

Reenvisioning Cather's Spaces: Dualities of Landscape and  
Meaning

Susan Rushing Adams

University Undergraduate Fellows, 1993-1994

Texas A&M University

Department of English

APPROVED

Fellows Advisor Janis P. Stout

Dr. Janis P. Stout  
Honors Director Debra L. Stout

## Preface

This study began as an effort to explain recurrent window imagery in the works of women authors. As I examined the fiction and nonfiction of Willa Cather and Virginia Woolf, the very frequency of window imagery seemed to be evidence that it is a meaningful element. I found in the writings of each that the numerous window images suggest a diversity of meanings and rich emotional connotations. Moreover, Cather and Woolf seemed to me to use window images in very similar ways; both use images of windows to indicate important dualities. For just as the inner and outer surfaces of a glass pane both separate and connect the worlds on either side, so the window image symbolically separates yet joins the opposing aspects of a wide assortment of dualities. Its very blankness or transparency, as well as its role as an item of familiarity, makes the window a convenient object on which both of these writers plausibly projected their ambivalent feelings about such issues as masculinity and femininity, youth and age, and public versus private spheres. Most importantly, I found that for both Cather and Woolf the window image serves to represent the duality of entrapment and freedom, especially for women characters. Windows often serve as actual and figurative barriers that imprison as well as openings affording a glimpse of release.

At the beginning of my project, I was interested in what is "behind the window" of Cather's and Woolf's indoor settings, wanting to know how their domestic spaces are delineated and how

these spaces relate to the themes and motifs of their books. As I read both primary and secondary materials, my hypothesis that window imagery emphasized enclosure led to an increasing interest in what lies on the outside, beyond the window, and how this relates to what is contained within. A series of interrelated questions came to mind. Woolf's female protagonists, for example, are circumscribed by window imagery as they care for their households, but how might they behave if "released" from societally-conditioned roles? In Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse, in what way are Woolf's chaotic London streets and domestic, glassed-in dinner parties related? In To the Lighthouse, characters who are painting or walking out-of-doors see the family mother, Mrs. Ramsay, framed in a picture window. To what extent is motherhood, a role executed "inside," defined by Mrs. Ramsay, and to what extent by the perceptions of these outsiders? Still, the main female characters and narrators I studied in Woolf seldom ventured out of the boundaries of the household, leaving women's lives in the area outside the window a gray, unexplored region.

My investigation of Woolf's imagery led to many appealing discoveries. I continue to believe that Woolf's and Cather's novels offer great possibilities for parallel comparative studies, which I hope to pursue at another time. But my study of Cather's work and of her biography as told by Sharon O'Brien led me to more and more new questions. My readings and critical research made me realize that the window is part of a larger

pattern in the works of Cather than I had realized and I wanted to accept the challenge of exploring that pattern.

## Reenvisioning Cather's Spaces: Dualities of Landscape and Meaning

Outside and inside form a dialectic of division, the obvious geometry of which blinds us as soon as we bring it into play in metaphorical domains. It has the sharpness of the dialectics of yes and no, which decides everything.

Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space 211

Each of Willa Cather's fictional characters, whether female or male, belongs to a landscape divided into domesticity and outdoors. These two spheres appear with varying degrees of emphasis in each of her novels. Cather's landscapes, then, can be conceived of in terms of dualities; open vistas are coupled with private and enclosed interior spaces. But the bisection of space is not always as absolute as Gaston Bachelard suggests in his Poetics of Space. In The Professor's House, for example, the focus is primarily on interior environments, in contrast to the expansive outdoors of O Pioneers!. The significance of the interior environment in The Professor's House is made clear only as it is contrasted with outdoor expanses as beheld through literal and figurative windows that are metaphors of unification as well as of separation. Similarly, the abundant outdoors of O Pioneers! becomes meaningful in comparison to the interior and its associations. Although the domestic and outdoors are separate, the distinction may be either blurred or pronounced.

Although in general Cather's landscapes are readily visible, and thus are much discussed, their meaning and significance goes beyond the connection that is often emphasized by critics and admirers, that between land and the pioneering American spirit. The great prairies and deserts appearing in the novels of Willa

Cather are not just the soil of the endeavoring pioneer. They perform an active, emblematic function in the novel, structuring and giving meaning to the conflicts and personal development of the characters. Setting itself becomes part of Cather's development of dramatic conflict, virtually a character enacting an alienation and opposition that precedes a resolution of discordant tendencies. Specific settings, for example, appear to compete with other settings for prominence and for affirmation of their value. Indoors and outdoors are sometimes separated rather than conjoined, because each person in the fiction has his or her own preferred space, whether inside or out. Accordingly, Cather often emphasizes the window's actual division of the interior and exterior landscapes, but sometimes offers the window as a kind of mediating influence between opposites, perhaps not an ideal one, but a serviceable one.

Many high school literature courses simplify Cather's landscapes. The Midwestern prairies become representations of hard work and Puritan ideals, and to some readers, the immigrants that inhabit them become stock characters, stereotypes rather than fully developed individuals. When viewed in this way, Cather's settings lose an important part of their meaning and become flat rather than multi-dimensional. Further, the interior spaces of short stories like "Paul's Case" and novels like The Professor's House can be obscured when emphasis is given only to the Great Plains or Southwest of O Pioneers!, My Ántonia, and "Neighbor Rosicky," and little is made of interior settings. Emphasis on one kind of landscape without attention to possible

counterparts is reductive.

The readily visible contrast of landscapes is apparent not just within each novel, but among the novels. Linked by the windows and window-like devices that connect interior spaces to outdoors, the open, symbolically freeing spaces represented by the Southwest or the Midwest and the architectural space designated by Cather's homes exist in mutually illuminating interrelationships. Such pairs of contrasting environments express recurrent themes and meanings, including such dualities as East/West, childhood/adulthood, freedom/confinement, and most of all, masculinity/femininity. The dualities of landscape and meaning, serving to reflect and telescope the meaning of one another, are not always so much dissimilar as they are complementary.

The concern with a sense of place and with mediation between opposing environments is traceable in part to Cather's life. She experienced such contrasts early, moving from the verdant hills of Virginia to the open Nebraska prairie in 1883, when she was about ten years old. The Cathers first lived on a farm, then moved into the town of Red Cloud. They were a large family crowded into houses that afforded little privacy (O'Brien 60-62). According to Sharon O'Brien, one the most important experiences to young Willa, a child with six siblings, was being given a room of her own. Although she and some of the other children originally had to share an attic room, Willa's mother arranged for her to have the attic to herself. She regretted losing the company of her brothers, but learned to appreciate her personal

space, using it for reading and daydreaming. Her room became a place for personal growth (O'Brien 84-86). As one critic proposes, that room with its "window view of the expansive world" became "the crucible for her art" (Briggs 160). Later, the Red Cloud home figured in one of her most successful works, The Song of the Lark, in which a young vocal artist, Thea Kronberg, also has an attic room given to her by her mother. Both the actual and the fictional room have a large window overlooking the outdoors. The rooms that Cather's characters claim as private spaces for working or thinking can, in fact, be seen as "simply duplicates of the insulated room with a view from her Nebraska parish" (Briggs 161).

Throughout her life, the protective connotations of enclosed spaces that included windows or similar openings were important to Cather because they served as reminders of the places of refuge available to her in childhood. She preferred to write in places that gave her this familiar sense of home and belonging. When she lived with the family of her friend Isabelle McClung in Pittsburgh, Cather was assigned a third-floor study similar to her old attic bedroom (O'Brien 237-8). During the writing of My Ántonia, when the weather became too warm for her to work in her selected attic space in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, she wrote in a tent pitched in a meadow (Brown and Crone 19-21), "out-of-doors yet sheltered in a demarcated, enclosed space" (O'Brien 71). In Grand Manan, when Cather had a cottage built as a permanent vacation home, it of course included an open attic (Brown and Crone 41-43). Even on her trips to the Southwest, Cather retired



to a breezy library with a large window when she wanted to write (Briggs 161). Such elements of comfort appear in her works as metaphors.

