Cather and Canada: American versus Canadian Perspectives in *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia*

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents.

CONTENTS

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

In "The Case of Willa Cather," David Stineback contends that Canadian critics have a better understanding of Cather's art than do American critics. Stineback argues that we must interpret Cather's work by analyzing her art and not her personality or politics. "My impression of native Canadian critics of Cather who remain affiliated with Canadian institutions is that they are more attuned than American critics to her artistry." Stineback hypothesizes that the reason Canadian critics are more attuned is that they "are better able to distance themselves from the cultural implications of Cather's work" (395). Without necessarily agreeing with Stineback's contention, my purpose in this thesis is to explain the way in which certain features of Cather's fiction seem to be at odds with the American mind-set and to have more in common with the Canadian way of thinking.[1]

The Canadian mind-set does of course have some affinities with the American because, as Marshall McLuhan points out, these two nations share certain psychological, social, and geographical "borderlines." Language, contends McLuhan, is

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[1] I am aware that some critics would question the notion that a nation has a "psyche," just as I am aware that some of the theories I use concerning distinctive Canadian or American characteristics have been disputed. Since my purpose is to elucidate Cather's fiction, however, I believe that my methodology is justified.

one psychological borderline that English Canada shares with the United States. He postulates that most Americans, not knowing Canada's history, think that the similarities between American and Canadian English is a result of Canada's close geographical association with the United States, whereas actually the American quality of Canadian English may be traced to the early English settlement of Canada by United Empire Loyalists who fled the American colonies after the Revolutionary War. McLuhan continues by looking at another shared borderline, which is space. He observes that out of the "nineteenth-century war on the empty wilderness" there developed the peculiar North American response to inner and outer space: "the outer space for aggressive extroversion and the inner space for cozy sociability and security amid dangers" (230, 231); the North American goes outdoors for solitude and indoors for social gathering. Because of this reversal of inner and outer space, the North American tends also to hide his private self in public. Whereas the European wears his past and personal struggles on his face, the North American appears, as McLuhan says, to have a missing face.

Ronald Sutherland also looks at some similarities between the two major nations of North America, and shows that they share a common moral basis founded in their Puritan/Calvinist heritage. For all the similarities of these two doctrines, there is one major difference between them, as well as between the mind-sets of each nation. Puritanism, as

Sutherland outlines, underscores "self-reliance and the responsibility of the individual" (405); moreover, it was the rejection of a "hierarchical, centralized, or extensively structured ecclesiastical system" that drove the Pilgrims from England. The Calvinism (and Jansenism) which inspired the Canadian settlers, in contrast, emphasized predestination and adherence to prescribed rules, and their religious system maintained ties with an established church. This reliance on a controlling system, according to Sutherland, is carried throughout most levels of Canadian life, whether it be "religious, governmental, social, educational, or...labour union" (406).

Eventually, says Sutherland, American Puritanism was split in two by rationalist thinkers of the eighteenth century, like Benjamin Franklin. He retained the Puritan notion of self-reliance and industry but eliminated God from the picture, thereby providing a rationale for American materialism. The spiritual dimension, in turn, was transformed into intellectual individualism which emphasized nonconformity and the right of each individual to think independently. The Jansenist-Calvinist ethos of Canada never split into these two extremes, just as this religious heritage retained its power for a longer period of time. To Sutherland, we can note the effects of these different religious orientations in the myths of each nation, as reflected in the words of their founders: "In contrast to the positive, expansionist thrust of American 'Manifest Des-

tiny' and 'Garden of the World,' Canadian myths were modest and low keyed. Rather than 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,' the fathers of Confederation opted for 'peace, order, and good government'" (408).

In addition to outlining the impact of religious heritage on each nation's psyche, Sutherland briefly mentions another factor that helped to distinguish the mind-sets of Canada and the United States: namely, the types of people who were their pioneers. Canadian settlers tended to be emigrants (emigres), dispossessed people who where forced from their homelands because of political unrest or famine conditions, and who retained their love for homeland. In contrast, American pioneers were immigrants, future-oriented individuals who came to the New World to seek a better life, to build a new society, and who rejected their roots.

Because of the different reasons that brought Europeans to the two nations of North America, a different attitude toward the wilderness developed in Canada and the United States. Frederick Jackson Turner defines the American attitude in his work on the American frontier mentality. Northrop Frye articulates the Canadian perspective in his discussion of the garrison mentality. Each argues that the phenomenon of settling has influenced the way Americans and Canadians perceive their countries and themselves.

Turner discusses the westward movement of American society and contends that "American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This per-

Turner discusses the westward movement of American society and contends that "American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating the American character" (2-3). He continues by postulating that in order for the American settler to survive the wilderness, it was necessary to strip away European dress and notions of civilization. "Thus the advance of the frontier has meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe, a steady growth of independence on American lines" (4). Carrying on the tradition of self-reliance established by the Puritans, the American frontier men and women independently went into the wilderness, cleared ground, built a house, and began to establish their life: "The rifle and the ax are symbols of the backwoods pioneer. They meant a training in aggressive courage, in domination, in directness of action, in destructiveness" (269-70). Each of these factors contributes to the development of the American mind-set, which strongly emphasizes personal development. The pioneer's development was one that lay outside the confines of the society and the government. Here civilization is one that is based upon personal success: the individual's rights take precedence over the good of the group.

In contrast, the Canadian mentality plays down self-reliance and individualism; the symbol of survival for the Canadian settler was not the rifle, but the garrison. The garrison is that which protects the settler from the surrounding wilderness. As Frye puts it: "Small and isolated communities surrounded with a physical or psychological 'frontier,' separated from one another and from their American and British cultural sources: communities that provide all that their members have in the way of distinctly human values, and that are compelled to feel a great respect for the law and order that holds them together, yet confronted with a huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting--such communities are bound to develop what we may provisionally call a garrison mentality" (225). Here the emphasis is not on the individual, but on the community.

Douglas G. Jones extends the antagonism between man and nature outlined in Frye's garrison mentality beyond the Canadian context: "The division between culture and nature dramatized in some of the literature goes beyond any purely Canadian Colonialism; it can only be considered to reflect an antagonism towards nature characteristic of western culture generally" (6). Jones takes Canadian literature out of the regional perspective and underlines its universality. As he sees it, the archetype of Canadian literature has roots in the Old Testament: "it is a world of Adam separated from his creator and cast out of Eden to wander in the wilderness" (15). By the same token, however, one might

argue that the world of American literature has been Eden, which Adam re-enters, carrying with him all the problems of trying to live in paradise.

Gaile McGregor, too, considers the different views of nature in each nation. In a discussion of differences in painting, she notes that the Canadian view tends to be "anti-panoramic." Whereas the American landscape painting "almost always comprises an overt celebration of man-in-nature...the substantially more mundane Canadian equivalent is an urban or semi-urban scene" (18). Although one might question the "city" implications of her diction, her analysis does support that of Frye; each recognizes that the emphasis in Canadian art is placed on the development of the community.

The differences between Canadian and American mind-sets outlined by these critics and cultural historians provide, I think, an interesting context for discussing the tensions which characterize the work of Willa Cather. In his article "Cather and Canada: The French Canadian Connection," Benjamin George argues that in Shadows on the Rock Cather articulates "a Canadian ideal" (261): the reliance on the values and traditions of the Old World as a basis for the New World society and civilization. In this novel, Cather dramatizes the preservation of traditions by highlighting the domestic customs of Mme Auclair, which she passes on to her daughter, Cecile. Another Canadian aspect of the novel that George recognizes is "the natural man with ties to society," char-

acterized by Pierre Charron. George sees Charron as a Canadianized Natty Bumppo, who unlike his American prototype, does not spend his "lifetime in the wilderness according to the tenets of Cooper"; instead, he "is very much a part of his society" (259).

George notes that "the development of those [Canadian] ideals and attitudes may be traced throughout her work" (249), but he chooses to concentrate on Shadows on the Rock since he feels that the ideals come into clearer focus in her work after World War I. He may very well be correct; however, if we are to appreciate the culmination of these ideals in Shadows on the Rock it is important to recognize their origins in Cather's earliest novels.

Canadian features, for example, are already present in the first novel, Alexander's Bridge, in which Canada is used as a setting for the construction of Bartley Alexander's ill-fated bridge. Cather bases her novel on an actual incident in Quebec where a partially finished bridge collapsed because budget constraints did not permit safe construction; significantly, the bridge had been designed by an American engineer (Brown 158). Although it might seem that Cather could have set the novel anywhere, that as an American she should have chosen a Canadian locus is not fortuitous. Northrop Frye tells us that "Canada...or the place where Canada is, can supply distinctive settings and props to a writer who is looking for local colour" (232). Yet that Cather is concerned with more than "local colour" is suggested by

Bernice Slote, in her "Introduction" to the novel. As she sees it, Alexander's ocean crossings between Boston and London are symbolic bridges between the Old and New Worlds. In this way, Alexander's Bridge contains the seeds of Shadows on the Rock in which, for example, Jacques gives Cecile a beaver for the creche. Here Cather similarly joins a symbol of the New World--Canada--with the Old World symbol of the nativity scene (111).

The emphasis upon the need to bridge the Old and New Worlds (something Americans traditionally find very difficult) becomes even stronger in Cather's second and fourth novels, O Pioneers! and My Ántonia. Although set almost entirely in Nebraska, these novels, even more than Alexander's Bridge, evidence concerns that can be aligned with the Canadian psyche. After identifying these concerns--and examining the way they interact with various American traits--I will then conclude by speculating on some of the reasons for Cather's "Canadianness." Similarly, after discussing the tensions in Cather's work in terms of the Canadian/American polarity, I will then address the question of whether the Canadian elements might better be described as features of prairie fiction and whether Cather's difference from mainstream American ideology may be traced to gender rather than to national/cultural issues.

