

The Open Window: Domestic Landscapes in Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*

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In her novels, Willa Cather pays particular attention to the landscape her characters inhabit. In her comments on the art of writing, she often uses visual terms to reiterate her critical point of view: that imaginative art should simplify the context of the story in order to clear the room so that the “emotional penumbra” of the story is most evident. It is the “hand of the artist” not the “gaudy fingers of a showman” that give high quality to a text. Her best-known comment on landscape as text is found in her essay, “On *The Professor's House*.”

Just before I began the book I had seen, in Paris, an exhibition of old and modern Dutch paintings. In many of them the scene presented was a living-room warmly furnished, or a kitchen full of food and copper. But in most of the interiors, . . . there was a square window, open. . . . In my book I tried to make Professor St. Peter's house rather over crowded and stuffy with new things. . . . Then I wanted to open the square window and let in the fresh air that blew off the Blue Mesa. (31-32)¹

To create such a landscape with paint or words is the mark of a true artist. Even the casual reader is caught up in Cather's clearly visual prose. Every detail

seems chosen because it is integral to the story. This is most apparent in her construction of the landscapes and dwellings in her novels. This paper draws on two of Cather's texts to explore her depictions of "domestic landscapes," a term I use here to describe her deliberately ordered places, and more especially, the built structures that counter the apparent formlessness of "natural space."

My Ántonia (1918) and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940) seem at first to represent the poles in Cather's literary career.² *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* is a late novel about an isolated woman in rural Virginia who is trapped by her steadily constricting physical condition, while *My Ántonia* is an early novel about an immigrant woman's realization of possibility on the Great Plains. Nevertheless, there are similarities in the ways Cather uses the domestic landscape to position Sapphira and Ántonia in their respective places. The house and outbuildings inhabited by Sapphira Dodderidge Colbert's family and the slave girl Nancy, and the homes that Ántonia Shimerda Cuzak experiences define these women's relationships to the physical and social space around them. Both novels reveal complex environments in which the women attempt to control the domestic space that they inhabit.

Three aspects of the domestic landscape, the relationship between setting and structures (here limited to human dwellings), interest me. First, a dwelling creates a place in a space that has no clear or marked boundaries: that is, unmarked, undefined space becomes a *place*. Second, the dwelling exists in a context, the landscape that surrounds it. I am using the term *landscape* to mean a scene consciously viewed (and thereby altered) by human consciousness. Dwellings alter undifferentiated space so that the viewed landscape limits or expands the observer's view of his or her world. This change arises from the individual observer's perspective and from the design and placement of the structures themselves. Finally, the spatial arrangement of the built environment (houses and other buildings) affects the social structure of the community: geography is never simply about topography. Arranged in a particular landscape, dwellings reveal the relationships between social classes, economic hierarchies, even ethnic and religious groups.³

Architectural historians distinguish between formal, "designed" architecture, houses with rooms intended for specific "monofunctions," and the vernacular, unplanned dwelling with multifunctional spaces that allow visitors and the inhabitants to interact informally in the midst of the family. John Brinckerhoff Jackson, a leading architectural historian, points out that landscape is not scenery or a political unit but rather a "system of man-made spaces on the surface of the earth." It is never simply a natural force or a feature of the natural environment but always artificial, that is, ordered by conscious human observation and acts and therefore subject to change. "Landscape is the place where we establish our own human organization of space and time."⁴

While some scholars focus on the vernacular, others consider the placement of the body in landscape. As the philosopher Edward Casey has pointed

out, the body is our primary agent in landscape: it is through intimate interaction of the body and landscape that we achieve orientation. To *im*place ourselves, we rely on familiar landscape features, usually visual, and remembered actions of our bodies, or both.⁵ Place, Casey points out, is determined by what occurs between body and landscape and, as a result of this interaction, both are imbued with cultural dimensions that interpret the distance between body, our perceived place *here*, and landscape, the context, over *there* (29).

These theories of place provide a useful frame of reference for considering Cather's two novels. They are especially apparent in *My Ántonia*, a work set on the Great Plains where traditional methods of building were impractical. The materials at hand for the first dwellings were minimal, and therefore limited the kind of structure the builder could create to an earth-bound sod house or a dugout, essentially a hole dug into a slope. Yet even when constructing such temporary dwellings, settlers took great care in selecting their homesites. Some looked for sites with far views, others for the protection afforded by a slight hill. They considered the proximity of water, other settlers, and roads that are basic amenities for the establishment of homes and a community. In *My Ántonia*, the immigrant Shimerdas are ignorant of these factors. They move into a mere hole, sold to them by their opportunistic countryman, Krajiek.

The pioneer woman faced a daunting task in her attempts to impose order and cleanliness on the dirt-walled house. Dugouts were effective shelters from the violence of plains storms, but they were poorly illuminated and the lack of ventilation meant that they were usually smelly and damp. The sod house with walls one and one half to three feet thick was well insulated, but water leaks, bugs, and sifting dirt made cleanliness almost impossible, and the thick walls prevented light from penetrating very far into the interior.⁶ Plainswomen brightened their houses with whitewash and potted flowers, but the impoverished Mrs. Shimerda, isolated by pride and language, is unaware of the devices used to create a semblance of order and cleanliness in an earthen home.

To create an identifiable *place* within the ground itself is, for women like Mrs. Shimerda, inconceivable. As geographer Kent Ryden has pointed out, the concept of place develops gradually from concrete particulars that are seen, heard, smelled, imagined, loved, hated, and feared.⁷ These accumulate meaning that enables inhabitants to differentiate a particular place from surrounding space. Ordinary objects, things that can be touched and smelled, rather than the structure itself, create the intimacy of the home place.⁸ But a dugout or sod house is hardly distinguishable from surrounding space. As Yi-Fu Tuan, a pioneering theorist of place theory, says, the domestic landscape, "like language, has the power to define and refine sensibility"(107).⁹ In this context, the necessity of a "real" house is obvious: only a built structure, distinct from surrounding space, can become a "true" place. In most cases, the woman's instinctual domestic ritual, drawn from familiar sights, smells, artifacts and events, gradually transforms even a dugout into an identifiable domestic place. Or, as John Brinckerhoff

Jackson puts it, a house “makes certain relationships possible and impedes others.”¹⁰

