follows James's example, intimately tying characters to the houses they

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inhabit, but she does so with a minimal amount of labor. In The Professor's House, Cather makes us aware of the Professor's complex attachment to his old house in language peculiarly concentrated. In a singular achievement of Cather's unfurnished style, we come to appreciate the Professor's complex and painful feeling about his house even through his weighty silences when the narrative moves away from his thought and through his impulsive and desperate evasions when he attempts to flee the stifling chamber of his memories.

Like the old house, the Professor's garden offers an essential pictorial reference through which further details of his internal life can be discerned. The garden provides a vision of that part of the Professor that is not only split from his social and domestic life but exists in opposition to it. He created the garden at a time when his wife began to object to his spending too much time away from home after the birth of their first daughter. It appears on the surface as a concession to the "unreasonable" demands of his wife to stay close to home but also as a place of refuge where he can avoid domestic responsibility. At least one critic has termed St. Peter's removal from the domestic sphere escapist and his motives misogynist (Grumbach 333); however, while the garden *is*, like the Professor's study, a place of marital escape, it is also a place of necessary self-expression independent of the family. It is the out-post of a hidden life separate and remote from the exigencies of his wife and society, a life rooted in memory, in the recollected innocence of youth; it is a place where St. Peter can attend to the life-affirming blossoms that are emblems of an aesthetic, not domestic, requirement of his existence.

In her essay on Katherine Mansfield (1936), Cather noted Mansfield's ability to capture the struggle in families for individuals to maintain, indeed to forge, their identities. She observed that in a family "every individual . . . (even the children) is clinging

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passionately to his individual soul, is in terror of losing it in the general family flavor. . . . the mere struggle to have anything of one's own, to be one's self at all, creates an element of strain which keeps everybody almost at the breaking point" (WCOW 109). She stated further that "even in harmonious families there is this double life--the one viewable and the secret, passionate and intense, *real* life" (WCOW 109). For Cather, the hidden, "real" life was the artist's life apart from the inhibiting domestic life that threatened both individuality and creativity. The Professor, unique among scholars in literature, is a scholar-artist, who must struggle not to lose his soul entirely to the demands and the constraints of his family. The garden, like his upstairs study and the lake he can see from his window, allows the Professor a place in which his "realest" self can be expressed and maintained.

For Cather, memory was not only the core of one's hidden, real self, but the wellspring of creation. The Professor's garden is borne of his attachment to the past, to his memory of another time and country. It suggests his feeling (and Cather's) for a tradition that valued not material advancement but aesthetic expression, a tradition that valued an industry of the spirit as well as the body. His creation of a French garden in Hamilton is the expression of his particular reverence for beauty rooted in a European tradition of the past. It is a reverence never directly articulated but suggested in the careful detailing of the garden's flora: it contains a "row of slender Lombardy poplars," linden trees, "a bed for salad herbs," salmon-pink geraniums, and French marigolds. The Professor grows superb dahlias "as no one else in Hamilton could" (6) -- not only because no one else has his touch but because no one else possesses his particular reverence for the European culture that the buoyant flowers represent. It is interesting to note that the resonance of the garden as symbol of an attachment to a distant culture extends even

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beyond its creator, St. Peter. The usually parsimonious German landlord, Appelhoff, offered "help and encouragement" and even "a little money" towards its maintenance. The familiar sight of the *Lindenbaum* and poplars of his nativeland no doubt stir the retired farmer; he shares an interest in the garden with St. Peter because he shares a tradition that valued it. Once again, Cather insists that landscape be read in the novel as more than simple setting or symbol but as an active part of her characters' complex inner lives.

Beyond its historical and cultural associations, the garden also suggests that part of the Professor's consciousness that is the source of creative expression, that has been "the comfort of his life" (5). It is in the garden that he finds spiritual and intellectual comfort: "when homesickness for other lands and the fret of things unaccomplished awoke, he worked off his discontent here" (6). When his wife and daughters are away for the summer, he retrieves in the garden the feeling of his unfettered bachelorhood and works undisturbed with his books and papers under the linden trees. The lush garden represents that aspect of his consciousness that fosters fertility of mind. Not surprisingly, Outland appears -- via St. Peter's memory -- for the first time in the novel in the garden where he "used to sit and talk half through the warm, soft nights" of summer with St. Peter. His appearance in the walled-in garden suggests his presence in the secret realm of the Professor's inner life. His appearance there establishes Outland's position of privileged spiritual and intellectual intimacy with the Professor; he occupies a space the Professor keeps separate from the demands of heterosexual and adult life.

One of the key ways we interpret the garden's meaning in relation to St. Peter is through the subtle shifts in narrative voice that bring us closer to his thought. The narrative describing the garden in Chapter One of the novel appears to be told from the

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objective third person point of view. At the same time, however, it suggests the implicit rhythm of the Professor's remembering consciousness and frequently adopts his thought language. The narrative serves a mnemonic as well as an expository function; we are introduced to the scene as we feel the Professor's reflective presence within it. The survey of the grounds of his old home and the particulars of his garden's inception, contents, and use moves with a fluidity that captures the rhythm of his remembrance. The sentence that most keenly suggests St. Peter's voice and presence is the one that ends the passage and ushers Outland into the book: "And it was there he and Tom Outland used to sit and talk half through the warm, soft nights" (7). To read the sentence is to feel one has arrived at an apex of feeling, of remembrance. The phrase "And it was there" pronounces the importance of the remembered occasion and suggests the physical and mental presence of the Professor in the garden addressing the spot "there" "under the linden-trees" where he and Outland once talked. The absence of any explication of Outland's identity at this point further places the statement in the Professor's consciousness where identification would be unnecessary. Initially, we sense Outland's importance to St. Peter through the subtly heightened tone and through Outland's connection to the highly symbolic external details of the scene.

St. Peter's presence becomes all the more palpable in the narrative when it suddenly ceases and then resumes the articulation of his mental action. Outland's remembered appearance in the garden is followed by an abrupt shift that suggests the Professor's distress at the recollection:

> On this September morning, however, St. Peter knew that he could not evade the unpleasant effects of change by tarrying among his autumn flowers. *He must plunge in like a man, and get used to the feeling that under his work-room there*

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> *was a dead, empty house.* He broke off a geranium blossom, and with it still in his hand went resolutely up two flights of stairs to the third floor . . ." (7). [my emphasis]

In this extraordinary scene of self-revelation, remembered time is displaced by the chronicling of narrative time --"this September morning." The sudden temporal change illustrates the abrupt dispersal of the Professor's pleasant recollection. As occurs so frequently in Cather's novels, the bright past, like the prelapsarian garden, can be recalled but not recovered. Awareness of present-time and its concomitant duties snaps the Professor out of his reverie. The harshness of the "snap" is captured in the abrupt time shift and in the severely contrasting language describing the garden (the past) and the old house (the present). The place of "glistening shrubs and bright flowers," of "warm, soft nights" of talk with Tom Outland gives way to the "dead, empty house." Language and imagery evoke and intensify the Professor's feeling of lifelessness and loss.

Once again, narrative that captures and imitates the Professor's thought works to bring the reader extraordinarily close to his interior life. The passage begins with psycho-narration and adopts St. Peter's angle of vision: "St. Peter knew that he could not evade the unpleasant effects of change." Narrated monologue (in italics above) follows and creates the impression that St. Peter is talking to himself, reinforcing what he knows but has difficulty accepting throughout the novel -- that he must not evade change and shun loss. The paragraph then ends in a report of physical action that succinctly dramatizes the characteristic doubleness of the Professor's thoughts. The breaking of the geranium blossom signals the end of his pleasing but disruptive reverie, while his carrying it into the house illustrates his reluctance to leave behind the garden and its fertile associations.

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Like Flaubert and Henry James who frequently employed a striking image to conclude a passage in which the third person narrative closely adopts the angle of vision of a particular character, Cather leaves us with an image that stunningly suggests even those parts of the Professor's consciousness that he might not consciously or voluntarily acknowledge.[5] The simple image of the geranium blossom suggests in one stroke the harshness of Outland's death, the broken glory of the past, and the Professor's diminished vitality. It also illustrates what the critic Doris Grumbach rightly asserts is the tragedy of St. Peter's love for Tom: "that it is private, unconfessed, sublimated" (339). The geranium blossom, like the red carnation of Cather's early short story "Paul's Case," becomes a powerful image because it acquires a meaning beyond that which the protagonist would consciously assign it.

Perhaps the greatest revelation of the Professor's inner life comes through the description of his third floor work room. Surrounded by the tools and props of Augusta, the sewing woman, he could be reminded of "the engaging drama of domestic life" (16) without being trapped by it. Here "he could get isolation, insulation" necessary for him to live out his "secret, passionate" life as an historian. The room, like the Professor's life, serves a dual purpose; by day, it serves the family's domestic needs, and by night, it serves the Professor's artistic needs. More so than the garden, the study, "the center of operations" for the Professor, allows him to explore and to cultivate a part of himself that could not prosper in the house below. Removed from the infectious distractions and temptations of the "human house," the house of the body, the Professor could harness his desire to "do this dazzling, this beautiful, this utterly impossible thing" -- create his Spanish Adventurers in North America.

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Like the rooms in the old house below, his work room has its marked imperfections. It lacks adequate heat, light, and ventilation; it was "the most inconvenient study a man could possibly have" (16). But as the Professor marvels over his having tolerated these inconveniences for so long, it is clear that physical discomfort was secondary to the creative freedom the room allowed. The study as a place is important only as it represents a place of mind, of spirit, and it is this "place" that lies at the heart of the Professor's existence. It is the locus of creative struggle and triumph, the fertile "dark den" of his imagination that the Professor does not wish to abandon.

An essential feature of the study -- the "one fine thing about" the room -- is its view: "From the window he could see, far away, just on the horizon, a long, blue, hazy smear--Lake Michigan, the inland sea of his childhood" (20). St. Peter's vision of the lake offers another example of an external landscape that is the essential medium through which we "see" the internal psychological scene. It provides St. Peter (and the reader) a necessary connection to a remote interior place -- a place of memory and creative sustenance. Key among the ingredients that lead us inward is the painterly blue "smear" which recalls for St. Peter the ineffable feeling of childhood freedom that both comforts and inspires him. Through the vision of the lake, he can repossess a feeling of constancy, possibility, and vitality that is the anchor of his childhood and his creative existence. Each element of Cather's extended description of the lake thereby reminds the reader of the subjectivity of experience and the inextricable connection between form and feeling:

> When he remembered his childhood, he remembered blue water. . . . the great fact in life, the always possible escape from dullness, was the lake. The sun rose out of it, the day began there; it was like an open door that nobody could shut. The land and all its dreariness could never close in on you. You had only to look at the

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> lake, and you knew you would soon be free. It was the first thing one saw in the morning, across the rugged cow pasture studded with shaggy pines, and it ran through the days like the weather, not a thing thought about, but a part of consciousness itself. (20)

The picture does not flicker between external and internal representation but obliterates inner/outer boundaries in much the way an impressionist landscape does. More than a representation of reality, the view appears as the physical embodiment of an impression or sensation -- "not *a thing* thought about but a part of consciousness itself" [my emphasis]. In a manner that is peculiarly modern, the concreteness of the terrain, its *thingness*, is altogether secondary to its sensory and psychological importance. To emphasize this internal quality of the landscape, Cather employs images that take on almost purely subjective associations or correspondences. Metaphor is pushed to new limits; in key instances of description, the landscape becomes what it represents: the blue smear of Lake Michigan *is* an "inland sea," a part of St. Peter; his childhood *is* blue water.

Further reinforcing the reader's sense of the landscape as a remembered vision occurring in the mind of St. Peter, the passage is almost entirely composed of narrated monologue, closely adhering to St. Peter's thought language. The opening phrase, "When he remembered his childhood, he remembered blue water," with its captivating repetition of sound, establishes for the narrative that follows a wavelike rhythm of remembrance. Once again we enter the consciousness of the Professor by means of a prose that does not call attention to the subtle shifts in narrative voice that determine our movement inward. The identification of the lake as "the great fact in life" illustrates a case in point. The word "fact" initially suggests the presence of a narrator who may be reporting an irrefutable truth, but the phrase "the great fact in life" clearly refers in the passage that

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follows not to life in general but to *one* life in particular -- St. Peter's. Here the absence of the third person possessive pronoun signals that the narrative occurs inside the Professor: in confessing the importance of the lake in *his* life *to himself*, the pronoun marker is unnecessary. To read the line "But the great fact in life . . . was the lake" is to overhear St. Peter's thoughts while barely being aware we are eavesdropping. Unlike later high modernist writers such as James Joyce, who highlighted changes in narrative voice to show the extreme differences between objective reporting and subjective, often unconscious, perception, Cather achieves the shift inward while barely creating a ripple on the narrative surface.

The passage also effectively suggests St. Peter's presence as it acquires the momentum of a remembering consciousness; as each sentence unfolds another detail of the landscape's peculiarly liberating effect, it suggests the piece by piece recovery of the lake scene as it is recalled. Through the ordinary accumulation of detail, we feel an extraordinary sense of the recollection in action. Repetition of the pronoun "it" as well as the verb "to be" emphasizes St. Peter's active effort to define his experience and establishes the pulsing rhythm of his remembrance: "the great fact *was* the lake. . . . *it was* like an open door . . . *it was* the first thing one saw in the morning . . . *it* ran through the days . . . ." [my emphasis]. In an effect Cather exploits repeatedly throughout <u>The Professor's House</u>, our step by step comprehension as readers mirrors St. Peter's mental action and the recovery of his past; we imagine the scene *as* St. Peter recollects it.

The intensity of St. Peter's recollected feeling about the lake -- and thus about himself as it is a part of him -- is perhaps most palpable as Cather employs the pronoun "you" four times in the paragraph and draws the reader into what feels like a moment of direct address. "You had only to look at the lake, and you knew you would soon be free"

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reads both as the Professor's silent dialogue with himself and a natural way of suggesting the inevitable quality of his feeling, that is, indicating to another that "you" too would feel it. Through the simple alteration of a single pronoun, Cather accomplishes a dual effect: heightening the Professor's emotion while drawing the reader into the intensity of his thought.

Images, as well as the flow and particularities of language, suggest St. Peter's presence both as a man recollecting and as a boy perceiving the natural scene. The feeling of possibility the lake inspires is "like an open door nobody could shut"; the lake is as dependable as the weather, as inevitable as the rising sun. The open door, the weather, the sun appear as integral parts of the child's outdoor existence now woven into the man's indoor recollection; through them we sense the integration of man and boy, indoors and outdoors, as well as the book's central correspondence -- the suggestion that outland and inland are one. To understand this is to understand St. Peter 's necessary connection to Outland, even before his character is fully delineated in the narrative. The point of Cather's subtly loaded landscape scene is not just that it represents interiority but that it reaches beyond externals to suggest meanings intricately tied to the text that follows. As it suggests St. Peter's link to Outland, the view serves a proleptic function: forecasting the deeper connection between the loss of Outland in the war and the loss of the sustaining force of his childhood that becomes the crisis of the book. The view suggests not only the Professor's attempt to recover the past but the futility of that attempt. For Outland is recoverable only in memory and the landscape that suggests his presence also symbolizes his tragic absence.

Another modern aspect of Cather's rendering of the lake view is its connection to an unconscious domain of uncontrolled and uncensored feeling. The lake becomes for St.

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Peter the elemental base, "the great fact," of his existence at a time when he is innocent and unaware of its effect on him, when "he didn't observe the detail or know what it was that made him happy" (21). It "had made pictures in him," Cather writes, "when he was unwilling and unconscious, when his eyes were merely open wide" (21). The striking feature of this description is its insistence on the unconscious -- and involuntary -- nature of St. Peter's perception. What sets the picture in memory is not the power of the ocular experience, but of something that occurs at a far deeper level. St. Peter can recall all of the lake's "aspects perfectly," not because of his conscious willingness to do so, but because of the profound impact of the feeling the lake inspired in him. Seeing and recalling the landscape is a function of having felt it deeply on an unconscious level. Contributing to the sense of the landscape's modernness is not only Cather's depiction of memory as a function of the unconscious but the suggestion that the motivation for St. Peter's action, his life choices, comes from a hidden, unconscious source. The feeling of possibility and freedom, the "intimation of immortality," unconscious and innocent, the lake elicits in the Professor is so fundamental to his life that we are told he determined his place of employment on the basis of its proximity to the lake. He chose the position at Hamilton, "not because it was the best, but because it seemed to him that any place near the lake was a place where he could live" (22). Living for St. Peter depends on his connection to this "inland sea of his childhood," to the "innocent blue" that is the pure, unconscious source of his imagination and his life.

The critic Malcolm Bradbury notes that "one essential way to perceive modernism is to see it as an art that insists on its internal frame . . . on the 'foregrounding' of the artistic activity, so that the achievement of the story's form becomes part of the story" (48). St. Peter's insistence on the centrality of his remembered childhood which he

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repossesses through the vision of Lake Michigan intentionally framed by his window reminds the reader of the wider frame in which Cather constructs her story and suggests the subjective nature of that construction. Like most modernist writing of the period, Cather's novel displays an obvious interest in the process of creating itself. St. Peter's creative dependence on the secret "place" of memory most clearly equates him with the artistic consciousness of the writer and calls our attention to the hidden core of memory that lies at the bottom of all novel writing and of Cather's The Professor's House in particular.

