

Student Work

---

6-1-1965

## Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill: A bond of tragedy

Marilyn Miller Marsh

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/studentwork>

---

### Recommended Citation

Marsh, Marilyn Miller, "Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill: A bond of tragedy" (1965). *Student Work*. 3250.  
<https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/studentwork/3250>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Work by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact [unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu](mailto:unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu).



**WILLA CATHER AND EUGENE O'NEILL: A BOND OF TRAGEDY**

**A Thesis**

**Presented to the  
Department of English  
and the  
Faculty of the College of Graduate Studies  
University of Omaha**

**In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts**

**by**

**Marilyn Miller Marsh**

**June 1965**

UMI Number: EP74649

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI EP74649

Published by ProQuest LLC (2015). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

Accepted for the faculty of the College of Graduate  
Studies of the University of Omaha, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts.

P. D. Harper English  
Chairman Department

Graduate Committee

<u>Name</u>	<u>Department</u>
<u>Paul L. Beck</u>	<u>History</u>
<u>Thomas P. Walsh</u>	<u>English</u>
<u>Clifford Anderson</u>	<u>Philosophy</u>
<u>Ralph M. Wardle</u>	<u>English</u>

## CONTENTS

### Acknowledgments

I.	The Two Worlds . . . . .	1
II.	The Lonely Quest . . . . .	27
III.	The Tragic Necessity . . . . .	59
IV.	The Sickness of Today . . . . .	98
V.	The Force Behind . . . . .	136
VI.	The Gift of Sympathy . . . . .	174

### Bibliography

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The preparation of a thesis involves far more than the research and writing performed by its author. It involves the encouragement and aid of countless others. Those to whom I am most indebted and appreciative are Dean Robert D. Harper, who suggested the initial literary correlation from which this paper grew, and who constantly offered stimulation and advice in his advisory role; my husband, P. Wayne Marsh, who demonstrated endless patience; my sister, Mrs. James R. Mansfield, who contributed invaluable assistance in manuscript preparation, and the University of Omaha library staff, which provided many services.

## CHAPTER I

### THE TWO WORLDS

Liberation, emancipation, freedom--all have been used to describe the particular nature of the United States' post World War I era; certainly, the period manifested these characteristics, but along with its revolution in manners and morals, the roar of the 1920s brought with it a renaissance in American literature. Primarily, the time was one of ferment and limitless variety: a time when writers, freed from tradition by the catalyst of war, could experiment with new forms and techniques; a time when they could reject nineteenth-century idealism in favor of criticism; a time when they could explain man's behavior with the new psychology of Freud, and a time when they could record the effects of science, technology, and urbanization upon a nation previously agrarian and self-contained. The height of American drama was reached during this period, and the direction of American poetry would never be the same following Eliot's The Wasteland. Still, the age is remembered as one of frantic gaiety and frivolous pastime.

The gaiety, however, did not obscure a fundamental problem which faced the writers of this period, whether they be just emerging or at the peak of recognition: that was the

problem of human responsibility. For the traditionalist, man, through the exertion of conscious will, could overcome obstacles by adhering to moral absolutes. For the naturalist, however, man was subject to direction by antagonistic forces greater than himself. This was the philosophy of disillusionment, of the new generation "grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken."<sup>1</sup>

Within this age of flux appeared Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill--two apparent literary opposites, brought into the same literary period by its characteristic diversity. Fifteen years older than O'Neill, Miss Cather published her first book, The Troll Garden, in 1905, eight years before O'Neill wrote his first play, A Wife for a Life. Furthermore, she preceded the twenties in spirit as well as in chronology, using modernism as a tool of literary technique rather than as substance. She brought to narrative writing a subtlety of tone and a selective realism reminiscent of the earlier Henry James, and she would have been the first to disavow any influence upon the young writers of the twenties, whose talent she disdained. Interestingly, the genteel Miss Cather professed complete aversion to the contemporary theater and its leading playwright. As Elizabeth Sergeant puts it: "O'Neill's stark revelations of lust, fear, weakness, cruelty, even poignant

---

<sup>1</sup>F. Scott Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), p. 304.



goodness, on the stage, offended her taste. Why spend an evening in Hades when there were still good comedies of manners--even of morals, say Galsworthy's, on Broadway?"<sup>2</sup>

In contrast, O'Neill caught the public interest largely because of his modernism and personal flair; his plays were characterized by innovative subject matter as well as technique. Fashionably bohemian in the sense that he rejected Victorian gentility and puritanical prissiness both personally and professionally, he was strongly influenced by the impact of psychology, and, like others of his age, brought to the stage topics which rarely before had left the bedroom. Always searching for a new method of presentation, he ranged from naturalism to realism to symbolism to expressionism, seldom perfecting one form before moving on to another.

The literary worlds of the two, as well as their attitudes, were different: Miss Cather writing of the prairie, "buried in wheat and corn, under stimulating extremes of climate; burning summers when the world lies green and billowy beneath a brilliant sky, when one is fairly stifled in vegetation, in the colour and smell of strong weeds and heavy harvests; blustery winters with little snow, when the whole country is stripped bare and grey as sheet-iron. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>Elizabeth Sergeant, Willa Cather: A Memoir (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1953), p. 209.

<sup>3</sup>Willa Cather, My Antonia (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1918), Introduction, p. 1.

O'Neill writing of the Hell Hole and Jimmy the Priest's-- saloons in which chairs and tables and degenerates are crowded together, in which toilet doors bear "This is it" signs, and in which windows are "glazed with grime."<sup>4</sup> The characters in Miss Cather's world are pioneers, who, imbued with a feeling for nature and a tenacious will, are able to overcome the elements and impose order upon the wild land. Their struggle to build an agricultural civilization from the prairie is a difficult one; for Miss Cather it is a test of their creative power and their moral courage. O'Neill's characters are sailors, derelicts, and prostitutes--homeless beings whose tragedy is that of not knowing what to struggle for. Unlike Miss Cather's pioneers, they exist in an age in which their creative power is first frustrated, then made non-existent, and they are tormented by forces beyond their control. Nature no longer holds a central position in their lives; substituted for it are the mysteries of human personality. Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill, then, appear to hold contrasting conceptions of man's position in the universe, Miss Cather embracing the traditional view of man's self-responsibility, O'Neill feeling that man is doomed by the absence of relevant values.

---

<sup>4</sup>Eugene O'Neill, The Iceman Cometh, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, 3 vols. (New York: Random House, 1954), stage directions, Act I. All subsequent references up to and including The Iceman Cometh are to this edition.

The personal worlds of Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill differed just as much as their literary worlds seemed to. Willa Cather was the product of a rural society, and, as a child of nine, moved with her family from Virginia to Nebraska. After a year on a homestead in Webster County, the family moved to Red Cloud, a town of twenty-five thousand. The contrast between the regions was profound, even to a nine-year-old. Virginia was an old land with a settled social aristocracy; Nebraska was as yet untamed, as a land and as a society. In Virginia, the young Willa had known nothing of the struggle for survival; in Nebraska, she could not avoid experiencing it. As she related her childhood: "This country was mostly wild pasture and as naked as the back of your hand. I was little and homesick and nobody paid any attention to us. So the country and I had it out together and by the end of the first autumn, that shaggy grass country had gripped me with a passion I have never been able to shake. It has been the happiness and the curse of my life."<sup>5</sup> From this tie made in her youth with the great, new land and its immigrant farmers, Miss Cather found the setting and the conflicts which were to influence her most successful work. As a college student, she experienced a period of rebellion toward the land, truly

---

<sup>5</sup>Cather, quoted in an interview by Eva Mahoney, The Omaha Sunday World Herald. (November 27, 1921), magazine section, p. 7.

regarding it as a curse, but her antagonism was brief and was followed by a near idolization of the prairie. As she stated in a 1921 interview:

Whenever I crossed the Missouri River coming into Nebraska the very smell of the soil tore me to pieces. I could not decide which was the real and which the fake me. I almost decided to settle down on a quarter section of land and let my writing go. My deepest affection was not for the other people and the other places I had been writing about. I loved the country where I had been a kid, where they still called me Willie Cather. . . .

. . . . .  
I knew every farm, every tree, every field in the region around my home and they all called out to me. My deepest feelings were rooted in this country because one's strongest emotions and one's most vivid mental pictures are acquired before one is fifteen.<sup>6</sup>

Eugene O'Neill, on the other hand, was the product of an urban, theatrical background. O'Neill's father was James O'Neill, the actor, whose The Count of Monte Cristo made him famous and required extensive touring. Eugene, typically, was born in a Broadway hotel room and nursed behind the wings and in the dressing rooms of various theaters. With no home base, O'Neill gained a feeling of rootlessness unrelieved by the boarding schools of his youth.

His sporadic home life was the reverse of Willa Cather's settled, multi-generation family. The eldest of seven children,

---

<sup>6</sup>Cather, quoted in the interview cited in preceding footnote, p. 7.

Willa spent a great deal of time with her brothers and sisters and could learn much from her Southern grandmother. <sup>Sargent</sup> Mildred R. Bennett notes that Willa Cather was particularly close to her father, and grief-stricken at his death.<sup>7</sup> It was her mother, however, who guided the young Willa toward knowledge and culture. In contrast, Eugene O'Neill's family situation was anything but settled. Though his father's greed had made the elder O'Neill a miser, of far greater significance for Eugene was his discovery, at the age of twelve, that his mother was addicted to drugs. Shortly after that, the young O'Neill refused to take further religious instruction at his Catholic school; at fifteen he left the church completely. In addition to all this, his brother, Jamie, had been expelled from school and by the age of twenty had become a cynical alcoholic.<sup>8</sup>

The contrasting pattern of stability versus instability followed the two writers into adulthood. After being granted a degree by the University of Nebraska, Willa Cather went to Pittsburgh, where she engaged herself in newspaper work and teaching prior to gaining a position on McClure's Magazine in New York. It was not until approximately seven years later,

---

<sup>Sargent</sup>  
<sup>7</sup>Mildred R. Bennett, The World of Willa Cather, Revised ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. 28.

<sup>\*</sup>Arthur and Barbara Gelb, O'Neill (New York: Harper and Bros., 1962), p. 71.

after publication of The Troll Garden, Alexander's Bridge, and O Pioneers! that she freed herself to write exclusively. Her personal life she kept private; it seemingly merited no comment or rumor. Only two of her friends, Edith Lewis, with whom she lived for some time, and Elizabeth Sergeant, have written memoirs, and they are not extremely informative. Both, however, recall that Miss Cather had a great enthusiasm for life and a similar capacity with which to express it--but only to a select few. To people in general, she remained as remote as she had to her college classmates in Lincoln. According to Elizabeth Sergeant, she had no circle of intimates, and never sought to use her growing success to cultivate "Important People."<sup>9</sup> Genuinely, bluffly, almost awkwardly she cared, come hell or high water, for the loyal friends who gathered about her,--with no underground motives of self interest or social esteem."<sup>10</sup> Miss Cather never married, nor did romance seem to have had any significance in her life. Biographers suggest at least one proposal by a Pittsburgh physician, but nothing is revealed in her creative work, and her will prohibits publication of personal correspondence. For the most part, she lived alone or with friends until her death in 1957. Gradually, she came to believe that fame was robbing

---

<sup>9</sup> Sergeant, p. 130.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

her of freedom and valuable time, but it did not seem to change her mode of life; she continued to enjoy it "at a leisurely pace with no car, radio, nor any other time-abridger to mar it."<sup>11</sup>

The personal pace of Eugene O'Neill was anything but leisurely. By the time he reached thirty, he had spent nearly six months in a tuberculosis sanitarium; he had been expelled from Princeton; he had married and divorced Katharine Jenkins, who bore him a son; he had been a seaman on a three-year voyage; he had begun writing and had participated in George Pierce Baker's Harvard playwriting class; he had become a member of the Provincetown Players, and he had attempted suicide with an overdose of veronal. In 1919, he married Agnes Boulton, only to divorce her eleven years and two children later in order to marry Carlotta Monterrey, the actress. The termination of his marriage to Agnes was accompanied by the development on O'Neill's part of an almost fanatical hatred toward his wife, marked by a complete rejection of their children. This was not surprising in terms of the great contrasts in character he evidenced. Biographers note that even as a child, O'Neill spent a good deal of time in an imaginary world to escape the reality of his sordid home life, and George Jean Nathan recalls that O'Neill had a dislike of meeting people

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 202.

amounting to terror.<sup>12</sup> At other times, however, he was extremely convivial, and at one point in his life, spent most of his time at Jimmy the Priest's, a favorite saloon. Alcohol proved so much of a problem for him that he later gave it up, influenced in this decision at least partially by psychoanalysis. Greatly troubled by early family problems, O'Neill provided little more stability for his own children: his eldest son committed suicide, his second son became a drug addict and died a comparatively young man, and his daughter married a man thirty-six years her senior and was subsequently disinherited. Finally, plagued by a long nerve illness which made it impossible for him to write, O'Neill died in 1953, six years after the death of Willa Cather.

These two writers--Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill--brought to the twenties contrasting worlds: the world of simple, agrarian virtue where truth is absolute, and the world of contemporary complexity where truth is undiscernable. Furthermore, they exerted significant influence on their genres, and for themselves achieved a literary eminence which has far outlived that of most of their contemporaries. The contrast between the two, however, obvious as it seems, is misleading, and to accept it completely is to ignore the changes which occur in the cycles of each author's work.

---

<sup>12</sup>George Jean Nathan, The Intimate Notebooks of George Jean Nathan (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932), p. 25.



Paradoxically, though Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill brought far different worlds to American literature, the message of their works is essentially the same. As has been mentioned previously, the two authors differed in their conception of human responsibility, Miss Cather feeling that man alone is responsible for his rise and fall, and O'Neill indicating that man is helpless, confronted by forces beyond his control. The change of thinking which brought them together belongs to Willa Cather, for it became the tragedy of her life to admit, ultimately, that with the decline of the pioneer era, man's omnipotent will diminished also, conquered by changes within contemporary society. Her pioneers were not the only characters of whom Miss Cather wrote, but they were the most dominant, for they gradually became the ideals against which she evaluated all others as well as society itself. Consequently, Miss Cather came to share not only the aversion toward life that O'Neill had had almost since childhood, but his tragic conception of life as well.

Though some chronological parallels may be developed, the thematic parallel which relates Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill is of greater significance.<sup>13</sup> This theme involves

---

<sup>13</sup>Of interest are these chronological parallels: The year 1918 marked the appearance of both My Antonia and Beyond the Horizon, the works establishing the merits of both authors. The year 1922 marked the entrance of both into social criticism with the publication and production of One of Ours and The Hairy Ape.

three phases: first, a concern for determining values by which to live; second, a criticism of society; and third, a veneration of the past. While developing as writers themselves, both Miss Cather and O'Neill projected their search for a philosophy of art into a greater, thematic search for values which not only encompass, but extend beyond man. Miss Cather's works in this vein include The Troll Garden, Alexander's Bridge, O Pioneers!, The Song of the Lark, My Antonia, and Youth and the Bright Medusa. O'Neill's comparable works include Beyond the Horizon, The Straw, Anna Christie, The Emperor Jones, and Diff'rent. The second thematic phase includes Miss Cather's One of Ours, A Lost Lady, The Professor's House, and My Mortal Enemy, and O'Neill's Marco Millions, The Great God Brown, and Dynamo. In these works both writers examined the current age, in which they saw science and technology robbing man of his traditional values, substituting instead the vices of greed and materialism. The final phase includes the last works of each author, and indicates a retreat into historical writing.

✕ It is primarily with the first two phases that this thesis is concerned, for it is here that the thematic relationship between the two writers is not only observable, but significant. Almost without exception, the main characters of this period are searching for something: Thea Kronberg searches for her identity as an artist; Robert Mayo seeks that

elusive self-fulfillment which lies "beyond the horizon"; Claude Wheeler hopes to find in war the meaning he could not find on a Midwestern farm; Yank strives to realize identity with some segment of human life. All are lonely, alienated from the mainstream of life; all are attempting to determine its meaning. A great proportion of the works of Miss Cather and O'Neill, then, may be viewed as variations on the theme of quest. This quest motif becomes the dominating theme upon which subsidiary themes are based.

Interestingly, critics of both Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill have noted the presence of this motif. No one, however, has suggested a parallel in the way in which the two authors explore it. One critical study of Miss Cather finds in her novels of the frontier "an allegory of quest--the individual's seeking and finding a direction of life. . . ."14 Another says of her, "she herself was engaged in a search, a lifelong quest for value. . . ."15 A contemporary of O'Neill mentions in his critical biography that in the plays "always it is the quest that counts--the quest that never ends, the search for happiness, the hope for an ultimate meaning and

---

<sup>14</sup>Edward A. and Lillian D. Bloom, Willa Cather's Gift of Sympathy (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962), p. 14.

<sup>15</sup>John H. Randall, The Landscape and the Looking Glass (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960), p. xi.

justification of life."<sup>16</sup>

Another plane of interpretation regards the quest motif as an expression of the writers' personalities. Maxwell Geismar sees the entire body of Miss Cather's work as an expression of a personal-literary search for a "sort of transcendent splendor in life. . . ."<sup>17</sup> And Doris V. Falk feels that O'Neill's plays are united by his own personal need to discover the identity of self.<sup>18</sup> Still others say O'Neill spends his life searching for meaning in life in which he can believe as ardently as he once did Catholicism.

Of perhaps equal significance in explaining the origin of the quest motif for both authors is the common dislike Miss Cather and O'Neill had for contemporary society. As has been mentioned, both devoted a portion of their writing to a denunciation of a society in which they felt materialism and mechanization were obliterating man's finer qualities and destroying his creative, powerful will. It was society, as

---

<sup>16</sup>Barrett Clark, Eugene O'Neill (New York: R. M. McBride, 1927), pp. 55-56.

<sup>17</sup>Maxwell Geismar, The Last of the Provincials (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1947), p. 186.

<sup>18</sup>Doris V. Falk, Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1958), p. 3.

well, which was destroying man's traditional values and offering no comparable replacement. O'Neill put his feeling in a letter to George Jean Nathan: "The playwright of today must dig at the roots of the sickness of today as he feels it--the death of the old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfactory new one for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with."<sup>19</sup>

For O'Neill, the twentieth century was disrupting man's psychological well being; for Miss Cather it was destroying his moral strength. Consequently, the characters of both--as representatives of contemporary man--are alienated from the nature of self and the meaning of life. The quest they make, therefore, is a dual one, occurring on both individual and universal levels of meaning. First, they search within their own souls; next, they seek meaning in their relationships with other human beings; and finally, they hope for a revelation within society at large. When their searching fails, they attempt, in O'Neill's plays, to create their own value structure, while in Miss Cather's work they often remain either helpless or become themselves propagators of the detested new creeds of science and materialism. The mutual pessimism toward their time exhibited by both Miss

---

<sup>19</sup>O'Neill in a letter to George Jean Nathan, reprinted in The Intimate Notebooks of George Jean Nathan, p. 180.

Cather and O'Neill helps to explain the sense of isolation and failure which permeates much of their work, creating ultimately Matthew Arnold's "high seriousness" and what comes very close in the twentieth century to a truly tragic vision.

Ultimately, her dislike for the present became a revulsion for Willa Cather--so much so, that she isolated herself from it completely. After publication of My Mortal Enemy in 1926, she never again set a major work in the twentieth century. The appearance in 1927 of Death Comes For the Archbishop marked her entrance into not only a past age, but a foreign culture. This descriptive approach to historical writing was repeated in Shadows on the Rock, published in 1933, and in Miss Cather's last novel, Sapphira and the Slave Girl, published in 1940. Her other works during this final creative phase--Obscure Destinies, Lucy Gayheart, and Not Under Forty--were, for the most part, repetitions of earlier frontier and artist themes. Personally, Miss Cather withdrew just as much. When living on Bank Street, she even rented the apartment directly above her to avoid noise, and was widely quoted as saying that the world broke in two in 1922, and that she belonged to the earlier half.<sup>20</sup> Of her withdrawal, Alfred Kazin states: "It was as if the pervasive and incommunicable sense of loss felt by a whole modern

---

<sup>20</sup>Sergeant, p. 159.

American generation had suddenly become a theme rather than a passing emotion, a dissociation which one had to suffer as well as report. The others were lost in the new materialism, satirized or bewailed it; she seceded, as only a very rare integrity could secede with dignity."<sup>21</sup>

O'Neill's withdrawal into the past, like that of Willa Cather, involved both his personal and his professional life. His greatest works, Mourning Becomes Electra and Long Day's Journey into Night, were written in his final creative period. Both were historical, the first set during the Civil War and the second set during O'Neill's youth. The third major play written at this time was The Iceman Cometh, which stands apart from all the mature O'Neill plays, for it embodies them all, being the playwright's philosophical summation of his life's work. Another play belonging to this period is unique by way of form and subject matter. Warmly nostalgic and reminiscent, Ah, Wilderness! is his only comedy. It portrays what O'Neill said was his dream of the youth he had never had. The other plays of O'Neill's last cycle--Days Without End, A Touch of the Poet, Hughie, and A Moon for the Misbegotten--were all set in time just past, and, like Miss Cather's last writings, are simply variations on earlier themes. Though writing for the theater, O'Neill refused to

---

<sup>21</sup>Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1942), p. 251.

become a part of it, for he found it difficult to work under the pressures of both it and city living. As his biographers put it: "Not the least of O'Neill's frustrations was the fact that the practice of his art required periodic emergence from the cloistered existence he preferred. He always felt that had he been able to express himself as a novelist rather than as a dramatist he would have been spared the continuous contacts with a world that unsettled him. He would have liked to write in a vacuum, without the inconvenient mechanical necessities of stage production."<sup>22</sup> To this end, O'Neill moved continually from New York to remote homes--Bermuda, Long Island, California, Sea Island, Georgia--and back again. Particularly during the years in which he wrote The Iceman Cometh and Long Day's Journey into Night did O'Neill see fewer and fewer people. Robert Sherwood noted of him: "Spiritually he seemed to contract rather than expand in the climate of success. More and more, he withdrew himself from the world, living in one retreat after another."<sup>23</sup> Again, O'Neill's biographers record that by the end of 1934, he had determinedly retreated into the past: "O'Neill was as remote from the upheaval taking place around him as he once had been from the clamor of the war; he became a symbol and a repre-

---

<sup>22</sup>Gelb, p. 457.

<sup>23</sup>Robert Sherwood, quoted by Gelb, p. 785.



sentative of the era, but not in the same way as other contemporary writers. His work did not reflect the times but continued to be a supremely individual expression of his inner preoccupation with timeless themes."<sup>24</sup>

In addition to their dislike for their time, Miss Cather and O'Neill felt they must withdraw from society in order to preserve their artistic integrity. Their remoteness was not so much that they disliked other people, but that they valued their art more. As far back as her college days, Willa Cather had written in an essay on Carlyle: "Art of every kind is an exacting master, more so even than Jehovah--He says only, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me.' Art, Science and Letters cry, 'Thou shalt have no other gods at all.'"<sup>25</sup> To friends, Willa Cather said she was going to "devote her life to the worship of Art," and later, while still working at McClure's, she discussed writing with Elizabeth Sergeant. Her need, she said, was "to write life itself." "But to do this paradoxical thing," she continued, "one must have the power to refuse most of the rest of life."<sup>26</sup> Her greatest literary expression of this devotion appears in The Song of the Lark, in which Thea Kronberg's artistic dedication

---

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 457.

<sup>25</sup>Cather, quoted by Bennett, p. 219.