As her insistence on having large windows in her comfortable indoor rooms indicates, Cather was equally tied to the open landscape. Leaving the mountains of Virginia that she had grown to love as a very young child was a formative and traumatic experience (O'Brien 66), but even her earliest books show an attachment to the broad horizons of Midwestern fields. Even so, she later had trouble writing there, perhaps because she always "feared the prairies' vastness," uneasy that, as Elizabeth Seargeant said, she would be "swallowed by the distances between herself and anything else" (O'Brien 64). Cather did not seem to exhibit this same caution on her first trip to the mountains and deserts of the Southwest in 1912. Photographs of her on this and later visits in 1914, 1915, 1916, and 1925 show her in clothing suitable for exploring and climbing, proving that she experienced these rugged spaces in ways not usually expected of cultivated, well-dressed ladies. The Southwest had an entirely different effect on her than did Nebraska, perhaps because the vertical planes of mountains and cliffs created "walls" and roomlike enclosures. Here she felt artistically and personally liberated and was inspired her to write about America's landscapes, including the Great Plains that overwhelmed her so.

In her fiction, Cather enriched the traditional depictions of soil and home with new representations, especially with respect to gender. Just as Cather herself did not solely belong

to the Midwest where she spent much of her childhood and young adulthood, but to many places where she lived and visited, and of which she wrote, so Virginia, Nebraska, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Quebec, and the mesas and canyons of New Mexico and Colorado become integral parts of her fictive world. The open, harsh West is no longer man's territory only, but woman's too, and the domestic sphere belongs to both sexes. Thus, the separation of landscapes is not absolute. Caves--room-like, confining spaces that might seem womblike and thus feminine--appear within and looking out on harsh, open, and seemingly masculine horizons, and the windows of otherwise isolating and confining indoor rooms give views of the broader expanses outside. Such figurative mediations between dualities, whether of landscape or meaning, can be referred to as "liminal," because they afford symbolic passage between opposing pairs, bringing them into the same context either for purposes of comparison or reconciliation. The limen, Latin for threshold, both marks a boundary between inner and outer and provides a passage between them. Similarly, the window pane that appears frequently in Cather's novels separates what is outside from what is within, but because it is transparent and because it can be opened, it affords transition or even union between the two. The continual pairing of landscape and meaning, together with the liminalities that bridge the gaps between pairs, means that Cather's outer and inner landscapes can be compared and contrasted with each other to illuminate common themes.

It is easy to omit study of these dualities, though, because

they are not always readily discernible; they lie beyond the surface elements of the novel. The novels instead achieve their wholeness and effect through suggestion and careful selection of a few critical details rather than from an accumulation of many particulars. The interior and exterior spaces therefore sometimes create what Cather called "the thing not named" ("The Novel *Démeublé*" 41). In this and several similar essays on writing, Cather calls on the artist to "simplify," asserting that "[w]hatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there--that, one might say, is created" ("The Novel *Démeublé*" 41). These personal writings invite and compel the reader to look beyond the physical details of her spaces for the relationship of both domestic and exterior landscapes to meaning and theme.

Cather wished to be silent about some of her beliefs and personal experiences and asked that certain records not be published or otherwise released to the public. Critics therefore often attach the phrase "the thing not named" to her possible identity as a lesbian, an idea given credence by the research of critics like Sharon O'Brien into her unpublished private papers. Yet the concept of "the thing not named" may be considered to be any idea not explicitly stated, but symbolized or just suggested by the components of Cather's landscapes as well as by her life. For although landscapes and concern with gender roles, for example, are clearly evident in Cather's fiction, she allows them to speak for themselves rather than naming their significance directly. Cather is most often a silent presence rather than a

noisy moralizer.

Critics, too, can unconsciously participate in suppressing "the thing not named." David Harrell's book on The Professor's House, for example, provides a good analysis of the Southwestern landscape as it appears in the middle section of the novel, "Tom Outland's Story," but neglects the setting of the two surrounding sections of text, Professor St. Peter's old house with its attic room. Some critics of The Professor's House have dealt with both spaces, but Leon Edel, for example, discusses the caves as homes, thereby de-emphasizing the duality between these confined room-like spaces and open expanses. Feminist critics have neglected to analyze fully the dual nature of Cather's landscape, but have at any rate shown a continual willingness to reevaluate scholarship on Cather and to accept pluralities of critical thought. These critics' perspectives on Cather's life and works have resulted in interesting views of her landscapes. Judith Fryer reads Cather with Bachelard's Poetics of Space in mind, and Sharon O'Brien keeps Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's Madwoman in the Attic in mind when describing Cather's interiors. These writers have examined Cather's life in terms of her novels, and her novels in terms of her life, resulting in excellent works such as O'Brien's Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice, which combines biography and criticism.

An awareness of biographical detail is important to all studies of Cather's fiction; such information has transformed recent scholarship on Cather. Perhaps of equal importance to my analysis of Cather's dualities of landscape and meaning, though,

are Cather's own critical writings "The Novel D meubl ," "The Art of Fiction," and "On The Professor's House." In considering the role of dualities of landscape and room, I will also examine novels that represent different phases of Willa Cather's career. After the false start represented by the uncharacteristic Alexander's Bridge, Cather found her own voice and her own landscape by turning to the Midwestern spaces in which she had grown up. In O Pioneers! (1913), Cather first depicted a strong woman who is associated mainly with the prairie. She then turned to create an even more strongly developed female figure, Thea Kronberg, in The Song of the Lark (1915). This character closely represents Willa Cather herself as well as her preferred spaces, both indoors and out. Both The Song of the Lark and The Professor's House (1925) were written after visits to the Southwest, including Arizona and New Mexico. The Professor's House is especially interesting because of its primary focus on interiors and secondary emphasis on cliff dwellings. In her final novel, Sapphira and the Slave Girl (1940), Cather's setting shifted from the open landscape of the West to the Virginia of her childhood. In this book, windows focus much of the text away from important outdoor scenes into rooms.



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!

Cather, O Pioneers! 230

O Pioneers! is a novel about the struggles of an immigrant woman, Alexandra Bergson, not just to "endure," but to "prevail" over the land which her dying father had charged her with managing. As William Barillas says, O Pioneers! is about "the fictional lives of characters whose fundamental task [is] to become physically and emotionally attached to the landscape" (20). In keeping with this idea and the minimalism stressed in "The Novel D meubl ," whose title might be translated, "The Unfurnished Novel," the home of main character Alexandra Bergson is perhaps underfurnished--she provides pretty objects only for the comfort of her guests, and her rooms are "curiously unfinished and uneven in comfort. One room is papered, carpeted, over-furnished; the next is almost bare. The pleasantest rooms in the house are the kitchen . . . and the sitting-room" (63). Although many important meals and other scenes take place in this home, the details of the house are de-emphasized, for Alexandra's greatest success has not come from domestic enterprises, but from her management of land and animals.

A visitor to Alexandra's home would "feel that, properly, Alexandra's house is the big-out-of-doors" (63), for her story is mostly one of outdoor activities. O Pioneers! is the novel in which some of Cather's most magnificent descriptions of the Midwest appear:

From the Norwegian graveyard one looks out over a vast checker-board, marked off in squares of wheat and corn; light and dark, dark and light. Telephone wires hum along the white roads, which always run at right angles. From the graveyard gate one can count a dozen gayly painted farmhouses; the gilded weather vanes on the big red barns wink at each other across the green and brown and yellow

fields. The light steel windmills tremble throughout their frames and tug at their moorings, as they vibrate in the wind that often blows from one week's end to another across that high, active, resolute stretch of country. (57)

Alexandra's allegiance to the out-of-doors signifies her strength and independence and also her freedom from societal constraints, since the role of landowner and manager is, as her brothers tell her, not usual for a woman. Through her efforts to tame the Plains through agriculture and other technology, Alexandra might be termed a "landmaker" rather than a "homemaker."

