Forethoughts and Eventualities: A Study of Willa Cather's Literary Code

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FORETHOUGHTS AND EVENTUALITIES
A Study of Willa Cather's Literary Code

BY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN LOYOLA UNIVERSITY.

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Vita Auctoris

John Bernard Amberg, S. J., was born in Chicago, Illinois, February 29, 1912. He received his elementary education at the Chicago Latin School and St. Ignatius Grammar School, Chicago. He attended Loyola Academy, Chicago, graduating in June, 1931. In August, 1931, he entered the Jesuit Novitiate of the Sacred Heart, Milford, Ohio, and began his college studies as an undergraduate of Xavier University, Cincinnati. He transferred to West Baden College, Indiana, in 1935, receiving the Bachelor of Arts degree from Loyola University, Chicago, in June of the same year.
FORETHOUGHTS AND EVENTUALITIES

A Study of Willa Cather's Literary Code

The Pioneers

The mute grandeur of Grey's "Elegy" lay over their venture. Tragedy edged their dreams; and epics slept in their lives, waiting for the kiss of art to awaken them.
The simplicity of literature, more sensitive, more threatened, and more important than other simplicities, needs a guard of honor, who shall never relax the good will nor lose the good heart of their intolerance. Alice Meynell, 1893.
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Introduction

A man's appraisal of himself may be mountain high in comparison to the estimate made of him by his fellows. So, too, may one's plans and ambitions, ideals and hopes, in whatever field he may pursue his life work, look arbitrary, even insignificant, to others not similarly motivated. Seldom does any man achieve such success that he is blinded to his own unfaithfulness, to a lesser or greater degree, to those ideals he set before him in days now passed. If he is a man to cringe before the criticism of his fellows, then will he bury his unattained ideals, his forethoughts, deep in his heart, lest his failure be flaunted in his face. It is the exceptional man who says: "This I attempted. Thus far have I failed. My success makes up the balance."

Such honesty is rare enough among ordinary men; rarer still, perhaps, among literary people. If an author places his book in the hands of the critics without comment upon his purpose, they cannot urge upon him the charge: "You have done well; yet you failed of your purpose, fell short of your ideal. Had you been silent, we, in turn, would have been free to praise."

Miss Willa S. Cather has never been greatly troubled by the judgements passed upon her work by critics. Had she
guided her pen in conformity to their demands, she would not hold today her position as one of America's foremost living novelists. Frequently her poorest work received unbounded praise; yet she was not tricked into walking the path of mediocrity. More recently, when her art has reached the perfection of its form, simplicity, and quiet beauty, she has been damned by critics whose narrow philosophy leads them to deny the praise which is assuredly her due. Neither praise nor condemnation have disturbed her calm purpose; though she had ears to hear, she heard not. For this we may well be thankful. Miss Cather has fearlessly stated her literary principles and ideals, deliberately permitting herself to be vulnerable before the attack of critics. She has in a remarkable degree fulfilled the promise of these ideals in all her work. She has suffered the consequence of her forthright attitude. Perhaps, she has lost to some extent her contemporary popularity. She has incurred the carping criticism of one school of critics, as Archer Winsten clearly shows in his spirited article "In Defense of Willa Cather." Her novels have not suffered. They are the product of her ideals coupled with her native literary gifts.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss Miss Cather's literary principles as made known to us by her own specific statements. When this is accomplished, the study will treat
these same principles in actual relation to her novels, by indicating the degree of success with which she vivified her work by her ideals. The title of this study, Forethoughts and Eventualities, will now be self-explanatory. By "forethoughts" is to be understood her literary code considered in se without reference to her work. By "eventualities" is meant the offspring of this code when combined with Miss Cather's artistic talents. Here we will endeavor to point out to what extent the authoress attained to the promise of her ideals in the novels she has written.
Part I.

FORETHOUGHTS
Chapter 1.

Miss Cather in the Eyes of Her Critics

Before entering upon a discussion of Miss Cather's remarks concerning her work, it might be well to indicate the opinions of several critics regarding her style and general characteristics. Thomas Whipple observes that "her style is her own natural mode of expression, painstakingly cultivated, and it constitutes a perfectly modulated instrument which can attain to surprising range of compass and volume." He also remarks, as do many others, that her way of writing is inconspicuous. Later we shall see that Miss Cather has always intended that her mode of expression should never obtrude itself upon the consciousness of the reader. The writing must remain a means to an end; never become an end in itself.

Though the authors of Contemporary American Literature believe that Miss Cather is "ill at ease in the presence of the novel-form"; yet they have high praise for her style.

Her style is lucid, fresh, observant. It is touched steadily with poetic sensitiveness. It has the simplicity of art and not of nature. The frequent statement one reads that Miss Cather's novels are not novels appears very misleading. It seems to imply
a flaw in her work, whereas the flaw, if anywhere, is in the critics themselves, who are unable to classify her work according to their old categories and have not the ingenuity to discover new ones. Certainly an author may write as he sees fit, without worrying about the hardship he is placing upon the critic who must tuck all productions into one dusty pigeon-hole or another. Perhaps, the classifiers will have to construct a new pigeon-hole; more than likely, they need not bother. Certainly it is not Miss Cather's problem; nor is it ours in this paper.

Stuart Sherman adds still other qualities not mentioned above. For him, as for many others,

Each of her novels has been a desired event, of which one could safely predict nothing but a style with the translucency of sky; a beauty cool, grave, persuasive; deep feeling under perfect control; and a criticism of life both profound and acute—a criticism which deals with the simple elements as with the fine complexities of human experience. 5

Another thinks she is characterized by a "copiousness of material and some breadth of sympathy." 6 Harry Hartwick significantly observes that "her stories are dramas of personality, not of action." 7 Yet he would not agree with those left-wing critics who call her work static. 8 Nor would he see eye to eye with the Frenchman who declares that many of her novels are based on suppression. 9 Elizabeth
Sergeant sees how ardently Miss Cather hates all cheapness and cheap success. The same critic knows that Miss Cather's work is distinguished by her powers of selection or rejection and finds her endowed with old-fashioned character, i.e., "virtues like faith, grit, determination, and unremitting labour."  

To think of Miss Cather at all, is to think of the West and Southwest and the pioneers whom she so vividly and faithfully portrays in many of her novels. Edward Tinker assures us that because of Miss Cather's fiction no present-day critic would say, as one did then, 'I don't give a damn what happens in Nebraska, no matter who writes about it.'

(This blunt remark was made in 1913 upon the publication of *O Pioneers!* For Tinker it was with *Death Comes for the Archbishop* that she "reached the zenith of her artistic maturity."  

In *Willa Cather*, the only full-length book* treating this novelist, the author shows Miss Cather's method of character portrayal by a brief observation. Her

---

*Rapin's* *Willa Cather* is a mediocre study which certainly does not do justice to Miss Cather, perhaps not even to Rapin himself. However it does contain some critical observations of considerable interest.
characters and environment are in harmony, both stand out in striking outline, characters, seldom analyzed, unfolding themselves in dialogue and in action. . . . They are all living men and women, built with short, cumulative touches, presented with that calm impartiality which we have come to look for in Willa Cather's books.13

In What I Like, William Lyon Phelps says that Death Comes for the Archbishop, Shadows on the Rock, and Obscure Destinies contain her finest work. "They are deliberately outside the tradition of American magazine tales; they have no climaxes; they are not stories of incident but revelations of character." 14

Michael Williams, while still editor of Commonweal, wrote several very appreciative articles on Miss Cather's recent novels. For the moment, we must pass these by to leave space for a paragraph of his dealing with her use of words, since as yet this aspect has not been mentioned. Although he refers to Death Comes for the Archbishop in particular, none the less, what he says is generally true of all her writings:

Her words and phrases, simple, and nearly always words of common use, are so vivified by their associations with her marvelous inner processes that they shine with their real meanings, which are so blurred and defaced in the hands of hasty or dishonest writers; they mix and mingle in rare combinations of color and music. A child could read this book without effort; artists, philosophers, and priests may, and will, ponder it profoundly.15

Lest any one be tempted to think Mr. Williams is alone in his estimate of Miss Cather's exceptional facility in the use of
words, we may be excused for making another quotation of some length. The citation also contains an interesting comment upon the classification of her novels mentioned above.

Her books tend more and more to be chronicles and pictures, and she makes her appeal to readers who still delight in the almost forgotten art of narration, and who value the power of words to evoke an image. Description therefore is not an idle accessory but the essence of her art, and so vivid is her visual sense, so wingedly light her energy of phrase, that familiarity with the scene would confirm but not intensify the truth and beauty of her presentation. 16

And anyone who has read *Shadows on the Rock* will agree with this last statement.

Thus far, little adverse criticism has been cited. There has been no lack of it. However, the fault-finding did not commence in earnest until she wrote of the first Bishop of Santa Fé. It has not ceased since. It is well to remember this time element in the opinions which follow. So, too, the best antidote to this phase of criticism regarding Miss Cather's work will be found in Archer Winsten's article mentioned in the Introduction. The personal philosophy of these critics logically forces them to be hostile to the theme of Miss Cather's later works. Even they cannot withhold praise for her style and effectiveness in writing. Harlan H. Hatcher states this fundamental opposition in mild terms as compared to others:
In a bewildered age whose uncertainties and preoccupation with fundamental problems of economics and government suggest nothing to challenge her fine pen, she has become the most talented of our escapists. 17

Few readers will disagree with Archer Winsten's viewpoint that it would be tedious and useless to list the complaints of these critics. Their refrain is always this: "Willa Cather is avowedly blind to modern problems; she neither tries nor cares to solve them: ergo, anathema sit." We need not ask here, if this be the creative artist's task or not. Another interesting variation of this refrain is quoted by Winsten. Miss Cather is an author who

'has never come to grips with the real life of her time,' who, 'writes as if mass production and technological unemployment and cyclical depressions and the struggle between the classes did not exist.' 18

It does not take exceptional insight to realize that this reviewer has, at the least, rather mild Communistic tendencies which cripple his critical judgement. Another, with clever yet sophistic argument, asserts that

Miss Cather's 'noble vacation' from life in Death Comes for the Archbishop becomes almost complete unemployment with Shadows on the Rock. 18

And so on. Turn to Archer Winsten, if you care for more of it in condensed form. If you prefer it whole, read the original reviews of Arvin, Chamberlain, Hicks, Kronenberger. The one-sidedness of these critics is clearly demonstrated by
Winsten. They will be discussed again when Miss Cather replies to their charges in a letter to the Commonweal entitled "Escapism." We will review this letter later.

The purpose of this first chapter was to familiarize the reader with the two-fold viewpoint taken of Miss Cather's work. Greater emphasis may have been placed on the favorable opinions, for they far outnumber the condemnations of the so-called left-wing critics. We are now in a better position to deal with Miss Cather's literary ideals as expressed in her own words. Keeping the views cited in this chapter before us, we may follow the discussion with greater interest and understanding.

We may now turn to Miss Cather's "Novel Demeublé," by far the most important single expression of her literary code.
Footnotes

Title Page:


Introduction:


Chapter 1.


Chapter 2.

"The Novel Déméublé" and Allied Writings

This critical essay was published by Miss Cather in 1922, the year in which her novel, One of Ours, won the Pulitzer Prize. It was printed in the New Republic. The date is significant: "The Novel Déméublé" appeared just ten years after her first book, Alexander's Masquerade, (subsequently edited in book form as Alexander's Bridge), ran in the pages of McClure's Magazine. However, the essay did precede six of her other novels, two of which are surely of artistic value far surpassing anything she had done before 1922. It does not seem an unwarranted assumption to say that the opinions expressed in this essay must have influenced Miss Cather's work before they were formally employed in the essay we now have. None the less, it would not greatly affect the discussion in hand, if we were to find that she does not adhere to her principles as enunciated in "The Novel Déméublé" so closely in her earlier work as in her more recent fiction.

In fact, this would seem to be more normal; since only after much actual writing could she come to definite ideas of the best way of going about her task. Thus, after considerable experience, she might safely express her more mature views concerning her art. We may, then, expect a closer adherence to "The Novel Déméublé" in the works which have been pub-
lished since 1922.

The essay was reprinted by Christopher Morley in 1924 in his Modern Essays, because he believed that it would be of considerable interest to the thousands of readers of My Antonia and A Lost Lady and other of Miss Cather's earlier novels. The essay was published a third (1926), and again a fourth time (1930) by other editors. A fifth reprint, and the most significant for this thesis, was made in 1936. This time "The Novel Demeuble" was one of several articles published in Miss Cather's only volume of essays, Not Under Forty. Perhaps, Miss Cather's publisher had read the ardent advice of Camille McCole pertaining to "The Novel Demeuble":

Mr. Knopf ought to reprint it in pamphlet form for distribution among all living writers, critics, and students in writing courses! Another generation might thus be at least partly spared our own generation's critical confusions.

At any rate, Mr. Knopf did reprint the essay, presumably because he considered it worthwhile, and indicative of Miss Cather's literary views. As a final bibliographical comment, we shall quote one of the few statements, in John Chamberlain's mocking review of "The Novel Demeuble," with which one

*Reprinted as Literary Encounters in Houghton Mifflin's (19-38) limited (970 copies, $120) autograph edition of Willa Cather's complete published works. It is in Volume XII.
may agree without subjoining several pertinent qualifications.

Although it was written some time ago, Miss Cather allows this to be printed without date or explanation; hence it presumably stands as her 1936 opinion.3

An even earlier expression (1920) of Miss Cather's views will be found in her very brief essay "On the Art of Fiction." This contains in substance many of the ideas which are more fully expressed in the later essay. We will refer to it as the thesis is developed. It adds weight to the probability mentioned above, that the thoughts of "The Novel Déméublé" had long been germinating in Miss Cather's mind.

There are a few more sources that ought to be noted in this descriptive chapter dealing with Miss Cather's writings as a critic. First, there is the Preface to the 1922 edition of Alexander's Bridge. Here she considers an author's peculiar material and the attitude he must have in his utilization of it. Another preface, this time to The Best Short Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1925), may be of value; however, much of the matter in this Preface is repeated by Miss Cather in Not Under Forty in the essay entitled "Miss Jewett." This latter book is more readily accessible and consequently will be referred to rather than the former. Miss Cather's article, "My First Novels," in the Colophon gives us an insight into her mature estimate
of her early works and adds somewhat to her views as expressed in the Preface to Alexander's Bridge. Aside from these glimpses into the workings of Miss Cather's critical mind, there are several of her letters to various editors: one to the Commonweal, another to The Saturday Review of Literature, concerning her purpose and method in the writing of Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock respectively.

The way is now cleared. We may pass on to the text of "The Novel Demeublé."
Footnotes

Chapter 3.

The Property-Man Needs a Vacation

The novel, for a long while, has been over-furnished. The property-man has been so busy on its pages, the importance of material objects and their vivid presentation have been so stressed, that we take it for granted whoever can observe, and can write the English language, can write a novel. Often the latter qualification is considered unnecessary. 1

In this first paragraph of her essay, Miss Cather states one of the dominant themes of the treatise that the modern novel is characterized by the exaggerated and unbalanced description of the purely material trappings of a story. There is a second thought indicated, namely, that the essential ability to write good English is required of every author worthy of his profession. This latter will be the subject of a subsequent chapter. Shortly afterward in the essay, she goes on to say that every author who knows his art, realizes that his "power of observation," as well as his "power of description" is but a modicum of the qualifications he must possess. Yes, he must have them both; still, he should not forget "that the most trivial of writers often have a very good observation." 2 The artist must never be merely photographic; he must select what is significant, discard the incidental.

The greater his observative faculties, the more abundant will be the matter from which he may sift what is adapted to his
purpose as a creative writer. In this chapter we will em-
phasize the negative aspect of the subject: i. e., Miss
Cather's complaint against the lack of standing-room on the
fictional stage. The positive remedy, artistic selection,
simplification, or what Elizabeth Sergeant calls "rejection,"
will demand a full chapter for its exposition. Miss Cather's
work is what it is primarily because she employs artistic
selection with uncommon skill.