While scholars of architecture and geography have focused on the relationship of space and the built environment, other scholars of American literature and culture have focused on the woman’s role in creating the domestic environment. Their studies clarify the relationship of dwellings to the landscape and, more especially, the social relationships that the house enables or impedes. Women transform dwellings into homes decorated with objects that accumulate significance for the family members. They try to manage their households so that order and a wholesome atmosphere prevail. For most of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, the “cult of domesticity” prevailed in upper- and middle-class American homes. Women were expected to devote their time and attention to the care of their homes and families.¹¹

Although much of the recent scholarship on domestic environment in America has focused on artifacts such as quilts and gardening, skills that require leisure time denied to pioneer or lower-class women, a few scholars have considered the process by which space is transformed into place.¹² Ann Romines focuses on the cult of domesticity in her study, *The Home Plot: Women Writing and Domestic Ritual*.¹³ She uses “faculty,” a familiar term in the late 1800s, to describe what was believed to be women’s innate ability to manage a house and their admirable skills of domestic competence (4-5). Romines defines domestic rituals as “rituals performed in a house, a constructed shelter, which derive meaning from the protection and confinement a house can provide” (12). She asserts that domestic ritual is important because it prevents the ordered, civilized world from reverting to nature and therefore to decay and decline. It signifies the triumph of human values over natural processes (12), a definition with which the geography and architectural scholars would most likely agree.

The “domestic landscapes” of the novels under consideration here include the topographical relationship of houses to the surrounding landscape, the physical design of the structures, the relationship of rooms to one another and to the immediate yards outside, and the ways houses reveal the relationships of family members to each other and to the wider community. Central to consideration of this concept is the effort of men and, more especially, women to order the spaces they see from their positions in the landscape and to counter forces such as natural occurrences, community standards and other societal pressures that threaten the domestic order. All of these are evident in *My Ántonia* and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*.

In Cather’s two novels, the central characters have been relegated to the physical and psychological margins of American society. The Shimerdas, from Bohemia, settle on the high plains in Black Hawk, Nebraska. Sapphira leaves behind the rich traditions of antebellum Virginia when she moves to her mill farm in the backwoods of western Virginia. In both novels, the struggles to establish true homes and housekeeping routines are exacerbated by physical

and social isolation. For Sapphira's slave Nancy and the immigrant *Ántonia*, who perform the domestic rituals, housekeeping is a way to order the constrictive landscapes they inhabit. Nancy learns to value order and cleanliness from her mistress Sapphira and her mother, Till. *Ántonia* learns to cook and sew by helping the narrator Jim Burden's grandmother on their farm and by working as a hired girl for Mrs. Harling, a woman thoroughly versed in the social implications of domestic rituals in *Black Hawk*.

Ántonia and Nancy come to know their respective domestic rituals. They use this knowledge to improve their social positions. *Ántonia*'s world expands as she learns farming from her neighbors and then housekeeping by careful observation and imitation in *Black Hawk*. These skills enable her and her husband, Anton Cuzak, to realize a fulfilling life on their farm, surrounded by their well-mannered children. In *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, Sapphira's world constricts as her physical health declines, until she can no longer move about the mill farm, but must rely on her imagination to "read" the domestic landscape. As a result, she misreads Nancy's world as well as her own. The slave's situation is as confining as the Shimerda's dugout, especially after Sapphira forces Nancy to sleep away from her mother's familiar cottage, inside the suspicious Sapphira's garrison-like house. However, after she escapes from slavery, Nancy also finds a place that, like *Ántonia*, she learns to control because she has a thorough understanding of the larger society's domestic expectations.

The dwellings where *Ántonia* resides define her for the narrator, Jim Burden.¹⁴ With each of her changes in residence, *Ántonia*'s relationship with Jim shifts noticeably. Jim first notices the Shimerdas when they are all traveling on the same westbound train. At *Black Hawk*, in the dark, he hardly has time for a glance at the pathetic group. Soon after his arrival at his grandparents' farm, Jim and his grandmother call on their new neighbors. On the way, Grandmother tells Jim of the "badger hole" that Krajiek has sold his fellow Bohemians, implying that their conditions are not much better than those of the burrowing animals. A skeletal windmill is sentinel for the dugout, which is hardly distinguishable from the red grass. Mrs. Shimerda and her son Ambrosch are described as moles, with shrewd little eyes (21). Mr. Shimerda, who reminds Jim of a Virginia gentleman, looks most out of place in this barren space.

Over the first months of their friendship, Jim avoids the unpleasant dugout. His friendship with *Ántonia* develops out of doors. Their domestic landscape is elemental. Jim is an orphan, displaced, like Cather, from his Virginia home, and *Ántonia* must focus first on literally learning the language, especially the vocabulary she needs to understand farming and domestic ritual in order to create bearable lives for her family, and, especially for her father. In the garden, out of sight of human habitation, they encounter a snake, the first act that becomes a shared memory. It has ritualistic importance in the process of creating a place with a history for the two of them in Nebraska.¹⁵ In spite of their shared experiences, the differences in circumstances strain the friendship that develops be-

tween them. Even after they are past the first difficult winter, they argue over Jim's privileged life and his family's apparent unwillingness to adequately help their struggling neighbors.

In the middle of that first harsh winter, when snows have forced the Shimerdas into their underground home, the Burdens enter the Shimerda's interior domestic landscape (69). Jim and his grandmother approach the dugout carrying a hamper of food after their hired man Jake reveals that Ambrosch has apparently killed prairie dogs for food (68). Cather describes the place in sinister, almost hellish, terms: the path to the sunken doorway of their house is icy and precarious. The family endures their animal-like existence in the dark, airless cave. The food barrels hold only frozen, rotting potatoes that they have scavenged from the town's trash and a "little pile" of flour (70-71). Thinking that they come empty handed, Mrs. Shimerda, from embarrassment or desperation, is rude to her guests, but when she sees the basket of food they have brought, she breaks down completely. Her humiliation leaves Ántonia "crushed" (71). When Grandmother Burden declares, "You'll have a better house after while, Ántonia," it seems only wishful thinking to Ántonia.

