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# Cather's New World Cultural Exploitation vs. Cultural Cohesion in Sapphira and the Slave Girl, The Professor's House and Shadows on the Rock

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Cather's New World  
Cultural Exploitation vs. Cultural Cohesion  
in Sapphira and the Slave Girl,  
The Professor's House and Shadows on the Rock

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## Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	3
2.	Chapter 1: African American Slavery	9
3.	Chapter 2: Native American Exploitation	24
4.	Chapter 3: Cultural Cohesion	38
5.	Conclusion	56
6.	Works Cited	60

## Introduction

In her Red Cloud high school graduation speech in June 1890, Willa Cather declared: "All human history is a record of emigration, an exodus from barbarism to civilization" (Bolke 141). Even as an adolescent, Cather recognized the need for social progress, equality, and community. In her earlier novels, including My Antonia (1918) and O Pioneers! (1913), European immigrants search for a sense of home and a civilization of their own in the New World, America, a nation full of opportunity and freedom. Bringing their heritage and culture to the rough Midwestern terrain of America, the protagonists of Cather's early novels create a harmonious life for themselves in the New World.

Yet Cather's view of her America as a New Eden changed in her later novels. As she grew older Cather began to find fault with America's failure to measure up to its founding ideologies most prominently represented in Winthrop's "A Modell of Christian Charity:" "[W]ee must Consider that we shall be as a Citty upon a Hill" (233). By the 1920s, Cather had begun to recognize a great discrepancy between America's earlier promise of prosperity and its actual state of injustice. Instead of being a model society,

America was becoming a materialistic, exploitative machine.

Specific events in Cather's life provoked her disappointment in her home, America. During the aftermath of World War I, Cather felt displaced and stunned by the world's belligerence. In an introduction to a group of essays entitled "Not Under Forty" (1936) Cather wrote: "the world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts" (811). In her mind, she belonged to the Old World, one of literature, art, culture, and intellectuals. Cather's contemporary America, the symbol of the New World, was becoming disinterested in the arts and literature. Instead, physical objects and displays of wealth were consuming American minds.

Cather's alienation from society was also heightened by the deaths of her loved ones. In his 1975 work Willa Cather's Imagination David Stouck notes Cather's troubling times between 1927 and 1931. Stouck cites "the loss of her Bank Street apartment in New York, the death of her father, and the prolonged illness of her mother, who had suffered a paralytic stroke" as particularly difficult events in Cather's adult life (150). With the fabric of her personal life disintegrating, Cather looked to her American society for guidance and optimism but could find none.

World War II also affected Cather greatly. In his

1987 work, Willa Cather, James Woodress notes that Cather was especially troubled by the global violence of World War II: "It seemed the end of the world she had loved, the final debasement of values she held dear, the destruction of all tradition and culture" (483). In her later life, then, Cather suffered great disappointment when she lost her once idealistic vision of America. She was disenchanted with America's collapse; instead of moving from "barbarism to civilization," from her perspective America was advancing straight into an uncivilized race for material wealth and power (Bolke 141). America and the world as a whole were in self-destructive, downward spirals.

Cather felt that even her beloved art form, the novel, was becoming "overfurnished." She wrote in her essay "The Novel Demeuble:"

the property-man has been so busy on its pages, the importance of material objects, and their vivid presentation have been stressed, that we take it for granted whoever can observe, and can write the English language, can write a novel. (834)

In Cather's mind, Americans were too preoccupied with obtaining "material objects." America was becoming a nation overly concerned with manipulation and wealth

rather than intellect and culture.

Cather's later works centering on her pessimistic view of America, Sapphira and the Slave Girl (1940) and The Professor's House (1925), depict an America motivated by self-interest and capitalistic exploitation. In these novels Cather warns against indulgence, as Stouck affirms in "Willa Cather and the Indian Heritage:" "In the satirical novels Willa Cather wrote in the early 1920s the struggle for power is seen in terms of the quest for material possessions" (440). Cather recognized America's fixations on social status rather than humanity and civility. Both Sapphira and the Slave Girl and The Professor's House not only transmit a message of alienation but also issue a call for a return to order and justice. In Sapphira and the Slave Girl, Nancy is forced to leave her home in Virginia and escape to Canada to avoid sexual abuse. In The Professor's House, in his quest to preserve an ancient Native American city, Tom Outland and his discovered city are exploited for financial gain. Blatantly disrespecting and dehumanizing other cultures, the dominant whites as portrayed in these two works abuse both the African and Native American societies.

A sharp contrast to these American settings is the idealistic society presented in Cather's 1931 work,

Shadows on the Rock. The novel illustrates how the seventeenth-century French settlement of Quebec combines aspects of both the Old World and the New World to form a model society. The French do not concentrate their efforts on attaining money or power; rather, their main concern is to fight for their survival in the rough Canadian wilderness. Valuing camaraderie more than commissions, the French treasure what few luxuries they have and share with their fellow settlers.

These three later works, Sapphira and the Slave Girl, The Professor's House, and Shadows on the Rock, distinguish two civilizations in North America. Cather sees greater community development and advancement in the French community than in the American ones. The Canadians celebrate life and its gifts in their rural settlement. The Canadians also do not isolate and ostracize other cultural groups. Rather, they accept and integrate the native people into their Canadian community. In comparison, the Americans appear to be in an intellectual and moral decline in both Sapphira and the Slave Girl and The Professor's House. They consume themselves with self-advancement, material gain, power, and control. The alienation of individuals, the breakdown of the overall society, and the depletion of the family unit in America are all



prominent themes in Cather's later canon.

Chapter 1 will examine the mental and physical abuses African American slavery imposed on its victims in Sapphira and the Slave Girl. A young slave girl Nancy is forced to leave her home in Winchester, Virginia, and journey on the underground Railroad to Canada to escape her abusers. Chapter 2 will reveal the abuse and neglect with which America has treated Native Americans in The Professor's House. Tom Outland, defender of Native American culture, falls prey to the lobbying self-interested politicians in Washington. Chapter 3 will demonstrate the cultural superiority and cohesiveness of the French settlement Quebec described in Shadows on the Rock. Cecile and her father Euclide Auclair live in harmony on their rock, which Cather portrays as the true City on a Hill in the New World. The conclusion will reiterate the theme that Quebec shines forth as a culturally aware and accepting community, a model society for the exploitative Americans to emulate.

Chapter 1: African American Slavery in  
Sapphira and the Slave Girl

Willa Cather's 1940 work Sapphira and the Slave Girl attacks one of the greatest evils of American history: African American slavery. Cather's text focuses on the injustices of slavery and the heartless degradation and abuse it forced on enslaved individuals. Slaves in a typical Southern household were possessions; they were used for their owner's convenience and comfort with little or no regard for the slave's emotional or mental well being. By focusing her novel on one young mulatto slave girl, Nancy, Cather allows the reader to create a personal bond with the innocent, exploited protagonist. Through Nancy's story, Cather portrays Southern society as deceitful and in a state of deterioration. The evils of slavery are felt on three different levels. African American slavery entraps Nancy, corrupts the family unit, and divides the white slave holding family, the Colberts.