Miss Cather continues to remark with reference to what
Camille McCole takes for granted is Dreiser's The Titan: 3

There is a popular superstition that "realism" asserts
itself in the cataloguing of a great number of material
objects, in explaining mechanical processes, the methods
of operating manufactories and trades, and in minutely and
unsparingly describing physical sensations. . . . 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, at all reinforced by a mas-
terly exposition of banking, our whole system of credits,
the methods of the Stock Exchange? Of course, if the
story is thin, these things do reinforce it in a sense,—
any amount of red meat thrown into the scale to make the
beam dip. But are the banking system and the Stock Ex-
change worth being written about at all? Have such things
any proper place in imaginative art? 4 *

Need one doubt for a moment that Miss Cather's reply to her

*Robert H. Footman in his study, "The Genius of Willa Cather,"
(American Literature, 10: 123-141, May 1938), quotes this
passage and argues that its ideas are not proposed by Miss
Cather as independent or objective literary views; rather
he sees in her remarks a subtle attack against her critics,
and, especially, a defense of her "sense of values." By this
last phrase is to be understood Miss Cather's moral standards
two last questions would be an emphatic "No!"? Should one doubt, he will find his uncertainty shattered in the next paragraph dealing with Balzac's attempt to utilize to the utmost "the value of literalness in the novel." He tried it with all the zest of which he was capable; yet according to Miss Cather he failed as an artist to just that extent to which he followed this easy path. Nor can a lesser genius hope to succeed,

If the heat of that furnace could not give hardness and sharpness to material accessories, no other brain will ever do it. 5

Balzac's intention, as that of those who follow him in this respect, is, in Miss Cather's mind, "unworthy of an artist." It is not due to his facility in covering his pages with a

and ideals of life as opposed to her purely literary standards and ideals. However, her sense of values (as he speaks of them) and her literary code are two different things; we need not assume, as does Mr. Footman, that Miss Cather enunciates this literary principle, (hereafter called the "demeuble technique"), merely to defend her sense of values. The demeuble technique fits in well with Miss Cather's sense of values as conceived by Mr. Footman; yet he is hardly justified in drawing the conclusion he does. The demeuble technique has validity as an artistic canon regardless of Miss Cather's sense of values; moreover, the extent of this validity may be judged simply on literary grounds alone. In other words, Miss Cather's sense of values is not the father of this literary principle---at least, he does not prove such unlikely parentage.

Further observations on Mr. Footman's article will be made in later footnotes.
"mass of brick and mortar and furniture and proceedings in bankruptcy," that he lives today but rather because of the "types of greed and avarice and ambition and vanity and lost innocence of heart which he created." They alone are as real today as they were in his own time. Their material surroundings---"the eye glides over them."

The city he built on paper is already crumbling. Stevenson said he wanted to blue-pencil a great deal of Balzac's 'presentation'---and he loved him beyond all the modern novelists. 6

Miss Cather wisely makes a distinction to prevent her view from being misunderstood. "Tolstoi was almost as great a lover of material things as Balzac"; yet his attitude and use of these props differs from Balzac's.

The clothes, the dishes, the haunting interiors of those old Moscow houses, are always 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. When it is fused like this, literalness ceases to be literalness---it is merely part of the experience. 7

Mérimée was never guilty of the overdone interior decorating of Balzac. Is then his Carmen "another sort of novel? Truly isn't it a better sort?" 8 So, too, Miss Cather finds, in the springtime of our American literature, a novel which exemplifies the simplification of the mise-en-scène so wanting
in the work of many of her contemporaries---The Scarlet Letter.

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.

How well does Miss Cather depict herself while describing Hawthorne.

Miss Cather criticizes D. H. Lawrence for the literalness with which he presents sensory reactions in The Rainbow. She argues that the presenting of mental reactions or physical sensations, when done to excess, is just as blameworthy (she speaks only from the artistic viewpoint) as is the unnecessarily minute description of material things. "A novel crowded with physical sensations is no less a catalogue than one crowded with furniture." Lawrence does not seem to know the deep gap which separates true emotion from mere sensory reactions. The unsavoury element of sex does not often appear in Miss Cather's novels*, and, when it does, she treats the subject with a delicacy unknown to those moderns who capitalize, in a highly immoral way, on this all too-trumpeted human weakness. As a Christian, she would not

*However, there are two, perhaps three, short stories which one wishes Miss Cather had never written, because of the way in which she handles an immoral situation in them.
follow their lead. Nor does she consider it compatible with
the canons of her art. This is surely the meaning to be
attached to her statement, that

Characters can be almost dehumanized by a laboratory
study of the behaviour of their bodily organs under
sensory stimuli—can be reduced, indeed, to mere animal
pulp. Can one imagine anything more terrible than the
story of Romeo and Juliet rewritten in prose by D. H.
Lawrence.

All that has been said in "The Novel Demeuble," accord-
ing to John Chamberlain, amounts only to "a simple statement
of her prejudices." Miss Cather "is either too tired or too
busy to argue"! No doubt, Mr. Chamberlain, in the vigor of
his manhood, wishes to contest everything on the assumption
that all points are arguable. Miss Cather is neither too
tired, nor too busy; she is too wise to call the traditional
principles of her art into question. John Chamberlain, in-
deed, is tireless; yet he can beg the question just as he
accuses Miss Cather of doing. His article purports to be
a review of Not Under Forty; it is, in fact, an attempted
refutation of her "Novel Demeuble." He objects to the paucity
of examples given by Miss Cather and sincerely believes he
has disposed of her view by listing modern novels sufficiently
"unfurnished" to please even her. This leads nowhere. Miss
Cather does not deny the existence of novels up to her
standard. She stated the artistic principle of selection,
which is not her property alone (save in the sense that she embodied it in practice in writing her novels), but rather the guide of all true artists from ancient times to the present. Chamberlain does not discuss the principle, but quibbles over the examples (or lack of them) and thinks he has won the day. The two would be in agreement concerning many of the novels listed by Mr. Chamberlain. He comes more to the point when he takes up Dreiser's works; for here the two critics differ on a definite aspect of a particular author's work. John Chamberlain speaks in defence of Dreiser:

And in any case, there are times when a minute notation of the detritus of the external world is absolutely necessary to the novelist. Dreiser uses a description of surfaces to indicate Frank Cowperwood's inner poverty, which is the 'point' of The Financier and Titan. Jim Farrell does something similar, using stretches of monotonous description to offset and render more affecting his big scenes. It all depends on what you want to do; there is no valid test in the démeuble as such. 13

Have we an argument here, or merely the statement of Mr. Chamberlain's "prejudices"? Perhaps, after all, he is "too tired to argue." Yes, Miss Cather would reply, "a minute notation of the detritus of the external world is absolutely necessary to the novelist," but only "if the story is thin"; then "these things do reinforce it in a sense,—any amount of red meat thrown into the scale to make the beam dip." 14

Frank Cowperwood's inner poverty may be the "point" of
the story. Still, Miss Cather does not think that the "description of surfaces" is the artistic method of portraying that weakness of his character; nor does she consider such procedure in any sense necessary. Mr. Chamberlain does not agree with Miss Cather, which neither makes her wrong, nor him right. If neither proves his contention, then the opinion of each must be judged with a view to the qualifications and experience of the one who expressed it. And here the debate may stand.

It is surprising that even John Chamberlain would condone "using stretches of monotonous description to offset ... big scenes." In art, as well as in life, the end does not justify every means. Boring one's reader in order to render a scene effective is very much like fortifying a man with drink on his wedding day, that he may think his bride more beautiful than she is—in both cases the ruse is either unnecessary or will lead to eventual disillusionment. This technique is less satisfactory than tossing red meat into the scale.

Yet, it not only depends on what you want to do, but more on how you want to do it. Miss Cather has her way in which she is not alone; rather, her way is the traditional, classic way. Mr. Chamberlain either misunderstands Miss Cather, or
has another way he thinks better. In the sense that he seems to understand the démeublé, it is not a valid test as such; as Miss Cather understands the démeublé, it is a valid test for a work of artistic fiction.

We may now state one of the principles of Miss Cather's literary code. In accordance with the viewpoint of this chapter, it will be negatively stated. Its positive form will be the fruit of the next chapter. The démeublé technique may be formulated as follows:

A writer must not overburden his work by literalness in the description of the material accessories of his story; neither may he permit an unbalanced literalness in presenting mental reactions and physical sensations.

In brief, avoid the cataloguing method of writing---let the property-man take his vacation. As the train rushes through the countryside, he might kill time rationally by meditating on these words of Alice Meynell:

Simplicity is not virginal in the modern world. She has a penitential or virtual singleness. We can conceive an ancient world in which life, art, and letters were simple because of the absence of many things; for us now they can be simple only because of our rejection of many things. 15
Footnotes

3. Camille McCole, _loc. cit._
5. Idem.
12. John Chamberlain, _loc. cit._
15. Alice Meynell, "Rejection." _The Rhythm of Life and Other Essays_ (London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1893), p. 79.
Chapter 4.

I. "Art, It Seems to Me, Should Simplify"

As a result of the last chapter, we know what Miss Cather considers the faults against her canon of selection or simplification in creative writing. Now we may say a word on the positive aspects of her theory in so far as this is possible. This is difficult, for it is almost paradoxical to discuss "rejection" from a positive viewpoint, when the process is one of negation. Yet what follows is less negative than the treatment of the subject in the preceding chapter; and will, at least, enlarge our knowledge of Miss Cather's opinion.

A writer, according to Miss Cather, must forget the "dazzling journalistic successes" of those story-writers of about the year 1900, who "surprised and delighted by their sharp photographic detail." ¹ Their success is a great obstacle to those wishing to do good work.

The whole aim of that school of writing was novelty---never a very important thing in art. They gave us, altogether, poor standards---taught us to multiply our ideas instead of to condense them. ²

Their work, now that the novelty is gone, is "journalistic and thin." They did produce good "reportorial" stories; these now have no point. They are but the detritus of their own
flaming popularity; a product of their day—not true art. These writers failed to cut away the purely contemporary and passing aspects of their stories; in fact, they built solely on these shifting sands. They must now pay the penalty of oblivion. If any of Miss Cather's work lives, as well it may, in American literature, it will be because she did not court an easy popularity among her contemporaries.

Art, it seems to me, should simplify. That, indeed, is very nearly the whole of the higher artistic process; finding what conventions of form and what detail one can do without and yet preserve the spirit of the whole. 3

So must an author go about his work even as a painter, who discards hundreds of sketches until he has produced the one picture that embodies them all in the simplest form. The process is

all the time one of simplifying, of sacrificing many conceptions good in themselves for one that was better and more universal. 4

She admits that much material must be ruthlessly cast aside; yet "a good workman can't be a cheap workman; he can't be stingy about wasting material, and he cannot compromise." Miss Cather develops these ideas at greater length in "The Novel Demeublé," though what she says is fundamentally the same.

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. 5

Again, Miss Cather grants that the writing of novels need not be, unless the author so wishes, a form of art. If he prefers to do hack work for the monetary returns such labor will bring, he is free to do so; then she is not dealing with the standards of his craft, nor are her ideals for him. He conducts "a business as safe and comendable as making soap or breakfast foods." After all,

One does not wish the egg one eats for breakfast, or the morning paper, to be made of the stuff of immortality. 6

There is a vast difference between the novel intended as a source of amusement only and the novel as a form of art. Miss Cather, obviously, has only the latter in mind when she prescribes for the novelist.

Camille McCole proposes "The Novel Demeuble" as the best means to stem the modern trend which points "dangerously in the direction of mere journalese instead of genuinely artistic writing." 7 He believes that there is a close connection between the unethical bent in modern books and the fact that they are inartistic. Furthermore, they lack the qualities of true art, because in practice their authors contemn Miss Cather's advice to select the "universal" material of art, and to avoid the cataloguing especially of physical sensations
and reactions. He regrets the advice of "How-to-Write-It" books; for students are told to attain verisimilitude "almost to the exclusion of suggestion." If, in describing his grandmother resting on the front porch, he has noticed that she is knitting, then, "if necessary, he should himself learn to handle knitting needles in order to achieve the desired verisimilitude." 8 Were also contemporary critics not infected with the same attitude of the "How-to-Write-It" books, we could expect young writers to forget their college training, should they become novelists; yet now they are sorely tempted to write what the critics praise most ardently. So again, Camille McCole would hand a copy of "The Novel Démeuble" to both critic and youthful author. It is not at all disparaging to Miss Cather to suspect that Camille McCole is unwarrantedly sanguine about the results his cure would bring about. Miss Cather's doctrine is sound, but sound doctrine is not palatable to all alike.

Harry Hartwick, among other critics, realizes that Miss Cather has embodied her proposed ideal in her writings. He remarks of her work that

The principle of selection, so central in humanism and so foreign to naturalism, has been carried in her novels even farther than in Howells, James, or Wharton. 9

None the less, he further observes, she does not allow her
art to be bound down to the "careful symmetry that James urged and Edith Wharton practices."

Miss Cather attains the simplification of her material not only by the rejection of the non-essential details of a story or characterization, but by a more subtle technique, which consists of making a definite desired impression without actually stating the thought in print. This last is so prominent in her novels that we may profitably devote the following section of this chapter to it. Chapters 3 and 4 will form a unit, dealing progressively with the principle of selection; each time more positively.

The second principle, or more correctly co-principle, of Miss Cather's literary code, may now be tersely stated in her own words: "Art should simplify!"

II. The Unprinted Overtone

Frequently while reading one of Miss Cather's novels we realize that she has conveyed an impression about one of her characters, or, more often, that we understand that some significant action has occurred; yet all the while this is not explicitly on the printed page. Examples of this will be given in the next or second part of the thesis. What she says of Katherine Mansfield in high praise is eminently
verified in her own stories. The passage also indicates her understanding of that which may be styled, for lack of a more appropriate term, the "principle of suggestion."

She communicates vastly more than she actually writes. One goes back and runs through the pages to find the text which made one know certain things about Linda or Burnell or Beryl, and the text is not there—-but something was there, all the same---is there, though no typesetter will ever set it. It is the overtone, which is too fine for the printing press and comes through without it, that makes one know that this writer had something of the gift which is one of the rarest things in writing, and quite the most precious. 10

Here we not only discover Miss Cather's understanding of "suggestion"; but more important still, we learn quite clearly her estimation of this gift so seldom found among writers. There is no one who will deny that Miss Cather possesses this "rarest" of endowments; nor will it be difficult to exemplify its preëminence in her work when the proper time comes. The radical difference between the results attained by this artistic procedure and the effect produced by homely literalness is surely self-evident to any intelligent reader. Since we are speaking exclusively of creative writing, it might be well to explain, in the words of "The Novel Démeuble," the significance in this context of the word "create." "Whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there---that, one might say, is created." 11 This explanation has an arresting implication. In a very definite sense, it is the reader, not the author alone, who co-operates
in this creative act. It is he who feels the presence of
the thing not named, dependent as he may be upon the author's
unprinted overtone. Thus, something is required of the
reader in order to complete the author's vision. This co-
creation is less subtle in the case of the playwright and the
actor and is usually taken for granted. When one reads a
play in private, there devolves upon him not alone the task
of lector, but similarly of actor, if the drama is to produce
its fullest effect. Readers of fiction are not always aware
that they too are, in one sense, creative artists. Their
talent may be paralyzed by constant inactivity/due, no doubt,
to the modern novelists' refusal to permit their audience a
share in the creative process. Exclusive photographic liter-
alness in the novel precludes the reader's co-operation---
the author has left nothing to be grasped by the insight and
imagination of his reader.

