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"The Great Pleasures Don't Come So Cheap:" Material Objects, Pragmatic Behavior and Aesthetic Commitments in Willa Cather's Fiction

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Introduction:
The Sources of Her Suspicions: Willa Cather's Life

After the publication of her novel *The Professor's House* in 1925, Willa Cather interviewed with Rose C. Feld at *The New York Times* regarding the large number of her books sold in the United States. Feld had suggested that the abundance of books Cather was selling might mean that Americans were becoming more cultured, but Cather pushed back against this supposition: "Don't confuse reading with culture or art; not in this country, at any rate. So many books are sold today because of the economic condition of this country, not the cultural. We have a great prosperous middle class, in cities, in suburbs, in small towns, on farms, to whom the expenditure of $2 for a book imposes no suffering," Cather said. Feld would later quote Cather in her article, "Restlessness Such As Ours Does Not Make for Beauty" in the *New York Times Book Review* in December of 1924. Throughout her life it was evident that Cather struggled to find a way to balance her love for art and beautiful objects with the growing impact that capitalism had on American society. Taking issue with its impact on the public perception of art, Cather saw the selling and commodification of art as an act that took away from the inherent value and meaning of the art itself. Cather's suspicion of the cultural climate in America is directly related to economic matters—the growth of capitalism being such a powerful influence that it allowed for the mass selling of art (Cather's novels being one example) to occur; this phenomenon not necessarily being caused by an appreciation for the art itself but simply because of economic accessibility. The rise of American capitalism had its effects on fine art as well. In *Art as Experience,* John Dewey argues that fine art has come to "reflect and establish superior cultural status" due to the fact that rare and fine works of art have become so costly; owning a piece of

fine art, therefore, allows for the wealthy to achieve high social standing in society.[1] Dewey's chief concern with capitalism's effect on art was a cultural one—in the act of selling art, the art becomes an object representative of social status, which therefore reduces (if not completely stripping) it of its 'native and spontaneous culture.'

In the same *Times* interview, Cather went on to talk about how the acquisition of new household products during this time became a representation of class distinction: "You might with equal reason ask whether we are becoming a more cultured people because so many more of us are buying chiffoniers and bureaus and mirrors and toilet sets...Forty or fifty years ago we couldn't afford them, and today we can. As a result, every home has an increased modicum of comfort and luxury. But, carrying the thought a step further, every home has not increased in beauty."[2] It is not necessarily the craftsmanship of such objects that Cather takes issue with so much as the intention of the buyers—acknowledging the quick spreading of wealth in the United States, Cather saw how simple it was for families to give off the appearance that they had good tastes. Known for her Francophilia, however, Cather it was evident that she was not completely hostile to beautiful things. She commented what she saw as a particularly-American dilemma when it came to being 'artistic' in the same *Times* interview:

> "Because of this vast amount of writing and reading, there are many among us who make the mistake of thinking we are an artistic people. Talking about it won't make us that. We can build excellent bridges; we can put up beautiful office buildings, factories; in time, it may be, we shall be known for the architecture which our peculiar industrial progress has fostered here, but literary art, painting, sculpture, no. We haven't yet acquired the good sense of discrimination possessed by the French, for instance. They have a great purity of tradition; they all but murder originality, and yet they worship it."[3]

[1] George Hutchinson, "The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White"
[2] Willa Cather, "Restlessness Such as Ours Does Not Make for Beauty" *New York Times,* p.11, cols 1-5. Dec. 21, 1924.
[3] Ibid.

Implying that Americans tend to be superficial in their tastes, Cather saw the domain of art in a post-industrialized America as something removed from our working, everyday lives; the issues of American artistry, therefore, being not just effects of industrialization but contrasting ideas. In America, where utility seems to be prioritized, artistic objects are consequently sacrificed. Tensions between art and economy become major concerns for the central characters in Cather's novels; yet they are also two ideas that Cather attempts to unify.

The French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville, in his treatise *De Tocqueville on Democracy and the Arts,* argues that democratic nations "prefer the useful to the beautiful and they will require that the useful be beautiful." De Tocqueville asks his readers to consider is whether a democracy like that of the United States can facilitate an aesthetic culture. De Tocqueville's suspicion that we cannot in fact achieve a robust aesthetic American culture seems to classify the trajectory of Willa Cather's novels. Arguing that democratic nations have caused a demand for certain material objects which might further cause craftsmen to abandon authentic elements of their artistic practices, de Tocqueville writes that "among a democratic population all the intellectual faculties of the workman are directed to these two objects: he strives to invent methods that may enable him not only to work better, but more quickly and more cheaply; or if he cannot succeed in that, to diminish the intrinsic quality of the thing he makes, without rendering it wholly unfit for the use for which it is intended."[4] De Tocqueville's diagnosis of the competing values of beauty and utility in America seems to be addressed across Willa Cather's novels.

Willa Cather emphasized in her will that no publication of her personal letters should take place after her death. This suspicious request left many unanswered questions pertaining to how

[4] Alexis De Tocqueville, "De Tocqueville on Democracy and the Arts"

Cather thought of herself as a public figure and why she so adamantly rejected the public from reading her personal writings. It is widely known that Cather had many of her letters burned, yet the amount burned does not seem substantial enough to suggest that there is a secret or reason behind their destruction. In *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather,* Andrew Jewell and Janis Stout suggest that Cather's restrictive orders on the publication of her letters may have been an act driven by her lifelong desire to have control over her public identity and to help cement her reputation as a true artist.[5] Despite Cather's wishes, her letters have been circulated widely today. Jewell and Stout justify their own publication of Cather's letters by arguing that her artistic reputation could not be tarnished at this point in history—that the concerns they believed to motivate Cather to assert such a preference are no longer valid or strong enough to refute her artistic excellence.

From the start of her literary career, Cather possessed a strong concern for the commercial aspects of publishing. Despite paper shortages during World War I, readers demanded more copies of *O Pioneers!* Come time for the publishing of *My Ántonia,* Cather was extremely specific with the kind of paper that she wanted the novel to be printed on. Cather complained to her editor, Ferris Greenslet, when she discovered that *My Ántonia* was printed on paper so thin that the ink was showing through on the back side of the pages. She insisted that poor-quality printed affected the reader's experience. Apparently Cather was equally as selective with her personal stationery; in several letters she apologizes to her comrades for the unfortunate circumstances that led her to use low-quality paper when addressing them.[6] Willa Cather's insistence on such matters might emphasize her own preoccupation with perfection, but it also speaks to the very unique way that she wanted everything she wrote—whether they were

[5] Andrew Jewell and Janis Stout, *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather*
[6] Janis P. Stout, *Willa Cather and Material Culture*

personal accounts addressed to her loved ones or fictitious novels for the masses—to be received delicately, in the exact fashion that she had imagined.

Willa Cather's later novels, in contrast to her earlier works, *O Pioneers!* (1913) and *My Ántonia* (1918), express doubtful visions of the individual's ability to overcome the materialistic impositions caused by increasing levels of industrialization and commodification in society—as depicted earlier, such impositions being the purchasing of art and other material objects due to financial ease rather than for the sake of the art. *The Professor's House* (1925) and *A Lost Lady* (1923) have this conflict in mind, yet the idea of aestheticism[7]—the appreciation of objects for their innate beauty—is front and center in the individual experiences of Cather's characters. Thematic similarities between *The Professor's House* and *A Lost Lady* might be justified due to their proximity—just two years apart—in publishing.

After World War I, Cather ventured to France for months at a time to distract herself with the aesthetics of a more modern, beautiful nation. Despite her efforts to write while abroad, Cather failed to produce work that she was excited about. In 1922, Cather caught a cold and set sail for Europe to spend some time abroad. While her initial plan was to remain in France for several months to restore her spirits and write, she ended up leaving earlier than expected. In one interview, she admitted that the beauty of the country itself was distracting. Cather shared her ambivalent feelings toward her premature departure: "I hate to leave France or England when I am there, but I cannot produce my kind of work away from the American idiom. It touches the springs of my memory, awaking past experiences and knowledge necessary to my work." Later

[7] The term 'aestheticism' has been used to identify a movement among artists and critics in Victorian England who rallied against the borrowed French slogan "art for art's sake," meaning that a work of art should be valued for its properties that were revealed in an intense experience of the work itself. This 'aesthetic experience' would be distinct from any useful function of the art or any social, moral, or political values that it might embody.

in the interview, Cather went on to describe her beautiful life in Ville d'Avray, but that she "was so busy drinking in the beauty of the place that I could not work. I went from there to Paris, hoping to achieve a working state of mind, but again it proved impossible. The Seine absorbed my thoughts. I could look at it for hours as it reflected every mood of the ever-changing skies, and the colorful life surging around me was utterly distracting as well." This sensation is quite familiar to St. Peter Godfrey, the protagonist of *The Professor's House,* whose field of specialization is Spanish colonial history and has just completed his life's work, but was only able to do so within the strict confines of the attic in his old home. While Cather's experiences in Europe seem to inspire her creative mode, her inability to successfully work and remain in France—or more specifically, her insistence on returning to America in order to complete her writing—speaks to the value and power that was placed on labour in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century.

Willa Cather was born on December 7, 1873 to Charles Cather and Virginia Boak in Gore, Virginia. Cather spent her early childhood in Willow Shade, an estate built by her grandfather near Winchester in Frederick County, Virginia, until the barn on the property spontaneously combusted when Cather was 9 years old. From there, the family headed for Nebraska in 1883, first to Cather's grandfather's home in Webster County. After a chimney fire struck the kitchen one evening, Cather's ill mother was shaken by the dangers of the house and Charles was influenced to move the family to the same town as their doctor. Red Cloud, Nebraska was a bustling railroad town with a population of about 2,500 people in 1884. Later in life after moving to New York for her writing career, Cather would return to Red Cloud for family visits. While at home, she installed some very unattractive shades and roof additions along the porch of the Red Cloud estate—wanting privacy and unconcerned with the impact that

the unfavorable shades had on the curb-appeal of her home, Cather felt that the best way she could enjoy the outdoors was to sit free from the gaze of neighbors and pedestrians.

Cather's relationship with her father was staunchly different from her relationship to her mother. According to Mildred R. Bennett, Cather found her mother of a far different temperament from her father. Charles was known for being a gentle southern man, while Willa's main issue with her mother, Virginia, was the fact that she was so obsessed with maintaining a meticulous appearance. Growing up, Cather seemed to protest this maternal interference by not dressing to her mother's standards. It was well-known that Cather had an odd relationship to color, often pairing colors "like a savage" and revolting against high fashion. Cather preferred to appear more masculine in dress and appearance—she is remembered as having a short haircut and emphatically rejected feminine beauty standards[8]. It seemed, however, that Cather's resistance to such appearances was simply a personal preference—she, nevertheless still gifted her mother with extravagant pieces of jewelry, perfumes, and clothing to honor her regality and refined tastes.

Despite an early resistance to materiality, Cather lived quite the cosmopolitan life in New York City; she frequently attended theatre and musical performances during the early decades of the century. France became a cultural haven for Cather. Among her tight circle of intellectual companions were Isabelle McClung Hambourg, Edith Lewis, Robert Frost, and Sarah Orne Jewett—that is to say, she was a part of a group of people who were famously opposed to art in the service of propaganda. Cather's circle was well-known for endorsing 'art for art's sake.' Janis P. Stout in *Willa Cather and Material Culture* discusses the complexities of Cather's notoriety as a modernist, citing Douglas Mao and his claims on Cather's distaste for

[8] Sharon O'Brien, *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice*

commodities: "modernism shows a reaction against consumption...no less decisive for it than its retention of aestheticism's privileging of the life devoted to art."[9] Cather and her alikes valued art and objects not as commodities or symbols of abstract values but objects as ends in themselves and 'beyond the reach of ideology.'