Unlike her earlier works portraying America as a land of opportunity, Cather's final work depicts an environment that oppresses and humiliates individuals and often denies their humanity. Woodress notes the

effect Cather's perception of America's lost innocence had on her work: "The evils of the system . . . are implicit in the story. Her purpose was to construct a narrative against the background of Virginia life as she could remember it from the 1870s" (485). By pointing out the blatant evils of this institution, Cather reveals the terrifying impact slavery had on African Americans, white slaveholders, and the country as a whole. By going back to the past, when slavery was legal, Cather reminds Americans of their painful history and forces them to reconsider developing more humane standards for all people.

In Sapphira and the Slave Girl, Cather portrays one of the most domineering and ruthless characters in her entire canon, Sapphira Colbert, a conniving, vengeful, jealous older woman confined to a wheelchair because of dropsy. Sapphira is one of the few residents of Winchester, Virginia who owns African American slaves and who consequently physically and verbally abuses her slaves. However, both Sapphira's miller husband, Henry Colbert, and her daughter, Rachel, view slavery as a dehumanizing institution.

Coming from a family who never owned slaves, Henry views the slaves more compassionately than does his wife. He works by their sides harvesting wheat and making grain in the mill. Lying alone in his bed late

at night, Henry reflects:

Sapphira's darkies were better cared for,  
better fed and better clothed than the poor  
whites in the mountains. Yet what ragged,  
shag-haired, squirrel-shooting mountain man  
would change places with Sampson, his trusted  
head miller? (229)

Henry Colbert recognizes that even though Sapphira's slaves are reasonably well cared for, they are still victims of the demeaning chains of slavery. In his article "Willa Cather's Experimental Southern Novel," Merrill Skaggs sympathizes with both Sapphira's husband, Henry Colbert, and with Sapphira's slaves: "His wife, born a Dodderidge, ungentlely plots against black servants, makes tasteless remarks about breeding blacks, and appreciates off-color jokes because of her crude sense of humor" (7). As Skaggs notes, Sapphira is a rude, cruel mistress who often demeans those whom she keeps enslaved. Thus, the slaveholding ideology creates a division between husband and wife; with her aggressive exploitation of her slaves and his passive resistance to her demands, the slave system pits husband and wife against each other.

Sapphira's jealous anger serves as a vehicle for Cather's indictment of slavery. Sapphira focuses on one young, innocent victim, Nancy. In the first

chapter, the narrator notes the slave community's awareness that their mistress has singled Nancy out for harsh treatment: "Nancy had fallen out of favor with her mistress. Everyone knew it, and no one knew why. Self-respecting negroes never complained of harsh treatment" (18). Nancy repeatedly tries to appease her owner, oblivious to the motives that give rise to such inordinate cruelty, even from a woman as vindictive as Sapphira. Sapphira directs the anger stemming from her failing marriage, health, and beauty towards the innocent house slave, Nancy.

In Sapphira and the Slave Girl, Nancy seeks to end her trials and persecutions in America, the supposed land of opportunity. Like some of the tragic mulatto figures found African American literature, Nancy is shunned by members of both races. Sapphira and two African American women, Fat Lizzie and Bluebell, ostracize Nancy because they suspect her of having sexual relations with Henry Colbert. As a result, Nancy is alienated and displaced, depressed by the attacks on her character and alienated from both the white and black communities. In Willa Cather's Imagination Stouck notes the powerful effect of Nancy as manipulated protagonist: "It is from the emotional vantage point of a child, helpless in the face of capricious authority, that the novel's themes of power

and justice derive their powerful, elemental character" (228). Despite her efforts to be accepted by her owner, Nancy suffers from taunts and physical abuse. Distressed over her hairstyle, Sapphira slaps the young servant with a hairbrush three times and tells her to "come back in a better humour" (12). Scenes like this one present Sapphira as a cold, unfeeling Southern matron.

In addition to showing the exploitation of African Americans in the New World, Sapphira and the Slave Girl also shows how gender inequities have corrupted the society. Though she attempts to assert her power over Nancy, Sapphira, too, lives in a state of bondage because as a married, Southern woman she is subordinate to Henry Colbert and to patriarchal Southern law. When Sapphira wishes to sell Nancy, Henry refuses to give his signature and thus prevents Nancy's dismissal. Although she views herself as an authoritative woman, Sapphira, like Nancy, is a victim because of her socially prescribed gender role. In her 1987 article "Of Human Bondage: Cather's Subnarrative in Sapphira and the Slave Girl" Marilyn Arnold describes Sapphira as a "servant of the system. She thinks that she is in control at the Mill House when in reality the social system that trained her is in control" (333). Therefore Sapphira, although ostensibly the head of her

household, is really bound by America's confining social structure, local businessmen, and her estranged husband. As Toni Morrison asserts, Sapphira becomes a "disappointed woman confined to the prison of her defeated flesh, whose social pedestal rests on the sturdy spine of racial degradation" (25). Disabled by her gender role and by her crippling illness, Sapphira clings to her racial superiority over Nancy as a final vindictive purpose in life.

When Sapphira's immoral nephew, Martin Colbert, visits the Colberts, both Nancy's race and gender suggest that she, the enslaved young woman, is the perfect victim. Martin is unruly, impetuous, and despicable; he exemplifies Cather's disdain for self-interested individuals. However, Sapphira dotes on him and encourages his sexual interest in Nancy. Like Nancy, enslaved African American women were often subjected to sexual abuse by white masters. John Blassingame notes in The Slave Community: "The white man's lust for black women was one of the most serious impediments to the development of morality . . . . This was particularly true when the slaves belonged to a white bachelor" (154). Martin's behavior towards Nancy epitomizes white male patriarchal entitlement, for he can dominate and exploit his family's slaves without repercussions.

Sapphira's plans and Martin's physical advances underscore Nancy's subservience. When Martin kisses Nancy against her will, she is terrified. Martin replies: "Now, my girl, what's there to make a fuss about? That's the way we say good-night down where I live. You ask my aunt" (166). The Aunt and nephew are collaborators in a malicious plan to "ruin" Nancy's purity and chastity. In his 1994 essay, "Willa Cather's Fierce Necessity," J. Shanley notes the reader's concern for "the lovely child who, when mistreated can only wonder why and worry lest she be caught by the young rake and thus ruined in the eyes of her master" (624). Nancy, then, comes to live in a state of constant terror. Sapphira aids Martin by giving him opportunities to "ruin" Nancy, including sending Nancy off alone in the woods and advising Martin of her whereabouts. Sapphira even makes Nancy sleep alone outside her bedroom door in the hopes that Martin will capture the defenseless girl and assert his racial and gender superiority.

As a result of these acts, Nancy suffers great mental and emotional agony during Martin's extended stay. Sleeping on a mat outside of Sapphira's door, Nancy's fright and imagination consume her: "[I]f she heard that stealthy step again, she would run down the hall and out the back door, over to her mamma's cabin"



(195). As Martin's pursuit of her intensifies, Nancy realizes that American society thrives on the dominant culture's ability to exploit women and minorities. Besides sexual abuse, Nancy must also endure cruel physical trials. As Shirley Abbott notes in her 1982 article "Southern Women and the Indispensable Myth" Nancy, like many female house slaves, was horribly overworked: "Seven-day workweeks, maidservants required to sleep at the foot of their mistress' bed, slaves deprived of sleep and decent food or sent out to die in their old age--all this was the work of white ladies" (88). Despite Sapphira's harsh treatment, the thought of being sexually violated by Martin terrorizes Nancy more than any of Sapphira's taunts ever could.