As might be guessed, one who employs the co-creative
technique inherent in the "suggestive" method of writing,
is, though to a lesser degree, at the mercy of his reader
in much the same was as a composer is dependent on his
musicians, a playwright upon his actors. Mr. Knopf was aware
of this stumbling-block to the sales-value of a true artistic
work, when he said:

You cannot establish a Cather, a Hudson, an Unset, or a
Mann with the customary publishing ballyhoo. You cannot suddenly provide readers with finer sensibilities, deeper emotional reactions, or more cultivated minds than those which they already possess. My problem has been to find the comparatively few intelligent minds, ready and eager for great discoveries. 12

There is no wish to imply, for the present writer is incompetent to do so, that what has been said above about the power of creative suggestion and its attendant hardships upon an author's publisher, is true of all the writers listed by Mr. Knopf. Yet the best of Miss Cather's work does presuppose an intelligent alertness and some imagination on the part of her readers, if they are to make "great discoveries" in her novels. Emerson well defines the quality required of all readers of literature.

One must be an inventor to read well. As the proverb says, 'He that would bring home the wealth of the Indies, must carry out the wealth of the Indies.' There is then creative reading as well as creative writing. When the mind is braced by labor and invention, the page of whatever book we read becomes luminous with manifold allusion. Every sentence is doubly significant, and the sense of our author is as broad as the world. 13

If what Emerson demands of every reader of whatever works, be legitimate; how much more then is to be expected of the reader of books deliberately written according to a canon which presupposes him to be intelligently sympathetic, and not without imagination.

Mr. Porterfield's study of Miss Cather's work is parti-
cularly interesting, since it is the opinion of an Englishman rather than that of an American. It is to be regretted that she had published no novels beyond My Mortal Enemy at the time he made his critique. He notes that she expresses ideas or moods in her stories for which it is impossible to point out a text.

... Like all works of art which manage to create the illusion of life, they convey the idea of mysterious and unwieldy forces operating, obscurely perhaps, somewhere underneath the surface of things which it would be impossible probably to treat in a directer manner. 14

Miss Cather, when she requires a ruthless amputation of detail, artless conventions, and all matter extraneous to a story, adds the caution that the operation be performed delicately in such a way "that all that one has suppressed and cut away is there to the reader's consciousness as much as if it were in type on the page." 15 Her purpose is not to produce the naked skeleton of a story or character; rather, after giving sufficient hints and suggestions to her reader, she allows him to aid her in clothing the character, and in realizing the fine shades in the actualization of the plot. This dependence of Miss Cather upon the creative reading of her work implies no imperfection on her part; yet it does run the risk of making her books less popular. This sacrifice she must make to her art. She, as all artists, no matter what their medium of expression, cares not at all for the
plaudits of those who lack the sympathetic creative intelligence necessary for an appreciation of her fiction. Still, it would be a mistake to understand these remarks as inferring that Miss Cather writes for an isolated esoteric clique. The numerous editions into which her works have run, as also the many translations of them, disproves such an impression.

Before passing on to the next chapter, where we will deal with the implication of Miss Cather's definition of "realism" as an attitude of the writer assumed toward his story and its characters, we may cite her own words to clarify what she means by "the thing created" on the page independently of printers' ink.

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. 16

We are now prepared to comprehend the third rule of Miss Cather's literary decalogue, which is virtually contained in the quotation immediately above. The principle of suggestion in creative writing may be formulated as follows:

A writer must convey impressions of characters, plot, action, and moods, for which the reader can find no explicit text.
Footnotes

I.

2. Idem.
3. Idem.
4. Ibid., p. 8.
6. Ibid., p. 44.
8. Idem.

II.

Chapter 5.

Realism: An Attitude of Mind . . .

As we have already made abundantly clear, Miss Cather denies, both in theory and practice, that artistic realism asserts itself in the cataloguing of material objects, in the vivisection of men's minds, much less in a laboratory study of their sensitive reactions. What then does the word signify for her? We can do no better than permit her to explain it for herself.

But is not realism, more than anything else, an attitude of mind on the part of the writer toward his material, a vague indication of the sympathy and candour with which he accepts, rather than chooses, his theme? First, it is evident that for Miss Cather realism is not merely an external cloak in which a story, whatever its inherent worth, may be dressed. This is saying no more, however, than what was mentioned previously. Realism is an attitude of mind on the part of the writer, which leads to a certain passivity in his relationship to the multitudinous material, apt for fiction, which lies in the world about him. Miss Cather believes that one portion of this vast potential stuff of fiction is suited to her experience and talent. With this alone can she produce work which rings true, which is not artificial. Other fields, she surrenders to those who are fitted to cultivate them. She knows her limitations.
her realism is recognized in her open, sympathetic acceptance of her inheritance. Some critics consider her talents limited, because she exercises them upon a definite theme. Perhaps they are; yet only the greatest genius can claim the whole world as vassal to his lordly pen—Shakespeare might make such a boast; for most writers it is stupid presumption. How much better it is to be well-nigh perfect within a certain range, than to spread one's talents thin in an attempt to cover vast territory beyond one's capabilities. In her essay on Miss Jewett, Miss Cather makes this pertinent observation.

To note an artist's limitations is but to define his talent. * A reporter can write equally well about everything that is presented to his view, but a creative writer can do his best work only with what lies within the range and character of his deepest sympathies. 2

Such a wise acceptance of one's limitations is the candor Miss Cather associates with realism. This realism may imply

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* Mr. Footman's article mentioned above is built around this sentence. He notes that the word "genius" was used in the Preface to The Best Short Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett and changed to "talent" in Not Under Forty. His paper then proceeds with this introductory paragraph.

The range of this investigation is set by Willa Cather's statement: 'To note an artist's limitations is but to define his genius.' Miss Cather herself has three important limitations: (1) her relations to the symbols of authority, (2) her use of devotion, and (3) her style. These limitations overlap, and the treatment of them does so likewise, since it is obviously impossible to force them into rigid compartments and keep them there. The nature and importance of these limitations are explained.
imperfection in the artist, but it likewise indicates an
honesty productive of finer work within a more or less limit-
ed scope. Realism, since it involves an acceptance rather
than a choice of a theme, presupposes that every author has
his peculiar material for which he ought to be grateful; to
yearn for the fleshpots of Egypt is not only foolish, but
disastrous.

Miss Cather's first novel, Alexander's Bridge, does not
treat of the characters and scene which she now knows to be
the valid subject-matter of her pellucid pen. "The people
and places of the story interested me intensely at the time
it was written, because they were new to me and were in them-
selves attractive." 3 It was not until she had finished 0

more or less in turn, after which they are used in an
attempt to delimit the nature of Willa Cather's genius.
(op. cit., p. 123.)

Mr. Footman's article must be read in full for any satis-
factory understanding of it. His theoretical interpretation
of Miss Cather is doubly difficult, for it is based on yet
more debatable opinions on the present social set-up and upon
philosophical views too unorthodox to be grasped (much less
accepted) by the present writer. Mr. Footman seems to be
charging Miss Cather of being an Escapist (see chapter 7),
though the word is never used. At least, his talk about Miss
Cather's sense of values being "individualistic" as opposed
to "communal" smacks of the escapist debate. The article is
extremely interesting when viewed in conjunction with this
thesis (not that it lacks an independent interest) because
of the diverse interpretation placed upon identical passages
of Miss Cather's critical writings. Like two trains rushing
full-steam ahead toward each other, we do not clash simply
because we are on different tracks.
Pioneers!, that she was able to distinguish her own material from that which, in her inexperience, she would like to have made her own. From *Pioneers!* on to *Lucy Gayheart*, Miss Cather is a realist in the sense in which she understands that multicolored word. It is true, that in some novels, she abandons the Nebraska prairies so spontaneously associated with her name; yet never does she revert to material akin to that which drew her to write the experimental novel, Alexander's Bridge.* In *A Lost Lady*, the Western scene is considered by some as accidental to the story; the moral disintegration of Marian Forrester is not essentially connected with the fact that it took place in a railroad center on the Nebraska frontier. Still, is the story, in its deeper signification, concerned only with the frailty of one charming woman; or is Marian Forrester symbolic in Miss Cather's mind of the passing of the sturdy, self-reliant spirit of the first pioneers? If this last interpretation be asserted, * then the novel remains within what Miss Cather considers her legitimate scope. Even in the case of *Shadows on the Rock*, she is once more writing of the struggle of the pioneer with his unfamiliar environment. There is a vast difference

*Alexander's Bridge was recently paid the doubtful compliment of being offered as a collector's item; Philip C. Duschines of New York considered $50 for a first edition of the novel an irresistible bargain.

between Antonia and Cécile; always they have this in common none the less: both are striving to accommodate themselves to a new life, a pioneer life, different, yes, in each case, yet demanding of each girl a stout idealism and considerable pluck.

Miss Cather further explains what she means when she says a writer must accept a story, rather than choose it. The following passage points out, as well, how we are to interpret that "certain passivity" an author must have toward his material. This passivity must not be misunderstood. It means chiefly the willingness on the part of the writer to fashion his story in just that way that it has "formed itself inevitably, in his mind." Miss Cather here is relating the change which took place between her writing of Alexander's Bridge and all the novels which followed it.

There is a time in a writer's development when his 'life line' and the line of his personal endeavor meet. This may come early or late, but after it occurs his work is never quite the same. After he has once or twice done a story that formed itself inevitably in his mind,* he will not often turn to building of external stories again. The inner feeling produces for him a deeper excitement than the thrill of novelty or the glitter of the passing show. 3

* An author writing a story, according to Mr. Footman, "as it inevitably forms itself" in his mind, is doing what is tantamount to producing a novel without planning it. There is some truth in Mr. Footman's views; yet what Miss Cather proposes does not preclude some planning before the inevitable
The explanation of the statement that a writer's "life line" and his "line of personal endeavor" must meet at some period of his creative work seems to be this. Sooner or later, an author will produce stories built out of his own material, that with which he has always been most familiar, that which is his by personal experience, that which has constituted part of his daily life----his "life line." Until he knows better, he may write of topics foreign to his deeper, more fundamental experience (as Miss Cather did in Alexander's Bridge), but eventually like the Prodigal, he will return home to honor his native inheritance. Nor will he ever again be content with superficiality or artificiality in the work he does; he will not invent, rather will he be faithful to the story which comes to him as an intuitive inspiration.

Sarah Orne Jewett prophesied to Miss Cather many years ago: "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." This advice, Miss Cather maintains, was one of the few helpful hints ever given her by an older, more experienced writer. Nor did she long hesitate to write of her own country; she turned to her own material without at first realizing that formation of the story, nor is all plan to be eschewed after a writer has received his "intuitive flash" of enlightenment. She merely says he is not likely to turn again to external stories.
she had "been working with it from the beginning---by living it." 3 Once a writer has recognized his proper theme, the element of choice in his work is largely diminished. His story---well,

It seems to be there of itself, already moulded. If he tries to meddle with its vague outline, to twist it into some categorical shape, above all if he tries to adapt or modify its mood, he destroys its value. 3

He may now safely ignore "literary devices"; rather must he depend on intuition or instinct in shaping his tale. He may always debate "as regards mechanical details"; may deliberate concerning the most "effective presentation";

about the essential matter of his story he cannot argue this way or that; he has seen it, has been enlightened about it in flashes that are as unreasoning, often as unreasonable, as life itself. 3

We may now more readily comprehend what Miss Cather implies in her definition of realism as a certain attitude a writer takes toward his material. Her final remark on the relationship existing between the author and the unformed stuff which he molds into lasting shapes, may well end this aspect of the discussion.

If he achieves anything noble, anything enduring, it must be by giving himself absolutely to his material. And this gift of sympathy is his great gift; it is the fine thing that alone can make his work fine. 4
Percy Holmes Boynton feels that Miss Cather "strayed from the paths in which she treads with a sure foot," when she shipped Claude across the ocean to fight in the World War. He asserts that she wandered further still in A Lost Lady, though this interpretation is not necessarily accurate as has been said above. He hopes she will find her way back to the "elemental people whom she really knows." He urges her to be an escapist (though today she is stigmatized as one with the deepest reproach); let the less talented dabble with contemporary events and problems. It is doubtful if she ever forsook her own material in any extended manner; however, presuming momentarily with Boynton that she did abandon her true field, then surely we may agree with him that,

She may well return to her old ambition, and say once more of the prairie lands: Prinms ego in patriam mecum deducam Musam. 5 *

It might be interesting to observe in passing, that Thomas Whipple judges that in A Lost Lady Miss Cather achieved "a rigorous perfection of form for which there is no word but classic." On the other hand, Boynton believes that "in A Lost Lady Miss Cather loses her bearings altogether." Then swinging back to the opposite opinion,

*Cf. My Antonia, p. 299.
Elizabeth Sergeant considers this novel Miss Cather's masterpiece, "a novel whose disillusions are full of illusion." For Porterfield it is the "culminating product of an unique and frugal talent which, indeed, borders at times closely on genius." Rapin retorts that it is neither "her most perfect book, nor her most important." This is a sample of the divergence of opinion in the criticism of Miss Cather's fiction.

It is so evident from reading her works that Miss Cather looks upon the West, especially Nebraska and the countryside round about Red Cloud where she lived as a girl, as her own peculiar subject matter, that critics would be blind not to notice this fact. Porterfield clearly enunciates a general truth when he says that "her talent has had its nourishment and inspiration wholly in that section of the American scene which forms the subject of her novels." 6 Perhaps, some distinction would have to be made to bring My Mortal Enemy and Shadows on the Rock under this generalization; however, despite the changed locale, the latter story is thought by many to be her masterpiece. Even in this instance she had first-hand knowledge* of Quebec before she attempted to incorporate its ancient traditions in an artistic production.

*In her letter to the Commonweal explaining Death Comes for the Archbishop, Miss Cather writes: "Knowledge that one hasn't got first-hand is a dangerous thing for a writer, it comes too easily!"
None the less, the West is more truly her home. She relates how she has travelled through all kinds of country, how much she admires each. She even tried to live in France, but homesickness overcame her and she quickly returned to her own wheat country. "It's a queer thing about the flat country---it takes hold of you, or it leaves you perfectly cold." 7 Others prefer their country more furnished, "like a German Christmas card." With Miss Cather it is different.

But when I strike the open plains something happens, I'm home. I breathe differently. That love of great spaces, of rolling open country like the sea,---it's the grand passion of my life. I tried for years to get over it. I've stopped trying; it's incurable. 7

Little wonder is it, then, if Miss Cather's incurable passion finds permanent artistic expression in her novels.

Miss Cather's definition of realism logically leads to a study of her subject-matter and her personal attitude toward it, whether in actual life or in the fiction she has created. To sum up, we may once more state a canon of her literary method.

A writer, usually, must find his own material by a more or less extended period of experimentation. Once he has discovered it, he must give himself to it wholeheartedly; never again must he give way to artificiality in structure or characterization; rather must he come to depend on the
intuitive flashes by which his story inevitably forms itself within his mind.
Footnotes

2. -----, "Miss Jewett." Not Under Forty, p. 31.
   (Italics not in original.)
7. Alfred A. Knopf, publisher, Willa Cather (New York:
   Alfred A. Knopf, [c. August, 1935]). Note: This is
   a 30 page pamphlet.
Chapter 6.

The Unobtrusive Writer

In the introductory paragraph of "The Novel Demeublé" quoted at the beginning of this paper, Miss Cather observes (surely with a certain bewildered disdain) that many people do not hold it as absolutely necessary that a novelist be able to write the English language. Certainly, this qualification may be presumed to be essential despite the opinion of any one to the contrary. Regardless of the sublimity, the inherent worth of an author's subject-matter, if his thoughts are not expressed in language fundamentally correct and adequate to portray his ideas, obviously his work cannot be adjudged literature. This ought to be evident to any one; if it is not, further discussion on the point would be as futile as a round of golf played with clubs with rubber shafts. Miss Cather's prose is English par excellence. Not one of her critics dares to deny this. What, then, is Miss Cather's mind regarding the use she will make of the medium of her art? The reply to this question might well include a treatment of that intangible quality of an author called style; however, style is not the precise subject of this chapter. It is rather the tools of style which are to be discussed—the actual writing. A knowledge of Miss Cather's style must be gained by individual reading of her novels, not once but
many times. Her style is an attribute more sensed or felt than understood; yet always it is a source of exquisite pleasure difficult to describe. There is no need for a separate section on her style, since this quality of her fiction is constantly mentioned throughout the thesis, though not always in explicit terms.