Among the important recurring dualities within Cather's presentation of the prairie is a contrast between the land as very old, "emerged from the waters of geologic ages" (50), and as "frank and joyous and young" (58), which can be linked to the contrasting elements of youthful vitality and the wisdom and "strength and resoluteness" (58) that also define Alexandra Bergson. Home to Alexandra is the agricultural landscape of checkered fields and painted farmhouses of a now fertile prairie (57). Unlike Thea Kronberg of The Song of the Lark, Alexandra prefers the soil to indoor spaces. Thea, like Cather herself, loves to watch the stars from her window, but Alexandra always views them from outside, liking "to think of their vastness and distance, and of their ordered march" (53-54). Ironically, two of Alexandra's brothers, Oscar and Lou, do not realize that the land rather than the house is her proper sphere and attempt to deprecate her inattention to traditionally female roles. The brothers insist that no good comes from a woman's doing business, although Alexandra is the successful one, having advised the family at crucial times to undertake a new crop or to try a

different feed for the animals. They propose that their sister has no right to own even her share of the land because as a manager, she has not worked it as they have. Alexandra's abilities are different from her brothers', but because Oscar and Lou resent taking orders from their sister, the land becomes the medium for a dispute over the proper roles for women.

Various objects in O Pioneers! connect domesticity and range in the same way that windows do, but these become less apparent as the novel progresses and as Alexandra becomes more like her father than her mother, an agriculturist rather than a housewife. During Alexandra's childhood, dwellings are made of sod, in contrast to the better built, more expensive homes of her adulthood. These early dugouts blend in so exactly with the prairie that they do not seem to be anything but a continuation of it. The interior is part of the outdoors. Literary critic Judith Fryer describes the dugouts as caves because of such qualities: "The houses on the Divide were small and were usually tucked away in low places; you did not see them until you came directly upon them" (O Pioneers! 15).

The most powerful reconciliation of the "feminine" indoors and the "masculine" outdoors occurs in the final chapter, when Alexandra's childhood sweetheart, Carl Linstrum, returns so that they can be married. The entire scene--a subdued love scene--takes place outside, as the two spend "the afternoon in the open fields" (224) walking and discussing their plans where the "brown waves of the earth [roll] away to meet the sky" (229). Their land is not an Eden gone awry (Rosowski, The Voyage Perilous 56)



as it is for Alexandra's brother Emil, who is killed by his lover's jealous husband. Alexandra and Carl belong to the real, imperfect earth.

Alexandra, too, had romantic visions of the land as a girl, but these have faded with maturity. As a child, she had a recurring "fancy,"

an illusion of being lifted up bodily and carried lightly by someone very strong. . . . [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. (153)

Alexandra is not carried away and Carl does not even propose, but they go indoors together. At the end, unlike the fated Marie and Emil, they enter a realisti, rather than romanticized relationship based on equality. As they go into the house together, Carl realizes that Alexandra "belong[s] to the land . . . more than ever" (229), not to the house.



Center implies circumference, a place in space. To find the center of one's boundless desire, to give it form, is to begin in a space that is felicitous, one that frees the imagination.

Judith Fryer, Felicitous Space 293

The Song of the Lark is the first of Cather's novels to develop what might be called a "room of one's own" motif. The phrase "a room of one's own" is drawn, of course, from the title of Virginia Woolf's famous treatise on women, independence and literature, first published in 1929. Although I have found no

specific evidence that either writer ever drew on the work of the other, their ideas are certainly congruent. Two of their novels, Cather's The Professor's House and Woolf's To the Lighthouse, even exhibit very similar structures. A description of a restaurant in this book demonstrates Cather's association of an ideal, "felicitous" space with a sense of secure retreat:

to dine gaily human beings must have the reassurance of certain limitations of space and of a certain definite style; that the walls must be near enough to suggest shelter, the ceiling high enough to give the chandeliers a setting. (315)

If we replace "to dine gaily" with "to live gaily," the statement becomes a clue to the novel as a whole, as well as to her other works. Private retreats, especially the attics that were so important to Cather herself, are the key to Thea Kronberg's growth as an artist.

At the opening of The Song of the Lark, the main character, Thea Kronberg, is ill and is temporarily sleeping in a downstairs parlor at home in Moonstone, Colorado. At this point, not having been assigned the attic bedroom her mother will later designate for her, she has no room of her own. Because she does not inhabit the place that will allow her mind and ambitions to grow, she is not yet fully herself. Indeed, her family hardly knows she is there; she is so quiet that they do not initially recognize that she has pneumonia. After Thea's recovery, her mother, like Cather's own, gives her daughter an attic space all her own, a place where she may read, daydream, and sleep. Its double windows and sloping ceiling (49) appear again and again as Cather's ideal. Indeed, as O'Brien says in the critical

introduction of the book, "the spatial metaphor for [the] interweaving of self and other is . . . the attic room" (xiii). Through the music lessons she gives and through the control of the attic space given to her by her mother, Thea gains the two possessions Virginia Woolf would consider necessities, financial independence and a room of her own. But it is probably significant that her parents do not assign Thea's use of her time and energies in her room; her time is unstructured so that she can use her room to grow in accordance to her preferences and abilities. Apparently, Thea does not even practice in her attic, nor is she necessarily encouraged to do so. It is important that she experiences many other things as well, reading and gazing at the stars. Here, in her own room, "she [thinks] things out more clearly. Pleasant plans and ideas [occur] to her which had never come before. She [has] certain thoughts which [are] like wise companions, ideas which [are] like older and wiser friends" (51).

Though she is associated at first with indoor domestic spaces, Thea gradually develops an overriding attachment to the outdoors as she matures, just as Alexandra Bergson does. For both, outdoor spaces are associated with personal freedom and power. This increasing attachment to outdoor places, as seen in her later trip to Arizona, is foreshadowed by a few occasions early on in her life. As a child, for example, Thea loves to go to the sand hills with an older friend, Ray Kennedy: "The sand hills were a constant tantalization; she loved them better than anything near Moonstone, and yet she could so seldom get to them"

(40). Thea needs this escape because her art, as we are told, is not taken seriously by her household until it brings in money. Although her income provides the first indication of the economic independence Woolf favored, Thea's attempt to justify her life and art by giving it monetary value must be especially difficult because she is only a child. Thea can get away from financial and other expectations by going out to the hills and making a camp there (78), thus creating a space within a space, her own spot within the larger expanse of nature. At one point, Thea and her mother travel by train out to these hills, foreshadowing the train rides and changes in landscape to come. This is only a day trip, but other journeys will be more extended and signify life changes.

Despite Thea's ever-growing attachment to exterior spaces, her parents think of their daughter in terms of her room. Their first discussion of Thea's future revolves around room imagery as they consider an addition to the house for the music lessons she gives (88-89). Thea's conversations with friends like Ray Kennedy also revolve around the music room and bedroom (93). Later, Ray's death results in an inheritance that allows Thea to study music in Chicago, where a never-ending concern for her is finding the right room. She rents rooms from families who belong to her church rather than staying in larger boarding houses (146-147), signifying to some extent that she has presumably not found her true, free "voice" in this new city, since she continues to belong to households not very different from the one she left. At first, she does not even choose these rooms herself; they are

chosen for her by her kindly friend Dr. Archie and by her new minister, Mr. Larsen. Even though such spaces are also rooms of her own, they seem less hers than her old attic in Moonstone because they are temporary and because she is thrust into new households in which she sometimes feels she does not belong. For example, her first room in Chicago is, like her room at home, on an upper floor, but this new room had always been occupied by gentlemen before (148). This extra detail subtly conveys that through living independently, Thea is claiming what is her own and freeing herself from stereotypes that would link her art to male intellect, conventions that might keep her with her family rather than allowing her to become an artist and to choose where she lives and what she does.

As Thea returns to her home in Colorado after her first year in Chicago, she looks out the train window and realizes, "the absence of natural boundaries [gives] the spirit a wider range. Wire fences might mark the end of a man's pasture, but they could not shut in his thoughts as mountains and forests can" (191). Thea's old town consists of people and places who are to her similar to these entrapping "natural boundaries" which can "shut in . . . thoughts," but Chicago is a "wider range." Once Thea comes to this conclusion, she quickly becomes impatient and restless in Moonstone, making frequent trips to the post office to hear news from Chicago. Moonstone is no longer the appropriate home for her, because it can drown her voice: "The desert was so big and thirsty; if one's foot slipped, it could drink one up like a drop of water" (214). Thea, like Cather,

must choose her domestic and exterior spaces herself, because "for her, the essential plot is to get herself born . . . and then to get herself reborn" via "the spaces [she] finds most meaningful" (Romines 145).