Nancy's mental turmoil increases as Martin's determination to "ruin" her becomes clear. In her 1984 article "Willa Cather's American Gothic," Susan Rosowski notes that for Nancy the Colbert's house "becomes an ominous labyrinth in which the girl is trapped, complete with stock Gothic elements: ancestral secrets, hints of incest, long, drafty dark halls, and creaking stairs" (223). Nancy feels so confined that she contemplates committing suicide by throwing herself into a well. Nancy would subject herself to worse forms of slavery and torturous field work in Georgia rather than endure the intolerable situation she faces

in the Colbert household. She tells Rachel Blake, "I'd go anywheres to git away from him. I'd sooner go down to Georgia an' pick cotton, 'deed I would" (218). This remark shows just how desperate Nancy feels in her Back Creek home.

Because of her personal alienation and disdain for her exploitative society, Nancy leaves America and thus breaks up her family unit. Sapphira's abolitionist daughter, Rachel, agrees to help Nancy find an escape route to a better life in Canada. Rachel believes the moral injustices of slavery are obvious: "It was the owning that was wrong, the relation itself, no matter how convenient or agreeable for the master or servant" (137). Rachel cannot understand her mother's willingness to go to such great lengths to prove her servant's subservience to Martin, a man she describes as "the worst rake in the country." Confused by her mother's behavior and motives, Rachel wonders: "Did her mother really want to ruin Nancy? Could her spite go so far as that?" (169) By creating a conflict among all of her central characters, Cather illustrates the effect slavery had on Southern society as a whole.

Consequently, the social structure depicted in Sapphira and the Slave Girl is crumbling. Both Anglo-Europeans and African Americans are part of a system that judges humans based on their race, lineage, and

gender. Arnold observes that in Cather's final novel "Order is substituted for rightness, fairness, humaneness; and when that order is founded upon privilege and accident of birth rather than merit it is contaminated, a system of vain, empty gestures" (325). Without the guiding principles of order and democracy, America, as portrayed in Sapphira and the Slave Girl, is a confining, corrupt land. Both Nancy's forced submission and Sapphira's immoral demands symbolize the breakdown of American morality, its social order, the concept of family, and the myth of the American dream itself. Like the belligerent early twentieth-century in which Cather created her novel, this setting on the Colbert farm also reflects elements of division and disorder.

Even though she is forced to leave her parents and her home in Back Creek, Nancy knows that the only chance for a truly free life without constant exploitation awaits her outside of America's borders. When Rachel Blake tells her father "I'm a-going to get Nancy away from here and on the road to freedom" (225), the reader knows that this road leads outside of America. Only outside the borders of America can Nancy hope to live a life of true freedom and independence. In his work From Slavery to Freedom, John Hope Franklin confirms that the Executive Council of Lower Canada

declared their refusal to recognize the institution of slavery by stating: "every slave therefore who comes into the province is immediately free whether he has been brought in by violence or entered it of his own accord" (362). Unlike the United States, Canada welcomed African Americans as free individuals, not as pieces of property. Nancy's mother, Till, confides to Rachel on one occasion: "If she's up there with the English folks, she'll have some chance" (249). Although Till does not want to lose Nancy, she understands that Canada offers escaped slaves freedom, hope, and opportunities unavailable in the slaveholding United States.

Canada becomes a shining light of freedom and acceptance in comparison to the American system of human bondage. Cather's description of Nancy's passage by foot, coach, and boat through the slave-owning lands of America parallels the biblical story of Moses' journey from Egypt to the promised land. After Nancy's escape, Henry Colbert reflects: "She would go out of Egypt to a better land" (228). Nancy's hiding place in Whitford's coach under the lid of a coffin symbolizes death and resurrection. Figuratively speaking, Nancy has died and is being transported into a new, better life. When she meets the freed black preacher who helps her reach Canada, Nancy is calmed by his praises

of the Quaker community: "Dey ain't strangers, where you're goin', honey. Dey call theyselves Friends, an' dey is friends to all God's people" (238). The narrator describes this man's effect on Nancy: "There was something solemn yet comforting in his voice, like the voice of prophecy" (239). Even in the deep South, the enslaved regarded Canada as a beacon of hope.

Rachel Blake considers: "From as far away as Louisiana, negroes were now reaching Canada . . . . If a negro once got into Pennsylvania or Ohio, he seldom failed to go through" (223). Unlike America, Canada is built on laws that create tolerant, peaceful communities.

In Back Creek, Nancy's sudden, mysterious disappearance causes immediate gossip and rumor. Sapphira, knowing that her daughter's house had been closed up for two days following Nancy's disappearance, suspects that Rachel has aided Nancy. Sapphira's curt note to Rachel reveals the rift this occurrence has created in the relationship between Sapphira and Rachel: "Mistress Blake is kindly requested to make no further visits at the Mill House" (245). The tension and the intra-familial division over Nancy's escape illustrate Cather's point that racial intolerance destroys families and societies alike.

Just as her parting was mystical and biblical so too is Nancy's reunion with Rachel Blake a quarter of a

century later: "There was something Scriptural in the meeting" (283). Cather portrays a moving reunion between Nancy and her liberator. When the two women are reunited after a twenty-five year separation, Nancy remarks: "I never forgot who it was took me across the river that night, Mrs. Blake" (283). After her journey across the river, Nancy experiences life in a superior country, Canada, with more accepting and encouraging terms.

When she appears again, Nancy is quite changed in appearance, manner, and experience. A new, younger narrator, a child of one of the house servants, states: "I liked the way she sat in her chair, the shade of deference in her voice when she addressed my mother . . . there was something so smooth and measured in her movements" (284). In his work Willa Cather and the Myth of American Migration, Joseph Urgo notes Nancy's transformation in Canada, a society that promotes tolerance: "Nancy takes flight to Canada and twenty-five years later returns in triumph to Virginia, dressed in a fur-lined coat and speaking English in a noticeably dignified and nonsouthern manner" (84). Nancy is a new and different person; she has developed into a refined, educated woman with a loving family of her own, yet she would have been raped and tortured if she had remained in Back Creek under Sapphira and

Martin's grasps.

Cather's novel about African American slavery constantly reinforces the reader's awareness of the abuses African Americans suffered under slavery. In the novel's third book, entitled "Old Jezebel," Cather devotes an entire passage to the history of an elderly slave, Jezebel, by describing the atrocious "middle passage" of Africans to America. Cather recounts the destruction of Old Jezebel's African village as well as the brutal slaying of her father and four brothers:

It was all over in a few hours; of the village nothing was left but the smoking ashes and mutilated bodies. By morning she and her fellow captives were in leg chains and on their march to the sea. (90-1)

Chained and bridled, Jezebel and her companions were victims of horrible conditions and inhumane abuse aboard the ship "Albert Horn." The sea captain only saves Jezebel because of her remarkable physique: "The skipper had a kind of respect for a well-shaped creature: horse, cow, or woman" (94). As Cather's rendering of Jezebel's capture reveals, white imperialists viewed Africans as primitive and used this view to justify slavery. Through her focus on the beginnings of slavery, Cather forces the reader to reconsider the ideology that created and sustained the

American slave system.