At the height of her notoriety as an author in the twentieth century, Cather was well-known for her criticism of the consumerism that she saw to be taking over American society. In her eyes, the standards for quality of life on all fronts was decreasing—this "commonness," as she often called it, is in some ways evidence of her deep affection for objects in that she expressed so much concern over the matter. Cather's interest in material goods is directly associated with her appreciation for art—and her concern for the imposed values of such objects is evidently on display across her fiction. The materiality in the first section of the *The Professor's House* is the most piercing example of a sphere littered with objects that impose on her central characters; in contrast to the first section, "Tom Outland's Story," feels much more bare and free from the material constraints in the first section, "The Family." By juxtaposing two drastically different environments—one characterized by materialism and the other by the beauty of the natural world—Cather moves her reader from a confined state of consumerism to an open landscape void of superficiality.

Despite her fancy for beautiful objects, Cather is best known for her depictions of American landscapes, particularly those of the western frontier. Much of her admiration for the West is a product of her childhood in Nebraska. In one of her earlier letters, Cather writes about the inspiration she felt from the people in the Great Plains who had immigrated from Sweden, Norway, and Bohemian: "I have never found any intellectual excitement any more intense than I

[9] Janis P. Stout *Willa Cather and Material Culture*

used to feel when I spent a morning with one of those old women at her baking or butter making. I used to ride home in the most unreasonable state of excitement; I always felt as if they told me so much more than they said—as if I had actually got inside another person's skin." As Andrew Jewell and Janis Stout write in *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather,* much of Cather's fiction is inspired by her memory of these women.

Cather's religious upbringing was one characterized by change. She and her family joined the Episcopal Church in 1922, however, Cather was remembered by her college classmates as someone who was never troubled by matters of religion and faith; apparently, while in undergraduate school, she professed to not believing in God. Yet, as Woodress notes in his biography of Cather, by 1922 she felt a need for religion and found it in the Episcopal Church. After becoming a loyal member of the Red Cloud congregation, Cather sent several donation checks to to the altar guide and even donated a stained-glass window in memory of her father after his passing.[10]

Between *A Lost Lady, The Professor's House,* and *Death Comes for the Archbishop,* there is an element of Cather's later fiction that challenges the impositions that the western American landscape seems to have imposed on its society. Across the three novels is a critique of modernity where aesthetic alternatives to debased contemporary societies are envisioned but almost always never actualized or practical enough for Cather's main characters to achieve. With each character's discovery of a harmonious landscape far from the mass, consumerist culture comes both an aesthetic and social ideal: that the preserved territories of the native West can contain civilized and integrated life while functioning as historical and aesthetic ideals in order to escape a degraded present.

[10] James Woodress, "Willa Cather: A Literary Life"

Diving deeper into these narrations entails a vast meditation on material objects—which as we know—are near and dear to Willa Cather. Yet, these specific objects, precisely because of the value that the market has imposed on them, more often than not become the sources of difficulty for Cather's central characters. It would be too simple to suggest that Willa Cather saw material objects as the sole sources of corruption in a bourgeois society when she herself partook in so many of the same leisures as a member of the upper-middle class—however, in moments of close contact with wealth, it seems that Cather is concerned with those who disregard the historical narratives of such objects. In other words, the very same issues that take place within the three novels—where towns and societies seem to be stripped of their historical identities due to the impacts of industrialization—are reflected through the objects that are products of these new societies and exist within them. Cather's assessment of the impact of industrialization on American societies is portrayed through the materialism of her characters—only through the juxtaposition of her primitive and modern characters are we able to see the limitations of both. While the high tastes of her wealthy characters indicate of a certain kind of aesthetic palet, there are moments where Cather implies that refined tastes can also be suffocating. Yet while the aesthetic alternatives that her rogue, primitive characters partake in might imply more of a historical consciousness, the environments where aesthetic ideals coincide with the value of labour are never sustainable.

The conditions in which the characters of Willa Cather's novels are able to integrate their aesthetics with pragmatic behavior are rare. Settings where there is a high concentration of wealth seem to be occupied by characters who are consumed with material objects and goods; yet in all three novels, there is at least one character who stands out for his dissatisfaction with the effects of industrialization and capitalism; those impositions being the diminution of the

concept that we should appreciate art for art's sake. Struggling to balance their aesthetic tastes and love for art with their pragmatic ideologies and resistance to an increasingly-industrialized society, these characters are often posed with the issue of having to choose one over the other. By synthesizing passages from *A Lost Lady, Death Comes for the Archbishop,* and *The Professor's House* with several philosophies on art, labour, pragmatism and aesthetics, I will effort to assess the circumstances in Cather's novels in which characters are able to reconcile their love for beauty, art, and beautiful objects with their pragmatic principles in societies that have been subjected to increases in commodification through the rapid transformation of historical landscapes.

Chapter One:
The Aesthetic Project: Material Culture, Economic Tensions, and Pragmatic Behavior

"The truth is that one-half of the American mind, that not occupied intensely in practical affairs, has remained, I will not say high-and-dry, but slightly becalmed; it has floated gently in the back-water, while, alongside, in invention and industry and social organisation, the other half of the mind was leaping down a sort of Niagara Rapids. This division may be found symbolised in American architecture: a neat reproduction of the colonial mansion — with some modern comforts introduced surreptitiously — stands beside the sky-scraper. The American Will inhabits the sky-scraper; the American Intellect inhabits the colonial mansion. The one is the sphere of the American man; the other, at least predominantly, of the American woman. The one is all aggressive enterprise; the other is all genteel tradition," George Santayana[11]

[11] George Santayana, "The Genteel Tradition of American Philosophy"

The end of the American Civil War marked the birth of modern America. Were it not for the military defeat of the confederacy, the Republican Party would not have become the dominant force in American politics after 1865. As Louis Menand describes in *The Metaphysical Club,* the Republicans were perhaps the greatest champions of the world of business; therefore the rise of the Republican Party was complemented by the rise of industrial capitalism, which naturally became associated with the term and way of life which we call "modern."[12] According to Menand, the post-Civil war era in the United States was characterized, for many, by both a failure of democracy and a failure of culture and ideas. While slavery was abolished in the South, the North was seemingly stripped of its intellectual culture, and the new and difficult conditions of "modern life" took nearly half a century for intellectuals to devise an explanation for. In light of this history, early modern thinker and American philosopher William James developed a philosophical tradition, pragmatism, that wrestles with issues of art in the domain of every-day life.

At its core, for James, pragmatic philosophy is the antithesis of the formulaic and abstract. In a review of Henry Rutger Marshall's *Pain, Pleasure, and Aesthetics,* James writes that those who have the impulse to shy away from a book with the word 'aesthetics' in its title hold the expectation that if they were to read the book, it would only widen the contrast between "the richness of life and the poverty of all possible formulas." Skeptical of these types of formulas—for example, the very word 'aesthetic' as it is used to describe an appreciation for beauty—James views art as the antithesis of classification, the formulaic, and the abstract.[13] In James's words, pragmatism was a philosophy "against bigness and greatness in all their forms," appealing to "a generation of academics, journalists, jurists, and policy makers eager to find

[12] Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*
[13] Jonathan Levin, "The Esthetics of Pragmatism"

scientific solution to social problems, and happy to be given good reasons to ignore the claims of finished cosmologies."

George Santayana, a student of James, developed his own aesthetic theory which justifies a pragmatic approach to understanding and dissecting aesthetic experiences. While James had a resistance toward theorizing rationalizing these rich and affective experiences, Santayana found such a task to be the ultimate effort to discover the "visible unities and recognisable types" that might improve our interactions with the material environment. For Santayana, aesthetic and religious attitudes are valuable because they fail to point us toward unity or harmony; the true value of an aesthetic experience is that it animates and infuses our interactions with meaning, yet aesthetic value cannot be recognized in an isolated fashion because "it is not realizable by itself in a set of objects not otherwise interesting." In other words, aesthetics have tentative and projected qualities; in observing something that you have an affinity for, you may not initially be able to discern the reason behind your affinity, but the aesthetic experience will sustain itself in your memory. Similar notions of memory as a device of an aesthetic experience are present in *The Professor's House*; when, for example, St. Peter recalls the pain of moving away from the water when he was young:

> "When he was eight years old, his parents sold the lakeside farm and dragged him and his brothers and sisters out to the wheat lands of central Kansas. St. Peter nearly died of it. Never could he forget the few moments on the train when that sudden, innocent blue across the sand dunes was dying for ever from his sight. It was like sinking for the third time. No later anguish, and he had had his share, went so deep or seemed so final. Even in his long, happy student years with the Thierault family in France, that stretch of blue water was the one thing he was home-sick for, In the summer he used to go with the Thierault boys to Brittany or to the Languedoc coast; but his lake was itself, as the Channel and the Mediterranean were themselves. 'No,' he used to tell the boys, who were always asking him about *le Michigan,* 'it is altogether different. It is a sea, and yet it is not salt. It is blue, but quite another blue. Yes, there are clouds and mists and sea-gulls, but—I don't know, *il est toujours plus naïf,*'"[14]

[14] Willa Cather, *The Professor's House (21)*

St. Peter's childhood experiences point toward Santayana's analysis of the long-term impact of an aesthetic experience. Despite St. Peter not being able to identify the source of his liking of the blue lakeside, it remains within him as he grows up, and later in his life when his student Tom Outland travels to the Blue Mesa. Outland's experience at the Mesa calls upon St. Peter's young relationship to blue water in more ways than a matching color—like St. Peter, Outland has difficulty expressing the exact sensations that he experiences; throughout "Tom Outland's Story," he uses phrases such as "there was something about.." in an effort to articulate the poignant and primitive feelings that the landscape elicited. Cather's stylistic choices even direct themselves toward Santayana's claim; the omniscient narrator is only able to compare St. Peter's withdrawal from the lake to the experience of 'sinking for the third time.' This simile used to describe St. Peter's anguish speaks directly to Santayana's claim that beautiful objects call upon feelings and sensations that are difficult to describe. By employing a metaphorical phrase, Cather evokes a feeling to describe another feeling; in this sense, it is a shortcut. Too, this passage points toward the polarities between European and American aesthetic experiences—by contrasting the English Channel and Mediterranean Sea with Lake Michigan, Cather is suggesting that the Mediterranean Sea has gained such notoriety in literature, art, and European history—specifically as a landmark—that one cannot perceive it without the filter of the human imagination; yet in order for St. Peter to convey that Lake Michigan is different from this, he must do so through the French phrase meaning "it is always more naive." The specific usage of French translation just for this one phrase suggests that Lake Michigan possesses a simplicity unlike anything but itself and that any element of nature—be it a body of water, a mountain, or a desert—possesses a unique sophistication.

In *Reason and Art*, George Santayana suggests that separating an object from its other various elements is a form of misrepresenting that object; this idea of pragmatic pluralism focuses on the many practical, moral and aesthetic functions an object can have as opposed to assessing a singular state of being; he writes: "aesthetic and other interests are not separable units to be compared externally; they are rather strands interwoven in the texture of everything." Santayana sees the act of isolating an object from its material and cultural environment as an act of aestheticizing that object—because it is detached from its true environment, it lacks the ability to be an object of both pleasure and order and merely becomes an abstraction. The pragmatic component of Santayana's argument lies in his insistence that each function of an object or piece of art (the practical, moral, and aesthetic functions) operate together to create the empirical, 'aesthetic' experience. For Santayana, aesthetic goods do not have separable values; one's assessment or perception of the beauty of an object or experience is imbued with a practical order of reasoning—examples of Santayana's pragmatic pluralism are blurted in *The Professor's House,* specifically in "Tom Outland's Story," when Roddy Black, Outland's platonic companion, sells the artifacts from the Cliff City to a modern museum. Distraught by the notion that the objects have been removed from their native environment, Outland persecutes Blake for succumbing to the exploitative temptations of a capitalistic industry, and for selling objects that he had no right to sell for they "belonged to this country, to the State, and to all the people," (219).