In a foreshadowing of her "rock room" in the ancient cliff dwellings of the Southwest, Thea awakens on the first morning after her homecoming to find that her attic reminds her of a "sunny cave" (195), an image that suggests home and comfort but also an outdoor space. Getting up and frowning at herself in the bedroom mirror, though, Thea realizes that she is not the same person as she was the last time peered in the same glass, before she left for Chicago (208). Further, the house, too "small" and too "intimate" (210), seems to have shrunk or she to have grown like Alice in Wonderland. As her interactions with her family and friends show, Thea is outgrowing this "cave" and her hometown. A "change of concrete space" indicates "a fundamental change in one's nature" (Fryer 310). Like a hermit crab, she does not have to abandon such spaces altogether, but she needs to find more appropriate ones.

Returning to Chicago, Thea finds a new room more suitable than her old ones, and she begins to feel less "walled in" (246). Each successive room in which she lives is more like the caves and cliff dwellings she will encounter during her trip to the Southwest, spacious and also comforting. Pictures begin to suggest to her that she needs the right environment. Looking out from her personal perspectives as if from a window, Thea observes Jules Breton's painting, for which the novel is named, in a

Chicago museum. The depiction of the peasant girl, which actually more closely represents Alexandra Bergson in the fields than Thea Kronberg in the city, seems to Thea to be "just right," and "her picture" (172-173). Perhaps the reason she responds so strongly to the picture is that it shows a girl seemingly in perfect harmony with her environment.

In Chicago Thea is growing toward the larger freedom and the spiritual expansion that her journey will provide. But even Chicago can choke off Thea's spirit after a few years. As her new friend Fred Ottenburg notices, Thea eventually becomes "as grey as the weather" (249) in the city. She loses her hold on the qualities of good cheer and personal security implied by interior spaces and the sunshine and flowers present on her morning of homecoming in Moonstone. Thea seems to realize that a "change of space" will do her good: "I'd go a long way from here! West, I think. Maybe I could get some of my spring back" (250). She withdraws to Arizona and its cliff dwellings and there, in Susan Rosowski's words, "she becomes aware of a larger world, one metaphorically linked with the female sexuality that underlies a woman's creative passion" (Rosowski, "Willa Cather's Female Landscapes" 235). Like Willa Cather, she finds a renewal in the Southwest not available to her in the busy city.

Surprisingly, though, Thea eventually outgrows even the Southwest, finding it a "world without change or ideas" (283-284) and returning to the city. Only in metropolitan areas does she have the opportunity to express in operatic singing the strength she has found among the cliff dwellings.

Among the most important imagery in Cather's novels is that which joins her domestic and exterior landscapes. This connection has the effect of bringing together the dualities of the separate landscapes, as well as the secondary dualities that these symbolize. In the Southwest of The Song of the Lark, the cliff-dwelling is a place of boundaries and transitions that is spiritual as well as physical. Ellen Moers explains that Cather's descriptions of the dwellings contain a feminine, sexual imagery which embodies forms of the land and sexual forms of the female body at the same time. As she puts it, "the associations come tumbling out" (Moers 258):

The cañon walls, for the first two hundred feet below the surface, were perpendicular cliffs, striped with even-running strata of rock. From there on to the bottom the sides were less abrupt, were shelving, and lightly fringed with piñons and dwarf cedars. The effect was that of a gentler cañon within a wilder one. The dead city lay at the point where the perpendicular outer wall ceased and the V-shaped inner gorge began. (The Song of the Lark 257)

Thea takes a "rock room" of her own within this complex of ancient dwellings, a "nest in a high cliff, full of sun" where she "always [feels] fresh delight in its comfort and inaccessibility" (258). She has again found an attic room of sorts. This one, though, is on the grandest scale--it was first hollowed out by winds, and then modified by Indian people. In this place she is both indoors and out, sheltered in her cave and yet part of the landscape. There is no glazed window to seal her inside, but instead the window-like opening to the cave allows her to be in her "room" and outdoors at once, completely connected by air and being to both her "room" and to nature.



Thea's rock room is very much like her attic room in Moonstone. Its "comfort and inaccessibility" fit her demands for all her rooms--those that do not match these criteria do not meet her liking. Thea is able to lose track of time, though she absorbs the sun instead of watching the stars as she could in Moonstone. The rock room is important to her emergence as an artist; she finds it just before she begins to achieve great things with her voice. She learns her most important music lessons in the Southwest, those that are self-taught and natural. She is inspired by the water jars of the Indians, and begins to use her throat as a such a vessel, an instrument that can "imprison for a moment the shining, elusive moment which is life itself" (263).

In this place, which resembles Thea's attic room in Moonstone and which can be described with a feminine imagery, Thea begins to feel her connection to other women. The connection is not just to the past in general, but to other people who she senses must have been much like herself. Tom Outland, a character who appears in The Professor's House, also looks at the vessels created presumably by women, but to him they are not womb-shaped as they are to Thea, nor does he find himself "trying to walk as [the women] must have walked" or feeling "the weight of an Indian baby" (261). Thea has a special empathy for the women of the lost Indian tribe, apparently because of her sex.

Significantly, Thea often has company on her visits to the cliff dwellings. Her friend Fred Ottenburg travels and explores with her, and Thea shares her rock room with him as they watch

the sunrise one morning and again later when they escape from a terribly violent rainstorm. In the first instance, Thea sits and watches the world awaken while Fred cooks for her; the cave becomes "his kitchen" (271) in a switching of traditional roles. Although Fred is in love with Thea, he realizes that she is "not a nest-building bird" (274). As revealed in the later rainstorm, in which Fred is now the "grey," loveless one, Thea's greatest commitment is to her music, not to Fred.

Although Thea is accompanied by Fred Ottenburg on her journey to the Southwest, this is a place for Thea's personal growth, not for the development of her relationship with Ottenburg. She shows a need for separation from others: "The great pines stand at a considerable distance from each other. Each tree grows alone, murmurs alone, thinks alone. They do not intrude upon each other" (255). The outdoors thus becomes a metaphor for the artist's autonomy; empty spaces are isolating. She also feels failure because of her exhaustion, but facing the forest upon her arrival in the Southwest, she is "tired enough not to care" (256). Thea finally manages to create, or find, her own voice in the outdoors, but because this process does not involve other people, it has little to do with words:

They were scarcely clear enough to be called ideas. They had something to do with fragrance and colour and sound, but almost nothing to do with words. She was singing very little now, but a song would go through her head all morning, as a spring keeps welling up . . . (259)

That wellspring is the vitality provided by her sense of the land and its freedom, and she takes its strength back with her to the

urban world of her profession.

It is important to recognize that no one of the range of settings in The Song of the Lark can be seen in isolation. Here, as in The Professor's House, each must be seen as if on a continuum matching the characters' personal development--from when we first meet them to their greatness or, conversely, to a period of troubles. In The Song of the Lark, the backdrop of scenery changes to match Thea's life. As she becomes increasingly independent, the landscape also changes from sheltering and even confining to releasing. But all of these spaces resemble her first room. For as she tells Dr. Archie, she left Moonstone for Chicago equipped with everything she needed for her art. Among these things is her room, to which she compares all other spaces.

The Song of the Lark might be termed a "portrait of the artist" who is attempting to find an appropriate means for artistic expression and who uses landscapes as a tool for discovery. In this way, Thea represents Cather's own attempts to find a literary "voice," as symbolized by Thea's vocal training. Yet the girl, as the reader knows, does not originally have a voice: "Thea, who had a rather sensitive ear, until she went to school never spoke at all, except in monosyllables, and her mother was convinced that she was tongue-tied" (14). Her first music teacher, Wunsch, helps her find expression through music, but her voice does not literally become her own until she begins to sing, and is not entirely her own until she rests in the cliff dwellings. Setting is a crucial factor in the development of

each artist. For Cather and her Thea Kronberg, the Southwest is a "spiritual center, a place that can be both sensed and touched, one that concentrates being within limits that protect" (Fryer 293) and within expanses that liberate. Cather withdrew to Mesa Verde when she was deciding to change her career from journalism to literary writing. Thea follows the same pattern when she needs the strength to push her art to a new level, to become an opera singer rather than a pianist.



We all live in some form of house; and doubtless for some of us, on some unconscious level, caves and attics may be wombs and houses mothers. . . . but houses, and the rooms within them, are also universal facts and a universal reality. . . . We juggle, so to speak, with the obvious when we invoke such universal symbols.