In her statements about the creative process, Cather frequently stressed the importance of memory. Perhaps most well-known among them is her comment to an interviewer in 1921: ". . . it's memory -- the memory that goes with the vocation" (Bohlke 20). She noted further that it was the material that had burned in to memory early in life that mattered most and became the source of her writing: "When I sit down to write, turns of phrase I've forgotten for years come back like white ink before fire. I think that most of the basic material a writer works with is acquired before the age of fifteen" (Bohlke 20). Felt before it was "seen," St. Peter's lake picture suggests Cather's emphasis on early life experience and the primary importance of feeling in perceiving. In the Professor's memory, as in Cather's art, physical landscape is a thing perceived by the eye and the spirit as well. The lake view suggests that the source of the artistic impulse is to be found, as it was for Cather, in the primitive, pre-sexual time of childhood, in the feeling of innocence and possibility rooted in the secret landscape of the past.[6]

St. Peter's self-consciously constructed view of the lake as a tableau of memory suggests further Cather's own motives for writing the novel . The narrative language of the passage not only summons up the rhythm and tone of the Professor's remembering

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consciousness but at the same time establishes parallels with Cather's life. While I will not explore the many autobiographical correspondences in the novel at length, the central shared feature of St. Peter and Cather's histories is their removal early in life from a place of fertile childhood splendor to a place threateningly unfamiliar. St. Peter, like Cather, was removed from his home at the age of eight; when he was "dragged" from his lakeside farm by his parents to relocate to the wheat lands of central Kansas, "St. Peter nearly died of it" (21). Cather similarly felt in her removal from Virginia to the flatlands of Nebraska that she "had come to the end of everything -- it was a kind of erasure of personality" (Cather in Woodress 36). St. Peter's precious view suggests that survival was possible for him by reconceiving a remembered source of vitality, just as we imagine Cather's novel-making as an act of necessary self-recovery.

The achievement of St. Peter's framed view into his childhood is in part its ability to suggest multiple meanings relating not just to a single character's psyche or to the individual author but to the creative process as well. Even in the absence of Cather's biography and critical commentary, as we observe St. Peter framing his past, we are presented with an occasion for reflecting on the process of seeing which we engage through the narrative frame of the work of art. Cather, in fact, calls our attention to the view as a specifically artistic creation. By describing Lake Michigan as a blue "smear," Cather emphasizes its painterly quality, its artifice; her use of this single, characteristically unassuming word invites us to regard the creative stroke of St. Peter's imagination and the writer's as well. We see the author's hand creating the stroke of blue as we see St. Peter attaching significance to it. Further, the word forces us to question our role as readers. The blue smear equates St. Peter's subjective associations to the landscape with those we may assign to a daub of paint, thus inviting us to consider the

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illusory and subjective nature of artistic as well as personal perception. As in many modern works, The Professor's House invites us through its internally constructed landscapes to consider not *what* we perceive but *how* we do so. In modern fashion, we are thus forced to examine our role as interpreters.

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While Book I of the novel presents multiple avenues for interpretation, Book II, "Tom Outland's Story," maintains the strong Catherian link between landscape and interiority and deepens our understanding of the Professor's inner life even as he himself remains off stage. In this section, Cather presents a first person account of Outland's past life prior to his acquaintance with Professor St. Peter. The story details Outland's work as a call boy for the railroad, his friendship with brakeman Roddy Blake, their tour as fellow cowhands in the Southwest, his discovery of the ruins of an ancient Indian cliff city in a Southwestern mesa, his trip to Washington, D.C., to gain the interest of the Smithsonian Museum in the ruins, his break with Roddy after Roddy sells off the Indian artifacts to fund Outland's education, his lone summer on the mesa, and his subsequent arrival at university. The compelling story of growing up, adventure, friendship, betrayal, and ultimately self-discovery is told in a voice distinct from the Professor in its unhurried, casual tone, its pulsing excitements and unpretentious, folksy language. Individual in style and subject matter, it seems at first easily separable from the rest of the novel. (The piece, in fact, was frequently anthologized during Cather's lifetime and translated into many other languages as a story unto itself.) Upon closer examination, however, the section appears intricately tied to the Professor and can even be read as a part of his complex character.

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Foremost in importance in linking Outland to the Professor is the symbolic significance of the Outland section's placement in the novel which charges it with meaning it simply does not possess on its own. Situated between the two sections of the novel pertaining almost exclusively to the Professor's thoughts and actions, Outland's story exists at the heart of the Professor's troubled world of loss and unnamed despair. Cather is careful to exploit this effect as she uses the Professor's consciousness as the frame through which we view and read Outland's tale. At the conclusion of "The Family," we move into, not away from, the Professor's deepest and most troubling reminiscences; the mood is entirely one of introspection. We move inland, that is inside the Professor, to get to Outland, and understanding this movement is essential to understanding the function of the Outland section in the novel.

To track this movement inward and then out into what can be seen as both an exterior and a deeper interior space is to discern how carefully crafted the novel is and how successfully Cather achieves in literature the relation she admired in painting between interior and exterior psychological scene. While it is entirely without action, the conclusion of Book I offers a dramatic example of inward movement that profoundly affects our reading of the Outland section. The final chapter of Book I shows the Professor settling into another summer of solitude after his family has sailed for France. It begins with a straightforward report of the family's activities and the Professor's plans for the summer, yet the tone quickly turns subjective, as the narrator begins to speak in language that closely resembles the Professor's were he to narrate his own thoughts and activities. Cather writes,

> After his university duties were over, he smuggled his bed and clothing back to the old house and settled down to a leisurely bachelor life. He realized that he ought

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> to be getting to work. The garden, in which he sat all day, was no longer a valid excuse to keep him from his study. But the task that awaited him up there was difficult. It was a little thing, but one of those little things at which the hand becomes self-conscious, feels itself stiff and clumsy (150).

Words like "smuggled" with its connotation of illicit transaction and those that suggest self-recrimination like "he ought to . . ." suggest the Professor closely steers the narrative and is battling with himself over the guilt he feels for abdicating his family and avoiding his work. His lack of resolve and wavering state of mind are further captured as he admits that the garden is no longer a valid excuse for not working, but then immediately backs away from the declaration and defensively offers an alternative reason for his lassitude: the difficulty of the task that lies before him, annotating and editing Outland's diary. When Cather writes, "But the task that awaited him up there was difficult," she achieves at least two effects simultaneously: the line creates a sense of the Professor's physical presence *below* in the garden, while allowing us to feel his psychological presence. The lead word "But" hardly serves as a coordinator, but appears more like a tripping, defensive interjection that reveals the Professor struggling to explain to himself why he does not rise to meet the challenges that await him in his study, a place he has in the past engaged his work with passion and ready industry. In keeping with the Professor's inability to explain adequately what ails him, Cather does not offer us any direct explanation for why the task is so difficult; instead she declares it perfunctorily and unsatisfactorily "a little thing" that makes "the hand" self-conscious, stiff, and somewhat clumsy. Complexity of effect is achieved by Cather with a single brushstroke; the simple word "little" suggests the Professor's urge to trivialize his inability to concentrate on his work and to diminish the immense effect Outland and his diary have had on him. The

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paragraph ends with the Professor's revealing need to reduce the task to the level of a troublesome writing project that is problematic not to the mind or heart, but merely to the mechanical "hand." Cather's ability to invoke meaning through what is *not* on the page is apparent; the Professor's presence is felt most as the narrative darts away from an exploration of the hidden reasons for his "difficulty."

Much like the effort to stifle an uncomfortable recollection, however, St. Peter's effort to avoid deeper probing into what really immobilizes him proves futile. The narrative gives way to what feel like irrepressible thoughts of his attachment to, and feeling for, Outland. The discursive quality of the rest of the chapter with its string of thoughts one after the other captures the flow and emotional intensity of the Professor's remembrance of Outland. He recalls his relationship with Outland from its innocent beginnings to a time when his wife Lillian grew jealous, a time of greater intimacy with his young student, of shared summer evenings in the garden where they dined, drank "sparkling Asti . . . talked and watched night fall" together (155). The anonymous third person narrator remains in place while we *feel* the Professor's subjective thoughts unfolding. As in previous memories he has considered, the emotional intensity of this recollection reaches a quiet summit *inside* the Professor, who seems almost to swoon over the details of his past experiences with Outland even as he struggles to explain to himself the innocence of his attachment. The height of feeling, however, and the romantic images of the two together in the garden suggest an intimacy not of the body -- though the remembered scenes are certainly sensual -- but of a more profound attachment of the heart and mind that might well make a wife uneasy. That we as readers have witnessed and experienced on a previous occasion early in the novel the Professor's stirring remembrance of Outland while in the garden deepens our sense of his nearly obsessive thoughts of

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Outland, his persistent grief, and his still strong emotional attachment to his former student. Through careful repetition of remembered images and sensations, Cather creates a mental pattern that makes us feel we occupy an interior place in the novel and in the Professor.

The conclusion of the chapter intensifies this sense of interiority as the Professor recalls the particular occasion of Outland's at last telling him his story: "It was on one of those rainy nights, before the fire in the dining-room, that Tom at last told the story he had always kept back. It was nothing very incriminating, nothing very remarkable; a story of youthful defeat, the sort of thing a boy is sensitive about--until he grows older" (155). The language suggests the Professor in silent dialogue with himself. The phrase beginning "it was nothing very incriminating . . ." suggests not only the Professor's view of Outland's story and his motives in coming to the university, but also reveals his perhaps unconscious need to maintain the innocence of his own feeling for Outland: it was neither incriminating, nor remarkable. Cather's repetition of the word "nothing" suggests, however, the Professor's faltering ability to make this claim.

To follow the chapter to this final sentence which introduces Outland's story is to follow a path within the mind of the Professor. We move with the Professor from the present time sitting in the garden of the old house on a summer day to another summer years before Outland's death; as we move into the world of the Professor's recollection, we enter an inner realm. Cather does not return us at the chapter's close to the present time in which the Professor reflects back, but importantly we remain located in the distant time of that rainy night long ago when we turn to Outland's story. Characteristically omitting signals that directly indicate the Professor is the one remembering Outland's story (e.g., he remembered . . . he recalled . . .), Cather makes the

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reader feel the Professor's remembering consciousness even through the silences in the text. Part of the singular achievement of this moment in The Professor's House is that we turn the page and engage Outland's first person story as a recollection of the Professor as well. We encounter Outland's story for the first time, but we experience it as a *twice* told tale remembered by the Professor whose presence is everywhere felt on the page, nowhere named. Synthesis of these two different parts of the novel is achieved here, in other words, as Fry notes it is in modern painting, via "a jump of the unconscious" (in Shiff 152).

Like the sonata form Cather wished to emulate, the contrasting middle section of the novel, although apparently discordant on the surface, resonates with tones, images, and themes that connect it to the two other movements of the book. Each part plays off the other, prompting endless associations and connections, creating a distinctly modern effect of simultaneous dissonance and unison. Sonata-like correspondences of tone, atmosphere, and theme exist primarily through a visual medium, however; it is Cather's exploitation of modern, painterly techniques that most clearly creates a sense of subtle connection between the Professor and Outland.

The single painterly stroke of blue the Professor sees out of his window, for instance, is the stroke that most profoundly connects Outland to St. Peter and knits the disparate sections of the novel together. Blue functions as color often does in modern painting -- most notably in Cézanne's work -- as a synthesizing force in a composition that may otherwise appear fragmentary.[7] It is the predominant color that Cather employs to create unison of atmosphere in the novel and to highlight internal and often unconscious correspondences between the Professor and his former student. Blue

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becomes the color of memory, of internal vision, of the unconscious element of innocence and potentiality lodged in the past.

The small streak of blue that sustains the Professor spiritually and intellectually in Book I seems to occupy almost the whole of the canvas in the Outland section. Description of Outland's time on the mesa forms the bulk of Book II and offers the most poignant examples of its use of resonating blue; Cather writes, the "arc of sky over the canyon was silvery blue" (226); the glorious canyon air was like "breathing the sun, breathing the colour of the sky" (217); the days themselves were "blue and gold" (170); and the summer Outland spends alone on the mesa was "high and blue, a life in itself" (228). Using color as her medium, Cather crosses inner-outer boundaries in a blur of synesthesia. Blue becomes rock and air and sky and life itself. It becomes the medium with which Cather illuminates the outdoor and the "indoor" scenes, the external world of mountains and mesa and the internal world of intoxicating possibility. Like the Professor's precious slip of blue lake, the blue of the Outland section suggests the potentiality and power of a life force to be found in the landscape and sustained in the mind. In painterly fashion, the color appears endlessly varying, rather than static or monotonous.

Most captivating is the blue of the Blue Mesa itself, a blue that presides over the entire landscape and represents even as it transforms Outland's imagination:

> The Blue Mesa was one of the landmarks we always saw from Pardee--landmarks mean so much in a flat country. To the northwest, over toward Utah, we had the Mormon Buttes, three sharp blue peaks that always sat there. The Blue Mesa was south of us, and was much stronger in colour, almost purple. People said the

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> rock itself had a deep purplish cast. It looked from our town, like a naked blue rock set down alone in the plain . . . (165-66).

This initial description seems at first straightforward, formalized by the directional notations of the Buttes in the northwest, mesa to the south. However, while the mesa is easily locatable on a map, its particular features appear a matter far more variable and the subject of individual interpretation. Color is a primary vehicle for expression for Cather, here revealing the mesa's ineffable quality and the subjectivity of observation. Some people say "the rock had a deep purplish cast"; Outland and Roddy think it looks blue. In typically modern fashion, how one sees the mesa becomes a means of examining the vicissitudes of perception itself.

Perhaps no aspect of Cather's novel is more impressionistic than her depiction of the Blue Mesa, which changes with each new description, bringing new colors, prompting new responses in the observing consciousness and furthering the exploration of the process of seeing. Like Monet's haystacks, Cather's mesa is transformed each time we look at it, the flickering changes of light and tone, depth and color, suggesting always the complex relation of eye and mind. Early in the Outland section, Cather writes,

> Just across from us, indeed, stood the mesa, a pile of purple rock, all broken out with red sumach and yellow aspens up in the high crevices of the cliffs. From the cabin, night and day, you could hear the river where it made a bend round the foot of the mesa and churned over the rocks. It was the sort of place a man would like to stay in forever (168).

Animated by colorful trees and the voice of the river, the mesa appears more life form than rock; just two pages later viewed from another angle, it becomes a living thing: "The mesa was our only neighbour, and the closer we got to it, the more tantalizing it was. It

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was no longer a blue, featureless lump, as it had been from a distance. Its sky-line was like the profile of a big beast lying down; the head to the north, higher than the flanks around which the river curved" (170). Further on at sunset, the mesa changes yet again, this time Cather's description suggesting a painter's study in contrasts -- rock and sky, ink-black and sunset red: "After a while the sunset colour would begin to stream up from behind it. Then the mesa was like one great ink-black rock against a sky on fire" (171).

In these descriptions, form, color, and light become vehicles of emotion and perception much as they did for the impressionist painters. The internal and external are so artfully grafted that it is impossible to read the painted scene on a literal level. The enduring harmony of the landscape depends on Outland's eye to reveal it, while what he sees moves him far beyond observation to deeper and eternal longings. As in the landscape painting of the impressionists and of earlier masters like Corot and Constable, man and nature are "seen to depend on each other for their sense" (Clark 183). Indeed, for Cather, they are inextricably bound: no landscape without the seeing eye; no identity, no *I*, without the landscape.

The vital connection of both Outland and the Professor to the landscape of the past serves to link them spiritually and psychologically in the novel. That connection is most pronounced in the similar language Cather uses to describe their individual responses to the landscapes they cherish. To read Outland's awe-inspiring response to the mesa is to recall the Professor's feeling about the lake, the "inland sea of his childhood"; repetition of image and sensation creates a forceful reverberation or echo effect in the text while also intensifying the reading experience. One memory inspires another like the concentric rings created by a stone dropped into water. Outland's memory of the mesa, the inland sea of *his* early life, prompts the reader's recollection of the Professor's remembered

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experience of the lake. The reader is a medium, in other words, not just of feeling but of memory; we are one of the reverberating, concentric rings. By recalling the Professor's experience as we read of Outland's, we participate in *the experience of memory* -- one of Cather's great achievements in this unfurnished book. We mimic through our reading experience the movement of the Professor's associative memory, thinking, as he does, of Outland when we encounter the blue of the lake or occupy the deserted summer garden. Alternately, we are cast back to thoughts of the Professor when we read of Outland's mesa. This movement between the two central characters of the novel exists not on the surface, but as a powerful undercurrent created through Cather's use of minimal diction and highly evocative images.

The effect is most pronounced at the conclusion of Book II when Outland recalls his summer alone on the Blue Mesa. During one solitary "summer, high and blue, a life in itself," Outland achieves self-possession. Like the Indians of the ancient cliff dwellings, he begins to live for "something more than food and shelter," to realize a life free of the contaminating influence of a corrupt, material world. Outland's awakening, the "religious emotion" he feels on the mesa, is characteristically captured by Cather in the description of the landscape:

> Every morning, when the sun's rays first hit the mesa top, while the rest of the world was in shadow, I wakened with the feeling that I had found everything, instead of having lost everything. Nothing tired me. Up there alone, a close neighbour to the sun, I seemed to get the solar energy in some direct way. And at night when I watched it drop down behind the edge of the plain below me, I used to feel that I couldn't' have borne another hour of that consuming light, that I was full to the brim, and needed dark and sleep (227).

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Outland's complete self-possession appears as total harmony with nature. While Hermione Lee asserts that "the novel's quiet, secret, central climax" (Lee 229) is Outland's discovery of the cliff-dwellings in the Blue Mesa, I would argue that it is rather the *self*-discovery that concludes Book II and suggests the underlying connection of the Professor to Outland. This moment, the "high tide" of Outland's existence, is the high tide of the novel. Outland's sense of participating in an eternal moment of creation and diurnal recreation of self and world on the mesa recalls the Professor's sense of eternal beginnings captured in his recollection of the lake. Cather writes of the Professor's lake,

> . . . the sun rose out of it, the day began there; it was like an open door that nobody could shut. The land and all its dreariness could never close in on you. You had only to look at the lake, and you knew you would soon be free. It was the first thing one saw in the morning . . . and it ran through the days like the weather, not a thing thought about, but a part of consciousness itself" (20).

As in Outland's mesa, the Professor's lake landscape prompts a sense of freedom and suggests limitless possibilities for the perceiving consciousness. The two passages are noteworthy as they mirror each other not so much in substance as in spirit, tone, and atmosphere. Both Outland and the Professor appear possessed by a light that is at once external and internal. What begins in each man, each day, lakeside and mesa top, is a connection to an eternal feeling of free will, of creative possibility, a feeling rooted in the landscape, cultivated and sustained through memory. It is the feeling that no doubt lies at the root of their friendship, at the core of their -- and Cather's -- existence as artists and experimenters. What distinguishes this correspondence of feeling is that it is never communicated by Cather directly but is rendered indirectly in a distinctly modern manner

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through image, gesture, nuance, and the shared responsiveness of the two men to landscape.