Just as Miss Cather was unduly self-conscious regarding the theme of *Alexander's Bridge*, because her latent artistic sense was vaguely aware of the story's artificiality, so, too, she admits that she "was still more preoccupied with trying to write well than with anything else." ¹ It was at this period of her career that she so greatly admired Henry James. She knows that naturalness in writing is the result of much experience and she confesses that as an author she was as yet untutored by time. While writing *One of Ours* she formulated more determined aims.

What I always want to do is to make the writing count for less and less and the people for more. ... Mere cleverness must go. I'd like the writing to be so lost in the object that it doesn't exist for the reader. ²

Miss Cather has neither accomplished her aims in this respect, nor has she failed of her ultimate purpose. She has attained to a perfection higher than she hoped, yet not to that virtue for which she strove. She leveled her shaft at a lower star, and miraculously struck a higher. It is a common experience
among the readers of such stories as "Neighbor Rosicky" (Obscure Destinies), Lucy Gayheart, and particularly the life of Archbishop Latour and the vision of Shadows on the Rock, that they are definitely aware of Miss Cather's clear and beautiful writing; that they enjoy her style equally as much as they find pleasure in her story. She failed to make her writing "count for less and less." None the less, though it may seem a paradox to her, she has by this felix culpa stressed the importance of her characters. The reader's twofold enjoyment is so blended by her artistry that the rhythm and color of her prose, the simplicity of her diction, qualities capable of being cherished for themselves, tend only to heighten the reality of her characters. How this occurs is the mystery of her creative genius. Frank Kendon in John O'London's Weekly shrewdly indicates that Miss Cather accomplishes so much because of her

instinctive and loving observation of persons, and by sound, solid prose---prose that does not try to be anything more than the clear medium in which the story appears. I am inclined to compare her with Hardy, chiefly because her eye is always on the people and not on the book. 3

Miss Cather understands that for every author there must "be a long period of writing for writing's sake." 4

No doubt, her stories about her childhood friends among the Nebraska farmers, which she wrote while studying at the University of Nebraska, were the first product of this re-
quired apprenticeship. So, too, The Troll Garden as well as the tale of a "great man who fissured and fell" 5 belong to this formative period of experimentation with the medium of her craft. By the time Miss Cather had finished the last page of the manuscript copy of O Pioneers!, there was little doubt in her mind that the "writing should count for less and less." Her years as an English teacher in a Pittsburg high school, as also the four years she worked as managing editor of McClure's Magazine, were surely a training season productive of assured ease and confidence in her powers as a writer. She resigned her editorial work to be free to write Alexander's Bridge; from this time on her life has been entirely devoted to her work as a novelist, in which she has shown a constant development and maturing of her native endowments. That her writing is, however, even now the result of careful and precise effort seems to be implied in her observation that "it is only the practiced hand that can make the natural gesture,---and the practiced hand has often to grope its way." 6

This chapter may well be brief, for Miss Cather has been comparatively taciturn regarding the point in question. She wants her writing always to remain in the background of the reader's attention; it must never cease to be a means and thus obtrude itself as a self-sufficient end unrelated to
the characters and story. Preciosity is a characteristic foreign to her prose. Miss Cather is an exceptionally gifted artist working with a tool which by strenuous self-discipline she has wrought to the finest temper of perfection. So equipped, we should be surprised were her novels other than they are.
Footnotes

2. Idem.
Chapter 7.

Escapism

Give the people a new word, and they think they have a new fact. The pretentious-sounding noun, Escapist, isn't even new.  

In this final chapter of Forethoughts, we are to deal with a topic and a term not explicitly mentioned in "The Novel Demeublé"; it is a subject, however, which flows as freely from this essay as water from a spring in April. Recall the latter section of the initial chapter of this thesis where we discussed the critics who contemn Miss Cather as a traitor to her profession, as an escapist. Miss Cather is avowedly an escapist; her entire theory of writing forces her to play this part. Her relation to her subject-matter, her principle of selection, her exalted conception of her rôle as an artist; all her ideals as enunciated in "The Novel Demeublé" logically lead her up the path of Escape. She walks along it willingly, even with determination, despite the opprobrium she brings down upon her head. An artist today is scorned as an escapist, if he does not enthusiastically believe that his "first concern should be to cry out against social injustice." Miss Cather does not cry out in protest against contemporary evils and is, therefore, an
escapist in this limited sense. However, it must be remarked that as an escapist she does not withdraw herself from reality. She is definitely a realist as has been explained above in chapter 5. In her works she reveals the inner nature of men and women, without recourse to sensationalism, without photographic reproduction, but ever within the boundaries of true art. In other words, Miss Cather writes in accord with her démeublé doctrine. She eschews discussion of modern technical social problems, because she finds extreme difficulty in selecting the universal aspects of them. Her more recent critics would have her prostitute her creative fiction by making it a mere instrument of doctrinaire propaganda. Escapist she is, in her refusal to comply with their demands. She is, moreover, an escapist in the much more fundamental sense of one who wishes to depict only the enduring aspects of life, to write of subjects deep-rooted in human nature. Of such matter she has tried to mold her fiction.

Harlan Hatcher's remark that Miss Cather is "the most talented of our escapists" has been cited above. He insinuates the same charge by his observation that "she was a fine novelist who did not attack too strongly or disturb the minds of nice people too deeply." 3 "'Face the stern realities, you skulking Escapist,' the Radical editor cries." 4 It is, to be sure, only the left-wing editors and critics who demand
that the novelist and poet be subservient to their social reforms. Their criticism is not a literary estimate of an author; it is a moral judgement upon him. They remonstrate that "the one really important thing for every individual is his citizenship, his loyalty to a cause---which, of course, always means his loyalty to a party"—perhaps, in this instance, the Communist Party. Ultimately, this serious verdict against Miss Cather offered by a minority in the entire critical jury is rooted in a social theory which states that all men and especially the creative artist must pledge their time and talents to reform and naught else. It is assumed that the creative artist is capable of aiding the "cause" by using his own peculiar medium of expression; and that art and social reform can skip hand in hand down the lane like happy children without risk of destroying each other. Miss Cather emphatically denies the actuality, even the possibility, of such an unnatural union. For her the artist and the social worker labor in different worlds and rarely do these two vocations find a sincere, objective, and selfless advocate in one and the same person. The wellsprings of art and of the ardent desire to bring about needed reform are not found in the same human instinct. "The major arts (poetry, painting, architecture, sculpture, music) have a pedigree all their own."6 Practical experience and history demonstrate that the true artist is often temperamente
unfit for the admirable yet none the less prosaic tasks of the reformer; "usually the poor Escapist has so little cleverness when he struggles with stern realities." Artists, escapists, in the past

were valuable, like powerful stimulants, only when they were left out of the social and industrial routine which goes on every day all over the world. Industrial life has to work out its own problems.8

Miss Cather does not deny that a creative artist's work may not stir up responsible men to a realization of their social obligations, that he may picture conditions in his fiction (as Dickens did) which cry to heaven for amelioration. He may even "cry out against social injustice"; in fact, she asserts that "writers have always done" this. Still, if this is an author's primary objective, he is not likely to produce great creative literature in the field of fiction. Fiction is not a medium through which an honest and practical reformer seeks to draw attention to the urgent correction of contemporary industrial evils. Rather, he will turn to the pamphlet, to the magazine, where his subject may be fully and clearly laid before those in a position to help. "Why do the propagandists use a vehicle which they consider rickety and obsolete, to convey a message which they believe all-important?"9 Miss Cather questions the sincerity of the propagandist-novelist; he is (usually) neither a wholehearted reformer, nor
a true artist. Where the exception occurs it "comes not only from a superior endowment, but from a deeper purpose, and a willingness to pay the cost instead of being paid for it." Were we forced to judge Hilaire Belloc's crusade against the evils of English high finance, governmental duplicity and consequent crime, by his novel Mr. Petre alone, surely we should class him as an ineffective social dilettante. Mr. Belloc wrote Mr. Petre, one suspects, quite aware that it was neither good fiction, nor good propaganda; no more than a harmless lark for his facile pen. The failure of Mr. Petre, Miss Cather would hold, will be the lot of all who attempt to mix up creative fiction with honest social reform or politics; just as oil and water cannot be permanently forced into a natural solution, neither can these two worthy pursuits be combined---the catalytic agent must first be found. Some critics who scorn the class of novelists to which Miss Cather belongs for being escapists are open or covert Communists, who endeavor to employ the Trojan-horse stratagem even in the novel in order to propagate their social theories. It is mere clever tactics on their part to camouflage their intentions behind a false critical theory. Whatever be the root of this social-literary criticism, Miss Cather is not fooled by it.

Now, my dear Mr. Williams, I have already said too much about a fleeting fashion which perhaps is not to be taken seriously at all. Mary Colum remarked in the Yale Review:
'The people who talk about art of escape simply know nothing about art at all.' At all, I echo! 11

Mr. Chesterton notes that it is only in the comparatively recent times of social unrest that "each writer has been expected to write a new theory of all things, or draw a new, wild map of the world." 12 Such was not the creative artist's task in the past, nor is it his today.

* * * * *

The first part of this paper, Forethoughts, is now complete. What have we learned? Perhaps, nothing startlingly new; still, Miss Cather's critical theory, simple as it is, ought to stand out in clearer view than previously. We know what is meant by her démeublé technique. When she insists that art should simplify, we understand her viewpoint. Her principle of suggestion in creative writing is clear to us; when she speaks of a writer having his own material, we quickly associate this with her definition of Realism. We will know that when Miss Cather is called an unobtrusive writer, she bows in recognition of the compliment. Finally, we may smile indulgently at critics who prate tautologically about the art of Escape.
Footnotes

2. Idem. (Italics not in original.)
5. Idem.
8. Idem.
9. Ibid., p. 678.
10. Idem.
11. Ibid., p. 679.
Part II.

EVENTUALITIES
Chapter 8.

Principles in Action: A Survey

It is the purpose of this part, Eventualities, to indicate the degree of success (or failure) Miss Cather had in applying her literary code to the products of her pen. It was inevitable that this aspect of the thesis should creep unnoticed into the foregoing pages; however, needless repetition will be avoided here even at the expense of formal symmetry. Some sort of limitation of the possible subject-matter of this section must obviously be made. The plan chosen is simple and, it would seem, adequate. Three of Miss Cather's novels, each roughly representative of one of the natural divisions into which her novels fall, whether viewed chronologically or according to types, have been selected for individual study. Her other works will be reviewed more briefly in this survey chapter. These latter books will be taken successively in the order of publication. Miss Cather's volumes of short stories, which are beyond the determined scope of this paper, will be mentioned, if at all, only incidentally. One observation, none the less, might well be made regarding her early story, "Paul's Case." This superb example of the popular psychological tale appeared in 1905 both in Miss Cather's first prose volume, The Troll Garden, and in McClure's Magazine. Periodically, this story has re-
appeared in anthologies perhaps a dozen times; so that there is danger of its being thought of as typical of Miss Cather's work. It is a gem for anthologists, who delight in gathering stories according to accepted types; yet "Paul's Case" is as unlike her work as Red Cloud, Nebraska, is unlike the New York of The Song of the Lark. Miss Cather seldom approaches her characters in the guise of a psychoanalyst as she did in Paul's exotic case; rather she prefers that her characters reveal themselves through their own actions and words or those of other people in the novels. In this regard, as likewise in her writing, she is resolved to remain backstage. One who reads "Paul's Case" alone would gather an utterly false opinion of Miss Cather's technique. We may now say a few words concerning each of those novels not treated fully in separate chapters.

Alexander's Bridge
1912

Alexander's Bridge has already in this paper born the weight of too many critical judgements simply because it was written in Miss Cather's experimental period and served as an apt basis of comparison. Enough has been said about its unfamiliar locale, its apparent artificiality, its violation of Miss Cather's later doctrine regarding her proper material, her understanding of Realism. Despite all this the story is readable and interesting. Lest the bridge be overburdened
and collapse before its fated moment, we must pass on.

0  Pioneers!

1913

Now Miss Cather is returned to her own country. In her own realistic manner, she wrote the story as she found it inevitably formed within her mind. She tells her story chiefly by painting little scenes, which of themselves may seem to be of small significance, but which never the less throw variegated light on the characters she wishes us to know. It is through such incidents that we discover Alexandra to be the guide of her family, the foreseeing and practical pioneer, the self-forgetful and enduring sister of hard-headed and unenergetic farmer-brothers. A true pioneer, she loved the prairie as she found it, yet she left her part of the countryside beautifully improved and wonderfully productive. Miss Cather's writing in this early novel is clear and simple as she always wanted it to be, though she has not so soon attained to that beauty and conciseness for which she is so justly praised in later years. She wrote the novel entirely for herself, she tells us, and enjoyed her work far more than in the preceding year when she produced Alexander's Bridge, for now she wrote in a joyous mood of reminiscence.

Here there was no arranging or 'invention'; everything was spontaneous and took its own place, right or wrong. This was like taking a ride through a familiar country
on a horse that knew the way, on a fine morning when you felt like riding. The other was like riding in a park, with someone not altogether congenial, to whom you had to be talking all the time. 1

Thomas Whipple thinks _O Pioneers!_ is not focused and that Miss Cather, contrary to her mature theory of writing, indulges in "much description and elucidation of character." 2 That both views seem justified merely indicates that her powers followed a natural mode of development, for Mr. Whipple admits that in _My Antonia_ these two faults are corrected in great part. Grant Overton speaks of this novel as "an epic of the Western plains"; and calls it "cyclic, that is it sums up an era." 3 He stresses the narrative's historical value, a quality Miss Cather likely attained unconsciously, solely because she has always been an honest writer, who spoke of things she knew from intimate personal contact. Perhaps half of her work is signalized by this broad historical character. Harry Hartwick believes _O Pioneers!_ is loosely built. This probably means much the same as saying that it lacks focus; doubtless, Miss Cather had still to strive for simplicity of theme in its most perfect form. Rene Rapin sums up this criticism with the remark that it is "no wonder if it turned out to be less powerful and less perfect as a whole that in its component parts"; 4 since it is of the very nature of the story to be episodic. _O Pioneers!_ holds the breath and spirit
of the West within its pages and gives high promise of the perfect fulfillment of Miss Cather's literary principles in the novels which are to succeed it.

The Song of the Lark
1915

The Song of the Lark is Miss Cather's longest story and, perhaps, for this reason not one of her best novels as it stands in its present form. Elizabeth Sergeant refers to this when she observes that "where she has tried for fullness of life, as in The Song of the Lark, she has failed in large measure." 5 In after years, Miss Cather realized her failure and agreed that Heineman had shown true critical acumen when he refused this book for publication. In the Colophon, she acutely observes, in the spirit of her démeuble doctrine, that too much detail is apt, like any other form of extravagance, to become slightly vulgar; and it quite destroyed in a book a very satisfying element analogous to what painters call 'composition.' 6

Harry Hartwick wagers that if this novel were reduced by a third, as Miss Cather has indicated she would like it to be, it would be one of the finest in our language. Apart from the superb craftsmanship of the forthcoming Authograph Edition of her works by the Houghton Mifflin Company, this definitive edition will have the additional critical value of giving us a substantially revised version of The Song of the Lark.
Of all her eleven novels, this one alone she judged ought to be recast. The majority of critics assert the wisdom of her decision. It will be extremely interesting to see in just what manner Miss Cather proceeded in this rewriting of Thea's story. Unfortunately the new volume cannot be obtained as yet. We must admit that Miss Cather did not simplify this novel to the extent she now considers necessary. In great part, the story does not deal with the West where she is most at home and at ease; however, the theme of struggle for the development and recognition of artistic talent is prominent in many of her short stories and has achieved its most beautiful expression in her last novel, Lucy Gayheart. Yet, one feels that Percy Boynton does not miss the mark when he states that of her early novels this one "is perhaps the least effective for the very reason that it is most explicitly given over to the struggle for artistic self-fulfilment." 7 In the fourth part of the book, when Miss Cather takes Thea and Fred Ottenburg from the depressive Chicago atmosphere out into the inspiring Arizona cañons, to the ruins of "The Ancient People," then it is that we sense that she has once more been set aflame by the love of her cherished patria.