<sup>26</sup>Cather, quoted by Sergeant, p. 63.

becomes the reality of her existence. Certainly, the novel illustrates the comment of one critic that all Cather artists are urged forward by their inner need to seek and find a direction of life, their art being the instrument by which they guide themselves.<sup>27</sup> As a mature novelist, Miss Cather explained her withdrawal from the contemporary world thus: "The condition every art requires is, not so much freedom from restriction, as freedom from adulteration and from the intrusion of foreign matter. . . ." <sup>28</sup>

It has been mentioned that Willa Cather attempted to make her art her religion; in fact, the creation of a novel almost became a spiritual experience for her. She described the writing of My Antonia as a sudden inner explosion and enlightenment, and came to believe that in writing, the least possible manipulation of form allowed it to be revealed from within.<sup>29</sup> O'Neill, too, seemed to work best under great emotional tension. And while he did not attempt to explain the creative process itself, he based his career choice upon what might be termed a spiritual insight. His stay at a tuberculosis sanitarium he described as a religious experience in which he faced the possibility of death, looked for a new

---

<sup>27</sup> Bloom, p. 273.

<sup>28</sup> Cather, "Escapism," On Writing (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1949), p. 26.

<sup>29</sup> Sergeant, p. 116.

faith, and found it in creative writing. Writing, he discovered, did for him what faith had done at an earlier age.<sup>30</sup> To George Pierce Baker he wrote in 1914: "I want to be an artist or nothing. . . ."31

Though not quoted as widely as Willa Cather on the role of the artist and the place of art in the creator's consciousness, still, O'Neill continually portrayed artists, or would-be artists, in his plays. And while Willa Cather's artists are in conflict with an antagonistic society, O'Neill's, for the most part, are in conflict with themselves. Robert Mayo, Stephen Murray, Dion Anthony--all dream of becoming artists. All fail, however, because they substitute for reality the glittering ideals of their imaginations; when then these ideals clash with actual experience, the characters are hurt.<sup>32</sup> Rarely theoretical, O'Neill preferred to give his artistic theories in terms of what he himself was trying to do: "I'm always, always trying to interpret Life in terms of

---

<sup>30</sup>Croswell Bowen, asst. Shane O'Neill, The Curse of the Misbegotten: A Tale of the House of O'Neill (New York: McGraw Hill, 1959), p. 72.

<sup>31</sup>O'Neill in a letter to George Pierce Baker, reprinted by Wisner Payne Kinne, George Pierce Baker and the American Theater (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 193.

<sup>32</sup>Sophus Keith Winther, Eugene O'Neill: A Critical Study (New York: Russell and Russell, 1961), p. 22.

lives, never just lives in terms of character."<sup>33</sup> And to a great extent, O'Neill put his own life into those dreaming characters, much as Miss Cather put her artistic philosophy into Thea Kronborg.

For both writers the need to know oneself and to find a suitable direction of life became paramount. And this desire permeated not only their artists and dreamers, but extended into their other characters. The questing spirit and the enduring strength of the artist <sup>Author too</sup> Thea is observable in the pioneer heroines; it is seen defeated in Marian Forrester and Claude Wheeler. Robert Mayo's confusion as to his identity and his desire for something better is seen vividly in Yank, Brutus Jones, and Dion Anthony--but all experience failure. The reality of modern life is fearful; and man's will is insufficient to combat the forces of the twentieth century. Consequently, the characters of Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill look to their dreams and to the past for guidance; they find none.

For both authors, life takes the form of quest and struggle--within the individual, his human relationships, and his society. The result is failure. Often, the failure ends in death. The repetition of this theme throughout the

---

<sup>33</sup>O'Neill in a letter to Arthur Hobson Quinn, reprinted in A History of the American Drama from the Civil War to the Present Day, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Bros., 1945) vol. 2, p. 199.

works of the two writers suggests, then, far more than thematic parallel. It suggests that between Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill there exists a bond of tragedy. Certainly, O'Neill was consciously attempting to create tragedy:

"Tragedy not native to our soil? Why, we are tragedy--the most appalling yet written or unwritten."<sup>34</sup> He expanded his idea thus:

The tragedy of life is what makes it worthwhile. I think that any life which merits living lies in the effort to realize some dream, and the higher that dream is the harder it is to realize. Most decidedly we must all have our dreams. If one hasn't them, one might as well be dead. The only success is in failure. Any man who has a big enough dream must be a failure and must accept this as one of the conditions of being alive. If he ever thinks for a moment that he is a success, then he is finished.<sup>35</sup>

At another time, O'Neill coupled his criticism of society with the genre he had selected: "A soul is being born, and when a soul enters, tragedy enters with it. Suppose some day we should suddenly see with the clear eye of a soul the true valuation of all our triumphant brass band materialism; should see the cost--and the result in terms of eternal verities.

---

<sup>34</sup>O'Neill, quoted by Gelb in a report of a conversation between the playwright and Malcolm Molland of the Philadelphia Public Ledger, p. 487.

<sup>35</sup>O'Neill, quoted by Gelb, p. 337,

What a colossal, ironic, 100 per cent American tragedy that would be--what?"<sup>36</sup>

While Willa Cather never defined her work in terms of tragedy, others have noted that she had "the sense of a human necessity whose origins are wild and whose destination is tragic."<sup>37</sup> One critic observes that she translated most of her novels into "the larger sense of tragedy in the supersession of the heroic pioneer generation of Nebraska by the neat petty generation of Ivy Peters and Bayliss Wheeler."<sup>38</sup> And at least one friend noted the tragic sense of life which was Miss Cather's personally: "with all her natural ardour and high spirits, I think that, unperceived by most of the people who knew her, there was in her also a deep strain of melancholy. It did not often emerge. Perhaps it even gave intensity to her delight of things--this sense that human destiny was ultimately, and necessarily, tragic."<sup>39</sup>

Both authors vacillated between the poles of pessimism and optimism; since the traditional motive of tragedy is to affirm, this makes intention difficult to ascertain. Of

---

<sup>36</sup>O'Neill, quoted by Gelb in a report of the conversation mentioned in footnote 34, p. 487.

<sup>37</sup>Geismar, p. 156.

<sup>38</sup>Brown, p. 51.

<sup>39</sup>Edith Lewis, Willa Cather Living (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), p. 84.

this difficulty, O'Neill once commented: "I have been accused of unmitigated gloom. Is this a pessimistic view of life? I do not think so. There is a skin deep optimism and another higher optimism, not skin deep, which is usually confounded with pessimism. To me, the tragic alone has that significant beauty which is truth. It is the meaning of life--and the hope."<sup>40</sup> Willa Cather, as well as O'Neill, was concerned with finding the meaning of life, and for both, it was their hope for man which made his current condition so intolerable. Both authors were critical of their age, but in being critical, they encountered ideas on an intellectual level, and they struggled with them heroically. Such a struggle is a dimension of tragedy.

The difficulty in regarding both Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill as tragic writers is the problem facing tragedy today: Can the twentieth century produce tragedy? The controversy continues, despite the obvious tragic spirit which is detectable in much twentieth century work and despite current attempts at a redefinition of the requirements of tragedy in terms of contemporary culture. According to one scholar, it is man's "mad persistence in the impossible quest for meaning [in life] that is the vital and enduring element

---

<sup>40</sup>O'Neill, quoted in a Feb. 13, 1921, New York Tribune story, "Damn the Optimists!" reprinted in O'Neill and His Plays, ed. Oscar Cargill, N. Bryllion Fagin, and William J. Fisher (New York: New York University Press, 1961), p. 104.

in the tragic vision."<sup>41</sup> If so, then Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill certainly are writers of tragedy, for it is precisely this quest for meaning which is the most dominant element of their works, and it is precisely the loss of traditional standards and the need for new ones which constitute their tragic view.

As representatives of American literature's renaissance of the twenties, Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill belong to different worlds--chronologically, geographically, personally--and they appear to be literary opposites. But they are not opposites, for both see the story of man as the story of quest, the story of man's striving to know himself and the meaning of life. The struggle may be with the elements of nature or the aspects of personality; the obstacles may be the standards of a new society or the unchanging world of the past, but regardless, the characters of these authors meet the same, ultimate failure. And their failure becomes universal, first, because their struggle encompasses man's greatest endeavor--to learn the meaning of the universe--and second, because they make their quest upon three levels of human experience: within their own souls, within their relationships with other human beings, and within society at large. The worlds of Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill may differ, but the tragedy is the same.

---

<sup>41</sup>Charles I. Glicksberg, Tragic Vision in Twentieth Century Literature (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963), p. 5.



## CHAPTER II

### THE LONELY QUEST

In the first act of Eugene O'Neill's Beyond the Horizon, Robert Mayo, the protagonist, attempts to explain to his brother why he wishes to go to sea. Finally, he says:

Supposing I was to tell you: that it's just Beauty that's calling me, the beauty of the far off and unknown, the mystery and the spell of the East which lures me in the books I've read, the need of the freedom of great wide spaces, the joy of wandering on and on-- in quest of the secret which is hidden over there beyond the horizon?

And his brother replies:

I should say you were nutty.<sup>1</sup>

This brief portion of dialogue is the essence of the play, for it defines the personality and foreshadows the tragedy of Robert Mayo--a young man who wishes to realize his life in terms of the ultimate beauties and freedoms, yet who is defeated by his inability to achieve his ideal, and who is alienated from others by his sensitivity. Additionally, the quotation establishes Robert Mayo's conception of life as a continual striving to learn its meaning. It also establishes him as the character who is to become the prototype for many O'Neill protagonists, among them: Yank,

---

<sup>1</sup>O'Neill, Beyond the Horizon, Act I, Scene 1, p. 85.

Brutus Jones, Dion Anthony, Stephen Murray, and Reuben Light. And finally, the quotation reveals the dominant theme of O'Neill's work, the theme which brings him close in spirit to Willa Cather.

For both Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill, life is experienced in one's quest for meaning in a world of changing values. Often, this quest is made by an individual like Willa Cather's Claude Wheeler, who is seeking not only knowledge of life, but knowledge of self. At other times, the searcher, like Robert Mayo, thinks he has realized his search, only to discover that his self-ignorance has misguided him. The quest motif, then, as used by the two authors, is of a dual nature: the characters search for their own identity as well as the identity of absolutes; and their searching occurs within their own souls, within their human relationships, and within society at large.

The quest is not without its struggle and its suffering. To Willa Cather, "Success is never so interesting as struggle--not even to the successful, not even to the most mercenary forms of ambition."<sup>2</sup> And to Eugene O'Neill, the one subject for drama was "man and his struggle with his own fate."<sup>3</sup> For both, the struggle involves tension between a

---

<sup>2</sup>Cather, quoted by Bloom, p. 136.

<sup>3</sup>O'Neill, quoted in a March 16, 1924, New York Herald Tribune interview, "O'Neill Talks About his Plays," reprinted in O'Neill and His Plays: Four Decades of Criticism, p. 111.

character's conception of the ideal versus his experience with the real.<sup>4</sup> While Miss Cather expressed this conflict in terms of the individual and society, O'Neill expressed it primarily in terms of the human personality.

Willa Cather's quest cycle is threefold and develops almost chronologically with the body of her writing. Over all, her work expresses the aspirations of artists, pioneers, and lost souls. Appearing early in the Cather cycle are the artists. Initially, they strive to identify themselves as artists; as they do this, they question the meaning of art itself. Their greatest struggle is with misunderstanding and exploitation.

Two of Miss Cather's books of short stories, The Troll Garden and Youth and the Bright Medusa, examine the sensitivity of the artist almost exclusively. In "Coming, Aphrodite," opposing concepts of art are expressed by two lovers, Eden Sower and Dan Hedgar. For Eden, art is measured by success. For Dan, art is equated with struggle and innovation: "A public only wants what has been done over and over. I'm painting for painters who haven't been born."<sup>5</sup> In "The Garden Lodge," subserviance to the mundane labors of life poses a threat to

---

<sup>4</sup>While the presence of the ideal-real conflict is generally acknowledged in O'Neill criticism, only Edward A. and Lillian D. Bloom in their full length study record it in the works of Willa Cather.

<sup>5</sup>Cather, "Coming Aphrodite," from Youth and the Bright Medusa (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1920), p. 66.

the creative personality. In "A Death in the Desert," unrequited love reveals the chasm which often exists between the artist's ideal of beauty and the practices of his personal life.

Another group of stories illustrates the conflict between the artist and society. In "The Diamond Mine," for example, singer Cressida Garnet is both misunderstood and exploited by almost everyone with whom she comes in contact, primarily family and husbands. The same theme continues in "Scandal," where the heroine, again a singer, is subjected to false rumors designed to destroy her reputation. The gulf between the artist and society becomes even greater in "A Gold Slipper," "Flavia and her Artists," and "The Marriage of Phaedra." In the last story, artist Hugh Treffinger, now dead, has been completely misunderstood by his wife. His concept of art is much like that of Dan Hedgar. For both, art is original; it does not follow the whims of an insensitive society. This attitude toward art is symbolized by the painting of the title; Treffinger's wife represents the epitome of insensitivity when she allows this symbolic, final painting to be sold to an obscure gallery against her husband's wishes. Both Treffinger and Hedgar seek to establish a new meaning of art; both are defeated in their quest.

In three of her artist stories, Cather contracts the world of art and the world of the prairie. In "A Wagner

Matinee," a young man takes his Aunt Georgiana to an afternoon concert. After being transported into the musical world, Aunt Georgiana does not wish to leave the concert hall. And her nephew understands: "For her, just outside the door of the concert hall, lay the black pond with cattle-tracked fluffs; the tall, unpainted house, with weather-curved boards; naked as a tower, the crook-backed ash seedlings where the dishcloths hung to dry; the gaunt, molting turkeys piling up refuse about the kitchen door."<sup>6</sup>

Indignation at the contrast of these worlds is expressed in "The Sculptor's Funeral." The story opens following the death of Eastern artist Harvey Merrick, whose body is being brought home to the prairie for burial. Miss Cather employs characterization alone to reveal the conflict which must have taken place earlier between the artist and the people of this environment--the ignorant, unfeeling, and selfish. That the sculptor had to escape such influence in order to discover himself as an artist is the theme implicit in the work: "Stevens understood now the real tragedy of his master's life; neither love nor wine, as many had conjectured, but a blow which had fallen earlier and cut deeper than those could have done--a shame not his, and yet so inescapably his, to hide in his heart from his very boyhood. And without--

---

<sup>6</sup>Cather, "A Wagner Matinee," from The Troll Garden (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, 1961), p. 115.

the frontier warfare; the yearning of a body, cast ashore upon a desert of newness and ugliness and sordidness, for all that is chastened and old, and noble with traditions."<sup>7</sup>

In "Paul's Case," the world of art becomes the world of the ideal, and the world of the prairie becomes the world of Cordelia Street. Paul is not an artist, but he possesses artistic sensitivity. In him, conflicts in previous stories become internalized in one personality. A Carnegie Hall usher and a high school student, Paul attempts to make his fantasy world the real one by stealing from his father's company and going to New York. Inevitably, the chasm between the real and the ideal proves too great, and Paul takes his own life.

In his quest for self-fulfillment and a theory of art, Willa Cather's artist meets constant struggle: sometimes with himself, but more often with a society unable to understand him. The culmination of this theme comes in the novel, The Song of the Lark. Growing up in a prairie town, Thea Kronborg must fight the cultural indifference of the community in order to preserve the artistic spirit within herself. Almost half the novel traces the development of this awareness: "She knew, of course, that there was something about her that was different. But it was more like a friendly spirit than like anything that was a part of herself. She thought everything

---

<sup>7</sup>Cather, "The Sculptor's Funeral," from The Troll Garden, p. 43.

to it, and it answered her; happiness consisted of that backward and forward movement of herself."<sup>8</sup> Later in the novel, the "something" is further explained: "She took it for granted that some day, when she was older, she would know a great deal more about it. It was as if she had an appointment to meet the rest of herself, sometime, somewhere."<sup>9</sup> From recognition of herself as being "uncommon, in a common, common world,"<sup>10</sup> Thea moves on toward a quest involving the meaning of art itself. Her greatest insight comes when she vacations at a site of ancient peoples: "What was any art but an effort to make a sheath, a mold in which to imprison for a moment the shining, elusive element which is life itself. . . ."<sup>11</sup>

Thea's story is the substance of the artist's quest: a search for identity, and a journey toward realization of an artistic ideal. The conclusion is invariably one of failure. Thea, for example, finds herself as an artist, but in so doing, sacrifices the warmth of her personality to art. At the end of the novel, Thea is no longer the Moonstone girl, but a disciplined artist with only one concern--her magnificent voice. Of her life she says: "Your work becomes your personal

---

<sup>8</sup> Cather, The Song of the Lark (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1915), p. 79.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 304.

life. You are not much good until it does. It's like being woven into a big web. You can't pull away, because all your little tendrils are woven into the picture. It takes you up and uses you, and spins you out; and that is your life."<sup>12</sup>

In her frontier novels, O Pioneers! and My Antonia, Miss Cather expands her theme of the individual's seeking and finding a direction of life to include man's struggle with nature. In addition, the pioneer attempts to identify himself with a new country, a new culture, and a new society.

The meaning of the quest in O Pioneers! is found in the characters' contrasting attitudes toward the prairie itself. At the beginning of the novel, the dying John Bergson reflects upon living on a land where "The record of the plow was insignificant, like the feeble scratches on stone left by prehistoric races, so indeterminate that they may, after all, be only the markings of the glaciers, and not a record of human strivings."<sup>13</sup> To him, the land "was still a wild thing that had its ugly moods. . . . Its genius was unfriendly to man."<sup>14</sup> His daughter, Alexandra, however, is able to conquer it, to transform it into a land proclaiming the influence of human endeavor. She achieves this conquest not by fearing

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 455-456.

<sup>13</sup> Cather, O Pioneers! (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1913), pp. 19-20.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 20.



the land, but by identifying herself with its genius.

For the first time, perhaps, since that land emerged from the waters of geologic ages, a human face was set toward it with love and yearning. It seemed beautiful to her, rich and strong and glorious. Her eyes drank in the breadth of it, until her tears blinded her. Then the Genius of the Divide, the great, free spirit which breathes across it, must have bent lower than it ever bent to a human will before. The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman.<sup>15</sup>

Alexandra succeeds with the land because she seeks and finds the laws behind the great operations of nature. She fails in her quest for self fulfillment, however, for like the artist, she subordinates her personal life to subduing the land. When she finally plans marriage, it is not with the love of youth, but with the affection of long friendship.

On another level of meaning, Alexandra's struggle with the land is man's eternal struggle to know the absolute. Gradually within the novel, the land comes to symbolize the positive force for good in the world, which, if understood, rewards its quester. At the end of O Pioneers!, Carl Lindstrum tells Alexandra, "You belong to the land." And she answers, "The land belongs to the future, Carl; that's the way it seems to me."<sup>16</sup> As an individual, then, Alexandra merges into the history of man's strivings.

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 307.

If Alexandra's quest becomes symbolic, so also does the quest of Antonia. The emphasis in My Antonia, however, is not so much the land struggle, but Antonia's struggle to find a place for herself in a new culture, a new society. As a member of a Bohemian immigrant family, Antonia Shimerda suffers as well as struggles. But throughout her life, she expresses an eagerness to acquire new experiences. In her early childhood, she is eager to learn the new words of a new language. In her youth, she accepts hardships and farm labor as her duty, yet she embraces with vitality the new opportunities for work and pleasure she finds in Black Hawk. She falls in love as enthusiastically as she dances, and when her lover proves false, she endures her shame with dignity. Through it, she comes to a greater realization of life's pitfalls and life's glories. By the end of the novel, Antonia knows herself; with a husband to love and innumerable children to care for, she has found life's role in motherhood.

Like Alexandra, Antonia both succeeds and fails in her quest. She finds happiness in personal relationships, but fails in her attempt to integrate into a new society. This failure is suggested by her marriage, for it marks both a return to the farm and a return to Bohemian society. Despite the ambivalent nature of their achievement, however, the strength and endurance of Miss Cather's pioneer heroines brings them closest of all her characters to a fulfillment of their quest.

Antonia's achievement as a mother transcends her personal identity much as the land transcends its reality in O Pioneers! By the end of the novel, Antonia has come to symbolize the absolutes sought by man:

She lent herself to immemorial human attitudes which we recognize by instinct as universal and true. . . . She was a battered woman now, not a lovely girl; but she still had that something which fires the imagination, could still stop one's breath for a moment by a look or gesture that somehow revealed the meaning in common things. . . . It was no wonder that her sons stood tall and straight. She was a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races.<sup>17</sup>

The third and final phase of Willa Cather's quest motif is found in the stories of lost souls: Alexander's Bridge, One of Ours, A Lost Lady, The Professor's House, and My Mortal Enemy. In each of these novels, the artist has declined and the frontier has faded, and the creative force of the artists and the pioneers has been replaced by inaction and unhappiness. Although the earlier characters fought human misunderstandings and prairie hardships, they were still able to discern the eternal values of life and to gain some knowledge from the quest. These later characters, however, are doomed to total failure, for they seek self-knowledge and life's meaning in a society no longer fostering traditional values.

Though Bartley Alexander of Alexander's Bridge is a successful engineer, he is discontented, for he wishes to

---

<sup>17</sup> Cather, My Antonia (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1918), p. 353.

experience life on two levels--the ideal and the real. He attempts to recapture his youth through a love affair, but cannot reconcile this means of self-fulfillment with his surface professional and social life: "Your life keeps going for things you don't want, and all the while you are being built alive into a social structure you don't care a rap about. I sometimes wonder what sort of chap I'd have been if I hadn't been this sort; I want to go and live out his potentialities, too."<sup>18</sup>

More isolated is Claude Wheeler of One of Ours. A lost soul among his contemporaries, he feels dissatisfaction with himself and knows there must be "something splendid about life, if he could but find it."<sup>19</sup> Under the illusion of a great love, he increases his unhappiness with an unsatisfactory marriage. Finally, still hoping to find himself, he goes to war. Ironically, he thinks he realizes his dream in battle and dies, "believing his own country better than it is, and France better than any country can ever be."<sup>20</sup> The truth is revealed by Claude's mother: "Perhaps it was well to see

---

<sup>18</sup>Cather, Alexander's Bridge (New York: A Bantam Book published by arrangement with Houghton Mifflin Co., 1962), p. 10.

<sup>19</sup>Cather, One of Ours (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922), p. 103.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 458.

that vision, and then to see no more. She would have dreaded the awakening."<sup>21</sup>

More than the other novels, A Lost Lady records the failure of quest, for it allegorizes the death of the pioneer ethic when challenged by a new ethic of materialism. Captain Forrester represents pioneer idealism, while Ivy Peters represents contemporary materialism. The tragedy of the novel is that of Marian Forrester, for her quest is marked not by the pioneer integrity of her husband, but by the changing values of her society. Trapped between the old and new orders, she seeks youth, and prefers "life on any terms" to death with "the pioneer period to which she belonged."<sup>22</sup> A sophistication of Alexandra and Antonia, Marian Forrester incites both Miss Cather's sympathy and contempt, for Mrs. Forrester is truly lost; with her, the quest has lost its ethical base and become a mockery.

With A Lost Lady, an era has passed, and the result of its passing is observable in The Professor's House. Like the other lost souls, Professor St. Peter is troubled by the conflict which exists between the values he desires and the values which predominate in his society. He regrets thoroughly the defeat of the pioneer values by the new standards of materialism. His conflict is illustrated symbolically by his

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Cather, A Lost Lady (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923), p. 169.

two houses. Although he has built a new house for his wife and family, he cannot bring himself to leave the old house. Throughout the novel, he resides in both, writing in the attic of the old house, and going to the new one only in the evening.