Scott L. Pratt, in *Native Pragmatism*, develops an account of pragmatism that is a philosophy of "borderlands," which has developed out of the colonial encounter between Native Americans and European colonists. Pratt identifies the central commitments of pragmatism to be "pluralism, community, and growth." Pratt's reading of American pragmatism speaks to its

interactive quality; as well, by Pratt's definition, we can read pragmatism as a state of physical and intellectual in-betweenness. This was certainly the case for Tom Outland from Cather's *The Professor's House,* a character who possesses an innate curiosity for pragmatic, scientific discoveries, but later displays many aesthetic appreciations during his trip to the Cliff City; as his research becomes monetized, his family's social status is elevated by the acquisition of material wealth. Even after Outland's death, his widow inherits his fortune and becomes suffocated by the constraints of a materialistic culture.

De Tocqueville's fears about the conflation of utility and beauty is also a concern felt in *The Professor's House.* As we overhear a conversation between St. Peter and his student, the Professor argues that science is not a phase of human development but something that has provided humans with many 'ingenious toys.' Humans, he reiterates, are naturally more curious about solving riddles because mysteries are attractive to our minds: "..and that's what makes men happy, believing in the mystery and importance of their own little individual lives. It makes us happy to surround our creature needs and bodily instincts with as much pomp and circumstance as possible," (55). The idea that De Tocqueville poses—that the actual practice of making art has lost its aesthetic value—is resonated in St. Peter's discussions of science; by his argument, humans are more excited by the concept of discovery than the actual discovery itself. St. Peter's skeptical attitude toward technological and scientific innovation is demonstrative of Cather's own skepticism of pragmatic ethos in the United States.

While her earlier works are more concerned with the characters maintaining romantic relationships to the physical landscape in the face of an increasing industrialization of agricultural production, Cather's later novels begin to examine how education might have played a role in the loss of the physical frontier. Particularly in *The Professor's House,* Tom Outland's

physical displacement—from the frontier to university campus—allows him to commit to the modern industrial ideal of the capitalist marketplace, so much that he begins to lose track of his frontier values. Outland's vision of self-sacrifice, working for the collective good, and education for individual moral improvement seems to dissolve under the institutional motivation to monetarily exploit discovery. While Cather gives us a flashback to a time in Outland's life where his morals aligned with his actions—his very visceral reaction to Roddy's selling of the artifacts from the Mesa—this aesthetic consciousness dwindles in the setting of higher education. Matched with the novel's overarching theme of materialism, the capitalistically-driven characters of *The Professor's House*—like Louie Marsellus—further push the reader to assess the extent to which Cather's characters should exist in isolation in order to relish in aesthetic bliss.

"Tom Outland's Story" depicts several essential moments that further hint at Cather's views on labour. As Outland searches through the specimens of the pueblo Indian country, he is humbled by the discovery that other human beings once stood where he was and all the more curious about unveiling the exact history of these people so that he can honor them accurately and in their entirety:

> "To people off alone, as we were, there is something stirring about finding evidences of human labour and care in the soil of an empty country. It comes to you as a sort of message, makes you feel differently about the ground you walk over every day. I liked the winter range better than any place I'd ever been in. I never came out of the cabin door in the morning to go after water that I didn't feel fresh delight in our snug quarters and the river and the old mesa up there, with its top burning like a bonfire. I wanted to see what it was like on the other side, and very soon I took a day off and forded the river where it was wide and shallow, north of our camp. I rode clear around the mesa, until I met the river again where it flowed under the south flank," Willa Cather, *The Professor's House (173)*

This "evidence of human labour" is inspiring for Outland in that it gives him the confidence to traverse the same land that the native Americans once did—throughout the narrative, Outland sees himself as being closely tied to the Native people, as if all who traverse the Cliff City inherit

each other and join one brotherhood. Outland's admiration for the native culture is partly due to his deep appreciation for its lifestyle and culture; for him, this kind of life allowed for the perfect integration of the labours of everyday life and art. Outland's walking in the literal footsteps of the Native peoples and partaking in their same ancient habits and chores is indicative of a kind of formula that he believes warrants him a legitimate relationship to the Cliff City. Outland's appreciation of the human labour signifies his pioneer spirit; yet there is a specific authenticity in Outland's story that suggests humans should partake in this type of labour in order to be self-sufficient. The beauty in Outland's journey is that he discovers how to live for himself and by himself, as opposed to other characters in the novel—again referring to Louie Marsellus—who are able to live off of the profits of someone else's labour. Outland's experience at the Cliff City is ideal because the humans who must have lived there before him existed during a time where society was not preoccupied with the value of objects, labour, or land.

Tom Outland's voyage to the Blue Mesa is a direct result of his frustrations with the commodified contemporary society. The Blue Mesa serves as an aesthetic alternative where Outland could escape the corruption of society through his pioneer spirit. Depictions of the frontier are not uncommon in a Willa Cather novel, in fact Cather's personal love for the West is evident in her depictions of the landscape. Cather employs a first person narration during this section of the novel, where Outland's voyage becomes meaningful because "landmarks mean so much in a flat country," (165). Writing a chapter about the frontier, therefore, is an aesthetic experience for Cather in it of itself. Tom Outland's experience at the Blue Mesa, however, is somewhat of a reconciliation between aesthetics and the materials of everyday labour—while Outland finds his time at the Mesa beautiful and empirically pleasurable, it is as well a moment of practical independence for him and Roddy Blake—a friend who lives with Outland and nursed

him when he was sick with pneumonia. Outland mentions his experience tidying up their cabin, changing the blankets in the beds and stowing away their food and also notes that Blake took up some of the tougher chores so that Outland could spend more time studying his Latin. These domestic tasks at the Blue Mesa country seem to become appealing to both men in ways that they have not before: "I confess I looked forward to cooking on an iron stove with four holes," (168). Outland achieves a type of personal fulfilment by the fact that there is both utility and beauty in these domestic tasks. Calling upon the philosophy of De Tocqueville, Tom Outland's experience at the Blue Mesa suggests that beauty can be found in practical, utilitarian tasks; however, Outland's experience is both a rarity in the novel and only seems to exists outside of the main setting. If something can be both beautiful and useful, it only appears outside of reality. Outland is evidently fulfilled at the Blue Mesa; his experience there representing a sort of historical ideal in a civilized, cultivated territory that also appeals to the senses. Yet Outland seems to acknowledge that the Blue Mesa has a particularly masculine setting; the mountains of the Colorado landscape help create the sublime context that "was the sort of place a man would like to stay in forever," (168).

The idyllic bliss in "Tom Outland's Story" offers an experiment of same-sex living between Blake and Outland that challenges conventional, heterosexual relationships. The dream-like quality of these experiences is both a product of the beauty of the mesa and the happiness that Outland finds in his relationship with Blake. Even once Henry Atkins joins the pair, Outland himself refers to the trio as a "happy family," (196). Yet, it is not implied that Blake and Outland's relationship is anything but platonic; rather, the flourishing of their relationship within a domestic sphere implies that societal norms are being challenged on multiple levels in this alternative to their regular society. In this light, the mesa offers Outland an escape from

conventionality; in his findings at the ruins, he is particularly struck by the shapes of certain jars and the painted patterns on the living chambers so much that he saved one jar to bring back to Mrs. St. Peter.[15] Despite his affinity for these artifacts, however, Outland is unable to internalize the possibilities that he encounters in this substitute lifestyle. Rather than engaging further with the wonders of this West, Outland decides to force Blake off of the mesa after their argument, and further subjects himself back into a conventional realm of strict scientific matters, academia, and war.

Many of the objects Outland finds at the mesa are traced back to the domestic tasks of a woman, like the grinding stones, jars, and clothes.[16] The placement of such objects in the novel reveal Cather's preference for domestic artifacts, particularly in that they represent the complex aesthetic spirit of Native American women who were able to craft earthly materials, like clay, into beautiful and utilitarian objects (jars and bowls). At the mesa, Outland calls the drained female body that they discover "Mother Eve." As Stout details in "Cather and Native American Women," the finding of Mother Eve's body inspires the men to learn more about the tribe that once lived there, however in their efforts to discover this history they ultimately fall short of entirely understanding who the body actually was and what significance this woman had in the Native society. Father Duchene's interpretation of the death of Mother Eve is imbued with clichés; it suggests that the husband might have killed Mother Eve because he "found her in improper company," for "in primitive society the husband is allowed to punish an unfaithful wife with death," (201). Toward the end of his time in the Cliff City, Outland stores his personal

[15] The act of Outland saving one of the 'beautifully-shape" water jars for Mrs. St. Peter implies that women, in particular, find more beauty in these crafted objects than a man might. Outland is an exception here. Additionally, it is likely that a woman from the ancient society would have made these very jars, given that pottery was more commonly a craft for women.
[16] Janis P. Stout *Willa Cather and Material Culture*

journal, which he had recorded his discoveries in "carefully to the very end," inside a niche in the chamber where Mother Eve remained. An effort to integrate his modern findings with the physical objects of the Cliff City's history, the storage of Outland's diary alongside the maternal figure, Mother Eve, is a gesture that suggests the very powerful influence that feminine artifacts—or objects of female influence—have on modern art; in this case, the modern art being Outland's diary.

Once Roddy Blake sells the collection of artifacts when Outland travels to Washington, Outland becomes enraged by the fact that items which he felt belonged strictly to the country were monetized by the poor assessment of one man and his own aspirations. As Roddy defends himself, he suggests that Outland was more frustrated with the fact that Roddy capitalized on Outland's property, which would then reveal Outland's own ulterior motives, despite Outland denying the claim. Yet, Tom Outland's desire to learn all of the many secrets of the mesa speaks to another convention—his desire to discover what is unknown and mysterious repeatedly fails at some capacity. By his failed efforts to unveil these secrets and his consequent break-up with Roddy Blake, Outland's time at the Blue Mesa points him toward the reality that he won't be able to grasp the true meaning and history behind every object or artifact that he comes across in his life.

While traveling in Washington, D.C. Outland spends some time renting a room in an apartment of a young, married couple. Over the course of his stay, Outland becomes suspicious of the couple, mainly because they seem to live beyond their means in order to appear as though they are members of a higher economic class—they ask Outland not to mention that he is paying to stay in their extra room; merely telling their friends that they have a guest visiting town who is staying with them. Outland's perplexed state over the behavior of the couple becomes all the

more intriguing as he tries to understand their motivations; he notes that the two "spent their lives trying to keep up appearances, and to make his salary do more than it could," (209). The pair compares to Rosamund and Louie Marsellus, who despite having all the financial means to partake in superfluous activities, also maintain a similar social reputation. By placing this lower-middle-class couple at the heart of the novel (and immediately following Tom's idyllic bliss at the Blue Mesa), Cather reminds us that neither the materialistic mindsets of the members of St. Peter's family nor the petty ambitions of the poor D.C. couple are ideal modes of family life. What we see from Tom Outland's perspective are several mutually distinct societies that are all, somehow, thematically linked in terms of their absorption with money and its effects on their social status.

Cather wrote in a letter that the narrative structure of *The Professor's House* is relevant to a personal experience. The contents of the novel are divided into three sections; "Tom Outland's Story" is sandwiched between "The Family" and "The Professor." In this letter, Cather writes that the order of the novel was intended to replicate the effect of a Dutch interior painting, looking at which the viewer has before her both the claustrophobic interior scene and the suggestion of fresh air offered by a window in the picture opening onto an exterior landscape.[17] St. Peter's position in the dusty attic of his old home is quite similar to that of the subject of the Dutch painting—both able to look out the window, but constrained to a position inside. St. Peter's placement in the attic is a claustrophobic one but just as much, a preference. While St. Peter denies practicing asceticism[18], his choice to work in a cramped space does not allow him to partake in any kind of extravagances. Aside from the meek window that overlooks his French

[17] Wilson, Anna. "Canonical Relations: Willa Cather, America, and The Professor's House." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 47

[18] A lifestyle characterized by abstinence from sensual pleasures, often for the purpose of pursuing spiritual goals.

garden, St. Peter's study keeps him far removed from any sort of indulgences, especially the luxurious amenities of the St. Peters' new home that Mrs. St. Peter often criticizes her husband for intentionally neglecting. The second section of the novel, "Tom Outland's Story," is an interruption of the suffocating materialism present in the Godfrey household; if the window in Cather's Dutch painting were opened, it would be revealing Tom Outland's story. Just as the home in the painting is filled with superficial possessions—clothes, furs, and petty ambitions—so are the first and third sections of the novel. Tom Outland's story within the story is a breath of fresh air as it follows someone with a disregard for all the frivolous concerns of St. Peter Godfrey's family.