Leon Edel, "A Cave of One's Own" 209-210

The interior spaces in Cather's novels are not always the shielded sanctuaries, symbolic "wombs" and "mothers," that she so loved; they can be places that choke off the self rather than foster its blossoming. In such instances, Cather seems to provide a reminder to herself that while she sits removed from others while working, this removal should not be a permanent or a complete one. To cut oneself off from the outdoors, family, and the childhood self only results in the sort of unhappiness that Professor Godfrey St. Peter comes to in The Professor's House.

Professor St. Peter, the protagonist who is despite his male sex often taken as an autobiographical representation of Cather, has a room of his own--or almost his own; one that is similar to

Cather's and Thea Kronberg's attic spaces. The Professor's attic study, like theirs, has a "low ceiling [that] sloped down on three sides, the slant being interrupted on the east by a single square window" (7). Once again, "Cather combines the small room and the expansive space by creating a room with a view" (Briggs 160). Like Cather's preferred retreats, St. Peter's study is a place for thinking, the setting in which the Professor can do most of his work, as Cather did hers. Initially, then, his attic space seems to be a positive presence. But it will also prove isolating, almost fatally so.

As the novel opens, the St. Peters are moving to a newly built home. Most of the family belongings have been moved out, but there is "one room still furnished--that is, if it had ever been furnished" (7), the study. Yet St. Peter, who had not really wanted the new house, does not intend to give up his special space in the old home; he will continue to work there.

Humorously, the absent-minded professor has always had a more impressive "show study" which contains his library and is probably shown to visitors. But this "show study" is "a sham" (8). The old attic is "the place where he work[s]" (8). Importantly, though, the Professor's attic study is not entirely his own, but is shared with the family seamstress, Augusta, for three weeks in the fall and again in the spring. The two generally work different hours, their schedules balancing each other. Augusta's presence in the attic is always evidenced by her sewing dummies. These dummies, despite obvious feminine physical characteristics, lack complete human form, but do manage

to provide an important function in the novel. Although St. Peter often reduces his wife and daughters to mere sex or gender without personality, that is, to the level of headless physiqués, these lifeless dummies ironically take on a larger meaning to him. Within the interior landscape, these figures connect the duality of masculinity and femininity. They indicate a female presence in his masculine space and serve to remove some of the emotional distance between St. Peter and Augusta.

In the privacy of his study, St. Peter may embrace a form of femininity, although it is only the reduced form that he normally attributes to women. The Professor regards the female dummies, who remind him of his wife and children, as his own as well as Augusta's, and even though the family is moving as the novel opens, he does not want these old mannequins to be carted away. He seems to worry that his old study, in addition to the library and the study in the new house, will also become a space that is meaningless for him if he can not have all the objects, and thus memories, that belong to this room. In the new house, St. Peter is supposed to have a "beautiful study downstairs" while Augusta will have a "light, airy room on the third floor" (11); neither room, though, could be to his liking, for he wants a room both upstairs and cluttered with objects of familiarity, a study that can provide "insulation from the engaging drama of domestic life" (16). Apparently reacting to his wife's and daughters' intensities, he wants detachment and a feminine presence at the same time. Augusta and her dress forms provide that emotionally safe distance. When Augusta moves to retrieve her dress patterns

from a storage space in the couch, she finds that her patterns and the Professor's manuscripts, originally in separate piles on opposite ends of the couch, have been muddled together (13), an androgynous image that hints at reconciliation. In this room where real work, the writing of books and the making of dresses, gets done, the customary separation of male and female roles ceases to exist.

The Professor's work space with its dummies reminds the reader that "Cather reflexively sees, thinks, and writes in oppositions. Those oppositions run dependably underneath her simplest plot lines" (Skaggs, "A Glance into The Professor's House 424). He stubbornly clings to the past not just because it has been the "scene of so many defeats and triumphs" (20), but also because of a more important patterning of his experience--he has "two lives" (19). The novel tells us that one life is teaching and one writing, but his life also might be divided in yet another way--between work and family. Yet St. Peter does not define himself by his family roles, but only by his work.

As St. Peter returns to his new home after a day of working in the old study, his wife tells him that it is "more dignified, at your age, to have a room of your own" (24), that is, a separate bedroom. The Professor, however, already feels he has his own space--the upstairs room in the old house. Indeed, St. Peter's commitment to keeping that space is apparent as he makes arrangements to pay full rent for the old house, insisting that before he moves he must finish a book, which turns out to be the editing and annotating of the diary of Tom Outland, a former

student. The Professor's family still want him to move to a more professional study. If he will not take the room in his own new house, his daughter Rosamond will build her father a study at the back of her new home.

Like Thea of The Song of the Lark, Professor St. Peter separates himself from his family in his space upstairs. Just as Thea does not connect to her family very well when she returns from Chicago, St. Peter can not relate to his family after the death of his beloved student, Tom Outland. Both do not seem able to return to the people they have loved, although they can return to these rooms. Although in some ways freed by personal development, both undergo a personal crisis and return to their isolated spaces.

Despite similarities between The Song of the Lark and The Professor's House, the overall effect of separation from others by retreating to one's private spaces is very different between the two books. Thea seems to be only a child normally growing away from her family; St. Peter is an adult avoiding responsibilities and commitments to his family downstairs. Thea finds a larger room, while St. Peter, though thinking of his town Hamilton as "small and tight and airless" (131), does not attempt to replace the room he is outgrowing, because he always feels, "the desk was a shelter one could hide behind, it was a hole one could creep into" (141). Thea has begun her life work in her room; St. Peter completes his life work in his. As his son-in-law Louis says, St. Peter's sons are born there, his "Spanish-adventurer sons" (144)--that is, the explorers about whom the



Professor writes. But in refusing to leave, St. Peter chooses, in effect, suffocation, literal as well as figurative. At the end of the book he almost dies because of having failed to keep the window open. Even more emphatically than before, Cather stresses the importance of the liminal opening to the outdoors.

In "The Novel D meubl ," Cather disparages the methods of the literary realists, who provide explicit detail, whether necessary or unnecessary to plot and characterization. She prefers "the unfurnished novel," but even so, she intentionally violates that standard in The Professor's House. As she said in a letter, "I tried to make Professor St. Peter's house rather overcrowded and stuffy with new things . . . until one got rather stifled. Then I wanted to open the square window and let in the fresh air that blew off the Blue Mesa . . ." (31-32). It is at this mesa that St. Peter's student, Tom Outland, discovers a great city of cliff dwellings and thereby experiences spiritual renewal. Significantly, it is a setting similar to one in The Song of the Lark, combining vast, free spaces with secure cave-rooms, which all have window-like openings onto the outer landscape.

Despite the importance of the Professor's "cave-study" (Grumbach 340), the open landscape also plays a prominent role in Godfrey St. Peter's life. He decides to accept the professorship he does because of its location near Lake Michigan, where he had grown up--"when he remembered his childhood, he remembered blue water" (20). For "when he was eight years old, his parents sold the lakeside farm and dragged him and his brothers and sisters

out to the wheat lands of central Kansas" (21), just as Cather's parents relocated to Nebraska. "St. Peter nearly died of it" (21). So although the Professor is most defined by his study, he does have an attachment to nature as well, even going swimming when he is exhausted from working.

The Professor is also connected to nature via his student Tom Outland, whose name itself speaks of open places. Indeed, the Professor's daughter Rosamond and husband Louie Marsellus decide to capitalize on this name in honoring Tom, who had been killed in the war, calling their new home on the lake "Outland" (29). Still "Outland" does not always connote freedom to St. Peter--he does not see this title as honorific, but regards it jealously, as if only he has "rights" to Tom and his ideas. His connection to nature, therefore, is ironic--he is as possessive of "his" outdoor spaces as he is of his special rooms.

Even when the setting itself cannot include open places, because of her attempt to "overfurnish" The Professor's House, Cather sometimes uses the language of the open landscape in metaphor or in a short reference to the past. The small square window in St. Peter's study provides the most frequent imaginative release for his mind, an escape from the dark realities pressing in on him. The window, though, also serves as a contrast to his former connection to open spaces, when he could sit on a ship off the coast of Spain and look at the mountains, letting the "design of his book [unfold] in the air above him" (89). His "window" of expansiveness has shrunk.