The Professor's House is a study of the quest motif in retrospect, for in reviewing his past, St. Peter decides that his marriage, his writing, and his teaching have all been illusory goals placed upon him by a society he now rejects. Like the Forresters, he represents the defeat of the quest, and exchanges striving for endurance: "Theoretically he knew that life is possible, maybe even pleasant, without joy, without passionate griefs. But it had never occurred to him that he might have to live like that."<sup>23</sup>

Another character who falls prey to the materialism of the new society is Myra Henshawe of My Mortal Enemy. Unhappy in her Midwestern community, Myra thinks she will find herself in marriage to Oswald Henshawe, with whom she elopes. But the marriage falls short of her expectations, and she realizes at the end of the novel that she had deluded herself earlier, thinking that love was what she valued, when all the time it had been wealth. "We were never really happy," she

---

<sup>23</sup>Cather, The Professor's House (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1925), p. 282.

says of herself and Oswald. "I am a greedy, selfish, worldly woman; I wanted success and a place in the world."<sup>24</sup>

With this, the last novel in the Cather cycle before her withdrawal into historical writing, the full circle of the quest motif is reached. Miss Cather's artists and pioneers sensed the eternal values in art and in nature; they sought them; and, though they failed to realize their quest in its entirety, they reached some level of achievement. But the later characters, faced with the changing values of a different world, are lost souls. As Miss Cather sees it, they are caught between two orders which conflict greatly: the old pioneer order in which the effort, strength, and endurance of the individual will overcome all obstacles, and the new order in which man is powerless to exert his will in a world dominated by the machine and its product--exploiting materialism. The alienation of these characters is not attributable to personal error, but to changing society.

And change was the process which Miss Cather could not endure. She withdrew from it in her personal life and she attacked it in her writing. Her values were determined as a child by the hard and honest labor she had observed in the pioneers. Grown older, she felt that change was not synonymous with progress, and deplored what she called "this

---

<sup>24</sup>Cather, My Mortal Enemy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926), p. 91.

rage for newness and conventionality" among the second and third generation of Nebraskans who, she felt, were somewhat ashamed of their pioneer parents.<sup>25</sup> For Miss Cather, the traditional standards of integrity, honesty, and respect were realized by hard work, tenacious will, endurance, and heroism. When these attributes are no longer valued, there can be no quest. Striving ceases, and only failure remains.

In contrast, the characters of Eugene O'Neill strive continually, despite the absence of traditional goals. However, their quest is basically the same as that of the Cather characters: to acquire self-knowledge and to find meaning in life. To compensate for society's vanishing values, the O'Neill characters create their own. And inevitably the substitution proves a failure.

O'Neill's characters are also lost souls. More specifically, they may be classified into two groups--the discontented and the deceived. The discontented mirror the conflict between the real and ideal which is portrayed in the artist stories of Willa Cather. With O'Neill however, this conflict is seen in terms of personality. For example, none of the characters in Beyond the Horizon knows himself. Robert Mayo, Andrew, Ruth--all experience sudden personality changes in which they exchange their traditional self-concepts

---

<sup>25</sup>Cather, quoted in an interview by Eleanor Hinman, The Lincoln Sunday Star, (Nov. 6, 1921), p. 1.



for roles which seem to be better. But they are not, and even at the play's end, the characters know they have erred, but remain too ignorant of themselves to improve their situations. For Robert Mayo the story is doubly tragic, for he is the classic O'Neill dreamer who would not have been a success at anything. Ironically, though he seems to recognize his illusions about himself at the end of the play, he retains one through death--that Andrew and Ruth will find happiness together. The pursuit of self-knowledge continues in The Straw, where Stephen Murray is dissatisfied with his work as a newspaper reporter in a small town, wants to write seriously, and yet does not begin to realize this desire and utilize his talent until inspired to do so by Eileen. A more sophisticated Robert Mayo, Murray is effectual enough to achieve the professional status Mayo never could have. Like Mayo, however, he deceives himself in human relationships, recognizing too late that he loves Eileen. Also trying to find a direction for life is Anna Christie. Unwittingly, the young harlot becomes the subject of illusion for both her father and her lover. Feeling that her genuine affection for the two can enable her to begin a new life, she is tempted to deceive them about her past. She realizes, however, the impossibility of living such an illusion, and reveals the truth.

O'Neill's most powerful use of the quest motif occurs in The Hairy Ape, where Yank, a ship's fireman, regards himself

as the power of the world. When this self image is destroyed by a glimpse of Mildred, he actively searches for a segment of life to which he can belong. When he finds that he belongs neither to the world nor to society, he surrenders to the only self-image left to him--that of the ape; to him he says, "Ain't we both members of the same club--de Hairy Apes?"<sup>26</sup> But even in this final attempt to find himself, Yank fails and is crushed by the ape: "Even him didn't tink I belonged."<sup>27</sup>

Of all the O'Neill characters, Yank most obviously personifies the modern everyman in search of values. Because he is more primitive, he is more universal than either Robert Mayo or Stephen Murray. Likewise, he is a greater misfit. Of him O'Neill stated: "Yank is really yourself, and myself. He is every human being."<sup>28</sup> In this sense, Yank most fully represents the pessimistic philosophy of both Willa Cather and O'Neill, whose characters first question, then reject the status quo, yet cannot find a more meaningful answer in their present world.

The deceived O'Neill characters are just as lost as the discontented. They are not confused as to their identity, however, but think they know themselves and believe that they

---

<sup>26</sup>O'Neill, The Hairy Ape, Scene 8, p. 254.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>O'Neill, quoted by Bowen, p. 142.

have found new values to replace the traditional ones. Only when it is too late do they discover the failure of their created gods. For Brutus Jones, the answer to the quest is power. Deluded with visions of grandeur, he has made himself emperor of a West Indies Island. The story of The Emperor Jones is Jones's journey from illusion to reality, and his subsequent destruction. His vision of himself is illustrated by his costume and his question, "Ain't a man's talkin' big what makes him big--long as he makes folks believe it?"<sup>29</sup> His flight in the forest, however, strips him of his illusions, takes him back to his primitive origins, and marks real progress in self understanding. Like Jones, Juan Ponce de Leon ultimately finds some degree of self understanding in his lifetime of exploration, only to fail in the goal he has set for himself: to discover the essence of youth from a non-existent fountain so he can win the love of the young Beatriz. His failure is inevitable, for the quest of The Fountain is based upon the illusion that de Leon can find in the outside world the unity which can exist only within man. Though her quest for self-fulfillment is not expressed geographically, as is de Leon's, Emma in Diff'rent has also set a goal for herself: to be "diff'rent" and to marry Caleb and keep him "diff'rent." When she discovers that Caleb is not "diff'rent,"

---

<sup>29</sup>O'Neill, The Emperor Jones, Scene 1, p. 179.

that on his last sea voyage he was involved with a native girl, she cannot accept this reality and refuses to marry him. O'Neill's description of Emma includes reference to "her large, soft blue eyes which have an incongruous quality of absent-minded romantic dreaminess about them," and to a heavy mouth and chin which contain a "self-willed stubbornness."<sup>30</sup> This is Emma's character: a contradiction between the romantic dreamer and the practical New Englander. The Robert Mayo facet of her personality causes her to reject Caleb, no longer her ideal. Her practical side influences her into spinsterhood. Of the play O'Neill said: "Diff'rent, as I see it, is merely a tale of the eternal, romantic idealist who is in all of us--the eternally defeated one. . . . We are all more or less 'Emmas'--the more or less depending on our talent for compromise. . . . Refusing to compromise, Emma lived on dreams; when the dreams were abruptly shattered, she had nothing more to live for."<sup>31</sup>

The central characters of Gold, Marco Millions, The Great God Brown, and Dynamo think they have found the meaning of life in the new values of wealth, materialism, and technology--the things both Cather and O'Neill felt were destroying contemporary life. Bartlett, the protagonist of Gold,

---

<sup>30</sup>O'Neill, Diff'rent, stage directions, Act I, p. 494.

<sup>31</sup>O'Neill, quoted by Gelb, p. 437.

lives for the day when he can return to an island where he and his crew once mistook a chest of cheap brass jewelry for gold. He becomes so obsessed with the idea that he passes his delusions on to his son. The ship returns to the island, but without father and son, and it is only at the end of the play that Bartlett admits that the desire for gold to which he has dedicated himself is false; further, he confesses that he had permitted even murder in order to retain his illusion. In Marco Millions, O'Neill attacks the American business ethic through the character of Marco Polo who, like so many O'Neill characters, has two aspects of personality: the dreamer-poet and the materialistic business man. The dreamer in Marco becomes suffocated by his desire for wealth, and though he succeeds in acquisition, he fails in understanding himself and other human beings. Marco becomes as mechanical a product as the ones he sells. In The Great God Brown, O'Neill expresses the destruction of the creative personality by the forces of an exploiting society. According to O'Neill, Brown, the exploiting conformist, is "the visionless demi-god of our new materialistic myth--a Success--building his life of exterior things, inwardly empty and resourceless. . . ." <sup>32</sup> Paradoxically, as Brown destroys Dion Anthony, the artist, he becomes aware of himself as an individual; in this self-

---

<sup>32</sup> O'Neill, quoted by Galb, p. 580.

awareness, he takes on the identity of the destroyed, and ultimately is himself destroyed. In Dynamo, Reuben Light's destruction is caused by his acceptance of a machine god--a god whose destructive force is symbolized by the dynamo. With sentiments much like those of Miss Cather, O'Neill described the play in a letter to George Jean Nathan: "[Dynamo] is a symbolical and factual biography of what is happening in a large section of the American . . . soul right now. It is really the first play of a trilogy that will dig at the roots of the sickness of today as I feel it--the death of the old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfactory new one. . . ." <sup>33</sup>

For O'Neill, not even love can supply the answer to man's desire to know the absolute; Welded, All God's Chillun Got Wings, and Strange Interlude all relate the failure of the love relationship to increase self-knowledge or to give life significance. In Welded, Michael Cape and his wife Eleanor think they have found the answer to man's quest in marriage; they fail by creating an impossible ideal of love: "We swore to have a true sacrament--or nothing!" <sup>34</sup> So they have nothing, for in loving each other, they torment each

---

<sup>33</sup>O'Neill in a letter to George Jean Nathan, reprinted in The Intimate Notebooks of George Jean Nathan, p. 180.

<sup>34</sup>O'Neill, Welded, Act I, p. 448.

other; they do not achieve their ideal together, and neither do they find it in random sexual relationships; they go on, day after day, hoping, seeking, yet never realizing their goal.

All God's Chillun Got Wings is a variation on the theme of the destructive power of love. Jim Harris, a Negro, first thinks he can find himself through marriage to a white woman and through admittance to the law profession. But his self-realization means entering the white world, an impossible goal, especially when his wife maintains racial superiority over him by destroying the confidence he needs to pass the bar examination. Later, when she becomes an invalid, she reverts to childhood, requiring protection instead of providing domination; in caring for her, Jim thinks he has certainly found identity; but his insight, like that of Robert Mayo, is a delusion, and Jim becomes more lost than ever.

The quest motif continues in Strange Interlude. At the beginning of the play, Nina Leeds is mourning the wartime death of her fiancée, Gordon. Feeling guilty because Gordon never possessed her, she feels she can find herself through the plan she reveals to her father: "What use is my life to me or anyone? But I must make it of use--by giving it! I must learn to give myself, do you hear--give and give until I can make that gift of myself for a man's happiness without scruple, without fear, without joy except in his joy! When

I've accomplished this I'll have found myself, I'll know how to start in living my own life again!"<sup>35</sup> When this effort does not free her from pain, Nina tries marriage to Sam Evans, hoping that in motherhood she will find happiness. Sam's mother effectively ends that possibility when she informs Nina that she must not bear Sam's children because of the family's hereditary insanity. As still another approach to motherhood (which she equates with self-realization), Nina has Dr. Edmund Darrell father a child for her. They fall in love, and Nina's frustrations continue. Their son grows up, Sam dies, but, in the end, none of the characters finds himself or happiness. All destroy their lives in attempting to escape reality: according to her father, Nina confuses the real and the unreal; but her father also lives in an imaginary world, and he forces upon Gordon a code of honor which no longer exists under all circumstances; Sam Evans, too, lives under an illusion, ignorant of his family's insanity.

The Iceman Cometh is the philosophical summation of O'Neill's concern with man's quest for happiness, self, and higher truth, and the ultimate failure of this quest. In The Iceman Cometh, however, the quest is over. Man has sought, but has found nothing. The essence of the play is found in

---

<sup>35</sup>O'Neill, Strange Interlude, Act I, p. 18.



the first speech: "The lie of a pipe dream is what gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of us, drunk or sober."<sup>36</sup> The nature and effect of these pipe dreams upon their instigators is the theme of the play, whose action is that Hickey reveals first, that he has discarded his dream, and second, that he has killed his wife. The dual revelation first shatters, then restores the pipe dreams of the other characters. These characters are, in fact, the play, for they are living evidence of the failure of philosophy, intellect, science, or love to find an answer to the problem of existence.

In The Iceman Cometh, O'Neill concludes that there are no values left in life. In the closely following Long Day's Journey into Night, he adds a postscript: that despite the absence of values, man continues to seek endlessly, if hopelessly. The characters in Long Day's Journey into Night are the members of O'Neill's own family, tormenting themselves and each other, "gradually stripping away every protective illusion until at the end each character must face himself and the others without hope, but with a measure of tolerance and pity."<sup>37</sup> Each character is portrayed in full, is an outline of other types appearing in O'Neill's work, and is a lost soul, searching for meaning and identity. Mary describes the Tyrone family this way: "None of us can help the things

---

<sup>36</sup>O'Neill, The Iceman Cometh, Act I, p. 578.

<sup>37</sup>Falk, p. 182.

life has done to us. They're done before you realize it, and once they're done they make you do other things until at last everything comes between you and what you'd like to be and you've lost your true self forever."<sup>38</sup> Like O'Neill himself, the members of the Tyrone family are dreamers, idealists, and searchers, caught between the real and the ideal, love and hate, hope and hopelessness. Always they look for what Edmund calls, "The peace, the end of the quest, the last harbor, the joy of belonging to a fulfillment beyond men's lousy, pitiful, greedy fears and hopes and dreams!"<sup>39</sup> Theirs is a tragic quest, doomed to failure, but it is the only thing left which can give any values to their lives.

That life has no meaning without quest is the personal and literary philosophy of both Eugene O'Neill and Willa Cather; their works express this theme in a myriad of situations. The two authors write of different worlds, but their characters within these contrasting worlds share similar traits. The most obvious parallel is perhaps that between O'Neill's Robert Mayo and Willa Cather's Claude Wheeler. Both have "a touch of the poet" about them, the capacity to dream of worlds beyond their immediate cornfields. At the beginning of their stories, both dream with an eagerness to

---

<sup>38</sup> O'Neill, Long Day's Journey into Night (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), Act II, Scene I, p. 61.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., Act IV, p. 153.

know life, to know "the joy of wandering on and on--in quest of the secret which is hidden. . . ."40 For both, the lure of the distant horizon is the promise of life not yet experienced. And their dreaming becomes more intense as each participates in a way of life unfavorable to him. Neither is a farmer, a true man of the soil; both perform the vocation because of chance; in their discontent they fail to achieve harmony with themselves or with the others who are certain there is something "queer" about them.

For both Robert Mayo and Claude Wheeler, the promise of the horizon seems to appear in the possibilities of love. As Robert says, "I think love must have been the secret--the secret that called to me from over the world's rim--the secret beyond every horizon; and when I did not come, it came to me."<sup>41</sup> The two find, however, that their dream of love does not coincide with reality, that its failure is real, and its promise ideal. In his marriage Claude "suffered in his pride, but even more in his ideals, in his vague sense of what was beautiful."<sup>42</sup> For both, the combination of suffering through love and environment makes the world a prison. Robert says: "Oh, those cursed hills out there that I used to

---

<sup>40</sup> O'Neill, Beyond the Horizon, Act I, Scene I, p. 85.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>42</sup> One of Ours, p. 207.

think promised me so much! Now I've grown to hate the sight of them! They're like the walls of a narrow prison yard shutting me in from all the freedom and wonder of life!"<sup>43</sup>

And Claude notes: "inside of people who walked and worked in the broad sun, there were captives dwelling in darkness,-- never seen from birth to death. Into those prisons the moon shone, and the prisoners crept to the windows and looked out with mournful eyes at the white globe which betrayed no secrets and comprehended all."<sup>44</sup>

Their lives, then, are fruitless searches for meaning, for something that endures. Paradoxically, both Robert Mayo and Claude Wheeler die thinking they have found their ideals: "Ideals were not archaic things, beautiful and impotent; they were the real sources of power among men."<sup>45</sup> In reality, both die under their greatest illusions: Robert Mayo believing that his wife and his brother will find happiness together, and Claude Wheeler thinking that he has given himself to France and the greatest cause of mankind. In Willa Cather's words, "Both were beautiful beliefs to die with."<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Beyond the Horizon, Act II, Scene I, p. 126.

<sup>44</sup> One of Ours, p. 207.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 420.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 458.

To a lesser extent, parallels may be drawn between the Robert Mayo prototype and other Cather characters: Paul of "Paul's Case," Carl Linstrum of O Pioneers!, and Jim Burden of My Antonia. Like Robert Mayo, Paul has the eyes of a dreamer; he is misunderstood by others, and he cannot live without the excitement of a dream which takes him away from the sordid reality of his own life. "It was at the theater and at Carnegie Hall that Paul really lived; the rest was but a sleep and a forgetting."<sup>47</sup> Again, like Robert Mayo, he is destined to be a misfit, for he lacks self understanding and the motivation needed to make his dreams come true. "He had no desire to become an actor, any more than he had to become a musician. He felt no necessity to do any of these things; what he wanted was to see, to be in the atmosphere, float on the wave of it, to be carried out, blue league after blue league, away from everything."<sup>48</sup> Perhaps his real tragedy is that, unlike Robert Mayo or Claude Wheeler, Paul does not die under the spell of an illusion; he is forced to end his own life because his illusion has been shattered and its inevitable replacement is reality. Carl Linstrum, too, is

---

<sup>47</sup>Cather, "Paul's Case," from The Troll Garden, p. 161. It is interesting to note that O'Neill's Mary Tyrone uses a similar phrasing in Long Day's Journey into Night, Act IV, p. 171. "Let me see. What did I come here to find? It's terrible how absent-minded I've become. I'm always dreaming and forgetting."

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

devoid of illusion; he is dissatisfied in Alexandra's country and discontent in his city, where he sees traditional standards being replaced by cheapness. He calls himself a failure: "off there in the cities there are thousands and thousands of rolling stones like me. We are all alike; we have no ties, we know nobody, we own nothing. When one of us dies, they scarcely know where to bury him."<sup>49</sup> Jim Burden, the narrator of *My Antonia*, possesses, too, the romantic disposition which sets him apart from the rest of his society; and although he achieves professional status, he fails to achieve personal happiness, and so draws upon the memory of his childhood friendship with Antonia for his personal satisfaction.

An additional parallel can be drawn between O'Neill's Nina Leeds and Miss Cather's Marian Forrester. Both women become lost through catastrophe: the death of Nina's fiancée, Gordon, and the death of Marian's husband, Captain Forrester. The loss so destroys their balance that they must depend on casual lovers; the nature of these associations proves destructive to their characters. Principally, it is the sexuality of both women which is the focal point of their stories; and the two in their promiscuity resemble each other in reverse: because Nina has lost Gordon, who to her symbolizes love, she attempts to recapture this love by

---

<sup>49</sup>O Pioneers!, p. 123.

exploiting three men--Ned, Sam, and her son, Gordon; and because Marian has lost Captain Forrester, who provided the strength for her character, she is exploited by the men who are the direct antithesis of the pioneer values her husband represented.

There are other character parallels in the work of Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill: Emma of Diff'rent and Myra of My Mortal Enemy order their lives according to delusion; both have exalted concepts of what their husbands should be. Yank of The Hairy Ape and Antonia of My Antonia seek to identify themselves with a stratum of society. Larry, the philosopher of The Iceman Cometh, and Professor St. Peter of The Professor's House conclude that scholarship, intellect, and truth mean nothing in contemporary society and render the quest no longer worth the effort. Among more minor characters, Bartlett of Gold, Marco of Marco Millions, Ivy Peters of A Lost Lady, and Bayliss Wheeler of One of Ours represent the new materialism, the new greed, the new absence of traditional values--as O'Neill put it, "the sickness of today."<sup>50</sup>

Though the settings and the situations differ in the works of Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill; though O'Neill developed his drama via the approach of psychology and its concern with conflicting self-images and frustrated sexual

---

<sup>50</sup>O'Neill in a letter to George Jean Nathan, reprinted in The Intimate Notebooks of George Jean Nathan, p. 180.

energy while Miss Cather developed her narrative through the forces of natural events and society as they work upon individuals, the two writers were concerned with the same type of character: the character who is isolated from others, who is seeking self-knowledge, who desires to know the meaning of life, who is tortured by the discrepancy which exists between the real and the ideal, and who ultimately fails in his quest because he lives in a world in which there is nothing to find. The Robert Mayos, the Claude Wheelers, the young Pauls-- all are lost souls, lost in the "immense design of things."<sup>51</sup> Their literary identity is certain, however, for they are the dominant individuals in the works of two authors whose story of man is the story of quest.

---

<sup>51</sup>"Paul's Case," from The Troll Garden, p. 174.



## CHAPTER III

### THE TRAGIC NECESSITY

While most American writers of the 1920s found in the postwar reactions of their contemporaries the freedom to explore new creative avenues or to chronicle the frivolous flapper age of riotous living and new prosperity, Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill continued to write their stories of man's quest and disillusionment. Amid the hectic partying of other literary characters, the life struggles of the Pauls and the Robert Mayes repeated themselves in the multiplying works of these authors. For both, this theme had preceded the birth of the lost generation, and for both, it superseded current history, accompanying the changes in American society, yet subordinating them to universal statements about man's dilemma in the twentieth century.

Not surprisingly, Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill found that the new freedoms of the century--science, technology, prosperity, sex--do not help man in his eternal quest to know himself and to find life's meaning; instead, they make his search more difficult. Primarily, the characters of both Miss Cather and O'Neill struggle with themselves; they attempt to achieve their desires through action, but are thwarted by the discrepancy which exists between their ideal

worlds and the world of reality. In addition to searching within themselves for the answers to the questions of life, however, they seek the answers in their relationships with other human beings; finally, they examine society at large.

Man's quest for meaning within the human family is the concern of this chapter, for just as Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill concluded that man as an individual is a lost soul, so they determined that the answer to man's quest is not found in relationships with others. In the words of Miss Cather, "human relationships are the tragic necessity of human life. . . they can never be wholly satisfactory. . . every ego is half the time greedily seeking them, and half the time pulling away from them."<sup>1</sup> O'Neill could have made this statement as well, for his plays constantly reiterate that in a world where man cannot know himself and where society cannot preserve eternal standards, love, too, fails.

O'Neill's pessimism toward love is not surprising, in view of his unhappy childhood. In fact, he could well have turned away from all emotional relationships after viewing the pathetic marriage of his parents. But the opposite was true. Despite each new personal agony thus produced, O'Neill plunged into one relationship after another, marrying three women and making mistresses of others. In addition, he emphasized the love-sex relationship in many of his plays.

---

<sup>1</sup>Cather, "Katherine Mansfield," On Writing, p. 109.

It is more difficult to understand, then, why Willa Cather, with her favorable childhood and home environment turned away from this segment of life, castigating it throughout the body of her writing. Whether Miss Cather's rejection of emotional associations was entirely the result of her devotion to art, whether this matter was one of serious conflict for her--both are as yet unanswered questions. Of her critical attitude toward love between the sexes, however, there can be no doubt.