Chapter II

O PIONEERS!

After the publication of Alexander's Bridge in 1912, Willa Cather returned to work on two stories she had written earlier, "Alexandra" and "The White Mulberry Tree"; she realized these two stories belonged together, which she published as O Pioneers! in 1913. Because the novel began as two separate stories, it has two strong plots that are woven together. Alexandra Bergson's story concerns her sacrifices and struggles to transmute the prairie into a vigorous, productive agricultural region. In the process, she alienates two of her brothers, Lou and Oscar, and denies herself romantic involvement in order to build a profitable farm. Her one failure is the tranforming of her third brother, Emil, into a great man. His story is the subplot and concerns his love affair with Marie Shabata, a young Bohemian woman whose husband's farm is next to Alexandra's. Emil and Marie share the intensity and passion of youth, which Alexandra denies herself. While they make love in an orchard, Marie's husband, Frank, shoots them.

When she was nearing the completion of O Pioneers! Cather wrote to her friend Elizabeth Sergeant and told her that "somehow she had on her hands a two-part pastoral" (Sergeant 86). Later, Cather was to send a copy of the book to Serg-

eant, who, in turn, showed it to a fellow American, Helen Quincy Muirhead. Muirhead's response was that "the story of the pioneer Puritans, 'our over-rate progenitors'...had been a hundred times told....But this fiercely untamed, untrammelled, sweeping natural world of the Divide, of which the author gave such rare and measured visual images, had new, almost cosmic vistas, overtones and undertones" (Sergeant 95-96). The "new" quality that Muirhead points to consists in Cather's infusion of a Canadian response into a typically American theme.

The American theme in question is the pastoral, which has two dimensions: the literary convention that puts "'the complex into the simple,'" and the "sentimentalized pretty-pretty" social myth that idealizes nature as a place where all worldy evils are eradicated (Randall 80, 78). The pastoral in either form involves an idealization of a simpler life. Leo Marx, in The Machine in the Garden, and Annette Kolodny, in The Lay of the Land, have explored the development and effects of pastoral thinking on American society. Both contend that Europeans found in America a place where they could bring their fantasy of Arcadia to fruition. The American continent was a garden "in fact as well as in metaphor" (Kolodny 9).

In his explanation of the effect of the pastoral myth on the Canadian mind, Frye observes that "At the heart of all social mythology lies what may be called...a pastoral myth, the vision of a social ideal" (238). This ideal, taking the

form of "nostalgia for a world of peace and protection, with a spontaneous response to the nature around it, with a leisure and composure not to be found today, is particularly strong in Canada." Canada's social myth is unlike that of the United States. Whereas in the United States one attempts to fulfill the pastoral ideal by living it, in Canada the idyll takes the form of "the evocation of an earlier period of history which is made romantic by having a more uninhibited expression of passion or virtue of courage attached to it" (239). Americans associate pastoral with the land and progress; Canadians view their past as a better place to live.

In O Pioneers! both nature and the past are idealized. The American elements of the novel are primarily manifest in the imagery of cultivation and the use of gardens. The Canadian elements are manifest in the inhospitable land, and the repeated garrison settings.

Leo Marx uses the term "Jeffersonian pastoral" to describe this Founding Father's ideal for his country, and explains that Jefferson believed that the best role for America would be that of an agrarian society whose citizens would live in nature, but also bring to it the virtues of civilization. This society is termed by eighteenth-century thinkers as the "middle state" (Marx 88). The American pastoral thinkers of the time could not accept the natural garden in its primitive, chaotic condition; they desired to impose an order on nature and so to perfect it. This work

was to be done by the Jeffersonian "noble husbandman," who would work the land, order it, and possess an intellect and wisdom derived from a simple life of working the land. The "middle state" is the world of O Pioneers!, and Alexandra is the "noble husbandman." Thus Cather writes: "When you go out of [Alexandra's] house into the flower garden, there you feel again the order and fine arrangement manifest all over the great farm; in the fencing and hedging, in the wind-breaks and sheds, in the symmetrical pasture ponds, planted with scrub willows to give shade to the cattle in fly-time" (84 emphasis mine).

Cather relies not only on the social pastoral myth of her country to construct her novel, but also upon the conventions of classical literature. John H. Randall contends that Virgil's Georgics are the basis of O Pioneers!, for in the novel we see the city sophisticate, Carl Lindstrum, admiring the simple innocence of the rustic, Alexandra. Randall bases his position on the fact that like the Georgics Cather's novel contains "no literal shepherds and shepherdesses" (81). Susan J. Rosowski, who defines pastoral as celebrating "the imaginative capacity to form ideals and to express them in art," sees Virgil's Ecologues as Cather's model. Rosowski sees Randall's interpretation as being limited because "by concentrating excessively on the 'machinery' of pastoral [he] misses the flexibility of the pastoral mode and the ways in which Cather adapted that tradition to the American scene" (254). Each critic points to Cather's

use of rustics, city sophisticates, love-sick swains, and the ordering of chaos. In Rosowski's words, Cather, along with other writers of pastoral, "celebrates the artistic imagination, with its power to bring order out of disparate materials" (46). The two different North American mind-sets belong in this category of "disparate materials," out of which Cather weaves an ordered novel.

Cather's reference to O Pioneers! as a "two-part pastoral" may help us further to understand the development of her "Canadian" psyche. Rosowski cites this comment as evidence that Cather was consciously working in the pastoral convention. Rosowski, however, does not consider Cather's feeling about the situation. According to Sergeant, Cather felt that "somehow she had on her hands a two-part pastoral: the most foolish endeavor imaginable, she mourned" (86 emphasis mine). Sergeant's account suggests that Cather was not particularly pleased with the tradition in which she chose to write. Perhaps her decision to depict Nebraska farmers in the pastoral mode was dictated not only by her classical studies in university, but by the social milieu of the United States, the belief in "the Edenic myth that irradiated America's self-image from the beginning" (McGregor 8). Cather admits that the novel required "no arranging or 'inventing'" (Writing 92); she drew upon the experiences of the country and her knowledge of the people (who looked upon their land pastorally) to write the novel. Because she writes about Nebraska pastorally does not indicate that she

was necessarily endorsing American values. The environment may be American but the view of it that emerges ultimately has more to do with a Canadian perspective.

Sharon O'Brien seizes upon Cather's reference to a "two-part pastoral" and similarly argues that Cather not only intertwines two stories, but also two contrasting passions: the controlled passion of Alexandra and the intense sexual passion of Marie. These differing passions can be related to the differing perspectives of the novel. Alexandra's coolness can be aligned with the Canadian mentality; Marie's intensity can be related to the American.

Remembering that literary pastoral brings order to disparated parts, we can see the way in which the garden functions as a symbol of ordered nature. In the garden, Jefferson's "noble husbandman" can work with nature, and enjoy its bounty. (The garden also has obvious religious overtones.) Rosowski, seeing the ordering effect of the garden, parallels it with art: "For as the garden is a design in nature, so the work is a design in art" (46); both strive toward perfection.

Cather's use of the garden in O Pioneers! is pervasive. After Sunday dinner, Lou and Oscar go into the orchard to pick cherries while Alexandra and her three nieces go into the flower garden (104-05). One "evening after supper, Carl and Alexandra [sit] by the clump of castor beans in the middle of the flower garden" (115-16). Marie's orchard, where she entertains Alexandra and Carl, is "shelterd...by a thick

mulberry hedge and bordered...by a [ripening] wheatfield," the blue grass has "driven out" (134) the weeds, and wild roses bloom; a sense of order dominates this orchard. These gardens provide serenity. Yet, Marie's orchard is also the site of intense passion, for here she and Emil make love, and here her husband Frank shoots them in a passionate rage of anger. As Ellen Moers says, "The gardens in Cather's work--the lush marsh at Sweet Water, in A Lost Lady or the garden under the mulberry tree in O Pioneers! --are scenes of passion and cruel violence; they are very different from Cather's landscapes of female ecstasy out on the open prairie" (399). Cather's description of "the brown earth, with such a strong, clean smell, and such a power of growth and fertility in it, yield[ing] itself eagerly to the plow" (76), is an example of this female ecstasy. Moers argues that the natural garden is aligned with the feminine while the fabricated garden is aligned with the violent masculine.[2] In her manufactured gardens, Cather is able to provide the setting for passion and restraint, violence and placidity, in the manner that she combines threat and solitude with her pastoral. As Kolodny points out, the pastoral in America is both metaphor and fact, and Cather is aware of the facts of life on the Divide, the isolation and loneliness.

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[2] Moers is correct about the two examples she cites, which are scenes of violence, but she ignores the gardens that provide inspiration and contemplation: the gardens of Bishop Latour, Godfrey St. Peter, and the Wunsches.

Although the garden is a strong American convention, it is a central motif in Canadian fiction, too; however, typically, it is hardly Edenic. Ross's As for Me and My House, for example, is set during the drought years of the thirties when farming was a hopeless venture. Unlike Cather's strong, fertile Divide, Ross's prairie is weak and sterile: "Along the road there are drifts of dust two and three feet deep. Sometimes the fence posts are almost buried. Here and there you can see a faint tinge of green, but most of the seed has been blown out and lost" (54). Mrs. Bentley's garden suffers the same fate; those seeds that are not blown away seem to be eaten by Mrs. Ellingson's chickens. The few plants that manage to break the surface are dried by the hot, perpetual wind. Even her houseplants cannot survive the inhospitable environment; her fuchsia freezes in the winter, unlike Marie Shabata's houseplants that thrive and bloom during January. Ross's unpastoral view of the prairie is in keeping with the general tendency in Canadian literature to view the land as unfeminine.