Because Miss Cather did not apply fully her démeublé method to the composition of the "old" Song of the Lark, she seems to fall shorter in the realization of her ideals as
explained in Forethoughts, than she does in any other novel with the exception, naturally, of Alexander's Bridge. We may safely assert that this harsh verdict will be reversed by a superior court so soon as the "new" Song of the Lark is placed before the jury as hitherto unreviewed evidence.

One of Ours
1922

For the present we will pass over My Antonia, leaving it for fuller consideration later on and turn our attention to Miss Cather's only novel to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize in Letters, (1923). This book, according to the general run of criticism, is like a spirited child: very, very good most of the time, but extremely bad on occasions. As fond parents do, we may try to overlook the moments of waywardness, though we could wish that they did not call for the closing of one eye. Until Claude is shipped over to France and the World War on the Anchises, his story gives the highest hopes of exemplifying Miss Cather's literary ideals; as it is, the book fails her at the last moment. The Western scene is concisely and beautifully painted without intruding itself unduly into the foreground. The novel has this characteristic in common with A Lost Lady, in which the locale is of even less importance. Claude is a youthful idealist who thirsts for sympathetic understanding; he is extremely sensitive, naturally pure, honest, hard-working, proud. He was at one and the same
time jealous and spontaneously admiring of his friends, the Erlichs and, especially, Gerhardt, whom he met in France. Urged on by her seemingly sincere devotion to him during a mortal illness, Claude marries the one woman in the world with whom he certainly could never have an interchange of love and aspirations. His mistake is cruelly evident when the door is slammed in his face by Enid on their wedding night—"he had married a frigid woman, 'a crystal cup'*. 8 This consummately selfish woman deserts him in the name of religion; sails as a missionary to China and returns no more to the story. Just when Claude is at the breaking point in his despair and disillusion, the United States calls him to support her, and he finds, in the defence of Democracy, an ideal and a new hope. Fortunately he dies bravely on the fields of France never once aware of the futility of this war to end wars.

When the story sails to France, one instinctively knows that Miss Cather has momentarily ceased, in a sense, to be an Escapist. She is realistic surely, but her realism here is of the common sort; it is not the peculiar realism of "The

Novel Démeuble," which inspires most of her other work. She is faithful enough to her démeuble technique; she writes as clearly as ever; she insinuates overtones both of plot and character, and creates a mood, which is sustained until Claude enters the War. Had she remained at home, her novel would have been almost perfect; as it is, it is disappointing. No doubt, she did not know what to do with Claude and merely took him to France, (where she had once tried to live herself), to conveniently dispose of him. The ending is as artificial as that of Alexander's Bridge. It is, none the less, difficult to agree with those who think Miss Cather was not "aware of the ironic pathos of Claude's death." She had developed his character to a point where he could only be miserable in this world. It is proof enough of the power of her characterization that we are relieved that Miss Cather swiftly sends him into the other world during one of his few moments of exaltation. Though the characterization is valid, yet the method is unfortunate in the latter part of One of Ours.

But here her Muse betrayed her a little. For when Claude's adventure took him to France, it dimmed before our eyes. The prairie farm was the centre where the War affected Willa Cather, and the image of Claude and his mother clinging together 'in the pale square of the west window, as the two natures in one person meet and cling in a fated hour' is one that will survive. For this woman has to touch life at first hand, in order to create it.
According to the cast of one's mind, a reader will see a subtle, yet well-defined, psychological unity knitting together the three books of The Professor's House, or he will fail to see it and will argue that no such coherence of parts exists in the novel. Tom Outland's colorful adventure (Book II.) pushes its way between the two sections of St. Peter's story and seems to destroy the unity of the novel. However, one thing is obvious; Miss Cather considered the book a novel and not a volume consisting of two distinct and unrelated stories. The thread which binds the three parts into one is not so obvious. Outland and Blake's discovery upon a high uninhabited mesa of an ancient Indian pueblo is real; so, too, is the friendship of these men full of the warmth of actuality—otherwise, where is the tragedy in their separation? And yet their adventure must in some way belong to Professor St. Peter, if unity is to dwell within the covers of this book. Tom Outland is dead. Outland's story is told only in retrospect. Dead also is St. Peter's youth and all it meant to him. Outland's life is a counterpart of St. Peter's in his twenties, and the Professor apes the phoenix and vicariously renews his youth in Tom. Whether the Professor's early manhood was similar to Outland's, we cannot know for certain; if it was, then Outland's life is but St.
Peter's in masquerade; if it was not, then Outland is the symbol of St. Peter's great and pathetic velliey; would that his youth had been as Tom's. Hence the bond which binds the adventure of St. Peter's brilliant student to St. Peter himself is a psychological tie, subtle to the point of being elusive. When this is said, it yet remains true that "Tom Outland's Story" may be read and enjoyed independently of its relation to the main theme of the novel, much in the same way in which Gulliver's Travels, which was Roddy's favorite book, may be traced without taking much notice of Swift's satire.

It is not difficult to agree with Stuart Sherman's estimate:

The Professor's House is a disturbingly beautiful book, full of meanings, full of intentions— I am sure that I have not caught them all. Everything in it has its own bright surface meaning. 10

And, as he implies, there are many subtle implications of plot and nuances of character. As in so many of her novels, (in fact, in nearly all of them,) Miss Cather employs here a material symbol, pregnant with meaningful associations; namely, the old house and the new. If ever Miss Cather wrote a story in which she might have been betrayed into violating her démeublé technique by an unbalanced literalness in presenting mental reactions, that story is The Professor's House. She did not fail; rather she has shown consummate insight
into the character of St. Peter; moreover, by suggestion and uncanny overtones, she lets us share her intuitional understanding of the Professor.

This novel, if read sympathetically, exemplifies the precepts of *Forethoughts* more clearly than any of the works already treated, *O Pioneers!* excepted; and there can be small doubt that *The Professor's House* is a most skillful and ingenious result of Miss Cather's principles in action. Though space in the text proper of this thesis may hardly be devoted to the debate, none the less, a most fascinating study might be made of the divergent critical opinions on this novel and particularly of the views on the status of the tale of the Blue Mesa. (Appendix A will supply further interesting estimates of the function of the Blue Mesa episode.)

*My Mortal Enemy*

1926

It seems surprising that so enterprising a publisher as Mr. Knopf has not offered, as a holiday gift to Miss Cather's numerous admirers, a twin, boxed edition of her two absorbing character studies, one of Marian Forrester, the other of Myra Henshawe. The books might well be read on successive evenings, so that one's memory of these totally different women may be alive and fresh when their life stories are compared. The
earlier volume, \textit{A Lost Lady}, which will be reviewed later, is not only the finer of the two, it is one of the most exquisite of all her novels. The domestic tragedy of the Henshawes falls into the background when too closely compared with the tragedy (for it is no less) of the Captain's charming wife. Yet \textit{My Mortal Enemy} is written with dramatic insight. Its condensation is a superb triumph of Miss Cather's demeuble ideal and gives the story a dramatic aroma apart from Myra's own selfish nostalgia for the footlights. Though we might be tempted to pass a prejudgement upon \textit{My Mortal Enemy} as not dealing with Miss Cather's true material, yet, the story once read makes us rejoice that Miss Cather pushed aside any \textit{noli tangere} thoughts she may have entertained concerning this study of a beautiful woman who was too proud to face comparative poverty and too blind to recognize the manly and loving character of her husband. The locale of the novel is not here of the essence of the story; it is the characters who constantly hold our attention. There is no plot. Myra's death upon "Glouster's" cliff is the climax and the end: the climax, because it portrays Myra's inconsiderate selfishness even in her last living act---cut the hearts of others as she may, she cannot resist dying an histrionic death. Her death is the end, because she has dominated the book from the start and, unlike the saintly Archbishop Latour, once gone from this world, she has no
power to influence it, for she had never been able to lift
the siege of her own mortal enemy.

Thomas Whipple speaks of the subtlety and power of My
Mortal Enemy, while Alexander Porterfield considers the
novelette

. . . quite as simple and tragic as that of A Lost Lady.
Similar, in fact, in theme and treatment, the story
lingers, like the other, in the mind, a definite and
haunting memory. . . . It is simple and arresting, it has
a fidelity which is the emanation of a rare perception,
and it has cadences for which we look in vain in almost
any other American novelist's prose. ll

Much that will be remarked concerning A Lost Lady and its
exemplification of Miss Cather's literary credo, will be valid
if applied as well to My Mortal Enemy, a story only less
perfect that that of the vivacious Marian. Simplification
could hardly be carried farther than here; while her medium
of expression has reached a level of perfection surpassed
only in individual scenes of her other novels, for example,
the episode "December Night."

Shadows on the Rock
1931

Due merely to personal bias, Shadows on the Rock has
been relegated to this survey chapter rather than Death Comes
for the Archbishop. Either novel would serve as an adequate
exemplification of the full realization of Miss Cather's
literary ideals. The narrative of the Southwest has been reserved for detailed study because of the subjective preference of the writer. It is unfortunately necessary that Shadows on the Rock be reviewed solely in passing; this, however, is not to be misinterpreted as a lack of appreciation of the high intrinsic merit of the book.

To comprehend Miss Cather's purpose in writing Shadows on the Rock, one must first study her letter to Governor Cross, one of the few critics who had sufficient insight to completely understand Miss Cather's motif in her picture of Quebec. She informs the Governor:

I tried, as you say, to state the mood and the viewpoint in the title. To me the rock of Quebec is not only a stronghold on which many strange figures have for a little time cast a shadow in the sun; it is the curious endurance of a kind of culture, narrow but definite. There another age persists. There, among the country people and the nuns, I caught something new to me; a kind of feeling about life and human fate that I could not accept, wholly, but which I could not but admire. It is hard to state that feeling in language; it was more like an old song, incomplete but uncorrupted, than like legend. The text was mainly anacolouthon, so to speak, but the meaning was clear. I took the incomplete air and tried to give it what would correspond to a sympathetic musical setting; tried to develop it into a prose composition not too conclusive, not too definite; a series of pictures remembered rather than experienced; a kind of thinking, a mental complexion inherited, left over from the past, lacking in robustness and full of pious resignation. 12

*This book was awarded the Prix Femina in France, 1932.*
No doubt, this is a strange procedure for a novelist. Recall what was pointed out earlier about the classification of Miss Cather's works. Most critics do not know whether this book is a novel or not, a difficulty readily comprehensible; yet those who are greatly troubled at being incapable of specifying its pedigree are, it would seem, needlessly disturbed. That this volume has been welcomed by high and low in the Church "as wholly and as sincerely Catholic in detail and in tone as a well-educated Catholic could make it," 13 is far less significant than the fact that Shadows on the Rock has been critically and popularly acclaimed as catholic in a much broader sense. There is deep foundation for each opinion, nor are the views even remotely self-exclusive. What Father Martindale said of one of Robert Hugh Benson's novels is equally true of Shadows on the Rock: "And it is full—like the world, where 'plots' are rare, but personalities abound—of 'characters'." 14 One does not soon forget Euclide Auclair or his patron, Count Frontenac; old Bishop Laval and his great kindness to the abandoned Jacques, son of "the woman they call La Grenouille"; nor the child Cécile Auclair, with all her precocious piety of a well-taught little French girl, will all her precocious tact and selflessness and steadfastness; 15 nor does one fail to remember so many of the characters who fill the book with a dominant sense of actuality.
No novel of hers surpasses this in its beauty of expression. She makes the most of her medium here; her démeuble technique can reach no clearer heights. In Shadows on the Rock we perceive

a sensitive use of words and a musically cadenced phrase, a free indulgence in description, a substitution of revery for analysis, and a multiplication of anecdote to satisfy her own narrative impulse and supply the reader with added lines and colors for the enrichment of her picture. 16

Oddly enough, it was this beautiful narrative which provoked the bitter escapist criticism previously discussed. The brave French émigrés, into whose lives we are carried by Miss Cather's magic spell, live, suffer, laugh and pray in a Quebec recreated so realistically that one could not today go to that city without seeing its old buildings and churches in terms of Miss Cather's paintings.

I think that Miss Cather's power of feeling and rendering beauty has never shown itself more superbly. Nothing in the book is more living than the magnificent pictures of the city on the rock above the great river, in many seasons, hours, weathers. The art of these passages is above praise. I believe that to many readers they will be the lasting impression made by the novel; as to others the enduring memory will be that of the human bravery seen afloat for a while on the mightier stream. 17

Lucy Gayheart

1935

To many who had nothing but the deepest admiration for Miss Cather as an author, because of their love for her Arch-
bishop and her faithful Apothecary in Shadows on the Rock, Lucy Gayheart came somewhat as a disappointment. The last paragraph of the New York Times review of the novel gives a fair account of the reaction to the book among many readers who had confidently expected something better than that which Miss Cather gave them.

One naturally regrets that Miss Cather did not choose to tell a story of wider implications, or one composed of elements that she had not fully utilized before, but the story she has told is done with all the distinction, all the quiet grace of style that have long marked her work.

One cannot dispel the impression that the beauty of form, of manner, in Lucy Gayheart is too exquisite for the slight story it clothes. Miss Cather did not consider Lucy's story insignificant—a point to be pondered. She lavished all her powers as an artist upon it. Perhaps, Miss Cather's very concept of realism led her to write Lucy's life in just that form it took when it first shaped itself in her mind; to have given more substance to the story might have meant no less than to resort to artificial construction in filling out the novel. This Miss Cather refuses to do. The story, the matter, is well within the scope of what no one denies is Miss Cather's legitimate province. J. Donald Adams adverts to Miss Cather's dictum, "art should simplify" and points out that "the principle is sound but hazardous"; moreover, he adds, logically enough, that the principle
has its obverse side; if you simplify, you must also intensify, for the act of selection will not of itself insure conviction and depth. These difficulties Miss Cather has admirably surmounted in 'Lucy Gayheart.' Her new novel is not an expansive reading of life; it has not the scope of a major work of fiction, but within the confines she has set for it her story achieves a rounded quality, a substance, that only a disciplined art could give.

Once more we may assert that Miss Cather has been guided by the démeuble approach to her story; moreover, Mr. Adams takes the witness chair to assure us that she has stood by her reiterated demand that "art should simplify." Book III. is more truly in the mood and style associated in our minds with Miss Cather's best work; and the entire novel has—to repeat the phrase of the defunct Literary Digest—"a beauty of phraseology unmatched in contemporary literature."

This ends the survey chapter. Its statements have been made almost entirely on authority, either personal or founded upon the opinions of critics—nothing has been proved. To prevent the justifiability here of the caustic comment, "gratis asseritur, gratis negatur," we will, in the next three chapters, turn to the novels themselves for proof of our assertions.
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<td>2. Thomas King Whipple, op. cit., p. 145.</td>
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<td>9. Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, op. cit., p. 270 (Italics not in original.)</td>
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<td>10. Stuart Sherman, op. cit., p. 35.</td>
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<td>12. Willa Cather, &quot;Willa Cather to Governor Cross.&quot; Saturday Review of Literature, October 17, 1932.</td>
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<td>17. Ethel Wallace Hawkins, loc. cit.</td>
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Chapter 9.