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The transcendence that Outland and the Professor experience through the landscape suggests Cather's sympathy with Emerson, whose herald of an eternal unity of mind and nature is echoed in the novel. Wordsworth's romantic relation to nature also can be felt in the tantalizing quality of the mesa, which, like the rising rock the speaker approaches in The Prelude, tempts Outland to greater self-examination the closer he comes to it. While Outland can be seen as a kind of Emersonian *wunderkind*, and Cather alludes to a typically Romantic connection between self and nature, the novel's unfurnished style and method, the subjects of my study, place the work and its author in an early modern context. Cather's modernism is further illustrated, however, in the novel's suggestion that this transcendence cannot be sustained, that it is vulnerable to the mutilations of the modern, material world. Part of the legacy of the Blue Mesa is that while the massive rock may endure through the ages, the spirited self-possession and universal harmony it inspires are perpetually threatened with extinction -- a fate that has already overtaken the original inhabitants of the mesa.

Book III of the novel depicts the Professor's struggle to maintain a connection to the deepest sources of his identity and his creative life through his solo occupation of the old house with its garden, attic study, window view to the lake beyond, and memories of Outland. One critic has noted that Cather succeeds so well in depicting the disturbing nature of the Professor's struggle, "it impresses the mature reader as dangerously threatening to his own self-possession" (Grumbach 330). For self-possession, so much a

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feature of the Outland section and the Professor's early life, eludes St. Peter in this last dolorous movement of the book. Much like the atmosphere after the Professor's gas lamp goes out, the five brief chapters engulf the reader in a singularly stifling indoor space in which St. Peter broods over his volitionless state and tries to trace the arc of his lost love for both his family and life in general. A striking lack of movement and absence of landscape in this final section suggests the Professor's inability to transcend his difficulties and locate himself in his world. Though we learn the Professor is seated at his window in the attic study, Cather does not offer us a picture of what he sees out the window; no lake view ventilates his thought or anchors his identity. The absence is important, for it suggests a blanking out of sensibility, an inability of the Professor to "see to see," to use Emily Dickinson's phrase. As the Professor's life, like Cather's art, depends on this peculiar vision of the eyes and the imagination, we understand as readers the potentially fatal nature of this blindness. The resonance of the Professor's lake and Outland's mesa, as well as the interconnected vitality of the two landscapes, is so strong in the earlier sections of the novel, that the removal of these outdoor/indoor vistas from the narrative in Book III becomes itself a source of feeling in the reader. Cather succeeds in creating space through absence like a modern painter who has so carefully crafted the blanks on the canvas, they become in themselves mediators of form and meaning; through what is *not* on the page, she prompts in the reader a palpable sense of loss that mirrors the Professor's.

This sense of loss, the sense that the Professor exists in a kind of wasteland that has become his existence, is perhaps what most strikes a modern chord in this final section of the novel. Cather takes us into the bleak underworld of the Professor's existence, in which he registers his alienation from the values and the culture of the

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society he inhabits. Those values and that culture are revealed chiefly through his family. from whom he feels almost entirely detached. His wife Lillian. daughter Rosamond and her husband Louie Marsellus. each in their own way, possesses an acquisitiveness which repulses the Professor -- Lillian through her attachment to the new house; Louie through the creation of their ostentatious estate Outland. built on the legacy left to Rosamond by Outland; and Rosamond through her lack of generosity and pronounced pleasure in the material, including her minks. furniture, and zest for shopping in general. His younger daughter Kathleen and husband Scott are pictured as contaminated too, not by their possession of wealth (they are far less well-off than Louie and Rosamond), but by their uncontrollable jealousy of their relations' fortune. This jealousy which turns to envy appears itself soul-destroying, as it leads Kathleen to hate her sister and Scott to act with venom against his brother-in-law whom he blackballs and prevents from attaining membership in the town's prestigious Society of Arts and Letters.

While each family member is seen as deeply flawed by the Professor in their relation to the modern world. their flaws are not their only character traits. To Cather's credit, we see other sides of their complex characters as well; we see Lillian's painful sorrow at the loss of her husband's love; Louie's touching ability to forgive Scott's nasty behavior. and Kathleen and Scott's real warmth toward St. Peter. Part of what makes the Professor's family so moving and realistic is that their unsavory characteristics appear all-too human; they seem helpless responses to the world around them. a commercial world that whets one's appetite for pleasure and gratification and promotes commercial values. This is the modern world from which the Professor and Cather are so famously alienated.

To a great degree, the Professor has been insulated from this "real" world of greed and acquisition through his dedication to the scholarly life -- a dedication his family is

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respectful of and supports, whatever his feelings about them. In his attic room, he is able to maintain his attachment to a world of ideas, to live like the cliff dwellers in harmony with something other than the domestic, material world of responsibility and things. He recalls that just when his energies were beginning to wane, Outland came into his life and brought "him a kind of second youth" (234). The young man reinforced his attachment to, or perhaps belief in, the virtue and necessity of the creative life, the life of true self-possession. Indeed, in the novel Outland exists as a kind of pure creative force or youthful self-possession, uncontaminated by material exigencies, unsullied by the demands of domesticity or a commercial world. Through Outland, the Professor resuscitates his own youthful attachment to his work, so much so that he begins to act especially during his summers like a bachelor, much to his wife's chagrin. But this manner of life, this youthful tempo, is in part vicariously acquired. We see St. Peter struggling to maintain it through memory and imagination after Outland's death. Without Outland to inspire him, he is again overtaken by a loss of energy; distracted by the demands and disruptions of his family and domestic life, he can no longer "coordinate and simplify," to find the right relation between himself and his work.

The final chapters find the Professor reflecting bitterly on the inevitability of his position, as he considers that were Outland to have lived, he too may have been susceptible to a contamination of spirit that would inevitably result from marriage and the necessity of providing for one's family and adhering to the conventions that would surely be imposed on him by society. Cather emphasizes the vulnerability of the artist as the Professor contemplates what would happen not to Outland, the person, but to his "blue eye" and "his fine long hand with the backspringing thumb, which had never handled things that were not the symbols of ideas" (236). Once "the trap of worldly success had

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been sprung on him," Outland's blue eye, the organ of the mind and the imagination, would be blotted out; his creative hand would have been necessarily "put to other uses" (236). Outland's identity is so much a part of the Professor at this juncture that the trials the Professor imagines Outland would have faced appear the very ones that most likely burden St. Peter, the decorated historian:

> His fellow scientists, his wife, the town and State, would have required many duties of it. It would have had to write thousands of useless letters, frame thousands of false excuses. It would have had to "manage" a great deal of money, to be the instrument of a woman who would grow always more exacting (236-37).

The Professor's anxiety at having himself acquired distracting fame and more money is evident; we feel his own wish to escape both new professional demands that come with his position as acclaimed historian and to flee his wife whose material concerns "grow always more exacting" and intolerable to him. One also cannot help but recognize in the passage the voice of the author, the Pulitzer Prize winner, lamenting the increased demands on her time once she had met with "worldly success." The crisis the Professor imagines for Outland is surely one Cather and every writer of renown faces -- how to avoid being swallowed up by the every-day demands of society. One solution for the writer, according to Cather, was not to marry.[8] The Professor's agonized attachment to his wife underscores Cather's belief that married life was incompatible with the life of the artist, and her only successful marriages in fiction are those that are more friendships than romances.

The other solution for the writer was to seek out remote places in which to write, to isolate oneself from family and friends, to preserve an inviolate space for the imagination to breathe and flourish. Cather sought famously out-of-the-way places in

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Vermont and later on Grand Manan Island in the Bay of Fundy, and while in New York City was always known to be fiercely protective of her writing time. The tragedy for the Professor is that although he can remove himself from his family, he achieves an isolation that is ultimately nonconstructive, one that in fact nearly destroys him. This must have been at least part of Cather's fear at the time she wrote the novel, a fear that her creative faculties were drying up, that the removal of a central source of inspiration, her friend Isabelle McClung, who had married and moved to France, would prove fatal to her life as an artist.

In the fictional working out of this fear, Cather's theme transcends the personal, as she imagines the more universal struggle of an individual to preserve his creative imagination. In The Professor's House, Cather depicts St. Peter's failed struggle and imagines for him a fate worse than physical death; she imagines the death of the self and along with it the death of the creative life. To follow the Professor's descent in the final chapters is to follow a terrifying path. He has not just lost his love for his wife, the inspired companionship of Outland, and a fruitful connection to his work, he has lost himself. The dislocation comes at the conclusion of months of solitary reflection. It comes quietly, more frightful because of the gentleness, the ordinariness of its arrival. Cather depicts the Professor as he gives up the "positive" routine of work, recreation, and sleep that he has been accustomed to his entire life and finds himself surrendering to a "twilight stage," a "half-awake loafing with his brain" (239). He finds "he could lie on his sand-spit by the lake for hours and watch the seven motionless pines drink up the sun. In the evening, after dinner, he could sit idle and watch the stars, with the same immobility" (239). The landscape the Professor observes at this point in the novel is significantly immobile and remote. Although Cather uses the landscape once again to

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illustrate the mind of the Professor, it is "mental dissipation" or a paralysis of the spirit that is captured in the "motionless pines" and distant stars.

The moment, so striking for the absence of motion and mental animation characteristic of Cather's landscape scenes, recalls a modern sense of alienation and loneliness captured by other writers of the period. Robert Frost, in particular, was not a stranger to portraying a terrifying isolation that can occur in the midst of a seemingly benign landscape. When Cather inscribed her note to Frost in his copy of her novel about "letting go with the heart," she was perhaps acknowledging an experience familiar to the writer she admired, for much of Frost's poetry suggests not just a letting go with the heart, but *of* the heart. The poem, "Desert Places," in particular, offers a noteable parallel to Cather's novel (Frost 120). Like the motionless pines and distant stars the Professor observes in the final section of The Professor's House, the falling snow of the poem augurs not connection to nature but stunning immobility and a disconnection from the positive forces of the self and world. The motion of the speaker who sees the snow "falling fast, oh, fast/In a field I looked into going past" in stanza one is arrested in stanza two, as he stands apart to observe the woods taking in the snow ("it is theirs") and the animals helplessly falling victim to its obliterating power: "The animals are smothered in their lairs." But he too is "smothered" by the perilous snow, subsumed by a sense of loneliness that catches him off-guard and reveals the deadening of his senses and his spirit:

> I am too absent-spirited to count;
>
> The loneliness includes me unawares.

More frightful than the loneliness which "will be more lonely ere it will be less" is the blotting out of all expression the snow prompts in the speaker. In the third stanza, a two-line sentence conveys this erasure as it notably lacks a subject: "A blanker whiteness

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of benighted snow/With no expression. nothing to express." Frost here imagines the modern condition as one of complete negation.

In the final stanza, the speaker reasserts his presence -- and the subjective "I," but he does so only to proclaim he possesses a greater emptiness than that of the blank snow or "the stars--on stars where no human race is." As if raising his fist to the skies. he proclaims, "I have it in me so much nearer home/To scare myself with my own desert places." Modern man conquers nature in the poem not through willful assertion of the spirit but by insisting on a greater alienation than the one the snow suggests: the speaker dominates, in other words, through negation -- his only power the power of emptiness. of his own "desert places."

Cather, like Frost, uses the landscape to explore the Professor's loneliness and isolation, and, like the speaker of Frost's poem, St. Peter triumphs only through an assertion of the negative; the Professor assumes a power to "meet the future" at the novel's close only through an understanding of what he no longer possesses -- an ability to express. The path to that understanding, however. nearly costs the Professor his life. After working desultorily on Outland's diary for "nearly two months . . . a task which should have taken little more than a week," the Professor finally accepts the fact that the two romances of his life have ended: the romance of the heart, which includes his love for Lillian, and "a second of the mind--of the imagination," which involves Tom Outland.

Chapter One of the final section underscores the greater of these losses and the source of his life-threatening despair, as the Professor recalls with passion how Outland transformed his life and work. Entrenched in his summer solitude at his old house, St. Peter traces the line of Outland's influence, remembering how, through the heat of Outland's extraordinary mind, he gained the vital energy and insight he needed to complete

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four more volumes of his Spanish Adventurers. He recalls how Outland's primitive but essential knowledge of the Southwest, the terrain of the Spanish explorers, deepens his understanding and lifts his spirits. Outland is both Muse and guide; he "had in his pocket the secrets which old trails and stones and water-courses tell only to adolescence" (235); he could take a sentence from Fray Garces' diary "and find the exact spot at which the missionary crossed the Rio Colorado on a certain Sunday in 1775" (235). The recollection reveals Outland's importance as the locator of old trails and hidden secrets of the past, but also as the spark of a deeper transformation in the Professor. He brings not just a second youth to St. Peter, but a second love or romance.

The Professor's brief reminiscences of Outland feel like reminiscences not merely of a friend, but of a lost love. In typical Catherian fashion, nothing in the text directly relates this romance, but the pulse felt beneath the prose signals the depth of his attachment. A striking example comes near the close of the chapter. After summarizing his travels with Outland to the Southwest and Old Mexico, the Professor recalls Outland's hasty departure for the war. Knowing, as we do, that Outland dies in the war, we expect next to hear something of the Professor's regret at his tragic death. Instead, a single sentence shifts the narrative indirectly and unobtrusively in another direction, revealing how much the Professor rues not just the loss of Outland's life, but his life *with* the Professor. Cather writes, "To this day St. Peter regretted that he had never got that vacation in Paris with Tom Outland" (236). The "great catastrophe" of Outland's death, in other words, is not just the tragic end of Outland's life, but the abrupt cessation of their romance which denies the Professor the opportunity to show Outland Paris, *his* Paris, the dream city of his youth and aspirations.

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Cather relates, again in language that suggests the Professor steers the narrative, "He had wanted to revisit certain spots with him: to go with him some autumn morning to the Luxembourg Gardens, when the yellow horse-chestnuts were bright and bitter after rain; to stand with him before the monument to Delacroix and watch the sun gleam on the bronze figures . . ." (236). We feel the sensuous pulse of the language and the images and thereby *read* the Professor's romantic attachment. The scene the Professor imagines is entirely one of sensual beauty -- a prelapsarian garden of burnished images, of glistening yellow horsechestnuts and gleaming sunshine on the sculpted forms of the body, of Time and youth that suggest Outland and the Professor entwined. Cather uses another abrupt shift in the narrative to illustrate the fact that the fantasy cannot be sustained. As the Professor fails to remember with certainty whether the sculpture portrays "Time bearing away the youth who was struggling to snatch his palm" or to lay a palm (236), the vision of Paris dissolves abruptly. We recognize in this moment the breakdown of the Professor's mind here not so much because he cannot remember the sculpture accurately, but because he states it no longer matters. Long before he nearly suffocates for failing to relight the gas lamp in his study, the Professor's indifference to the failure of his memory signals the beginning of his surrender to death, for the scholar who has built his life around the search for knowledge, no longer cares about it in the absence of the chief source of his inspiration. With Outland's death, "all youth and all palms, and almost Time itself" is swept away.

In Chapter Two of Book III, the Professor's detachment from life increases, intensifying the downward thrust of the novel's conclusion. After he bitterly recognizes that Outland will not "come back again through the garden door" (239) of his old house or his imagination, "another boy" returns to his consciousness, "the boy the Professor had

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long ago left behind him in Kansas, in the Solomon Valley--the original, unmodified Godfrey St. Peter" (239). The Kansas boy is not, however, the harbinger of renewed energy, but of deeper losses of the soul.

The Professor sees the Kansas boy as his pre-social, real self, but a self that he has abandoned for most of his life. As the boy returns to him in his meditative "twilight" state, the Professor seems not to coalesce with his earlier, primitive self but to be displaced by it, as he divests himself completely of his existing self. The "most important things in his life" (233) do not merely slip away with the return of the Kansas boy; they are obliterated as the Professor denies their significance: "His career, his wife, his family, were not his life at all, but a chain of events which had happened to him. All these things had nothing to do with the person he was in the beginning" (240). The vehemence of the Professor's denial of his social existence is here pronounced by Cather in the two strongly negative statements. Subsumed by his "unmodified" early self, the Professor appears to reach a profound state of detachment from his life as scholar, husband, and father.

As the Kansas boy presides once again in the Professor's consciousness, the repudiation of the social man becomes yet more forceful, and an almost childlike simplicity of language and sensation displaces the Professor's previously more complex mode of existence and expression:

> The Kansas boy who had come back to St. Peter . . . was a primitive. He was only interested in earth and woods and water. Wherever sun sunned and rain rained and snow snowed, wherever life sprouted and decayed, places were alike to him. . . . He seemed to be at the root of the matter; Desire under all desires, Truth under all truths. He seemed to know, among other things, that he was solitary and

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> must always be so; he had never married, never been a father. He was earth and would return to earth (241).

Repetition of words and sounds suggests the inevitable and cyclical nature of life and death and the Professor's surrender to its natural cadence. Perception is reduced to an awareness of the indifferent movement of snow and rain and sun. Even place, the distinguishing feature of the Professor's interior life -- and of Cather's writing -- is leveled. Gone are the Professor's particular connections to Lake Michigan, the Southwest, his garden, as he attaches himself to the undifferentiated place of the child and of the man who is close to death -- "He was earth and would return to earth." Earth is in the passage both place and no place for the Professor; it is simultaneously the unfettered "everywhere," the domain of the boy, and the nothingness of the grave. The effect in both cases is an absorption of the consciousness into nature. The primitive Kansas boy appears not so much a part of the Professor's being as an element of nature itself, dissolved into the natural world like the speaker of "Desert Places" who is shrouded in snow.