Despite her generosity, Jim's grandmother is incapable of reading the Shimerda's domestic landscape. When Mrs. Shimerda bestows upon the departing Burdens some of her treasured dried mushrooms that she gathered in "some deep Bohemian forest" (77), Grandmother Burden has no cultural references that enable her to recognize the value of Mrs. Shimerda's gift; she is so blinded by the family's immediate mean circumstances that she cannot imagine that they would possess anything of worth or taste, and she throws the precious mushrooms away.

His wife's behavior makes Mr. Shimerda's fine bearing and careful appearance seem even more pathetic. One feature of the house seems to distress him the most: his daughters sleep in barrel-sized holes dug into the back wall of the dugout. Jim understands that to the old man, the family has succumbed to the bestial wilderness. Their house is not a *place* but a mere hole in a landscape devoid of any human-made place that he can recognize.¹⁶ To further underscore the family's desperate circumstances, Cather sets Mr. Shimerda's agony against the festive warmth of the Burden's house on Christmas day. The family, including the hired men Otto and Jake, are gathered in the "comfort and security" of the upstairs parlor when the old Bohemian pays a social call (83). Apparently convinced by his family's chaotic life in their "cluttered cave" that "peace and order had vanished from the earth," Mr. Shimerda is overcome by the warmth and comfort of the Burden's house. When the candles on the tree are lighted, he responds by kneeling and crossing himself, an act that confirms the sacred nature of the Burden's well-ordered domestic ritual. But this incident is only a brief respite for Mr. Shimerda. Unable to imagine that the alien space of Nebraska could one day become a familiar landscape, he ends his own life in the barn, where his death will not further soil his family's wretched earth-bound home.

By spring following Mr. Shimerda's mid-winter suicide, *Ántonia's* family, with help from the community, has a log house, some stock and adequate equipment to farm, and they can invite Jim to share their supper (119). But these beginnings of prosperity have taken a toll on *Ántonia*. She must work in the fields, not play with Jim as they did the year before when they were still children: "Nowadays Tony could talk of nothing but the prices of things, or how much she could lift and endure" (121). The lives of Jim and *Ántonia* diverge even further when Jim goes to school and *Ántonia* continues to work on the farm. The Burdens are soon quarreling with Ambrosch and Mrs. Shimerda again (123-25), but Grandfather Burden, the mediator, uses housekeeping to restore harmony between the two families. He asks Grandmother to have *Ántonia* help her in the kitchen during harvest and her cheerful enthusiasm smooths over hard feelings. *Ántonia* realizes that her own home has—and will—shape her life. When Jim asks, "why aren't you always nice like this, Tony?" she replies, "If I live here, like you, that is different. Things will be easy for you. But they will be hard for us" (134-35). *Ántonia* is fully aware that the domestic landscape she will create and inhabit will be very different from Jim's. Although she learns the finer points of housekeeping from Grandmother Burden and later from Mrs. Harling, she knows that she will not enjoy the Burden's and Harling's social standing or be bound by the social conventions that define a middle-class woman's role. *Ántonia's* domestic landscape will encompass the far horizon of the plains.

The domestic landscape that Jim finds in Nebraska is in sharp contrast to the Shimerda's mean existence. He is welcomed into a warm and sturdy home to live with his paternal grandparents, who focus much of their familial care and attention on him, now their only child. The cozy, bright underground kitchen is the focus of young Jim's world, a place warmed by a stove "with bright nickel trimmings" and permeated by the smell of gingerbread, with Cather's hallmark geraniums to lend a spot of color (9). The kitchen provides not only physical comfort but order as well. Everything has a place and a purpose, from the outdoor entrance and wash stand where the men clean up before entering the domestic environment, to the cat that keeps the rodents under control. The quiet comments of Jim's deliberate and dignified grandfather ameliorate his grandmother's impatience with the Shimerdas' differences. Even their hired hand, the adventurous Otto Fuchs, is tamed in the time he resides at the Burden farm (10-12).

The architectural and geographic features of the Burdens' farm reflect their social position in the rural neighborhood. Jim orients himself to his new place from this secure vantage point. Their farm house, the only wooden one west of Black Hawk, is a story and a half high and tops a rise that provides Jim with a clear view of his extensive domain, a sharp contrast to *Ántonia's* ground-level point of view. He looks down on the relatively large farm yard—a windmill, barns, granaries, pig-yard, corn cribs. The minuscule hedge row does not inter-

ferre with the view of the sea of red grass that seems about to overrun them (13-14). The farm is connected to town by a life-line, the road from the post office that comes “directly by our door” (14). Significantly, it is in his grandmother’s garden, a place where human labor provides food, leaning against one of her “warm yellow pumpkin(s)” that Jim realizes his connection with his new world: “I was something that day under the sun and felt it and I did not want anything more” (18). Clearly, Jim’s sense of integration arises not only from the land but from the elevated perspective of his family’s solid home just out of sight behind him. Its order assures him the leisure and security to consider his new home with pleasure and contentment.

The opening chapter of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* is, in almost every sense, the apparent antithesis of the opening chapters of *My Antonia*. Set in the western Virginia neighborhood of Cather’s childhood in the years just before the Civil War,¹⁷ it begins with what should be a most domestic landscape, but the Colberts’ breakfast, the only meal that Henry regularly takes with his wife, is oddly formal. Henry comes to the table from the mill, not from their bedroom or any other part of the house. Washington, the “coloured man,” brings their food and Sapphira, “the Mistress,” draws coffee from an elegant four-footed coffee urn. That eating breakfast is conducted in such a formal manner suggests wealth and social status. The Colberts are participating in a formal, social ritual rather than a common, democratic one. The quality china and the other fine household things belong to Sapphira Dodderidge Colbert. Sapphira inherited these items from her family and her considerable land holdings in the western reaches of Virginia from an uncle. After her marriage to Henry Colbert, Sapphira determines to live in relative isolation in a region settled within recent memory, since the removal of the Indians. Before the new couple moves to their western property, Sapphira rearranges the mill farm’s architectural landscape. She remodels the simple mill that has served the scattered local population since the Revolutionary War and rebuilds the family house in the traditional architecture of a fine eastern Virginia home. She brings into this still-plain region not only her considerable household goods, but also slaves, more than any that the locals have ever seen in one household.