The final section of the novel, "The Professor," is a closer look at St. Peter's depressive state as he grows older, his lack of a will to live, and near-death experience in the very same attic that he completed his life's work in. Ultimately, Cather's three sections highlight the distinct importance of aesthetic meaning in the novel. Tom Outland's account is restricted by nature—enclosed by two meditations on domestic life, obligation, and class tensions. Outland's narrative is only significant as a story within a story as opposed to being a present reality. Despite the theme of freedom, adventure, and discovery in Outland's voyage, the fate of the novel is one of a specific order and perspective in that the ending fails to take place in the fresh air from Cather's 'open window' metaphor but indoors, confined to the old habits of St. Peter's domestic life—in the end, his life depends on the good senses of his housekeeper, Augusta, who saves him from asphyxiation when his makeshift heating device in the attic malfunctions. Unlike Outland, St. Peter is unable to survive in an environment where he is given complete agency. After Augusta saves St. Peter, he suddenly acknowledges her prominence in his household: "he even felt a sense of obligation toward her, instinctive, escaping definition, but real. And when you admitted

that a thing was real, that was enough—now," (257). St. Peter's acceptance of such 'real' feelings again channels the sentiment behind Santayana's rationalization of pragmatism and aesthetics: to identify the source of such a sense of obligation would take away from the sensation itself, but by simply identifying the existence of his senses, St. Peter can sincerely pursue the obligations he now possesses toward Augusta. 'Realness' in this context might also be an effort on Cather's behalf to refer back to the French mind, which as she had spoken of "has been formed by rubbing up cruelly with the inescapable realities of life...The Frenchman doesn't talk nonsense about art, about self-expression; he is too greatly occupied with building the things that make his home."[19]

The existence of material culture in *The Professor's House* and *A Lost Lady* is complicated through the frequent presence of specific material objects: china, furniture, fur coats, and more. Illustrious objects seem to act as social constraints for most characters—an example of a character hindered by materiality from *The Professor's House* would be Louie Marsellus, the son-in-law of St. Peter Godfrey. In the act of bragging over the construction of his new home at the dinner table, Louie expressed "his heedless enthusiasm that made him often say untactful things," (29). At the end of the chapter, Cather gives us a glimpse of a conversation between St. Peter's other daughter Kathleen and her journalist husband, Scott McGregor: "McGregor seized his wife's elbow and rushed her down the walk to the gate where his Ford was parked, breaking out in her ear as they ran: 'Now what the hell is a virtual widow? Does he mean a virtuous widow, or the reverseous? Bang, bang!'" (34). Mr. McGregor is unenthused with Louie' discussion of his wealthy inheritance from Tom Outland. While the dialogue alone suggests McGregor's irritation—where he mocks the unappealing tone of Louie's language

[19] James Woodress, "Willa Cather: A Literary Life"

(reverseous, while it sounds pretentious, is not a word)—the objects within this scene also provide more of an economic context for the reader; McGregor is moving toward his Ford vehicle, evidence that he drives a standard American-made car. McGregor's Ford might represent the exact kind of humility that Cather finds necessary for someone with aesthetic tastes and fiscal freedom; if a character like Louie still lacks certain social graces despite his comfort and luxury, then Mr. McGregor—with his standard-grade vehicle—is the antithesis of Marsellus. McGregor's Ford, however, is still a material possession.[20]

While he is directly contrasted with Louie Marsellus, Scott McGregor and his moral consciousness go against the grain of the entire St. Peter family. McGregor, who is a journalist by trade, despises the pretentious materialism that Louie seems to encourage among the St. Peter family. At one point, Scott mentions an editorial assignment for his job at the newspaper. In contrast to St. Peter's cultivated and meticulous writing habits, Scott is able to complete his work in a rush in order to meet a deadline. This is the only point in the novel where a fixed value is actually provided, unlike the ambiguous, large "monetary returns" that Louie and Rosamund inherited from Outland: "It's not an editorial I have to finish, it's the daily prose poem I do for the syndicate, for which I get twenty-five beans," (33). While Scott is dissatisfied with his vocation as a journalist, knowing that he is more talented and capable of something that would pay more, it is evident that journalism is viewed in the novel as an inferior writing practice to the creative and high-level of academic writing that St. Peter has dedicated his career to. Despite

[20] The first Model T Ford was completed in 1908; between 1908 and 1927, over 15 million Model T cars were built. To own a Ford vehicle during the early-twentieth century in America—*The Professor's House* was published in 1925 and presumably takes place around the same period—was common for a middle class family. The Roaring Twenties, remembered for its dramatic influence on social and economic culture in America and Europe, was characterized by extravagance. While owning a Ford was not necessarily luxurious due to it being a common object in middle class families, it was nevertheless an object that enhanced the standards of living and social patterns of American families, allowing for more freedom and adventure by the accessibility of leisure activities.

Scott McGregor's wit and brains, his smaller source of income makes him an outcast in the St. Peter family.

Rosamund as a female consumer in *The Professor's House* raises a series of important questions. To begin, her preference for antique, handmade items as opposed to the mass-produced is indicative of her refined taste. As her husband points out, "she doesn't like anything showy..she doesn't care about intrinsic values. It must be beautiful, first of all," (106), and to maintain this focus, she avails herself of experts such as her father to confirm the uniqueness of her finds. Like Tom Outland and St. Peter, Rosamund has an admiration for the rustic; the very specific objects that are infused with beauty and meaning—the antitheses of commodities. Yet it is precisely Rosamund's disregard for the intrinsic values that Cather seems to take issue with—there is something incongruent to Rosamund's appetite for material objects in that she seems disregard the integrity and history of them. In fact, this disregard expands beyond her relationships with objects, but people as well. Despite only being engaged to Tom Outland—for he was killed in the War[21] before they were married—Rosamund inherits his fortunes from the Outland vacuum and spends them generously with her new husband, Louie Marsellus. Such lavish spending in it of itself seems to betray the memory of her deceased fiancé due to Outland's own resistance to refined objects. Rosamund's consumption becomes a point of speculation for characters who are not as fiscally endowed, such as her sister, Kathleen (Kitty) and brother in-law, Scott McGregor. When McGregor questions the virtue of Rosamund, his comment seems to cast doubt on the morality of the transaction that Outland's inheritance represents; despite Rosamund's legal rights to Outland's fortune, her consumption of it destroys Outland's notions of preservative, pragmatic integrity.

[21] All we know of Tom Outland's experience in combat is that he was was killed at 30 years old in Flanders, fighting with the Foreign Legion in the second year of World War II.

As Janis Stout underlined in *Willa Cather and Material Culture,* the central section of the novel, "Tom Outland's Story" contains several urgent hints that point toward Rosamund's betrayal of Tom Outland. Outland's mother dying shortly thereafter the death of his father after watching him drown is indicative of her devotion toward him. At the center of Tom's journey, his discovery of the mummy called "Mother Eve" points toward ideas of fidelity when Father Duchene suggests that the woman's death may have been a form of punishment after she cheated on her husband, for "in primitive society the husband is allowed to punish an unfaithful wife with death," (222). While it seems that fidelity is a core value in Tom Outland's world, and Rosamund seemingly betrays this value, Kathleen—the younger of St. Peter's two daughters who does not possess the same luxuries as her sister—is the one who, according to St. Peter, has most successfully preserved Outland's memory: "Can't you stay awhile, Kitty? I almost never see anyone who remembers that side of Tom," (83) St. Peter asks his daughter as she visits him in the attic-study. Kitty's fond memories of Tom Outland suggest a moral integrity associated with her position as a young woman with less privileges than her wealthy sister and brother-in-law. If Kathleen's memories of Outland are indeed the purest, most authentic depictions of him, then one might read Rosamund's acquisition of wealth as a detriment to her own memory. The notion of authenticity is an important element in Kitty's memory—unlike her sister, who names her new country home on the shores of Lake Michigan, with her new husband, 'Outland,' Kitty preserves Tom Outland's character through memories. The irony of the new 'Outland' estate lies in the fact that Tom Outland himself was so critical and fearful of the material world; the country house named after him, designed by a Norwegian architect with a parisian training, therefore functions as a debased material good. As well, the sincerity of Kitty's memories proposes memory as the purest medium of preservation.

Louie and Rosamund's marriage represents the modern consuming couple; yet Outland was the primary provider of this relationship and Louie is reduced to being a shopper. The Marsellus' seem to present a warped notion of male-female relations; at one point, Rosamund 'proudly' tells her father that her husband selects all things for her and that they do not go shopping without each other. Yet, in "Tom Outland's Story," Outland notes that his landlord spend too much time to go shopping with his wife to select satin. A husband accompanying his wife on a shopping trip seemed strange to Outland, yet Louie facilitates the unleashing of Rosamund's consumer desires.

St. Peter's habits in *The Professor's House* are oddly obsessed with the mechanical aspects of labour. In his study, he subjects himself to the crowded, dusty sewing space of his bohemian housekeeper, Augusta. Despite the room being overcrowded, the professor refused to purchase items that might help him organize his materials better; at one point he contemplates the usage of filing-cabinets to help keep his drafts in order, but admits "now he really didn't need them," (22). St. Peter's method to insulate the office is characterized by a similar resistance to convenient objects; since the furnace heat did not work in the attic, he developed a method by which the window must be left open in order for the wind to filter out air from the gas stove. The great lengths that St. Peter will go to in order to convenience himself directly play into his skepticism of commodified objects; if he can fix an issue or complete a task on his own, he sees no reason to pour money into such items. As the narration highlights, the sewing room was in no way a conducive workspace, yet St. Peter continues to pay rent for the entire house just to use that one inconvenient room. St. Peter's refusal to buy items like a filing cabinet, however, seem to contradict his willingness to spend money—the refusal of convenient objects, therefore, has less concern with their costs and more with the accommodations that they allow. St. Peter's

abstinence from such purchases indicates a sort of pride associated with the fact that he was able to complete his stories without the organizational convenience of the filing cabinets and create his own method in heating his study. St. Peter's method is not only a positive act because it helps him complete a task, but because conducting the task itself evokes a sense of pleasure for him.

St. Peter's liking to the sewing room is peculiar for several reasons. From what we know, he is very skeptical of material goods and spending money on indulgences for himself; he even admits to his wife that the sewing room study is practically "his only indulgence." Yet, St. Peter evidently takes a liking to certain material objects and is happy to purchase these certain objects for his wife and daughters. Specifically in the first section of the novel, "The Family," the professor and his wife are often bickering about why he is not entirely utilizing the features of their new home. St. Peter, whose daughters often seek his advice when it comes to selecting fur coats or furniture, admitted that he likes his closets because he likes having room to hang all of his coats and clothing items. Despite his ambivalence toward purchasing useful items for himself, St. Peter does not seem to take issue with spending his money on his family. Mrs. St. Peter, Lilian, asked Godfrey if he would rather have spent his money on something other than their new home, and he replied: "If with that cheque I could have bought back the fun I had writing my history, you'd never have got your house. But one couldn't get that for twenty thousand dollars. The great pleasures don't come so cheap," (23). If the creative, imaginative process of writing is most important to St. Peter, then it should make sense that the monetary consequences of his work do not mean much to him, too. Yet, St. Peter seems to receive some sort of pleasure from buying beautiful objects for his family.