In her final work, Sapphira and the Slave Girl, Cather presents her disdain for two main forces of American history: racial and gender injustice. Nancy is fortunate enough to escape Sapphira's cruelty and finds a new identity and lifestyle outside of exploitative America. In a 1938 letter to Sinclair Lewis, Cather observes that World War II had brought a closure to life as she knew it: "Americans tend to refuse to believe evil exists." She disliked "Americans' gullibility and misplaced kindness, seen in evasive excuses for Stalin and Mussolini, and she feared Americans would not wake up until mortally threatened" (Woodress 479). While writing this novel, then, Cather was concerned with evil forces in the world, be they the past sins of African American enslavement or contemporary political divisions and fascism. But in Sapphira and the Slave Girl, Cather also conveys a hopeful message to a crumbling, belligerent world. Cather presents Nancy's story to prove that through journey and self-discovery, true freedom and wisdom are attainable, even though in Nancy's case, her freedom was plausible only outside of America's borders in Canada, the true land of opportunity and New World cohesion.



Chapter 2: Exploitation of Native Americans in  
The Professor's House

Just as Cather visited her native state of Virginia before writing her final completed novel Sapphira and the Slave Girl (1940) so too did she visit the Southwest before writing her 1925 work The Professor's House. In some of the articles she wrote during the 1920s for The Denver Times, Cather described the liberating landscape of Mesa Verde and the artistic freedom it provided. Unlike the rest of urbanized America, the rustic Southwestern region struck Cather as an unspoiled source of spiritual insight. In The Professor's House, Cather presents two displaced protagonists who battle with twentieth-century American society in their quest for purity and harmony with nature. Both Professor Godfrey St. Peter and Tom Outland search for a sense of community in a changing America. Both men believe that their nation is built on self-interest and material wealth, not on intellect and tradition like that of the past civilizations of Native Americans. In America's modern world, natural wonders and ancient Native American civilizations are exploited for financial gain. Both governmental and personal institutions seem to be crumbling. The

Professor's House focuses on both the poignant friendship between St. Peter and Outland and a tragic tale of cultural exploitation to demonstrate the adverse effects of sacrificing spirituality and living in harmony with nature for materialism.

The novel's three-part structure is at times quite confusing in that one protagonist, Tom Outland, has died a decade before the novel itself begins. The three-part structure, consisting of Book One: "The Family," Book Two: "Tom Outland's Story," and Book Three: "The Professor," has been the source for much criticism and debate in terms of its unity and cohesiveness. By giving the novel a tripartite form, Cather creates a fragmented sense of human life and its fragility in the twentieth-century. All three books detail St. Peter's and Outland's feelings of isolation from their society, friends, and families. By incorporating this three-part form, Cather portrays a poignant friendship between an older, weathered Professor and a young, inspirational student. Their alienation from their worlds brings these two men together in their search for a sense of community and peace in the natural world.

In Book One: "The Family," Cather introduces the reader to Godfrey St. Peter, a middle-aged professor in Hamilton, a small, fictional college town near Lake

Michigan. St. Peter is in the midst of several transitions: publishing a set of histories, receiving a higher income, and moving into a newer, larger house. Because of the professional, personal, and artistic changes, the Professor feels alienated from his former, rather placid lifestyle. As E.K. Brown notes in Willa Cather: A Critical Biography, the Professor's alienation from society, like Cather's, is great. St. Peter thinks the "postwar students" are "common lot" and considers his younger colleagues "utilitarian, political, self-interested" (23). To make matters worse, the decline in higher education mirrors a national decline deriving from programs that he believes "have suffered by the pressure of the will of the state legislature and the community, for whom the ideal in higher education is a trade school passing under the name of college" (23). Like Cather, St. Peter is disheartened by the intellectual and cultural decline of early twentieth-century America.

St. Peter's displacement also stems from his relationships with his wife, Lillian; his two daughters, and their new husbands. In Book One, "the Family," after a shopping trip to Chicago with Rosamond, his daughter, St. Peter criticizes Rosamond's excessive materialism in a conversation with Lillian: "Too much is certainly worse than too little--of

anything. It turned out to be rather an orgy of acquisition" (135). Cather contrasts Rosamond's unneeded material possessions with the sparse furnishings of the Professor's study like his "rusty, round gas stove with no flue" (16) and his "faithful kerosene lamp" (17). Through these comparisons, Cather reaffirms her theme of a changing, materialistic America.

As a result of his alienation from his colleagues and his family, St. Peter begins to reflect on times spent with his former student, Tom Outland. These reflections form the basis for Book Two: "Tom Outland's Story," a short story that Cather published separately in Collier's before using it as the focal point for The Professor's House. When Outland walks into St. Peter's garden one sunny afternoon to ask guidance about enrollment in his college, Outland reveals both his linguistic talents and his charming nature. Outland appears quite rustic yet unique, "a turquoise set in silver . . . . Yes, a turquoise set in dull silver" (1). Like a turquoise stone, which symbolizes beauty and strength, Outland also stands apart from his surroundings as a beautiful, although displaced, stone. Representing a connection with nature and Native American civilization, Outland harbors disdain for American bureaucracy. Losing both his sacred Mesa

Verde artifacts and his best friend because of greed and America's disinterest, Outland enters the Professor's life as an alienated, questioning young man who also strikes St. Peter as a genius.

Included in the collection Cather: Stories, Poems and Other Writings is a reprinted letter of Cather's explaining the contrast of settings in The Professor's House. Cather responds:

In my book I tried to make Professor St. Peter's house rather overcrowded and stuffy with new things; American properties, clothes, furs, petty ambitions, quivering jealousies--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, and the fine disregard of trivialities which was in Tom Outland's face and in his behavior. (974)

The way Cather contrasts the Professor's cluttered world and Outland's pristine natural world compels the reader to consider twentieth-century America's preoccupation with greed. St. Peter himself recalls his friendship with Tom Outland in an attempt to recapture simplicity and peace. Woodress notes Cather's disinterest in material possessions in her later life: "As Cather became richer and richer and

America wallowed in prosperity in the years before the stock market crash in 1929, she became increasingly preoccupied with the corrupting power of money" (372). In these ways, both Godfrey St. Peter and Tom Outland become mouthpieces for Cather's changing views of a declining America. In her view, America was too concerned with personal possessions and wealth, not civility and tradition.

In Book 3, "The Professor," St. Peter reflects on Outland's death in World War I, jealously considering that through his death Outland escaped the social responsibilities caused by the money the deceased left to Rosamond. St. Peter appears to become consumed by his alienation from his family. While pondering his later years and their joylessness, St. Peter inhales asphyxiating fumes from his heater. After Augusta finds the Professor and subsequently saves his life, St. Peter considers his "temporary release from consciousness seemed to have been beneficial" (258). After his being rescued from death, St. Peter appears rejuvenated: "He had let something go--and it was gone: something very precious, that he could not consciously have relinquished, probably" (258). The Professor resolves to go meet his family and try to become interested in their "own affairs" (258). St. Peter knows he must force himself to live on and to allow his

past friendship with Tom Outland to become a memory.