Sapphira’s adherence to the social code and elaborate domestic ritual of the more traditional regions of Virginia keeps the local community at arms’ length: not even the Colberts’ thirty years’ residence in this Virginia backwoods community negates their “immigrant” status. But outsider status does not concern Sapphira. Until her physical health confines her to a wheeled chair, she is free to travel often to visit family and to “import” family friends and relatives from her own social strata, who come to enjoy the riding and other activities afforded by the Colberts’ rural retreat.

Sapphira’s efforts to establish and maintain the family’s social position as a part of a privileged leisure class are at odds with Henry Colbert’s work ethic. His preference for work is one of the conflicts that undermines the orderly breakfast scene. He spends so much of his time at his mill, even sleeping there, that he

has little time to devote to his wife and their domestic arrangements. Instead of having slaves or hired personnel run his mill and retreating to a country gentleman's life, Henry Colbert tends to his own mill. As a result, his mill is profitable, something of a rarity in the sparsely settled rural area. He demonstrates his independence from traditional Southern culture in other ways as well. His refusal to sell any of his wife's slaves is an indication that in 1854 his thinking is more nearly attuned to local democratic sentiments than to the traditions of his wife's family. He does not want to split up families or surrender them to difficult circumstances (6-8). The opening chapter, where this intricate domestic landscape is established, ends with a final irony: Sapphira, the woman so obviously in control of the domestic scene, is not in control of her physical self; a sufferer from dropsy, she is wheeled from the dining room by Washington.¹⁸

As in *My Ántonia*, Cather provides a careful description of the house's topographic context. Design features identify it as the familiar Mount Vernon architectural style: two stories, with a long, thin front porch that presents an impressive backdrop for the sloping green lawn and white picket fence. Box-hedged walks and deep shade preserve the inhabitants' privacy. Orderly flower beds and shrubbery and a lilac-lined arbor present a pleasant public facade. The back yard reflects the fact that such apparent order requires work—and disorder. It is a “helter skelter scattering” of buildings—the kitchen, Negro cabins, a laundry, a smoke house. Only on Sundays is the back yard free of the clutter of drying laundry, the necessary housekeeping tools (brooms, mops, and hoes), and the clutter left by Negro children who play underfoot (20-22). Cather's description follows closely the plantation architecture described by architectural historians, especially John Michael Vlach.¹⁹ Like the majority of land holdings, the Colberts' place is a small property, arranged like most antebellum plantations, to reflect a strict social hierarchy: the planter, at the pinnacle of this domestic landscape, lives in a house set physically above the other buildings, and, indeed, Sapphira's home tops a sloping, green lawn. Like the owners of larger plantations, Sapphira carefully orders the landscape around her house to keep at a distance her husband's customers and the casual visitor.²⁰

Henry's mill is, of course, at the stream's edge, the very lowest point in the family's yard, without the benefit of a porch or a hall to function as a neutral zone between his public and private lives: in fact, his sleeping room is also his office, his place of business. This arrangement reflects Henry's democratic nature. He lives and works among the backwoods people, further removed physically and socially from his wife than from his customers and apparently indifferent to the traditional values of his wife. His patterns of social interaction are anathema to Sapphira, who depends upon the physical arrangement of her domestic landscape to afford herself some degree of social status, respect, and control, even in Virginia's backwoods.

The physical arrangements of the domestic landscapes in *My Ántonia* and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* reflect the social contexts that are central motifs in

these novels. For *Ántonia* and Nancy, housekeeping defines their relationship to place and provides a socially acceptable way for them to escape poverty and the ignominy of their social status. Both women appropriate the domestic rituals of women who have what Romines terms “faculty.” Nancy learns these skills from her mother, Till, who passes on to her the carefully orchestrated routines of Mrs. Matchem, the Dodderidge’s housekeeper and a proper Englishwoman, who taught Till these rituals when she was growing up as a slave in Sapphira’s childhood household. *Ántonia* learns from Grandmother Burden and Mrs. Harling skills necessary to create an orderly home.

In Book II of *My Ántonia*, “The Hired Girls,” the domestic landscape increases in complexity. *Ántonia* and the other immigrant farm girls arrive in town soon after the Burdens move from the country. They take the menial jobs that are shunned by the children of Black Hawk’s merchant class. The domestic landscapes they encounter in Black Hawk homes and commercial establishments are at once more orderly and more confining than their lives on their families’ farms. The town itself, with its grids of streets, carefully tended homes, and orderly lines of business buildings, reflects the same effort that has enabled farmers to create their deliberate landscapes of orderly fields from the chaos of grasses that confronted the first settlers. Cather’s narrator, Jim Burden, describes this civic order:

Black Hawk, the new world in which we had come to live, was a clean, well-planted little prairie town, with white fences and good green yards about the dwellings, wide, dusty streets, and shapely little trees growing along the wooden sidewalks. In the center of the town there were two rows of new brick “store” buildings, a brick schoolhouse, the courthouse, and four white churches. (141)

The Burdens’ house on the edge of town marks a transition point between country and Black Hawk. Neighbors from the country leave their wagons at the Burdens’, and their wives can “set their bonnets right” before they enter town (142).

Ántonia becomes a part of the prosperous Harling household, next door to the Burden’s house, when she is hired to replace their departing cook. Mrs. Harling, “short and square and sturdy-looking, like her house” (144), like Sapphira Colbert, exhibits faculty. Order and an appreciation of culture and knowledge provide the foundation for her domestic landscape. *Ántonia*, no longer relegated to the earth-bound tasks of a farm hand, regards her new position as a step toward a more equal relationship with Jim: “Maybe I be the kind of girl you like better, now I come to town,” she tells him (150), and although their friendship does reflect *Ántonia*’s improving situation, Jim soon finds that *Ántonia*’s world encompasses more than their neighboring houses. First, he realizes that he must share her with all of the Harlings, especially the handsome Charlie and

little Nina. When the other immigrant country girls, Lena Lingard, the three Mary's, and Tiny Soderball, arrive in town, they expand the circle of friends and increase the complex pattern of relationships that surrounds Jim and *Ántonia*.

The hired girls offer alternatives to the established, traditional courtship-marriage-household pattern most town girls anticipate as their future. Lena is the first to declare her independence from domestic tradition: "I've seen a good deal of married life, and I don't care for it" (157). Her passion is personal adornment and fine appearances. Even before she leaves Black Hawk, Lena becomes a successful businesswoman, but the towns-women persist in their suspicions that an unmarried, attractive woman who ignores the traditional domestic arts and exhibits her obvious sensuality must conceal some kind of immorality beneath her finery.