St. Peter's commitment to working exclusively in the attic seems to be influenced by Augusta's presence there. With the female forms taking up most of the space, the attic

constitutes as a feminine, matriarchal realm; a realm which St. Peter seems to be attached to because of Augusta's company. In many senses, Augusta seems to be St. Peter's feminine muse; he even tells her as they pack the materials of the attic for the move, that their work has become intertwined: "I see we shall have some difficulty in separating our life work, Augusta. We've kept our papers together a long while now," (14). The physical mixing of St. Peter and Augusta's art is representative of an aesthetic integration—by working among Augusta and her feminine influences, St. Peter sees the physical materials of Augusta's artistry as sources of inspiration for his own writings.

When Augusta saves St. Peter from the perils of the burning stove, she herself becomes skeptical of the object. While Augusta initially seeks medical assistance, she calls the family doctor but only tells him that he is needed and not what had happened. She retells the story to St. Peter once he wakes up: "'I thought I'd better not say what the trouble was, but I asked him to come at once..'Augusta hurried over her recital. She was evidently embarrassed by the behaviour of the stove and the condition in which she had found him. It was an ugly accident, and she didn't want the neighbours to know of it," (281). Augusta's embarrassment toward the stove suggests that we might hold our household appliances to social account, or more importantly, that along with technological improvements on appliances like stoves, that we might project human failures onto such objects and further detect them as scientific flaws as opposed to human ones. Yet, as Augusta relays this information to St. Peter, she clearly does so for the sake of his reputation among his neighbors—afraid that others might discover that an out-of-date, malfunctioning stove nearly asphyxiated Godfrey St. Peter, Augusta's effort to disguise the causation is motivated by social anxieties as well as a fear of appliances.

The authority of St. Peter's sensibility in *The Professor's House* is constantly shifting; while he subjects himself to a quiet attic swamped with the old forms of his housekeeper, he at one point begs his younger daughter Kathleen to keep him company in order to evoke fond memories of his deceased student, Tom Outland. In this light, the attic acts as a place of storage; both where Augusta's forms, St. Peter's papers, and the old, untarnished memories of Tom Outland are allowed to roam freely. If an isolated, dusty indoor space evokes so much livelihood for St. Peter, then we might begin to question what sort of role the external world plays in this novel.

The distinctly interior and exterior elements of *The Professor's House* are evidence of the complications that been imposed on the material objects of the interior world and the natural landscapes of the exterior. While St. Peter's most productive mode occurs is in a cramped, indoor attic, it is also the place where he is the most depressed and dissatisfied with his life. On the exterior, in "Tom Outland's Story," we get a glimpse of beauty but only to find that Outland was killed in World War I. If the interior spaces of *The Professor's House* represent realms of production, artistry, and privacy, they still ultimately fail to show us the art that is produced within them. We never get a glimpse of the actual content of St. Peter's *The Spanish Adventurers in North America*[22]. As a compromise, the most successful moments in the novel take place

[22] The idea of the historical narrative is brought to the forefront in *The Professor's House.* Godfrey St. Peter's eight-volume history of the Spanish explorers in North America seems to be influenced by the adventures of his protégé, Tom Outland, who explored the Blue Mesa, a Native American village in New Mexico. The reader is left to imagine what sort of history St. Peter actually did write about: whether he dedicated space to the brutal operations of the Spanish colonists or to what detail his writing depicts the influence that the Catholic church had on the native population. Because the details of St. Peter's writings remain unknown to the reader, the details within "Tom Outland's Story," are several clues that point toward the sources of St. Peter's inspiration. In Outland's narrative we discover his deep appreciation and desire to unveil the history of the pre-civilization—it is through artifacts, and the beauty of the Cliff City, that Tom Outland learns the history of the native people and their land. And despite having no blood-connection to the people of a seemingly-utopian civilization, Outland identifies them as his ancestors because he recognizes the value of the objects that they produced. This appreciation, however, is different from the kind of acquired, aesthetic cultivations that we see of the St. Peter family in their modern society. Louie and Rosamund Marsellus' refined tastes for material objects, for example, contrast with Tom Outland's attraction to the Mesa in that they do not possess a similar urge to discover the intrinsic values of their material objects. Outland's

when the external world is viewed from within. When St. Peter opens his window as a part of his heating method, he is most comfortable. Likewise, when he looks out the same window to view his French garden, he is pleased to view the beautiful product of his labours.

"The novel, for a long while, has been over-furnished," Willa Cather writes in her essay "The Novel Démeuble," published in 1922. "..How wonderful it would be if we could throw all the furniture out the window; and along with it, all the meaningless reiterations concerning physical sensations, all the tiresome old patterns, and leave the room as bare as the stage of a Greek theatre." Cather's minimalistic aesthetic metaphor, here the unfurnished room, is similarly produced in *The Professor's House,* where Professor St. Peter retreats from the embellished interiors of his new home to study in an old attic void of the 'great number of material objects' that Cather describes as 'meaningless reiterations.' While St. Peter's study is in one way the epitome of Cather's literary ideal of an unfurnished room, it also serves as a metaphorical representation of homo-erotic desire, acting as a small closet that contains the very intimate memories of his deceased student, Tom Outland. Yet, St. Peter's attic does not seem to be the only signifier of his potentially-suppressed homoerotic desires; throughout the first section of the novel, his wife constantly criticizes him for his refusal to celebrate and utilize the upgraded features and designs of their new home: "'Whoever said I didn't? But more than anything else, I like my closets," (24). While St. Peter's particular liking to his new closets does not entirely imply a contained sexuality, it alludes to the importance that privation and enclosed spaces play

appreciations, therefore, appear to be more authentic because of his efforts—though not always successful—to educate himself on the histories of the artifacts. As well, Outland's connection to the ancient objects is one that is free from social contamination—unlike certain fur coats, electric bells, and furniture sets that characterize the first and third sections of the novel, the artifacts at the Mesa have had no monetary values imposed on them by modern, capitalistically-motivated businessmen.

in St. Peter's life; and at the very least, directs us toward the notion that something is being hidden.

The peculiarities of the St. Peter family might also indicate a performative heterosexual family arrangement, a mask of St. Peter's otherwise homoerotic conditions. In "The Family," St. Peter meditates on the coquetry of his wife when she is among her sons-in-law; he notices that Mrs. St. Peter "had begun the game of being a woman all over again," (64) which allowed for St. Peter to be dismissed from his heterosexual obligation.[23] While St. Peter might depart from obligations to his wife, his behavior toward his daughters is also suspicious—at one point, he compares Rosamund and Kathleen, admitting one to be more attractive than the other. Within this section of the novel, Cather's reader might begin to detect certain behaviors of St. Peter that reach beyond idiosyncrasy—by meditating on the seemingly beautiful and feminine features of his daughter's faces and bodies, St. Peter describes the two in objective terms. This language allows St. Peter to strip himself of his paternal position and further release himself from certain moral expectations and behaviors of fathers.

A Lost Lady continues Cather's historical account of capitalism and exploitation in an industrialized railroad town. Inspired by Cather's Nebraska childhood town, Red Cloud, the small, fictional town of Sweet Water witnesses a growing population as it is located along the transcontinental railroad. Early critics of the novel pronounced it as one with a nostalgic lament for the golden days of the pioneers, which Cather herself was known to prefer over the post-frontier financiers and developers who succeeded them.[24] Yet as much as Cather favored the 'old West,' she was resistant to appear 'nostalgic' or 'sentimental' in the way that her early critics

[23] Kishi, Madoka. ""More than Anything Else, I Like My Closets": Willa Cather's Melancholic Erotics in The Professor's House."
[24] Frus, Phyllis, and Stanley Corkin. "Willa Cather's "Pioneer" Novels and [Not New, Not Old] Historical Reading." *College Literature* 26, no. 2 (1999): 36-58.

have described. Despite the representation of Sweet Water as "one of those grey towns along the Burlington railroad, which are so much greyer today than they were then," (2) *A Lost Lady* offers a more critical glance at the tension between the corruptive forces of capitalism and the tensions between an aesthetic feeling in an otherwise uncultivated territory. [25]

A Lost Lady, published in 1923, tells the story of Marian Forrester and her husband, Captain Forrester. Throughout the novel, Marian is characterized by her physical beauty and charm, yet under the surface, she is engaged in a slew of corrupt social and economic affairs that all circle back to her infidelity toward her husband. *A Lost Lady* is narrated by Niel Herbert, a boy who has observed Marian Forrester from his childhood to what, in the present narration, is his young adulthood. The growing disenchantment experienced through Niel Herbert speaks to Cather's broader concerns with the declining view that utilitarian and capitalist thoughts have had on the Western landscape. Disenchantment as it is presented to us through Niel's coming of age story works as a vehicle to transport Cather's reflection on the dangers of an overly-romanticized perspective of the way life was before industrialization. With Niel as a narrator throughout his young adulthood, Cather carefully allows for her criticism of American capitalist culture to unfold without providing a completely sentimentalized view of the way life was before.

Many of the economic tensions and anxieties in *A Lost Lady* are consequently portrayed through the character Ivy Peters, a peer of our narrator Niel Herbert, who ultimately inherits the Forrester estate after becoming a wealthy lawyer. The Forrester property, which was built on a lake in the industrialized town of Sweet Water, is itself an object of tension; despite Captain Forrester's cultivation of the land, a product of his noble, pioneer spirit, he expresses a

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protectiveness and delicate handling of the environment: “anyone but Captain Forrester would have drained the bottom land and made it into highly productive fields. But he had selected this place long ago because it looked beautiful to him, and he happened to like the way the creek wound through his pasture, with mint and joint-grass and twinkling willows along its banks,” (11). By protecting the marshes, Captain Forrester represents a balance between the masculine will to tame the land and aesthetic beauty. With this example, economics are being compromised by an effort to attend to aesthetic value. Yet, Captain Forrester’s noble position is unusual for a person of such a class distinction; as the narrator describes, any other man alike would have exploited the land for its money-making potential—Ivy Peters later becomes the person to do this. Once Ivy takes possession of the property, he immediately decides to drain the marsh to reap its profits: “By draining the marsh Ivy had obliterated a few acres of something he hated, though he could not name it, and had asserted his power over the people who had loved those unproductive meadows for their idleness and silvery beauty,” (89). The differences between Captain Forrester and Ivy Peters seem to be both aesthetic and temperamental; while Ivy evidently drains the marsh because of its economic appeal, that is not his only motivation. If Captain Forrester represents the noble pioneer who originally settled the West like, the "dreamers, great-hearted adventurers who were unpractical to the point of magnificence," (89), then Ivy Peters represents the second-wave of settlers, "shrewd young men, trained to petty economies," who would "cut up into profitable bits" "the space, the colour, the princely carelessness of the pioneer,” (90). Yet, the major difference between the two is most evident in the polarity of their actions toward the land, instead of their actions toward Marian Forrester. This is one example of the way Cather’s male character prioritize their land over their women; or, in the way that women are expected to preserve such tensions.

It becomes Marian Forrester's duty as Captain Forrester's wife to delicately balance the two distinct divisions—the homesteaders and handworkers versus the bankers looking to invest in the new commodities on the industrializing east coast. Marian's obligation to preserve these divisions is foreshadowed in the beginning of the novel when she comes to Niel's rescue after he falls and injures his leg in an effort to save the woodpecker that Ivy Peters cruelly blinded.

Cather first introduces Ivy Peters when he is young, hunting in the Forrester's backyard along with Niel and their group of friends. In the scene, Peters blinds a woodpecker by slitting its eyes open and then releasing it. If this initial act of aggression toward the ecosystem does not alone conflict with Cather's beautiful Western landscapes, then Ivy's later physical destruction of Captain Forrester's property epitomized a conflict of interest. As the novel progresses, so does Ivy Peters' reputation; once he inherits the Forrester property he drains the very marshes that Captain Forrester had efforted to preserve. After Mr. Peters claims the land, Niel's romanticized vision of the historical Western landscape seems to dissolve:

> "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," Willa Cather, *A Lost Lady,* (107).