Clearly the backbone for Cather's novel is Book Two, "Tom Outland's Story," a story that she based on a tale she heard from "Dick Wetherill's brother when she visited Mancos in 1915" (Woodress 375). The story portrays Outland's discovery and attempted restoration of Native American remains in the Cliff City of Mesa Verde. Tragically, Outland's trip to Washington's pretentious society causes him to distrust twentieth-century academic research and urbanized society. Outland is amazed that the couple with whom he lives in Washington D.C. concentrates on false appearances. In his view they "spent their lives trying to keep up appearances, and to make his salary do more than it could" (209). Disgusted with this preoccupation with appearance, urban status, and deceit, Tom longs for the concrete, artistic, and inspiring Southwestern elements of his life devoid of "hundreds of little black-coated men pouring out of white buildings" (213). Tom sees the daily lives of clerks and business men, quite unlike his mesa home, as monotonous, colorless, and anonymous. In his view, Washington's metropolitan residents are repressed, misguided, enslaved individuals.

Outland's spirit is extinguished by the world of Washington, a bustling city that greatly contrasts with

his tranquil Mesa Verde home. As Conrad Oswald, Jr notes: "The Cliff Dwellers preserved the natural integrity of the land and lived in harmony with it, while the pioneers changed the face of the land and commercialized it" (63). Unlike the Native Americans who worked with the land, the Washingtonians mold the landscape and technology to fit their desires for luxury. In "Tom Outland: Emerson's American Scholar in The Professor's House," Dillman recognizes a spiritual connection between Outland and his Mesa home, which appeared as a "unified whole in which the arc of the sky over the canyon was silvery blue, with its pale yellow moon, and presently stars shivered into it like crystals dropped into perfectly clear water" (382). Outland creates a union with the past Native American culture and clings to it as he would a home.

Perhaps Cather offers the idealistic Cliff City as a reminder for the self-interested, driven urban peoples of the United States to live simple lives in harmony with nature. In Willa Cather: A Critical Biography Leon Edel notes the Cliff City's charm: "Here was beauty, the beauty of pure and noble design, unspoiled by clutter and ornament, undistracted by coziness, uncontradicted by the ugliness of machinery or industry" (241). In a January 31, 1916 article in The Denver Times, Cather notes that instead of



interfering with their environment, the Native Americans "accommodated themselves to it, interpreted it and made it personal; lived in a dignified relation with it. In more senses than one they built themselves into it." (85) Yet because of American exploitation, Outland, and, in turn, his discovery of the Native American Mesa, are both used for financial gain, not as sources of scholarly or spiritual insights.

Ironically, rather than researching and exploring Outland's Native American city, the Smithsonian Institute ignores the great find and its sacred possessions. As Dillman notes: "Tom is a transcendentalist in New Mexico but a pawn in Washington where his idealism has no impact on the bureaucratic mind" (382). One clerk he meets wants to buy one of his pottery pieces to serve as an ashtray. The clerk chides Outland when he refuses to sell the artifact: "He said it had no market value, I'd find Washington full of such things; there were cases of them in the cellar of the Smithsonian that they'd never taken the trouble to unpack, hadn't any place to put them" (204). This harsh response and manipulative attitude towards art represent Washington's disinterest in cultural preservation. Instead of being a museum that represents culture and tradition, the Smithsonian is revealed through the clerk's words to be a warehouse

for objects acquired by self-serving, materialistic individuals.

The Washington bureaucracy once again reveals its shallow motivations when it overlooks the Native American site for an upcoming International Exposition in Europe. According to a secretary and new friend of Outland's, Virginia Ward, the bureaucratic elite--even those within the highly renowned Smithsonian--are only interested in "getting a free trip to Europe and acting on a jury, and maybe getting a decoration" (212). Virginia says: "They don't care much about dead and gone Indians. What they do care about is going to Paris, and getting another ribbon on their coats" (212). Sadly, America's original inhabitants, the Mesa Verde Native Americans, are overshadowed by decoration and pomp in the shallow academic world of the Smithsonian.

With America's exploitation of Native Americans comes personal defeat for Outland as well. From the minute that Outland returns to the Southwest, he learns that American materialism has crept into his beloved Cliff City and his family unit, represented by his partner, Roddy Blake. His old friend, Hook, informs him that Blake is hiding out and the townspeople are greatly dismayed:

You see, Tom, folks weren't bothered none

about the mesa so long as you fellows were playing Robinson Crusoe out there, digging up curios. But when it leaked out that Blake had got a lot of money for your stuff, then they begun to feel jealous--said them ruins didn't belong to Blake any more than anyone else. It'll blow over in time; people are always like that when money changes hands. But right now there's a good deal of bad feeling. (214)

Tom is shocked; he listens as Hook explains how an enterprising German by the name of Fechtig came in, moved all of the artifacts out on mules, and cleared out three weeks prior to Tom's arrival. Tom thinks to himself: "I wanted to see and touch everything, like home-sick children when they come home" (217). Yet for Tom, just like Nancy in Sapphira and The Slave Girl, there is no longer peace and a sense of belonging at home. Blake's deception robs Outland of his faith in perception of America's innocence. And because of Blake's action, Tom himself unwittingly has become a materialistic exploiter of nature.

However, Fechtig is not the only guilty individual in the Mesa Verde auctioning. At Blake's first words to Outland, the reader infers Blake's guilt through his defensive tone: "Don't say anything, Tom. Don't rip me

up until you hear all about it" (217). Tom responds with grief and accusation as he blames Blake for abandoning their discovery:

I admitted I'd hoped we'd be paid for our work, and maybe even get a bonus of some kind, for our discovery. But I never thought of selling them, because they weren't mine to sell--nor yours! They belonged to this country, to the State, and to all the people. They belonged to the boys like you and me, that have no other ancestors to inherit from. You've gone and sold them to a country that's got plenty of relics of its own. You've gone and sold your country's secrets, like Dreyfus. (219)

Feeling betrayed, Outland refers to Blake as the notorious French traitor Dreyfus. Tom recognizes that he and his partner had no right to sell the Native American city because they never owned it. Focusing more on the financial rewards of the sale, Blake overlooks the lack of ownership and legal connection to the land. Blake believes as though the financial profits will provide for Outland's college education. Yet the Mesa represents far more than financial gain for Outland. Even though Blake intends to provide for his friend's future, he destroys Outland's past,

leaving him with only cherished memories of the Native American culture. In a sense, Outland's roots have been torn out from under him.

America's interests in manipulation and greed also bring division and sometimes even destroy familial bonds. In the final pages of Book Two: "Tom Outland's Story," Tom wants nothing to do with the money from the Mesa's sale. He defiantly tells Blake: "You think I'd touch that money? . . . . No more than if you'd stolen it. You made the sale. Get what you can out of it" (220). Referring to it as if it had been stolen, Tom fails to view the money as rightfully his. Just as Tom won't touch Blake's money, neither will Godfrey St. Peter touch Tom's inheritance decades later, as portrayed in Book One. The Professor speaks to his daughter Kathleen in more polite terms than Tom used: "My dear daughter . . . . I couldn't possibly take any of Outland's money" (48). St. Peter's declaration of false ownership is just as defiant as was Tom's decades before.