Despite their differing depictions of the prairie, Cather's and Ross's novels share many similarities. For instance, central to both works is the train, a major emblem of isolation in Canadian literature that symbolizes severed contact with outside communities. In O Pioneers! we are told, "About the station everything was quiet, for there would not be another train in until night" (4). Hanover is isolated from the world. Similarly, in As for Me and My

House, Mrs. Bentley talks of the effect of the train on her husband when he was young: "always the train, roaring away to the world that lay beyond" (32). She senses his feeling of isolation--a feeling that returns to him. "He's alone in his study with [his drawings] now, quieter even than he usually is. It is the train today, reminding him again of the outside world he hasn't reached" (33). Philip's isolation reflects another feeling that is prominent in Canadian literature, a longing to be somewhere else than where one is. Gabrielle Roy describes this longing as a "disease, departure sickness" (106), a disease that also affects Carl Lindstrum. He leaves Nebraska for Chicago, returns, then travels on to Alaska. Carl, like characters in Canadian fiction, suffers from "the grass is always greener" syndrome, which Cather, however, qualifies when Alexandra says, "people always think the bread of another country is better than their own" (63).

One of the most interesting Canadian/American tensions in the novel pertains to Cather's use of the garrison mentality. Crazy Ivar chooses to live "in the most inaccessible place he [can] find" (34), across the county line, near no one except for a few Russian settlers. Alexandra's farm is another example of a garrison; its "big white house...stood on a hill....There were so many sheds and out buildings grouped about it that the place looked not unlike a tiny village" (83). These two garrisons protect their inhabitants not from the threatening forces of the wilderness--

Ivar and Alexandra thrive on nature--but from other humans: "Ivar [finds] contentment in solitude" (37); Alexandra finds protection from her stupid brothers. These are not garrisons in a strict Canadian sense; Alexandra and Ivar are not seeking protection from an imposing wilderness, and here we do not have the huddling together.

A third type of garrison is the town of Hanover, as described in the opening scene, and this type is close to the Canadian tradition because it protects its inhabitants from the threatening forces of nature like the wild Nebraska plain. Cather's diction highlights both the physical and the psychological frontier. The town of Hanover is "anchored on the windy Nebraska table land"; nature threatens the town and its buildings: "the howling wind [blows] under them as well as over them" (3). In this opening scene, Cather's diction "serves to accentuate the force of nature and the impermanence of man's dwellings in the face of such a force" (Thacker 152). We can see in the first paragraph the psychological frontier: the prairie sod is "tough"; the "low drab buildings [huddle] on the gray prairie, under a gray sky"; and the wind threatens to blow away the town and surrounds each building, permeating its space. Wind, moreover, is an ominous force throughout the novel: "Neighboring Fields" begins with "wind that often blows from one week's end to another across that high, active, resolute stretch of country" (76). "Alexandra" begins much like "Wild Land" with "black clouds" and "a cold wind" (275).

As for Me and My House opens with a similar image of a threatening wind. Mrs. Bentley records in her diary that "The town seems huddled together, cowering on a high, tiny perch, afraid to move lest it topple into the wind" (5). Ross shares Cather's use of this motif and even her diction. The wind becomes an everpresent symbol of threat throughout Ross's novel: "For the wind and dust keep on" (54). Mrs. Bentley also records the wind's continual rattling of the eaves, invading the house.

Although there are moments of beauty in Ross's prairies in Saskatchewan, beauty is fleeting, lacking permanence: "It was a clear, still morning. There was a bright fall of sunshine that made the dingy landscape radiant. Right to the horizon it winked with little lakes of spring-thaw water. The sky had a fragile, crystal look, as if a touch or breath might bring it round our heads in tinkling ruin" (19).

"The dingy landscape," however, is not totally absent from Cather's early view of the Divide; though she presents images of a beautiful prairie, there is a degree of dreariness. Despite the pastoral quality of O Pioneers!, Cather shares with Ross ~~differences~~ the view that the prairie can cut one off from others. As Brown has noted, such a passage as "The variegated fields are all one color now; the pastures, the stubble, the sky are the same leaden gray" (187) is indication that "In all seasons, the Divide...was 'one of the loneliest countries in the world'" (28).

Although these three garrisons--Crazy Ivar's homestead, Alexandra's farm, and Hanover--are featured early in the novel, the symbol of the isolated community continues up through the last section. Here Alexandra travels to Lincoln to visit Frank Shabata in the State Penitentiary. The evening before she goes to the prison she strolls near the University. "She did not go into the grounds, but walked slowly up and down the stone walk outside the long iron fence, looking through at the young men who were running from one building to another, at the lights shining from the armory and the library" (287). The University is a safe little world unto itself, with an armory and an iron fence to protect it from the outside world.

Cather carefully places the visit to the campus along side the visit to the prison, and though she does not give a physical description of the prison, we can assume what it would be like: large stone walls and iron fences and armed guards--not unlike the University, with its armory and fence. The prison becomes an inverse symbol of the garrison because its purpose is not to protect those within from the wilderness without, but to protect those without from the people within. These institutions symbolize the degeneration of the instinct of people to cling together for safety after the wilderness has seemingly been tamed. Now they cut off the inhabitants from the society around them. The University nurtures academia, with its esoteric language that few people from the outside can understand. In contrast,

language in the prison declines. Frank confesses, "'I forget English. We not talk here, except swear'" (294). Even in the prison society, the members become isolated from one another because of the lack of communication.

Alexandra feels this same sense of isolation when she leaves the Penitentiary, recalling some lines from a poem she had learned in school: "Henceforth the world will only be/ A wider prison-house to me,--" (298). The entire world as prison thus becomes the culmination of the increasing number of garrisons which appear in the novel. This notion counters the world as garden metaphor that the pastoral has established; these two metaphors seemingly tug at each other, with Cather adhering to the pastoral tradition at the same time that she emphasizes the isolation caused by the prairie. Right to the end of the novel, moreover, the Canadian feeling of isolation tempers the American desire to look forward toward future possibilities. For if O Pioneers! concludes on an optimistic note--"Fortunate country, that is one day to receive hearts like Alexandra's into its bosom, to give them out again in the yellow wheat, in the rustling corn, in the shining eyes of youth!"--just prior to this apocalyptic statement, Alexandra says, "'I have been very lonely, Carl'" (309). Isolation and pastoralism are never divorced.

Although characters in American literature rarely experience emotional isolation the way Canadian characters do, the characters of both fictions are faced with the problem of

conformity. Unlike the American character, the Canadian tends not to rebel against society, but to withdraw and avoid open confrontation. As Frye says, in the garrison, "one is either a fighter of a deserter." The individual works with the society against a common enemy; yet "the terror is not for the common enemy....The real terror comes when the individual feels himself becoming an individual, pulling away from the group, losing the sense of driving power that the group gives him, aware of a conflict within himself far subtler than the struggle of morality against evil" (226). Frequently the withdrawl takes the form of suicide or its psychological equivalent: insanity. As Frye explains "The human mind has nothing but human and moral values to cling to if it is to preserve its integrity or even its sanity, yet the vast unconsciousness of nature in front of it seems an unanswerable denial of those values" (225).

We see the effect of such a denial of values in Morley Callaghan's Such is My Beloved when Father Dowling is unable to revolt against his wealthy parishioners and his bishop in order to help two lonely prostitutes. The novel ends with Father Dowling committed to a sanitorium where he offers his insanity to God for "all the living who need [His] pity and justice" (143). Likewise, Cather's Crazy Ivar withdraws from his society; he speaks to animals and wears no shoes nor cuts his hair; he, too, is a religious zealot. "'You know there has been talk,'" he tells Alexandra. "'About

sending me away; to the asylum'" (91). His differences are not tolerated: "'The way here [in the United States] is for all to do alike....they have built the asylum for people who are different'" (92-93). Ivar cannot rebel against the pressure of conformity, so he must rely on Alexandra's protection, and cling to her garrison.

The connection between the landscape and mental condition is starkly depicted in an early short story titled "On the Divide" (1896), in which this location is described as a barren and bleak place where "Insanity and suicide are very common things"; "most of the Poles after they have become too careless and discouraged to shave themselves keep their razors to cut their throats with" (495). Though Cather viewed her earlier work as inferior, the despair that exists in this story does foreshadow her later concern with the negative effects of solitude.

Solitude caused by the land is most evident in the first section of O Pioneers! in which Nebraska is still a wilderness. In describing the physical frontier, once again Cather conveys a sense of the psychological frontier. Thus, if she celebrates "the great fact [of] the land itself," she adds that this immensity "seemed to overwhelm the little beginnings of human society that struggle in its sombre wastes" (15). Michael Klug, too, observes that "The wild prairie of O Pioneers! is charged with life, but it is also malevolent" (289). A windmill is "gaunt" and a sod house is "crouching in a hollow." American in her reponse to the

land itself, Cather is Canadian in her sense of being overpowered by it.

Cather is also Canadian in her depiction of society. Her Divide is a cultural mosaic of separate ethnic groups and not an Immigrant "melting-pot" as Bernice Slote asserts ("History" 163). There are the festivals and suppers at the "French Church"; there are ethnic neighborhoods of the "French country" and "Norway Creek" (214). Cather's different families include the Bergsons (Norway), the Shabatas (Bohemia), and the Chevaliers (France). The mosaic of cultures, though it offers diversity and color, also causes isolation; although the characters and groups interact, they are still separated from each other. When Alexandra's brother Emil falls in love with her married neighbor Marie Shabata, he attempts to transcend the ethnic barrier. While consummating their love in the orchard, Marie's jealousy-enraged husband shoots and kills them. Although his rage is brought on by her infidelity to him, and not to Bohemians, Frank's reaction stems from the young lovers' lack of respect for tradition, in this case the tradition of marriage; tradition is the binding force that keeps ethnic groups segregated.