That her artists feel the attractions of love as well as art is obvious. Just as obvious is their decision in favor of art. In "Coming, Aphrodite," for example, Dan Hedgar finds in Eden Bower the woman he has always dreamed of loving; but when he realizes that their concepts of art are poles apart, he relinquishes the romance in favor of his artistic philosophy. Katharine Gaylord of "A Death in the Desert" keeps secret her love for Adrianca Hilgarde so he can devote himself entirely to his art. In contrast, Cressida Garret of "The Diamond Mine," accepts love relationships, but learns the incompatibility of art and love.

Like Miss Cather's other artists, Thea Kronberg encounters the conflict between love and art. And again like the others, she turns away from the possibilities of love. Early in The Song of the Lark, Thea is the recipient of Ray Kennedy's love. Though she is too young to be fully aware of

it, it is Ray's love through his bequest made to her at his death which enables her to go to Chicago for music study. Dr. Archie, too, loves Thea. But it is with Fred Ottenburg that Thea's real love conflict arises, for she admits her love for him and agrees to marriage, only to discover that he already has a wife. Despite his sincere devotion, she will have him on no other terms. Later, Thea rejects terms again when the Swedish singer, Nordquist, wishes to marry her if he can free himself from a wife who will divorce him if offered a substantial remuneration by Thea.

Thea's broken love relationships are important, too, for what they reveal of her attitude toward people in general. Throughout the novel, she is described as being "very much interested in herself,"<sup>2</sup> and at one point, Fred Ottenburg says to her: "Do you know, I've decided that you never do anything without an ulterior motive. . . . You ride and fence and walk and climb, but I know that all the while you're getting somewhere in your mind. All these things are instruments; and I, too, am an instrument."<sup>3</sup> For Thea, the struggle for human relationships is secondary to the struggle for art. As she begins to achieve success, Thea illustrates the pre-occupation with her art which has made her create instruments

---

<sup>2</sup>The Song of the Lark, p. 278.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 315.

of the men who love her. At this point in her life, Dr. Archie and Fred exist merely as sounding boards for her artistic ego. "I've only a few friends, but I can lose every one of them if it has to be."<sup>4</sup> Certainly, her profession has taught her "the inevitable hardness of human life,"<sup>5</sup> and has provided her with only one way "of being really kind, from the core of her heart out"<sup>6</sup> --through song.

Thea's principal love conflict is summarized in the final pages of The Song of the Lark when Fred says to her, "You've done what I hoped for you, what I was honestly willing to lose you for--then. I'm older now, and I think I was an ass. I wouldn't do it again if I had the chance, not much! But I'm not sorry. It takes a great many people to make one--Brunnhilde."<sup>7</sup> Thea answers, "We've been a help and a hindrance to each other. I guess it's always that way, the good and the bad all mixed up. There's only one thing that's all beautiful--and always beautiful!"<sup>8</sup> And that, of course, is the art to which Thea devotes her life. Despite their love, Fred and Thea conclude that for them, marriage, even if

---

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 467.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 463.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 462.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 465.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 467.

possible, would have resulted in failure. To Fred's inquiry, "could I have kept you, once, if I'd put on every screw?" Thea responds, "You might have kept me in misery for a while, perhaps."<sup>9</sup>

Certainly misery seems to typify the marriage relationships in the Cather novels. In The Song of the Lark, Fred is drawn into marriage with a girl who possesses all the opposites of charm and grace. Her refusal to grant him a divorce culminates in a pathetic situation when she becomes insane and is committed to an institution for life. Dr. Archie, too, is unhappily married. "He had married a mean woman, and must accept the consequences."<sup>10</sup> As in Fred's case, there seems to be little understanding and no love between the doctor and his wife. Miss Cather seems to comment on marriage in general when she says of Dr. Archie: "He consoled himself for his own marriage by telling himself that other people's were not much better. In his work he saw pretty deeply into marital relations in Moonstone, and he could honestly say that there were not many of his friends whom he envied."<sup>11</sup> But she has Fred Ottenburg make the final pronouncement of the man-woman relationship when he asks

---

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 468.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

himself "whether, between men and women, all ways were not more or less crooked. He believed those which are called straight were the most dangerous of all. . . . In their unquestioned regularity lurked every sort of human cruelty and meanness, and every kind of humiliation and suffering."<sup>12</sup>

The Song of the Lark, then, reveals the failure of love to transcend both dreary reality and artistic desire. The joy of human love seems remote, indeed, when compared to the misery it inevitably causes the sensitive individual. The earlier O Pioneers! emphasizes this pattern of love conflicts, as well as portraying another--the destructive power of spontaneous love.<sup>13</sup> Two contrasting stories compose the novel's narrative: Alexandra Bergson's conquest of the land, and Emil Bergson's love for Marie Shabata. In terms of human relationships, the stories are in direct contrast: one relates the rejection of love, the other, its acceptance. Not unsurprisingly, the latter proves tragic.

Just as Thea Kronborg gives herself to her art, Alexandra gives herself to the land. Throughout the novel, her primary emotional attraction is toward the land, and this feeling is symbolized by her recurring dream of being lifted into the air and carried over her fields by a man who "was

---

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 341.

<sup>13</sup>Randall, p. 77.

like no man she knew; he was much larger and stronger and swifter, and he carried her as easily as if she were a sheaf of wheat. She never saw him, but, with eyes closed, she could feel that he was yellow like the sunlight, and there was the smell of ripe cornfields about him."<sup>14</sup> Alexandra herself never comprehends the meaning of this fantasy, for she has little imagination: "Her training had all been toward the end of making her proficient in what she had undertaken to do. . . . Her personal life, her own realization of herself, was almost a subconscious existence; like an underground river that came to the surface only here and there, at intervals months apart, and then sank again to flow on under her own fields."<sup>15</sup> As a result, her rejection of Carl Linstrum's love is largely an unconscious one, made inevitable by her success with the land. Carl cannot marry Alexandra as long as the land belongs to her, as long as it provides her emotional stability.

In contrast, Marie Shabata feels a kinship not only with the natural world, but with mankind as well. And her response to both aspects of life is a spontaneous one. "Marie was incapable of being lukewarm about anything that pleased her. She simply did not know how to give a half-

---

<sup>14</sup>O Pioneers!, p. 206.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 203.



hearted response. When she was delighted, she was as likely as not to stand on her tip-toes and clap her hands. If people laughed at her, she laughed with them."<sup>16</sup> Marie accepts completely the emotional relationships life offers her; at seventeen she falls in love with Frank Shabata, marrying him after running away from a convent; and though she attempts to dissuade Emil from falling in love with her, she cannot help but accept his love, so unlike that which her marriage provides. The acceptance of this love, however, does not alter its impossibility, its "treasure of pain."<sup>17</sup>

Willa Cather makes the two lovers the most attractive characters in the novel. Not only do they feel Alexandra's kinship with the land, but they possess the imagination and perceptiveness she lacks; they embody the intense emotional life that for Alexandra exists only subconsciously. Their relationship, however, instead of illustrating the joy of love, demonstrates its destructive power. Their first experience of love becomes the moment of their murder. In this second story of O Pioneers!, love is not rejected, but its acceptance proves tragic.

In the deaths of the two lovers, Alexandra begins to see life in more human terms: "She wondered then how they

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

could have helped loving each other; how she could have helped knowing that they must,"<sup>18</sup> and begins to break her ties with the land in preparation for death, "the mightiest of all lovers,"<sup>19</sup> for she now sees the cycle of life in its entirety. In the final chapters of the novel, Alexandra no longer dominates the land; rather, it controls her, and it belongs to all succeeding generations: "We come and go, but the land is always here. And the people who love it and understand it are the people who own it--for a little while."<sup>20</sup> Carl Linstrum, too, recognizes that Alexandra's emotional attachment to the land has changed, that she now belongs to it. When this happens, she is able to accept his affection--not with the passion of spontaneous love, but with the wisdom and resignation of age. The love of Alexandra and Carl will not be destroyed like that of Marie and Emil, but neither will it be wholly satisfactory. In O Pioneers!, Willa Cather presents a sympathetic case for spontaneous love between the sexes, though she regards its results as destructive. In no other novel does she so fully explore the love relationship; in no other novel does she express sympathy for it; and no other novel does she make its tragedy so poignant.

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 308.

The rest of the Cather characters likewise seek love as they journey on their quest, but they encounter a reality far different than their dream of love. Even in My Antonia, the most idyllic of the Cather novels, most of the human relationships are anything but pleasant. Not only do the Shimerdas confront the hardships of a new country; they illustrate a basic incompatibility. Mr. Shimerda is a quiet man, a musician, a man of culture who has come to the new country at the insistence of his wife--a woman whose lower social and cultural level would not have demanded marriage. The two appear to be nearly opposites: Mrs. Shimerda continually grasping, talking, and snooping, and Mr. Shimerda proud, silent, and aloof. It is easy to theorize that Mr. Shimerda's suicide might have been prompted as much by his quarrelsome wife as by the prairie hardships.

The Cutters, Antonia's employers, are unpleasant to the townspeople in general; they are even more unpleasant to each other: "They quarrelled from the moment Cutter came into the house until they went to bed at night. . . . Those two could quarrel all morning about whether he ought to put on his heavy or his light underwear, and all evening about whether he had taken cold or not."<sup>21</sup> More serious than their quarrelling, however, is Mr. Cutter's public infidelity. He has already

---

<sup>21</sup> My Antonia, p. 212.

ruined one hired girl when Antonia is employed, and his attempted attack on her is averted only by the substitution of Jim Burden in her bed. Antonia's next encounter with the opposite sex is no happier, for she is tricked by the promise of marriage into running away with Larry Donovan, a railroad conductor, and when deserted, is left to bear a child alone. Like Marie Shabata, Antonia gives herself spontaneously to the joy of love, but the joy is a dream, and the reality is disillusioning. Jim Burden, too, experiences the loneliness and suffering of an unhappy marriage. True, Antonia ultimately does achieve personal happiness in human relationships, chiefly in motherhood. But she is the exception, as are Jim Burden's grandparents. Like Alexandra, Antonia has a special relationship to the land; she learns of life's great cycle through personal misfortune, gaining the wisdom that love seldom has the perfection of a dream. Its imperfection in her life is suggested by Jim Burden's observation to Cuzak: "This was a fine life, certainly, but it wasn't the kind of life he wanted to live. I wondered whether the life that was right for one was ever right for two!"<sup>22</sup>

Increasingly, Miss Cather's characters experience the disillusionments of love. Whether in the world of art, the world of the prairie, or the world of the discontented, love

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 367.

fails. As early as Willa Cather's first novel, Bartley Alexander is literally destroyed by his conflicting love relationships. For Claude Wheeler, the most searching of Willa Cather's questers, love is simply one more frustration in his numerous attempts to find "something splendid" in life.<sup>23</sup> Despite the fact that Gladys Farmer shares his sensitivity, Claude falls in love with Enid Royce. From their wedding night, when Enid refuses to sleep with him because she has eaten too much chicken salad, their marriage is a failure. While Claude remains alone on the farm, Enid travels the countryside, distributing anti-saloon, sex hygiene, and hoof-and-mouth literature. The reality of his marriage is defeating to Claude. Always the idealist, he finds refuge in the timber claim, where he can "let his imagination play with life."<sup>24</sup> When reports come from China that Enid's sister is ill, she cheerfully leaves Claude in order to "do her duty." Earlier, Gladys Farmer alone had foreseen the bleak future of his marriage: "She had liked Enid ever since they were little girls--and knew all there was to know about her. Claude would become one of those dead people that moved about the streets of Frankfort; everything that was Claude would perish,

---

<sup>23</sup> One of Ours, p. 52.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

and the shell of him would come and go and eat and sleep for fifty years."<sup>25</sup>

Claude's parents share an incompatibility similar to that of Claude and Enid. Mr. Wheeler is a business opportunist for whom money and machinery are life's values. Mrs. Wheeler, however, lives for the soul; where her husband is insensitive, she is the opposite. Though little is revealed of the Royce marriage, it remains for Mr. Royce to provide the commentaries on marriage in general. Before Claude's marriage, the older man tells him, "You'll find out that pretty nearly everything you believe about life--about marriage, especially--is lies. I don't know why people prefer to live in that sort of a world, but they do."<sup>26</sup> After the youthful marriage breaks, Mr. Royce, "As he grew older . . . was more depressed by the conviction that his womenfolk had added little to the warmth and comfort of the world. Women ought to do that, whatever else they did."<sup>27</sup>

A Lost Lady also relates the disintegration of a love relationship. Captain Forrester and his wife Marian are portrayed as the epitome of midwestern culture; it is to be assumed that they lead a gracious life both socially and

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 154-155.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

personally. The particular nature of their love relationship is seen in Niel Herbert's admiration of Mrs. Forrester: "it was in her relation to her husband that he most admired her. Given her other charming attributes, her comprehension of a man like the railroad-builder, her loyalty to him, stamped her more than anything else. That, he felt, was quality; something that could never become worn or shabby. . . ."28 But Niel finds that this loyalty does become shabby when Marian Forrester establishes a romantic liason with Frank Ellinger shortly after the Captain's accident. Love has begun to diminish before the death of the Captain; after his death, love itself dies. At this point Marian Forrester is "like a ship without ballast, driven hither and thither by every wind."<sup>29</sup> The ultimate symbol of her weakness is her decision to become the mistress of the coarse, materialistic Ivy Peters. When Niel Herbert learns this he reflects: "All those years he had thought it was Mrs. Forrester who made that house so different from any other. But ever since the Captain's death it was a house where old friends, like his uncle, were betrayed and cast off, where common fellows behaved after their kind and knew a common woman when they saw

---

<sup>28</sup>A Lost Lady, p. 78.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

her."<sup>30</sup> The fate of Mrs. Forrester is to conclude her life as the youth-seeking wife of an eccentric Englishman, who, like Ivy Peters, seems to represent the opposite of Captain Forrester's fine qualities.

In The Professor's House, Willa Cather returns to the problem of the conflict between human relations and artistic, or creative, desire.<sup>31</sup> Professor St. Peter, like Miss Cather's artists, values the creative effort of his life--writing The Spanish Adventurers in North America--above his marriage to Lillian St. Peter. When the novel opens, he has finished his work, and can no longer feel a great affection for his wife. He has sacrificed love to his literary achievement. The rift between the Professor and his wife is apparent from the first of the novel, when St. Peter refuses to move his writing materials into the new home he has just built for her, and continues to work at the old house. It is given perspective by the story of the Professor's association with Tom Outland, and it is intensified by St. Peter's decision not to accompany his wife, daughter, and son-in-law on a European trip. The marriage is not typified by antagonism; rather, it is marked by misunderstanding and the subsequent alienation the couple feels from one another. To St. Peter

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>31</sup> Randall, pp. 219-225.



his wife says, "I wonder what it is that makes you draw away from your family. Or who it is. . . . Two years ago you were an impetuous young man. Now you save yourself in everything. You're naturally warm and affectionate; all at once you begin shutting yourself away from everybody. I don't think you'll be the happier for it."<sup>32</sup> Though her husband does not at this point answer her directly, he does comment elsewhere on the marriage relationship: "I was thinking, about Euripides; how, when he was an old man, he went and lived in a cave by the sea, and it was thought queer, at the time. It seems that houses had become insupportable to him. I wonder whether it was because he had observed women so closely all his life."<sup>33</sup> St. Peter's conclusion seems to be that "The heart of another is a dark forest, always, no matter how close it has been to one's own."<sup>34</sup>

This novel also marks the expansion of the art-love conflict into that of materialism versus nonmaterialism. Primarily, Professor St. Peter and his wife are unable to understand one another because in St. Peter's mind, the forces of an increasingly materialistic society have "changed and hardened" her. The two represent the opposing sides of this

---

<sup>32</sup>The Professor's House, p. 162.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

conflict which is restated in the Tom Outland story.<sup>35</sup> Both Mrs. St. Peter and Roddy Blake represent the individual who cannot see beyond the material things of life to its intangible qualities. In yet another sense, they represent reality as it opposes the ideal world of those who dream of joys beyond the horizon.

Just as The Professor's House records these conflicts in the person of Godfrey St. Peter, My Mortal Enemy reveals them in Myra Henshawe. The novel itself is the account of an "intense and destructive human relationship."<sup>36</sup> And again, as in The Professor's House, love is destroyed by materialism. In order to marry Oswald Henshawe, Myra has relinquished a sizeable inheritance. While her husband prospers in business, their relationship has a fairy-tale quality amid a setting of wealth and culture. When he fails in business, however, his marriage declines. Myra is first to recognize the cause: "We've destroyed each other. I should have stayed with my uncle. It was money I needed. We've thrown our lives away."<sup>37</sup> Like Godfrey St. Peter, Myra Henshawe isolates herself from her mate--but she is the materialist of My Mortal Enemy, not her husband. Though parallels exist to a certain

---

<sup>35</sup> Randall, pp. 219-225.

<sup>36</sup> Geismar, p. 190.

<sup>37</sup> My Mortal Enemy, p. 91.

extent between the two novels, their tone differs. In The Professor's House, the tone is one of defeat, while in My Mortal Enemy it is one of cynicism. In the first novel, materialism is contrasted to nonmaterialism, and censored in the process. In My Mortal Enemy, however, nothing is contrasted to nonmaterialism. In fact, nothing else seems to exist. In this, her last novel before withdrawing into historical writing, Miss Cather seems to be illustrating her aversion to a society devastated by the materialistic values she deplures. With the exception of My Antonia, the marriages she portrays in the novels of this period are also devastated; all are in the process of disintegration, as is the agrarian civilization Miss Cather admires.

In My Mortal Enemy, Willa Cather has Myra Henshawe make what is apparently her final pronouncement of the nature of human relationships in the twentieth century: "People can be lovers and enemies at the same time, you know. . . . A man and woman draw apart from that long embrace, and see what they have done to each other."<sup>38</sup> Here, then, is the paradox Miss Cather finds repeatedly in love relationships: that they are inevitable, yet tragic. Love cannot help man in his quest because it fails in itself. For Willa Cather's artists, love fails because it lacks the potential of art; for her pioneers,

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

it fails because of its spontaneous, innocent nature; for her discontented, it fails because it cannot transcend materialism. And for all the Cather characters, love fails because it cannot fulfill one's ideal.

Like Willa Cather, Eugene O'Neill finds love relationships essentially tragic; yet again, like Miss Cather, he finds them the "necessity of human life."<sup>39</sup> The love of his characters for each other is thwarted, too, by the antagonistic forces of materialism and idealism. The O'Neill characters, however, find to a greater extent than the Cather characters that the nature of their ideal has degenerated into the cynicism of illusion.

Both elements--materialism and illusion--are the destructive agents of love in The Great God Brown. Dion Anthony, the protagonist, is the artist who is ruined by society's concept of "success," symbolized by William Brown. The love relationships between Anthony, his wife, and Brown, are tangled by the illusions each has of the other--illusions forced upon them by their roles in a materialistic society. Margaret has married the man she believes Anthony to be, a confident, Pan-like creature who scorns the world of success. In reality, Anthony is frightened, struggling to find love in a society which renders it impossible. Throughout the play,

---

<sup>39</sup>Cather, "Katherine Mansfield," On Writing, p. 109.

O'Neill objectifies the illusions by masking the main characters. Margaret, then, loves the mask, not the man. Anthony describes their knowledge of each other this way: "We communicate in code--when neither of us has the other's key!" At another time, he says: "I love Margaret! Her blindness surpasseth all understanding!"<sup>40</sup>

The complexity of human relations increases as Anthony attempts to find with the prostitute Cybel the love he cannot achieve with Margaret. And his antagonist, Brown, seeks to possess Cybel just as he desires love with Margaret, a love he ultimately gains by assuming the mask of the dead Anthony. As they die, both men think they have found love in the worship of Cybel. But O'Neill's final pronouncement seems to be in the character of Margaret--for she retains her illusion of love for the mask of Anthony, handing it down to her sons. Probably the play's statement on love is expressed by Cybel: "What makes you pretend you think love is so important, anyway? It's just one of a lot of things you do to keep life living."<sup>41</sup>

In Marco Millions, materialism alone is the destroyer of love, for even as a youth, Marco measures love only in terms of dollars and cents. Note his poem to love:

---

<sup>40</sup> The Great God Brown, Act I, Scene I, p. 271.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., Act II, Scene I, p. 285.

You are lovely as the gold in the sun  
 Your skin is like silver in the moon  
 Your eyes are black pearls I have won.  
 I kiss your ruby lips and you swoon,  
 Smiling your thanks as I promise you  
 A large fortune if you will be true,  
 While I am away earning gold  
 And silver so when we are old  
 I will have a million to my credit  
 And in the meantime can easily afford  
 A big wedding that will do us credit  
 And start having children, bless the Lord! <sup>42</sup>

This attitude, inherited from his family, so obliterates Marco's finer sensibilities that he cannot recognize love, even when it is offered him by Princess Kukachin. She represents the joy of love; he represents the blasphemy of love. O'Neill seems to be saying that contemporary man cannot know love because of his materialistic preoccupations. Marco illustrates precisely the resultant insensitivity:

Kukachin: . . . My heart feels as if it were bursting!  
 Marco: It burns?  
 Kukachin: Like a red ember flaring up for the last  
                   time before it chills into gray ash forever!  
 Marco: Then something must have disagreed with you.  
                   Will you let me see your tongue? <sup>43</sup>

In Dynamo, O'Neill intensifies the materialism-non-materialism conflict by equating it with religion. The Fife family represents atheistic materialism which has made the dynamo its god. The Light family represents traditional religion in the narrow, puritanical sense. Reuben's rejection

---

<sup>42</sup> Marco Millions, Act I, Scene II, pp. 360-361.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., Act II, Scene III, p. 413.

of God in favor of the dynamo is paralleled by the degeneration of his love for Ada into lust. He tells her: "What we did was just plain sex--an act of nature--and that's all there is to it!"<sup>44</sup> The dynamo has influenced Reuben's conception of love--and this form proves destructive to them both.

Just as Reuben Light thinks he has found life's meaning in love for the dynamo, Robert Mayo and Stephen Murray believe they will find it in marital love. The entire action of Beyond the Horizon is based upon the conflict between illusion and reality as it affects the love relationship. At the beginning of the play, both Robert and his brother Andrew believe they love Ruth. At the end of the play, all three recognize that their personal illusions have provided a barrier to love. The tragic quality of the play is not so much Robert's death as it is the hopelessness of the future which O'Neill suggests. This hopelessness is illustrated specifically in The Straw, where Stephen Murray and Eileen Carmody, refusing to recognize the reality of her imminent death, plan an impossible marriage.

In All God's Chillun Got Wings and Welded, love alone is the destroyer. And the hopelessness of the earlier plays becomes the pattern of action in the first drama. Attempting to pass the state bar examination, Jim Harris fails repeatedly

---

<sup>44</sup>Dynamo, Act II, Scene II, p. 469.

as his wife, Ella, works to diminish his self-confidence. Their love is based upon a mutual dependence: Ella is a former prostitute, who must have love in order to maintain some measure of self respect; Jim desires the love of a white woman so he can identify himself with that race. Jim explains their dependency this way: "I can't leave her. She can't leave me. And there's a million little reasons combining to make one big reason why we can't. For her sake-- if it'd do her good--I'd go--I'd leave--I'd do anything-- because I love her. I'd kill myself even--jump out of this window this second--I've thought it over, too--but that'd only make matters worse for her. I'm all she's got in the world!"<sup>45</sup> The result of this morbid love is mutual destruction. Both lose their sanity.

In the second play, Michael and Eleanor Cape are bound together by their mutual desire for an ideal, sacramental love on the one hand, and their desire for personal freedom on the other. This conflict leads them to quarrel after quarrel, and finally, a desire to kill their love. The attempt proves a failure, and they learn that their dream of love will always be punctuated by the reality of hate in which they'll "torture and tear, and clutch for each other's souls! fight--

---

<sup>45</sup>All God's Chillun Got Wings, Act II, Scene II, p. 332.



fail and hate again--but!--fail with pride--with joy!"<sup>46</sup>

This play thus expresses a philosophy basic to O'Neill's work--that love between the sexes is both man's greatest hope and his greatest threat.<sup>47</sup> This attitude, of course, recognizes the same duality of love which Willa Cather sees in life. For both authors, human relationships are inevitable, but tragic.