At the Harlings, *Ántonia* becomes a part of a traditional middle-class domestic landscape. Even in winter, the house's windows draw Jim, "like the painted glass into a warm, roomy" comfortable house (169). Inside, there are games, dancing, music, stories. Here, *Ántonia*'s energy goes into baking, sewing, and telling stories about Bohemia. Surrounded by a family appreciative of her skills, she learns the art of housekeeping from Mrs. Harling:

There was a basic harmony between *Ántonia* and her mistress. They had strong, independent natures, both of them. They knew what they liked, and were not always trying to imitate other people. They loved children and animals and music, and rough play and digging in the earth. They liked to prepare rich, hearty food and to see people eat it; to make up soft white beds and to see youngsters sleep in them. They ridiculed conceited people and were quick to help unfortunate ones. Deep down in each of them there was a kind of hearty joviality, a relish of life, not over-delicate, but very invigorating. (174).

Years later, when Jim comments to her that she should never have gone to town, *Ántonia* contradicts him: "I'm glad I went! I'd never have known anything about cooking or housekeeping if I hadn't. I learned nice ways at the Harlings' and I've been able to bring my children up so much better" (332). To have a full life and to be a good mother, *Ántonia* understands that a woman needs to be able to "read" the domestic *and* the natural landscape: to see through the window both ways.

This period of apprenticeship in domestic ritual, about half of the novel, ends for Jim, *Ántonia*, and the other hired girls, with a picnic in the country. From their vantage point on top of a bluff, the girls can point in the direction of their families' farms, now literally and symbolically seen from a distance. Along the river among the elder bushes and flowers, and protected from the hot sun by

overhanging elms, the girls and Jim share their nostalgia for the homes they have left and their goals for the future. Jim is “overcome by content and drowsiness and by the warm silence” that makes the girls’ stories seem not like careful evaluations of their rather grim realities, but rather as if they have the power to remember and imagine ideal landscapes. In this state, they review their pasts, the present, and their futures. For *Ántonia*, a familiar flower becomes a direct link to her Bohemian home and memories of her father, and Jim reveals to her his own strong vision of her father’s passage from his Nebraska death to his native Bohemia (229). In this suspended state, Jim remembers *Ántonia* as a little girl, and *Ántonia* remembers her Bohemian village past (230). The others imagine their own mothers’ various domestic landscapes and the struggles they faced on the unfamiliar plains. Lena comments, “It must have been a trial for our mothers, coming out here and having to do everything different. . . . [My mother] says she started behind in farm-work and never has caught up,” and Tiny Soderball observes, “It seems like my mother ain’t been so homesick, ever since father’s raised rye flour for her” (231). Their focus shifts to the present and the things they want to buy for their families: coats and toys for their siblings and, for their mothers, decent houses. In the present, their domestic landscapes confine them to menial tasks and an inferior place in Black Hawk’s social hierarchy. Their pasts, symbolized by the image of the plow framed in the blazing setting sun, are closed to them by choice and distance. Only the future can be contemplated with pleasure in this natural setting under the bowl of sky above them, a landscape of unlimited possibility.

My Ántonia was written early in Cather’s career as a novelist, although she was a mature woman, able to appreciate the vagaries of time that, unvoiced, inform this pivotal scene in the novel. In *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, her last novel, the characters exhibit no such appreciation of possibility. *Sapphira* assumes that her world and that of her slaves Nancy and Till will continue to exist unchanged: the mill has been in operation since the Revolutionary War. Here, domestic landscape and social relationships seem to be assured by history and by law. Ironically, Cather, writing in the late 1930s—and her readers—know that change, not certainty, is the normal order.

Sapphira Dodderidge Colbert takes no part in the housekeeping duties, nor would she if she were physically able. Order and custom dictate a separation of roles and duties in the Colberts’ house. Rather, it is Till, her daughter Nancy, and other slaves who maintain domestic order for the Colberts. Till and Nancy approach cleaning with professional efficiency: in the bedroom, they move the beds, wash the closet floors, open the windows, beat the rugs, and pin a clean antimacassar on the wheel-chair.²¹ When Till has an opportunity to clean and inspect Henry’s room, she thinks it “right for him” and approves of her daughter’s work (58-59). It is clear that she thinks of her daughter in the context of her housekeeping skills, not as her child to nurture.

In *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, as in *My Ántonia*, Cather sets Nancy’s story against a broader scene. Various approaches to domestic ritual provide a frame

of reference against which to judge Nancy's choices and alternatives. There is Henry Colbert's ascetic alternative to his wife's overwrought domestic landscape. Henry has melded his private and business lives in a room that links him physically with the place's history. There is the original, still-sound chimney and bare floors that reveal old boards, "ax-hewn from great trees before the days of sawmills" and thereby a link to the wilderness past (47). The white-washed ceiling is the floor of the grain-storage level above. Flour sifts down on everything, giving the place a white washing and Henry a baptism-like immersion in his work (47). This is Henry's domain: "Here the miller had arranged everything to his own liking." His "secretary" efficiently functions as a writing desk and bookcase and contains a jumble of business ledgers and "a curious assortment of other books," a sign that Henry has an active intellectual life.

Till provides an outsider's view of life at the mill farm. Raised among the "folk" of eastern Virginia, her feelings of estrangement persist for years after she arrives with the Colberts in the Back Creek community, and when Sapphira's illness ends the visits of her family and friends, Till misses the opportunities to keep the house clean in anticipation of the guests' arrival. In a sense, Till is an extension of Sapphira. They grew up in the same setting, if in very different situations. Till shares with Sapphira and Mrs. Matchem the value of order, precision, and position. She finds the mill farm "damp," the people "poor farmers and backwoods people" (69).

It is from Till's point of view that Cather conveys to the reader a sense of the liminality of the mill farm that echoes, in this sense, the Shimerdas disorientation on their arrival in Nebraska. Till knows that beyond Timber Ridge there are communities and people who are of "some account" (73), but she also knows that beyond North Mountain, the woods never end: she is on the edge of the wilderness, and it is not a place she finds familiar or romantic. Till believes that her true station in life is at the foot of the stairway in the big hall, greeting the guests and helping the ladies with their wraps.