Cather's concern with past, present, and future also focuses Canadian versus American attitudes. The Canadian tends to look to the past to idealize it, and to maintain a strong hold on ethnic backgrounds. The people of the Divide have a deep regard for the past and its traditions. Marie

bakes several kinds of Bohemian breads; Alexandra hires Swedish girls to work in her kitchen. Each retains a link with the Old World. When characters disregard the past they are presented as stupid, like Lou's wife, who tries to hide her Scandinavian background, or they meet a tragic end, like Emil and Marie, who, through their lack of respect for the traditional marriage, suffer a tragic fate.

The strong presence of the Catholic Church also emphasizes the importance of the past and tradition. Significantly, Alexandra's Protestant church plays a minor role in the novel; perhaps because the Protestants broke with the Church and its traditions. All religious activity takes place at the French Catholic Church. In O Pioneers! we see a society that is dependent on the Church, which provides religious guidance and social activity. The Church teaches conformity, not self-reliance; the church is also a link with the past.

Attention to the past is evident not only in Cather's evocation of history, but in the novel's structure as well. O Pioneers! is written in five parts, each individually titled. The narrative begins in the past tense, but with the beginning of "Neighboring Fields" we read that "It is sixteen years since John Bergson died" (75). This shift from past to present to past occurs throughout the middle sections; only "Wild Land" and "Alexandra" are told completely in the past tense. The novel begins in the past--"Thirty years ago" (3)--and ends by returning to the past.

By shifting to the present, Cather makes the past more immediate, just as she could be said to shift from a Canadian to an American way of thinking: that is, living the past in the present with the added American dimension of looking to the future (McLuhan).

Looking to the future is expressed very strongly in the prophetic vision of O Pioneers!. At the end of the first section Alexandra is leaning against a windmill, and "Under the long shaggy ridges, she felt the future stirring" (71). This strong reliance on what is to come is felt throughout the rest of the novel. As much as Cather emphasizes the future, however, she implies that the growth of a new culture requires deep Old World roots.

Cather's final apocalyptic statement, which is followed by Alexandra telling Carl she has been lonely, combines not only the pastoral and isolation, but past and present as well. Rosowski says that the "effect of the concluding scene is of timelessness....[Cather] joins age and youth, life and death, the present and the universal" (60). What is also joined are the Canadian and the American mentalities. We can understand more fully this mixture of mentalities by examining the characters of Carl and Alexandra and looking at how the Canadian and American characteristics that they embody complement one another.

In an early scene Alexandra and Carl are traveling home from town. Cather tells us "The light fell upon the two sad young faces that were turned mutely toward it...upon the

sombre eyes of the boy, who seemed already to be looking into the past" (14). Carl has a magic lantern that projects slides of Robinson Crusoe and of hunting pictures in Germany; he plans to paint his own slides, copied "out of Hans Andersen's book" (17). Not only are Carl's eyes turned to the past, but his attention is on European culture--the Old World. If we consider Turner's interpretation that the advance of the frontier means "a steady movement away from the influence of Europe, a steady growth of independence on American lines," (4) then Carl does not show American idiosyncracies. His reliance on the traditions and influences of Europe show his Canadian characteristics. Carl's Old World inclinations and leanings toward the past become more apparent on a symbolic level. In the American frontier experience, the West was regarded as the nation's future, the East its past. It is, then, significant that when Carl leaves Nebraska he goes East and becomes an engraver in Chicago, and later in New York. Admittedly Carl travels West to the Klondike, yet his destination is Dawson (192), in the Yukon, which is a Canadian territory.

Although Carl reflects the American inclination to idealize the land, his way of doing so has a Canadian flavor. "'I even think I liked the old country better,'" he says, and then goes on to recall the old German song "Wo bist du, wo bist du mein geliebtest land" (118). Although this reaction to the "tamed" prairie is American, notice how Carl chooses to express himself--with an old German song. Like-

wise, earlier in the novel Cather describes the splendors of the prairie in very American terms: the earth "rolls away from the shear, not even dimming the brightness of the metal, with a soft, deep sigh of happiness"; and in the harvest "The grain is so heavy that it bends toward the blade and cuts like velvet." She then compares the prairie, when rising "to meet the sun," to "the plains of Lombardy" (76). Like Carl, Cather chooses an Old World simile. She combines the old and the new in her description of the prairie as she combines the old and the new, the Canadian and American psyches in her characters Carl and Alexandra.

At first appearance, Alexandra is a strong-willed independent spirit. Her development, however, is curious because she begins the novel as a strong active pioneer woman; she takes charge of the family farm; she uses her imagination and the advice of progressive thinkers to build her family's fortune. In the scene where Cather tells us that Carl's eyes are looking to the past, she says that Alexandra's eyes "seemed to be looking with such anguished perplexity into the future" (14): a strong American characteristic. As the novel progresses, she becomes passive and less imaginative. In the first chapter, when a peddler "innocently and foolishly" shouts admiration for her hair, Alexandra stabs "him with a glance of Amazonian fierceness" (8). In her analysis of Alexandra as an asexual being, O'Brien focuses on this phrase and notes that "Aggressive, military imagery surrounds Cather's prairie Amazon, her female Alexander" (160).

Just as the historical and mythological Alexanders were prototypes for Bartley Alexander in Alexander's Bridge, they are prototypes for Alexandra. She is a warrior who will be charged with battling against nature to bring order to the prairie, a strong American characteristic. The same land that causes Carl's mouth to "become so bitter, because he felt that men were too weak to make any mark here, that the land wanted to be let alone" (15), and that sends Mr. Bergson to his grave a broken man because he cannot conquer it, motivates Alexandra.

Thacker argues that the harsh imagery presented early in the novel "reflects the values of those who like John Bergson 'had come to tame' the land without understanding it" (269). He suggests that Alexandra can subdue the prairie because she understands it. Yet Alexandra requires more than understanding to succeed; she must love the prairie. She neither subdues nor conquers the land; she works with it because one cannot be lover and master at the same time. If the land is conquered, then it is vanquished, yet Cather never describes it in terms other than virility and compliance: the giver of sustenance.

Alexandra's treatment of the prairie is definitely not American if we consider Turner's opinion of the frontiersman. "The rifle and the ax are the symbols of the backwoods pioneer. They meant training in aggressive courage, in domination, in directness of action, in destructiveness" (269-70); this analysis does not apply to Alexandra. We

could turn to Canadian terms to define Alexandra's attitude toward the land, but Frye, when discussing the architecture of Canadian cities and villages, asserts that they show "little adaptation to nature", and that they express "an arrogant abstraction, the conquest of nature by an intelligence that does not love it." He continues by saying that "The word 'conquest' suggests something military" (224).

Something military does agree with Alexandra as the female Alexander--Conqueror of the world--but somehow Alexandra's attitude to the land is quite different from masculine dominance. Since Frye's description of the Canadian attitude is similar to Turner's, it would seem as if the Canadian attitude would not fit either. Perhaps, however, the problem lies with Frye's "masculine" view. Thus, in her analysis of Margret Atwood's Surfacing vis a vis James Dickey's Deliverance, Evelyn J. Hinz has argued that "Atwood is obviously characterizing the Canadian psyche as essentially feminine" (96). Alexandra's view of the land can best be described in similar terms. She does not go out and work to conquer the land; instead, she mates with it and the land responds. Alexandra is forceful but in a cooperative rather than combative sense. She does not subdue the land but rather nurtures and cultivates it.

The turning point in the depiction of the landscape follows Alexandra's and Emil's visit to the riverside farms. After spending five days away from the Divide, Alexandra realizes how much she loves it. "'We must have faith in the

high land,'" she tells Emil (64). As their wagon climbs up to the Divide we are told, "For the first time, perhaps, since the land emerged from the waters of geologic ages, a human face was set toward it with love and yearning. It seemed beautiful to her, rich and strong and glorious. Her eyes drank in the breadth of it, the great, free spirit which breathes across it, must have bent lower than it ever bent to a human will before" (65). As Alexandra physically emerges from the river valley, like the land from the geological waters, she symbolically emerges as the land's lover.

Judith Fryer agrees that in such a passage "the land is Alexandra's lover"; she argues that the landscape is "an emblem of the female body," and suggests that "loving the land...is for a woman a different experience from the dominance and mastery" of the land as viewed by men (376).[3] Alexandra is able to appreciate the pre-tamed prairie as well as the cultivated one because she lives a balanced life; she exemplifies the pioneer ideal: "A pioneer should have imagination, should be able to enjoy the idea of things more than the things themselves" (48). She can enjoy the idea of the prairie in two different stages--the undeveloped and the developed--and not feel remorseful about the change. Here we see neither a strict American attitude nor a strict Canadian one, but an ideal blending of the two.

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[3] Fryer states that the Genius of the Divide is feminine, too, but Cather gives no indication of the Genius's sex: she uses the pronoun "it" as reference.

As we have seen, Cather combines the traditional pastoral view of America with a theme of exile. Just as the pastoralism of the novel is not always pastoral, the sex of the land is not always female. Moers believes that in Cather's "work the female landscape is either a central issue or it is not there at all" (225). Quite often female imagery is used to describe the land. In the first pastoral passage Cather employs a typical scene of planting that is wrought with sexuality. In this passage, the land is powerful and fertile; it "yields itself eagerly to the plow" (76). In Alexandra's day dream, however, the land becomes masculine:

> Sometimes, as she lay...luxuriously idle, her eyes closed, she used to have an illusion of being lifted up bodily and carried lightly by some one very strong. He was a man, certainly, who carried her, but he was like no man she knew; he was much larger and stronger and swifter, and he carried her as easily as if she were a sheaf of wheat. She never saw him, but, with eyes closed, she could feel that he was yellow like the sunlight, and there was the smell of ripe cornfields about him. She could feel him approach, bend over her and lift her, and then she could feel herself being carried swiftly off across the fields. (206)

O'Brien sees this man as a "harvest-god" that is one of the "products" of the feminine land's "procreation and growth" (163). He is not merely a product, however; he is made of the elements of the prairie: sunlight and cornfields. He is nature. Earlier, when describing the farming of the land, Cather says, "The air and the earth are curiously mated and intermingled, as if the one were the breath of the other" (77). What she describes is a hierogamous marriage

of earth and sky, and likewise, Alexandra's union with her dream-man is a hierogamous bonding.