Love assumes a new dimension in Diff'rent, for O'Neill's illusion-reality motif is translated into biological terms. According to one scholar, reality takes the form of man's sexual needs, while his inner illusions are the repression of the sexual drive.<sup>48</sup> Even the form of the play illustrates this conflict: the first act demonstrates Emma's refusal to accept the reality of her fiance's sexual need, and the second presents the frustrations which come to her as the result of repressing her instincts. The result is grotesque.

Sexuality is again the focal point in Strange Interlude; in fact, it is so frequent in O'Neill's plays that one critic has commented, "Sex is almost the only idea he has--has insistently--and it is for him only an idea."<sup>49</sup> This idea,

---

<sup>46</sup>Welded, Act III, p. 488.

<sup>47</sup>Falk, p. 87.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>49</sup>Eric Bentley, "Trying to Like O'Neill," O'Neill and His Plays: Four Decades of Criticism, p. 344.

nevertheless, controls the action of Strange Interlude, for the play's complicated love relationships are all triggered initially by the desire of Nina Leeds to give herself to any man who will have her; this, she feels, will relieve her guilt for not allowing her fiance to possess her before he left for war and death. Every character in Strange Interlude desires love, and every character obtains an unsatisfactory substitute in which the emphasis is on sex--nothing more. In her search for love, Nina Leeds exploits the men she values most: Darrell, Sam Evans, and her son, Gordon. She marries Evans, has a child by Darrell; later, she selfishly wishes to reveal his paternity to her son in order to punish the two men. She exemplifies the play's attitudes toward human relationships with this comment: "There's no use trying to think of others. One human being can't think of another. It's impossible."<sup>50</sup> The sexuality of the characters appears through the asides which O'Neill employs to reveal man's internal and external conflicts. Charles Marsden, for example, like Emma of Diff'rent, attempts to repress his sexual instincts; unlike her, he sublimates them into the care of his ailing mother.

The Iceman Cometh and Long Day's Journey into Night demonstrate a further degeneration of love between the sexes. Harry Hickey's wife bases her love for him upon the illusion

---

<sup>50</sup>Strange Interlude, Act V, pp. 103-104.

that he is faithful; Hickey's love is based solely upon guilt. The irony of their relationship, however, is that Harry possesses an illusion greater than that of his wife. Unable to admit it even to himself, Hickey in reality hates Evelyn, and this, not love, leads him to destroy her. More bitterly here than in any other play does O'Neill appear to conclude that love no longer exists. To emphasize this, he parodies love in the relationship of Chuck and Cora. Chuck is a pimp, Cora a prostitute, but both entertain the illusion that some day they will marry and live on a farm.

The primary union in Long Day's Journey into Night re-echoes the pleasure-pain principle underlying most of O'Neill's love relationships. The Tyrone's married with illusions of supreme happiness; the reality of their marriage has been far less than their expectations. The matinee idol is, in fact, a miser; and the sweet convent girl becomes a drug addict. Years of misunderstanding have built up barriers no longer destructible. Relating more closely to the Iceman picture of love, however, are the subsidiary sexual relationships in O'Neill's autobiographical play. Jamie and his brother Edmund have no concept of love; for both, it is sexual gratification, whether with the "good" girl across the street or with the fattest "madam" in the local establishment.

While definitely oriented toward sexuality, Eugene O'Neill nevertheless shares with Willa Cather his basic

attitude toward the love relationship. On the one hand, he presents love in all its cynicism and grotesquerie; on the other, he sympathizes with the suffering it exacts from man. His conclusion is neither the acceptance nor rejection of love, but instead, the realization of its duality. Love between men and women can never reach the ideal; for this reason, it fails as the answer to man's quest for meaning. The comment of Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill on the human dilemma does not rest solely upon man-woman relationships, however, but is further illustrated within the family.

Both authors parallel the disintegrating nature of love relationships with the pattern of escape from the family unit. And again, their common attitude seems to take its impetus from changes occurring in society. Particularly does Miss Cather see the breakdown of the family as an outgrowth of man's increasing social mobility and changing social values. Repeatedly, she chronicles the contrasting values among the members of a family: "One realizes that even in harmonious families there is this double life: the group life, which is the one we can observe in our neighbour's household, and, underneath, another--secret and passionate and intense--which is the real life that stamps the faces and gives character to the voices of our friends. Always in his mind each member of these social units is escaping, running

away, trying to break the net which circumstances and his own affections have woven about him."<sup>51</sup>

The nature of these family relationships is seen in miniature in Miss Cather's "The Sculptor's Funeral." Even at the death of Harvey Merrick, a hometown boy who went East in order to become a noted sculptor, his family exhibits a complete lack of understanding of his personality, his desires, and his talent. Steavens, a student of Merrick's who has accompanied the body home for the funeral, reveals Merrick's personality; and the contrast between the man himself and his origin make clear that his life had been a continual effort to escape the "raw, biting ugliness" of the home where his mother had "made Harvey's life a hell for him."<sup>52</sup> Merrick does not even possess the repose of death, but has "drawn brows" and a chin "thrust forward defiantly. It was as though the strain of life had been so sharp and bitter that death could not at once wholly relax the tension and smooth the countenance into perfect peace--as though he were still guarding something precious and holy, which might even yet be wrested from him."<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup>Cather, "Katherine Mansfield," On Writing, p. 109.

<sup>52</sup>Cather, "The Sculptor's Funeral," from The Troll Garden, pp. 441-442.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

The pattern of escape and misunderstanding is continued in The Song of the Lark, One of Ours, and My Mortal Enemy. Thea's father, the Reverend Kronborg, has no concept of her talent. To him, it simply indicates that she should perform at church meetings and leave school at the age of fifteen in order to teach music lessons. To her, it means four hours of practice a day. The only place Thea finds real understanding is outside her family circle: from Professor Wunsch, Ray Kennedy, and the Mexicans. And it is these people who enable her to leave home and learn her art. Similarly, Claude Wheeler's desire to escape from a life which is choking him is frustrated by his family responsibilities. His college education has been cut short by his father's demand that he take over the farm; and as is the case with Thea, it is the intervention of outside forces which changes his fate--in this instance, war. Romance causes the conflict between Myra Henshawe and her wealthy uncle. Despite his disapproval of Oswald Henshawe, Myra runs away from home, marries the young man anyway, and is disinherited.

The misunderstanding between parent and child in Miss Gather's works becomes dislike when it occurs between the children of the family. Thea Kronborg's talent isolates her to some degree from her brothers and sisters, but it is not until she refuses to sing for a funeral that she is aware

of the spiteful, vindictive dislike of her sister Anna. Soon within her family she feels that "chilling hostilities might be awaiting her in the trunk loft, on the stairway, almost anywhere."<sup>54</sup> In evaluating her relationships with her sisters and brothers, Thea observes: "Now they had all grown up and become persons. They faced each other as individuals, and she saw that Anna and Gus and Charley were among the people whom she had always recognized as her natural enemies. Their ambitions and sacred proprieties were meaningless to her. . . . Nothing that she would ever do in the world would seem important to them, and nothing they would ever do would seem important to her."<sup>55</sup> Not unexpectedly, Thea severs her family relationships to obtain more artistic freedom.

Dislike also alienates Claude Wheeler from his brothers Ralph and Bayliss. Even Alexandra, who achieves understanding with her father, if not her mother, is subject to the distrust and contempt of her brothers, save Emil. At the beginning of O Pioneers!, both Lou and Oscar disagree with Alexandra about keeping the farm. Their reluctant agreement, however, culminates in their prosperity. Despite this show of unity, their failure to recognize Alexandra's identity as a woman and their

---

<sup>54</sup> The Song of the Lark, p. 240.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

criticism of her affection for Carl Linstrum and of her business management of the land cause a family break.

In The Professor's House, Willa Cather makes some of her "most sensitive and acute observations of the human family in general: and here the persistent undertones of suffering in these human relationships, of thwarted desire, of broken delight, of jealousy, malice, and actual anguish, become more marked."<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the daughters of Professor St. Peter do not love each other, and the Professor himself admits no understanding of either of them. Despite this, it is clear that he feels a greater affinity with Kathleen, while his wife is protective toward Rosamond. Money, however, not individuals, is the great destroyer of family harmony in the novel. Rosamond and her husband Louie have inherited the wealth realized from Tom Outland's invention, while Kathleen and her husband have only a journalist's salary. Envy and condescension are the result. The feeling of the two sisters toward one another is described thus by Kathleen: "When she comes toward me, I feel hate coming toward me, like a snake's hate!"<sup>57</sup> Their antagonism is exhibited also by their husbands, as Scott thwarts Louie's attempt to join the Arts and Letters Society.

---

<sup>56</sup> Geismar, p. 184.

<sup>57</sup> The Professor's House, p. 85.



The exception to the pattern of escape, misunderstanding, and dislike in Miss Cather's family relationships is found in My Antonia, where the Burden and Cuzak families are examined and found harmonious. These families become the ideal against which Miss Cather contrasts less favorable reality, for they are representative of the old, pioneer order she extolls. In contrast, the characters of the new order are "natural" or "mortal" enemies of those who possess creative energy, even finding their way into this novel as Jim Burden describes the families of Black Hawk--a group whose characteristics appear in individual families of Miss Cather's later works:

On starlight nights I used to pace up and down those long, cold streets, scowling at the little, sleeping houses on either side, with their storm-windows and covered back porches. They were flimsy shelters, most of them poorly built of light wood, with spindle perch-posts horribly mutilated by the turning-lathe. Yet for all their frailness, how much jealousy and envy and unhappiness some of them managed to contain. The life that went on in them seemed to me made up of evasions and negations; shifts to save cooking, to save washing and cleaning, devices to propitiate the tongue of gossip. This guarded mode of existence was like living under a tyranny. People's speech, their voices, their very glances, became furtive and repressed. Every individual taste, every natural appetite, was bridled by caution. The people asleep in those houses, I thought, tried to live like the mice in their own kitchens; to make no noise, to leave no trace, to slip over the surface of things in the dark.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup>My Antonia, p. 219.

Eugene O'Neill, like Willa Cather, writes one play in which the family relationships are harmonious and society is simple. Ah, Wilderness! relates the 4th of July celebration of the Miller family, in which the most serious conflicts are affectionate family squabbles and the most serious misunderstandings are caused by young Richard's interest in love poetry and the works of Shaw, Swinburne, and Oscar Wilde. The play nostalgically relates a young man's initiation into life with the aid of his family--most particularly his father, who offers kindly advice and sincere sympathy for his son's growing pains.

By comparison, the other O'Neill plays abound in antagonistic family relationships. And the patterns of escape, misunderstanding, and dislike which occur in Miss Cather's works appear in greater intensity in O'Neill's dramas. The love conflicts of Beyond the Horizon have already been mentioned; the conflict between generations occurs when the elder Mayo, unhappy at Andrew's decision to go to sea in Robert's place, disowns him for criticizing the farm. The conflict between the fighting Carmodys and the dreaming Cullens is made evident in the opening lines of The Straw; further, Mr. Carmody, bitter at the death of his wife and the physical weakness of his daughter, begrudges spending the money for medicine to make her well. In Dynamo, Rueben Light escapes from his parents when they disapprove of the girl he loves.

His one remaining family objective is to convert his mother to his new god of electricity. Years of parental neglect separate Chris Christopherson from his daughter, Anna Christie. Because he sees in her the mental picture he has carried so long, Chris does not recognize Anna's real nature. Their relationship is not marked by antagonism, but by ignorance. In contrast, Miss Leeds of Strange Interlude wants to prevent her son's marriage merely to placate the demands of her own ego.

O'Neill's most detailed accounts of degenerating family relationships are found in Desire Under the Elms, Mourning Becomes Electra, and Long Day's Journey into Night. In the first play, the action is triggered by the war between maternal and paternal forces which takes place within the split personality of Eben Cabot.<sup>59</sup> The revolt of Cabot's elder sons against him reinforces the tyrannical attitude he embodies. In contrast, his dead wife represents the spirit of love which Cabot sacrificed to hard work and a lack of love. It is to revenge the spirit of his mother's love at the expense of his father that Eben joins in adultery with Abbie, Ephraim's third wife.

The tension between Puritanism and love, between maternal and paternal forces, is again felt in Mourning

---

<sup>59</sup>Valk, p. 94.

Becomes Electra. The destruction of the Mannon family is a multi-generation affair, set in motion by Lavinia's and Orin's grandfather, who put his brother out of his house after the younger man's involvement with a French-Canadian governess. The pattern of the plot is that of the Oedipus and Electra stories, for the child of the liaison, Adam Brant, returns to the house of the Mannons to avenge his parents. Lavinia's mother has hated her husband, Ezra, for some time. Both she and Lavinia fall in love with Adam, but it is Christine who becomes his mistress, and who, when the opportunity arises, poisons her husband. To revenge her father and her love for Adam, Lavinia drives her brother, Orin, to the murder of their mother's lover. After the murder, Orin and Lavinia take on the attributes of their parents; in fact, Orin feels that they have actually become their mother and father:

"Can't you see I'm now in Father's place and you're Mother!"<sup>60</sup>

The symbolic incest resulting in this role change sets up a duality of love and hate between Orin and his sister, culminating in Orin's suicide and Lavinia's self-imposed isolation:

"I'll live alone with the dead, and keep their secrets, and let them hound me, until the curse is played out and the last Mannon is let die!"<sup>61</sup> The entire Mannon family has destroyed itself.

---

<sup>60</sup>Mourning Becomes Electra, "The Hunted," Act II, p. 155.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., Act IV, p. 178.

"As in most families, the mere struggle to have anything of one's own, to be one's self at all, creates an element of strain which keeps everybody almost at the breaking point."<sup>62</sup> Thus does Willa Cather describe the nature of the family unit. It is Eugene O'Neill, however, who conveys this sense of strain most mercilessly and realistically in his autobiographical play, Long Day's Journey into Night. The tormented relationships within the Tyrone family illustrate precisely the love and pain duality expressed continually by Miss Cather and O'Neill. Bound together by love, by the past, and by their dreams, the members of the Tyrone family are simultaneously trying to escape these ties: Mary, through drug addiction; James Tyrone, through preoccupation with money; Jamie, through liquor and women; and Edmund, through illness and death. The action of the play centers about Mary Tyrone's return to drug addiction after her family hopes she has been cured. Just as this pipe dream vanishes, so do the illusions each member of the family holds about himself. The ambivalent feelings of the Tyrones are revealed in the dialogue which alternates between biting accusations and pathetic confessions. As Jamie admits to Edmund: "Mamma and Papa are right. I've been rotten bad influence. And worst of it is, I did it on purpose. . . . Never wanted you to succeed and

---

<sup>62</sup>Cather, "Katherine Mansfield," On Writing, p. 109.

make me look even worse by comparison. Wanted you to fail. Always jealous of you. Mamma's baby, Papa's pet! . . . God damn you, I can't help hating your guts! . . . But don't get wrong ideas, Kid. I love you more than I hate you. My saying what I'm feeling you now proves it."<sup>63</sup>

Man's hope and man's threat--this is love as Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill express it in their works--a duality in which joy and misery alternate. The emphasis, however, they place upon misery, for both authors consistently portray the destructive power of love and the disintegration of love relationships. Family situations as well as marriages are marked by hate, distrust, and the desire to escape. For Miss Cather, love is not as powerful as personal ambition; her characters, therefore, reject it in favor of creative endeavor or materialism. For O'Neill, love is not strong enough to meet the excessive demands his characters make of it. Both writers, then, portray the failure of love--in its ability to withstand the new pressures of a changing society, and in its inadequacy as an answer to man's quest for the meaning of love. In her portrayal of personal relationships, Willa Cather regards other people as enemies; O'Neill, however, sees man's greatest enemy as himself. Despite this difference, they both recognize that the reality of love falls short of

---

<sup>63</sup>Long Day's Journey into Night, Act III, pp. 163-164.

its ideal. The joys of love are ephemeral; the miseries, eternal. Through love, man does not discover life's meaning; instead, he realizes that "human relationships are the tragic necessity of human life. . . ."<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup>Cather, "Katherine Mansfield," On Writing, p. 109.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SICKNESS OF TODAY

Essentially lost souls, the characters of Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill are searching constantly within themselves for their own identity; when they fail, they extend their search to find life's meaning to the human relationships of family and sexual love. The result is torment and frustration, and the strugglers--Robert Mayo, Claude Wheeler, Yank, Alexandra, and Antonia--give way to the utterly defeated--Marian Forrester, Professor St. Peter, Myra Henshawe, Dion Anthony, Theodore Hickman, and Jim Harris--who have learned that the forces of the twentieth century are antagonistic to love as well as to the individual will. This is the theme echoed by Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill, who, though primarily writers of the twenties, to some extent spanned the transitional period between nineteenth and twentieth-century America, and created their characters to reflect the changing nature of the United States and its people.

More than O'Neill, Miss Cather contrasted the characteristics of the two centuries: the one age optimistic, in which man directed his own destiny through the exercise of individual will, the new age pessimistic, in which declining heroism had no chance whatsoever against the ruthless



materialism of twentieth-century America. Particularly in the 1920's, however, did both authors register their criticism of the new age; the old pioneer order was being superseded by the new, materialistic one--but only over their protests. Each writer dramatized the problem differently; their theme, however, was the same: that man's quest as it occurs within his individual soul, his human relationships, and his society at large, is doomed to failure. O'Neill put it this way in a letter to George Jean Nathan: "The playwright today must dig at the roots of the sickness of today as he feels it--the death of the Old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying new One for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort his fears of death with."<sup>1</sup> Certainly, both O'Neill and Miss Cather in examining the worlds of the discontented do just that--they "dig at the roots of the sickness of today."

World War I, of course, played a part in producing this sickness: its diminution of the United States' isolation from the rest of the world; its disorganization of man's traditional individual and group identity; its emphasis on science and technology to achieve an end rather than upon

---

<sup>1</sup>O'Neill in a letter to George Jean Nathan, reprinted in The Intimate Notebooks of George Jean Nathan, p. 180.

human endeavour alone; and its stimulation of general prosperity throughout the nation. These changes, among others, transformed American life from its simple agrarian existence into a highly mechanized, urban society, a society whose writers for the most part waged war against the old-fashioned provincialism and championed the new trends--for they marked progress; they formed the basis for modern living. For Eugene O'Neill and Willa Cather, however, these trends suggested the reverse of progress; in supplying man's material needs, society was ignoring his spiritual and creative needs. The advent of the machine, particularly, they saw as destroying man's creative spirit and robbing him of his rightful place in the natural order of things; from him was being taken not only his identity, but his humanity.

One indication of how strongly O'Neill felt about the emerging modern society is his often quoted statement: "I'm going on the theory that the United States, instead of being the most successful country in the world, is the greatest failure."<sup>2</sup> His characters are obviously representative of that failure. In the opinions of both authors, the new age imparted to its citizens spineless conformity instead of heroic struggle. "At present in the west," Willa Cather once

---

<sup>2</sup>Barrett Clark, Eugene O'Neill: The Man and his Plays (New York: Dover, 1947), p. 152.

said, "there seems to be an idea that we all must be like somebody else, as much as if we had all been cast in the same mold. We wear exactly similar clothes, drive the same make of car, live in the same part of town, in the same style of house. It's deadly!"<sup>3</sup> She summarized her reaction to the new standardization this way: "Life began for me when I ceased to admire and began to remember."<sup>4</sup> Similarly, O'Neill stated, "I do not think you can write anything of value or understanding about the present. You can only write about life if it is far enough in the past. The present is too much mixed up with superficial values."<sup>5</sup> These are the two poles, then, which delineate the works of Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill: bitter pessimism for the present age and nostalgia for the one just past. Indications of both attitudes are evident in their works of the twenties.

Their criticisms of the present may be grouped into three primary concepts which become symbols for both authors: the machine, commercialism, and materialism. Appearing individually and in combination, these symbols suggest a thematic relationship between Willa Cather's works of this

---

<sup>3</sup>Cather, quoted in an interview by Eleanor Hinman, *The Lincoln Sunday Star*, (Nov. 6, 1921), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>Sergeant, p. 107.

<sup>5</sup>O'Neill, quoted in a *New York Times* interview by Karl Schriftgiesser, (Oct. 6, 1946), Sec. 2, p. 1.

period and T. S. Eliot's The Wasteland.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, too, the mood which prevails is a pessimistic awareness of the sterility of a modern civilization whose inhabitants are like O'Neill's William Brown: "inwardly empty and resourceless, an uncreative creature of superficial preordained social grooves. . . ." <sup>7</sup>

In the works of Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill the wasteland comparison becomes valuable as it vivifies man's changing relationship to nature; for the two writers associate man's quest for the ultimate at least partially with his affinity toward the natural world. For Miss Cather, the prairie is both a test and an outlet for the expression of man's creative strength; for O'Neill, the sea performs a similar function.<sup>8</sup> In Miss Cather's prairie novels, for example, man works with nature to achieve something great; in her later novels of this period, however, twentieth century man has lost his identity with nature; consequently, his world

---

<sup>6</sup>For a comparison of Miss Cather's symbolic setting with that of T. S. Eliot, see Bernard Baum's "Willa Cather's Wasteland," South Atlantic Quarterly, XLIII (October 1949), pp. 589-601.

<sup>7</sup>O'Neill, quoted by Gelb., p. 581.

<sup>8</sup>Interestingly, both authors experienced a change of heart in their evaluations of soil and sea. Miss Cather's initial reaction to the prairie was one of criticism and rebellion, i.e. The Troll Garden, while twenty years later, she attributed to it man's greatest values. In his early one-act plays and in Anna Christie, O'Neill treats the sea as devil; by The Iceman Cometh and Long Day's Journey into Night, he sees in it the enduring values of life.

and the natural world become divorced. Though the prairie continues to flourish and to produce abundantly, it does so independently of man; his mechanistic, materialistic existence becomes a sterile wasteland. My Antonia is almost rhapsodic in its descriptions of the land, subtle in its message of the ideal man-nature relationship:

We sat looking off across the country, watching the sun go down. The curly grass about us was on fire now. The bark of the oaks turned as red as copper. There was a shimmer of gold on the brown river. Out in the stream the sandbars glittered like glass, and the light trembled in the willow thickets as if little flames were leaping among them. The breeze sank to stillness. In the ravine a ringdove mourned plaintively, and somewhere off in the bushes an owl hooted. . . . There were no clouds, the sun was going down in a limpid, goldwashed sky. Just as the lower edge of the red disk rested on the high fields against the horizon, a great black figure suddenly appeared on the face of the sun. . . . On some upland farm, a plough had been left standing in the field. The sun was sinking just behind it. Magnified across the distance by the horizontal light, it stood out against the sun, was exactly contained within the circle of the disk; the handles, the tongue, the share--black against the molten red. There it was, heroic in size, a picture writing on the sun.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, the descriptions in One of Ours do not focus upon the prairie, but upon the world man himself has created. Instead of beauty, there is ugliness--the ugliness

---

<sup>9</sup>My Antonia, p. 245.

of disorder, of broken, soulless objects. Instead of the plow, there are machines.