The Colberts' daughter offers yet another domestic alternative. Rachel's husband, Michael Blake, was a popular Washington politician, and his wife took pleasure in creating a pleasant domestic landscape for her family. She was equally at ease in the kitchen and in conversation with her husband's guests (140-41). When her years as a gracious society hostess end abruptly with the death of her husband and son in a New Orleans yellow fever epidemic (142-43), Rachel and her two daughters return to Back Creek, to "a house on the road" that her father builds for them and to her quiet life as a mother and neighbor.

Unlike her mother and Till, Rachel's domestic landscape more closely resembles that of most people in the Back Creek community. It is focused on her church, her family, and her good works among her neighbors. Unlike Till, who feels threatened by the wild roadside landscape, Rachel is acutely aware that she is in the midst of the "rich flowering and blooming of a Virginia spring" (116). In the opening paragraphs of Book IV, "Sapphira's Daughter," Rachel walks up

the Timber Ridge road, where she “could look down over the hills and valleys, as if she was at the top of the world” (117). It is in this wild landscape, not her mother’s ordered house or her father’s business-like mill, that Rachel is homesick for Washington, the other rich source of feeling in her life (111).

That Rachel Blake, revealed against this lush landscape, should be a caregiver, a deeply domestic woman, is not surprising. Like her father, Rachel feels at home with the rural folks. She takes food and ointments to the farmers and their wives in isolated homes in the hills and enjoys in return the talk of the spirited country folk, better company in her opinion than comfortably well-off families dulled by their conscious adherence to social customs (118). In a scene that contrasts sharply with the Colberts’ breakfast that opens the novel, Rachel enjoys talk and coffee in Mandy Ringer’s cabin. The old, illiterate farm woman “was born interested” (119). A simple white cloth, “blue chiney” cups and a stone crock full of fresh cream are a contrast to Sapphira’s silver coffee urn, and the two women’s frank talk reveals a comfortable honesty based on common-sense social conventions, such as avoiding painful family matters, very different from Sapphira’s use of conversation to obscure her true intentions.

There are inevitable counter forces in both of these novels. The hired girls and the slave Nancy present threats, either direct or indirect, to the social order in the communities of Black Hawk and Back Creek. Mrs. Harling and Sapphira attempt to control the behavior of *Ántonia* and Nancy, fearing that if there is any deviation from the communities’ moral or social codes, carefully constructed social orders will be endangered, but their fears pale when compared to the very real threats that *Ántonia* and Nancy face.

The idyllic period in *Ántonia*’s life ends when she rebels against Mr. Harling’s condemnation of the dancing pavilion. The young women of the respectable town families do not go to the public dances and, as a member of the Harling household, *Ántonia* is expected to adhere to Mr. Harling’s rules, to which Mrs. Harling, the good wife, acquiesces. But *Ántonia*’s landscape is not limited to the Harlings’ house, as open and honest as it is. She wants to experience all the aspects of the town’s social scene. She tries to explain to Mrs. Harling: “A girl like me has to take her good times when she can” (201).

Ántonia leaves the Harlings for the Cutters, an act that radically alters her domestic landscape. Wick Cutter has come West not to build up the country or establish a respectable domestic order, but to “escape restraint.” He is a sharp money-lender, a gambler, and a hypocrite (202-03). The Cutters’ domestic landscape is a battleground (205-06). The hatred and tension that imprisons the Cutters in their marriage threatens to engulf *Ántonia*. Frightened by hints from Cutter, *Ántonia* reveals her discomfort to Grandmother Burden and Jim, who offers to take *Ántonia*’s place in the Cutters’ locked and bolted house. When Cutter comes upon the sleeping Jim, the boy struggles and escapes but not before he is bloodied and humiliated. Jim reacts as if he had been raped, an act that Cutter clearly intended to inflict on *Ántonia*. The scene reflects the empathy between

Ántonia and Jim: they are very different and yet both are a part of a social milieu that is revolted by Cutter's perversion.

When Jim returns to visit Black Hawk after his years at school, he is brought up to date on Ántonia's life. Ántonia has followed a railroad man to Denver, expecting marriage, but she returns alone, pregnant and unmarried. Because they rarely see Ántonia, who has retreated to the family's farm, Grandmother Burden and Frances Harling imagine the worst kind of domestic life for her. But the Burdens' renter, the Widow Steavens, supplies a much more immediate and sympathetic report. Jim learns that Ántonia prepared for her marriage in the Burden farmhouse, attacking this task with all the energy she usually reserved for field work. "I never saw a girl work harder to go to housekeeping right and well-prepared," comments the widow (300). Like any middle-class bride of the nineteenth century, she hemstitched tablecloths and pillow cases, sewed clothes, and applied lace her mother had knitted to her underclothes. She even had silver spoons and forks in her trunk (300). Clearly, Ántonia has the "faculty" necessary to establish a respectable domestic landscape, but her considerable housekeeping skills, constricted by a small city apartment, have not been sufficient to enable a weak man to live up to his responsibilities. Jim's reunion with Ántonia takes place in an unploughed patch of tall red grass near Mr. Shimerda's grave, a neutral setting. Ántonia's brief sojourn in Denver has reinforced her commitment to her own domestic landscape, the horizon-less fields of the divide. "I like to be where I know every stack and tree, and where all the ground is friendly," she tells Jim (312).

Like Ántonia, Nancy finds herself in circumstances that threaten to undermine her secure place in the hierarchy of the Colberts' mill farm. Henry Colbert's predatory nephew Martin appears, summoned for a visit by Sapphira, who intends to destroy her husband's imagined liaison with Nancy by allowing Martin to prey upon her as he has upon numerous other women. Sapphira's suspicions originate in a conversation she overhears between the jealous and cruel-tongued Lizzie and Nancy. Lizzie accuses Nancy of catering to Henry and insinuates even more: "an' you makes his bed cumf'ble for him? Ain't dat nice! I speck! Look out you don't do it once too many. Den-it ain't so fine, when somethin' begin to show on you, Miss Yaller Face" (61). Sapphira orders Nancy to sleep outside her bedroom, even in winter when the cold drafts in the big house keep Nancy chilled and awake, a decidedly undomestic arrangement. Nancy misses her familiar home, her mother's white-washed, warm cabin where she could sleep by the stove and feel "snug, like when she was a little girl," and where the homelike country noises close at hand elicit sleep (62).