My Ántonia
1918

The story of Ántonia is a simple and forceful narrative. Its charm is the result, more than anything else, of the sympathy with which Miss Cather deals with the character study of Ántonia and of all those who played a part in her full life. We cannot but be infected by Miss Cather's partiality toward Ántonia. Ántonia herself has a way of drawing people to her even when she, like her mother, is stupidly and ignorantly headstrong, as happened when "Mrs Harling declared bitterly that she wished she had never let herself get fond of Ántonia." We, too, become as fond of Ántonia as Mrs. Harling; perhaps even, our attachment for her grows into something akin to Jim Burden's devotion; though neither Jim nor we are blind to the girl's faults. Ántonia's fascination alone would explain the power of the novel. Harlan Hatcher develops such an interpretation when he says of her that

She is one of the few heroines in modern fiction untouched by a longing for escape and social advancement. It is this self-reliant spirit of Ántonia, serene through long contact with the soil, which gives the novel its dignity and makes it unique in this period of the American novel.

The Nebraska prairie is so much a part of Ántonia's life that it becomes, in its influence upon her, almost as important as
her father, whom she dearly loves during his sad, brief life in the West; and whom, with childlike devotion, she idealizes despite his suicide's grave at the proposed crossroads. The prairie in all its seasonal variations of color and mood, its kindly warmth and bitter cold, is the frame containing the miraculously vivid portrait of Antonia; not a gaudy gilt frame, no, rather it is one so beautifully and delicately carved that without the masterpiece it encloses, it would yet deserve to hang in any gallery. This statement cannot be proved by quotation, for it is the impression derived from many passages taken collectively, the outcome of a cumulative artistry. Miss Cather has been faithful to the démeuble ideal even though the material investiture of her narrative is so much to the fore. Antonia in any other environment would not have been Jim Burden's and Mr. Shimerda's "My Antonia."

Separate descriptions of the pioneer country are concise enough and highly suggestive, as is that of Jim's first view of the land of his adventure:

If there was a road, I could not make it out in the faint starlight. There was nothing but land: not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made. 3

Or when next morning in the bright sunlight, Jim for the first time sees the prairie in full dress:

 Everywhere, as far as the eye could reach, there was nothing but rough, shaggy, red grass, most of it as tall as I. . . . As I looked about me I felt that the grass
was the country, as the water is the sea. The red of the grass made all the great prairie the color of wine-stains, or of certain seaweeds when they are first washed up. And there was so much motion in it; the whole country seemed, somehow, to be running. . . . More than anything else I felt motion in the landscape; in the fresh, easy-blowing morning wind, and in the earth itself, as if the shaggy grass were a sort of loose hide, and underneath it herds of wild buffalo were galloping, galloping.... 4

Miss Cather's description of the sunflowers that grew as tall as little trees and "made a gold ribbon across the prairie," and her legend to account for them, may seem simplicity to the point of artlessness, yet this is a false impression. This passage is capable of reviving vivid images in the mind of one who has jogged along one of those prairie roads that run about "like a wild thing." How much insight into the country do we gain by this démeuble observation on trees:

Trees were so rare in that country, and they had to make such a hard fight to grow, that we used to feel anxious about them, and visit them as if they were persons. It must have been the scarcity of detail in that tawny landscape that made detail so precious. 5

Little wonder then that Antonia, years later, would quietly leave her bed, careful not to disturb her husband and her numerous children, and carry water to the trees in her parched orchard--mere practicality is not the entire explanation of her care to preserve the trees. The weather and the change of the season made a deep impression upon the pioneers and, in one sense, guided their lives; consequently, Miss Cather justly devotes considerable space to descriptions of the
colorful transformations caused by the first frost (which made the air "clear and heady as wine"), by the everfalling snow, and by the triumphant conquest of the heartening spring.

This, then, is the mise-en-scène of the larger portion of My Ántonia, of necessity more fully developed than in A Lost Lady, yet démeublé enough to satisfy in great measure the literary strictures of Miss Cather's code. The story has a subordinate locale which ought to be considered. Many readers feel that the continuity of the novel is somewhat weakened as soon as Ántonia goes to work with the Harlings in Black Hawk (Book 2). They do realize that Ántonia does not belong in the shabby, confined atmosphere of the town; they forget that they are sure of this fact only because she did go to Black Hawk and actually disappointed all who loved her. We do not entirely like the Black Hawk side of Ántonia's character; still, had she remained on the prairie, we could not have known her so thoroughly. The mood of the novel is broken, not in ignorance, but with deliberate intent. The mood is designedly recaptured in all its warmth only in the last book, "Cuzak's Boys." Black Hawk is the foil to the farmland round about it. Miss Cather has little sympathy for either the town or its people, ever on their guard for "devices to propitiate the tongue of gossip." She deals more harshly with Thea's home town, Moonstone; while she is even bitter
toward the village stupidity satirized in "The Sculptor's Funeral." The chief difficulty with Black Hawk is that it lacks all power to inspire, as well as any source of intelligent entertainment.

Winter lies too long in country towns; hangs on until it is stale and shabby, old and sullen. On the farm the weather was the great fact, and men's affairs went on underneath it, as the streams creep under the ice. But in Black Hawk the scene of human life was spread out shrunken and pinched, frozen down to the bare stalk.

Jim was only too happy to leave the dead little town for the State University, and we welcome the change of scene, regretting only that we must part with the Harlings and Antonia. So far we have wished to show that Miss Cather has not over-emphasized the background of Antonia's story, that she has been guided by her démeublé technique.

A little reflection on the novel will show that Miss Cather has left, in accordance with her principle of co-creative writing, many stories, one might say, many novels, for the reader to reconstruct for himself. Jim Burden tells Antonia's life which is all-important; we must not, however, forget how much he reveals to us about himself, his aspirations, hopes, and ideals. In one paragraph, Miss Cather supplies us with the key to the *unwritten* tragedy of Jim's life; how could he have been happy with the wife he chose? From What, knowing him as we do, cannot we infer/this sole reference
When Jim was still an obscure young lawyer, struggling to make his way in New York, his career was suddenly advanced by a brilliant marriage. Genevieve Whitney was the only daughter of a distinguished man. Her marriage with young Burden was the subject of sharp comment at the time. It was said she had been brutally jilted by her cousin, Rutland Whitney, and that she married this unknown man from the West out of bravado. She was a restless, headstrong girl, even then, who liked to astonish her friends. Later, when I knew her, she was always doing something unexpected. She gave one of her town houses for a Suffrage headquarters, produced one of her own plays at the Princess Theater, was arrested for picketing during a garment-makers' strike, etc. I am never able to believe that she has much feeling for the causes to which she lends her name and her fleeting interest. She is handsome, energetic, executive, but to me she seems unimpressionable and temperamentally incapable of enthusiasm. Her husband's quiet tastes irritate her, I think, and she finds it worth while to play the patroness to a group of young poets and painters of advanced ideas and mediocre ability. She has her own fortune and lives her own life. For some reason, she wishes to remain Mrs. James Burden. 7

We learn one last thing about Mrs. Burden toward the end of the book; she has no children.

The mystery around Mr. Shimerda's apparent suicide is difficult to solve; yet his unfitness for the pioneer life, his loss of courage, and his final despair are all artistically portrayed. He had no desire to come to America; he was happy in the old country with his music and his friends. We know he came solely because his wife insisted. Now she was not his equal intellectually and, had he mentioned culture to her, she would have asked for the price at which it might be
sold. Obviously, these two people were not complementary to each other; no sympathetic understanding did or could exist between them. Peace of a sort hovered intermittently about the Shimerda household simply because Mr. Shimerda acquiesed repeatedly to his wife's demands, and turned to Ántonia for his only comfort. Now we suspect that this domestic tragedy has a deeper root than the antagonistic temperaments of the two involved; how much of the sad story we can create for ourselves when we overhear Ántonia remark years after her father's death:

'You know, Jim, my father was different from my mother. He did not have to marry my mother, and all his brothers quarreled with him because he did. I used to hear the old people at home whisper about it. They said he could have paid my mother money, and not married her. But he was older than she was, and he was too kind to treat her like that. He lived in his mother's house, and she was a poor girl come in to do the work. After my father married her, my grandmother never let my mother come into her house again. When I went to my grandmother's funeral was the only time I was ever in grandmother's house. Don't that seem strange?'

Ultimately, Mr. Shimerda was paying the penalty of one sin of weakness, followed by an unwise, perhaps, yet heroically generous act of reparation. Mrs. Shimerda was too small a woman to understand why he had married her rather than pay her money. She ruled him ever after, one fears.

There are few incidents in Miss Cather's novels or short stories to compare with the dénouement in the life story of
the two Russians, Peter and Pavel. They had, or more correctly, Pavel alone had, in a moment of terror, committed the most disgusting of murders, actually throwing two human beings to starved wolves. Pavel's useless search for peace of mind leads him to Nebraska, where he dies thinking of his awful crime. These two Russians have their influence in Antonia's life, their own life is only hinted at; the torture of Pavel's mind is left for the reader to imagine as also are his wanderings. * * * These last three examples show what is meant by the principle of co-creative writing in actual practice. There are more subtle forms of this method of writing both in A Lost Lady and in Death Comes for the Archbishop; perhaps, less obvious examples might be found in My Antonia itself. We will now give a few instances of the use of suggestion, though it is difficult to distinguish its application from the practice just treated above. Examples of the use of this technique are less tangible than in the former case and it is not always possible to find the text to prove its presence. Usually, to pin the impression made on the reader to specific passages tends to dispel the atmosphere and the unaccountable knowledge we have derived from this subtle kind of suggestion.

When Jim Burden, in the last book, goes out to the farm to visit Antonia after twenty years absence, he is met by two

of her daughters.

The older one, who wore shoes and stockings, came to the door to admit me. She was a buxom girl with dark hair and eyes, calm and self-possessed.

'Won't you come in? Mother will be here in a minute.'

Recall what we know of Ántonia. Then make a few inferences from her eldest daughter's words. They are simple and polite; moreover, they are correct English. And the use of the word "Mother" instead of any one of the possible substitutes also carries a meaning not to be lost. Ántonia has given her daughter something she herself never possessed, something of the refinement of Mr. Shimerda and the Harlings. We sense in their words and actions as soon as we meet them, that Ántonia has achieved her ideal in her children. ... Charley Harling and Jim shared a private belief that Coronado had made his way into the country around Black Hawk, though this romantic view is frowned on by historians. Jim tells Ántonia that

A farmer in the country north of ours, when he was breaking sod, had turned up a metal stirrup of fine workmanship, and a sword with a Spanish inscription on the blade. ... Father Kelly, the priest, had found the name of the Spanish maker on the sword, and an abbreviation that stood for the city of Cordova. 10

It is nothing to be stressed, but at the same time it is well to note that Father Kelly is apparently the one man in the Black Hawk territory who delves into the secret of the Spanish
sword. His intellectual superiority is taken for granted by Miss Cather and her characters. This is always true of Catholic priests in her fiction. She is, on the other hand, not too kind to Protestant ministers in her treatment of them; even Thea's father is severely criticized. The portrayal of unworthy priests in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* is done with the utmost tact and understanding of sacerdotal ideals. These last remarks are merely made in passing; though there is an overtone discernible in Father Kelly's archeological find. That the Spanish sword is a symbol for Jim of the romance of history is clear. Jim was not gifted with the excitable imagination which enabled Jody Baxter to see his armored Spaniard ride past him in the forest. Still this loveable boy of *The Yearling*, sheltered as he was by his father, Penny, would have been a boon companion for Antonia, for both he and Jim had sympathetic natures.

In nearly all of her novels, Miss Cather has applied her principle of suggestion by the use of a symbol such as the solitary wild duck on the pond, which seemed oblivious of the searching eyes of Alexandra and her little brother; the Professor's two houses; the "rock" of Quebec; Alexander's bridge; or the majestic eagles which so fascinated Thea and Fred. The symbol in *My Ántonia* emphasizes the gigantic task accepted by the pioneers in contrast with the insignificance
of the physical aids they could utilize in the conquest of the virgin prairie. The pioneer's life may have been compounded of drab, uneventful, routine labor, yet he had his vision of a new empire, his moments of exaltation such as symbolized in the magnifying of the deserted plow against the sun. Much can be read into this passage. Antonia and Jim

sat looking off across the country, watching the sun go down. The curly grass about us was on fire now. The bark of the oaks turned red as copper. There was a shimmer of gold on the brown river. Out in the stream the sandbars glittered like glass, and the light trembled in the willow thickets as if little flames were leaping among them. The breeze sank to stillness. In the ravine a ringdove mourned plaintively, and somewhere off in the bushes an owl hooted. . . . Presently we saw a curious thing: There were no clouds, the sun was going down in a limpid, gold-washed sky. Just as the lower edge of the red disc rested on the high fields against the horizon, a great black figure suddenly appeared on the face of the sun. We sprang to our feet, straining our eyes toward it. In a moment we realized what it was. On some upland farm, a plough had been left standing in the field. The sun was sinking just behind it. Magnified across the distance by the horizontal light, it stood out against the sun, was exactly contained within the circle of the disc; the handles, the tongue, the share---black against the molten red. There it was, heroic in size, a picture writing on the sun.

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

This passage, apart from its power to stir up images and thoughts not contained in the printed words before the reader, also shows the effectiveness of Miss Cather's medium when she employs it according to her dictum, "Art should simplify";
moreover, these three paragraphs are surely cut down to suit
her démêuble aspirations: in fine, of all the quotations made
thus far, this description of the symbolic plough is the best
in showing what Miss Cather can create in conformity with the
full spirit of her literary creed.

Miss Cather has been rigorously true to her doctrine of
realism in this pioneer chronicle; she is so sure of her
material that she writes with perfect ease and naturalness.
Probably, Jim's experiences are those of Miss Cather's own
childhood. Ántonia is still living (in real life) and is one
of her dearest friends. Some one tells of a Bohemian farmer
who wished to put himself in the good graces of the hospital
authorities in Lincoln, to whom he had come for treatment,
that he naively introduced himself by saying: "I am the
husband of my Ántonia." Since Cuzak is a kindly person,
neither inconsiderate nor unimaginative, he would have made
friends with the doctors without calling on Ántonia's aid. We
are conscious of such traits of his character when we see his
special care for his son, Jan, during the hubbub after his
return from the fair at Black Hawk:

He beckoned to the little boy they called Jan, whispered
to him, and presented him with a paper snake, gently, so
as not to startle him. Looking over the boy's head he
said to me, 'This one is bashful. He gets left.'

Artificiality of any species is as absent from this novel as
from Antonia's character and one feels that Miss Cather wrote
the story as it "inevitably formed itself within her mind",
and that it revives many of her own friendships and experiences
"recollected in tranquility". Her style is clear and forceful
and frequently foreshadows the sustained beauty to which it
attains in her later work. All of Book 5 has a glow about it
that illumines the mind and lingers in the imagination long
after the novel has gathered dust on the library shelf. Miss
Cather's love of color, so pronounced in all her more recent
novels, is clearly seen in this description, which might be
interpreted to exemplify any one of the principles discussed
in Forethoughts:

I took a long walk north of the town, out into the pastures
where the land was so rough that it had never been
ploughed up, and the long red grass of early times grew
shaggy over the draws and hillocks. Out there I felt at
home again. Overhead the sky was that indescribable blue
of autumn; bright and shadowless, hard as enamel. To the
south I could see the dun-shaded river bluffs that used
to look so big to me, and all about stretched drying corn-
fields, of the pale-cold color I remembered so well.
Russian thistles were blowing across the uplands and piling
against the wire fences like barricades. Along the cattle
paths the plumes of golden-rod were already fading into
sun-warmed velvet, grey with gold threads in it. I had
escaped from the curious depression that hangs over little
towns, and my mind was full of pleasant things; trips I
meant to take with the Cuzak boys, in the Bad Lands and
up on the Stinking Water. There were enough Cuzaks to
play with for a long while yet. Even after the boys grew
up, there would always be Cuzak himself! I meant to tramp
along a few miles of lighted streets with Cuzak. 13

In 1920, H. L. Mencken wrote in exaggerated praise of My
Antonia: "Here, unless I err gravely, was the best piece of fiction ever done by a woman in America." 14 Even if this estimate had held water at the time it was made, it would not be valid today; either novel reviewed in the following pages is its superior. After listing a few additional critical comments on *My Antonia*, Chapter 10 will continue this study with a critique of *A Lost Lady*. Grant Overton says (and who would deny it?) that "The figure of Antonia Cuzak is a biographical triumph. Reminiscence here surpasses fiction." 15 Regis Michaud aptly states that Miss Cather painted the background of this story "with the simplicity and forcefulness of a master" 16; while Mr. Porterfield asserts (and it is difficult to agree with him) that *My Antonia* is distinguished chiefly by reason of its promise rather than its actual achievement---a promise which was fully kept in her next novel, *One of Ours*." 17 Since this is the last and best of the Western novels to be discussed in this paper (recall what was said above about the locale of *A Lost Lady*), it might be well to end this lengthy treatment with a pregnant criticism passed on to us by Thomas Whipple:

The shrewdest criticism yet made of Miss Cather is that she represents 'the triumph of mind over Nebraska.' 18

*English viewpoints are often interesting. Mr. Porterfield says of Miss Cather that "she is, in fact, that rara avis, an autochthonous American author." And again, of the pioneer country:
For that, after all, is the American scene—-that inarticulate conglomeration of a half-assimilated people moving steadily through the vicissitudes of life in the crude to a single destiny of racial culture and completeness. (loc. cit.)