The cellar was cemented, cool, and dry, with deep closets for canned fruit and flour and groceries, bins for coal and cobs, and a dark-room full of photographer's apparatus. Claude took his place at the carpenter's bench under one of the square windows. Mysterious objects stood about him in the grey twilight; electric batteries, old bicycles and typewriters, a machine for making cement fence-posts, a vulcanizer, a stereoptican with a broken lens. The mechanical tyres Ralph could not operate successfully, as well as those he had got tired of, were stored away here. . . . Nearly every time Claude went into the cellar, he made a desperate resolve to clear the place out some day, reflecting bitterly that the money this wreckage cost would have put a boy through college decently.<sup>10</sup>

The mechanical progress of the century is reflected in the Wheeler family. Claude's brother, Ralph, "was the chief mechanic of the Wheeler farm, and when the farm implements and the automobiles did not give him enough to do, he went to town and bought machines for the house. As soon as Mahalley got used to a washing-machine or a churn, Ralph, to keep up with the bristling march of invention, brought home a still newer one."<sup>11</sup> Just as Ralph is characterized by his mechanical ability, so is Claude's wife, Enid, characterized by her pre-occupation with the automobile. Instead of staying home and

---

<sup>10</sup> One of Ours, p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

building her marriage, she drives constantly over the countryside. And instead of farming the land, Claude's father departs his community to sell machinery.

Like Miss Cather's novels, the plays of O'Neill emphasize the gulf between the world of man and the world of nature. And O'Neill, too, sees man's world as intensely ugly. The characters of The Hairy Ape have become machines themselves, existing in a cellar far more oppressive than that of the Wheelers. O'Neill's stage directions call for the effect of "a cramped space in the bowels of a ship, imprisoned by white steel. The lines of bunks, the uprights supporting them, cross each other like the steel framework of a cage. The ceiling crushes down upon the men's heads. They cannot stand upright."<sup>12</sup> Contrasting with this mechanistic world is the desire of one character, Paddy, for the beauty and spiritual unity of the age just past. In Act I he says, "Oh, to be back in the fine days of my youth, eochone! Oh, there was fine beautiful ships them days--clippers wid tall masts touching the sky--fine strong men in them--men that was sons of the sea as if 'twas the mother that bore them. . . . Yerra, what's the use of talking? 'Tis a dead man's whisper. 'Twas them days a ship was part of the sea, and a man was part of a ship,

---

<sup>12</sup>The Hairy Ape, Scene I, p. 207.

and the sea joined all together and made it one."<sup>13</sup> Not only is man destroying the beauty of the past; he is also destroying the ideal man-nature relationship in which man identifies himself with nature. The latter idea is given further expression in Beyond the Horizon, as Robert Mayo attempts to analyze the reasons he and his brother have failed in their vocations. To Andrew, he says: "You used to be a creator when you loved the farm. You and life were in harmonious partnership. . . . What I mean is that your gambling with the thing you used to love to create proves how far astray--so you'll be punished. . . ."14

Alexandra, the first of Miss Cather's pioneer heroines, feels this lost harmony; she imposes order and arrangement upon nature in her farm and in her garden. Of her heroine, Willa Cather says, "You feel that, properly, Alexandra's house is the big out-of-doors, and that it is in the soil that she expresses herself best."<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Antonia achieves order in the land--particularly in her orchard garden. But the frustrated characters of Miss Cather's later novels are unsuccessful in their attempts to preserve this relationship to the land, and the relationship--once so important--steadily

---

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 213-214.

<sup>14</sup>Beyond the Horizon, Act III, Scene I, p. 162.

<sup>15</sup>O Pioneers!, p. 84.



declines until in My Mortal Enemy the main character views the land merely as an observer. Finally, even the beauty of the land itself is laid waste in A Lost Lady, when Ivy Peters drains Captain Forrester's unproductive, yet beautiful marsh in order to cultivate marketable wheat.

The resultant wasteland is the setting for O'Neill's plays; no beauty is portrayed here, for the author finds it always elusive, and always just beyond man's grasp. The only sure beauty is that of man's past or of man's dreams. His characters may toil the land or sail the sea, but on the stage they feel only frustration, and any beauty they may have observed is far removed.

Of the three symbols, then--the machine, materialism, and commercialism--the machine is most instrumental in weakening man's ties to nature; more important than its destruction of the beauty in man's world, however, is the fact that it devastates the essential quality which binds man to nature originally: his creative, forceful spirit symbolized in My Antonia by the plow silhouetted against the sun. Both Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill record the process of this loss and the struggle and subsequent failure in life it causes their heroes. And both characterize the nature of this spirit in one word--desire. In commenting upon The Great God Brown, O'Neill described this desire as "the deep main current of

life."<sup>16</sup> In Miss Cather's The Song of the Lark, old Wunsch tells Thea, "Nothing is far and nothing is dear, if one desires. The world is little, human life is little. There is only one big thing--desire. And before it, when it is big, all is little."<sup>17</sup> At another point in the novel, Miss Cather makes this apostrophe to desire: "O eagle of eagles! Endeavor, achievement, desire, glorious striving of human art!"<sup>18</sup> The idea is continued in The Professor's House: "A man can do anything if he wishes to enough, St. Peter believed. Desire is creation. . . ."<sup>19</sup>

The scientific twentieth century, however, successfully nullifies St. Peter's optimism, for both Miss Cather and O'Neill are forced to acknowledge the existence of forces greater than the creative desire of their characters. The frustration of this acknowledgement is voiced by Dion Anthony in The Great God Brown: "But to be neither creature nor creator! To exist only in her [life's] indifference! To be unloved by life!"<sup>20</sup> The advancing technology of the twentieth century weakens man's relationship with nature by limiting his opportunity for personal creativity. In addition, the

---

<sup>16</sup>O'Neill, quoted by Gelb, p. 581.

<sup>17</sup>The Song of the Lark, p. 75.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 320.

<sup>19</sup>The Professor's House, p. 29.

<sup>20</sup>The Great God Brown, Act II, Scene III, p. 296.

world of science and machinery fails to provide the intangible qualities which make life enjoyable for man. In The Professor's House, Godfrey St. Peter makes precisely that point in a meeting with his university class:

No Miller, I don't myself think much of science as a phase of human development. It has given us a lot of ingenious toys; they take our attention away from the real problems, of course, and since the problems are insoluble, I suppose we ought to be grateful for distraction. But the fact is, the human mind, the individual mind, has always been made more interesting by dwelling on the old riddles, even if it makes nothing of them. Science hasn't given us any new amusements, except of the superficial kind we get from witnessing dexterity and sleight of hand. It hasn't given us any richer pleasures, as the Renaissance did, nor any new sins--not one! Indeed, it takes our old ones away. . . . I don't think you help people by making their conduct of no importance--you impoverish them. . . . And that's what makes men happy, believing in the mystery and importance of their own little individual lives.<sup>21</sup>

For Miss Cather, science in general was symbolized by the machine. And in One of Ours, this symbol becomes her evaluative measure of man. Here, Claude Wheeler contrasts the lives of his family with those of his ideals, the Erliches. They "knew how to live, he discovered, and spent their money on themselves, instead of on machines to do the work and machines to entertain people. Machines, Claude decided, could not make

---

<sup>21</sup>The Professor's House, p. 68.

pleasure, whatever else they could do. They could not make agreeable people, either."<sup>22</sup> This position was made even more clear by Miss Cather in a 1921 Omaha newspaper interview: "Money, motors, movies, machine music! The American people are so submerged in them that sometimes I think that they can only be made to laugh and to cry by machinery!"<sup>23</sup>

Both authors find that the joy of life, then, in its individual achievement, in its human relationships, in its pleasures of the spirit, is largely negated by the machine, for the machine, in stimulating production, causes the process of buying and selling to supersede that of producing. With this changed emphasis, Miss Cather and O'Neill see new qualities of character emerge: selfishness, laziness, narrowness, cruelty. As one critic says of the playwright's characters: "The passion of O'Neill's characters is . . . the passion of business, ownership, and acquisitiveness."<sup>24</sup> The personification of this passion is seen in Marco Polo, the protagonist of O'Neill's Marco Millions. This changed emphasis is also described by Willa Cather in One of Ours:

---

<sup>22</sup>One of Ours, p. 43.

<sup>23</sup>Cather, quoted in an Omaha Daily News interview, (Oct. 29, 1921), Sec. C, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup>Harry Slochower, No Voice is Wholly Lost: Writers and Thinkers in War and Peace, (New York: Creative Age Press, 1945), p. 249.

The farmer raised and took to market things with an intrinsic value; wheat and corn as good as could be grown anywhere in the world, hogs and cattle that were the best of their kind. In return he got manufactured goods of poor quality; showy furniture that went to pieces, carpets and draperies that faded, clothes that made a handsome man look like a clown. Most of his money was paid out for machinery,--and that, too, went to pieces. A steam thrasher didn't last long; a horse outlived three automobiles.

Claude felt sure that when he was a little boy and all the neighbors were poor, they and their houses and farms had more individuality. . . . With prosperity came a kind of callousness; everybody wanted to destroy the old things they used to take pride in. The orchards, which had been nursed and tended so carefully twenty years ago, were now left to die of neglect. It was less trouble to run into town in an automobile and buy fruit than it was to raise it.

The people themselves had changed. He could remember when all the farmers in this community were friendly toward each other; now they were continually having lawsuits. Their sons were either stingy and grasping or extravagant and lazy, and they were always stirring up trouble.<sup>25</sup>

The third twentieth century force O'Neill and Miss Cather see--materialism--is the product of the other two, for the prosperity produced by the forces of machine and commercialism reorients man's goals from production to acquisition. And it is this reorientation of values surrounding them which isolates the characters of Miss Cather and O'Neill not only from nature, but from their fellow men, and from society at large. Paradoxically, while money unifies the Polo family in Marco Millions, it alienates them from the Eastern society

---

<sup>25</sup>One of Ours, pp. 101-102.

in which they move; on the other hand, money divides the St. Peter family of The Professor's House, while simultaneously the possession of it joins them to society. Interesting, too, in Miss Cather's work is that the absence of money largely causes the failure of two marriages--those of the Forresters and the Oswalds. As Mrs. Forrester says to Niel Herbert in A Lost Lady, "Money is a very important thing. Realize that in the beginning; face it, and don't be ridiculous in the end, like so many of us."<sup>26</sup> The importance of money to O'Neill's characters, too, cannot be underestimated; it is money on which Andrew, in Beyond the Horizon, attempts to base meaning in life, and it is parsimoniousness which characterizes the paternal figures O'Neill creates from The Straw to Long Day's Journey into Night.

The characters of Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill are rendered helpless by the combination of machine, commercialism, and materialism. Not only must they exist in a world these forces render devoid of beauty and joy; they must survive in a society devoid of traditional values. While Miss Cather records the process of this value loss, O'Neill pictures a world with values already extinct. That beauty, truth, order, sensitivity, integrity, strength, imagination, courage, and heroism are needed to remedy the sterility of contemporary

---

<sup>26</sup>A Lost Lady, p. 114.

society is implicit, however, in the works of both authors. O'Neill dramatizes this need in his characters' creation of new gods to replace the values now lost; in the process, the characters are destroyed. In contrast, Miss Cather's characters observe passively the changing order, disapprove of it, and are ultimately corrupted by it. They do not create new gods, but look back to the qualities of the pioneers and the artists, seeing in them more than personal traits--principles which oppose contemporary dissolution.<sup>27</sup> Miss Cather's best expression of this idea is found in her essay, "Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle":

In Nebraska as in so many other States, we must face the fact that the splendid story of the pioneer is finished, and that no new story worthy to take its place has yet begun. The generation that subdued the wild land and broke up the virgin prairie is passing, but it is still there, a group of rugged figures in the background which inspire respect, compel admiration. With these old men and women the attainment of material prosperity was a moral victory, because it was wrung from hard conditions, was the result of a struggle that tested characters. . . . The generation now in the driver's seat hates to make anything, wants to live and die in an automobile, scudding past those acres where the old men used to follow the long corn-rows up and down. They want to buy everything ready-made;<sup>28</sup> clothes, food, education, music, pleasure.

---

<sup>27</sup>Kazin, p. 250.

<sup>28</sup>Cather, "Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle," The New Republic, CXVII (September 5, 1923), p. 238.

This criticism of the machine world dominates One of Ours. Already mentioned have been the novel's wasteland images which indicate the sterility of man's world. Here Claude Wheeler's pioneer sensitivity is completely out of place. As his friend Ernest Havel puts it, "It's queer about that boy. . . . He's big and strong, and he's got all that fine land, but he don't seem to fit in right."<sup>29</sup> Only in France does Claude feel he has found himself; here, despite war, man has not only retained his relationship with the land, but has sustained his sense of values: "This war has taught us all how little the made things matter. Only the feeling matters."<sup>30</sup>

A similar condemnation of the machine is found in O'Neill's Dynamo and The Hairy Ape.<sup>31</sup> In the first of these plays, traditional religion has become bigoted, so it is easily conquered by the new god of electricity, symbolized by the dynamo. The protagonist, Reuben Light, comes to believe that "There is no God! No God but Electricity!"<sup>32</sup> His belief

---

<sup>29</sup>One of Ours, p. 138.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 386.

<sup>31</sup>As early as 1912, Willa Cather in a short story, "Behind the Singer Tower," (Colliers, May 1912), created a plot not unlike that of O'Neill's The Hairy Ape. Though crude in form, it portrays man at the mercy of a machine culture in which "men are cheaper than machinery." Destruction of the protagonist comes not from psychological displacement, however, but from mechanical catastrophe.

<sup>32</sup>Dynamo, Act I, Scene III, p. 453.



that electricity is the Great Mother of Eternal Life is false, however, for it causes him not only to destroy his parents, but to kill Ada and himself. That the dynamo is an unworthy god is emphasized by Mrs. Fife's reaction to it at the conclusion of the play: "What are you singing for? I should think you'd be ashamed! And I thought you was nice and loved us! You hateful old thing, you!"<sup>33</sup>

In The Hairy Ape, man not only worships the machine, but identifies himself with its force. Early in the play, Yank says, "I'm de start! I start somep'n and de woild moves! It--dat's me!--de new dat's moiderin' de old! I'm de ting in coal dat makes it boin; hear it; I'm steam and oil for de engines; I'm de ting in noise dat makes yuh hear it; I'm smoke and express trains and steamers and factory whistles; I'm de ting in god dat makes it money! And I'm what makes iron into steel! Steel, dat stands for de whole ting!"<sup>34</sup> Yank's identity with the machine world, however, robs him of a place in the human world, for the force of the machine is not the throb of life, despite his notions to the contrary. Even on a higher social level than Yank's, the machine dehumanizes man, substituting debilitation for his original, creative vitality. As Mildred puts it: "I'm a waste product in the Bessemer

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., Act III, Scene III, p. 489.

<sup>34</sup> The Hairy Ape, Scene I, p. 216.

process--like the millions. Or rather, I inherit the acquired trait of the by-product, wealth, but none of the energy, none of the strength of the steel that made it."<sup>35</sup>

It is Mildred's visit to the stokehole which shatters Yank's sense of identity, and motivates his search for a place in the universe. But his attempts are ineffectual. And his final one--to return to man's origin among the apes--ends in tragedy. As one critic puts it, "not an angel and no longer a primitive, man stands between heaven and hell, finding it impossible to return to the world of nature from whence he came."<sup>36</sup> In The Hairy Ape, O'Neill is condemning machine civilization in its entirety, not because its god is false, as was the case in Dynamo, but because it destroys the psychological well-being of those who make it possible.<sup>37</sup> Yank is the living example of Professor St. Peter's man impoverished by the technology of science. Viewed in the context of his twentieth century society, Yank's conduct, or identity, is of no real importance. For to repeat Professor St. Peter's statement in part, it is "believing in the mystery and

---

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., Scene II, p. 219.

<sup>36</sup>Louis Broussard, American Drama: Contemporary Allegory from Eugene O'Neill to Tennessee Williams (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), p. 22.

<sup>37</sup>Winther, p. 196.

importance of their own individual lives" which makes men happy.<sup>38</sup> And Yank has nothing in which to believe.

The element of primitivism in this play is a strong one. Yank himself is a primitive; this in itself, however, is insufficient protection against twentieth century civilization. Only a return to the world of nature where existence is simple and clean might save him. And this is impossible. O'Neill's idealization of primitivism is a characteristic which once again allies him with Willa Cather, in the feeling that the world of nature is superior to the world of man. The preference of both writers for the society of the past is directly related to their interest in the purifying power of primitivism. Miss Cather's primitives are the Indians of the Southwest and the pioneers of the prairies; against these two groups, she contrasts the spiritual decay of machine civilization, just as O'Neill reveals it in The Hairy Ape. The primitivism of her prairie heroes is a moral criticism of society because it is based on unhampered nature; when it is replaced by sophistication, her characters, like O'Neill's Mildred, become debilitated.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup>The Professor's House, p. 68. For the full quotation, see footnote 21.

<sup>39</sup>Robert Spiller, The Cycle of American Literature (New York: MacMillan, 1955), p. 169.

In a previously quoted passage from The Hairy Ape, Yank outlines his part in the economic process: from machine to goods to money, or to put it another way, from machine to commercialism to materialism. It is the second item in the series--the buying and selling of goods--which figures predominantly in O'Neill's Marco Millions and The Great God Brown, and in Miss Gather's A Lost Lady and "The Sculptor's Funeral." In Marco Millions, O'Neill holds that the profit motive is at the root of the evil in Western civilization--it destroys what is noblest in man, transforming him into a beast capable of no great passions and no love of the beautiful.<sup>40</sup> Marco's aesthetic sensibilities conflict for a time with his practical inclinations; his mania for buying and selling, however, inevitably wins out. The conflict within Marco is externalized by the parallel conflict which exists between East and West. In light of his Western background, Marco cannot help but become what he does--a successful business man who is described thus by the Great Kaan of the East: "Marco's spiritual hump begins to disgust me. He has not even a mortal soul, he has only an acquisitive instinct. We have given him every opportunity to learn. He has memorized everything and learned nothing! He has looked at everything and seen nothing. He has lusted for everything and loved

---

<sup>40</sup> Winther, p. 206.

nothing."<sup>41</sup> The Kaan only too well recognizes the Westerner's positive virtue: Marco has bought everything and sold everything--at a profit. And the most important information he has gleaned concerns the breeding of silk worms.

Again, in The Great God Brown, O'Neill castigates the successful businessman. In this play, the creative spirit has become a commodity to be bought and sold by those more powerful. In addition, however, the spirit itself has become crippled, for Dion Anthony can neither create in his society, nor can he conform to it and remain sane. Brown, on the other hand, is the exploiter who has no problem with a crippled spirit until, from envy, he begins to imitate Anthony. Ultimately, neither Anthony nor Brown is able to integrate into their shallow society, where individual destiny is controlled by the competitive element and where personal worth is measured in terms of profit.

Similarly, in A Lost Lady, Willa Cather records the passing of an era in which creative integrity is replaced by grasping commercialism. Captain Forrester is doomed to economic devastation because of the unwillingness of his younger associates to take the responsibility for the insolvency of their bank. As Judge Pommeroy explains the situation to Mrs. Forrester: "By God, Madam, I think I've lived too long! In

---

<sup>41</sup>Marco Millions, Act II, Scene I, p. 387.

my day the difference between a business man and a scoundrel was bigger than the difference between a white man and a nigger. I wasn't the right one to go out there as the Captain's counsel. One of those smooth members of the bar, like Ivy Peters is getting ready to be, might have saved something for you out of the wreck. But I couldn't use my influence with your husband. To that crowd outside the bank doors his name meant a hundred cents on the dollar, and by God, they got it!"<sup>42</sup> Later, pioneer integrity recedes even further as Mrs. Forrester, caught between the two eras, gives way to the lure of commercialism. Speculating in land, she makes her position clear in a conversation with Niel Herbert who says, "Mrs. Forrester, rascality isn't the only thing that succeeds in business." Her answer: "It succeeds faster than anything else, though."<sup>43</sup> Her complete capitulation is symbolized by her becoming the mistress of Ivy Peters, Miss Cather's supreme commercialist.

Rascality and opportunism are the community values to which Harvey Merrick is opposed in "The Sculptor's Funeral." They are elaborated in the speech which Jim Laird makes to his fellow citizens in discussing the lack of reputable men in Sand City. "Harvey Merrick and I went to school together,

---

<sup>42</sup>A Lost Lady, p. 92.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

back East. We were dead in earnest, and we wanted you all to be proud of us some day. We meant to be great men. . . . I came back here to practice, and I found you didn't in the least want me to be a great man. You wanted me to be a shrewd lawyer."<sup>44</sup> Integrity, then, as a society value, is replaced by shrewdness in these works of Miss Cather and O'Neill. Peripherally important in One of Ours, it takes the form of opportunism in the characters of Mr. Wheeler and his eldest son, Bayliss. Mr. Wheeler reacts initially to war with economic emotion; he is concerned with the price of wheat, nothing more. Likewise, Bayliss is concerned with making a success of his business; anything else is secondary, even his pacifism.

Opportunism, rascality, greed--all lead to the inevitable goal of profit. And this goal fosters a philosophy of materialism. Obviously, materialism is not divorced from commercialism in the works of either Willa Cather or Eugene O'Neill; it plays a predominant part in both Marco Millions and A Lost Lady. As a separate symbol, however, it receives its greatest emphasis in The Professor's House and My Mortal Enemy.

A previous chapter noted that the first of the two novels contrasts materialism with non-materialism, and that

---

<sup>44</sup>Cather, "The Sculptor's Funeral" from The Troll Garden, p. 48.

money is the force which divides the St. Peter family. As a symbol of the degeneration of the twentieth century, however, money in The Professor's House is regarded as a corrupting influence on man. Professor St. Peter has suddenly come into a five thousand pound prize awarded him for his Spanish Adventurers in North America. He appreciates the honor, but not the money, and disapproves of its being used to build a new house. His daughter, Rosamond, and her husband, have acquired a greater fortune through the bequest of Tom Outland, a deceased student of the professor who discovered a revolutionizing aviation vacuum. The profits from the discovery stimulate the young couple to build a showplace they call "Outland"; and their chief activity throughout the novel is acquiring expensive furnishings. For example, St. Peter accompanies Rosamond on a Chicago trip which turns out to be "an orgy of acquisition."<sup>45</sup> As he describes it to his wife, Rosamond "was like Napoleon looting the Italian palaces."<sup>46</sup> St. Peter's views on money and materialism are capsuled in a brief conversation with Rosamond in which she suggests that he, too, should realize some of the invention's profits. "there can be no question of money between me and Tom Outland. I can't explain just how I feel about it, but it would somehow

---

<sup>45</sup>The Professor's House, p. 154.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.



damage my recollections of him, and would make that episode in my life commonplace like everything else. And that would be a great loss to me. I'm purely selfish in refusing your offer; my friendship with Outland is the one thing I will not have translated into the vulgar tongue."<sup>47</sup> For St. Peter, then, money and friendship, money and integrity, do not mix.

Tom Outland, in his lifetime, held a similar opinion. Like St. Peter, he finds that money destroys love and friendship. He and a friend, Roddy Blake, discover the ruins of an ancient cliff city deep in the Southwest. The conquest of the cliff, and speculation as to the nature of this early civilization assume a religious significance for Tom. While Outland is in Washington, however, attempting to create government interest in the project, Roddy sells the Indian relics to a dealer for four thousand dollars. Stunned, Tom refuses to accept any of the profits. To Roddy, he says, "they weren't mine to sell--nor yours! They belonged to this country, to the State, and to all the people. . . ."<sup>48</sup> Later, he continues: "There never was any question of money with me, where this mesa and its people were concerned. They were something that had been preserved through the ages by a miracle, and handed on to you and me, two poor cow-punchers,

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 242.

rough and ignorant, but I thought we were men enough to keep a trust."<sup>49</sup>

Miss Cather emphasizes that the attitudes of both Professor St. Peter and Tom Outland toward money are contrary to those held in their society. In addition, the two share the same atypical reverence for the past--the professor, in his dedication to his history, and Tom, in his regard for the mesa civilization. Both, however, find their desire to identify themselves with the values of the past thwarted by the constant intrusion of the shoddy present, much as Captain Forrester of A Lost Lady found his values overrun by the advancement of petty commercialism. Tom Outland is Miss Cather's ideal character in The Professor's House, for he is able to disassociate himself from money--in terminating his friendship with Roddy, and in dying before his invention becomes tainted by profit.<sup>50</sup> The others are not so lucky; Dr. Crane, who aided Tom, is finally persuaded of the importance of money, and threatens to sue for a share of the invention's profits; Professor St. Peter escapes this corruption, only to learn that in a materialistic society, the sensitive individual must endure life stoically.