Henry's anger when Sapphira sends Bluebell "the laziest, trashiest wench on the place!" to clean his room and his comment that "Nancy knows how I want things," is ambiguous enough to serve as further evidence for Sapphira. That Henry could hold affection for the slave girl simply because she maintains order and cleanliness in his mill room, and that Nancy could admire her master

simply because he treats her in a kindly, fatherly way does not occur to Sapphira who, immobile and confined to her own enclosed landscape, has the leisure to imagine the worst kind of attraction.²²

Sapphira deliberately sets up situations that will put Nancy in Martin's path. In Martin's presence she asks Nancy to go into the woods alone to gather laurel branches. Nancy turns to Rachel Blake, the only person in Back Creek who she feels can understand and help her, and Rachel accompanies the girl. When they encounter Martin, Rachel's presence deflects his advances for the moment. Before Martin's appearance, the out-of-doors for Nancy, as for Rachel and *Ántonia*, represents a kind of freedom, a means of self-discovery. She can climb a cherry tree to pick the ripe fruit and enjoy the climb, but the tree is also a refuge: "no trouble followed a body up there" (178). But Martin invades this sanctuary. When he comes upon her in the cherry tree, he stands on the chair she used to climb into the tree and grabs her legs. Her frightened screams bring the Negroes Old Jeff, who is oblivious to Nancy's predicament, and Sampson, who senses immediately what has transpired.

Martin's threat to Nancy even invades Sapphira's house: at night, he stalks Nancy as she sleeps in the hall. The frightened girl senses that her secure world is being threatened by the evil she instinctively senses in the easy Martin. Nancy again goes to Rachel Blake for advice. Rachel realizes that because Martin, a kinsman, has full access to all corners of the Colberts' property, no part of the mill farm is safe for the slave. With help from a neighbor active in the abolitionist cause, Rachel arranges Nancy's flight. Although Henry's sense of family honor and loyalty precludes any overt act on his part that would oppose his wife's legal right to manage her property, he makes the escape possible by leaving money accessible to his daughter, and Nancy escapes Back Creek. More than anyone else on the farm, Henry Colbert has a deep sense of the paradigmatic change in the cultural landscape that this act presages. Sapphira takes to her bed, a permanent invalid, but the illness of Rachel Blake's daughters and the death of one, brings about a reconciliation between the two households that is necessary for their continuation as a family. Speaking to Henry, Sapphira sums up their life at Mill Farm: "Take it all in all, though, we have had many happy years here, and we both love the place. Neither of us would be easy anywhere else" (269).

My Ántonia and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* close with similar idyllic epilogues. The last section in *My Ántonia*, "Cuzak's Boys," recounts Jim's visit to *Ántonia*'s family after twenty years away from Black Hawk.²³ As he approaches the Cuzak's farm, he sees a landscape that reveals careful domestic tending. The farm house, buried to the eaves in hollyhocks and sheltered by a thorny locust hedge and feathery mimosa trees, is at the center of a rural pastoral: ducks and geese, white cats, yellow pumpkins.²⁴ Inside the farmhouse, two girls wash dishes, and a long table and rows of wooden chairs signal a simple but efficient domestic routine.

Significantly, when Jim appears, he is immediately admitted into the kitchen, the heart of her family's home. David Murphy, who has researched the Pavelka homestead, the model for Cuzak's farm, points out that at the time of Jim's fictional visit, the Pavelka farmhouse, unlike most American farmhouses, had only one entry, directly into the kitchen. There were two downstairs rooms. One room functioned as a parlor, dining room, kitchen and sleeping room; the other was for storage and sleeping.²⁵ Like Henry's mill, the farmhouse is a democratic, vernacular structure. Jim is accepted as a family friend. No room, not even the formal parlor common in the simplest American farm home, is set aside for entertainment and guests. Jim sits at the family's kitchen table and sleeps in the barn with the boys.

When her children gather around her, it is evident that *Ántonia* has created a place that functions according to the family's norms, and not according to the dictates of society or popular fashion. *Ántonia* is surrounded by children who speak Bohemian, their "private" family language. Every part of the house attests to her careful attention to the details of her domestic landscape: the children's practical dress, their sense of duty and order, their pride in her fruit cave with its ample supplies of pickles, cherries, strawberries, and crab apples. Their bread is made with flour ground from their own supply of wheat.

As important as her house is to *Ántonia*, her domain includes a grape arbor, with seats along the side, and a plank table, domestic furnishings that define this natural refuge, in the heart of her garden, as a place of refuge in *Ántonia's* domesticated landscape²⁶ :

It was surrounded by a triple enclosure: the wire fence, then the hedge of thorny locusts, then the mulberry hedge which kept out the hot winds of summer and held fast to the protecting snows of winter. The hedges were so tall that we could see nothing but the blue sky above them, neither the barn roof nor the windmill. The afternoon sun poured down on us through the drying grape leaves. The orchard seemed full of sun, like a cup, and we could smell the ripe apples on the trees. (331-32)

As the philosopher Edward Casey has pointed out, buildings—deliberately confining structures—condense a culture: "Even if [the building] is more confining than a landscape, it is more densely saturated with culture than is a landscape" (32). This orchard, perhaps more than any other setting in Cather's works, presents such a distillation of the limitless natural world. The heart of this naturally-formed but deliberately enclosed place, the densely saturated landscape that *Ántonia* has created, is open to possibilities, but it is also a clearly articulated place: the man-made wire fence and furniture domesticate this natural refuge: richly colorful barnyard fowl—ducks and geese—can enter to feast on the fallen fruit, safe from predators. The surrounding orchard, "full of sun," con-

tains ripe apples, reminiscent of the Edenic garden, but they are carefully grafted, manipulated by Ántonia's husband, Anton. The farm's fecundity reflects the Cuzak's own fruitfulness, evident not only in their children but also in the plenty of Ántonia's fruit cellar, the productivity of their orchards and the surrounding fields. Ántonia's summation of their years on the farm underscores her own role in shaping this domestic landscape "'We'd never have gotten through if I hadn't been so strong. . . . I'm never lonesome here like I used to be in town. . . . I've never had [sad spells] out here'" (332-33).