One feels the urge to burst into song with Gilbert and Sullivan's: "For he is an Englishman . . .".

*Robert H. Footman "ventures to say" that My Antonia and Death Comes for the Archbishop are Miss Cather's two greatest books. When he said this, he had all of her novels from which to choose.
Footnotes

4. Ibid., pp. 16-17.
5. "", pp. 32-33.
7. "", pp. x-xi.
8. "", p. 270.
9. "", p. 373.
10. "", pp. 277-278.
11. "", pp. 278-279.
12. "", p. 405.
Chapter 10.

A Lost Lady

1923

Much has been said above about A Lost Lady which need not be repeated here. As might be imagined, it is somewhat of a problem to determine just what might be the most appropriate approach to a discussion of this concise (174 pages) fictional drama. Obviously, the essential observation upon it should be the ardent admonition: "Read A Lost Lady, if you never read anything about it!" Critics have taken sides regarding Marian Forrester. How much fairer then to see and know her for oneself. Afterwards, one may challenge or congratulate her admirers with an open mind. It seems best to reduce this chapter to a minimum, to aim solely at proving the contentions of Eventualities in so far as this can be done by quotation from A Lost Lady, and to allow the selected passages to speak for themselves. An appreciative critique is not required, furthermore, it would surely prove inadequate were it attempted. The most intelligent criticism of this beautiful novel, among many commentaries of varying value, is that of Alexander Porterfield which will, logically, have small significance if you have cheated yourself of an exquisite evening by not heed- ing the recommendation, "Tolle, lege." This English critic writes, in part, that
this story, like all Miss Cather's works, is difficult to describe or quote from. Beautifully developed to its end, it is something to read; and its haunting loveliness lingers in the mind afterwards with the delicacy of music. Miss Cather's gifts and fine perceptions, manifest in even her first novels, are here crystallised into a wholeness and harmony of narrative and feeling which has all the freshness, the vitality and understanding of her earlier work with a clear, added beauty of its own.

There are two incidents in *A Lost Lady* which nearly all critics indicate as superb instances of Miss Cather's quietly subtle art: the dramatically condensed "ring scene," followed later on by the "rose episode." Out of context, their impact upon the mind is weakened; yet, in these passages we have clear and forceful proofs of Miss Cather's ability to apply in her fiction the principles expounded above in chapter 5—simplification, suggestion, co-creative writing. Marian and Frank drive into the countryside to cut a Christmas tree.

Ellinger took off his glove with his teeth. His eyes, sweeping the winding road and the low, snow-covered bluffs, had something wolfish in them.

'Be careful, Frank. My rings! You hurt me!'

'Then why didn't you take them off? You used to. Are these your cedars, shall we stop here?'

'No, not here.' She spoke very low. 'The best ones are farther on, in a deep ravine that winds back into the hills.'

...

Under the bluffs that overhung the marsh he came upon thickets of wild roses, with flaming buds, just beginning to open. Where they had opened, their petals were strained with that burning rose-colour which is always

*Porterfield quotes these passages.*
gone by noon,---a dye made of sunlight and morning and moisture, so intense that it cannot possibly last...must fade, like ecstasy. Niel took out his knife and began to cut the stiff stems, crowded with red thorns.

He would make a bouquet for a lovely lady; a bouquet gathered off the cheeks of morning...these roses, only half awake, in the defencelessness of utter beauty. He would leave them just outside one of the French windows of her bedroom. When she opened her shutters to let in the light, she would find them,---and they would perhaps give her a sudden distaste for coarse worldlings like Frank Ellinger.

After tying his flowers with a twist of meadow grass, he went up the hill through the grove and softly round the still house to the north side of Mrs. Forrester's own room, where the door-like green shutters were closed. As he bent to place the flowers on the sill, he heard from within a woman's soft laughter; impatient, indulgent, teasing, eager. Then another laugh, very different, a man's. And it was fat and lazy,---ended in something like a yawn. 2

When we read the first passage, we know in a flash more than we could have suspected before. We sense a good deal of the nasty side of Frank Ellinger's personality, and we realize that Mrs. Forrester's charm hides a weakness of character which may bring grief to herself and others. At this stage in the novel, the reader has glimpses into the past of Marian's life, into the future, though all he sees is hidden in the few words typed above. Fifteen soft white rabbits from a sole silk topper is child's magic compared to this! The art of simplicity and suggestiveness can go little farther than this.

In the second passage, Miss Cather shows her genius (and her moral sensitivity) by what she does not say: "Then another laugh, very different, a man's." Poor Captain Forrester! We
do not, as Niël, become "blind with anger," for we had been warned against idealizing Marian as he did; he had never thought the Prince of Denmark's thoughts, "Frailty, thy name is woman!" Miss Cather's title gathers meaning now. There is a symbolism, too, in the discarded wild roses, which Niël thrusts into the mud; for him "this day saw the end of that admiration and loyalty that had been like a bloom on his existence. He could never recapture it. It was gone, like the morning freshness of the flowers." 3

The next day the Captain returns to Sweet Water a financially ruined man. Now we have an opportunity to learn much about Miss Cather's life-values from the words she places in Judge Pommeroy's mouth as he recounts the outcome of the Captain's trip. (This is an example, as well, of Miss Cather's employment of her medium, clearly and forcefully; in the first passage above, she attains to a beauty of style---with a tincture of poetry in it---over and above the practical aim she set herself, i. e., the emphatic and crystal clarity of her prose.)

At this part of his narrative the Judge rose and began to pace the floor, twisting the seals on his watchchain. 'That was what a man of honour was bound to do, Mrs. Forrester. With five of the directors backing down, he had either to lose his name or save it. The depositors had put their savings into that bank because Captain Forrester was president. To those men with no capital but their back and their two hands, his name meant safety. As he tried to explain to the directors, those deposits
were above price; money saved to buy a home, or to take care of a man in sickness, or to send a boy to school. And those young men, bright fellows, well thought of in the community, sat there and locked down their noses and let your husband strip himself down to pledging his life insurance! There was a crowd in the street outside the bank all day, every day; Poles and Swedes and Mexicans, looking scared to death. A lot of them couldn't speak English,---seemed like the only English word they knew was "'Forrester.'" As we went in and out we'd hear the Mexicans saying, "'Forrester, Forrester.'" It was torment for me, on your account, Ma'm, to see the Captain strip himself. But, 'pon my honour, I couldn't forbid him. As for those white-livered rascals that sat there,---' the Judge stopped before Mrs. Forrester and ruffled his bushy white hair with both hands, 'By God, Madam, I think I've lived too long! In my day the difference between a business man and a scoundrel was bigger than the difference between a white man and a nigger. I wasn't the right one to go out there as the Captain's counsel. One of these smooth members of the bar, like Ivy Peters is getting ready to be, might have saved something for you out of this wreck. But I couldn't use my influence with your husband. To that crowd outside the bank door his name meant a hundred cents on the dollar, and by God, they got it! I'm proud of him, Ma'm; proud of his acquaintance!' 4

This speech might have been written for the stage. Miss Cather does not intend her reader to forget that Mrs. Forrester had not been so noble at the very time her husband was keeping faith with those who had trusted him implicitly; hence, it was not by mere chance that the Captain observes: "The place looks very nice, Mady, ... I see you've watered the roses." Miss Cather's admiration for men of Captain Forrester's calibre is negatively demonstrated by the contempt she has for the men who succeeded him, such as Ivy Peters. The passing of the "Old West" may or may not be an overtone symbolized by the gradual vulgarization of Marian Forrester; though it would
However, Miss Cather laments that distressing phenomena in this oft referred to passage:

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

Here again we see her power to condense, to simplify. A whole historic movement, distasteful to Miss Cather, is summed up in a brief paragraph, a paragraph full of insight into the character of the men who created an empire out of the vast prairie and then, too often, let it slip from their hands.

No one, having read the book, would deny that *Lost Lady* is the outstanding achievement of Miss Cather's démeublé technique as explained in chapter 3. Chapter 4 has been clearly illustrated above in the passages given. Each point

*Just nine days before the publication of *A Lost Lady*, Miss Cather's article, "Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle," appeared in the *Nation*. Here she says: "The splendid story
has been touched upon here or in Part I. of this thesis. *
The next and last chapter, both in amplitude and exactness, will counterbalance the deficiencies which may exist in the review of My Ántonia and A Lost Lady. The beauty of the latter novel must be experienced directly; to write about its charm entails a difficulty analogous to that involved in a treatise on music.

of the pioneers is finished"; and the "old West" is swiftly passing. In part, at least, this essay and novel have a common theme.

*Cf. above pp. 42, 46, 75, 76.
Footnotes

1. Alexander Porterfield, loc. cit.
3. Idem.
"When Miss Cather was asked how Shadows on the Rock was selling, she replied, 'Very well, thanks to the sainted Archbishop.' Indeed, it was the Archbishop who introduced many readers to Miss Cather, and it is surely due to him that interest in her earlier works was revived. Apart from the escapist critics, Death Comes for the Archbishop is usually conceded to be Miss Cather's masterpiece. A greater amount has been written on this novel than upon any several others of hers combined. We will now endeavor to show that this novel is the finest illustration of Miss Cather's literary principles.

In the Prologue, "At Rome," Miss Cather evokes a pervasive mood and, through Bishop Ferrand, gives us our first impression of the future Archbishop Latour. She draws a character sketch as sharp in ironic contrast as would be an artist's picture were he to paint with red and yellow pigments alone. Although no person in the Prologue appears in the novel proper, each fulfills his purpose before leaving the stage. We see them but a brief space; yet in that moment we can judge them as though possessed of a spark of God's
omniscience. It is not so much the actual men we admire or respect, but rather that for which each stands. The villa of the Spanish Cardinal, García María de Alcántara, in the Sabine hills overlooking Rome rouses our admiration; yet when its ordered and cultivated beauty is contrasted with the vast, unknown desert-land of New Mexico, we understand to what insignificance such a landscape may dwindle. We will quote, one after another, two descriptive paragraphs in which emphasis is emphatically secured by means of contrast. However, it is not so much from this part of the character sketches, which deals especially with externals, that we gain insight into the four churchmen taking dinner in the Cardinal's garden. What they talk about tells us more. One is interested in a lost ancestral painting of St. Francis by El Greco; the other is absorbed in nothing but his mission. These are the passages.

Their host, García María de Alcántara, was still a young man. He was dark in colouring, but the long Spanish, that looked out from so many canvases in his ancestral portrait gallery, was in the young Cardinal much modified through his English mother. With his café oscuro eyes, he had a fresh, pleasant English mouth, and an open manner... In his leisure the Cardinal played tennis. As a boy, in England, he had been passionately fond of this sport.

The missionary, Bishop Ferrand, looked much older than any of them, old and rough—except for his clear, intensely blue eyes. His diocese lay within the icy arms of the Great Lakes, and on his long, lonely horseback rides among his missions the sharp winds had bitten him well. The missionary was there for a purpose, and he pressed his point. He ate more rapidly than the others and had plenty of time to plead his cause,—finished each course with such dispatch that the Frenchman remarked he would have been an ideal dinner companion for Napoleon.
Such passages taken separately, still more, the Prologue as a whole (pages 1-13), illustrate the demeublé method of writing. The scene is solidly laid before us; none the less, for all its vividness, could it possibly be more concise? Almost any section from this novel could be pointed out as indicative of the care with which Miss Cather has avoided inartistic literalness. The function of "At Rome" is twofold: it creates the atmosphere for the narrative which is to follow; it foreshadows the character of the Archbishop, and intimates the hardships and responsibilities soon to be cast upon him.

"Your Eminence, it would be a great misfortune if a native priest were appointed; they have never done well in the field. Besides, this Vicar is old. The new Vicar must be a young man, of strong constitution, full of zeal, and above all, intelligent. He will have to deal with savagery and ignorance, with dissolute priests and political intrigue. He must be a man to whom order is necessary --- as dear as life."

"And your new Vicar Apostolic, what will he drink in the country of bison and serpents a sonnettes? And what will he eat?"

"He will eat dried buffalo meat and frijoles with chili, and he will be glad to drink water when he can get it. He will have no easy life, your Eminence. That country will drink up his youth and strength as it does the rain. He will be called upon for every sacrifice, quite possibly for martyrdom."

More than this, we are told that the proposed Bishop is "a man of severe and refined tastes, but he is very reserved."

Already, we are in sympathy with Jean Marie Latour, anxious to follow his apostolic adventure. From what we have learned of
him above, we desire, (as did Miss Cather when she passed the bronze of Archbishop Lamy before the Cathedral of Santa Fé,) to know how such a man lived in surroundings so foreign to his nature. The mood which the Prologue evokes is a refined and subtle illustration of the principles of suggestion and simplification in creative writing, as these laws are understood by Miss Cather.

No particular citations need to be made to indicate the success with which Miss Cather has utilized the medium of her art; any passage in this chapter will be sufficient to show that this author has achieved a beauty of style, and a supreme clarity of expression far above the ordinary. Recall Mr. Williams' eulogy above (p. 7.) of her use of words. Miss Cather thought that to write Death Comes for the Archbishop according to the plan she had decided upon, "one must use language a little stiff, a little formal, one must not be afraid of the old trite phraseology of the frontier." If there is any stiffness or formality, it is disguised beyond recognition. In the same letter in which she comments on the language of the novel, she explains her entire aim in writing this chronicle of the Southwest. Much erroneous critical speculation might have been avoided by perusal of this revealing commentary, which is indispensable for a clear understanding of what the author wished to accomplish specifically in
Death Comes for the Archbishop as distinguished from her other works of fiction. This is not the appropriate place to discuss this interesting letter, for such detailed study of a particular novel would not advance the theme of Eventualities. For convenience, a most significant paragraph from it is given in Appendix B.

The cruciform tree, before which the young bishop knelt to pray for guidance out of the "geometrical nightmare" of a desert in which he had lost himself, is a symbol full of meaning. "Living vegetation could not present more faithfully the form of the Cross." And how significant is the Cross in the story of a man who could so readily turn his own suffering into an occasion of meditative prayer: "The Passion of Jesus became for him the only reality; the need of his own body was but a part of that conception." Such symbolism is a variation of the usual application of the principle of suggestion. As the priest prays, Miss Cather says of him:

Under his buckskin riding-coat he wore a black vest and the cravat and collar of a churchman. A young priest, at his devotions; and a priest in a thousand, one knew at a glance. 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. There was a singular elegance about the hands below the fringed cuffs of the buckskin jacket. Everything showed him to be a man of gentle birth--brave, sensitive, courteous. His manners, even when he was alone in the desert, were distinguished. He had a kind of courtesy toward himself, toward his beasts, toward the juniper tree before which he knelt, and the God whom he was addressing.
Surely this description carries an overtone of character
delineation far beyond the bare facts the words convey to the
reader. . . . The Bishop and Father Joseph rode out of Santa
Fe at noonday on Contento and Angelica; though "the Bishop
did not disclose his objective, and the Vicar asked no
questions."