The recognition of this natural, primitive self fosters both pleasure and sadness in the Professor -- pleasure at the peacefulness of his pre-adolescent, pre-sexual existence, uncomplicated by "the penalties and responsibilities" of the adult (240), and sadness at what he fears is his solitary and loveless movement toward the grave. For St. Peter soon recognizes that the tranquillity the Kansas boy brings him -- one he has witnessed in his aged grandfather, Napoleon Godfrey -- is also a preamble to death. Alarmed at his own growing conviction that he will not live much longer, St. Peter consults his doctor. The visit is significant as it reveals the limits of modern medicine and the modern imagination. Unlike Outland's doctor, and his friend and spiritual guide Fr. Duchene, who both

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prescribe the ultimately life-transforming and life-sustaining outdoors to improve Outland's health earlier in the novel, the Professor's doctor fails either to understand on a physical or a spiritual level what ails him. After conducting numerous tests on the Professor over the course of days, the thorough yet clueless doctor concludes "there was nothing the matter with him" (244). Furthermore, he prescribes the very thing that will nearly cause the Professor's death; he advises him to do nothing, to follow his "inclination." The advice is again strikingly antithetical to that which the young Outland receives from his doctor and Fr. Duchene to "live in the open all summer" (165); for to follow his inclination means the Professor will not give himself to pleasant idleness but will shut himself up in isolation and surrender to the ultimate nothingness that is death.

Through the unwitting doctor's advice, Cather presents a picture of the modern world's failing to offer the Professor a way out of his spiritual crisis, a modern world that cannot reconstruct the lost world of the past or restore its faded values. The doctor does not direct the Professor to "Outland's country, to watch the sunrise break on sculptured peaks and impassable mountain passes--to look off at those long, rugged, untamed vistas" that call to him (246), but to a modern, diminished, interior landscape that is without air and light and hope. This is the landscape the Professor escapes to in his attic study at the book's conclusion. It is an interior landscape so completely without light, it welcomes the darkness of death, as the Professor does when his gas lamp is extinguished. After the light goes out, he does what the doctor orders -- nothing, and, though he finally springs up from the couch, it is too late, and he is overtaken by a feeling of "acute strangulation" (258). Appropriately it is Augusta the family's faithful sewing woman who saves him and offers a model for how he can live out his life.

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Having detached himself completely from his family, and without Outland to serve as life-sustaining inspiration, the Professor's only recourse seems to be to submit to death, but Augusta the Catholic presents another option -- to tolerate life's losses, to live "without delight," and to accept death as a natural part of life, as ordinary as a "hard winter or a rainy March" (256). Her faith is not the transcendent force of what the Professor calls Outland's "devotion"; it is, like Augusta herself, planted firmly on the earth. Unmarried, childless, and a servant to others, Augusta represents for the Professor the power of negation, the antithesis of Outland, who is the pure power of affirmation but who cannot survive in the soul-destroying modern world. Augusta offers the Professor a way to live in the wasteland he now occupies, a way to live without the transcendent force of his imagination, something he "could not consciously have relinquished" except through his near-death experience and Augusta's saving grace. The victory is a Phyrric one, however, as it leaves the Professor accepting an existence tasting of "bitter herbs." The faithfulness of Augusta inspires St. Peter to an acceptance of the "bloomless side of life" (256), while the hereafter appears as distant as the fading horizon. He lives not with hope for the future, but fortitude -- a determination to endure the pain and suffering that comes with his passionless existence.[9] The only comfort for St. Peter is that in his acceptance of life on these terms, he is not alone: "There was . . . a world full of Augustas, with whom one was outward bound" (257). In perhaps one of the novel's saddest notes, we understand that outward is *not* Outland, but the nothingness that is his end.

It is perhaps not until these final pages of the novel, when we see the Professor having become Augusta-like, that the significance of his name becomes clear. Napoleon Godfrey St. Peter appears like St. Peter, the rock of a church and a faith that Augusta

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represents, but that faith for him is a Godless one; he is god-free -- without transcendence, without belief in the eternal possibilities of the creative life. He is the emperor of a lost empire of the soul, of Outland, of that sacred part of his imagination most threatened by the modern world and the necessities of the social self. Like Napoleon, he will live out his life in a state of exile from his earlier, triumphant, and creative self. He is Cather's paradoxical and grim working out of what most threatened her at the time of the novel's construction -- the vision of a life without creative power, a vision of the modern mind "with no expression, nothing to express."

While the Professor's apathetic end creates a sense of failure and loss, the book manages to resist bleakness and manages somehow not to be entirely the "nasty, grim little tale" Cather deemed it. Part of the affirming quality of the work is due to Cather's ability as an early modern writer to create a " new discourse for coping with temporal and psychic disturbance, for the existential dislocation of the modern mind" (Bradbury 93). Through her unfurnished prose, her insistence on the power of subjective perception in the creation of self and world, and her resilient landscapes that open vistas of consciousness, the reader's experience of The Professor's House is curiously double. We engage the novel's captivating exploration of a peculiarly modern unease, while we become aware, in Catherian fashion through memory, of the enduring power of aesthetic expression. We feel St. Peter's palpable despair, his irremediable emptiness, but that despair never entirely disperses our memory of the most compelling and resonant parts of the book -- Outland on the mesa, the Professor entering the blue of Lake Michigan, the fertile garden that is the symbol of the creative mind. While the religious emotion that swells out of a belief in art is no longer available to the Professor at the book's close, it

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lingers in the luminosity of Cather's prose and becomes the central subject of her ninth novel, Death Comes For the Archbishop.

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Notes

[1] The Professor's House includes more overtly autobiographical content than perhaps any other novel. The year of its publication, Cather was the same age (52) as the Professor. Like Cather, the Professor had experienced a life-changing displacement from one home to another as a youth. The attic sewing room of the Professor resembles the sewing room in which Cather wrote at the McClung house in Pittsburgh. In addition, the Professor's loss of Outland in the war parallels Cather's loss of her beloved friend Isabelle McClung to marriage. See Woodress, 368-69.

In addition, Cather's alienation from a world increasingly hostile to art, a world of "standardization . . . false conventions of thought and expression . . . and superficial culture" (Bohlke 149) is mirrored in the Professor's disillusion with the modern world. Like the Professor, Cather's creative work had established her reputation and won her a prestigious award, the Pulitzer Prize, about which she was ambivalent. The irreplaceable pleasure in her struggle to create was far more important to the writer than the honor she won by it. The Professor's pleasure comes in remembering having dispensed with "foolish conventions" in his field, in recalling a time when "his relation with his work was becoming every day more simple, natural, and happy" (23). St. Peter embodies Cather's lifelong feeling that "the end is nothing, the road is all" (Bohlke 76). Edith Lewis terms it "the most personal of Willa Cather's novels" (137).

[2] In her study of narrative modes in fiction, Dorritt Cohn uses the term "psycho-narration" to identify third-person narrative that articulates a character's consciousness and adopts his angle of vision. She notes that psycho-narration, which frequently involves "she thought," "she knew . . ." constructions, allows an author to "order and explain a character's conscious thoughts better than the character himself," while "it can also effectively articulate a psychic life that remains unverbalized, penumbral, or obscure" (46).

[3]Cohn identifies "narrated monologue" as "the transformation of figural thought-language into the narrative language of third-person fiction" (100). She notes, "narrated monologues can cross . . . inner-outer [boundaries], and can reflect sites and happenings even as they show a character reflecting *on* these sites and happenings" (132).

[4] References to windows and the complex idea of seeing abound in James's work. In The Portrait of a Lady, James frequently points out that what his characters see out of the window is far more a matter of internal vision. Here is a typical example from Volume II, Chapter LII of the novel which highlights the primacy of internal, not external terrain: ". . . she [Isabel Archer] stood apparently looking out of the window . . . On the

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other side of the window lay the garden . . . but this is not what she saw; she saw nothing of the budding plants and the glowing afternoon. She saw . . . the dry staring fact that she had been an applied handled hung-up tool, as senseless and convenient as mere shaped wood and iron" (459).

5 Dorrit Cohn points out that "Flaubert's favorite device for vitalizing summary psycho-narration" is the striking image, which often takes the form of a hyperbolic simile. Henry James frequently applies this technique, imbuing third person narrative with images that suggest the point of view of an individual character were they able to relate directly their inmost thoughts. There are numerous examples to be cited in his work, but let me cite one. In The Portrait of a Lady, after Gilbert Osmond professes his love to Isabel Archer, the narrative reports her dread of having to make a choice whether or not to marry. James writes, "What made her dread great was precisely the force which, as it would seem, ought to have banished all dread--the sense of something within herself, deep down, that she supposed to be inspired and trustful passion. It was there like a large sum stored in a bank--which there was a terror in having to begin to spend" (263). The language describing Isabel's dread, complete with tripping hesitancies, closely resembles her thought language were she to speak her thoughts aloud, but the summary image of the "large sum stored in the bank" goes further to suggest something the significance of which she could not at this point in the novel consciously articulate. It captures Isabel's unconscious awareness that Osmond's passion, as well as her own, may have everything to do with her inheritance, "the large sum stored in a bank," and little to do with genuine affection.

6 Numerous scholars and critics have made this observation, most recently among them, Hermione Lee in Willa Cather: Double Lives.

7 The art historian Richard Shiff notes that Cézanne "paints in terms of parts rather than wholes. He moves from part to part on his canvases, unifying the whole only by means of the uniformity of his coloristic illumination, his 'atmosphere'" (115).

8 Aside from the fact that she was herself attached to a sole companion, Edith Lewis, for more than 30 years, that relationship flourished in part because of its unconventionality, neither necessitating children, nor disrupting her life as a writer.

9 I disagree with Merrill Maguire Skaggs who asserts the Professor faces the future with hope (see Skaggs 84). His existence is particularly hopeless in the declared absence of passion, energy, and the core element of his creative life, desire.

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Chapter 3:

Death Comes for the Archbishop and the Miracle of Perception

> We must be still and still moving
> Into another intensity
> For a further union, a deeper communion
> Through the dark cold and the empty desolation.
> The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters
> Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end is my beginning.
>
> T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*

After addressing the problems of a diminished and fractured spirit in The Professor's House and in the short novel which followed it, My Mortal Enemy, Cather produced what is perhaps her greatest stylistic experiment in fiction, Death Comes for the Archbishop. In it she depicts the experiences of two Jesuit missionaries, Bishop Jean Latour, who is later ordained Archbishop and is the Archbishop of the novel's title, and Father Joseph Vaillant, fellow priest and boyhood friend of Latour. Modeled on the lives of Archbishop Lamy and Bishop Machebeuf, the story of Latour and Vaillant is Cather's fictionalization of the real missionaries' experiences in the still unsettled terrain of the Southwest in the later half of the nineteenth century. Focusing primarily on Latour (the Lamy figure), the novel follows the missionaries as they travel throughout the remote new territory of New Mexico and Colorado to tend to the believing and yet-to-be-converted people of the region and work in the spirit of St. Ignatius *ad Majoram Gloriam Dei.* Loosely chronological in sequence and episodic in form, the novel covers the period from

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a meeting of cardinals outside Rome in 1848 regarding the appointment of Latour as Vicar Apostolic of New Mexico to the Archbishop's death in Sante Fé in 1889.

As she did in each of her novels, Cather looked to experiment in Death Comes For the Archbishop with a new style and to apply her unfurnished technique in new ways. Eschewing the conventions of a dramatic narrative, she wished her ninth novel to be plotless and to capture the simple, unelaborating style of legend. Much as it did in The Professor's House, the novel's non-chronological form raised questions, as did Cather's unprecedented use of historical figures in the novel (e.g., Lamy, Machebeuf, and Kit Carson). Cather chose to address the particular queries she received about the novel's genesis in a single letter to a wide audience in Commonweal in 1927. In it, she stated,

> I had all my life wanted to do something in the style of legend, which is absolutely the reverse of dramatic treatment. Since I first saw the Puvis de Chavannes frescoes of the life of Saint Genevieve in my student days, I have wished that I could try something a little like that in prose; something without accent, with none of the artificial elements of composition. In the Golden Legend the martyrdoms of the saints are no more dwelt upon than are the trivial incidents of their lives; it is as though all human experiences, measured against one supreme spiritual experience were of about the same importance. The essence of such writing is not to hold the note, not to use an incident for all there is in it -- but to touch and pass on (WCOW 9-10).

Cather's statement, which has done much to steer critical commentary on the novel, is interesting as it points to two distinct inclinations in her writing -- one toward restoring past forms and the other toward innovation. As the letter makes clear, she wished to restore a simplicity of effect in her work comparable to that found in legend and in the

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lives of the early saints, but she also wished to push that simplicity to new limits, to create a novel "without accent," to use language "not to hold the note," but "to touch and pass on." To do this, she had to create a different kind of novel altogether -- one that was neither legend-like, nor entirely traditional. While many critics have noted the novel's indebtedness to the style of legend and hagiography, I would like in this chapter to address the sometimes easy-to-overlook and more modern characteristics of the novel, including Cather's continued preoccupation with modern themes of alienation and perception, her continued experimentation with unfurnished prose, and her innovative use of landscape and memory.

In Death Comes For the Archbishop, Cather continued to explore the modern struggle to preserve one's creative and spiritual existence in a material world that perpetually threatened to corrupt it. However, while this struggle dominates much of The Professor's House, it exists at the margins of Death Comes for the Archbishop where it provides an important thematic frame for the narrative. This frame is set in the first pages of the novel's prologue in which Cather pictures the clash of spiritual vs. material values not outside, but *within* the Church itself. Painting a spectacular scene of outdoor splendor that cannot but dazzle the reader, Cather simultaneously and almost without notice suggests the hidden themes of corruption and degradation that are part of a material age. Her method is once again strikingly indirect, for the picture both cloaks and reveals the complexities of meaning beneath it. To enter the narrative, Cather requires us to read double and often to hold opposing images and ideas in the mind simultaneously.

Cather's indirect method is immediately apparent in the novel's opening which details the meeting of three high-ranking men of the Church -- a French, an Italian, and a Spanish Cardinal -- and a Bishop from America who are gathered on the terrace of a villa

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in the Sabine hills to discuss the imminent founding of an Apostolic Vicarate or diocese in the newly acquired American territory of New Mexico. In the prologue's opening paragraph, Cather paints a picture of breathtaking grandeur and paradisal beauty that at first appears an apropos setting for the religious men:

> The hidden garden in which the four men sat at table lay some twenty feet below the south end of this terrace, and was a mere shelf of rock, overhanging a steep declivity planted with vineyards. A flight of stone steps connected it with the promenade above. The table stood in a sanded square, among potted orange and oleander trees, shaded by spreading ilex oaks that grew out of the rocks overhead. Beyond the balustrade was the drop into the air, and far below the landscape stretched soft and undulating; there was nothing to arrest the eye until it reached Rome itself (277).

Cather here entrances the reader with the profusion of verdant images, while the language itself works like a kind of perfumed poetry -- ilex, oleander, oak -- filled with sensuous pleasure. Even the sound of the words and the rhythm of the sentences captivate the senses; "the landscape stretched soft and undulating . . ." with its repeated "s" sound, for example, suggests the flow of repeating rolling hills, while "undulating" with its extended four-syllables creates a sense of rippling, harmonious motion. Through the sensuous description and fluidly pleasing sound, Cather carefully builds a sense of the four clerics seated in a hidden garden paradise, suspended in a world blessed by Divine munificence, a place where trees spring miraculously out of rock, but that sense is quickly dissipated by Cather in the paragraph that follows.

Beginning unassumingly with the line, "It was early when the Spanish Cardinal and his guests sat down to dinner" (277), the paragraph alters our perspective. The single

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unelaborated fact that the Spanish Cardinal is not mere visitor but host significantly alters our understanding of the picture and suggests a disjunction between the selfless devotion we expect the religious man to embody and the material wealth he apparently possesses. Given this piece of information, we are obliged to read the setting *not* as symbol of spiritual "height" or intimacy with the Almighty, but of spiritual corruption; it suggests a scene not of divine grandeur, that is, but of worldly power and aristocratic splendor. In these first two paragraphs of the novel, Cather shifts the foundation of our understanding considerably, but she does so in a typically indirect fashion, moving us unawares from the once-upon-a-time innocence and splendor of paragraph one and its lofty setting to the hidden complexities of paragraph two with its suggestion of a fallen spirituality, a world where material glory and comfort are supreme -- even to a man of the Church. It is here in the scene's conflicting images of wealth and religiosity, of grand heights and earthly desires that we first encounter the pulse of the modern.

Cather emphasizes the contradictions inherent in the Cardinal's circumstances as further descriptions of the terrace gathering are grafted to the individual tastes of de Allande, who seems to control the setting like a God in his own heaven. Even light itself, the masterwork of the Creation and medium of divine inspiration for centuries of Cathedral builders, appears an acquisition of the Spanish Cardinal. DeAllande, we are told, prefers his dinner served in the late afternoon, "when the vehemence of the sun suggested motion." The "eccentric preference" suggests the Cardinal's refined sensibilities, but a refinement that smacks of self-indulgence and is curiously devoid of religious devotion -- a devotion as distant and irrelevant it seems as Rome. The primary note that is struck here is narcissism as de Allande fails even to consider the effect of his arrangement on his guests: the visiting Bishops must suffer the sun in order that he can

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enjoy the peculiarities of the late afternoon light. No longer a man of real spiritual motion, Cather implies, de Allande uses light to "suggest" a motion that is simply meant to please his senses. The description of the afternoon light on the occasion of the dinner is noteworthy for the absence of spiritual reverence implicit in the scene: Cather describes not the light of the Holy Spirit, but a light that reveals the underlying tension between the spiritual and the material, between art and artifice that is integral to the novel and characteristic of modern fiction:

> The light was full of action and had a peculiar quality of climax--of splendid finish. It was both intense and soft, with a ruddiness as of much-multiplied candlelight, an aura of red in its flames. It bored into the ilex trees, illuminating their mahogany trunks and blurring their dark foliage; it warmed the bright green of the orange trees and the rose of the oleander blooms to gold; sent congested spiral patterns quivering over the damask and plate and crystal. The churchmen kept their rectangular clerical caps on their heads to protect them from the sun. The three Cardinals wore black cassocks with crimson pipings and crimson buttons, the Bishop a long black coat over his violet vest" (277).