Throughout this account of Jim's evening with the Cuzaks, there is a deep sense of "a kind of physical harmony" among the family members. All of this is in sharp contrast to the portrait of the Shimerda's in Book I, when it appeared to Mr. Shimerda that they had descended into the chaos of wilderness. Ántonia, by force of her considerable imagination, has created a place for herself and her family on the high plains of Nebraska.

Sapphira and the Slave Girl ends with a similar nostalgic epilogue that links Cather's own post-Civil War childhood to the story. The child who narrates the story of Nancy's homecoming is Cather herself. Rachel Blake is her Grandmother Boak, and her mother is the surviving daughter. The scene is a rare personal reference by a writer who created many richly suggestive narrators. When Nancy returns after twenty-five years, she encounters a different social landscape: Civil War enmities are forgotten under the burden of common work; young couples enjoy social gatherings; buggies and carriages carry people farther from the Back Creek neighborhood on their Sunday drives. The child Willa inhabits a house literally by the side of the road that separates their "long front yard," from the creek. Nancy arrives a stranger whose wealth and station are apparent in her bearing and her clothes; a fur-lined coat, a gold watch, and stylish dress.

Nancy shares fragments of her domestic landscape in Canada with her mother, Till, and the other witnesses: photos of her husband and children, and talk of their cottage "at the end of the park" on the estate of her employer. Nancy has used the housekeeping skills to become a success in her own right. During her visit, Nancy appropriates certain household duties—roasting coffee and helping with whatever house work is underway (286). Cather's affectionate description of the Burden's underground kitchen in Nebraska is echoed in this last scene in her last novel set in the domestic heart of her own childhood home.

Cather herself valued domestic ritual: her contemporaries describe her as a good cook and a gracious, if particular, hostess.²⁷ That she valued domestic landscape seems evident in these two novels, written early and late in her career and linked explicitly by the author's attention to the chaotic space of unsettled regions and the creation of landscapes carefully crafted by the traditional skills of domestic ritual. In her carefully crafted prose, Willa Cather creates places that share techniques of selection and clarity with the scenes beyond the open frames of meticulous Dutch paintings.

Notes

1. These comments are from "The Novel D meubl ," and "On The Professor's House," *Willa Cather on Writing* (1920. rpt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988).
2. *My Antonia*, Charles Mignon, ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994); *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940). All further references to these texts will be from these editions and will be cited parenthetically.
3. This concept of domestic landscape has been drawn from studies in cultural geography and vernacular architecture. See esp. Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 32; Dolores Hayden, "Urban Landscape History: The Sense of Place and the Politics of Space," *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, John Groth and Todd W. Bressi, eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 112-113; John Brinckerhoff Jackson, "Concluding with Landscapes," *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 156; Jackson, *A Sense of Place, A Sense of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 151-53; D.W. Meinig, "Introduction," *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, D.W. Meinig, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 1-7.
4. Jackson, "Concluding with Landscape," 156.
5. Casey, 25.
6. For an account of dugout construction and habitation, see Cass G. Barns, *The Sod House* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970); Everett Dick, *The Sod-House Frontier, 1854-1890: A Social History of the Northern Plains from the Creation of Kansas and Nebraska to the Admission of the Dakotas* (1954; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979); Howard Ruede, *Sod-House Days: Letters from a Kansas Homesteader 1877-78*, John Ise, ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1983); Roger Welsch, *Sod Walls* (Lincoln: J&L Lee, 1991).
7. Kent C. Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Writing and the Sense of Place* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993).
8. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 144.
9. Tuan uses the term "built environment," which is slightly broader than my term, "domestic landscape."
10. *A Sense of Place, A Sense of Time*, 35.
11. See Marilyn Ferris Motz and Pat Browne, eds. *Making the American Home: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Material Culture 1840-1940* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Press, 1988), 1-2.
12. Annette Kolodny's two volumes, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975) and *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1663-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984) address the process by which women carried their cultures into the western United States.
13. Ann Romines, *The Home Plot: Women, Writing and Domestic Ritual* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992). Further references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.
14. I consciously avoid the term, *lives* when referring to  ntonia's early place. The term connotes circumstances that are absent in the Shimerda's dugout.
15. When Jim visits  ntonia years later, her children know this story. It is part of the family lore. The snake has grown to mythical size in the retelling.
16. See David Murphy, "Jeich Antonie: Czechs, the Land, Cather and the Pavelka Farmstead," *Great Plains Quarterly* 14 (Spring, 1944), 85-106. The Shimerda's Czech village would have been a cluster of houses, each designed around a warm kitchen, close to neighbors who went out from the village to their fields. In America, by contrast, the Homestead Act dictated that farmers live on their claims, and, on the Great Plains, these were usually a mile or more away from the neighbors, thereby negating any possibility of a village and field arrangement.
17. Cather's childhood home is on U.S. highway 50, west of Winchester, Virginia. A roadside historical marker identifies the Cather's neighborhood.
18. Dropsy is an archaic term for edema, the collection of fluids in the body and a sign of circulation problems that, in severe cases, are often caused by heart, kidney or liver disorders.
19. John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).
20. According to Vlach, in 1860 only one percent of plantations fit the stereotype of the large plantation with many acres and many field workers Colbert's mill would employ even fewer workers than the 20 or 30 slaves needed to work the average-sized cotton plantation of 400-500 acres (78).
21. A covering for the arms or back of a chair, originally as protection from Macassar hair oil. Also called a "tidy."

22. Cather makes it clear that neither Nancy nor Henry has been physically attracted to the other: one is still an innocent, the other a deeply moral man (66).

23. The Cuzak farmstead is modeled on the home of Cather's friends, the Pavelkas, who also provided the inspiration for Cather's late story, "Neighbour Rosicky."

24. Murphy compares the Pavelka/Cuzak house and its orientation to the farmyard and road to traditional Czechoslovakian rural architecture.

25. The author saw village homes and even city apartments arranged in this way during a year in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia's neighbor, in the 1980s.

26. Murphy also recognizes the sanctuary qualities of Antonia's grape arbor (98).

27. For background on Cather's own very particular domestic habits and preferences, see Romines; Brent Bohlke, *Willa Cather in Person: Interviews, Speeches and Letters* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press); Roger Welsch and Linda Welsch, *Cather's Kitchens: Foodways in Literature and Life* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987).