Yet St. Peter's daughters are not so wise; they become divided over the inheritance from the Outland vacuum. Turmoil abounds when Kathleen declares her jealousy of her sister Rosamond to her father: "I am envious. I don't think I would be if she left me alone, but she comes here with her magnificence and takes the

life out of all our poor little things" (69). A rift in the sisters' once close relationship develops through the distinction between Rosamond's "magnificence" and Kathleen's "poor little things." Woodress comments on the family turmoil that stems from the unearned acquisition of wealth: "The younger daughter is jealous of her sister's wealth, and the elder has become hard, grasping, mercenary" (372). This breakdown of sibling compassion and friendship mirrors the rift between Tom and Blake over the fate of the sacred Mesa.

In her 1925 work The Professor's House, Willa Cather presents two displaced protagonists, Tom Outland and Professor St. Peter. Both Outland and Professor St. Peter view exploitation with distrust and alienation. Both men feel that theirs is a nation built on self-interest and material wealth, not culture and tradition like that of the past Native American civilizations. Financial temptations motivated by greed and desire for social status destroy human relationships and cultural preservation. Besides societal structures like the Smithsonian Institute, personal relationships and the family unit disintegrate as a result of the American quest for financial reward.

Woodress notes that in Cather's later novels, especially My Mortal Enemy(1926) and The Professor's

House(1925), "She [Cather] seems to be finding life more complex, more elusive, more irreducible than she once did. The simplicity, the openness, the warmth of Antonia no longer deeply interests her" (389).

Cather's later works, which probe the depths of human trials and defeat in an exploitative America, take on a pessimistic tone towards her once beloved country.

Rather than celebrating the joys of immigration and new experience, The Professor's House probes deeper into self-discovery and renewal, emotions that Cather's St. Peter must assume in his thoughts in Book Three "The Professor." Cather's inscription in Robert Frost's copy of this work explains her purpose in writing the novel: "This is really a story of letting go with the heart" (Woodress 367). In the concluding pages of Book Three, Professor St. Peter must let go of Outland's memory and resume his own life with his family and as a college professor. He must continue teaching in the hopes that he will once again have an outstanding student like Outland. As in Sapphira and the Slave Girl, Cather's America once again has failed to achieve its goal of providing freedom and equality for all individuals. Cather presented The Professor's House to her twentieth-century misguided American readers as a cautionary tale warning of exploitative tragedies both for groups like the Native Americans and for

individuals like Tom Outland.



### Chapter 3: Cultural Cohesion in Shadows on the Rock

In her 1931 novel Shadows on the Rock Cather presents a model society that greatly contrasts with her earlier American settings. Cather looked back in time to the seventeenth-century settlement of Quebec for purity and guidance, elements she thought her twentieth-century American audience would appreciate. The French Canadian society in Shadows on the Rock is a nurturing, cohesive group that is untarnished by the excessive materialism and racial and gender divisiveness found in the United States. The French work together in their quest for survival in the harsh Canadian wilderness.

Unlike the self-interested Americans, the French settlers band together in a common bond, mixing elements of their past, the Old World, and elements of the New World. They treasure the few luxuries they have, mainly French linens and furniture, and they generously welcome their neighbors to share their possessions. In his essay "Willa Cather: American Experience and European Tradition" Woodress notes Cather's "happy marriage" of the two worlds:

The New World experience in her novels gives them character and drama, color, and romance

--the emotional content. The Old World experience provides the texture, the ancient myth and the symbol, the profundity--the intellectual content. (47)

Cather's mixing of the traditional and modern realms in Shadows on the Rock provides a perfect society, shaped by intellect and tradition yet placed in a bright new setting in the New World.

Cather's admiration for the traditional French way of life dates back to her childhood and schooling. As Sharon O'Brien notes in her 1984 essay, "The Thing Not Named," Cather felt that France was "the sign for everything repressed or feared in commercial, puritanical northern climes: it was the decadent, liberated realm of the senses" (588). To Cather the French culture represented a classical, artistic influence for her pioneering characters in Shadows on the Rock. By combining elements of the Old and New Worlds the French survive and flourish unmotivated by self-interest.

In Shadows on the Rock seventeenth-century Quebec is portrayed as a rustic community for the French pioneers. By beginning with a letter written by her character Sister Marie de L'Incarnation to one of her sisters in 1653, Cather reveals an image of a seedling society, transplanted into a new world and germinating

in a new environment. In French, Marie declares: "You ask me for seeds of this country. France was our garden . . . . Everything here is savage, the flowers and the men alike" (1). Like Marie de l'Incarnation, the French settlers portrayed in Shadows on the Rock have been transplanted into a new, harsher way of life, quite a contrast from their original gardens in France. Yet their great achievement is that they survive and flourish on the frontier. In his 1990 study After The World Broke in Two: The Later Novels of Willa Cather, Skaggs notes that Cather's Quebec is "shaped by mothers who pass along necessary knowledge before they die, and by fathers--natural, governmental, and clerical--who live to care for their own" (139). As Skaggs notes, Quebec represents a connected society, one that is united in purpose and tradition.

Cather's novel centers on the life of one young girl, Cecile, and her everyday activities. Unlike Cather's displaced American protagonists, Cecile is grounded in her love of her home and for the other settlers. Losing her mother to sickness, Cecile does her best to make her home comfortable and pleasant for her father and all of their visitors. Like a newly planted seed, Cecile works to mold the Old and New Worlds into her home, which is figuratively not made of "wood and cloth and glass and a little silver," but

rather "of very fine moral qualities in two women: the mother's unswerving fidelity to certain tradition, and the daughter's loyalty to her mother's wishes" (21). Incorporating her mother's traditional refinement and her own concepts of order and beauty in her new environment, Cecile represents the first generation of French Canadians.

The image of a home in the wild terrain is important in Shadows on the Rock. Cecile and her father, Monsieur Auclair, the town apothecary, are frequently portrayed working in the shop, cooking dinner, or resting by the fire. The house is well insulated by the harsh forces of nature with "double walls, with sawdust and ashes filling the space between the two frames, making a protection nearly four feet thick against the winter cold" (8). With its tough construction, the insulated home serves as a reminder of the fragility of life on the rock of Quebec. In his 1951 work Willa Cather David Daiches notes that Cather creates unifying threads in and beyond the settlement of Quebec:

the domestic interiors and the way in which they are related, in ever widening circles, to the settlement of the rock as a whole, to the challenging world of nature beyond, and to the Old World across the ocean are

particularly effective in plotting the unity of the settlement with their past and future.

(127)

The Auclairs' circle widens to accept all people and provides comfort in the vast, frigid Canadian wilderness. With sacred traditions of the past and determined hopeful inhabitants, Quebec offers a haven of peace and harmony in the New World.

Cather not only portrays the significance of a warm, supportive home but also emphasizes the Auclair family's disinterest in acquiring material possessions. The Auclairs are thankful for their few possessions and mild luxuries, a box from Cecile's aunts back home, and seek no more. They even patiently wait to open a package for months until Christmas arrives. Noting the Auclair's satisfaction, Shanley declares that:

"none of them sacrifices the enjoyment of life to the getting of things; and as they give themselves generously, they reap in abundance the contentment that comes with human understanding and love" (626). Human understanding and love, not subservience and control, are important qualities in the Quebec Cather describes. The French Canadians, represented by the Auclair family, create their own system of morality and values based on these virtues.