Unlike landscape descriptions in Cather's previous work, this one does not invite our participation in or engagement of a remote interior space; rather Cather invites us to view and admire it as spectators, from a distance. The distance is key for Cather's effect, as it suggests the dislocation of those in the scene from a vital source of identity and of Cather's imagination -- the landscape. Cather represents neither self-possession nor interiority in the scene, rather she suggests the play of artifice. Light, the central medium, is emphasized, as if by Cardinal de Allande himself, for its ability not to "illuminate" the soul, but to gild and dominate all that it touches. It appears both a violating and

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transformative force that "bore[s] into the ilex trees," blurs the mahogany's dark foliage, and turns "the green of the orange trees and the rose of the oleander blooms to gold." Here nature is subordinate to the uses of art, and art itself with its "splendid finish" appears an object of acquisition, as prized as the damask, plate, and crystal. Far from the clear, near liquid light of Outland's Blue Mesa in The Professor's House which becomes the light of being, the glitzy light of the Cardinal's terrace creates "congested spiral patterns" that dazzle the eye, but leave the soul untouched.

The self-consciously artificial nature of the scene becomes more apparent in Cather's summary description of the Churchmen in their rectangular clerical caps. As if to underscore the dehumanizing quality of de Allande's aestheticizing vision, they appear not so much as living beings but as necessary elements of color and form that balance and complete the picture. Cather does not offer an elaboration of who these four men are or what they think, but how they are dressed: the Cardinals in "black cassocks with crimson pipings and crimson buttons, the Bishop [in] a long black coat over his violet vest." Their individuality, their character, not to mention their physical discomfort in the vehement sun are secondary to the visual effect their presence creates. More props than living figures, they compose a kind of *tableau vivant*, their black forms interspersed with crimson and purple providing a bold contrast to the brilliantly sunlit gardens. At least part of the modern quality of this moment and of the novel's spectacular opening in general is the way in which Cather calls our attention to the artifice of the scene, to the *process* of novel-making itself which demands artificial arranging and selecting (i.e., the sun here, the Cardinals there). While we contemplate de Allande's grandly arranged setting which is designed to meet the requirements of his imagination, we are made aware, in modern fashion, of the self-conscious hand of the author who here functions as a

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painter preoccupied not with building character so much as plying light and color to add and manipulate form on canvas.

The terrace scene also reveals Cather's engagement of the modern problem of spiritual depravity in a world driven by material comfort. It is the first of many pictures in the novel of stillness in motion or what Father Vaillant calls "rest in action"; however, here at the novel's beginning, it is without the essential meaning Vaillant assigns the phrase and the one Cather celebrates in the lives of the two missionaries in the rest of the book. The dazzling picture with its still figures and moving light does *not* capture the Ignatian ideal of spiritual serenity and devotion at the heart of selfless action; rather it suggests a peculiarly modern vacuity Cather's novel attempts to combat. Cather's vision of a modern world "driven and derided by vanity," in which art is reduced to valued adornment is implicit in her description of the powerful Churchmen at rest and provides the frame through which we view the story that follows. Curiously inert and gilded by the light of a too material world, the mid-nineteenth century clerics high above Rome suggest a struggle still of profound concern to Cather -- the modern, twentieth century struggle with spiritual depravity and art's increasing commercialism.

The modern conflict between a truly heightened spirituality and artistic expression and a fallen world of artifice and commerce is intensified through the contrast Cather sets up throughout the prologue between the Old World decadence of the three Cardinals, particularly de Allande, and the uncorrupted, New World spirit of devotion of Bishop Ferrand from America. Description of the physical features of the French and Italian Cardinals, though "men in vigorous mid-life," hardly suggest heightened sensibilities, but rather spiritual lassitude and a preoccupation with appetite: the "Norman [is] full-belted and ruddy, the Venetian spare and sallow and hook-nosed" (278). The younger Spanish

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Cardinal appears in every way but his title more prince than cleric; the "most influential man at the Vatican" under the reign of the conservative Pope Gregory XVI, he has retired after Gregory's death to his country estate, where he lives a life of apparent leisure amid servants and splendor. Instead of politics, he plays tennis -- so well, in fact, he draws contestants from as far as Spain and France to "try their skill against him." The only suggestion of spiritual activity appears more like a hobby of de Allande and is the reason for the gathering; he still occupies himself with the work of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, an organization initiated by Gregory and one still influential in the appointment of Vicars in the new territory.

While de Allande's portrait is hardly suggestive of the devout life, Cather takes pains to suggest his character is not unequivocally self-indulgent. She writes, "With his *caffe oscuro* eyes, he had a fresh, pleasant English mouth, and an open manner" (278). Here despite his obsessive idleness and preoccupation with material beauty and self-indulgent pleasures, Cather carefully plants a seed of intelligence in de Allande which keeps his portrayal from becoming mere caricature and intensifies the question that propels the episode's suspense: Will de Allande's dark eyes be discerning enough, be open enough to entertain the Bishop's request?

Juxtaposed against the French and Italian Cardinals' static quality and de Allande's princeliness is Bishop Ferrand, "an Odysseus of the Church" who "looked much older than any of them, old and rough--except for his clear, intensely blue eyes" (278). Appearing more like a beseeching peasant than a mythic wanderer, Ferrand comes in search of their support of the appointment of Jean Marie Latour as Vicar Apostolic of New Mexico, and Cather dramatically pits his blue-eyed clarity and humility against de Allande's dark-eyed power and intelligence. The interest of the Cardinals in the proposed

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Vicarate is at first tepid until Ferrand, who fails to flatter de Allande for the sumptuous meal or fine vintage he serves, speaks to them in a language they can understand -- not the language of religious devotion but the language of power. Alluding to a kind of Manifest Destiny of the Church, he suggests that if the clerics fail to propose a new Vicar and rid the new land of Godlessness and sin, "it will prejudice the interests of the Church in the whole of North America" (279). By cleverly appealing to them as spiritual imperialists who possess near Godlike power to cleanse the new territory's "Augean stable," Ferrand exhibits an Odyssean resourcefulness and successfully rallies their interest in his project.

Even as the Cardinals express interest in the Bishop's plea, however, their responses and queries suggest their stubborn refusal to ascend to matters of the spirit. Calling for champagne for the Bishop, de Allande asks rather imperiously, "And your new Vicar Apostolic, what will he drink in the country of bison and *serpents a sonnettes*? And what will he eat?" (281). Ferrand responds by admitting the Vicar will have to subsist on a crude diet of buffalo meat, frijoles with chili, and water "when he can get it," but underscores that poor food will be the least of the Vicar's hardships. He will have to endure the more taxing diet of regular sacrifices of comfort and companionship, and may even be called upon to give up his life. In drawing our attention to the ultimate sacrifice the Vicar may be compelled to make, Cather juxtaposes the transcendent religious passion of the Bishop and his new Vicar with the earth-bound interests of the Spanish Cardinal in physical and self-indulgent comfort. That Ferrand alludes to martyrdom before a Cardinal so removed from all notion of sacrifice in his own life underscores the American Bishop's bold and steadfast refusal to compromise his deepest religious convictions.

The contrast of the American Bishop's transcendent values and the Spanish Cardinal's worldly concerns further intensifies as Cather shifts the terrain from the

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religious to the literary. When de Allande notes that the Bishop is submitting the new Vicar to a hard fate, he quickly adds, "I suppose it is no worse than a life among the Hurons" and rather proudly proclaims his knowledge of America is drawn chiefly "from the romances of Fenimore Cooper, which I read . . . with great pleasure" (282). Here Cather subtly aligns the Spanish Cardinal's interest in the new missionary with his pleasant enjoyment of a "romance" by Cooper. Whatever his stated worries about the Vicar's life, de Allende is clearly less interested in the real conditions in the new territory than he is in inventing a pleasing fantasy of what those conditions might be. Whether the Indians live in wigwams or adobe houses is hardly of importance to him. As he insists to Ferrard who tries to correct him, he likes his "redskins" as Cooper has drawn them, and that is that. In suggesting the futility of envisioning the conditions in the Southwest through the novels of Cooper, Cather not only highlights the limits of de Allande's perception, she sets her own novel apart from the romantic traditions that preceded her. Ferrand's firsthand experience among the Indians thus works to authenticate the tale and implies Cather's novel is not imagined so much as lived. By referencing de Allande's reading of Cooper, Cather also underscores once again her preoccupation with the diminished value of art in a modern, material age. Here in the form of literature, de Allande enjoys art purely as entertainment or self-aggrandizing pleasure. In exposing the limits of de Allande's reading of Cooper, Cather sounds a cautionary note: Readers in search of mere entertainment need not enter here.

The dual themes of spiritual impoverishment and the problem of art as "a diminished thing" are further highlighted by Cather in the Spanish Cardinal's telling of the story of his great-grandfather's lost El Greco. After posing the anomalous question of whether the proposed Vicar Latour has any "intelligence in matters of art" (282), de

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Allande recalls the tale of a Franciscan missionary from New Spain. While traveling to raise funds for his mission, the Franciscan, de Allande reports, "wheedled a good sum of money out of" his great-grandfather along with a painting in his famed El Greco collection. Having offered the missionary any painting from his collection, the Cardinal's great-grandfather never expected the priest would choose the best of the lot, a portrait of the young St. Francis in meditation. Horrified that he will lose the treasure, he tries to dissuade the priest from choosing it:

> My grandfather protested; tried to persuade the fellow that some picture of the Crucifixion, or a martyrdom, would appeal more strongly to his redskins. What would a St. Francis, of almost feminine beauty, mean to the scalp-takers? (283)

In an unintentionally revealing gesture, the grandfather exposes his lack of true generosity as well as his lack of regard for the priest's religious mission. The religious paintings are clearly and comically proffered not because they would mean more to the priest but because they are valued less by their owner. The moment is noteworthy, however, as it unintentionally reveals the character not just of the subject of the tale, the grandfather, but the teller of the tale, de Allande. The question, "What would a St. Francis, of almost feminine beauty, mean to the scalp-takers?" following the report that the grandfather "protested" and "tried to persuade" the missionary reads like the direct and desperate cry of the great-grandfather himself; we hear his voice. However, without quotation marks and with no preceding "he said" to guide the narrative, Cather's line also serves another function. It suggests the blending of de Allande's voice with the great-grandfather's; Cather uses the rather ordinary and unobtrusive moment in the storytelling to suggest that de Allande not only mimics his grandfather's voice, but possesses the covetousness of his ancestor as well.

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The primacy of worldly over spiritual values is further accentuated in the qualities the great grandfather cherishes in the portrait. Modeled on "the very handsome Dukes of Albuquerque," Cather suggests the portrait of the saint is prized by the great-grandfather for its noble air and its feminine sensuousness, qualities he imagines the Indians incapable of appreciating. Although he appears to resist losing the painting because he appreciates the fine elements of the composition, his attachment to social status and physical beauty (here debased by the reference to sensuality) both define and taint his regard for the work of art and make striking the absence of his veneration of the saint and the painting's religious subject matter. Here again Cather emphasizes a spiritual poverty embedded in the appreciation of art itself. The point is driven home by the missionary's harsh, though amusing accusation, "'You refuse me this picture because it is a good picture. *It is too good for God, but it is not too good for you*" (283).

The Spanish Cardinal reports that the Franciscan's words have "become a saying in our family" (283), but given the apparent pride of de Allande, Cather makes clear that more than the memorable phrase has survived. As we learn of the Spanish Cardinal's interest in retrieving the valued picture from the missionary territory of the Southwest, we understand that what has been passed down from generation to generation is not only humorous acknowledgment of the great-grandfather's human failing, but a proud continuation of his worldly attachments, of an acquisitiveness that obliterates Godliness. The Spanish Cardinal, who has inherited his ancestor's pictures by the great Spanish painters, wishes to restore the "lost treasure" to *his* collection and with grand indifference to the outrageous crassness of his request proposes a kind of bribe to the Bishop: "If your French priest had a discerning eye, now, and were sent to this Vicarate, he might keep my El Greco in mind" (283). Once again Cather foregrounds the issue of art in

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relation to a diminished spirituality; for, as Cather makes clear, de Allande wishes to retrieve not the portrait of a venerable saint in contemplation of the Divine, he wishes to retrieve and repossess a valued object.

In a response that declares the unassailable nature of his moral character, the Bishop refuses the proffered arrangement and will not assure the Spanish Cardinal that Latour will search for his painting: "No, I can't promise you--I do not know. I have noticed that he is a man of severe and refined tastes, but he is very reserved" (283). In language at first stuttering -- "I can't promise you--I don't know" -- Cather draws our attention to Ferrand's anxiety, for to refuse de Allande could clearly mean defeating his own purpose of gaining the Cardinal's support of Latour's appointment. His understandable hesitancy is merely temporary, however, a kind of moment of shock, and Ferrand quickly refuses to acquiesce. In doing so, he declares his and Latour's incorruptibility; he refuses, that is, to contaminate the religious aim of his Vicar's journey to the new territory and shuns the Spanish Cardinal's attachment to the *things* of this world. The understated, yet clear refusal is stunning in light of the Bishop's earnest need of de Allande's support. When de Allande responds by abruptly inviting his guests to the terrace for coffee and "to watch the evening come on," it appears he has effectively closed the subject of the new Vicar and that the American Bishop has lost his case. The moment is a fine example of the submerged drama of Cather's novel; here the rather ordinary invitation to coffee becomes a dramatic moment only if we read the gesture as part of an unspoken power play, as part of the ongoing tension between the high moral standards of the Bishop and the worldly concerns of the Spanish Cardinal. The small moment becomes dramatic, that is, only if we are attuned to the intricate play of language and image in the scene.

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Cather further stresses the divide between the spirituality and moral turpitude of Ferrand and the worldliness of de Allande and the Cardinals in the description of the Cardinals' desultory conversation on the terrace. From their privileged perch, the Cardinals speak of colorful news and events that relate little to the spiritual life -- "a new opera by young Verdi" and "the case of a Spanish dancing-girl who had lately become a religious and was said to be working miracles in Andalusia" (284). Cather's contrast of the Cardinals' gregariousness with the Bishop's reticence on this occasion is particularly striking and further emblematic of what separates them. The Bishop, we learn, takes no part in the conversation and can not "follow it with much interest" (284). When he wonders to himself whether "he had been on the frontier so long that he had quite lost his taste for the talk of clever men," it is clear that what he has lost is a taste for mere cleverness divorced from any kind of heightened feeling. In a scene that suggests a peculiarly modern tableau, the Cardinals seem to "come and go talking of Michaelangelo" like Eliot's Boston ladies in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," while the Bishop's religious conviction makes him ineligible for the clever, but spiritless conversation.

Although the prologue concludes with de Allande's whispered support of Latour to the Bishop, a support that launches Latour's journey and the novel, its primary focus is "the matter of art" and spirituality as they are debased by hedonistic and acquisitive concerns. The momentous beginning of Cather's "accentless" novel is noteworthy as it is filled with strongly accented descriptions that suggest the story to follow is propelled by a modern vision of art and humanity threatened by the drive for comfort and wealth. Through the lives of the missionary priests whose active devotion *is* their art, unspoiled, pure, and free of financial motivations, Cather provides an antidote to de Allande's decadence and to the modern world's spiritual wasteland. Her struggle to combat a

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corrosive materialism is implicit not only in the novel, however, but in the act of writing the novel. By telling the missionaries' story of spirited, transcendent devotion, she could redeem the sanctity of her art. Death Comes for the Archbishop captures Cather's and the modern writer's hunger "to make the world re-cohere . . . by reaching behind the present to a recovered pastoral world . . . to some timeless moment set beyond the contingency of modern time" (Bradbury 62). By casting back to an earlier time, Cather could reimagine a world that, like "the infidels" in the new territory, could yet be saved.

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While the prologue sets forth a peculiarly modern tension between a corrupted and corrupting materialism and an uncontaminated spirituality and artistic expression, the novel that follows opposes that tension with a serenity reminiscent of its more traditional sources. As many critics have noted, Cather draws readily in style and subject matter on earlier works, particularly medieval tales of the saints' lives.[1] As in The Golden Legend, which Cather declared influential, in Death Comes For the Archbishop, the author places primary emphasis not on the individual storyteller but on the moral value or virtuous examples of her subjects' lives. Cather's narrative for the most part does not call attention to an identifiable, individual narrator, and there is little of the preoccupation with subjective experience and individual psychic turmoil which distinguishes the modern character of her earlier novels, particularly The Professor's House. Instead an overall atmosphere of serene and selfless devotion presides, as Vaillant and Latour's faithful action against all odds calls to mind the steadfast devotion of the saints.

In addition, many of the inset stories about individual priests or encounters with the native population recall medieval exempla or parables on the dangers of sin,

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particularly the novel's dramatic story of Fray Baltazar, the priest at Ácoma, whose gluttony and selfishness lead him to commit an impulsive act of murder for which he is ultimately executed. Other stories suggest an oral tradition and read like tales that have been and will be retold. The Mexican priest's retelling of the story of Our Lady of Guadaloupe, for example, stands out as but one variation of the story of the appearance in 1531 of the Virgin Mary before a poor Mexican peasant that has been passed down for centuries. These stories, as David Stouck notes, are often "told by characters within the novel or as legends rehearsed in their time-sanctified forms" (Willa Cather's Imagination 134); their form, that is, is not new, but obviously and intentionally derivative. Set next to the experiences of Latour and Vaillant, the inset legendary stories suggest the enduring value of the tale of the two priests' which, Cather implies, is eminently worthy of being retold.

But certainly one of the most distinctive features of the novel is its refusal to be neatly categorized. For while Cather relies on traditional forms like the saints' legends to build her narrative and imbue it with enduring value, she also continues to experiment with distinctly modern techniques and forms of expression. In particular, she uses her unfurnished style in new ways, pushing the representation of consciousness to new limits, splicing her narrative into shifting, non-chronological segments that suggest a modern complexity and reliance on abstraction, and exploring the process of writing itself as she did in the prologue. In addition, throughout the novel, Cather continued to use landscape as a means of examining perception. More so than in any work she had written at the time, the narrative appears, like the light of the desert, fluid and constantly changing, its various effects often illusive and surreal.