For the most part, the Professor's communion with nature is

indirectly experienced. It is Tom Outland who visits the Southwest, and the Professor comes to know it only through his student. Tom's story as well as his artifacts--turquoises and vases--directly connect the Professor and Tom, but only circuitously connect the Professor and nature. Nature is not the "sweetness and light" it is for Tom; it can also signify isolation to St. Peter. When he thinks, "the heart of another is a dark forest" (78), he indicates some of his feelings about nature as well as the idea that he and his wife, despite many years of marriage, can not truly know one another. This statement is similar to the one in The Song of the Lark, in which Thea considers how "each tree grows alone, murmurs alone, thinks alone" (255), indicating that St. Peter is not, ironically, alone in his personal isolation. All of Cather's artists, academics, and agriculturists struggle with alienation from others.

For Tom Outland, just reaching the top of the Blue Mesa, where he is herding cattle nearby, is an achievement, for the mesa is accessible only by a challenging canyon which is blocked by a river. His achievement also lies in his affinity to the ancient people. To Tom, the city and its artifacts are an representation of a people, not primarily of specific individuals who lived there, like the women Thea imagines. Tom feels "that only a strong and aspiring people would have built [the city], and a people with a feeling for design" (182). Though Tom finds a mummy he calls "Mother Eve," his relation to the Indians is not a gendered one like Thea's. While she feels especially connected to women, imagining their babies and their usage of water

vessels, Tom does not perceive his canyon in terms of feminine symbols.

Just as he tries to find renewal in Tom's experience of vast space, so the Professor tries to connect the dualities of openness and privacy by constructing a walled garden. The Professor's garden is like Thea's cave and like his own attic window in that it connects dualities of landscape and meaning. St. Peter takes pride in his self-made garden: "The Professor had succeeded in making a French garden in Hamilton" (6). But the garden's romantic connotations suggest his removal from reality and society in much the same way as his study does--the garden is another way to isolate himself from the world in a way that his student Tom Outland does not. Tom Outland, too, had his favorite place among the cliff dwellings. Although Tom spends one summer alone on the mesa, he returns to society; his removal is only a temporary one. The Professor chooses to shut himself in rather than to let himself out, isolating himself from the present and his family in his study. Even an intermediate like a garden or a window is not a complete connection to the world outside, to his family, or to a true memory of Tom, whom he seems mostly to worship rather than to honor. The French garden also serves a less immediate purpose, perhaps reminding the Professor of his studies and research in Europe, and allowing him to recall a particular memory of Tom playing with the St. Peter daughters in the garden (107). Consequently, the Professor often spends the summer holing up as Cather did in her tent in Jaffrey, New Hampshire,

at home with his garden, sending his wife and daughters to Colorado . . . . In those months when he was a bachelor again, he brought down his books and papers and worked in a deck chair under the linden-trees; breakfasted and lunched and had his tea in the garden. And it was there he and Tom Outland used to sit and talk half through the warm, soft nights. (7)

Still, despite the Professor's stubborn refusal to move, the transitions among dwellings and the end of the novel suggest that "the narrative progress of the novel depends in part upon movement among places" (Grumbach 331).

Because of the autobiographical quality of The Professor's House, it seems possible that by presenting St. Peter's flaws, Cather is critiquing herself, reminding herself and other artists that to write well, one can not be completely removed from others. While his family is visiting France, St. Peter returns to his garden and attic more completely, moving all his belongings back to the old house before beginning on Tom's diary. Doing so presents difficulties, though--it takes him two months to write what should have taken one week (238-239). For writing implies attachment to society, but Cather too had the problem of detaching herself to her private room, insisting on absolute silence and working away.

Many of the Professor's problems with his roles are related to gender; he feel shut in by his family of women, but freed by Tom. He thinks about Euripides and of caves, and

how, when he was an old man, he went and lived in a cave by the sea, and it was thought queer, at the time. It seems that houses had become insupportable to him. I wonder whether it was because he had observed women so closely all his life. (136)

Though he fails to see it, the Professor's misogyny, not women or society, is most responsible for shutting him in.

In contrast to the Professor, Tom's connecting spaces are more freeing. His cliff dwellings are very like Thea's: there is in one of the caves "a long, low, twilit space that got gradually lower toward the back until the rim rock met the floor of the cavern, exactly like the sloping roof of an attic" (186). Tom, like Thea, says that the thing that "made it delightful to work there" is the setting: "The town hung like a bird's nest in the cliff, looking off into the box canyon below, and beyond into the wide valley we called Cow Canyon, facing an ocean of clear air" (190-191). Both Tom and Thea have found a particular space that conjoins rooms and protective spaces with great open landscapes in a unique way. Later, the Professor visits Tom's Mesa when they are on a research trip together, following the trail of a Spanish explorer. The Professor has seen the importance of connection. So why does he not incorporate it into his own experiences until a moment in which his life is in danger?

At the end of The Professor's House, St. Peter has completed his introduction to Tom's diary, and as the summer ends, he, like Thea, takes to daydreaming. He sits out on the lake or watches the stars--he is now a part of his environment, the vessel soaking up sun, rather than an active part of the landscape, the one who must go swimming if he spends time outdoors. One of the most autobiographical aspects of the Professor's house is that the Professor becomes for a moment "the boy the Professor had

long ago left behind him in Kansas, in the Solomon Valley--the original, unmodified Godfrey St. Peter" (239). He is not a professor, husband, or father any longer; because his family is away in France, he can allow these social roles to fall away for a while, as perhaps Tom did in his last summer on the Blue Mesa. He is now a "primitive," "only interested in earth and woods and water" (241). St. Peter realizes that this self, the Kansas boy, is "the realest of his lives" (240). As he sits outdoors he experiences a second childhood, growth, and renewal. One of the most important social roles that falls away is his gendered one, the one that has actually cut himself off from his family and given him over to responsibilities to work and non-responsibilities for emotional response:

The Professor knew, of course, that adolescence grafted a new creature into the original one, and that the complexion of a man's life was largely determined by how well or ill his original self and his nature as modified by sex rubbed on together. (242)

When he almost dies from gas inhalation from the old stove in his upstairs study because he had allowed the window of ventilation and communication to the outside world to shut, Augusta, the woman with whom he had shared his space, rescues him. Despite demands from his family, his thoughts about her are different than towards other people: "there was still Augusta, however; a world full of Augustas, with whom one was outward bound" (257); and it is Augusta, his opposite, who forces him to become once more part of the living. Augusta is the one at the end of the novel who rushes in and opens the window of the attic, releasing

the gas that had overcome the Professor and symbolically releasing him from the self-imposed bounds of solipsism.



I was in my mother's bedroom, in the third storey of a big old brick house entered by a white portico with fluted columns. Propped on high pillows, I could see the clouds drive across the brilliant, cold blue sky. . . . The slats of the green window shutters rattled. . . . Today Nancy was coming home from Montreal. . . . She had been gone now for twenty-five years.

Willa Cather, Sapphira and the Slave Girl 279, 281

In her last novel, Sapphira and the Slave Girl, Cather turns to themes she does not normally take up. The duality of house and outdoors is significant, although much more subdued. For the most part, landscape is as an active element only in the Epilogue. The setting is not the yet untamed Great Plains or the rugged Southwest, but the farms of the Virginia in which Cather spent her early childhood. Cather had no special room of her own in Virginia, though, and this difference shows up in the themes of the novel. The book lacks the literary skill of her previous works, perhaps simply because it is missing the well-constructed landscapes that made Cather's writing art.

Sapphira and the Slave Girl presents the problems of a young slave girl, Nancy Till, whose owner Sapphira, jealous that her husband is friends with her, plots to have her raped. Nancy's enslavement involves not only Sapphira's domination of her, but her spatial restriction to the indoor world of the house servant. She gains liberation only by moving away from Sapphira's house to safety in Canada. Other characters can not even achieve this bit



of release from their problems. Sapphira's husband, Henry Colbert, whose room has the same connotations of isolation as the study in The Professor's House, has actually moved out of the house and lives some distance away in a chamber of the mill he operates. Because it is alluded to rather than directly depicted in the book, even Nancy's northward journey does not offer relief from the constraining indoor scene. When Nancy returns at the end of the novel, the power and affirmation of her presence is again placed within rooms, especially the kitchen. Here however, a window provides a layered perspective and hints at the mediation of indoor and outdoor that Cather had achieved so powerfully in earlier works.