No longer can the natural beauty of Sweet Water exist due to Ivy Peters. If the Forresters were exquisite for their ability to balance the town's rapid industrialization with its natural beauty, then their reputation could not be followed. Niel's realization of the increasingly commodified marsh lands is characterized by melancholy; in consequence, as the heroic, pioneer period of Western settlement is abandoned and replaced by the depressed era of industrialization,

so does the narration lose its spirit. For Niel, the Old West is 'dreamlike' in the same way that he remembers Mrs. Forrester—a beautiful vision from his childhood. Yet as the novel progresses and Niel matures he discovers the many faults of his matriarchal figure and his dream dissolves in the same fashion as the marshes.

In its opening passage, the novel presents the Forrester estate as its subject. The narrator ascribes a sort of liveliness to the home, which was "well known from Omaha to Denver for its hospitality and for a certain charm of atmosphere," (9). This initial description directs the reader toward a follow up question, that being, who exactly are the Forresters? By briefly waiting to mention the actual family that occupies this home, Cather prioritizes the physical representation of a home and family as opposed to the family itself. The home, representing the extravagant spirit of the Forresters, is likewise able to maintain such a strong reputation because of its existence in the industrialized railroad aristocracy. Any person familiar with the Forrester estate, therefore, was also a part of the broader railroad network in the town of Sweet Water. Shortly after this introduction, we learn that the house "was not at all remarkable" and "the people who lived there made it seem much finer than it was," (10). The skeptical tone of Cather's narrator subtly acknowledges the frivolous culture of Sweet Water's railroad aristocracy; yet it is unclear whether the narrator is suspicious of the Forresters themselves or the misleading decoration of their estate. The nuances of these passages point the reader toward a broader tension within *A Lost Lady*—one that is concerned with environmental degradation, sketchy economic exchanges, and superfluous material wealth. Cather's pessimistic narrative tone toward the Forresters and their obscure home speaks to her broader concerns regarding the pioneer life and the aesthetic sacrifices that industrialization inevitably causes.

Chapter Two:

Memory, Isolation, and the Garden Motif

"To think we must be in solitude," Hannah Arendt [26]

Part One: Sentimental Nostalgia Versus Contemplation

Memory as it is represented in Cather's novels walks a fine line between being nostalgic versus contemplative. Memory is an important device employed by Cather—yet, her passages that evoke memories walk a fine line between a sentimental nostalgia and contemplative meditations of the past. Skeptical of sentimentality and the pejorative associations of the term 'nostalgia,' as being delusive, Cather is careful to call upon the past experiences of her characters without priming her reader with the possibility of a reconciliation between a more ideal past and a corrupt present[27]. While many essential moments where contemplative memory is evoked tend to service Cather's characters by the consequential reconciliation between aesthetic and labour values, other moments calling upon memory still slip between deep, contemplative meditations into delusive sentimentalizations that Cather herself expressed resistance to.[28] Critics of the Romantic period argued that artists who meditated too closely on the past were too dejected for their own good. In the context of the Industrial Era in America, specifically, the Romantic art

[26] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Solitude*
[27] By 'more ideal past' I am mainly referring to the idealized, pre-Industrial, pioneer period; the 'corrupt present' being characterized as post-Industrial and capitalistic
[28] James Woodress, "Willa Cather: A Literary Life"

movement was characterized by a heavy-nostalgia which longed for the pre-industrial period to the extent that it turned too far away from the issues of the present. Between *The Professor's House, A Lost Lady, and Death Comes for the Archbishop*, such 'nostalgic tones' seem to appear against the backdrop of massive identity dislocations and in historical periods of transition also characterized by fear and change.

In *The Professor's House*, both Godfrey St. Peter and Tom Outland experience reflections that might seem 'nostalgic' in the sense that they are reflective; yet, these recollections of memory evoke particular memories that service the broader concerns of the novel beyond the confines of 'sentimentality.' The same experiences occur in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* as Father Latour reflects on his youth once he is retired. Perhaps the most conflicting representations of memory in a Cather novel come from the narrative voice of *A Lost Lady*—as he suffers from a sense of disenchantment with a new industrial society, Niel Herbert consequently reflects on his romanticized memories of Marian Forrester, a woman who he has staged as an erotic spectacle within the novel. Because Niel categorizes Mrs. Forrester's mental state as one dominated by her sexuality—and reads her sexual betrayal to her husband as an act of deviance—Niel's narration perpetuates a sentimental, idealized vision of the archetypal pioneer's wife— a stereotype that becomes difficult for Marian Forrester to escape over the course of the novel.

Cather herself acknowledges the nostalgic portrait of Marian Forrester in *A Lost Lady* as a less-perfected piece of literature. Mrs. Forrester, our protagonist, is based off of a friend of the Cather family, Mrs. Silas Gerber, who was the wife of Nebraska governor Mr. Silas Gerber. Mrs. Gerber often had young Willa as a Sunday evening visitor at their mansion in Lincoln. According to Mildred R. Bennett, the Garber homestead was one of the most pleasant and

commodious residences in western Nebraska, with a five-acre grover of cottonwoods where the family often held picnics. In order to evoke the elated spirit of her young self, Cather said she had to get up to feeling thirteen years old and all set for a picnic in that grove.[29] Cather shared more of her inspiration for the novel in a letter:

> "*A Lost Lady* was a woman I loved very much in my childhood. Now the problem was to get her not like a standardized heroine in fiction, but as she really was, and not to care about anything else in the story except that one character. And there is nothing but that portrait. Everything else is subordinate.
> I didn't try to make a character study, but just a portrait like a thin miniature painted on ivory. A character study of Mrs. Forrester would have been very, very different. I wasn't interested in her character when I was little, but in her lovely hair and her laugh which made me happy clear down to my toes."

To digest *A Lost Lady* in the way Cather imagined it as—a portrait—we must, therefore, highlight all of the very specific details that Cather saw as important of a socialite like Marian Forrester. Throughout the novel Mrs. Forrester is reduced to being a materialistic, beautiful woman. Mrs. Forrester's striking beauty is conveyed through the third person narrator, Niel Herbert, who becomes increasingly disenchanted with his romantic vision of Western aristocracy as he witnesses the downfall and degradation of the Forrester estate and consequently, the downfall of Marian. The omniscient third person narration, however, was not the original form that Cather intended to employ. She attempted to write it in the first person, but ultimately abandoned this medium because it did not, in her eyes, best represent the vividness of Mrs. Forrester. Cather's use of the omniscient third person narrator calls to mind one of her greatest influencers, Henry James. As Elsa Nettels discusses in her essay "Willa Cather and the Example of Henry James," perhaps the most important lesson Cather learned from James was how to unify a novel by centering the narrative in the mind of one specific character.[30] The main subject

[29] Mildred R. Bennet, *The World of Willa Cather*
[30] Nettels, Elsa. "Willa Cather and the Example of Henry James."

of *A Lost Lady,* therefore, is illustrated by the feelings of her observers. In this light, *A Lost Lady* is intensely inspired by the same instinctive, reactionary qualities that define the aesthetic experience—Marian Forrester, consequently, is characterized by the nostalgic enthusiasm that Cather shared toward a true socialite from her younger life. Aesthetic beauty, therefore, is an essential element in Cather's literary and personal nostalgia.

Deep reflections of memory also occur throughout *The Professor's House,* where the final section in Tom Outland's diary offers an alternative approach to the feeling of reminiscence; once Outland is abandoned by his partner and in complete isolation at the Blue Mesa, he partakes in the ultimate aesthetic bliss. Broadly speaking, the most poignant and productive moments for Cather's characters occur in solitude. Not until St. Peter is isolated in his old attic is he able to properly conduct his writing; the same circumstance of solitude applies to Tom Outland at the mesa—once Roddy abandons him, Outland experiences his most profound sensational experience with the mid-Western landscape:

> "I'll never forget the night I got back. I crossed the river an hour before sunset and hobbled my horse in the wide bottom of Cow Canyon. The moon was up, though the sun hadn't set, and it had that glittering silveriness the early stars have in high altitudes. The heavenly bodies look so much more remote from the bottom of a deep canyon than they do from the level. The climb of the walls helps out the eye, somehow. I lay down on a solitary rock that was like an island in the bottom of the valley, and looked up. The grey sage-brush and the blue-grey rock around me were already in shadow, but high above me the canyon walls were dyed flame-colour with the sunset, and the Cliff City lay in a gold haze against its dark cavern. In a few minutes it, too was grey, and only the rim rock at the top held the red light. When that was gone, I could still see the copper glow in the piñons along the edge of the top ledges. The arc of sky over the canyon was silvery blue, with its pale yellow moon, and presently stars shivered into it, like crystals dropped into perfectly clear water," Willa Cather, *The Professor's House (226)*

Outland goes on to attribute the strength of his memory toward these sensory experiences to the fact that it was his first evening where he was truly able to observe to mesa in its entirety. Through Outland's language, we can see that he feels an innate possession over the land that he was unable to express or understand while Blake was present; furthermore, Outland's present

feelings of blissful clarity contrast with his blurred recollection of the past—the passage is characterized by a nostalgic tone, with Outland alternating from the past to present tense in an effort to describe a past feeling that still remains with him as he writes in his journal. Outland's experience in this passage looks like what we might imagine Cather's ideal aesthetic experience to be—severed from the problems of materialistic consumerism, Outland's solitude allows him to engage with the physical environment. In the final moments where each hue of the Cliff City sunset complements the other, Outland's experience is idealized by a vision of clear water beneath him. If Outland's shining sky were to represent a hopeful future, then the clear water beneath him is an opportunity for him to accept the faults of his past, and look at them in a reflective manner. The clear representation of a body of water here is a new motif in *The Professor's House*, directly contrasting with the very blue depictions of water that we see from St. Peter earlier on. If the blue body of water speaks to a sad body of nostalgia, then Outland's perfectly clear water is a result of his abandonment of a sentimental vision and ambitious outlook toward the future.

If Cather's ideal aestheticist can only function in solitude, then the aestheticist faces a great issue of limitation. For Outland, however, his personal isolation not only allows for his peak aesthetic experience, but as well, the abandonment of his suffocating nostalgia. Despite the colorful imagery of Outland's Cliff City sunset, he allows for a distinction between nostalgic romance and optimistic pragmatism to be made through the blending of colors and restorative element of the clear water. Ultimately, as Outland puts it, "something had happened that made it possible for me to co-ordinate and simplify, and that process, going on in my mind, brought with it great happiness. It was possession," (226). Outland's assessment of his experience is even defined by objective and functional terms. His pragmatic desire to know and possess the proper

blissful feeling is both quantified and qualified; it is only through his experience in isolation that he is able to collapse his pragmatic desire to uncover the history of the Blue Mesa with his aesthetic impulses to indulge in the sheer beauty of it. Outland identifies this new mode of thinking as the first time he ever studied methodically or intelligently—therefore, his aesthetic bliss seemed to also function as a causation of a more practical mode of studying. Considering Outland's experience here, Cather's prescriptive measure to the problem of nostalgia might involve embracing one's isolation. Outland even recounts on abandoning his diary by the end of it all, stating that "it would have been going backward." Yet, if remaining in isolation seems to be a limitation to the aesthetic experience, then perhaps Cather is proposing that such an experience can only happen in intimacy; beauty being so personal and specific to the individual that the presence of others, like Roddy Blake in the example of Outland, might always skew (or commodify) the very objects and things that others finds beauty in.