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Nowhere is Cather's modern penchant for experimentation more apparent than in the novel's opening paragraphs. As it does so frequently in Cather's novels, the first paragraphs offer an immediate and typically unassuming example of the stylistic innovations she will explore in the course of the narrative to follow. Death Comes for the Archbishop's first chapter, "The Cruciform Tree," begins:

> One afternoon in the autumn of 1851 a solitary horseman, followed by a pack-mule, was pushing through an arid stretch of country somewhere in central New Mexico. He had lost his way, and was trying to get back to the trail, with only his compass and his sense of direction for guides. The difficulty was that the country in which he found himself was so featureless--or rather, that it was crowded with features, all exactly alike. As far as he could see, on every side, the landscape was heaped up into monotonous red sand-hills, not much larger than haycocks, and very much the shape of haycocks. One could not have believed that in the number of square miles a man is able to sweep with the eye there could be so many uniform red hills. He had been riding among them since early morning, and the look of the country had no more changed than if he had stood still. He must have travelled through thirty miles of these conical red hills, winding his way in the narrow cracks between them, and he had begun to think that he would never see anything else. They were so exactly like one another that he seemed to be wandering in some geometrical nightmare; flattened cones, they were, more the shape of Mexican ovens, red as brick-dust, and naked of vegetation except for small juniper trees. And the junipers, too, were the shape of Mexican ovens. Every conical hill was spotted with smaller cones of juniper, a uniform yellowish green, as the hills were a uniform red. The hills thrust out of the ground so thickly

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> that they seemed to be pushing each other, elbowing each other aside, tipping each other over.
>
> The blunted pyramid, repeated so many hundred times upon his retina and crowding down upon him in the heat, had confused the traveller, who was sensitive to the shape of things (285).

The opening picture presents an immediate and searing contrast with the physical grandeur depicted in the prologue. From the heights of the Spanish Cardinal's splendid villa, Cather plunges us into the relentlessly unadorned Southwestern desert where "a solitary horseman" toils in the hot sun to find his way. Far from the comforts of lush surroundings and fine food and wine, the lone traveler moves across the bleak landscape that is "naked of vegetation except for small juniper trees." The first note struck is one of negation. In stark opposition to the regal de Allande who is situated firmly in his plush kingdom above the Sabine hills, the picture of the solitary man, wandering on horseback in the desert, lost and confused, suggests his powerless and comfortless state. Unlike de Allande, he is entirely without material resources; he neither commands his place, nor appears to know it. But just as de Allande's wealth and comfort suggested spiritual depravity, the horseman's suffering and uncertainty while in the desert landscape suggest his Christ-like character and invest the scene with a Biblical majesty notably absent from the earlier description of the Spanish Cardinal. In contrast with the cleric who lives a life of apparent idleness, the horseman appears, as he labors in body and mind to find his way, curiously ennobled. The immediate and dramatic juxtaposition of de Allande and the horseman is striking, as it sets forth a contrast that animates the entire novel, that between the unsaintly and the saintly, between those who possess material wealth and those who seek riches of the spirit, between those who are truly lost and those who seek

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the way of the Lord. Through contrast and juxtaposition, Cather invites us in the opening chapter to engage a typically modern tension between appearance and reality, between what is visible to the eye and what lies beneath the surface "picture."

The novel's opening is instructively deceptive in other ways as well. Beginning with the same unassuming once-upon-a-time rhythm as the prologue, it suggests a tale of almost storybook simplicity is about to begin; however, the closer one looks, the more our expectations of a straightforward story are again foiled, and the seeming simplicity fades away. For as we follow the unidentified protagonist, we move into a terrain of almost complete uncertainty. Cather's ability to engulf the reader in that uncertainty suggests her affinity with modernists who were similarly concerned with engaging the reader's sensations in a more pronounced way. Much like Flaubert and Henry James before her, Cather aimed in her writing to heighten feeling, to draw the reader into the action or sensation described, to make the reader see and to feel intensely (Flaubert, Letters: 1830-1857 154).

In Death Comes For the Archbishop, Cather achieves this effect as she had earlier in a particularly unJamesian manner, intensifying feeling not through the building up of immense detail, but through the paring away of detail. The result is a more drastically unfurnished narrative than any she had previously attempted, but one that is nevertheless highly evocative. Disclosing even as it withholds, her prose has the striking capacity to spark emotion in the reader even through the blanks on the canvas. In the opening scene, for example, though we suspect the horseman is Bishop Latour, the traveler is unidentified, as is his destination, and the terrain he traverses "somewhere in New Mexico" is both difficult and uncertain. The reader's lack of knowledge, albeit temporary, creates a sense of dislocation that simulates the one the horseman experiences and

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emphasizes a major feature of the reading experience -- our struggle to discern a narrative line, to gain orientation. Like the traveler, we seem to have lost our way.

Although we may not experience a disorientation on a par with that we are likely to encounter at the beginning of high modernist works like Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury, for instance, the withholding of information, of a straightforward exposition of place and character suggests Cather's part of a modern tradition that stresses the *process* of knowing or seeing. As readers, we understand by degrees with each step of the narrative, with each step of the priest and the pack mule. Here the step by step unfolding of the novel suggests what is true for many modernist works -- that "the narrative method is the meaning" (Lee 270). Our groping to understand is the point. And to make our way, to see and to find meaning in this narrative, Cather makes clear, the reader will need, like the Bishop, more than "his compass and his sense of direction for guides" (285). And through the use of a meandering, episodic narrative with palpable gaps and disjunctions, Cather reminds us of the illusiveness of meaning itself.

The painterly quality of the quietly momentous beginning marks another of the novel's specifically modern traits. Once again like Flaubert and James before her, Cather sought to render a mood and atmosphere in writing that was coincident with that created by the painter with color, form, and light on canvas. In her summary statement on Death Comes for the Archbishop, Cather specifically pointed to the influence of Puvis de Chavannes, the 19th century French painter. Known primarily for his medieval-style paintings of religious and allegorical subjects, Puvis's influence is often noted by critics in terms of Cather's interest in reviving earlier, more traditional forms of expression in the novel. Indeed the novel's accentless style and religious subject recall the flat forms and simple religious scenes of Puvis's murals, particularly those depicting the life of St.

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Genevieve which Cather herself had seen in Paris. As one critic, Clinton Keeler, points out, like Puvis's work, Cather's novel conveys a sense of "intense feeling framed by stillness" and is composed of objects that appear "suspended outside of time" (254). Keeler also notes that the form of Cather's story of the missionaries' lives with its loosely connected episodes recalls the separate, snapshot-like moments of St. Genevieve's devoted and faithful life as depicted by de Chavennes in the Panthéon's mural series.

While numerous correspondences between Puvis's Giottoesque painting and Cather's novel can be made, there are distinct differences between them that reveal the more innovative quality of Cather's work. A brief look at one of Puvis's St. Genevieve murals is helpful in highlighting some of these differences.

De Chavennes's panel of "St. Genevieve as a Child in Prayer" presents an obvious point of comparison as it mirrors in general outline the opening scene of Cather's novel and was its most likely source. In the painting, the young St. Genevieve is depicted in the countryside where she appears absorbed in prayer before a rustic, handmade cross attached to a tree that is mostly off canvas. Her saintly virtue is accentuated by the simple white dress she wears and the halo that floats above her golden-haired head. In the foreground, a triumvirate of humble passersby -- a man, woman, and child -- having just laid down their bundle of sticks, views her adoration, their heads bowed respectfully. The background landscape includes white lamb roaming on soft green pastureland, two oxen standing inertly on curiously soft grey rock, and the vague outline of a shepherd or farmer nearby. Slender trees stand out against a soft greywhite sky which hovers above a gently sloping blue hill in the distance.

The overall scene works iconographically. The three figures suggest the Holy Family, while the white lambs recall the Lamb of God and Genevieve's divine purity. In

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addition, the shepherd in the distance alludes to both God's role as divine Shepherd tending his flock and Genevieve's pastoral role as patron saint of Paris. Overall, the humble country setting stresses the spiritual humility of both Genevieve and the onlookers. No doubt compelling to Cather is the achievement in the painting of a unifying harmony of mood and atmosphere which pervades the flat and softly colored forms; all seem part of a devotional mood, part of Genevieve's worshipful attitude of prayer. Entirely without discord, the scene invites reverence and heightened contemplation on the part of the viewer.

Cather's version of the scene with Latour as the Genevieve stand-in presents a strikingly similar picture of devotion, but profound differences are noteable. While the setting of the Saint Genevieve panel is, as one critic notes, "of an idyllic, pre-lapsarian world of earnest faith, chastity and natural virtues" (Price 148), the setting of Cather's devotional scene is altogether one of discord, uncertainty, and negation, and in this respect it appears distinctly modern. While Puvis's landscape is not meant to be naturalistic, it primarily functions allegorically -- the levels of reality all pointing to a central religious significance. Cather's desert landscape, while also allegorical and summoning images of Christ in the desert, works on another level as well. With its sharp lines and repeating colors and forms, it suggests a sense of dislocation and a preoccupation with perception that characterizes modern writing and modern painting of the period. In this regard, Cather's novel suggests her alignment not with Puvis's monumental style, but with the more fragmented style of those modern painters who sought to explore in their work the problem of perception and the act of creation itself.

Cather's Southwestern landscape, as Latour sees it, a cacophony of intersecting forms and images, suggests an interest she shares with early modern painters in exploring

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reality as a perceived truth, as the object of subjective experience. Painters like Monet and Cézanne who used light, color, and form in new ways to explore the vicissitudes of perception come to mind, but also more abstract cubist painters like Duchamp, Braque, and Picasso. In one of the most well-known examples of early cubism, Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase," repetition of form becomes itself an object of contemplation; the repeating lines of the figure stepping down the stairs invite us to consider not just the form in motion, but the motion of perception. Indeed in Cather's opening scene, the repeating, flattened cones and blunted pyramids of the desert appear much like the repeating forms of a cubist painting. We engage them not simply as elements of the external setting, but as part of a mental process. In Cather's scene, as in cubism, the landscape recedes into the mind, moving beyond the impressionists' exploration of subjective reality to that of intrasubjective reality (Keeler 256).

In the opening scene, Latour struggles not merely to find his way, but to *see*. And the despair which prompts him to dismount and seek guidance in prayer is located by Cather in a crisis of perception. Surrounded on every side by "an arid stretch of country . . . crowded with features all exactly alike," Latour "had begun to think that he would never see anything else." At this point, Cather stresses not who the traveller is but his state of mind, and it is this "state" or mental condition of Latour that captivates us as readers. To read the passage is to engage not the individual traveler, but to be absorbed into his seemingly anonymous disorientation, his mental perplexity; hills become haycocks become cones become Mexican ovens become pyramids to form "a geometrical nightmare" that envelopes the viewer and reader alike in a kaleidoscope of form. As David Stouck points out, it is this "consciousness of form" that suggests Cather's alliance

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with other modern writers and, I would add, modern painters of the period (Willa Cather's Imagination 134-135).

The extended description of the landscape in the first scene further captivates us because it makes demands on more than the visual imagination. Complex, bleak, and uncertain, it compels us to acknowledge multiple possibilities for interpretation and sets forth a central feature of Cather's novel and of modern painting, that "what is seen is meant to be translated" (Lee 273). More than detailing the terrain in which Latour travels, the landscape raises a question about how one locates oneself in a modern world of unvarying patterns and no apparent source of nourishment -- spiritual as well as physical. Disorienting and without clearly identifiable features that allow one to *read* it easily, the landscape suggests the "displacement in perception . . . [and] breaking up of forms" that characterize the modern (Bradbury 42-43), a displacement not explicit in the painting of Puvis.[2]

Questions of perception become especially prominent in Cather's description of the tree which gives the chapter its title. After "closing his eyes to rest them from the intrusive omnipresence of the triangle" (286), the priest opens them to discover the cruciform tree, a tree unlike all the others:

> When he opened his eyes again, his glance immediately fell upon one juniper which differed in shape from the others. It was not a thick-growing cone, but a naked, twisted trunk, perhaps ten feet high, and at the top it parted into two lateral, flat-lying branches, with a little crest of green in the centre, just above the cleavage. Living vegetation could not present more faithfully the form of the Cross.

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> The traveler dismounted, drew from his pocket a much worn book, and baring his head, kneit at the foot of the cruciform tree.
>
> Under his buckskin riding-coat he wore a black vest and the cravat and collar of a churchman. A young priest, at his devotions; a priest in a thousand, one knew at a glance (286). His bowed head was not that of an ordinary man,--it was built for the seat of a fine intelligence. His brow was open, generous, reflective, his features handsome and somewhat severe . . . (286).

In this passage, seeing the landscape *is* an interpretive act. We witness the traveler translating the shape of a juniper into the shape of a crucifix, and it is this act of translation that gives meaning both to his devotions and to our understanding of his identity. The anonymous traveler comes into clearer focus, that is, *as* we learn of his attitude toward the cruciform tree; it is the symbol that orients him in the world and allows us to discern at last who he is -- a priest.

That the traveler's identity is at least partly uncloaked at this juncture suggests the primacy of the idea of perception in the novel. As he is lost among the red hills and as he prays before the cruciform tree, the traveler is defined foremost by his sensitivity "to the shape of things" (285) and by how he perceives the world around him. The sequence of the unfolding details is important; only *after* engaging his manner of seeing do we learn the externals of his appearance, his buck-skin coat, his elegant hands, etc. He is "a priest in a thousand," Cather suggests, not because of his extraordinary looks, though "his bowed head was not that of an ordinary man" (286), but because of the particular way he *sees* -- through the light of his extraordinary imagination, intelligence, and devotion. The importance of this distinction is underscored by another significant variation of Puvis's praying St. Genevieve. Unlike the cross St. Genevieve kneels before, Latour's cross, seen

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in the form of a tree, is entirely a thing of the mind. not the hand. By placing the praying Latour before an imagined cross, Cather prompts us to witness and to participate in a creative act of the priest's imagination. We are not the humble spectators who admire Genevieve's devotion from a distance in other words; in reading Cather's description. we participate in Latour's act of faith which *is* an act of seeing.

In the early moments of the novel, Cather thus heightens the power of perception. but she also reveals it as a saving grace. As he kneels before the cruciform tree. the lost priest locates himself spiritually, and through prayer and contemplation ultimately finds his way. In the scene, Cather once again emphasizes the close relation of art and religion -- a relation she had put forth in The Professor's House. in which the Professor. another artist figure, pointedly tells his students that art and religion are "the same thing in the end." In Death Comes For the Archbishop. however. this notion is no longer marginal. but presides over the whole of the book. As he finds saving comfort through the cruciform tree, Latour becomes the artist-priest. who is able to find his way through the power of his faith *and* his creative imagination.

That faith like art depends on the acute awareness of a creative imagination is underscored by Cather more forcefully in Latour and Vaillaint's discussion about miracles following Padre Escolastico's telling of the story of Our Lady of Guadaloupe. The earthy Vaillant is deeply moved by the Padre's recitation and proclaims to the Bishop, "Doctrine is well enough for the wise, Jean; but the miracle is something we can hold in our hands and love" (306). Latour's response to his less reflective, but deeply devout friend, conveys once again the importance of not what the hands can hold, but what the mind can perceive:

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> 'Where there is great love there are always miracles,' he said at length. 'One might almost say that an apparition is human vision corrected by divine love. I do not see you as you really are, Joseph; I see you through my affection for you. The Miracles of the Church seem to me to rest not so much upon faces or voices or healing power coming suddenly near to us from afar off, but upon our perceptions being made finer, so that for a moment our eyes can see and our ears can hear what is there about us always' (306-307).

Here one can almost feel Cather, the writer, lurking behind the text. For the miracle of heightened awareness Latour describes is the miracle of art as Cather conceives it. It is the miracle through which our perceptions are "made finer," through which we see and hear "what is there about us always." Human vision as it is transformed by the imagination or what Latour calls "divine love" is, Cather suggests, *the* transcendent element of being.

Throughout Death Comes For the Archbishop, Cather calls our attention, as she does in the prologue, to "the matter of art." Through Latour's refined sensibility, she explores the peculiarly modern theme of the nature of artistic expression. Yet exactly *how* the author does so is worth close scrutiny and best illustrates the innovative quality of Cather's novel. Emphasis on the idea of art and the creative process is rarely achieved directly, but is created via a highly suggestive prose in which Cather relies on momentary impressions to create resonating effects. Her stated aim "to touch and pass on" seems everywhere in evidence, as the text is filled with instances when a single observation -- most frequently of Latour -- is held like a note for a moment before it dissolves and the narrative moves swiftly on to something else. The effect is not so much one of transience

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but of resonance as frequently moments of observation echo in the novel long after they have passed and suggest the lingering effect of a work of art in the mind and memory.

One of the most striking examples of Cather's impressionistic, resonating technique occurs when Latour wakens to the Angelus ringing outside his window. As happens so many times in the novel, the scene offers a powerful illustration of how art captures the elusiveness and mystery of experience. Awakening slowly to the sound of the bell ringing, Latour's response is like that of a listener to a great piece of music; each note of the bell strikes a chord of intense feeling or remembrance within him and summons the reader to consider the depth of perception and emotion a work of art can inspire. Cather writes,

> He recovered consciousness slowly, unwilling to let go of a pleasing delusion that he was in Rome. Still half believing that he was lodged near St. John Lateran, he yet heard every stroke of the Ave Maria bell, marvelling to hear it rung correctly . . . and from a bell with beautiful tone. Full, clear, with something bland and suave, each note floated through the air like a globe of silver. Before the nine strokes were done Rome faded, and behind it he sensed something Eastern, with palm trees,-- Jerusalem, perhaps, though he had never been there. Keeping his eyes closed, he cherished for a moment this sudden, pervasive sense of the East. Once before he had been carried out of the body thus to a place far away. It had happened in a street in New Orleans. He had turned a corner and come upon an old woman with a basket of yellow flowers; sprays of yellow sending out a honey-sweet perfume. Mimosa--but before he could think of the name he was overcome by a feeling of place, was dropped, cassock and all, into a garden in the south of France where he had spent one winter in his childhood to recover from an

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> illness. And now this silvery bell note had carried him farther and faster than sound could travel (302).

In a kind of twilight state between waking and sleeping, Latour's mind resonates freely with uninhibited associations. Images and emotions seem, in fact, to surface direct from his unconscious, and we witness the deepest parts of his being animated by the sound of the bell. With each note of the Angelus's nine strokes, a new image or sensation unfolds within him. He imagines himself in Rome, then Jerusalem, "though he had never been there," in New Orleans which he associates with the scent of the Mimosa's "honey-sweet perfume," and finally in a garden in the south of France where he had spent time as a child. Transported beyond time and space, Latour takes part in a transcendental experience. He feels himself "carried out of the body" to distant places, including those he has never seen. The range and depth of his responsiveness suggests the universal experience of an acutely refined sensibility deeply affected by a work of art.