This shift in the land's sex, then, creates a paradox that is best explained both by gender and national ethoi, and further suggests the feminine quality of the Canadian orientation. In Alexandra's fantasy, she, the strong "Amazonian" woman submits to the masculine figure. Her strong-willed, independent (American) spirit becomes Canadian when she gives in to the masculine landscape.

We can see yet another dimension of Alexandra's Canadianness if we consider Warren Motley's analysis of Alexandra's character and development. O'Brien contends that Alexandra is "a fertile but asexual Earth Mother" (159). To Motley, however, "Cather's heroine is not an Earth Mother or corn goddess as many critics have held" (151); instead, Motley argues that Alexandra is simply a woman who worked for the autonomy and power of a man's world, and in turn she sacrificed her feminine development. Because of this underdeveloped side of her nature, Motley contends that Alexandra suffers a depression that causes isolation. In one respect, Alexandra is a true American character: she rebels against established sex roles and becomes a successful farmer and landowner. The effect of her success, though, has a Canadian quality. Alexandra withdraws from her society. She does not venture into town after the opening scene. In the latter chapters, she does not leave her farm except to go to Marie's house or to church. In the final section she does

travel to Lincoln, but while there she visits only garrisons: the University and the prison. Motley asserts that Alexandra's isolation causes her to think of suicide. Klug agrees and feels that "She longs for death" (291). Alexandra compares herself with Carrie Jensen, a woman who "tried to kill herself once or twice" (124). Motley argues that Alexandra's desire to find relief in death from her pain as an underdeveloped woman is expressed in the return of her daydream after having gotten "cold clear through" (280) in a rainstorm while at Emil's grave. In this dream she recognizes the man as "the mightiest of all lovers" (283), whom Motley interprets as being death. Here, Alexandra embraces death as relief from her isolation.

In Canadian terms, Alexandra pulls away from the moral and social values of her garrison (the community of the Divide) and experiences the isolation of becoming individual--the "real terror" (Frye 226) of the Canadian. Unlike other American characters who rebel and set out on their own, Alexandra suffers from the loneliness of independence. In this respect she is not a Huck Finn or an Ishmael; she is closer to a Father Dowling. Motley supports this idea when he concludes that "Without a community to sustain her, the pioneer woman's success is shadowed in her inner life by the repression and retrospective vision that blights Jim Burden and other young men in Cather's fiction" (163). They suffer from a psychological garrison.

In the marriage between Carl and Alexandra, Cather embodies, then, not only a marriage of two people, but of two mind-sets. Both Carl's and Alexandra's characters contain, to varying degrees, Canadian elements, joined with American characteristics. Their wedding comes to represent an even stronger matrimony in Cather's fiction between American and Canadian ideals that develops through the course of her career.

Chapter III

MY ANTONIA

Like the "two stories" that are combined in O Pioneers!, Cather's second Nebraska novel features a dual narrative technique: My Ántonia consists of Jim Burden's recollection of his early life with the titular protagonist. The novel begins with Jim meeting an old friend from his hometown while on a westbound train. The two reminisce about Nebraska and the people they knew. This encounter leads Jim to write his recollection of Ántonia Shimerda. Although the title refers to another, Jim writes an autobiography that begins with his move at age ten to his grandparents' farm in Nebraska from his home in Virginia after his parents' deaths. The story revolves around the Shimerda family, and Ántonia in particular. The story ends with Jim's visit to Ántonia in her middle-age, then the mother of ten and the wife of a moderately successful Bohemian farmer. The dual narrative comes from Jim's concern with and highlighting of Ántonia while telling his own history. To a critic like Randall, this duality can be seen as following the pattern of classical pastoral poetry--with Burden as city sophisticate commenting on the rustic charms of Ántonia (77). The polarity of Cather's novel, however, also supports my thesis concerning the interaction of Canadian and American atti-

tudes in Cather's work. Moreover, Slote, in her "Introduction" to Alexander's Bridge, contends that "the central concept of the book" is "the divided self" (xx-xxi) and the "The theme of double selves is pervasive in Cather's work" (xxi). Klug likewise states that "Internal division is the central theme of Willa Cather's life" (287). In O Pioneers! both Carl and Alexandra are divided between American inclinations and Canadian leanings. In My Ántonia, Cather separates these two attitudes and assigns them to the individual characters of Jim and Antonia.

The development of Jim and Antonia, however, differs from that of Carl and Alexandra because with the two main characters of My Ántonia Cather clearly defines their motivating psyche. Whereas Cather describes Carl's eyes as turned to the past, she organically demonstrates that Jim's attention is to the past through his development and the structure of the novel. Likewise, Ántonia has much clearer American characteristics than Alexandra. Alexandra confesses a loneliness and recedes into her garrison; Ántonia possesses an explosive, strongly rebellious nature.

Cather's Canadian viewpoints are not limited to character development, moreover; she uses elements of the Canadian psyche throughout the novel. For instance, she relies upon the garrison metaphor to describe the Shimerdas after they have arrived in their new Nebraska home. Frye points out two phases in the garrison mentality, which My Ántonia reflects. In "The Shimerdas," Jim relates the struggle of

this Bohemian family, which exemplifies elements from the first phase of the garrison mentality.

One of the elements of phase I is the tendency to use one's house as a fortress against enemies. In the Shimerdas' case, the enemy is nature. "'They seem awful scared of cold,'" Otto Fuchs tells the Burdens, "'and stick in that hole in the bank like badgers'" (70). Their cave becomes their garrison to which they cling to survive the cold. "As soon as we entered," says Jim remembering his grandmother's and his visit to the Shimerdas', Marek "threw a grainsack over the crack at the bottom of the door. The air in the cave was stifling, and it was very dark, too" (73).

Another element of phase I is the struggle to survive, and the Shimerdas' struggle consists not only in surviving the cold. Since they arrived in autumn, they did not have a chance to lay away supplies for the winter. They have very little food or money, so are reduced to begging rotten potatoes from the postmaster, "'What he throw out'" (74). If it were not for the Burdens, the Shimerdas possibly would not have survived their first winter.

Mr. Shimerda enters phase II when the isolation of life on the Divide proves too much for him; his loneliness, caused by the separation from his homeland and his friends, leads him to commit suicide. In phrasing that echoes the ideals of the Canadian Fathers of Confederation (peace, order, and good government), Cather writes that Mr. Shimerda "had come to believe that peace and order had vanished from

the earth, or existed only in the world he had left behind" (86). The feelings that bring about his suicide are similar to the feelings of Canute Canuteson in the early story, "On the Divide". When Canuteson looks to the trees along Rattlesnake Creek, the narrator tells us that "If it had not been for the few stunted cottonwoods and elms that grew along its banks, Canute would have shot himself years ago" (493). For Mr. Shimerda there is no relief from the prairie's oppression, as there is for Canute. Shimerda is a weak man, and even the love of his daughter cannot save him from the feeling of loneliness caused by the prairie. His reaction to the Divide is in keeping with the Canadian character: he withdraws into himself and finds relief only in death.

After Shimerda's suicide, spring comes and the family begins to work their land. With the change in the season comes a change in the family's attitude toward the prairie. They take on qualities which Turner defines as being part of the frontier American mentality. Their discussion of the old country ceases; they concentrate on the building of their farm, which in turn is symbolic of building the nation.

In "The Shimerdas", we see a combination of both the garrison and frontier mentalities. This dichotomy, however, is only one of the many that Cather employs in the development of the novel. For example, Cather again works with the dichotomy of the Old and New Worlds. If Jim seems to accept

the role of spokesperson for his society when he thinks about the line from Virgil "'for I shall be the first, if I live, to bring the muse into my country'" (264), so does Cather. The importance of bringing a voice, which is a combination of old and new elements, into a bare country pertains to both Jim and Cather, as his creator. She is conscious of the fact that through the past a people may have a future. In My Ántonia Cather dramatizes the joining of elements for the Old and New Worlds by describing new things and experiences in terms of Old World similes.

Jim makes two comparisons with the Middle East in describing a train conductor and his grandfather: the conductor's uniform cuffs are "engraved with hieroglyphics," and "he [is] more inscribed than an Egyptian obelisk" (4). Jim also tells us that a missionary once described his grandfather's beard as being "like the beard of an Arabian sheik" (12). The exotic quality of the Eastern world mingles with the mundane Nebraska prairie. Likewise, Jim introduces a mystic quality when he describes an indigenously North American tree, the cottonwood, as looking "like the gold and silver trees in fairy tales" (21). With this simile, Cather resurrects the enchanted forest and places it in Nebraska. Again, this enchantment returns when Mrs. Shimerda gives Mrs. Burden the precious gift of a small sack of dried mushrooms. Mrs. Burden, however, does not know what they are. "'I'm afraid of 'em,'" she tells Jim, then throws them into the stove. Many years later, Jim learns that the

gift was mushrooms, which "had been gathered, probably, in some deep Bohemian forest...." (79). Jim's speculation, followed by ellipses, takes the reader into the realm of enchantment and magic; anything can happen in deep Bohemian forests. Mrs. Burden's reaction is a typical American distrust of foreign things--an attitude about which Cather wrote in an essay soon after she had left Nebraska. She said that Americans would not associate with immigrants nor try "to profit by their older traditions" (Brown 25).