By discounting the importance of material wealth

in Quebec, Cather further illustrates America's preoccupation with ownership and personal wealth. Quite unlike Rosamond in The Professor's House, a young girl in another French settlement becomes a religious recluse, giving up both her family and her wealth. The young recluse is free to choose her lifestyle without being influenced by material wealth and ownership. Woodress notes Cather's ideology: "We haven't yet acquired the good sense of discrimination possessed by the French. The problem lies in our posterity, our judging success in terms of dollars" (355). Cather certainly reveals the American preoccupation with finances in "Tom Outland's Story" and the problems acquiring wealth causes individuals, families, friends, nature, and society as a whole. Yet in Shadows on the Rock, finances play a minor role in the Auclair family's world, which thrives on order, compassion, and peace.

Shadows on the Rock presents a variety of all classes living together on the rock and working for the common good: survival. Traditional social distinctions have little significance in the daily lives of the French settlers. The Cobbler, Noel Pommier, refuses to be rushed by the pompous Monseigneur de Saint-Vallier or even the Bishop: "He would not hurry a piece of work for anybody,--not for the Count or the Intendant or the

Bishop" (63). Pommier candidly tells the Monseigneur to have his shoes made in France if he is not satisfied with his service. Towards the conclusion of the novel, Auclair also stands up to this same Monseigneur when questioned about the Count's maladies. The apothecary refuses to comply with contemporary conventions such as leeching the sick Count. Thus, social distinctions and codes in Shadows on the Rock are built on morals and the rights of the working classes, not social prestige. Shanley notes the communal ideas of the French settlers in Shadows on the Rock: "There was a generosity, born of courage and peace of mind, a lack of scrambling for mere possessions, in the lives of all these characters" (626). Rather than manipulating each other, the characters in Quebec concentrate on working together on their rock, which Cather describes as an altar: "gleaming above the river like an altar with many candles, or like a holy city in an old legend, shriven, sinless, washed in gold" (137). Quebec is portrayed as a holy city, marvelously washed in gold, a place of acceptance and renewal for all of the French settlers.

One of the most poignant examples of group nurturing occurs when the Auclairs feed and protect their deformed worker, Blinker. Author Dorothy McFarland in her 1972 work Willa Cather notes the significance of this act of kindness:

Through the Auclairs' encounters with their friends and neighbors there emerges a vivid pictorial image of the rock of Quebec . . . and its citizens, from the misshapen creature Blinker, whom the Auclairs befriend out of kindness, the little boy Jacques Gaux, to whom Cecile is half playmate and half mother, and the cobbler and his lame mother on Holy Family Hill. (112)

The reader views the French settlement as a varied society, a complete group living and working together for the common good.

Another example of independent yet compassionate living involves Bishop Laval and the offspring of 'Toinette Gaux, the town prostitute. The Bishop and the Auclairs protect and practically rear the town prostitute's son, Jacques. The Bishop finds the young child searching for his mother in the snow one frigid night. Bishop Laval has him bathed, puts him to sleep in his own bed, and then harshly reprimands the mother, 'Toinette Gaux, reminding her of every creature's responsibilities and rights: "His silence was so dreadful that it was a relief when he began to thunder and tell her that even the beasts of the forest protected their young" (62). Like the protective Bishop, Cecile also acts as the caretaker of the young



lad. She is both a mother and an older sister to the young, impressionable, good-willed Jacques. No one questions her motivations or their relationship; she merely seeks to help him when his irresponsible mother falters.

Besides forming a cohesive society, the Quebec settlers are also optimistic about their new setting. The New World represents a fresh chance for the French settlers. Euclide Auclair is thankful to leave certain miseries and injustices in the Old World of France:

People died of starvation in the streets of Paris . . . . All the while the fantastic extravagances of the Court grew more outrageous. The wealth of the nation, of the grain lands and vineyards and forests of France, was sunk in creating the pleasure palace at Versailles. The richest peers of the realm were ruining themselves on magnificent Court dresses and jewels. And, with so many new abuses, the old ones never grew less; torture and cruel punishments increased as the poor became poorer and more desperate. (26)

Auclair reflects on the tragic plight of his French civilization; the French citizens hunger and suffer to pay taxes to support Versailles, a "pleasure palace"

for the King and his court. These materialistic motivations remind one of Washington society in The Professor's House, or Sapphira's elaborate dinner parties with overworked servants fanning guests in Sapphira and the Slave Girl. Auclair and his family journeyed to Canada to escape the evils of the French government and its excuses. In this new land, Auclair seeks a new home and a renewed sense of order and justice.

Outside of Quebec's closely knit community of French descendants, several of the French settlers work with the indigenous people of the area, the Hurons. Even though there are some undercurrents of fear stemming from the Iroquois Attack of 1648, historically the French were strongly allied with the Huron tribe. When the French in Shadows on the Rock remember the Iroquois attack of 1648, it is important to note that the Iroquois were not only battling the French but also with the Hurons. Competition among the Europeans for Indian allies was quite rampant. In his 1993 work Chronicle of the Indian Wars, historian Alan Axelrod notes:

It was the Europeans who forced this crisis. The directors of the Dutch West India Company, seeking a chance to usurp trade from the French, decided on April 7, 1648, to

reverse their policy against trading arms to the Indians and sold Mohawks about 400 rifles. In effect, the Dutch were arming their Indian allies against the French-backed Hurons. (43)

The European imperialistic powers then, particularly the Dutch, were behind much of the Native American warfare in Canada.

In her 1931 letter to Governor Wilbur Cross of Connecticut, Cather reveals her intention to depict tolerant aspects of Quebec rather than the exploitative ones. Part of a collection in an anthology entitled Willa Cather: Stories, Poems and Other Writings, Cather's letter explains her source for the novel. She informs the Governor that the domestic life of the Auclairs interested her "more than Indian raids or wild life in the forests" (966). Cather writes: "Those people brought a kind of French culture there and somehow kept it alive on the rock" (966). Cather illustrates her point by creating a distinct contrast between belligerence on one hand and cultural cohesion and survival on the other. Cather does not portray the Native Americans as uncivilized savages, as do many American writers such as James Fenimore Cooper does in many instances, but rather reveals them as people with whom the French will integrate.

Quite unlike the Smithsonian Institute in The Professor's House, the French Canadians in Shadows on the Rock treat the Native Americans with the utmost respect and recognition. The Count's young guard, called Giorgio, announces their arrival to the Count's palace as he would other noble visitors. Cather illustrates Giorgio's political duties: "Giorgio was stationed there to announce the arrival of the commanding officer, and of all distinguished persons by a flourish of his drum" (44). Giorgio extends the same honor to the Native American leaders: "For all Indian chiefs and messengers, too, Giorgio could beat his drum long and loud" (45). Visiting Native Americans, then, receive the same recognition upon arriving in Quebec as do other leaders.