With each swelling note, Latour's associations expand like sound itself and invoke a sense of the many-layered past -- of the early Church in Rome and its papal seat, St. John Lateran; of the birthplace of Christ. Even the mysterious roots of Christianity itself surface with Latour's "sudden, pervasive sense of the East." Like the soup Vaillant prepares earlier in the novel, the bell's rich tone is the result of "a thousand years of history." It is similarly "not the work of one man." Cast out of the possessions of "the people of some besieged city" centuries earlier and made of silver, gold, and base metal, the bell is, like a work of art, an amalgam, the product of the varied influence of a multitude of people over time. As the sound of the bell animates Latour's past and reveals the curious past of the bell itself, Cather suggests the ability of art to touch the deepest parts of identity and of history.

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Much like the miracle as Latour defines it earlier in the novel, the bell inspires the listener (and the reader) to see, to hear, to feel on a higher plane. Cather achieves this heightening of the senses through language as provocative as poetry. Images convey a palpable texture and vividness. The notes of the bell, for example, float through the air "like a globe of silver"; Rome fades and gives way to Eastern palm trees; after feeling himself "carried out of the body," Latour imagines being "dropped, cassock and all" into a garden. Here simple concrete images -- globe, tree, body, cassock -- are transformed into vivid elements of a half-waking dream world or "delusion." In a striking moment of synesthesia Latour's senses are not only heightened but seem to blur; the sound of the bell prompts him to recollect the sight and smell of a flower he had once seen in a street in New Orleans. He recalls "sprays of yellow sending out a honey-sweet perfume." The line with its repeating "s" sound ("sprays . . . sending . . . sweet") conveys the expanding rush of the remembered aroma and the sensuous pleasure of aesthetic experience. To read the line is take part in Latour's rapture. We engage not merely the rapture of feeling, however, but the rapture of remembering as Cather depicts it: intense, visceral, and sprung from the natural world of prelapsarian innocence and robust flowers, of bright colors and sweet scents.

The "feeling of place" that comes to Latour through the sound of the bell is the elemental place of childhood, of memory, that is the fundamental basis for Cather's art. As Alfred Kazin points out, only place retained for Cather "the sacredness of early attachment" (Writer's America 109). While travel over the Southwestern territory plays a central role in Death Comes For the Archbishop, Latour's living connection to his native France is a vital element of the movement of his mind. In the above passage, the apex of Latour's reflection and the memory that brings him to waking is his recollection of a

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"sacred" place of boyhood -- "a garden in the south of France where he had been sent one winter in his childhood to recover from an illness." Like so many gardens in Cather's writing, this one is a place of fertility and renewal, a place where the ailing soul can be refreshed. In this instance, Latour's memory of the garden not only connects him to his remote past but restores his spirit as he wakes to the uncertain present. Through Latour's recovery of childhood, Cather illustrates the essential and rejuvenating power of memory.

Throughout the novel, Latour's connection to his past is the source of his profound self-possession and strength. In recalling his boyhood experience, especially through his friendship with Vaillant, Latour finds not only comfort but power; by returning to the inner "territory" of his childhood, Cather suggests throughout the novel, Latour is better able to conquer the many hardships that face him in the strange and often bleak territory. Latour's faithful action depends, that is, on memory. The pervasiveness of the recollections of things past in the novel reminds us that memory is for Latour what it is for Cather -- the core of consciousness and creativity.

Indeed for Cather all novel writing is an act of remembering, an attempt "to present the experiences and emotions of a group of people by the light" of her own (WCOW 13). Cather's personal connection to Death Comes For the Archbishop is revealed in a comment she made about the process of writing it. She claimed, the novel took only a few months to write because it "had all been lived many times before it was written" (WCOW 10). Furthermore, she noted, the experience was like "a happy vacation from life, a return to childhood, to early memories" (WCOC 11). While writing was a matter of remembering and "reliving" an experience for Cather, it also affords refuge from the harsher realities of life. But the prominence of memory throughout Cather's novels suggests more than an escape *from* the world of adult hardship and responsibility;

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it suggests a modern urge to make the world whole again. In recovering a lost past, in reconstructing an earlier way of being, Cather could counter "what was for her and other literary modernists a period of unprecedented change and cultural decline" (Chabot 86). In The Professor's House, Cather pictures the failure of the Professor to preserve the life-sustaining memory that is the source of his identity and creativity in the face of a corrupt, material world. In Death Comes For Come the Archbishop, the act of remembering itself becomes a sublime and eternal triumph, a means not only of self-possession, but of self-transcendence.

Even as she represents the triumph of memory through her novel, Cather also illustrates the limits of perception. Latour's and Vaillant's differing analyses of the bell reveal the highly variable nature of interpretation as it is based on individual perception, while at the same time suggesting an ineffable or untranslatable quality of creative expression. Cather interestingly does not engage the two clerics in a discussion about what they mutually recognize -- the symbolic significance of the Angelus's nine strokes commemorating the Angelus prayer and the Annunciation. Instead she engages the two in a discussion about the bell's curious and uncertain history. Vaillant notes that the Spanish inscription to St. Joseph from 1356 may suggest the bell was cast by Spaniards seeking St. Joseph's protection during a war with the Moors; he also remarks on the heroic labor of those who carted the bell from Mexico City to the Southwest. Latour, on the other hand, suggests its silver tone could derive from the Moors who taught the Spaniards how to work silver. Vaillant objects to what he thinks of as Latour's "belittling" association of his bell with the "infidel" Moors. Cather emphasizes in this exchange the two priests' contrasting sensibilities, their differing ways of *seeing* and, thus, of understanding. Vaillant will have his bell like his miracles -- heroic and direct; he sees the bell as possible

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evidence of an ennobling battle of the faithful (those who believe in St. Joseph) and the non-believing (the Moors). On the other hand, Latour the intellectual disinterestedly delves into history's more mysterious reaches, suggesting the bell may very well have been crafted by Spaniards from knowledge garnered from the Moors. In his disregard for setting forth an allegiance with early Christians, he reminds the reader that he is the artist-priest in search of a higher truth.

If Latour recalls the artist, he is surely one in the Catherian spirit, reminding us of the heft of unanswered questions -- the weight of what is not on the page. For though Vaillant and Latour's discussion of the bell's possible history is interesting, it calls our attention to what is not said and perhaps cannot be expressed. Latour does not describe, for example, the sound of the bell in detail to his friend, and he does little to communicate his complex experience upon hearing it. As Cather has made us privy to this experience, its absence is all the more noticeable in the discussion with Vaillant. What resonates in the reader's mind during the scene, as it must in Latour's, is not the scraps of inferred history the two priests discuss, but the *un*spoken, unexpressed depth of feeling the bell prompts in the barely conscious Latour. The marked absence of Latour's attempt to relate his experience suggests both his characteristic reserve *and* another modern theme -- the untranslatability of experience or the futility of language to express perceived truth. Whatever he can say about the bell's formal history, the unspoken scents and sights he has remembered, the image of sound floating "through the air like a globe of silver" are far more potent and more resonant. And it is in these descriptions that Cather shows through words and images both the power and the limits of language.

That Cather was interested in representing both the experience of art and the paradoxical aim of the artist to express the inexpressible is evident when one examines the

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source of the episode in Howlett's Life of the Reverend Machebeuf. In the book. Howlett describes the bell in the old Church of San Miguel in Santa Fé. declaring it the "sweetest-toned bell in America, and perhaps the richest" and noting the legend about its creation during the Spaniards war with the Mōors in 1356 (174). The reference is brief and strikingly unembellished. Howlett does not suggest that the bell was rung for Father Lamy by Machebeuf, nor does he relate either priest's responses to its sound or history. In devising the scene, Cather allows us not merely to hear the sound of the bell, but to contemplate as we do throughout the novel "the matter of art." Through each of Latour's responses to the bell, the author suggests the aims of her art to restore the past, to engage the senses, to spur memory, to inspire transcendence, and finally to return one to oneself in a fuller recognition of place, of beginnings. The nine strokes of the Angelus in fact suggest the nine chapters of Cather's novel itself. "Full, clear, with something bland and suave," the bell's notes, floating "through the air like a globe of silver" not only suggest the elements of a work of art, but describe Cather's delicate and evocative prose itself as it reaches for a meaning beyond words.

Throughout Death Comes For the Archbishop, Cather frequently uses unspoken gestures and even silences between characters to convey the limits of language. In one of the rare dramatic episodes in the novel, Cather points directly not just to the power of non-verbal communication, but to its superiority over speech. When Latour and Vaillant stop on the road to Mora at the house of a malignant-looking American, a distracted and terrified woman covertly signals to the two priests that they must flee for their lives: "With her finger she pointed them away, away!--two quick thrusts into the air. Then, with a look of horror beyond anything language could convey, she threw back her head and drew the edge of her palm quickly across her distended throat--and vanished" (318).

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Latour and Vaillant are at first "speechless," "struck dumb" by her terrible meaning, but it is clear that their lives depend on their heeding her warning, and they quickly escape the murderous intentions of their erstwhile host. Here as elsewhere Cather points not just to the futility of words to convey meaning, but to the importance of being able to "read" and understand through the nonverbal or unspoken, of ascertaining a meaning "beyond anything that language could convey." The rather simple episode with its pronounced distinctions between villain and victim invokes the drama of a western or cowboy legend, yet it reminds the reader that this novel is, like many modern novels, on one level about language.

The power of the unspoken is further emphasized by Cather less obviously in the sketch she draws of Kit Carson. Despite being unable to read and barely able to write his name, Carson is quick "to read a landscape or a human face," and, we learn, he possesses the most reliable map of the yet uncharted "great country of desert and mountain ranges between Santa Fé and the Pacific coast" in his head (323). Illiterate though he is, Cather makes clear, his unschooled intelligence is to be admired; he is "ahead of books" and has traveled "where the printing-press could not follow him" (323). Here again Cather suggests the limited range of language and highlights a dimension of understanding beyond that based on the written word.

Cather most clearly demonstrates the power of the unspoken through her depiction of Latour's association with the Indian guide Jacinto from the Pecos pueblo and his Navajo friend Eusabio. Frequently words are not the primary tools of communication between Latour and those close to him, and expressions of trust and friendship with the Indians in particular come through a non-verbal language or the eloquent silence of mutual regard. As Latour and Jacinto travel to remote parts of Latour's mission west of

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Albuquerque, for example, their only shared language seems to be the language of the landscape. As the travellers ride, they exchange no words, and Cather offers little direct insight into their thoughts. Rather she unfolds a vivid picture of the desert plain, each detail -- the "thickets of withered, dead-looking cactus, and patches of wild pumpkin," the absence of juniper and rabbit brush -- creating an atmosphere of hardship that envelopes the two in a harmony of endurance. When, after a day of riding, they kneel "on either side of the fire, the sand curling about them" (330), they appear to be one, the gritty bread they eat an emblem of their connection. In this scene Cather suggests that both the storm and the quiet power of their shared experience render dialogue, mere language, unnecessary and irrelevant.

When the two do speak, it is significantly language itself, the act of naming, that separates them momentarily. Surrounded by the petrified sand dunes north of Laguna, the two make their camp among the rocks. Cather then paints another simple yet stunning picture: "As the sun dropped low, the light brought the white church and the yellow adobe houses up into relief from the flat ledges. Behind their camp, not far away, lay a group of great mesas" (331). Observing the mesas, the Bishop asks Jacinto if he knows the name of the nearest one, and a kind of spell is broken. Jacinto responds "No, I not know the name," then adds, "I know Indian name" and informs Latour that the Laguna Indians call it "Snow-Bird mountain." Here the Indian name seems beyond language itself -- a word picture that suggests the Indian culture's distinct connection to nature, a connection neither the whiteman's language nor his culture can render or appreciate. When Latour compliments the name, Jacinto recoils at what he takes to be the priest's condescension and says "Oh, Indians have nice names too!" -- a reproach he quickly feels is not deserved or one aimed perhaps at the wrong whiteman. To mend the moment of ill

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will, Jacinto flatters the Bishop about his youth and rank, but it is interestingly not his words that move Latour, but the manner in which he speaks them. A "slight *inflection*" [my emphasis] in Jacinto's voice makes Latour feel he had "received a great compliment" (331). If language separates the two momentarily, it is a tone of meaning, an element beyond words that heals them.

Further on in the chapter, as the two companions watch the sun's fading light in the western sky and stars flicker into view, Jacinto breaks the silence, their "usual form of intercourse," by telling Latour the name for the small star beside the evening star: "Indians call him the guide" (332). As Jacinto is in fact Latour's *guide* in the new territory, the statement appears self-referential and reads almost like Jacinto's introduction of himself to Latour. Like an outstretched hand, Jacinto's words initiate a deeper connection between the travelers and bring the two closer as they together observe the single point of light. But the moment of connection is fleeting, like so much in this novel, and the two lapse into a silence that this time signals not "intercourse" but separation. It is a separation caused, Latour believes, not by the differences of their language, but by the differences of their memory. In a striking instance of psycho-narration, Cather crafts a language that suggests Latour thinking aloud to himself: "There was no way in which he could transfer his own memories of European civilization into the Indian mind, and he was quite willing to believe that behind Jacinto there was a long tradition, a story of experience, which no language could translate to him" (332). With Jacinto, he could not talk long into the evenings as he does with Vaillant, because Jacinto does not share common memories, and memory, the root of language and of history, is what offers connection. Here again Cather emphasizes that speaking depends on memory. Earlier in the novel, Vaillant and Latour's thoughts and hearts can meet "in that tilted cobble street,

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winding down a hill, with the uneven garden walls and tall horsechestnuts on either side: a lonely street after nightfall, with soft street lamps shaped like lanterns at the darkest turnings" (301) because the two share the experience of walking those streets. Without common memories, common histories, Latour believes he and Jacinto cannot bridge the distance between them. It is "useless" to ask Jacinto his thoughts, Latour thinks, because no language could translate his incommunicable past.

And yet Cather has Jacinto, in a remarkable moment, resist just such a separation by asking Latour what *he* thinks about the stars. The single query in the blue night challenges Latour to defy their mutual isolation and press language to do the impossible -- to offer connection and to "translate" thought. At first no bridge appears possible, as the two express divergent opinions: Latour notes "the wise men" of his culture think the stars "worlds, like ours," while Jacinto opposes that with his own thought that "they are leaders--great spirits" (332). However, just short of the chapter's close, Latour's final words move them toward a feeling of unifying acceptance: "Whatever they are, they are great. Let us say *Our Father*, and go to sleep, my boy" (332-33). Although it is easy to recognize a patriarchal tone in Latour's reference to Jacinto as "my boy," the address resists being merely domineering and implies their shared position as children of God. "Kneeling on either side of the embers," the two, divided by different cultures and memories, are united in their regard for a God who is not only the God of the Catholic Church, but the *catholic* God of all humanity. Beyond language and memory, Cather implies paradoxically, are humankind's eternal longings that preside in prayer and in art.

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Many critics have noted Cather's pronounced emphasis in the novel on the saintly virtues of selflessness and transcendence of the personal and the material. David Stouck

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notes that in Death Comes For the Archbishop Cather's "only concern is to describe the life of the priests, not to analyze their individual psychological motives" (Imagination 140). He states further, the actions of the priests "are viewed not in terms of psychology, but in terms of religious faith; consequently, characterization is very flat, creating a stronger impact visually than emotionally" (140). While certainly inward conflict is not the primary subject of the novel as it is in The Professor's House, Cather depicts crucial instances of inward reflection on the part of Latour which heighten our awareness of his inner life and suggest further a modern interest in subjective experience as a "process that lies not outside but within the self" (Bradbury 32).

One of the most remarkable moments of inward revelation in the book occurs in Book VII, chapter 3. Upon learning that his Navajo friend Eusabio's son has died, Latour travels four hundred miles from Santa Fé to see him while also visiting other Indian villages along the way. Upon meeting, Latour and Eusabio exchange few words, but Cather emphasizes the power of the unspoken to convey a deeper meaning. In the middle of a raging sandstorm, Eusabio "came out of his house and took possession of Angelica by her bridle-bit. At first he did not open his lips, merely stood holding Father Latour's very fine white hand in his fine dark one, and looked into his face with a message of sorrow and resignation in his deep-set eagle eyes" (411). Here again Cather draws our attention to a language of gesture and action far more compelling than words. Eusabio's handling of Latour's mule expresses his consideration of his friend as finely as any words he can utter. Cather suggests that in not opening his lips, the eloquence of his expression is in no way diminished, and perhaps even enhanced. Eusabio's language of greeting is spoken with the hands, his "message of sorrow and resignation" is conveyed through the eyes. As often occurs in the deepest friendships in the novel, much is communicated in silence, and

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language appears secondary to what is felt and seen. When Eusabio says simply, "My friend has come," Cather notes his unembellished words were "everything" to Latour: "welcome, confidence, appreciation" (411). The words serve, that is, as a kind of summation of meaning that Eusabio has already enacted.

In considering this scene, Stouck's observation at first appears well-suited to the narrative. The impact of the meeting is indeed primarily visual; Cather compels us to feel through images and gestures, and little attention is directly paid to the individual psychological state of the two men. Here Cather appears to fulfill her stated intention in the novel to convey an impression, "to touch and pass on." However, one of the achievements of the scene and of Cather's novel as a whole is that even as the characterization appears flat, Cather succeeds in conveying a depth of feeling beneath the surface picture that refutes flatness and suggests her preoccupation with internal action. On some level, that is, Cather achieves depth *through* flatness.

As the chapter unfolds, Cather offers a more in-depth individual mental picture as she focuses on Latour. Eusabio who notes sympathetically that the Bishop "looked weary and the way to Santa Fé was long" gives Latour "a solitary hogan, a little apart from the settlement" (411). In providing Latour this resting place, Eusabio attends to his physical needs, but in offering solitude, Cather *indirectly* suggests, he recognizes his friend's need for mental as well as physical refreshment. In noting that he will stay three days, as he has been too taken up with "practical matters" and is in need of reflection, Latour acknowledges a need beyond the physical, and Cather moves us past one-dimensionality to explore a more complex inner picture.