Anxieties about space sometimes seem to dominate the literature of both nineteenth-century women and their twentieth-century descendents. . . . Works of women . . . show . . . concern with spatial constrictions. . . . It reflects [the] growing suspicion that what the nineteenth century called "woman's place" is itself irrational and strange.

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Madwoman in the Attic,  
83-84

The significance of Cather's dualities of constructed spaces and outdoor expanses is clarified and focused by a frequent use of window images. In all four of these novels, Cather poses an opposition of indoor spaces and outdoor expanses, with all they represent, and moves towards a reconciliation of that duality, primarily by means of the liminal image of windows.

In its figurative meaning, the window serves as a particularly appropriate image for women writers. Although the

home was often indicative of marital, economic, and social confinement for nineteenth century women, it could nevertheless serve as a place of security and a place of culture, as the only sphere one could inhabit with a sense of success and self-worth. As evidenced by their winning the vote, women were making gains in achieving equal rights by the 1920s, but they were still often constrained within the domestic landscape. Indoor rooms and closed windows, then, tended to have negative connotations in the works of some authors. They did not always have such meanings for Willa Cather, even though she too clearly felt constrained by conventional gender roles. Given a sense of women's collective and personal relationships to the home, it seems logical that a modern writer like Cather would have created a metaphor that embodies the contrast between the "inside" and the "outside," public and private, which serve as the frames and scenery of Cather's interiors. For Cather, the window served as a symbol of mediation between the nurturing, but possibly confining, enclosure of a room and the sense of open possibility for personal expansion.

Although windows often represent for Cather an inspiration and a positive connection between the outside world and the personal, Cather's use of window imagery is not always consistent. Not surprisingly, rooms and windows can be vulnerable to invasion. According to a story Cather once told to her friend Edith Lewis, a "half-witted boy" who lived on the Virginia farm of Willa's early days came into the room where she was playing and threatened her with a knife. As the tale goes,

"[s]he began talking playfully to the lad, and coaxing him to the window, showed him a tall tree that grew outside, its branches almost touching the house" (O'Brien 89). Finally, the young Cather managed to cajole the other child to climb out the window onto the tree outside. Thus, Cather empowered herself with her ability with words and protected her own space, having learned early on the escape that the window could afford her. She was also equipped with an understanding that the connotations of interiors will be affected by the particular situation.

Cather's attachment to window imagery is related to her early experiences in another, less obvious way. During adolescence and throughout her undergraduate years, Cather dressed like a boy in an attempt to cross the social boundaries associated with traditional gender roles (Gilbert and Gubar, No Man's Land, Sexchanges 172). While she was attempting to "break the rules" in her college days, however, she still only saw writing and life in terms of a sharply contrasted male/female duality. She disparaged the writings of other women authors and rejected customary housework as menial, preferring the mentorship of great men like Henry James (O'Brien 122, 133) to anything sentimental or stereotypically feminine. Cather began to defy societal norms in another way, not just by being a woman writer, but by writing about men and women from a perspective that was both feminine and masculine, a viewpoint that knew both. Transcending and revisiting boundaries between the masculine and feminine is thus a duality that was of personal significance to Cather, and as such, appears in many of her works. Later in her

life, Cather viewed female traditions of storytelling and housekeeping as more important, coming to value works of writers like Sarah Orne Jewett and revering the strength of the immigrant women in Nebraska. As critic Anne Romines notes, Cather felt a renewed connection to the neighboring women whom she had visited in her childhood, enjoying their stories and camaraderie. The memories and emotions provoked by home and the mother-daughter relationship are an integral part of a homecoming theme in Cather's work, one that expresses her attachment to her childhood home in Red Cloud, Nebraska, in addition to her ambivalence about her love of the family set against her desire for independence and a successful writing career (O'Brien 47).

The window, then, is an important motif connected to personal and general issues of gender as much as to the writer's development and identity. Indeed, because of issues surrounding domesticity in the novels considered here, gender conflicts and differences are among the meanings most attributable to windows in her novels: the window symbol easily encompasses the social and family roles that limit women to small spaces from which they may live their lives. Cather, though, always seems to provide a way out. Her windows are not at the pinnacles of isolated and isolating structures such as towers; they are penetrable and can be opened, so that the literal entrapment is always coupled with a possibility of escape from confining spaces and values. Hope of bridging the "gender gap" through understanding and being understood is possible for the characters behind the window, and this desire, though perhaps unconscious, may be complemented or

opposed by the views of others.

"The Novel Démeublé" and Cather's letter commenting on The Professor's House particularly support the biographical evidence about the relevance of particular domestic and realistic imagery and expresses her urge to escape the confinement of traditional realism and find her own fictional forms. "How wonderful it would be," she writes, "if we could throw all the furniture out of the window," because we only need "[o]ne passion, and four walls" ("The Novel Démeublé" 42-43) to write a novel. She conceived of The Professor's House, often regarded as a crucially important work in her career, in terms of a window:

Just before I began the book I had seen, in Paris, an exhibition of old and modern Dutch paintings . . . in most of the interiors, whether drawing-room or kitchen, there was a square window, open, through which one saw the masts of ships, or a stretch of grey sea. The feeling of the sea that one got through those square windows was remarkable, and gave me a sense of the fleets of Dutch ships that ply quietly on all the waters of the globe. ("On The Professor's House 31)

Cather did not entomb her characters or her own artistic vision in some sort of enclosed space with four walls, a ceiling, and a floor. Again, at all times, the window provides an opening to the outside, while it serves as a reminder that the way to the outside world and to connection between the opposing sides of gender or other differences is not a completely open one; it is at best partial. The window provides an "opening" for contemplation of expanses wider than those bounded by the "room" of the isolated self. But a window is, after all, only an opening set into a wall.

Cather keeps the walls with their windows as the important "furnishings" and uses them again and again as representative of a place of internal development connected to the opposing outside world that grants the person "inside" a grounding in reality, preventing a complete removal from reality and others. At times, the enclosure may be absolute, or at times an opening for rebirth.

In The Professor's House specifically, we can see that in keeping with the window motif that appears as a literal image throughout the book, the sections and chapters are a series of nested viewpoints, like "windows inside of windows" (Stout 207). The book begins with "The Family," but despite the omniscient narrator, the focus is on the life of the main character, Professor Godfrey St. Peter, as if the family members were the mere frame for the seemingly more important Professor. As the novel progresses, Cather relates that St. Peter has had a close relationship with a brilliant student, Tom Outland. As the Professor contemplates the editing of Tom's diary, the voice of the narrator changes to focus on Tom's life, and the second section begins: "Tom Outland's Story." The book concludes with a return to St. Peter's life and his personal growth in a portion entitled "The Professor."

Not only are the perspectives offered by the novel's structure window-like, but so are the perspectives of the characters and the author. As a student of Professor St. Peter, Tom Outland is a reflection of his mentor, both different and the same. When St. Peter examines the world through Tom's eyes--by

editing his diaries--St. Peter becomes the reflection of Tom, also having been educated in a sense through the relationship. Furthermore, Professor St. Peter mirrors Willa Cather in her despondency, who had to persevere while adapting to great changes in her later life (Skaggs After the World Broke in Two 9-10). The personal attic room that St. Peter inhabits is the "one place in the house where he could get isolation" (PH 16), with only a "single square window" (PH 7) interrupting the continuity of his solitude. This space is decidedly similar to Cather's Red Cloud attic, although the window is, significantly, a smaller one, opened mostly for keeping the old gas stove from using up the oxygen in the room.

For Professor St. Peter, as for Cather, the window reminds him of childhood vistas from which he had been uprooted. Both the Professor and Cather must turn to memories of windows like this one and those of childhood for comfort. The window, then, can represent a vulnerability, connecting the emotive and the subjective together. Unlike Cather's female characters, though, St. Peter ignores the importance of the attic window until he is compelled to consider it in a life-threatening moment. St. Peter, like Cather, is compelled to return to the spaces and objects that seem to symbolize the conflicts he faces. Although he almost suffocates when he carelessly allows a storm to blow the window shut (252), he ultimately can not let himself be smothered. To kill himself would also imply striking down the memories of Tom, who had died in a plane crash. The Professor must embrace his memories of Tom and write about them. To do

this, he must look through Tom's window on the world, thus embracing "the Other." He can not look at Tom's perspective through his own, as he had when he often glances through the window of his home to the candle burning in the window of Tom's physic laboratory not far away (74).