Cather's observance is similar to Turner's. Americans ignore the past and its traditions to establish a new order. Yet, this tendency causes problems for a society because, as we have observed, Cather believes that a society needs to be aware of its past in order to build its future. Being unaware of the past may not be strictly an American characteristic; as McLuhan points out, we can find this phenomenon throughout the North American continent: we live the past in the present. He quotes Leopoldo Zea's discussion of Hispanic America, but Zea's comments are accurate for all Americans. "'The past, if it is not completely assimilated, always makes itself felt in the present....Hispanic America continued to be a continent without a history because the past was always present. And if it had a history, it was not a conscious history'" (240). This commentary sounds similar to Brown's assessment of Cather's Nebraska society, one "without a real past, and without much consciousness of what past it had" (xxii).

Cather's use of pastoral, then, is a reflection of this phenomenon. The desire to live in the garden is an old, European myth, part of the baggage American settlers have brought to the New World. My Ántonia, like O Pioneers!, has an abundance of gardens, which critics are quick to point out. The gardens of the two novels differ, however, because in My Ántonia Cather has included snakes.[4]

Jim's grandmother does not go to her garden without her stick with which she kills snakes. On Jim's first visit to the garden, he asks to stay longer. "'Aren't you afraid of snakes?'" asks Mrs. Burden. "'A little,' I admitted, 'but I'd like to stay, anyhow'" (17). Jim is willing to risk the snakes to stay in the garden because of his need to live the past as present. Jim's battle with the rattler in the prairie-dog town is the pinnacle of his struggle with the two North American psyches under which he is operating at this stage in his development. He tries to wipe away the past because the snake is a symbolic link with the past, "left on from buffalo and Indian times." Here is an attempt by Jim to end the connection with the earlier times, as if he is trying to live the frontier mentality fully, erasing every link with the past, but he cannot; Jim admits that the snake "seemed like the ancient, eldest Evil. Certainly his kind have left horrible unconscious memories in all warm-blooded life" (47).

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[4] Blanche H. Gelfant considers the role of the snake, seeing it as a phallic symbol, in her discussion of sex in My Antonia.

At the same time that Jim tries to eradicate the past, he resurrects it by telling his story; therefore, his Canadian attitude dominates his development. Antonia, in contrast, can assimilate past, present, and future with ease. She tells her children the stories of her childhood. In these moments, Antonia lives her past in the present by giving her stories to her children, the symbols of her future. She tries neither to eradicate nor to resurrect the past; she simply lives it in her present.

Another dimension of the past/present dichotomy is religion. Not only does Christianity come to the New World from the Old, but also the split into Catholicism and Protestantism reflects the two poles. The very nature of the Reformation parallels the nature of American society's development; both involved the abandoning of old traditions to establish a new order. Perhaps this parallel explains why the United States is, psychologically at least, a Protestant nation. Canada is predominantly Catholic. Cather's admiration for the Catholic Church is similar to her admiration of those qualities that are a part of the Canadian world view.

Cather brings all these dimensions--past/present, New/Old World, Protestant/Catholic--together in Jim's description of the Christmas tree. "Grandmother said that it reminded her of the Tree of Knowledge" (83), Jim tells us. Here, the grandmother links a Nebraska cedar with the tree in the Garden of Eden. This Christmas tree is decorated with "gingerbread animals, strings of popcorn, and bits of candle"

(82), all from the New World. Then, Otto Fuchs produces paper ornaments from Austria: figures from the Nativity scene. "Our tree became the talking tree of fairy tale; legends and stories nestled like birds in its branches" (83). Thus, the tree combines the two worlds. Jim emphasizes the link with past and present when he remarks the story of Christ's birth "seemed like something that had happened lately" (84).

On Christmas day, when Mr. Shimerda visits, his reaction to the tree elevates it to the realm of the sacred:

> As it grew dark, I asked whether I might light the Christmas tree before the lamp was brought. When the candle-ends sent up their conical yellow flames, all the coloured figures from Austria stood out clear and full of meaning against the green boughs. Mr. Shimerda rose, crossed himself, and quietly knelt down before the tree, his head sunk forward. His long body formed a letter 'S.' I saw grandmother look apprehensively at grandfather. He was rather narrow in religious matters, and sometimes spoke out and hurt people's feelings. There had been nothing strange about the tree before, but now, with some one kneeling before it--images, candles...Grandfather merely put his finger-tips to his brow and bowed his venerable head, thus Protestantizing the atmosphere. (87)

The Protestant/Catholic question is also related by Cather to the issue of the immigrant/emigrant mentalities. Being immigrant nations, the countries of the Americas have been settled by people who have had to carry their pasts with them, as Aeneas carries his household gods, but that history loses it validity and immediacy when brought into a wilderness, and must be redefined and reshaped to fit the

North American context. Ross's As for Me and My House deals with this issue. The title, taken from Joshua 24:16, directs us to consider the struggle of winning a homeland, to which the book of Joshua is devoted. For Ross's protagonists, the struggle is too great, and they abandon the country village for the city; similarly, they did not go to Horizon to find a home but because Philip had a job there. The Bentley's are emigrants to Horizon. Herein lies another difference in the respective constitutions of the American and Canadian psyches. Ideologically, the settlers of the United States usually had an immigrant mentality: they came to the United States because they chose to. The settlers of Canada came to their new country because economic or social conditions forced them out of their homelands. They did not choose to come to Canada because of what Canada offered, but because it would serve their purpose of earning enough money to return home; thus, they had an emigrant mentality. Frederick Philip Grove dramatizes this mentality in A Search for America when his protaganist decides to emigrate from Europe:

> Canada, the United States, South Africa, or Australia--on one of these four my choice had to fall. What I resolved to do, was this. I intended to step in at Cook's tourist-office in London...and ask for the next boat which I stood any chance of catching, either at Liverpool or at Southampton, no matter where she might be bound. As it happened...a White-star liner was to weigh anchor next day, going from Liverpool to Montreal....I bought my passage...and--had burnt my bridges. Thus I became an immigrant into the western hemisphere. (10-11 emphasis mine)

Interestingly, Grove uses the word "immigrant" but his hero does not make a conscious decision to immigrate. Only chance takes him to North America. Soon, he leaves Canada for the United States, only to return to Canada at the end of the novel because the "American dream" he seeks in the United States no longer exists, and he hopes to find it in Canada.

Being a population of dispossessed people, then, is one source of Canada's émigré mentality. Canada had been peopled by such groups as remittance men, United Empire Loyalists, Ukrainian refugees, Irish potato famine victims: the homeless and the vanquished. Jim's family is similarly dispossessed. Coming from Virginia, part of the former Confederate States, they are vanquished people in their own land, much like French-Canadians. Jim comes to Nebraska, not by choice, but by chance. Jim is an emigrant.

Cather's European settlers, in contrast, exhibit the immigrant mentality. Tiny Soderball and Lena Lingard are two examples of the immigrant mentality, as well as of the American Dream. Each woman works hard and becomes successful in her business ventures. Each abandons the old country for the new. Ántonia exhibits all the virtues of the Jeffersonian ideal. Our last glimpse of her is not of a lonely woman who has at last found companionship, like Alexandra, but of a woman who, though she has lived a hard life, has successfully pursued happiness. She has a family and a farm; she is content.

We also see Ántonia's Americanness in her regard for the land, which is best described as geopious, or the "'emotional [bond] between man and his terrestrial home'" (qtd. in Carpenter 111). Geopiety is what Jim explores when he considers the meaning of patria. Knowing one's patria and being in harmony with one's space is something upon which Cather places importance. Antonia knows her patria and, as a result, is fruitful, as evidenced by all her children bursting out of the fruit cellar in "a veritable explosion of life" (339).

Another quality of Ántonia's Americanness is her independent and rebellious nature. When Mr. Harling forbids her to continue attending the dances in town, she quits his employ and goes to work for the Cutters. Later, she gives birth to her first daughter "'without calling to anybody, without a groan, she lay down on the bed and bore her child'" (316).

Jim's dependence on his community, which is yet another sign of his Canadian psyche, is quite opposite to Ántonia's self-reliance. We see Jim's Canadian mentality fully when he ponders the meaning of "Primus ego in patrium mecum...deducam Musas," and concentrates on the word "patria." His professor has told him that in this sense, "patria" does not mean "a nation or even a province, but the little rural neighbourhood on the Mincio where the poet was born" (264). The meaning of patria indicates Jim's Canadian psyche because, ideologically, Americans--regardless of affection for a specific locale--would think of patria as

meaning nation. For the regionalistic Canadian, Gaston Cleric's definition makes perfect sense. Similarly, Jim's story is a quest for his patria, a place with which he has lost touch; as a result, he senses that the good place is somewhere else. Jim attempts to fulfill his life by retelling his past, reliving it through his story. Thus, the implications of the narrative structure of My Ántonia have much in common with Margaret Laurence's great prairie novel The Stone Angel. The retelling of a life is very Canadian because, as Frye points out, idealizing the past is typical of the Canadian pastoral myth. Hagar Shipley, the novel's protagonist, shifts between the past and present to tell the story of her ninety-year life. Even the epigraph of My Ántonia, optima dies...prima fugit (best days fly first), is fitting for Laurence's novel. Hagar's best days have flown early in her life.

Another example of Canadian fiction concentrating on childhood nostalgia is W. O. Mitchell's Who Has Seen the Wind. Michael Peterman, in a comparison of My Ántonia and Who Has Seen the Wind, says that both novels are "celebrations of childhood experience and elegies that rigorously place that special openness and sensitivity of youth in full human perspective" (95). To Peterman, the word "charm"[5] best describes the effect of My Ántonia, with charm being an emotional quality that attracts both scholar and leisure reader, causing them to overlook the novel's defects and

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[5] A word he borrows from James Woodress.

lack of structure (93-94).