Before delving into Latour's thoughts, however, Cather carefully sets the scene, describing at length the surrounding landscape. The world Latour inhabits is composed of

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the raging sandstorm with its "boisterous spring winds," the river winding among the "mounds and dunes of loose sand which whirled through the air all day," the grove of tall, naked cottonwoods, with "their strange twisted shapes," leaning at odd directions, and "so large that they seemed to belong to a bygone age" (411-12). Here Cather's mastery with landscape is at its height. Each feature of the spare yet tumultuous landscape powerfully suggests not only the peculiarly bleak beauty of the Southwestern landscape, but the particular state of Latour's mind and spirit. Inside the hogan, Latour wrestles with a vigor and intensity as great as the storm outside and with a persistence like that of the trees that struggle upward in the dry wind. Like the uniformly textured brushstroke of an impressionist painting, Cather's landscape description suggests that both tree and man are made of the same stuff. The storm's "moving wall of tapestries of sand" suggests the whirling turmoil of Latour's thoughts. Cather so carefully grafts the landscape to Latour's mind that when we imagine Latour sitting in his house or listening to the wind or walking "abroad under those aged, wind-distorted trees," the terrain he occupies and traverses appears to *be* the terrain of his own consciousness. Physical landscape becomes, that is, psychological landscape in the scene. Achieved through the simple accumulation of detail, the correspondence between mind and matter is both complete and memorable. There is little chance the reader will recall what Latour thinks in this chapter without recalling his isolated hogan in the midst of the sandstorm.

The landscape serves not merely to represent Latour, but to insulate him from all outside intrusion and to suggest his complete withdrawal into himself. Cut off, "even from the remote little Indian camp," Latour appears to enter his own mind when he steps into the hogan. Beyond the pulse of human affairs, he seems poised to journey to the more remote reaches of consciousness. The scene is noteworthy, as Cather pulls back the

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curtains for a moment and allows us to see into and beyond the man of faith. In the scene, Latour seeks not "to blot himself out" in prayer, as he does when faced with the disorienting shapes and patterns of the desert in the novel's opening chapter. Rather as he embarks on his three days of reflection and braves the pelting sand while walking beneath the twisted trees, he seeks self-engagement, not self-transcendence. In a rare moment in this book that so frequently transcends an interest in, as Stouck puts it, "individual psychology," we learn what lies at the heart of Latour's consciousness. Not surprisingly one finds there thoughts of Vaillant.

The chief, non-practical matter that concerns Latour is "whether he would be justified in recalling Father Vaillant from Tucson" (412). The matter is clearly not one pertaining to the propagation of the faith in the new territory, but of Latour's personal relation to and deep personal need for Vaillant as beloved friend and companion. In depicting Latour's mental struggles, Cather employs a narrative voice that closely simulates Latour's and allows us to feel the movement of Latour's mind as he reflects on the past and on his friend. The narrative shift to Latour's point of view comes subtly and without much notice. In describing the increasing burdens of the Bishop, Cather captures the pulse of Latour's thoughts:

> The new priests from Auvergne were all good men, faithful and untiring in carrying out his wishes; but they were still strangers to the country, timid about making decisions, and referred every difficulty to their Bishop. Father Latour needed his Vicar, who had so much tact with the natives, so much sympathy with all their shortcomings. When they were together, he was always curbing Father Vaillant's hopeful rashness--but left alone, he greatly missed that very quality. And he missed Father Vaillant's companionship--why not admit it? (413)

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In the passage the third person narrative appears straightforward, distanced, but it has the subjective feel of Latour's thoughts in motion. As we learn of the burdens of working with the new recruits, we feel Latour struggling not to diminish the value of their service -- "They were all good men, faithful and untiring . . . ." Further on, as the anonymous narrator suggests that the sympathetic and highly capable Vaillant could compensate for the inexperience of the new priests, we feel Latour's presence beneath the narrative surface rationalizing his need for recalling his friend. Cather creates in the central and simple assertion, "Father Latour needed his Vicar," a typically double effect. We recognize Latour's need for Vaillant's clerical service, but we also hear the resonance of an unspoken and more personal yearning. Recognition of this yearning, like a submerged thought of Latour's, surfaces with the final query that caps the paragraph: "And he missed Father Vaillant's companionship--why not admit it?" Cather's use here of narrated monologue suggests Latour as speaker in silent dialogue with himself. The unassuming, rhetorical question serves multiple purposes; it signals Latour's admission of needing his friend for human not divine reasons, and it directs the reader to consider the narrative to follow as closely related to Latour's point of view.

Without employing obvious visible changes on the verbal surface, such as alteration of the pronouns that signal point of view, Cather shifts the narrative inside of Latour. What unfolds are touchingly personal recollections of Vaillant that although not obviously assigned to Latour's point of view, we read as the fruit of his three day mediation. The concluding pages of the chapter flow with the pulse of memory, in waves of recollection from Latour and Vaillant's first meeting as Seminarians at Montferrand in Clermont to more particular reflections on the many contradictions of Vaillant's buoyant character -- his unscholarly nature and fervent faith; his delicate health and great energy;

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his love of good food and willingness to endure great privation. With each stroke, we feel Latour lovingly recalling Vaillant and summoning cherished moments of his 25 year friendship. Small touches poignantly suggest the internal nature of the recollection and the depth of Latour's regard. Reference to Vaillant as "Joseph" suggests, for example, both Latour's presence and his intimate connection with his friend. When the narrative refers to "His Vicar," we feel Latour striking a note of proud possession.

The chapter's final recollection pertains to Vaillant's audience with Pope Gregory XVI, who is kin to Vaillant in the curious contradictions of his character, for Cather notes, "the aristocratic and autocratic prelate" who was "consistently on the wrong side in European politics, and was the enemy of Free Italy, had done more than any of his predecessors to propagate the Faith in remote parts of the world" (416). Vaillant's extended visit with the Pope, during which he brazenly calls for valise after valise of crosses, rosaries, payer-books and other items to be hauled in for blessing, is recalled by Latour comically and with affection. In the Pope's unprecedented response to Vaillant upon his departure, Cather suggests the power of the Vicar's splendid energy and irrepressible spirit to inspire and touch others, no matter their rank: as Vaillant bows out of the room backward, two valises in hand, "the Pope rose from his chair and lifted his hand, not in benediction but in salutation and called out to the departing missionary, as one man to another, '*Coraggio, Americano*!'" (417). With these stirring words Cather bursts for a moment the limits of the narrative, for they express not only the Pope's animated support of Vaillant, but suggest Latour's own need to take heart, to be courageous as he seeks to relieve his loneliness through recollection of his friend in tranquillity.

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As if Latour is stirred by this final recollection to silence. the narrative reverts to the objective narrator who reports rather stiffly that "Bishop Latour found his Navajo house favourable for reflection, for recalling the past and planning the future" (417). But even as she removes Latour from the immediate narrative. Cather concludes the chapter with a picture that suggests his thinking presence in the landscape:

> The hogan was isolated like a ship's cabin on the ocean. with the murmuring of great winds about it. There was no opening except the door. always open. and the air without had the turbid yellow light of sand-storms. All day long the sand came in through the cracks in the walls and formed little ridges on the earth floor. It rattled like sleet upon the dead leaves of the tree-branch roof. This house was so frail a shelter that one seemed to be sitting in the heart of a world made of dusty earth and moving air (417).

Here the landscape takes on a peculiarly modern resonance. not merely representing but embodying Latour's consciousness in a manner more typical of landscape in Cather's earlier works. The small hogan with its open door suggests Latour's perceiving eye or open "I," the great winds the ceaseless whirling of his deepest thoughts. especially those which cannot be suppressed and seep like the sand through the cracks in the walls into consciousness. The hogan, as Cather pictures it -- a fragile vessel subject to "dusty earth and moving air" -- *is* Latour, unaccomodated man, sitting in the center of his own being. As the images resonate in the reader's mind, they also suggest once again the limits of language; Cather emphasizes with wind and sand that words, mere words, cannot capture the complex inward motion of Latour's existence. Just as "Nothing one could say of Father Vaillant explained him" (416), so no words can adequately record Latour's state of reflection as eloquently as the landscape picture. As Cather concludes the chapter, we are

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left with a kind of summary abstraction that works much like a modern painting, simultaneously suggesting and eluding meaning.

Only in the chapter that follows do we learn that "On the third day of his visit with Eusabio, the Bishop wrote a somewhat formal letter of recall to his Vicar, and then went for his daily walk in the desert" (417). That Cather withholds Latour's decision regarding whether to summon Vaillant until the next chapter illustrates another experimental feature of her writing. In delaying the piece of information, she achieves an expressiveness in the gap between the chapters, in the blank on the canvas. Using this transitional slip of blank space, Cather suggests Latour's ongoing reflection outside of earshot and a kind of time lapse in which we don't see but sense his preoccupations; in addition, the absence of description at this moment suggests the untransmittable nature of his thought. In the silence before our knowing he will write his friend, the mystery of Latour's reflection is enhanced. One of the curious achievements of Cather's book can be located in moments like this -- moments of silence, without accent, in which the action of the book is *felt* but not seen. For even as Cather turns away from Latour's inner thoughts, we *feel* his ruminating presence and apprehend its ineffable quality.

Cather emphasizes in Latour's dire need of Vaillant, not only his great love for his friend and the extreme loneliness of the Bishop's condition, but an essential Catherian need -- the need to summon the past. More than friendship and even faith, it appears the past is the great sustaining force in this novel. Landscape itself, ever changing and often bleak, is important for its ability to prompt a life-giving connection to the past. The bleak, wind-torn desert, like Latour's solitude, suggests neither atrophy, nor negation, but "perpetual flowering" (432) because it inspires the blossoming of the past in the imagination. Latour is drawn to the desert not only because there he can pursue his

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spiritual vocation, but because it is in the desert that he can best recall his past. Shortly before his death he returns to New Mexico to revisit not only his missionary days, but his boyhood; Cather writes of Latour,

> In New Mexico he always awoke a young man; not until he rose and began to shave did he realize that he was growing older. His first consciousness was sense of the light dry wind blowing in through the windows, with the fragrance of hot sun and safe-brush and sweet clover; a wind that made one's body feel light and one's heart cry "To-day, to-day," like a child's (443).

In New Mexico, the wind "made one a boy again" (443). Freedom for Cather in this novel of near nomadic missionaries is the freedom of the mind to journey back, to recover eternal beginnings, to respond to the "Something soft and wild and free, something that whispered to the ear on the pillow, lightened the heart, softly, softly picked the lock, slid the bolts, and released the prisoned spirit of man into the wind, into the blue and gold, into the morning, into the morning!" (444). Here the modernist's urge to recover an earlier, purer time is evident, but for Cather it is not just the recovery of the past that counts, but *how* one recovers, *how* one reconnects.

Neither fixed, nor definite, the past breaks out in this novel in fleeting pictures, in fragments of thought, in memories that disappear and reappear like the Zuni messengers Latour and Eusabio witness running among the sand dunes (420). In fact, the whole of Death Comes for the Archbishop can be seen as an exploration of the necessary but elusive art of remembering. At the close of the novel Cather locates this exploration in the mind of Latour and engages us the purely mental action. Absorbed in thought, no longer with any "perspective in his memories," Latour is pictured sitting "in the middle of his own consciousness" (453). Cather suggests for the first time that the novel itself -- with

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its non-chronological passages and fragmented memories that dissolve into pictures -- is Latour's story. Attempting to dictate "certain facts about the old missions in the diocese" to a young disciple, Latour is frustrated by his inability to relate them "systemicatically." He fears the "truths and fancies relating to a bygone time would probably be lost; the old legends and customs and superstitions were already dying out" (444). Here Cather prompts the reader to consider how much the *un*systematic, often perspectiveless narrative with its interspersed legends and stories of old customs and beliefs is Latour's.

As Latour moves nearer to death, Cather moves us closer into Latour's thoughts. Again she carefully sets a scene in which outer stasis belies inward action: "Lying so still that the bed-clothes over his body scarcely moved, with his hands resting delicately on the sheet beside him or upon his breast, the Bishop was living over his life" (449). Living is for Latour what we sense it is for Cather -- coincident with remembering. Poised on the brink of his life's end, Latour recalls, while gently touching the inscription of Vaillant's signet-ring, an all-important moment of beginning -- the occasion of his and Vaillant's departure together from Clermont to the College of Foreign Missions, where they would then travel to America. For the first time in the novel, we learn the full details of how Latour helped his friend overcome his anguish and board the *diligence* for Paris in the predawn hour. The dramatic scene, which Vaillant recalls only sketchily earlier in the novel, seems to burst the boundaries of the past and reunite Latour with his beloved friend:

> . . . those two men in the fields in the grey morning, disguised as if they were criminals, escaping by stealth from their homes. He had not known how to comfort his friend; it seemed to him that Joseph was suffering more than flesh could bear, that he was actually being torn in two by conflicting desires. While

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> they were pacing up and down, arm-in-arm, they heard a hollow sound; the diligence rumbling down the mountain gorge. Joseph stood still and buried his face in his hands. The postilion's horn sounded.
>
> "*Allons*!" said Jean lightly. "*L'invitation du voyage*! You will accompany me to Paris. Once we are there, if your father is not reconciled, we will get Bishop F--- to absolve you from your promise, and you can return to Riom. It is very simple' (450).

Here each stroke of detail -- the fields in the grey morning, their stealth and disguise, their nervous pacing up and down, arm-in-arm, the rumbling of the *diligence*, Latour's words -- suggests Latour's presence not only recalling but reliving the seminal moment in his life in which he and Vaillant became bound by a mutual trust and love. The memory is noteworthy because it illustrates once again the vital power of memory.

As Latour, in the moments before he actually dies, recalls the predawn scene yet again, as he imagines himself "standing in a tip-tilted green field among his native mountains . . . 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." Cather pictures not a beginning in the past, but the past as perpetual beginning. In the end the miracle Cather celebrates in Latour's life is not his deep love for Vaillant but the blessing of memory itself to restore his friend to him. God is glimpsed in this novel of saintly men not through their physical acts alone, but through the miracle of perception itself which allows them to love and to remember.

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Notes

[1] See Rosowski, Lee, Stouck, and Keeler.

[2] While Puvis de Chavannes's painting with its harmonious imagery and religious and allegorical subject matter is generally not considered modern, it should be noted that several art historians have observed the influence of his monumental figures and use of color, among other elements, on later modern painters, including Matisse, Gauguin, and Picasso. See Wattenmaker 1-31, and Price 148.

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Afterword

This study was sparked in part by a conversation I had with Alfred Kazin more than nine years ago about Willa Cather and her work. At the time, I was familiar only with two of Cather's early novels, My Ántonia and O Pioneers!, which I had read as an undergraduate and thought stirring, and a late collection of short stories, Obscure Destinies, which I had found only vaguely memorable. Something in these few works, however, led me to inquire of Kazin what more there was to read and how Cather fit into the predominantly male American literary tradition of the time. Kazin hardly needed prodding; he launched into a rapture of enthusiasm that was neither monologue, nor lecture, but more the unfettered expression of his belief that Cather was an underappreciated "genius" and his strong desire that I should discover her greatness for myself -- immediately. What Kazin meant by "genius" and "greatness" had to do with Cather's style, her sense of doing more with less, her way of enfolding the nation's history into her stories, her ability to capture so much movement -- in the land and within the soul of her characters, of her landscapes, of the railroad -- "one of her best characters," but mostly it concerned Cather's supreme attachment to memory as a life-giving force. Kazin on more than one occasion repeated and wrote about Cather's claim that "it's memory that goes with the vocation" as if it were an almost sacred admission.

Not long after our discussion, I began to read Cather's later novels, as Kazin had recommended, beginning with The Professor's House. In this work I recognized features that were familiar from the earlier novels -- moving, deeply resonant landscapes; an emphasis on memory; a pronounced attachment to the past that cannot be reconciled with even a winning present, and a highly controlled, poetic use of language. And yet in this book there was an intensity of effect I could not quite account for -- some mysterious

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quality deeply present but hidden just out of sight that lent depth to the reading experience; in the Professor's attachment to the lake, in Outland's self-discovery on the Blue Mesa, Cather seemed to delve far deeper into internal experience than she had in her earlier pioneer novels. Furthermore, the novel -- with its use of a non-chronological narrative, its unusual form, and preoccupation with interiority -- felt modern, and yet it had none of the surface difficulty one associates with modernism.

When I began this study, my aim was twofold -- to track the source of the intensity of feeling present in her three greatest novels and to explore the ways in which Cather could be considered modern. How fully I have realized that aim, I leave to others to judge. For myself, I have come to grasp how Cather achieves a rare intensity of feeling in her work by analyzing some of the ways in which she uses form and language to represent and explore her characters' inner lives. Through this study, I have come to appreciate, more deeply than I had anticipated, that Cather's peculiarly resonant landscape scenes are the vehicles for far more than memorable pictorial settings; they function as the essential forms through which she conveys inner states of being and reveal Cather's mastery at representing consciousness in fiction.

While modern is itself a slippery, even protean term, I discovered in Cather's preoccupation with interiority and with the elusive but palpable pulse of memory that runs through her work a distinctly modern quality. My examination of the use of landscape and of narrative voice in particular revealed to me the extent to which Cather sought to experiment with form and language in order to explore the more mysterious, obscure, and even bleak reaches of existence. In tracing shifts in perspective in these novels, I uncovered Cather's particular interest in depicting not just what characters are thinking, but what they are not aware they are thinking. Part of the drama of Cather's

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greatest works is a peculiarly modern drama of the unseen and the unspoken, a drama, that is, of the unconscious.

In examining some of the ways Cather intensifies the experience of thought and feeling in her novels and in looking at some of the modern features of her writing, I sought never to lose sight of her innovative and captivating use of language. The simple, storybook cadences and polished surfaces of her prose convey a complexity of meaning and effect that I have, I am sure, only begun to appreciate and to understand. Far more modern and strange than it appears, Cather's deceptively simple prose demands rereading and like the finest writing holds the promise of endless revelations. To appreciate the "greatness" of Cather's art, one must begin and end with this singular achievement.

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