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>50</sup> Randall, p. 218.

In Miss Cather's next novel, My Mortal Enemy, money wins out completely over the values of the past; in fact, money is almost the only value appearing in the novel.<sup>51</sup> In his attempt to discourage his niece from marrying Oswald Henshawe, John Driscoll threatens to disinherit Myra, saying, "It's better to be a stray dog in this world than a man without money. I've tried both ways and I know. A poor man stinks, and God hates him."<sup>52</sup> And though Myra disregards this advice and does marry, she comes to accept it later. A rather imperious woman in her youth, Myra becomes even more demanding and selfish as she grows old and ill after the decline of the Henshawe fortunes. Disturbed by the people upstairs, she measures her inconvenience in terms of money: "Oh, that's the cruelty of being poor; it leaves you at the mercy of such pigs! Money is a protection, a cloak; it can buy one quiet, and some sort of dignity"<sup>53</sup> Instead of blaming herself in any degree for her misfortunes and marriage failure, Myra blames her husband and their lack of funds. This preoccupation has robbed Myra of her capacity to love; it has destroyed her humanity.

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>52</sup> My Mortal Enemy, p. 22.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

Claude Wheeler, Dion Anthony, Niel Herbert--these characters of Miss Cather and O'Neill fight the encroachment of the new, materialistic age. But Myra Henshawe accepts its values fully. In that sense the novel represents the triumph of the new order as completely as did Marco Millions, and it re-echoes the theme running through all of the works here discussed: the spiritual conquest of contemporary man by a society whose values are either non-existent or perverted.

This conquest is not immediate, however; it occurs gradually as the sensitive characters of O'Neill and Miss Cather are first tormented by machine, commercialism, and materialism, then defeated; finally, some become themselves the perpetuators of the new, contemptuous tradition. The torment and defeat of Yank, Claude Wheeler, Professor St. Peter, Dion Anthony, and Captain Forrester have already been discussed in some detail. But three characters in particular--Reuben Light of Dynamo, Marco Polo of Marco Millions, and Ivy Peters of A Lost Lady--demonstrate the progressive triumph of contemporary forces. Initially, both Reuben and Marco possess a degree of the sensitivity so consistently observable in the characters of Miss Cather and O'Neill. Reuben reveals a sincere affection for Ada, and a strong pull toward the religion of his father. When he discovers, however, that his father's Puritanism, warped by years of conflict with atheistic machine-worship, is inadequate to

cope with this new force, he rejects it, becoming himself an advocate of the dynamo. The values of the machine have conquered the values of the past. By comparison, Marco's sensitivity is the object of parody; his family and society have so influenced him that even his poetic attempts are characterized by economy rather than simile. Like Reuben, however, Marco is given a choice of gods--one of profit, and one of the spirit. And just as Reuben selects the machine, Marco chooses commerce.

No such choice exists for Ivy Peters, for he is completely the product of a machine society; he is the embodiment of commercialism and materialism. Furthermore, he demonstrates deliberate cruelty in man. Certainly cruelty is not lacking in O'Neill's Reuben Light and Marco Polo, but Reuben's cruelty is misguided obedience to a god of his own making, and Marco's cruelty is the result of unintentional spiritual myopia. Ivy Peters' cruelty, however, is intentional--from the time he poisoned dogs and blinded a woodpecker as a youth until as an enterprising lawyer he drains the Forrester marsh. "He was an ugly fellow, Ivy Peters, and he liked being ugly."<sup>54</sup> Clearly, Miss Gather intends Peters to be representative of the men of the new era, devoid of any perceptivity of the meaning of life:

---

<sup>54</sup> A Lost Lady, p. 22.

The Old West had been settled by dreamers, great-hearted adventurers who were unpractical to the point of magnificence; a courteous brotherhood, strong in attack but weak in defence, who could conquer but could not hold. Now all the vast territory they had won was to be at the mercy of men like Ivy Peters, who had never dared anything, never risked anything. They would drink up the mirage, dispel the morning freshness, root out the great brooding spirit of freedom, the generous easy life of the great land holders. The space, the colour, the princely carelessness of the pioneer they would destroy and cut up into profitable bits, as the match factory splinters the primeval forest. All the way from the Missouri to the mountains this generation of shrewd young men, trained to petty economies by hard times, would do exactly what Ivy Peters had done when he drained the Forrester marsh.<sup>55</sup>

The crassness of Peters may be observed to a lesser extent in William Brown, Marco Polo, Ralph and Bayliss Wheeler, and even James and Jamie Tyrone. All are greedy; all are motivated by a desire to obtain something for nothing. Unlike their historical predecessors, they are uncreative, sapping the beauty of the world for profit instead of working it for pleasure.

Similarly, the two authors portray the women of this era as petty and grasping, seeking gratification in the immediate pleasures of wealth and sex. Allowing for a chronological difference, there is a parallel between Willa Cather's Marian Forrester and Eugene O'Neill's Christine Mannon. Both women,

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 106-107.

much younger than their husbands, are caught in a period of cultural transition: Marian, between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and Christine, between pre and post Civil War times. Both women are mistresses of homes esteemed widely in their areas. And both are corrupted by the promise of love and youth to be found in affairs with men younger than themselves. Likewise, neither woman can retain the values associated with her husband when faced by the temptations of a changing time. More definitely women of the new era are Nina Leeds and Myra Henshawe. Both have had their initial dream of romance shattered: Nina, by the death of her fiance, and Myra by the loss of her husband's ample income. Nina turns to sexual exploitation and motherhood for gratification, while Myra becomes obsessed with the desire for money and turns against her husband, calling him "my mortal enemy." Both are motivated completely by their own selfish desires, and other people have no more meaning for them than the beauty of the countryside has for men like Ivy Peters.

Though criticism of the individuals of the new era is never hidden by O'Neill and Miss Cather, it is seldom stated explicitly, but emphasized by the contrast which exists between these characters and the strong men of the past. Just as Ivy Peters represents the present, Captain Forrester represents the past; a railroad contractor, he possesses the integrity, courage, and foresight of Miss Cather's earlier

pioneers; he has the imagination to dream, and the strength to make that dream come true. His weakening illness does not come from any corruption within himself, but begins with a fall described this way: "There was no ice, he didn't slip. It was simply because he was unsteady. He had trouble getting up. . . . it was as if one of the mountains had fallen down."<sup>56</sup> Captain Forrester's unsteadiness suggests a growing awareness on the part of Miss Cather that even the pioneer values are gradually weakening under the encroachment of materialism.

O'Neill expresses a similar attitude as he exhibits the declining strength of the pioneer in Ezra Mannon and Ephraim Cabot. Like Captain Forrester, General Mannon heads a great business enterprise; in addition, he has become judge and mayor of his community and a brigadier-general in the Civil War. People respect him, and his daughter idolizes him; only his wife despises him enough to poison him at his homecoming. In contrast, Ephraim Cabot possesses none of the accomplishments or finer sensibilities of Captain Forrester or General Mannon. He has, however, with his own brawn, created a farm from the stony New England soil. In his own way, he is a more patriarchal figure than the other two. His failure comes in his refusal to accept the inevitable

---

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 169.



limitations of old age, and in his short sightedness in all save his personal triumph--his farm.

Despite the decline of pioneer power and dignity, both Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill establish the values of the past as the ideal which other characters generally revere. As has been mentioned, Paddy of The Hairy Ape aspires to the nobility of earlier sailing days; like him, Niel Herbert mourns the passing of an age of integrity: "He had seen the end of an era, the sunset of the pioneer. He had come upon it when already its glory was nearly spent. . . . This was the very end of the roadmaking West; the men who had put plains and mountains under the iron harness were old; some were poor, and even the successful ones were hunting for a rest and a brief reprieve from death. It was already gone, that age; nothing could ever bring it back."<sup>57</sup>

It is this passing of an age, this general decline of values, which leads Miss Cather further into primitivism. Always, the element has been present in her works, from the Southwest episode in The Song of the Lark to the characterizations in her pioneer novels; but in The Professor's House, she again emphasizes it in Godfrey St. Peter's discontent with his age and with his and Tom Outland's affinity for

---

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

ancient civilizations.<sup>58</sup> The mesa civilization Tom discovers particularly symbolizes the values Miss Cather felt were being destroyed in the twentieth century: order, endurance, creativity, achievement. Extremely important is that the mesa's high level of culture was possible because of man's possession of the right relationship to nature--the relationship lost by twentieth-century man. Another aspect of the ancient community particularly attractive to Miss Cather is its unchanging quality. This civilization did not degenerate from within, as she felt was the case with American society, but was suddenly arrested at the height of its primitive sophistication. Certainly, this is what she wished might have happened to her pioneer civilization; as Elizabeth Sergeant put it, "Willa . . . looked backward with regret. Our present lay about us in ruins but we had, she wistfully remarked, a beautiful past."<sup>59</sup> Ultimately, this attitude led her to reject her own age and enter historical writing.

---

<sup>58</sup>James Richard Bash in Willa Cather: A Study in Primitivism, (University of Illinois, 1954), points out two types of primitivism in Miss Cather's works: chronological primitivism, which invests the past with values missed in the present, and cultural primitivism, which sees admirable qualities in a level of society not one's own, ie. Miss Cather's pioneer tradition and her high regard for rural living. Bash further suggests that the opposing values of pessimism versus optimism and materialism versus idealism are concepts closely related in the primitive attitude.

<sup>59</sup>Sergeant, p. 164.

Like Miss Cather, Eugene O'Neill deplores the present and has his characters look to the past and to primitivism. It may be questioned, however, whether they esteem the past solely because of its values, or because they cannot face the sordidness of the present. Certainly this is the case with Mary Tyrone; much of her time is spent in recalling her youth; for the passing of years has put a glow on that segment of time, and these recollections provide her the same sort of escape as do drugs. Other O'Neill characters grasp at primitive cultures: Brutus Jones, for example, achieves greater understanding through his regression to a primitive existence; Caleb enjoys love among the natives of the South Seas; Lavinia finds new life in the primitive culture of the same islands; Yank himself is a kind of primitive, seeking to penetrate even further into the past. These characters desire regression because they feel threatened by the materialistic, valueless present, just as O'Neill himself felt threatened by it. As he once said, "if I have the 'guts' to ignore the megaphone men and what goes with them to follow the dream and live for that alone, then my real significant bit of truth, and the ability to express it, will be conquered in time."<sup>60</sup>

Both Eugene O'Neill and Willa Cather recoiled from their own age; both felt that it was "sick and soulless--led by

---

<sup>60</sup>O'Neill in a letter to George Jean Nathan, reprinted by Isaac Goldberg, The Theatre of George Jean Nathan (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1926), p. 150.

capricious gods of money and quick riches,"<sup>61</sup> whose origin lay in the mass production and standardization of the machine. For the two authors, technology did not mark progress, for man cannot retain his individuality and his strength when the spiritual soul of his age is dying. While Willa Cather wrote of a world in which the traditional pioneer virtues are first declining, then disappearing, Eugene O'Neill wrote of a world in which values have already vanished. Both attributed the loss to the change in man's relationship to nature brought about by the substitution of the machine for man's creative desire. This concern for man's relationship to nature led the two authors quite naturally to a veneration of past societies, and even past civilizations. Thus, it contributes to the element of primitivism which pervades their works generally. The tragedy of their pessimism is that man, whom they see as questing for the meaning of life, is doomed to failure-- within his own soul, within human relationships, and within society. Worse yet, man cannot regress to an earlier age, nor can he see hope in the present one. What remains of his personal desire and virtues is insufficient to cope with the machine, commercialism, and materialism of the twentieth century. The problem of the age, and his conception of its

---

<sup>61</sup>Jordan Y. Miller, Eugene O'Neill and the American Critic (Hamden: Archon Books, 1962), p. 65.

cause, Eugene O'Neill revealed in a 1946 interview. Willa Cather would have agreed with his conclusion: "We are the greatest example of 'For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' . . . If the human race is so damned stupid that in two thousand years it hasn't had brains enough to appreciate that the secret of happiness is contained in that one simple sentence, which you'd think any grammar school kid could understand and apply, then it's time we dumped it down the nearest drain and let the ants take over."<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup>O'Neill, quoted by Gelb, p. 871.

## CHAPTER V

### THE FORCE BEHIND

Though pessimistically critical of their age--so much so that they termed it valueless and sought personal escape from it--Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill do not hold their positions in American literature on the merits of their social criticism; primarily, because their intentions were not limited to criticism, and largely, because their creative techniques transcended the immediate present. Although purpose and theme separated them from many of their contemporaries, at least one tendency of O'Neill and Miss Cather brought them closer to the twenties. Both were innovators. With this tendency far less developed in her than in O'Neill, Miss Cather nevertheless professed its influence on her genre, and substantiated innovation in her selection of geographical region. "Writing," she said, "ought either to be the manufacture of stories for which there is a market demand . . . or it should be an art, which is always a search for something for which there is no market demand, something new and untried, where the values are intrinsic and have nothing to do with standardized values."<sup>1</sup> In commenting on O Pioneers!, Miss

---

<sup>1</sup> Cather, "On the Art of Fiction," On Writing, p. 103.

Cather referred to the newness of its locale: "Nebraska of all places! As everyone knows, Nebraska is distinctly declassé as a literary background; its very name throws the delicately attuned critic into a clammy shiver of embarrassment."<sup>2</sup>

Though Willa Cather professed experimentation with technique, O'Neill consistently attempted the untried. Miss Cather did not radically change the form of the novel; rather, she sought to refine this form as it had been developed in the traditions of Hawthorne, James, Wharton, and Jewett. Her realism is not the realism of the novelists immediately following her--Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos--but is the moral realism of James and Hawthorne. It is a realism of aura, symbol, and allegory. Her technique does not meet the "vogue of technical stunts and of psychoanalytical explorations which distinguished the Nineteen-twenties," but it does create a new method of narration, a new use of setting, and a lightening of the novel form.<sup>3</sup> O'Neill, on the other hand, did change the form of the American play, from the well-made productions of Augustus Thomas, to drama approaching that of Ibsen and Strindberg and anticipating that of Anderson, Miller, and Williams. Many of O'Neill's plays are essentially

---

<sup>2</sup>Cather, "My First Novels," On Writing, p. 103.

<sup>3</sup>E. K. Brown, "Willa Cather," Literary Opinion in America, ed. Morton Dauwen Zabel, 3rd edition, Vol. 2 (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 502.

plotless, gaining their illusion of action from staging devices rather than episodes. Further, they offer innovation in content, relying heavily upon current intellectual fashions: radical sociological theorizing, Freud, Jung, and Roman Catholicism.<sup>4</sup> That of these, psychology had the greatest impact upon O'Neill is obvious from his works, for his conception of drama arises from man's internal conflicts. As he stated in a 1925 letter to Arthur Hobson Quinn:

I'm always, always trying to interpret Life in terms of lives, never just in terms of character. I'm always acutely conscious of the Force behind . . . --and of the one eternal tragedy of Man in his glorious, self-destructive struggle to make the Force express him instead of being, as an animal is, an infinitesimal incident in its expression. And my proud conviction is that this is the only subject worth writing about and that it is possible--or can be--to develop a tragic expression in terms of transfigured modern values and symbols in the theatre which may to some degree bring home to a member of a modern audience their ennobling identity with the tragic figures on the stage.<sup>5</sup>

Most of O'Neill's symbols come from psychology, for to him, "the Force" is man's unconscious self which must be challenged successfully by his conscious self.<sup>6</sup> This struggle is not the

---

<sup>4</sup>Joseph Wood Krutch, The American Drama Since 1918 (New York: Random House, 1939), p. 79.

<sup>5</sup>O'Neill in a letter to Arthur Hobson Quinn, reprinted in Quinn's A History of the American Drama from the Civil War to the Present Day, p. 199.

<sup>6</sup>Falk, p. 26.



only one in O'Neill's work; but its particular nature stimulates man's need to know himself so that he may control these internal forces.<sup>7</sup>

If there is a force operating behind O'Neill's characters, there is also a force which operates behind O'Neill, the playwright; and this force is the idea which motivates his writing. For O'Neill, like Miss Cather, disdained contemporary literary movements, writing, not for the commercial theater, but as he felt it, for all time. Both Cather and O'Neill were seeking intrinsic values in their art; both wrote for the idea rather than for specific audiences or for personal popularity. As one critic said of the novelist: "Miss Cather is predisposed to sacrifice animation and sharply delineated personality to innate meaning. From the beginning the idea is the thing, and therefore, once the reader has grasped the intellectual motif, all the other elements fall into perceptible patterns."<sup>8</sup> The statement applies to O'Neill as well, for many of his plays failed to receive critical acclaim for just this reason--that he remained too far from his audience, that he was "more interested in affirming his ideas than in representing the experience in which they are

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> Bloom, p. 14.

implied."<sup>9</sup> Miss Cather's prose at times seems deceptively simple, O'Neill's deceptively difficult; but for both, the entry to understanding lies in the perception of intellectual framework.

The importance of conveying the idea, then, is the force motivating Miss Cather and O'Neill toward the use of symbol, myth, and allegory. For this reason, critics are divided as to the writers' classifications; some calling Miss Cather a realist, others designating her a symbolist; most assigning to O'Neill the category with which they themselves are most familiar: either naturalism, realism, expressionism, or symbolism--all observable elements in his works. The two do not use the modes they share in the same way; neither is their intellectual motif identical; but as has been demonstrated in previous chapters, their controlling idea is the same: that the story of man is the story of man's quest to know himself and to know the absolute.

Probably more influential than his social criticism in determining the origin of O'Neill's theme of quest was his interest in psychology. Though he disclaimed any dependency upon Freud, still to many, O'Neill epitomized the Freudian

---

<sup>9</sup>Francis Fergusson, "Eugene O'Neill," Literary Opinion in America, p. 518.

period of the American theater.<sup>10</sup> Certainly evident within his works are indications of interest in Freud's theories on sex: most specifically, the Oedipal and Electra complexes and the death-wish. Examples of works suggesting these three ideas come easily: Strange Interlude, Mourning Becomes Electra, and The Iceman Cometh. O'Neill was slightly more open about the influence of Jung upon his thinking. In a letter to Barrett Clark, he stated: "Authors were psychologists, you know, and profound ones before psychology was invented. And I am no deep student of psychoanalysis. As far as I can remember, of all the books written by Freud, Jung, etc., I have read only four, and Jung is the only one of the lot who interests me. Some of his suggestions I find extraordinarily illuminating in the light of my own experience with human motives."<sup>11</sup> His concern with two Jungian concepts underlies two aspects of O'Neill's work discussed previously: his primitivism and his illusion-reality motif. O'Neill agreed with Jung that man's problems come not from his unconscious alone, but from a "collective unconscious" shared by his entire race and exhibited in archetypal symbols and patterns. The Emperor Jones is a dramatization of his

---

<sup>10</sup>

David W. Sievers, Freud on Broadway (New York: Hermitage House, 1955), p. 97.

<sup>11</sup> O'Neill in a letter to Barrett Clark, reprinted in Clark's Eugene O'Neill: The Man and his Plays, p. 136.

concept, as Jones, the successful entrepreneur, regresses to the primary existence Yank longs to reach in The Hairy Ape. The second Jungian theory embraced by O'Neill is that man, through identification with the moment, deceives others and himself as to his real character. He puts on a mask, or assumes a persona, which he knows corresponds with his conscious intentions, while it also meets with the requirements and opinions of his environment.<sup>12</sup> This is the reason, then, that O'Neill's characters suffer from the discrepancy between illusion and reality, for the mask allows them to hide not only from the reality of the world at large, but from themselves as well.<sup>13</sup>

These psychological theories, therefore, support O'Neill's quest theme and influenced his attitude toward the human dilemma, the human "sickness." In addition, they impelled him toward his search for a "new language of the theater,"<sup>14</sup> with which to express the tragedy of man. One of his expressions of a "new language" was his use of theatrical masks. In a 1932 article, "Memoranda on Masks," he suggested

---

<sup>12</sup>Sievers, p. 98.

<sup>13</sup>Both Sievers and Falk agree on this interpretation of O'Neill's use of Jung's theories.

<sup>14</sup>Robert F. Whitman, "O'Neill's Search for a 'Language of the Theatre'," O'Neill: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. John Gassner (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 143.

that masks would be the "freest solution" of dramatizing "those profound hidden conflicts of the mind which the probings of psychology continue to disclose to us." Further, he asked, "For what, at bottom, is the new psychological insight into human cause and effects but a study in masks, an exercise in unmasking?" Finally, in his prescription for the new drama, he stated, "One's outer life passes in a solitude haunted by the masks of others; one's inner life passes in a solitude hounded by the masks of oneself."<sup>15</sup> Primarily in the 1920s did O'Neill experiment with the mask: in The Hairy Ape, All God's Chillun Got Wings, The Fountain, The Great God Brown, Marco Millions, and Lazarus Laughed. Later came Days Without End. First, O'Neill used masks expressionistically to suggest the emotion of the Fifth Avenue crowd in The Hairy Ape. Later, he used the mask to convey tensions of personality. The complexity of the latter device is illustrated by The Great God Brown. Here, Dion Anthony's mask represents his divided consciousness. In his youth, he adopts the mask of a mocking Pan in order to protect his real face, that of a sensitive artist. In time, the mask itself is distorted by the modern age, becoming the countenance of Mephistopheles. Lost between his

---

<sup>15</sup>O'Neill, "Memoranda on Masks," The American Spectator Yearbook, ed. George Jean Nathan, Ernest Boyd, Theodore Drieser, Sherwood Anderson, James Branch Cabell, Eugene O'Neill (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1934), pp. 159, 160-161.

masks of self, the tormented Anthony can find no release save death.<sup>16</sup>

When he did not use masks, O'Neill often used analogous devices such as the asides of Strange Interlude and Dynamo. In both instances he employs the aside, or interior monologue, to reveal the inner tensions, conflicts, and struggles of a character which he had previously suggested by the mask. In Strange Interlude, the asides do more--they demonstrate the subtle attitudes and relationships of the characters to each other; and in Dynamo, the forces which ultimately destroy Reuben are revealed primarily through his soliloquies.

Neither masks nor asides are used in Mourning Becomes Electra, but characterizing the play as "unreal realism," O'Neill suggests the use of masks in describing the Mannon home and characters as possessing a "life-life" mask.<sup>17</sup> The spell upon the Mannons drives all vitality and reality inward, leaving only the appearance of life until the inner forces, long repressed, break out in violence.<sup>18</sup> The need for

---

<sup>16</sup> A detailed study of O'Neill's use of the mask is Eugene M. Waith's "Eugene O'Neill: An Exercise in Unmasking," O'Neill: A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 29-41.

<sup>17</sup> Whitman offers a discussion of the trilogy's mask-like nature, p. 156.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

dramatizing these inner conflicts led O'Neill to a still further extension of the mask idea in Days Without End, where conflicting aspects of one personality are illustrated in two separate characters.