In line with the observation that nostalgia is present in the midst of a character's dislocation of identity is the portrait of Father Latour in the final sections of *Death Comes for the Archbishop.* A depiction of Archbishop Latour once he has retired, the chapter zooms in on the life he has created for himself on the country outskirts of Santa Fe, where he spends most of his time gardening on his new property and training missionary priests:

> "Beautiful surroundings, the society of learned men, the charm of noble women, the graces of art, could not make up to him for the loss of those light-hearted mornings of the desert, for that wind that made one a boy again. He had noticed that this peculiar quality in the air of new countries vanished after they were tamed by man and made to bear harvests. Parts of Texas and Kansas that he had first known as open range had since been made into rich farming districts, and the air had quite lost that lightness, that dry aromatic odour. The moisture of plowed land, the heaviness of labour and growth and grain-bearing, utterly destroyed it; one could breathe that only on the bright edges of the world; on the great grass plains or the sage-brush desert,"[31] 273

[31] Willa Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*

Father Latour's contemplative memories are directly associated with the idea of a somewhat untouched landscape. Even the syntactic structure of Father Latour's meditation alludes to the notion that man's cultivation and commodification of land has destroyed its natural appeals—the air of the 'parts of Texas and Kansas' in which Latour describes loses its lightness and pleasurable scent. While this passage is heavily concentrated on old and new sensory experiences, it is also concerned with the effects of the exploitation of land for economic objectives. It is precisely the foul whiff of the new and corrupt farming districts that evokes Father Latour's memories of an unscathed past; furthermore, Latour directs the reader toward the many 'beautiful' features of his cultivated life—aside from the garden—that do not compare to what existed before them. Father Latour's intense sensations speak to a quality of the physical environment—and flaw in the cultivated atmosphere—that does not seem to deceive him; should new terrains be built atop the old ones, he is telling us that he would either smell or see the difference because he remembers a time when the case was otherwise. Yet, in his old age, Father Latour's memory seems to inevitably fail him; despite this meditation, he has already disregarded the environment in his own way by building a Cathedral on the sacred territory of the Native Americans. Likewise, Father Latour is unable to directly identify his garden as a similar source of cultivated beauty, which possesses the same features of cultivation and flavor as the very 'beautiful surroundings' that he feels are incomparable to the natural landscape he is longing for. Despite his partial desire to retrieve elements the past, however, he is not completely capable—as evidenced by the garden and building of the Cathedral—of remaining loyal to this old way of life. Father Latour overcomes his the appeals of his memories by further indulging in more acts of cultivated beauty; he notes to himself that he even prefered the New World to the

Old, and during the day he distracts himself by enjoying "his dinner and his wind and the company of cultivated men," (272).

If *The Professor's House* proposes isolation as a necessity for contemplation, then isolation reaches its extreme in the final section, "The Professor," when St. Peter nearly dies from a suicidal attempt. The same sphere that brought him comfort because of the livelihood of its contents—the attic containing the old forms belonging to the housekeeper Augusta and the very lively journals of Tom Outland—becomes the sight of his near-death experience. Yet, St. Peter's lowest point is salvaged by a working class woman, Augusta, who is a sewer by trade. It is exactly Augusta's detachment from the corrupt life of academia and materialism that allows for her saving of St. Peter to bear moral weight on the broader suspicions of the novel—that the new materialism populating the educated American class, a new materialism that Cather sees as an effect of a democratized nation, is far removed and incompatible with old, pre-industrialized ideals. In many ways, Augusta's character is De Tocqueville's epitome of an artisan who has resisted the corruptive forces of commodification and industry. Not a member of the St. Peter family, Augusta is precisely the opposite of a "fixed character that belongs to aristocratic nations," (De Tocqueville, 401) but instead a woman, who as St. Peter describes, "had always been a corrective, remedial influence," (255). Augusta's permission to sew in the St. Peter home was arranged only if she made breakfast for the family on the same days. In this sense, her transactional work for the St. Peter family was more indicative of her manipulation of the value of her own labour which allowed her to work a job separate from her art, but one that nevertheless permitted her conduction of independent craftsmanship. Augusta is an ideal, modern working woman in this sense, providing for herself by working a job where she can exercise her talents and artistry while also benefiting financially. Her aptitude is not sacrificed,

but rather glorified by St. Peter as he reflects on Augusta presence in his home: “She came early, often directly from church..very often she gave him some wise observation or discreet comment to begin the day with. She wasn’t at all afraid to say things that were heavily, drearily true,” (255). A self-sufficient woman with realist principles, Augusta’s saving of Godfrey St. Peter provides hope for change and serves as a representation of both the aesthetic and pragmatic ideals that Cather’s main characters struggle to balance. While Augusta’s pragmatic artistry might look like an integrated solution to Cather’s two tensions of aesthetics and labour value, her presence as a character in the novel is too miniscule to properly render an ideological solution, despite her physical saving of St. Peter. Augusta’s minor feature in the novel alludes to the minority of a character of her sort in the twentieth-century American reality; therefore it is precisely her irrelevance to the broader issues in *The Professor’s House* that prevents her from functioning as a solution to Cather’s question of aesthetic pragmatism.

Part Two: Dangerous Landscapes and The Garden as Reconciliation

Garden imagery is a consistent theme throughout Cather’s *A Lost Lady, The Professor’s House,* and *Death Comes for the Archbishop.* Cather’s novels seem to be marked by the crossing of dangerous thresholds, such as the movement from one geographical region to another, movement from isolating shelters like attic rooms into society, movement from conception to art, and movement from life to death.”[32]Between these three novels, landscapes exist almost

[32] Steinhagen, Carol. "Dangerous Crossings: Historical Dimensions of Landscape in Willa Cather's "My Ántonia, The Professor's House, and Death Comes for the Archbishop"."

unanimously as objects of tension, where they struggle to define historical presence and are oftentimes subjected to the modern motivations of cultivation and commodification as exploitative economic measures. The movement of Cather's characters in and out of these historically-defined landscapes represents Cather's own efforts to reconcile her love for nature with the power of human beings. In conversation with the themes of isolation and memory throughout Cather's novels, a character's presence in and working on the garden serves as an object of reconciliation between aesthetics and labour. Isolation and reflection seem to also be contingencies for Cather's garden scenes, where each central character tends to work on his garden alone, while reflecting on his past experiences, in an effort to partake in physical labours that are also aesthetically appealing.

In *Death Comes for the Archbishop,* the most blaring examples of a corrupt landscape is revealed in the story of Friar Baltazar's garden. Baltazar seems to represent what we might see as an aesthetic tyrant. After enslaving the native Indian people to maintain his garden and serve a fine dinner for his visiting priests, Baltazar kills one of the Indian boys for spilling sauce on one of his guests. In an act of revenge and recognition of their enslavement, the Indian people throw Baltazar off of a cliff and he dies. The killing of Baltazar, while an act of retaliation from the Native Indians, is also a retaliation on behalf of the environment in which Baltazar has manipulated. The Native Americans are able to defend their historical presence but only through an act of violence—in this sense, they have no platform to defend themselves or their history except through deathly measures. Friar Baltazar's death is both a warning of the negative side-effects that can plague the aesthetically-obsessed as well as a clue that Cather might view working on a garden as strictly a personal task—it is precisely because Friar Baltazar had taken individual credit for a garden he made no effort to cultivate himself that it fails him in the end.

Furthermore, Cather's gardens only seem to resolve issues when they are solely addressed by their owners.

St. Peter's French garden also becomes an important element of his personality. At the beginning of the novel, the garden is one of the first details used to describe St. Peter's whereabouts on his property:

> "The professor had succeeded in making a French garden in Hamilton. There was not a blade of grass; it was a tidy half-acre of glistening gravel and glistening shrubs and bright flowers. There were trees, of course; a spreading horse-chestnut, a row of slender Lombardy poplars at the back, along the white wall, and in the middle two symmetrical, round-topped linden-trees...St. Peter had tended this bit of ground for over twenty years, and had got the upper hand of it. In the spring, when home-sickness for other lands and the fret of things unaccomplished awoke, he worked off his discontent here. In the long hot summers, when he could not go abroad, he stayed at home with his garden, sending his wife and daughters to Colorado to escape the humid prairie heat, so nourishing to wheat and corn, so exhausting to human beings. In those months when he was a bachelor again, he brought down his books and papers and worked in a deck chair under the linden-trees.." (41).

By describing St. Peter's life in the garden without his wife and daughters as 'the bachelor life,' Cather alludes to the idea that the aesthetic pleasures St. Peter achieves through the garden are only able to happen when he feels like the young, single man that he once was. This bachelor life, characterized by a presence in the humid air too hot for women to relax in, calls to mind the lifestyle of Tom Outland that we later see when he joins a herd of cattle for a year and travels to the Blue Mesa in New Mexico alongside his friend Roddy Blake. The pioneer spirit Cather famously depicts in her literature is front and center in St. Peter's cultivation of a French garden—rather than sharing the luxuries of a vacation in a more preferable climate with his family, St. Peter make a choice to remain at home in solitude, a state of being that seems to characterize his productive mode of work. As the reader later discovers in the novel, St. Peter will retreat to a cramped office space in the old attic of his house in order to write in peace. Despite the flaws of both settings—the hot air outside in the garden and lack of heating in the attic—St. Peter finds both comfort and beauty in inconvenient environments. While the French

garden is florid and refined in its presentation, it seems especially beautiful because of the labour that St. Peter poured into it—rather than stating that he simply made a garden, the narration points out that St. Peter *succeeded* in making one. St. Peter's work ethic is likewise characterized by both formula and surplus; while each instance of successful work was made possible by isolation, too were they enhanced by unnecessary amounts of labour. For St. Peter, making the French garden, with its glistening gravel and symmetrical trees, was necessary in order to cultivate a space for him to be in repose. The success of the garden, therefore, is all due to St. Peter's diligent manual labour on it.

Louie Marsellus is criticized by several characters in *The Professor's House* for his pretentious discussion of material wealth. St. Peter describes this sort of behavior as florid, suggesting that floridity is distasteful when it is "beaten up to cover the lack of something." In essence, the professor takes less of an issue with floridity and more of one regarding the strong colour and exuberance by which floridity is often conveyed; it is not Louie's actual tastes that are problematic but the manner in which he expresses them. The metaphor of floridity is significant in that the window of St. Peter's study overlooks a French garden—a garden that St. Peter only seems to want to work on once his family leaves town. When Louie takes Rosamund and Lilian to France, St. Peter suddenly "had plenty of time to spray his rose-vines, and his garden had never been so beautiful." Cultivating his garden, however, is the extent to which St. Peter actually spent time in it: "he realized that he ought to get back to work. The garden, in which he sat all day, was no longer a valid excuse to keep him from his study," (150). In the context of Louie's floridity and the legitimate floral details in St. Peter's garden, both motifs only seem to portray superficial matters. St. Peter never utilizes the garden as a leisurely feature of his property or for the produce that grows in it (insofar as we know), but is instead only concerned

with the process and act of refining it. Louie's florid preferences, moreover, draw more attention to his material acquisitions than to his actual tastes—this type of flamboyance attributes to the issue that art is being reimagined through a superficial lense, where its pure artistic value is sacrificed. If Cather's "garden," therefore serves as a motif which efforts to reconcile the values of labour with the values of beauty, then only through the deep, contemplative consciences of her characters does access to these 'gardens of reconciliation' become possible.

Order and importance in the garden setting is not exclusive to *The Professor's House.* In *Death Comes for the Archbishop,* Father Latour possesses a similarly compulsive behavior toward selecting the perfect spot for his new garden. When traveling the outskirts of Santa Fe to search for land to retire on, Father Latour notices the garden of a home which had a magnificent apricot tree. The narration continues by describing the rarity of a tree this size, and exact conditions that allowed for the fruit to grow so well: "since this tree grew against the hill-side, the Archbishop concluded that the exposure there must be excellent for fruit. He surmised that the heat of the sun, reflected from the rocky hill-slope up into the tree, gave the fruit an even temperature, warmth from two sides, such as brings the wall peaches to perfection in France," (264). Father Latour's detailed observations are significant in that they employ the same deductive methods to find the perfect spot for a garden. By considering the heat of the sun and the way in which the light is reflected to allow the tree to grow, Father Latour is acknowledging the practical features that are necessary for maintaining the life of the plants in a garden. In this example, pragmatic behavior is necessary in order for Father Latour's aesthetic dreams to become accomplished.