The charm, however, does not have this effect on all readers. Granville Hicks sees the novel's theme as "heroic idealism," that is, "the joyous struggle against nature sustained by a confidence in the ultimate benefice of that nature against which it fought" (142). He also believes that the novel depends "upon a mystical conception of the frontier...[looking] back longingly to the heroism of earlier days" (140). For Hicks, the novel's nostalgic quality is a flaw; however, his difficulty with the novel perhaps derives from the extent to which looking forward rather than backward is the orientaion of the American. Hicks would be one of those critics whom Stineback would catergorize as having difficulty with Cather's work because he looks for only American qualities, and when he finds something incongruous with the American psyche he considers it a flaw in Cather's writing. Peterman, on the other hand, has no such difficulties because, as a Canadian, he does not approach the novel with the same expectations as Hicks, namely, that the novel should follow the American tradition of denying the past.

Cather's embracing of the past, which we see in Jim, is one of the elements of the novel that is similar to Canadian fiction. When, in the Canadian novel, the pastoral is used, it functions as an "idealization of memory, especially childhood memory" (Frye 241). Ernest Buckler's The Mountain and the Valley exemplifies this idealization. This novel is

a recollection of David Canaan's past, beginning with a prologue and ending with an epilogue of David's present, which is disappointing and bleak. His childhood, however, was a time when each day "was brand new, with a gift's private shine" (19). The structure of Buckler's novel is similar to Cather's, which begins and ends with Jim's present, bookending his past.

One of Jim's early memories of Nebraska is his fist day at his grandparents' home: "It was pleasant there in the kitchen. The sun shone into my bath-water through the west half-window, and a big Maltese cat came up and rubbed himself against the tub, watching me curiously" (10).

Jim remembers the warmth and security of his childhood--a memory to which he returns at the end of the novel. In the final chapter, Jim discovers that he does not like the change that has come over his hometown. "My day in Black Hawk," he says, "was disappointing. Most of my old friends were dead or had moved away. Strange children, who meant nothing to me, were playing in the Harlings' big yard when I passed; the mountain ash had been cut down, and only a sprouting stump was left of the tall Lombardy poplar that used to guard the gate. I hurried on" (369). Thus, Jim rejects change, the great American motivator, and therefore his Americanness, in favor of his static memory, and the search for his "incommunicable past" (372). Jim eventually walks out to a bit of untouched prairie north of town where he feels "at home again" (370). Here, in this pasture, is

the remnant of the old road that once led out to his grandparents' farm. He finds that the road and the prairie are unchanged, that the land is eternal: the thing which he seeks. Symbolically, this road also leads back to Jim's childhood: "This was the road over which Antonia and I came on that night when we got off the train at Black Hawk." He merely has to close his eyes to be transported in time, "to hear the rumbling of the wagons in the dark, and to be again overcome by that obliterating strangeness. The feelings of that night were so near that I could reach out and touch them with my hand. I had the sense of coming home to myself" (371). Through Jim's experience of "coming home" again, the reader, too, is transported back to the night when Jim and Antonia first arrive in Nebraska.

Jim's desire to relive the past reflects his failure to live in the present. Hicks interprets Jim's failure as Cather's failure, but this interpretation ignores the fact that Jim is the "nostalgic narrator" (Miller 115), not Cather. What information Cather gives of Jim's present life is sparse, but enough to indicate that the best years have already flown: he is married to a woman who is irritated by his "quiet tastes," and who plays "the patroness" to mediocre artists (x); she is quite unlike the women Jim was attracted to in his Nebraska days. Jim's living in New York is significant in terms of his commitment to the past, because in the novel the West is a symbol of the future, and the East, a symbol of the past. After Jim's establishment

on the farm, his movement is continually Eastward: first into Black Hawk, then to Lincoln, then to Yale and New York.

Although there is a steady retreat to the East, i. e. the past, Jim's profession as "legal counsul for one of the great Western railways" (x) would seem to signify his longing for the future. We learn of Jim's present life in the "Introduction," written by an unnamed author friend of Jim's from his Black Hawk days, now living in New York, who tells us that they meet on a train. In American literature, the train is a symbol of the future, the portent of industrial power and the nation's greatness. Cather seems to use the train in this manner since the train is heading west. Yet the two friends discuss the past, and it is this train journey that motivates Jim to write down his memories of Ántonia. At the same time that Cather uses the train as a symbol for a jouney into the future, she also uses it for a journey into the past. Since the past is a better place for Jim, Cather's train, here, serves as the typical American emblem as well as the typical Canadian emblem. From the beginning we see a blending of the two mind-sets.

Jim's initial move West to Nebraska would seem to make him a typical American character, but even as a boy, he makes decisions that mark him as being like the mythical Canadian. As a child he has a close connection with the prairie and sees it as a grand place. Jim's view of the prairie as the holder of life's secrets is very similar to Brian O'Connal's view of the prairie in Who Has Seen the

Wind. Each writer stresses "that the larger truths of life are perceivable only in close proximity to the prairie" (Peterman 100). Yet each boy rejects the prairie in favor of the city. Jim moves to Black Hawk, then to Lincoln, and finally to New York. Brian runs away from his uncle's farm back to town. Although, each boy goes to a farm in the West, each returns to the town in the East, a symbolic return to the past.

From Jim's first exposure to the Nebraska plain, we see the emergence of his Canadian qualities. While riding at night in the back of a wagon, staring at the stars, he senses there is "nothing to see....There was nothing but land....Between that earth and that sky I felt erased, blotted out" (7-8). In Canadian fiction, characters similarly feel overwhelmed by nature. As Brian O'Connal lies in a haystack, he looks "up to the dark face of the sky pricked out with stars. He was filled now with a feeling of nakedness and vulnerability that terrified him" (228).

As Jim stares out at the vast nothingness from the back of the buckboard he thinks about Virginia and all he has left behind; nothing familiar remains: "I had left even [my parents'] spirits behind me" (8). Here, Jim is like Aeneas, leaving a vanquished land and traveling West into the wilderness, but unlike Aeneas, who leaves much of his past behind in ruined Troy, Jim does not even take with him his household gods. The Virgilian overtones in the novel are quite strong. Randall and Rosowski use the Virgilian basis,

relying heavily on the Georgics and the Ecologues, as support for their arguments that My Ántonia is a pastoral work. Yet the parallels between Jim and Aeneas also highlight Cather's Canadianness: Aeneas was dispossessed of his patria and had to go into a new land to build a new empire; Jim, too, goes into a new land, but he is a failed Aeneas because he does not help to build a new empire in the American Western manner.

That Jim enters a new land is emphasized in this section, because Nebraska is inundated with "nothing." Cather uses the word frequently in the early pages (7, 8, 14, 19, 21, 26). No wonder Jim marvels at the creation of something from all this nothing. The settlers claim this empty wilderness, civilize it, and make it part of a nation. Jim's role in this transformation, however, is limited and passive, i. e. Canadian, unlike Ántonia's active role. He has little connection with the land, and his relationship to the land is distanced as he grows and moves away.

Jim's experience, too, is akin to that of the Canadian. In "The Hired Girls," he is confronted by the small town attitude, which Peterman recognizes as being "garrison-like" (103). Small town comformity is a typical social pressure in both Canada and the United States: Mrs. Bentley, in As for Me and My House, articulates the small town attitude as serving "the exacting gods Propriety and Parity" (6); Jim says that it is "like living under a tyranny" (219). The American reaction to tyranny is to rebel, as Americans did

in the War for Independence. Yet Jim does not rebel. The townspeople's "respect for respectability" (202) disgusts Jim, but he does nothing about this disgust. He withdraws from his society.

Jim's town experiences cause him to regard the prairie as the only thing which is vital, and he sees this vitality only in people who have an association with the prairie--much as Brian O'Connal does in his fascination with the young Ben. Jim's grandmother remarks that if they had to live in town, "she thanked God [they] lived next door to the Harlings. They had been farming people, like ourselves, and their place was like a little farm, with a big barn and garden, and an orchard and grazing lots--even an windmill" (147). Although the Burden's rural attitude is not exclusively Canadian, it stands in contrast to the general American orientation, toward an "intricately organized, urban, industrial...society" (Marx 354). The Harlings are the only people in town, besides the hired girls, of whom Jim speaks kindly. He looks on the rest of Black Hawk with disdain, "The Black Hawk boys looked forward to marrying Black Hawk girls, and living in a brand-new little house with best chairs that must not be sat upon, and hand-painted china that must not be used" (201). These are faceless people who do not have the vitality of country people--people who have a close link with the soil.

Rather than openly confronting these people, Jim keeps to himself. He turns down an invitation to join the Owl Club,

and instead, he opts for dances at the firehall. This action exemplifies Jim's avoidance of open confrontations, another element of the garrison mentality (Frye 226). When his grandmother asks him not to go to the firehall dances, Jim, unlike Antonia, who rebels when forbidden to attend the dances, acquiesces, leaving him only one outlet: walking through the dark town; he becomes more and more isolated, finding that he must live within the social mores of his small town, causing him to withdraw to his room, where he studies Latin, another form of retreat to the past.

Living in town, Jim feels a psychological isolation; he does not fit in with the townspeople or their morality. Physically, he lives on the edge of town, caught between two worlds, not a part of either. We can see this marginality in Gabrielle Roy's The Road Past Altamont: "The village was small and Grandmother's house stood right at the end of it; the prairie surrounded us like the ocean on all sides except the east, where a few other little houses could be seen, our companions on what seemed a terrifying journey" (7). The Bentley's house is perched on the edge, too. As it does for Brian O'Connal and Jim Burden, the prairie has a powerful lure for Christine and Mrs. Bentley. This inbetweenness--a typically Canadian phenomenon, as McLuhan points out--symbolizes the characters' inability to find their patria: Philip Bentley is a minister for a church in which he has no faith; Mrs. MacMurray, in Who Has Seen the Wind, lives in town, but her thoughts are always of the homestead.