At about four o'clock they came out upon a ridge high over
the Rio Grande valley. The trail dropped down a long
decline at this point and wound about the foot of the
Sandias into Albuquerque, some sixty miles away. This
ridge was covered with cone-shaped, rocky hills, thinly
clad with pinons, and the rock was a curious shade of
green, something between sea-green and olive. The thin,
pebbly earth, which was merely the rock pulverized by
weather, had the same green tint. Father Latour rode to
an isolated hill that beetled over the western edge of the
ridge, just where the trail descended. This hill stood up
high and quite alone, boldly facing the declining sun and
the blue Sandias. As they drew close to it, Father
Vaillant noticed that on the western face the earth had
been scooped away, exposing a rugged wall of rock---not
green like the surrounding hills, but yellow, a strong
ochre, very much like the gold of the sunlight that was
now beating upon it. Picks and crowbars lay about, and
fragments of stone, freshly broken off.

'It is curious, is it not, to find one yellow hill
among all these green ones?' remarked the Bishop, stooping
to pick up a piece of stone. 'I have ridden over these
hills in every direction, but this is the only one of its
kind.' He stood regarding the chip of yellow rock that
lay in his palm. As he had a very special way of handling
objects that were sacred, he extended that manner to things
which he considered beautiful. After a moment of silence
he looked up at the rugged wall, gleaming gold above them.
'That hill, Blanchet, is my Cathedral.'

Father Joseph looked at his Bishop, then at the cliff,
blinking. 'Vraiment? Is the stone hard enough? A good
colour, certainly; something like the colonnade of St.
Peter's.'

The Bishop smoothed the piece of rock with his thumb.
'It is more like something nearer home—I mean, nearer Clermont. When I look up at this rock I can almost feel the Rhone behind me.'

'Ah, you mean the old Palace of the Popes, at Avignon? Yes, you are right, it is very like. At this hour, it is like this.'

It can be justly said of this citation that it is average, or representative of the style of the novel throughout. Such scenes as this indicate why Miss Cather prefers to call Death Comes for the Archbishop a narrative rather than a novel—a novel usually presupposes stronger accent upon situations. She would rather "touch and pass on." In the lines quoted above, passing remarks convey the impression of Bishop Latour's refinement and priestliness more forcefully than any extended analysis possibly could. And the ever practical Vicar: "Is the stone hard enough?" Nor can one miss the nostalgic overtone in the references to Rome, Clermont, and Avignon. The same lines open the door into the past of both men, if we care to picture them as two young clerics making their studies at "a Seminary that is one of the architectural treasures of France." The dramatic sentence, "That hill, Blanchet, is my Cathedral.", reveals the Bishop's creative powers of imagination. This passage is not a "picked" one to show what Michael Williams meant when he wrote that Miss Cather's prose is, "at the right moments, shot through and scintillant with colors, and the ghosts of colors, the tones of colors, and super-tones." Yet notice all the colors she manages to find in the desert.
A "picked" paragraph might be page two of the Prologue. This quality of viewing all objects with the delicate perception of a painter is evident in all Miss Cather's fiction. In her last three novels, words flash colors before our eyes as if they were endowed with the properties of pigments. This trait is just one of the components of a style which gives to her prose a beauty far surpassing anything she originally strove to attain.

Some Catholics have been annoyed that Miss Cather chose to tell the story of such priests as Padre Gallegos, Padre Lucero, or Padre Martinez; yet history bears witness to these men just as clearly as to the Archbishop and the clergy who remained worthy of their calling. Father Talbot, S. J., gives the fairest account of Miss Cather's procedure in depicting renegade priests:

But Miss Cather's concern is not so much with scandals as with the opportunity these scandals afforded to show the nobility of her two priest-heroes. They were untouched by them personally and they exemplified in their reformations the cleansing sanctity of the Church.

Another aspect of this re-telling of Padre Martinez's story is that it is done in the démeublé spirit; the whole account covers twenty pages—literalness here would be distasteful as well as inartistic. We do not condone Padre Martinez's life, nor does Miss Cather, indeed. We do, however, divine the same strange quality in him, as did the Bishop.
Rightly guided, the Bishop reflected, this Mexican might have been a great man. He had an altogether compelling personality, a disturbing, mysterious magnetic power.

The book is filled with episodes and legends narrated with skill. How beautifully Miss Cather tells of the appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe to Juan Diego! "The Legend of Fray Baltazar," like so many other parts of the book, might stand alone, complete in itself; however, as always, it deepens the mood of the entire work. It might well be read as illustrative of the principles discussed in chapter 4. The narrative restraint and mysterious air of the section, "Stone Lips," proves the power of literary reserve, the advantage of suggesting rather than stating the strange religious practices of the Mexican Indians. An overtone of horror and mystery is skillfully evoked; Miss Cather will "touch and pass on," leaving the reader to dwell on the scene with his own creative imagination. . . . When Father Joseph is barely well again after what might have proved a mortal illness, he begs Bishop Latour to allow him to return to his neglected people. He tells the Bishop:

"Down near Tucson a Pima Indian convert once asked me to go off into the desert with him, as he had something to show me. He took me into a place so wild that a man less accustomed to these things might have mistrusted and feared for his life. We descended into a terrifying canyon of black rock, and there in the depths of a cave, he showed me a golden chalice, vestments and cruets, all the paraphernalia for celebrating Mass. His ancestors had hidden these sacred objects there when the mission was sacked by Apaches, he did not know how many generations ago. The
secret had been handed down in his family, and I was the first priest who had ever come to restore to God his own. To me, that is the situation in a parable. The Faith, in that wild frontier, is like a buried treasure; they guard it, but they do not know how to use it to their soul's salvation. A word, a prayer, a service, is all that is needed to set free those souls in bondage. I confess I am covetous of that mission. I desire to be the man who restores these lost children to God. It will be the greatest happiness of my life.'

How much insight into Father Vaillant's spiritual energy do we gain in this conversation with his beloved Bishop. For Miss Cather, the story of the Catholic Church is the "buried treasure" of the Southwest. She has brought that treasure out of the darkness into the light and her witness to the priestly pioneers is simultaneously a clear-voiced herald of her own manifold artistry. That Miss Cather has not violated her peculiar tenets of realism is self-evident to any reader of Death Comes for the Archbishop. No one could write with the sympathy she reveals toward her characters and the scene of their experiences, unless he were "to give himself wholeheartedly" to his theme. In all the quotations of this chapter, it is obvious that she has never given way "to artificiality in structure or characterization"; hence she has been faithful to her ideas concerning her proper material, with which, in this case, she was almost as familiar as with her own Nebraska prairies.

Few writers in any language have selected this period in American history, and have revealed such a capacity for making that history live. . . . This story of Jean Marie
Latour comes in the nature of a revelation to historians, to those who fancy they can write fiction, and to that multitude who know little or nothing of that ardent fire kindled by Jesus Christ in the hearts of His apostles.

In her letter to the Commonweal, Miss Cather explains the sources of her work and in what sense it is history. She does not seem to be indebted to Francis Parkman, as Edward Larocque Tinker states; though she graciously admits her dependence upon Father Dennis Fitzgerald, the resident priest of Red Cloud, Nebraska, for guidance on certain things Catholic. Tinker thinks that her love of Gregorian music served as an impulse in the writing of this essentially Catholic narrative by Miss Cather, who is a Protestant. Rapin writes that the novel, "for all its variety, has perfect harmony of tone" and "suggests subtle nuances of character, intimate speechless interchange of impressions and sympathies." Pelham Edgar also realizes that Miss Cather has followed her principles of suggestion in the portrayal of characters in the book: "Fathers Latour and Vaillant are the central figures, and their portraiture emerges from the narrative with no apparent intercession by the author." 3

Were all that has been said thus far about the possibility of illustrating Miss Cather's literary code by references to Death Comes for the Archbishop, were all this unconvincing, then we would need only to turn to the scene,
"December Night," for the desired exemplification of her principles. * Pelham Edgar is not blind to the nuances of character in it: "We are, indeed, insensible if we read the chapter 'December Night' and fail to know and love the Bishop better at its close." 14 And Michael Williams believes that this section "contains the quintessence of the meaning, the power, the consolation, the charm, the beauty of Catholic devotion to the Blessed Virgin." 15 Now this "quintessence of meaning" could not be conveyed to the reader directly by the narrative; it is an "unprinted overtone." One could not ask for a simplicity more in accord with Miss Cather's literary canons, nor a finer product of the démeublé technique. Nor is the prose of this passage surpassed elsewhere in her fiction for its quiet, serene beauty. From the moment we first enter the room of the sleepless, disheartened Bishop, "failure clutching at his heart," until we watch him sending old Sada back to her cruel master, refreshed and encouraged by her prayers with the Bishop before the Lady Altar, from the first paragraph to the last, we are under the spell of Miss Cather's art. Note that the Bishop's victory over self is immediately rewarded. His own peace of soul returns as he prays and consoles the poor bond woman.

*pp. 211-220; also published separately by Mr. Knopf in 1933.
One night about three weeks before Christmas he was lying in his bed, unable to sleep, with the sense of failure clutching at his heart. His prayers were empty words and brought him no refreshment. His soul had become a barren field. He had nothing within himself to give to his priests or his people. His work seemed superficial, a house built upon sands. His great diocese was still a heathen country. The Indians travelled their old road of fear and darkness, battling with evil omens and ancient shadows. The Mexicans were children who played with their religion.

As the night wore on, the bed on which the Bishop lay became a bed of thorns; he could bear it no longer. Getting up in the dark, he looked out of the window and was surprised to find that it was snowing, that the ground was already lightly covered. The full moon, hidden by veils of cloud, threw a pale phosphorescent luminousness over the heavens, and the towers of the church stood up black against this silvery fleece. Father Latour felt a longing to go into the church to pray; but instead he lay down again under his blankets. Then, realizing that it was the cold of the church he shrank from, and despising himself, he rose again, dressed quickly, and went out into the court, throwing on over his cassock that faithful old cloak that was the twin of Father Vaillant's.

And he found old Sada trying to get into the church. She was weeping. We may leave the two with Our Lady to pray for fortitude.

Eventualities was doomed, perhaps, to partial failure. Miss Cather's novels suffer under vivisection as would a living organism. Such a method of research may add certain truths to our store of literary knowledge, but the danger is that the specimen may die upon the table. Let us hope we have not killed the spirit of her fiction in an effort to comprehend it. With no such claim as hers upon your generous co-operation,
still we ask you to apply, one eye closed, Miss Cather's principle of co-creative writing to this study of her literary code, and

Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts.
Footnotes

1. Edward Larocque Tinker, loc. cit.
3. Ibid., pp. 6-7, p. 8.
5. ----, Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 16.
7. Michael Williams, op. cit., p. 274.
10. Ibid., p. 207.
12. Rene Rapin, op. cit., p. 84.
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----, "The Novel Demeublé." New Republic, 30: sup. 5-6, April 12, 1922.

Republished by:


* Cf. note in entry under Knopf, Alfred A., on next page.


"Willa Cather to Governor Cross." Saturday Review of Literature, 9: 216, October 17, 1932.


Note: Articles conveniently reprinted in this pamphlet are listed in the bibliography with an asterisk after the author's name, e.g., Cather*, Willa.


----, "Willa Cather Eulogizes the Archbishop." America, 37: 572, September 24, 1927.


APPENDIX A.

These juxtaposed quotations cannot but provoke interesting reflections, whether upon The Professor's House or its critics, or both.

For sheer sustained beauty of description I know of nothing that surpasses the account of the Blue Mesa in The Professor's House---far too lovely and too cumulative to injure by quotation. T. K. Whipple, op. cit., p. 152.

The author deprived The Professor's House of almost any plot. She appears to have hesitated between telling a story and drawing portraits. The book is interrupted in the middle by a lengthy digression. R. Michaud, op. cit., p. 239.

It does not take long, I think, to perceive that the episode, while seemingly breaking the structural unity of the book, in fact, strengthens it, enriches it, rounding off, as it does, the professor's portrait, making us acquainted with the Tom Outland in him, the adventurer, the explorer and resuscitator of the past, the man in love with the obscure, the beautifully human origins of the race, . . . R. Rapin, op. cit., pp. 76-77.

So much cannot be said of the Tom Outland digression in an inferior novel The Professor's House. The anecdote within the anecdote is a device of hers which she constrains us to accept in many of her books. In this case all action is suspended for nearly a hundred pages, and the effort of accommodation is made with difficulty. . . . It was as if she had felt constrained to justify the Outland digression in terms of the Professor's character. She therefore cancels almost everything we have learned about him, develops the Outland story to disproportionate length, and constrains us to believe that its primitivism has led St. Peter back to his own primitive boyhood. His intervening life is a meaningless blank. P. Edgar, op. cit., pp. 259-260.

Willa Cather saw the way the modern world was splitting the souls of men, and the two houses symbolize the disunion. . . . Even that long short story attempts to reinforce the duality by setting the adventures of this unusual boy in the cliff cities of the old Southwest and his idealized death over against the gaudy pleasures of his fiancée. Something precious has gone out of the world, and out of Professor St. Peter's life. H. H. Hatcher, op. cit., pp. 68-69.
The Professor's House dares to pause in its flow to insert Tom Outland's eighty page 'story within a story;'

H. Hartwick, op. cit., p. 398.

And in The Professor's House she has carved a set of filigree boxes, one within another, out of a substance firm as ivory; T. K. Whipple, op. cit., p. 148.

Miss Cather's next book, after this astonishingly touching and fine novel, seems almost in the nature of a descent, a disappointment. The Professor's House is a study in introspection, even slenderer than usual in story but conceived and treated with a tenderness and sympathy which is characteristic. It is not quite so compact in form as some of her earlier novels, with its shifting of interest in the middle and its rather uneventful climax. At the middle of the book the narrative breaks off to become the story of Outland's scientific investigations in the south-west of the United States. It is not the best of devices, but it does allow Miss Cather to exhibit, in the Professor himself, that searching quality of introspection which comes with the termination of middle age to every reflective man on earth. A. Porterfield, loc. cit.

"Tom Outland's Story" is the most strikingly coloured part of The Professor's House, but far less moving than those last serene thirty pages where the professor distils his life's memories. E. S. Sergeant, op. cit., pp. 276-277.

APPENDIX B.

From Miss Cather's letter to the Commonweal concerning her Death Comes for the Archbishop.

"My book was a conjunction of the general and the particular, like most works of the imagination. 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. I felt that such writing would be a kind of discipline in these days when the 'situation' is made to count for so much in writing, when the general tendency is to force things up. In this kind of writing the mood is the thing—all the little figures and stories are mere improvisations that come out of it. What I got from Father Machebeuf's letters was the mood, the spirit in which they accepted the accidents and hardships of a desert country, the joyful energy that kept them going. To attempt to convey this hardihood of spirit one must use language a little stiff, a little formal, one must not be afraid of the old trite phraseology of the frontier. Some of those time-worn phrases I used as the note from the piano by which the violinist tunes his instrument. Not that there was much difficulty in keeping the pitch. I did not sit down to write the book until the feeling of it had so teased me that I could not get on with other things. The writing of it took only a few months, because the book had all been lived many times before it was written, and the happy mood in which I began it never paled. It was like going back and playing the early composers after a surfeit of modern music.
The thesis, "Forethoughts and Eventualities: A Study of Willa Cather's Literary Code", written by John Bernard Amberg, S.J., has been accepted by the Graduate School with reference to form, and by the readers whose names appear below, with reference to content. It is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.