Yet as much as a pragmatic discipline becomes a necessity for Father Latour's aesthetics, it is also an element in his downfall—aware that his death is approaching, Father Latour

"arranged an order for his last days; if routine was necessary to him in health, it was even more so in sickness," (274).

A Lost Lady is not void of the garden motif, either. Violent human acts against nature characterize the opening chapters of the novel. As he plays with his young male friends in the Forrester's garden, the young Ivy Peters slits the eyes of a woodpecker in an effort to blind it. Niel Herbert, Cather's narrator, bears witness to the entire scene and expressed an immediate sense of sorrow for the bird; out of all of the boys, he instinctively wants to kill the animal to put it out of its misery. In the setting of the Forresters' marsh—a space that we identify to be an aesthetic symbol due to Captain Forrester's preservation of it—Niel displays an act of compassion. Yet, his inability to formally identify the dangerous and sketchy behavior of Ivy Peters creates a tension between what is outwardly visible and what we do not see on the surface. Throughout the novel, Niel struggles to reconcile the two. As the plot progresses, skewed visions seem to reappear—the blinding of the woodpecker is called to mind when Niel fails to see and understand the socioeconomic turmoil that Marian Forrester and Ivy Peters are caught up in. Niel's naivety toward Mrs. Forrester and Ivy Peters becomes the source of his disillusionment. If Ivy Peters' blinding of the woodpecker represents a hostility toward the environment, then the naiveté displayed in Niel's character underlines the successful scheming of Ivy Peters; the reality being that Ivy did successfully gain access to the Forrester land by manipulating and controlling Marian Forrester's finances. The significance of the garden in this scene ties back to the broader issues of individual intervention—it is Mrs. Forrester who has worked so diligently to cultivate the beautiful aspects of the "wide open wild roses and blue-eyed grass," (17) in her garden and consequently Captain Forrester who provides the financial support to maintain this garden. Despite the Captain's preservation of the marsh meadows, he doesn't continue to garden on his

property to the extent that his wife does. While the Forrester property, specifically the garden here, remains beautiful, it is a site that attracts danger and corruption precisely because Mrs. Forrester does not alone possess the pragmatic consciousness to guard it from dangerous trespassers like Ivy Peters. With her husband absent from the scene, all Mrs. Forrester can do to render Niel's broken leg is physically arrive and relieve the group of boys through her patience and gentle, motherly manners.[33]

Refinement, specifically of a French kind, is a central theme in *Death Comes for the Archbishop.* The novel is structured around Father Jean Marie Latour, a French Jesuit missionary priest who has been tasked with the challenge of reviving the Catholic church in a region from Ohio to New Mexico that seems to be without a history. Father Latour is accompanied by his longtime friend Father Vaillant in his travels. Along with his religious mission, Father Latour's experience in the novel is marked by an effort to surrender his attachment to his memories and experiences from growing up in France. *Death Comes for the Archbishop* is imbued with motifs concerned the refined objects and traditions of Father Latour's European background and tracks his effort to historicize and spiritualize a pre-historic land. From the beginning of the novel, Vaillant and Latour spend great lengths discussing the ingredients in their soup, a soup which Father Latour describes as, "the result of a constantly refined tradition," (*Archbishop*, 38). In

[33] As Marian Forrester's sexuality is described in the novel, it works as a representation of the deteriorating contemporary moment. Niel Herbert's narration—which is somehow limited in that it only staging Marian as an erotic spectacle—identifies and categorizes Marian's behavior with the domestic and coquettish classifications of female sexuality. The limitations of Niel's perspective pave way for a broader misconception of the same social, class, and race-based classifications that define the era that Niel is latching on to. Niel's nostalgia for the way of life on the old western frontier is settled in his portrayal of Marian Forrester; which furthers the idea that women are changeable, adaptable objects in an environment that has historically and is presently being reconstructed by men; both in the sense of colonization, industrialization, and here, narration. The restrictions that Cather places on Niel's narrative voice are indicative of a realistic limitation that characterizes the American effort to reconcile the changing environmental and domestic features of the industrial era—through Niel's consistent suspicion of Marian Forrester, and his reading of her sexuality as deviance, Cather shows us that women and their bodies are not only sites of confusion for men, but the subjects and distractions of a man's confusion and distress over political and economic matters.

order to create the optimal version of this tradition while on their journey, Father Latour concludes that a garden is a necessity so that its produce would make the most fresh ingredients for soup, like the "lettuces in France."

Throughout the novel, all of Father Latour's aesthetics tastes are evidently tied to his European upbringing; yet these very specific traditions also impose restraints on Father Latour. It is precisely Father Latour's displacement in an untouched American landscape that inspires him to transpose his European values onto American land. In building his Cathedral on the sacred, native New Mexican soil, Father Latour employs a French architect to execute his artistic vision. Yet, Cather's narrator notes that "no one but Molny and the Bishop had ever seemed to enjoy the beautiful site of that building..the steep carnelian hills drew up so close behind the church that the individual pine trees thinly wooding their slopes were clearly visible..the tawny church seemed to start directly out of those rose-coloured hills—with a purpose so strong that it was like action," (269). While it is evident that the Cathedral only bears an aesthetic significance to Father Latour and his architect, the Cathedral's physical presence amid an otherwise barren landscape is strange—with the church appearing as though it were emerging from the hills, its erect stance creates a tension between the natural world and the man-made. By acknowledging that the lone pair are the only two who appreciate the physical aspects of the church, Cather suggests that not only is the environment hostile to this construction, but to the overall influence that French culture and aesthetics play on Father Latour's decisions throughout this novel.

Father Latour's garden—though inspired by elements of his French culture—is his own measure of reconciliation. The garden, in Latour's ideal vision, serves as a human artifact balancing the organic relationship between the environment and Father Latour's French aesthetics. While remembering the pleasant details of a trip he and his architect took to

Arizona—where the two explored cliff ruins among grazing sheep and Navajo horsemen—Father Latour compared the landscape to an "Indian Garden of Eden," (295). While this comparison might immediately call to mind the Bishop's preoccupation with gardens alone, it also speaks to an example of the Native people blending into a landscape as opposed to a foreigner, like Father Latour, imposing himself onto one. It also sheds light on Father Latour's conception of the New World as being reminiscent of the first creation. As well, it tracks Father Latour's efforts to comprehend the New World beyond his preconceived European notions.

Across all three narrations, gardens function as potential locations of reconciliation for Cather's characters—particularly those who seem to be grappling with finding a balance between their aesthetic temperaments and their notions of the value of labour and pragmatic principles. Yet in each circumstance, the importance of individual labour is emphasized in that it is necessary in order for this reconciliation to occur. It is precisely Louie's inheritance of a fortune that he did not earn that makes his frivolou spending habits appear so obnoxious. Similarly, Friar Baltazar's death occurred when he enslaved other to make a beautiful, functioning garden that he later took credit for. Augusta's pragmatism and artistry are able to coexist because she is self-sufficient. The danger of the garden at the Forrester estate, furthermore, can be attributed to the fact that Marian's beautification of the land and Captain Forrester's ownership of it function separately—should they have worked on it in unison (combining Marian's taste for beauty and Captain Forrester's pragmatism), perhaps it would have been able to powerfully retaliate against the characters who later take over the land for the purposes of their capitalist exploits. Each predicament points toward the responsibility of the individual. Specifically in the context of maintaining his or her garden, Cather places an emphasis on the importance and integrity that one should associate with their labours. It is, therefore, only possible for such labours to be

reconciled with the concept of the beautiful when a character reaches that conclusion by their own means.

Conclusion:
Influences

Throughout this year-long project I have become more and more aware of the subtle ways that Willa Cather's love for art has affected my own behavior toward certain objects that I encounter in my daily life. As I started printing the copies of my senior project, I discovered some small ink marks scattered across several pages of each copy, which I printed in the Bard library using the printing money on my ID card. Already feeling guilty that I did not splurge on thicker, higher-quality pieces of paper that we now know Miss Cather would have preferred[34], I decided to reprint the pages that were accidentally tainted with minor marks. In actuality, the original copies were more than good enough for my board members to read, yet it still became a moral dilemma for me—given the extent to which I discuss refinement in this project, it seemed contradictory to disregard the way I would turn in the physical copies of my work. This conundrum could not embody the tensions of my project more candidly. Thinking pragmatically, I considered that if I were to print new, cleaner pages then I would be wasting several materials (paper, ink, electricity from the library printer) as well as spending a bit more money on the cost of re-printing. Ultimately, I prioritized my aesthetic concerns due to my guilty conscience—"this is what Willa would have wanted," I thought to myself. So inspired by the relevance of this conundrum, I am now rewriting—and consequently reprinting—my conclusion.

[34] See pages 7-8

It has always been difficult for me to work on my school assignments in the comfort of my own home. I prefer working a library or coffee shop—there is something about working around other people that allows me to isolate my thoughts more swiftly. I do believe in the quote I pulled earlier on from Hannah Arendt—that to think, we must be in solitude; yet, as I have worked to complete this project over the course of the year, I have found that the kind of solitude Arendt speaks of stretches far beyond the physical. I believe that when Arendt discusses solitude, she is pinpointing the sensitivity of our minds—with memories and cognitions being as fragile as they are, the objective, physical world can oftentimes become a distraction. Isolating ourselves from physical restraints, therefore, is impossible—especially in a world so many things, objects, and people.

As I mentioned in my Acknowledgements section, my mother was my main source of inspiration for the topic of this project. Despite not knowing what I would write on for the first few months of the Fall semester, I knew that I wanted to discuss the way women in America—particularly mothers and housewives—can be reduced to their domestic tasks and subjected to the notion that women are more concerned with appearances and superficial motivations than anything else. My mother is the antithesis of this stereotype, yet, she has a passion for both antique objects and interior decoration.

Since I have moved out of my home in Florida and away to college in New York, my mother has become increasingly obsessed with clearing out all of the unnecessary objects (mainly toys and clothing) from my childhood and replacing them with more sophisticated things like antique clocks and ottomans. Similar to the way Louie Marsellus is constantly discussing his new purchases, my mother will incessantly consult me on what arrangement of furniture looks best in our living room or what kind of tile she should replace our carpet with when she

renovates the house in a few years. To my dismay, I grew up watching the Antiques Roadshow with my mother. I do not share even an ounce of my mother's excitement for antiques like those featured on this show (and I blame it on my allergy to dust), but I am always pleasantly surprised by the great amount of history she knows, and has learned, simply because of her interest in old objects. When I first heard that Willa Cather had written a novel called *A Lost Lady,* I made an assumption based off of the title that the story would tackle the exact stereotypes of women that piqued my interest. After reading *The Professor's House,* my project somewhat shifted gears, where I took more of an interest in the way that the history of the Native American artifacts mentioned in "Tom Outland's Story" embody an integration of art and the value of our everyday labours.

My mother describes herself as a visual person; when she is not working, she is painting Trompe L'Oeil[35] murals on the walls of our home—we have over 50 clocks on our kitchen wall, some of which are real, hanging clocks and others that she has painted on the surface. She also dropped out of college after her first year to pursue a career in acting. Neither of these artistic practices are relevant to her career now. If, on the rare occasion, I am particularly proud of something I write for school, I read it to my mother as she has a difficult time doing so on her own—she developed dyslexia during her teenage years and attributes it to the superstitions of my grandparents who made her switch from writing with her left to right hand as soon as they detected she was a "southpaw." Despite having to read to my mother, the process always, for the most part, yields positive edits to my work—her knowledge of history never failing to enhance my perspective and enrich my analyses. Up until a few days ago, I had not made the time to even tell my mother what I have been writing my thesis on over the past year. She texted me the other

[35] French for "deceive the eye"; An art technique that uses realistic imagery to create the optical illusion that the depicted objects exist in three dimensions.

day (by voice control, I can assure you, because she never types) and asked what my project was about; my reply: “the tensions between aesthetics and economic and industrial ideals as they are represented in a few different novels by an author named Willa Cather.” When I sent the text, I initially felt a wave of guilt. She replied just a minute later with no words, just a thumbs-up emoticon.

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