For women, the window can be a reminder that the public world can be unreachable for them, but St. Peter's childhood friends and Tom Outland inhabit this outside space, a masculine realm Cather perhaps thought at times excluded even herself. Thus, Cather's double-bind in identifying with other women and women writers appears here. When working under the example of Henry James, Cather realized that the "best," or most recognized literary artists were men, and in many of her works, she attempted to refute a female consciousness. She never wanted to be called a woman writer. Thus she had often placed herself in the role of man in reality as well as in fiction and encountered the constraints on both, but this effort seems more an attempt to succeed despite her femininity. Still, St. Peter, unable to appreciate his family or any individual other than Tom Outland, sometimes seems as limited as are women by social conventions. In the end, Cather and St. Peter realize that the individual can not be isolated from others, male or female, and be human. Augusta, representing the female/feminine side of the Professor and perhaps of Cather herself, opens the window and saves St. Peter from death and his own narrow perspectives.

The contrast between Tom's and the Professor's views of women shows up in the attic space and its window, but first



appears in windowed images in the open landscape. Tom Outland's informal education in the Southwest is as important as his university learning, because it is there that he first becomes aware of other outlooks. He, like Cather, feels a connection to the past and other people. In contrast to St. Peter, who feels no union with his all-female immediate family, Tom plays games with the St. Peter daughters. But St. Peter does not even envision the liminal threshold between masculine and feminine traditions that Tom perceives, and Cather implies that such a lack of understanding is one factor that has placed constraints on the marriages of her characters (Romines 139). Ironically, Tom Outland, as a member of the younger generation, dies and leaves a member of the older generation to tell his story, further complicating the windowed perspectives of the novel.

The caves that are so important in both The Professor's House and The Song of the Lark, are linked by Leon Edel to houses and rooms in his essay "A Cave of One's Own." Edel is punning here on the title of Virginia Woolf's book. In many of Woolf's works, too, the window demonstrates gender and personal conflict. The cave is like the attic room, a personal space to dream and think, a place where one can regard nature from a window-like opening. These spaces that the young Thea Kronberg prefers, which resemble Cather's favorite places (Briggs 163), are connected to one another primarily by their windows. As Thea awakens after her homecoming and begins to think of her attic as a cave, light streams in from the window and is magnified by a mirror and a flower vase, multiplying the glass imagery

associated with her fragmentation away from her family and hometown (193). Like her rooms, her cave is not an absolute construction of "four walls and a passion," but contains an opening through which a rebirth can and does occur. It allows for the emergence of a renewed spirit that begins to characterize her singing, to make her into the "wild bird" flown into the music studio (164).

Thea characteristically leaves her window "open a little way" (50), expressing the affinity with space, sunlight, and stars that represents both freedom and her ambitions as a musician:

she used to drag her mattress beside her low window and lie awake for a long while, vibrating with excitement, as a machine vibrates with speed. Life rushed in upon her through that window--or so it seemed. In reality of course, life rushes from within, not from without. (123)

The ambiguity of this last sentence especially echoes the theme of duality and the idea that the window is liminal, a literal and metaphorical threshold. The reader wonders whether the significance of Thea's window is in its belonging to the inner space of the self or that of the room. Either way, the self and the window offer a perspective of looking out from the inside. Perhaps Cather suggests that part of the self is a type of window, a mediator between private thought and values and public interaction with others.

Sadly, once Thea becomes a great opera singer, she seems to forget the importance of attics or cavelike spaces to her artistic development. She loses her affinity with spaces and the

sky at her apartment hotel when her personal domain becomes a superficial and a likely windowless one, the bathroom. "Her bathroom, almost as large as her sleeping-room, she [regards] as a refuge" (359); her upstairs attic-like space with its sloped ceiling and large window is no longer her special place. The multistory building is a parody of the Southwestern landscape, like "a perpendicular cliff of "many windows" (347). These are not the "safe" windows of childhood homes, nor are they the caves of self-discovery. Instead, they represent a corrupting urbanization of Thea's spirit, one which is struggling for success and has given up the search for self-identity. For although she has a greater exposure to other people, Thea becomes more secluded, alone and away from her family and old friends. Only spaces like her attic room and the cliff dwellings can apparently inspire her to greatness and open her to new possibilities.

In the Epilogue to Sapphira and the Slave Girl, the voice seems to be that of Cather as a girl (Skaggs After the World Broke in Two 166). Bedrooms are a place of reunion between the past and the present, between mother and daughter, reminding the reader repeatedly of the attic space given to the young Willa Cather by her mother. In Sapphira, the mother puts her ill daughter in her own room at the time of another reunion. Nancy, the slave girl of the book's title, had once run away from her mistress, entrapped by slavery as well as femininity. In the end, Nancy returns. When she arrives, the unification is a dual one, between Nancy and her mother Ruth and between the narrator

and her mother. As Nancy arrives, the narrator says that her own mother "carried me to the curved lounge by the window and put me down on the high head-rest, where I could look out" (281). Thus, two mother-daughter pairs are joined, the four linked together by the window.

Another important window image in Sapphira reverses the exclusion of women from public participation. Mrs. Blake, the abolitionist child of Sapphira, has two daughters who have contracted diphtheria and have consequently been instructed to drink and eat nothing because of the ill-advised medical theories of a male doctor who would reject home remedies. But in a moment that Cather describes as Communion-like, the minister and family friend Fairhead sees the young child Mary through a window; she is drinking a bowl of soup. Fairhead, out to retrieve firewood, realizes "he ought to go in and take the soup from her. But he was unable to move or to make a sound" (259). Now Fairhead, a male, is separated from female traditions of intuition, religion, and emotion, as represented by the girl's innate knowledge that a drink would break her fever. The girl internalizes her wisdom, representing a unification that is as important as Communion is to the Church, making her inaccessible to those who are not part of her action. Cather seems to enjoy the implications of this reversal of the control over knowledge that appears in the window imagery of The Professor's House, but she indicates at the same time that each group, male and female, has something to gain in the attempt to understand the other.



In the works of Willa Cather, window imagery indicates the duality between the contradictory elements associated with home. The final emphasis is not on a resolution of conflict, where one side of the "pane" must be chosen over another, but is an emphasis on enlarging the developing character's perspective by incorporating both positive and negative into a world view. The character--Alexandra Bergson, Thea Kronberg, the Professor, or Cather herself as the child narrator of Sapphira--has multiple perspectives from which to see life. The individual can see the connection of his or her own values and history to those of other people, recognizing that similarities exist between the personal and the larger world, and neither viewpoint can or should stand alone; each side must be revisited.

Despite the particular characteristics of each of Cather's novels, one aspect of window imagery is constant: the window enables characters to enlarge their perspective and to achieve a commonality with other people or groups. The character may effectively remove herself or himself from the public sphere for a moment of inner contemplation or reflection on the "small things," or, by contrast, may transcend the self and the everyday for an objective view of the outside world. Either way, the protagonist succeeds in claiming something of consequence: the latitude to think sometimes about the self first, in order to assemble life's details into a global perspective; or the chance to claim an identification with rational and objective qualities

rather than the subjective, intuitive side of the self that is often ascribed to femininity. Cather's "heroes" always manage to connect to other people and to themselves in new ways and can often move among viewpoints. The character may open the actual, liminal window and may, like a bird, easily enter or escape the imaginative ones. The window is a place of beginnings and awakenings, and one may return to the past and the familiar or cross into the vast unexplored territories of the self, the landscape, or society.

In presenting her dualities of landscape through inside, outside, and in between, Cather gives extra dimensions of meaning to the plot and characterization of each novel. Ultimately she moves beyond the "insulated isolation" of the characters' "rooms of one's own" to what Bachelard would call "intimate immensity," to suggest that we open ourselves to others rather than narrow our possibilities and perspectives.

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