The French not only respect the Native Americans but also admire them for their knowledge of nature and medicine. Pierre Charron, a friend of the Auclairs, particularly respects the strengths of the Native American cultures. As Pierre Charron later recounts to Euclide Auclair, he and a Catholic priest would have surely died if they had not been saved by a generous and strong Native American. Charron relates to Auclair: "When he saw what a bad way we were in, he made a fire quick and cooked the hares, -and he ate very little of that meat himself. He said Indians could

bear hunger better than the French" (116). Charron's story illustrates the human kindness and great strength that Cather allows her French Canadians to witness among the Native Americans. Another character in the novel, the Reverend Mother, notes the Native Americans' bravery and endurance: "When the Indians have a sprain in the woods, they bind their leg tightly with deer thongs and keep on the march with their party. And they recover" (28). The Sister's words illustrate her admiration for the Native American traits of strength and persistence.

Like a true pioneer in the New World, Pierre values tradition and innovation. He knows the ways of the wilderness, yet he also understands the importance of refinement, a trait he exhibits when in town visiting his mother. Pierre is wealthy not in an financial sense but rather in spiritual and natural ways. These characteristics earn him the respect and admiration of young Cecile, who thinks to herself: "[H]e had authority, and a power which came from knowledge of the country and its people . . . . His daring and his pride seemed to her more splendid than Count Frontenac's" (217). Thus, the charismatic Pierre has charm and knowledge of the New World. Through her portrayal of Cecile's childhood idealization of him, Cather foreshadows the couple's marriage, a union that

will eventually produce the pair's four Canadian-born sons.

These notions contrast with the actions of Cather's declining twentieth-century America. In The Professor's House the greatest of American museums is too preoccupied with a European conference to preserve an archaeological wonder created by its first inhabitants. Unlike the twentieth-century Americans, the French Canadians respect the Native Americans' understanding of the earth and nature and their ability to adapt to their environment. They seek to understand and learn the Native American ways, not to ostracize them for their differences.

In Shadows on the Rock, Cather presents several components that suggest she intends for readers to regard her vision of Quebec as an ideal society. The French inhabitants are not confined to social stratification, nor do they emphasize material wealth. Rather, the settlers celebrate what gifts they have and share them generously. Loyalty and compassion are guiding forces for the French Canadians. As Skaggs notes: "[I]n Quebec Cather spotted a new and interesting place that seemed to her to represent something she at that point yearned for: stability and undisrupted cultural continuity" (131). With her friends and family weakening because of old age and

sickness, Cather's thoughts were uplifted by recreating the story of Quebec's cohesive community and perseverance of the French settlers.

Cather relates Euclide Auclair's last words eloquently in the novel, tying together her emphasis on themes of the value of discovery, perseverance, and morality. After speaking with the greatly altered and humbled Monseigneur Saint-Vallier, who returns to Quebec after many years in France, Auclair ponders the news of his homeland and his new home, in which he could "spend his old age here where nothing changed; to watch his grandsons grow up in a country where the death of the King, the probable evils of a long regency, would never touch them" (229). Auclair is thankful that he has escaped the political evils and hardships of his native France. In Quebec, he has lived in an isolated yet comforting community. In this New World, the Canadians escape the grasp of power, servitude, and manipulation in their mother country, France.

The French Canadian society of Quebec celebrates cultural tradition, opportunity, and development, positive elements that a disheartened Willa Cather saw declining in her own country. In his 1984 essay "The French-Canadian Connection: Willa Cather as a Canadian Writer" Benjamin George notes that in Quebec Cather

found "respect for the maintenance of the traditions of the past and European culture, making for a refuge of all she valued in the midst of a world which she found distasteful"(270). In her "distasteful world" Cather praises Shadows on The Rock's Quebec for its greatness and beauty, presenting it as a model society for all Americans to emulate. The mixture of cultural tradition and an innovative, compassionate community makes it a strong society that will survive coming hardships. Quebec, then, is portrayed as a society built on cultural cohesion, quite unlike the worlds of both Sapphira and the Slave Girl and The Professor's House, which illustrate American exploitation, manipulation, and greed.



### Conclusion

Cather's message in these later novels is clear. As she matured, she viewed her America as deficient in significant ways. Manipulation and materialism, not intellect and cultural appreciation, had come to dominate American minds. Instead of upholding cultural acceptance and opportunity, America was bending to the pressures of social status and abusing other cultures. In Sapphira and the Slave Girl, Sapphira and Martin use Nancy as their rag doll, their toy to taunt and torment. They never consider her, or any of the African American slaves, as an equal human being. In The Professor's House, the Smithsonian, a national symbol of scientific preservation and scholarly study, is too concerned with European affairs and awards to preserve Mesa Verde, a prominent Native American site. These examples reflect a tendency for Americans to overlook African and Native Americans and to manipulate them to further the interests of the dominant culture.

In her later works, then, Cather speaks out against manipulation and exploitation by demonstrating her characters' desires to escape their confining environments. For only outside their original environments do Nancy in Sapphira and the Slave Girl

and Tom in The Professor's House gain enlightenment, education, and hope. Rather than respect individuals like Native and African Americans, Cather's America was attempting to force a common bond among all people of the nation. In Cather's mind, early twentieth-century America was becoming manipulative, evil, and materialistic. As Cather once stated, rather than respect groups like Native Americans, America's social workers "go after them, hound them, pursue them, and devote their days and nights toward the great task of turning them into stupid replicas of smug American citizens" (Woodress 356). Hers was not a respectful, cohesive society, but one built on exploitation and inhumanity.

However, Cather's French Canadian society in Shadows on the Rock greatly contrasts with the dismal American settings found in Sapphira and the Slave Girl and The Professor's House. In Quebec the townspeople live in harmony with each other. Unlike the greedy, self-serving Americans portrayed in Sapphira and the Slave Girl and The Professor's House, the French Canadians in Quebec live in a cohesive, accepting community. Differing from their American neighbors who undermine African and Native Americans, the French Canadian society treats the natives and nature with respect. Incorporating cultural and intellectual

traditions from their mother country, France, the Canadians combine elements of their past with their New World setting. Canada, then, becomes a land of cohesive cultural living, a model for the exploitative America.

As Cather grew older, the world seemed to her chaotic and out of control. As the twentieth-century progressed, she observed a lack of appreciation for beauty, nature, and intellect. In their place were materialism, self-advancement, and hostility. As Edel notes in "Willa Cather: Paradox of Success," Cather was greatly affected by the troubling global news and her own personal losses. During World War II she declared: "There seems to be no future at all for people of my generation" (309). In the 1920's and 1930's Cather viewed the belligerent world with a more questioning eye than she had earlier in her career. Cather remarked:

Why should the beautiful cities that were a thousand years in the making tumble down on our heads now . . . . Now countries were being sponged off the map, just as the kids used to do when they had drawn them on the blackboard of school. (Woodress 497)

Cather felt as if she were witnessing global destruction instead of intellectual advancement.

Her honesty and understanding of human weakness, especially the desire to manipulate nature and people, makes Cather an inspiring writer. In Sapphira and the Slave Girl, The Professor's House, and Shadows on the Rock, she creates powerful contrasts between the American and Canadian societies within the New World. Her comparisons suggest that twentieth-century Americans appear to be in moral and intellectual decline. Individuals are displaced, family units are destroyed, and American institutions, represented by the Smithsonian, are corrupt. Unlike the manipulative Americans, the French Canadians create the genuine New World dream, the true City on a Hill. Through its accepting and nurturing community, the settlement of Quebec in Cather's Shadows on the Rock serves as a model society for the exploitative Americans to emulate.

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