Because his life in the city is unfulfilling, Jim chooses to live in his memory. Even when he breaks with the small town, he cannot commit himself fully to the city. As a student in Lincoln, he chooses to live with an elderly couple on the edge of town, "near the open country" (258). Jim cannot ignore the lure of the prairie, yet he refuses to recognize its power and submit to it throughout his life. He is much like the Canadian who leaves the Old World, but cannot become a part of the New; therefore, he is caught in the middle, looking back and remaining static.

Although Jim's attention is to the past and Ántonia's is to the future, they share the same view of space, like the Canadian and the "United Stater."[6] McLuhan contends that this shared feeling comes about from the war on the wilderness of our continent, making "customary the habit of going outside to confront and explore the wilderness and of going inside to be social and secure." In contrast, the European goes outside to socialize and inside to be alone (230). In My Ántonia, all public social activity takes place indoors, such as the tent dances and the Saturday evenings in the Harlings' front parlour. When Jim and Antonia need privacy, they go out to the prairie, as in the final scenes of "The Shimerdas" and "Cuzak's Boys." Likewise, when Brian O'Connal needs solitude, he goes out to the prairie.

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[6] A term I borrow from Howard O'Hagan's romance Tay John.

As Antonia is a more clearly defined Alexandra, Jim is a more clearly defined Carl; both male characters exhibit Canadian characteristics. Jim's character is more developed, yet what they both share is an abandonment of their patria.[7] Jim's nostalgic mental journey at the end of the novel is the culmination of his Canadian proclivities. From his first feeling of being overwhelmed by the prairie, his development has been toward a Canadian mind-set. As he sits in the pasture of untouched prairie, he sees a remnant of the trail on which his journey began. This scene becomes a microcosm of the novel: the final scene is a recalling of his past, as his whole narrative is. Jim, unlike Antonia, sees his past as a better time than his present. His nostalgia is not so much a character flaw, as Hicks contends, but a conscious strategy on Cather's part to develop an attitude which is different from the progressive American frontier value system.

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[7] Cf Claude Wheeler in One of Ours, whose name suggests a link with the prairie (clod) and at the same time motion (wheel), pulling him away from the land; he cannot recognize his being a part of the land. He lives out of kilter with nature's cycles and is always yearning for far away things and places. His death is inevitable because he cannot find contentment with the land.

Chapter IV

CONCLUSION

Willa Cather did not consciously attempt to dramatize the Canadian psyche in fiction: these elements appear because of a basic similarity between her experiences and those of many Canadians. Cather believed "that most of the basic material a writer works with is acquired before the age of fifteen. That's the important period" (Bohlke 20). During her formative years, her family moved from the American South to the Mid-West, from the civilized Virginia hills to the wild Nebraska plain. This sense of enforced emigration, of coming to a new and raw environment not by choice but by accident or as a result of circumstantial pressures, is deeply rooted in the Canadian psyche.

The societal features of sparsely settled pioneer Nebraska also had/have much in common with the general structure of Canada and the cultural mosaic (and vertical stratification) that have come to characterize this nation. The neighborhood of her grandparents' homestead, in the Catherton township, was settled by European immigrants: "To the north of Catherton there was a settlement of French-Canadians....Spotted across the northern and central tiers of the county were colonies of Germans, Bohemians, Swedes, Danes, and Swiss. All but the Swiss have important roles in Willa Cather's fiction (Brown 24).

Although such a society might seem to be a goldmine for a local-color artist, to Cather it seemed to lack both the historical ghosts and sense of history that give mythic resonance to regionalist writing, just as it did not seem to be a climate supportive of esthetic pursuits. In his pioneering commentary on the state of the arts in Canada (On Canadian Poetry, 1943), E. K. Brown had expressed similar sentiments, and perhaps this is what enabled him to write so sympathetically about Cather. According to Brown, Cather "did not care to start from nothing"; rather she wanted to begin "from the point art had reached in the sequence of great experiments...which make up tradition....It began to appear to her that her art had been kept poor, and her personality clipped, by inadequacies in the society in which she had grown up. It was a society without a real past, and without much consciousness of what past it had" (xxii).

Ultimately, however, what Cather's background and the Canadian experience most have in common pertains to the landscape of Nebraska and Cather's initial response to it. In an interview given after the publication of O Pioneers!. Cather recalled her first impressions of the Nebraska prairie: "I felt a good deal as if we had come to the end of everything--it was a kind of erasure of personality" (Slote 448). Cather expressed this feeling in a letter to her friend Elizabeth Sergeant, written in 1912, while in Red Cloud. At the time, Cather was working on her story "Alexandra," which later became part of O Pioneers!. Sergeant

relates that the "general effect of the West had been overpowering--she had run into the same old shock she used to suffer at the mere size of it. When she was in the East, she forgot everything but the sharp, specific flavor. Once there, an unreasoning fear of being swallowed by the distances between herself and anything else jumped out at her--as in childhood, again" (79). Although Cather is here responding to the prairie, this sense of living in the midst of no-where and being overwhelmed is a recurrent motif in Canadian literature.

And with this observation, I think we have the answer to the question of whether the "Canadian" elements in Cather's work are better described in "regionalistic" rather than nationalistic terms. Although geographically, Canada has many distinct and diverse regions, psychologically its landscape has a "prairie" quality. What appears as realistic detail in the works of Sinclair Ross, Margaret Laurence, W. O. Mitchell and Gabrielle Roy is also present as emotional climate in the works of Canadian non-prairie writers. Set in the Rocky Mountains, Howard O'Hagan's Tay John equally evokes the "silence" of an obliterating and obliterated enviornment, just as Ernest Buckler's The Mountain and the Valley ends with the "erasure" of David Canaan as the snow falls. Despite its urban setting, a sense of impermanence and lack of definite circumference characterize Morley Callaghan's Such Is My Beloved, and the echo of the train is as lonely as it is in the "lone land" of prairie fiction.

Moreover, that the Canadian psyche has a "prairie" character may be seen from the central position occupied by such writers in the Canadian literary tradition, the current canon and--possibly most significant of all--in the popular imagination or reputation of Canadian literature outside of Canada. Conversely, one might notice the extent to which prairie literature lies outside the mainstream in American literature. If it is "prairie" that Cather has in common with Canada, in short, then it is also "prairie" that distinguishes her from the domenant American tradition.

In much the same way one can deal with the question of whether it is gender rather than national ethoi that accounts for various elements in Cather's fiction. Certainly, the sense of being faceless and surviving against odds can be allied with a female sensibility, and certainly many of Cather's images and specifically the sexual aspects of her depiction of her female protagonist's relationship to the land may be discussed in feminist terms. Yet as Margaret Atwood's twinning of Canadian and feminist issues suggests, the argument for gender scarcely cancels out the validity of discussing Cather as having a Canadian mentality. Similarly, support for the notion that the Canadian psyche is feminine can again be found in the quantitative and qualitative predominance of women in the Canadian literary canon, especially in contrast to the reverse situation in the American literary canon.

Another reason for approaching Cather from a nationalist rather than a gender oriented perspective has to do with the extent to which her fiction differs not merely from that of American male writers but also that of American women writers. A particularly revealing example here is Ellen Glasgow who like Cather was born in Virginia (1874) and within a year of Cather (1873). Unlike Cather, Glasgow never left the South, and she shared none of Cather's respect for tradition of nostalgia. Similarly, although Cather is not ignored in feminist revisionist criticism, she tends not to be presented as a female writer who has been neglected merely because of male prejudice.

In turn, that a nationalist/ideological way of approaching Cather is more appropriate than one based either on gender or on regional/prairie affinities becomes apparent when one considers that the concerns I have identified are not limited to O Pioneers! or My Anotnia --i.e., novels with a prairie setting and female protagonists. The same value systems and tensions may be found in The Professor's House, wherein Godfrey St. Peter is a grandson of an "old Kanuck" (30). Similarly, in Death Comes for the Archbishop, Magdalena, a Mexican woman, tells her story of her husband's murders to an American notary, who "had brought along his friend, St. Vrain, a Canadian trapper who understood Spanish better than he" (70). Seemingly insignificant, these brief allusions to things Canadian do not seem accidental in an artist who espoused the virtues of the "the novel démeublé" (Writing 35-43).

Thus although in terms of setting Shadows on the Rock would seem to be Cather's most Canadian novel, a Canadian mind-set is pervasive in her fiction, and for the purpose of my thesis this novel is of primary importance for the way it concretely realizes Cather's attraction to Canada. Although Cather was quite fond of Grand Manan and Quebec, she did not particularly like Toronto, and there is no evidence to suggest that she ever visited Western Canada. She did, however, do a good deal of research on Quebec for Shadows on the Rock, and, consequently, became quite knowledgeable about French-Canadian history.

Cather wrote most of Shadows on the Rock at her summer retreat on Grand Manan island in New Brunswick. She spent her first summer there in 1922, later building a cottage that had "a large attic from which one could look out over the cliffs and the sea, and this Willa Cather chose for her study" (Lewis 131). She returned annually until she was barred from the island during World War II.

In conclusion, then, although my purpose in this thesis has not been to reclassify Cather as a Canadian writer, I do think that her world view has much in common with a Canadian perspective, and that for American critics herein lies her "charm" and paradoxically the consequent tendency to view her as a "case." Similarly, although my purpose has not been to suggest that Canadian critics are more sophisticated than Americans in their discussion of Cather's artistry, I do think that if they have a "better" understanding it can

be traced to the shock of recognition they experience in reading her fiction.

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