O'Neill's commentary on masks has been an important guide to the interpretation of the content and technique of his plays. Several critics have seen the characteristic structure of an O'Neill play as a movement toward unmasking; most plays contain recognition scenes in which the principal characters are for the first time fully revealed to the audience and to themselves; often, it is only then that they understand their relationships to each other and to the world in which they live.<sup>19</sup> Even O'Neill's early plays suggest movement toward epiphany via extrinsic symbol. In Bound East for Cardiff, Yank is dying while his ship makes its way slowly through the fog. Toward the end of the play, he unexpectedly confesses to Driscoll his real attitude toward the sea; then he dies. Simultaneously, the fog lifts. Because long-repressed self knowledge is achieved, the symbol of that repression disappears. The unmasking symbol in The Emperor Jones is Brutus Jones' flight through the forest. The flight represents the psychological regression of the panicked Jones as he flees

---

<sup>19</sup> Waith, pp. 33-34. Whitman also notes the unmasking characteristic.

from death. O'Neill's later plays--The Iceman Cometh and Long Day's Journey into Night--demonstrate the unmasking process unencumbered by the machinery of masks and asides. The entire action of The Iceman Cometh consists of discarding and restoring the illusions of the characters. And though it is Mary Tyrone's resumption of her drug habit which is the central action of Long Day's Journey into Night, each character is unmasked by the others, and experiences self revelation for the first time.

Willa Cather's characters, like O'Neill's, experience revelation and discovery. But whereas O'Neill's characters are blocked from self knowledge by their masks of illusion, the Cather characters are constrained by an antagonistic society of changing values. Though interested in the inner conflicts of her characters, Miss Cather never put these conflicts into psychological terms, nor allowed them to influence technique. For her, the advent of psychology was merely another disagreeable aspect of contemporary life. As Elizabeth Sergeant put it, "She was truly skeptical about the post-war world. Take this Viennese Freud: Why was everybody reading him? Tolstoy knew as much about psychology--with no isms attached--as any fiction writer needed."<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Sergeant, pp. 163-164.



Instead of psychology, Miss Cather drew on memory and history--and much of the significance of both she found in man's relation to nature. Her pioneering childhood drew her to nature, just as O'Neill's unstable personal history drew him to psychoanalysis. And the events of the natural world had much the same significance for her writing as personality tensions did for O'Neill. Several critics have noted that Willa Cather punctuates her moments of crisis with a mood derived from natural description; that for her, natural events embody moral truths or insights.<sup>21</sup> In the prairie novels this seems particularly true. Alexandra of O Pioneers! senses her identity with the land as she views stars in the autumn sky: "She always loved to watch them to think of their vastness and distance, and of their ordered march. It fortified her to reflect upon the great operations of nature, and when she thought of the law that lay behind them, she felt a sense of personal security. That night she had a new consciousness of the country, felt almost a new relation to it."<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the intensity of Marie Shabata's feeling for Emil is expressed in a nature image:

---

<sup>21</sup>Two writers note Miss Cather's moralistic nature imagery: David Daiches, Willa Cather: A Critical Introduction (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1951), p. 38, and Bloom, p. 186.

<sup>22</sup>O Pioneers!, p. 71.

The moon was almost full. An owl was hooting somewhere in the fields. She had scarcely thought about where she was going when the pond glittered before her, where Emil had shot the ducks. She stopped and looked at it. Yes, there would be a dirty way out of life, if one chose to take it. But she did not want to die. She wanted to live and dream--a hundred years, forever! As long as this sweetness welled up in her heart, as long as her breast could hold this treasure of pain! She felt as the pond must feel when it held the moon like that; when it encircled and swelled with that image of gold.<sup>23</sup>

In The Song of the Lark, Thea Kronborg's awareness of art comes as, on vacation, she bathes in a canyon stream:

"One morning, as she was standing upright in the pool, splashing water between her shoulder blades with a big sponge, something flashed through her mind that made her draw herself up and stand still until the water had quite dried upon her flushed skin. The stream and the broken pottery: what was any art but an effort to make a sheath, a mould in which to imprison for a moment the shining, elusive element which is life itself,--life hurrying past us and running away, too strong to stop, too sweet to lose?"<sup>24</sup> Later, the appearance of an eagle sailing across the sky signifies to her the effort, endeavor, and desire inherent in art. Like the canyon, the cliff city in The Professor's House suggests similar

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>24</sup> The Song of the Lark, p. 304.

revelations for Tom Outland, for it is in living in this environment that he senses the eternal continuity of human endeavor; this truth gives him unlimited energy, happiness, and ambition. Claude Wheeler, in One of Ours, also gains insights from nature. As he looks at the moon which "seemed particularly to have looked down upon the follies and disappointments of men; into the slaves' quarters of old times, into prison windows, and into fortresses where captives languished," he reflects upon the complexity of life: "Inside of living people, too, captives languished. Yes, inside of people who walked and worked in the broad sun, there were captives dwelling in darkness,--never seen from birth to death. Into those prisons the moon shone, and the prisoners crept to the windows and looked out with mournful eyes at the white globe which betrayed no secrets and comprehended all. . . . And these children of the moon, with their unappeased longings and future dreams, were a finer race than the children of the sun."<sup>25</sup>

Some of the natural descriptions used by Miss Cather in this way transcend their context to become memorable images on their own. The plow silhouetted against the blazing sky in My Antonia becomes the image of all human striving, while in A Lost Lady, Niel Herbert's bouquet of morning roses tossed

---

<sup>25</sup>One of Ours, pp. 207-208.

in a mudhole symbolizes the potential treachery of every woman: "Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds."<sup>26</sup>

Miss Cather's moralizing use of nature imagery suggests its influence upon the emotional tone of her work. The significance of tone she explained in "The Novel Demeuble": "It is the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, of the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it, the verbal mood, the emotional aura of the fact or the thing or the deed, that gives high quality to the novel or the drama, as well as to poetry itself."<sup>27</sup> In her treatment of the fact in her prairie novels, Miss Cather generally follows the cycle of nature, the progression of the seasons, to which all man's activities are subordinated. In both O Pioneers! and My Antonia, the characters seem less significant than the background against which they move: two seasonal cycles are related in full in O Pioneers!, while Book I of My Antonia covers a one-year cycle. Throughout these novels the perspective is the same: that man is a part of the larger movement of nature. In The Song of the Lark, this concept is expanded to suggest the unbroken movement of man and nature through the ages, to indicate the existence of a continuum of tradition, or history. In the later novels

---

<sup>26</sup>A Lost Lady, p. 87.

<sup>27</sup>Cather, "The Novel Demeuble," On Writing, pp. 41-42.

under discussion, emphasis on nature diminishes as man's relationship to it degenerates.

The emotional tone of Miss Cather's work is fairly consistent; the actions of her characters may be heroic, cruel, petty, or treacherous, but the revelations of these actions is subdued; the action swells and declines, rather than bursting and breaking; the struggles of man are incidental in terms of the universe. Miss Cather achieves this cyclic movement in several of her novels by setting her action at a distance, and by revealing it through the consciousness of a detached observer. The degeneration of Marian Forrester in A Lost Lady is revealed by the disillusionment of young Niel Herbert; Antonia's story is told by Jim Burden. Particularly in My Antonia is emotional content minimized, for Mr. Shimerda's death is related in its effects upon the surviving, and Antonia's unfortunate love affair is twice-removed from the reader, being related to Jim by the Widow Steavens. As Miss Cather said of My Antonia: "There was the material in that book for a lurid melodrama. But I decided that in writing it I would dwell very lightly on those things that a novelist would ordinarily emphasize, and make up my story of the little, every-day happenings and occurrences that form the greatest part of everyone's life and happiness."<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup>Cather, quoted in an interview by Eleanor Hinman, Lincoln Sunday Star, (Nov. 6, 1921), p. 1.

As a dramatist, Eugene O'Neill necessarily emphasized the very material Miss Cather sought to omit, and for him, too, emotional tone became the essence of dramatic action. Profane dialogue punctuated liberally by exclamation points is sufficient indication that the emotional tone of O'Neill's work is far more intense than that of Miss Cather. In a play, the viewer is in the midst of the action; and in O'Neill's dramas, the perspective is immediate, rather than panoramic, as is the case with Miss Cather. In addition to dialogue itself, O'Neill achieves emotional tone by devices of stage production. Already mentioned have been his use of masks and asides; along with their primary function, these devices create tone, as do sound effects. For example, the beating of native drums in The Emperor Jones grows more intense as Jones becomes more frightened; it ceases with his death. In Bound East for Cardiff, O'Neill uses the ship's whistle in a similar way; when Yank dies, the sound stops. And Mourning Becomes Electra, opens and closes with the melancholy sea song, "Shenandoah." In addition to sound, O'Neill uses setting to convey emotional tone. Two enormous elm trees brood over the Cabot farmhouse in Desire Under the Elms, suggesting the spirit of Eben's mother, full of love before being beaten down by the stony, perverted Puritanism of her husband. In this instance, the mood stimulated by setting contributes to plot motivation. In Beyond the Horizon, the alternation of

interior and exterior sets determines tone and suggests the theme of the play. As O'Neill said: "One scene is out of doors, showing the horizon, suggesting the man's desire and dream. The other is indoors, the horizon gone, suggesting what has come between him and his dream. In that way I tried to get rhythm, the alternation of longing and of loss. Probably very few people who saw the play knew that this was definitely planned to produce the effect. But I am sure they all unconsciously get the effect. It is often easier to express an idea through such means than through words or mere copies of real actions."<sup>29</sup> O'Neill had the same purpose in settings for The Hairy Ape and Dynamo. Here, scenery was designed, not realistically, but suggestively, to indicate the oppressiveness of the machine upon human personality.

The creation of emotional tone, then, was important for both Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill, for it frequently influenced the structure of their work. O'Neill commented upon this relationship between emotional tone and form in a letter to Joseph Wood Krutch: "Even the best of modern novels strike me as a dire failure. . . . They are all . . . so padded with the unimportant and insignificant, so obsessed with the trivial meaning of trivialities that the authors appear to me as mere timid recorders of life, dodging the

---

<sup>29</sup>O'Neill, quoted by Gelb, pp. 411-412.

responsibility of that ruthless selection and deletion and concentration on the emotional which is the test of an artist--the forcing of significant form upon experience."<sup>30</sup>

Earlier, Willa Cather had made a similar comment in "The Novel Democrite": "The novel, for a long while, has been over-furnished. The property-man has been so busy on its pages; the importance of material objects and their vivid presentation has been so stressed, that we take it for granted whoever can observe, and can write the English language, can write a novel. Often the latter qualification is considered unnecessary."<sup>31</sup> More positively, she noted in "On the Art of Fiction," that "Art, it seems to me, should simplify. That, indeed, is very nearly the whole of the higher artistic process; finding what conventions of form and what detail one can do without and yet preserve the spirit of the whole--so that all one has suppressed and cut away is there to the reader's consciousness as much as if it were in type on the page."<sup>32</sup>

Mutually deploring the triviality of the contemporary novel, Miss Cather and O'Neill were also in agreement upon the literary criteria they established for themselves. Both

---

<sup>30</sup>O'Neill, quoted by Gelb, p. 630.

<sup>31</sup>Cather, "The Novel Democrite," On Writing, p. 35.

<sup>32</sup>Cather, "On the Art of Fiction," On Writing, p. 102.



were highly concerned with emotional tone, "the spirit of the whole," and both valued the concentration of content as an artistic objective. Their preoccupation with these criteria, as well as their primary desire to convey meaning, probably propelled these authors toward the use of symbol, allegory, and myth. In addition, both believed in the necessity of an author's immersing himself in his art. Of this necessity, Willa Cather once stated of the writer: "If he achieves anything noble, anything enduring, it must be by giving himself absolutely to his material. And this gift of sympathy is his great gift; it is the fine thing in him that alone can make his work fine."<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps the novel closest in form to what Miss Cather described in "The Novel Demueble" is A Lost Lady, for this brief novel is one of concentration, and Miss Cather's realism suggests instead of states, creates aura rather than records facts.<sup>34</sup> According to one critic: "A Lost Lady seems very slight, even attenuated. But in essential substance, it is

---

<sup>33</sup>Cather, "The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett," On Writing, p. 51.

<sup>34</sup>Interestingly, this novel is constructed in changing scenes of rapid succession, much like O'Neill's The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape. Whereas the plays each contain eight scenes, Miss Cather's A Lost Lady is written in two parts, with eight brief chapters comprising the first part, and nine chapters comprising the second part. Similarly, the form of My Mortal Enemy falls into approximately five divisions, with different settings for each.

richer than any of Miss Cather's books that preceded and, in force of feeling as well as in the exhibition of the figure in its particular carpet, vastly their superior."<sup>35</sup> The essential substance of the novel consists of allegory: its narrative movement records the dissolution of a crippled railroad builder and the corruption of his wife; its symbolic action is the destruction of a society and an age. More specifically, Captain Forrester represents not only an aging and wronged husband, but the pioneer strength and virtue esteemed so highly by Miss Cather. His fall, his illness, and his death are merely stages in the decline of the pioneer ethic. His wife's adultery marks its devastation.

The allegorical content of The Professor's House rests upon the central symbol of Professor St. Peter's two houses: one, the old home in which he has written his life's work, and the other, the new house made possible by the winning of an award and made necessary by the demands of his wife. Again, the allegory records a story of defeat--the defeat of the old, pioneer order by the new, materialistic one. There are no Captain Forresters in this novel, but his historical insight has given St. Peter pioneer virtue. His old home represents traditional values; the new home represents the

---

<sup>35</sup>Brown, "Willa Cather," Literary Opinion in America, p. 505.

new ones of greed and materialism. The conflict between the two orders brings St. Peter to the point of death, and to a final, unwilling surrender to the new order. The allegorical content of the novel explained thus far is amplified by the irregular structure of the work.<sup>36</sup> Interrupting the main action is an excerpt from a diary of Tom Outland, a student of the professor; this excerpt, however, relates a conflict parallel to the one already discussed: past versus present values, or non-materialism versus materialism. The novel's central narrative involves the reintegration of Professor St. Peter into his family and his society after the completion of his life's work; but it is the symbolic narrative which gives the novel its meaning. Parenthetically, the Biblical origin of St. Peter's name might possibly suggest the extent of his intended moral significance.

O'Neill's The Great God Brown was not one of his more successful plays, though he once regarded it as one of "the most interesting and moving" he had written.<sup>37</sup> Probably the

---

<sup>36</sup> Of the novel Miss Cather stated: "When I wrote The Professor's House, I wished to try two experiments in form. The first is the device often used by the early French and Spanish novelists: that of inserting the Nouvelle into the Roman. . . . But the experiment which interested me was something akin to the arrangement followed in sonatas in which the academic sonata form was handled somewhat freely." Cather, "On the Professor's House," On Writing, pp. 30-31.

<sup>37</sup> Mary B. Mullett, "The Extraordinary Story of Eugene O'Neill," American Magazine (November 1922), p. 118.

chief reason for its lack of popularity is its complexity, for the play's two-fold allegory is revealed through the exchanging of masks. On the narrative level, the play relates the deformation of the creative impulse in a hostile environment. The artist is Dion Anthony, who is persecuted by Billy Brown, O'Neill's embodiment of worldly success. On the philosophical level, Anthony personifies the struggle between paganism and Christianity, for the creative urge is also the urge toward spiritual self-fulfillment. O'Neill explained the character of Dion thus:

Dion Anthony--Dionysus and St. Anthony--the creative pagan acceptance of life, fighting eternal war with the masochistic life-denying spirit of Christianity as represented in St. Anthony--the whole struggle resulting in this modern day in mutual exhaustion--creative joy in life for life's sake frustrated, rendered abortive, distorted by morality from Pan into Satan, into a Mephistopheles mocking himself in order to feel alive; Christianity, once heroic in martyrs for its intense faith now pleading weakly for intense belief in anything, even Godhead itself.<sup>38</sup>

This idea is dramatized by the taking off and putting on of masks, and by the change in Dion's real face to that of an ascetic, while his original Pan mask becomes Satanic. On the psychological level, Dion himself explains the allegory:

---

<sup>38</sup>O'Neill, quoted by Clark, Eugene O'Neill: The Man and his Plays, p. 104.

Why am I afraid to live, I who love life and the beauty of flesh and the living colors of earth and sky and sea? Why am I afraid of love, I who love love? Why am I afraid, I who am not afraid? Why must I pretend to scorn in order to pity? Why must I hide myself in self-contempt in order to understand? Why must I be so ashamed of my strength, so proud of my weakness? Why must I live in a cage like a criminal, defying and hating I who love peace and friendship? . . . Why was I born without a skin, O God, that I must wear armor in order to touch or be touched?<sup>39</sup>

This allegory indicates that Anthony's real self, which loves life for life's sake, is lost between the masks of St. Anthony and Mephistopheles. When Billy Brown, the exploiter, assumes the demon mask, it brings him Anthony's suffering, but the result is different, for in the death of Brown, both aspects of self--the Dion and the Brown--are harmonized, and the conflict ends.<sup>40</sup>

The two authors' use of allegory does more than emphasize the importance of idea to their work; it provides a technical illustration of a basic conflict within their characters discussed earlier--the conflict between the ideal and the real. This conflict hinders the individual primarily as he struggles alone to know himself and the meaning of life, for it is usually the character's ideal which brings him

---

<sup>39</sup>The Great God Brown, Prologue, pp. 264-265.

<sup>40</sup>Two authors share this interpretation: Falk, pp. 99-198 and Waith, pp. 36-37.

into conflict with other human beings and with society. By the use of allegory, Miss Cather and O'Neill reinforce the existence of this conflict, since the conceptual level of their work, contrasted with the narrative level, reveals their moral purpose--to state an ideal against which they test reality.

That myth, as well as allegory, may emphasize idea and influence structure is illustrated in O'Neill's Desire Under the Elms and Mourning Becomes Electra. Both plays have as their source classical myth: the first play, the Hippolytus of Euripides, the second, the famed Orestea. The first play covers one seasonal cycle, beginning and ending in spring. Its action is the Hippolytus plot: the father has returned, bringing with him a young wife who is immediately attracted to her stepson. Like Phaedra, Abbie at first conceals her passion for Eben with scorn; like Phaedra, she asks that he be banished; and like Phaedra, she and her stepson fall prey to lust. O'Neill modifies his source in the death of Ephraim's supposed child and in the nature of the sin committed against the gods. The curse on his son, uttered by Theseus in the original, is transferred to Eben, rightful father of the slain child, and the sin is committed by Ephraim, not against the gods, but against Eben's mother. In expiating the wrong done to the mother, Eben and Abbie become agents of the process of justice, directed against Ephraim.

Without the classical framework, Eben and Abbie have no tragic proportions, and are simply the victims of lust. With the resolution of the play, the cycle of retribution is finished, for Ephraim, cause of the curse, is condemned to his land, the very thing he had coveted.<sup>41</sup>

While myth in Desire Under the Elms controls structure and determines the tragic character of the play, it is not the only level of meaning which O'Neill assigned to his work. Though motivated by characterization, the Biblical names Ephraim Cabot assigns to his sons suggest religious interpretation: Peter (the rock) casts a stone at his father's house, while Simeon reiterates the idea of an eye for an eye; Eben (store of hope) is best suited to carry on the family line; Ephraim embodies the archetypal patriarch and the New England Puritan tradition which represses life.<sup>42</sup>

In addition, Desire Under the Elms may be interpreted psychologically as a study in sexual repression. The frustrated maternal spirit brooding over the play demands normal sexuality, which is supplied by the lust and ultimate love between Eben and Abbie. The Puritan conception of sex as ugly and sinful conflicts with the maternal conception which

---

<sup>41</sup>This is a paraphrasing of the interpretation of Edgar F. Racey, Jr., "Myth as Tragic Structure in Desire Under the Elms," O'Neill: A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 57-61.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., pp. 57-58.

views it as a spontaneous, unselfish, life force, whose repression can create a powerful avenging spirit.<sup>43</sup>

Similar levels of meaning can be assigned to Mourning Becomes Electra. Again, myth determines structure, with O'Neill's drama following the Orestes plot. His family shadowed by an ancient curse, Agamemnon goes to the Trojan war; during his absence, his wife takes Aegisthus and shares the government of Argos with him. When Agamemnon returns from war, he is murdered by his wife and her lover. Later, his son returns home to kill his mother and Aegisthus. After this killing, Orestes is pursued by the Furies, and is doomed to a life of wandering to expiate his sin. Similarly, Ezra Mannon is killed upon his return home from war and his discovery of his wife's infidelity. Unlike his source, however, O'Neill has Christine kill herself instead of being murdered by her son; in addition, the modern playwright has placed his emphasis upon Electra instead of Orestes, and has added an incest motive toward the end of the play. Whereas Orestes was haunted by the Furies, Orin Mannon is haunted by the realization of his desire.

The trilogy gains its significance as contemporary tragedy in the nature of its motivation--not fated curse, but modern psychology. O'Neill emphasized his equation of the

---

<sup>43</sup>This interpretation is suggested by Falk, pp. 95-98.



Oedipus and Electra complexes with destiny as "a modern tragic interpretation of classic fate without benefit of Gods--for it [Mourning Becomes Electra] must, before everything, remain [a] modern psychological play--fate springing out of the family."<sup>44</sup>

The curse upon the Mannon family has not been determined by fate, but by the Puritanical rejection of love symbolized by the casting out of David Mannon from the family because he loved and married a French-Canadian governess who bore a son, Adam Brant, whose role in the play parallels that of Aegisthus in the classical drama. The house of Mannon, then, has been built on outraged pride and Puritanism, and its members seek release in love and death. Lavinia Mannon is caught in the father complex, though outwardly she resembles her mother, while Orin possesses unnatural love toward Christine, even desiring to go with her to some "island of freedom and peace." The death of her parents and of Adam Brant seems to release Lavinia from her paternally-inspired inhibitions and to lead her into a search for a love much like that of her mother. Conversely, the deaths influence Orin in the direction of his father. It is in symbolic incest that the two destroy each other, just as their parents had been destroyed.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup>O'Neill, quoted by Falk, p. 129.

<sup>45</sup>This is basically the interpretation offered by Falk, pp. 129-135 and Stark Young, "Eugene O'Neill's New Play," O'Neill: A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 82-88.

Orin commits suicide and Lavinia condemns herself to a life locked away from the world. As she says, "I'm the last Mannon. I've got to punish myself! Living alone . . . with the dead is a worse act of justice than death or prison."<sup>46</sup>

Classical myth is replaced by archetypal myth in the works of Willa Cather. And, as with so many elements in Miss Cather's prairie novels, myth is derived from nature's cycle of life and death. One interpretation of My Antonia holds that the novel derives both meaning and structure in its representation of the age-old vegetation myth. Unity is gained from the repetition of cycles: the seasons of the year, the successive phases of human life, and the hierarchic stages of civilization from a primitive culture to a sophisticated one.<sup>47</sup> A similar interpretation may be applied to O Pioneers!. Both novels record the passing of the seasons, and the first portions of each are devoted to the pioneer's initial struggle to survive the elements and to dominate the land. Human death--John Bergson in O Pioneers! and Mr.

---

<sup>46</sup> Mourning Becomes Electra, "The Haunted," Act III, p. 178. O'Neill biographers Arthur and Barbara Gelb have noted that O'Neill made Lavinia a symbolic representation of himself, that her last speech "incorporates both his consuming preoccupation with the act of suicide and his mordant belief in the inevitability of an even crueler self-punishment," p. 721.

<sup>47</sup> James E. Miller, "My Antonia: Frontier Drama of Time," American Quarterly (Winter 1958), p. 478.

Shimerda in My Antonia--relates to the cosmic order of time in which winter follows the harvest of autumn. The cycle of cultural evolution is traced from initial immigration-- Sweden for the Bergsons, Bohemia for the Shimerdas--to migration from the East, the land struggle itself, the establishment of frontier towns, and finally, the establishment of small prairie cities like Lincoln. In the cycle of human life, both heroines become archetypes of the physical fertility which perpetuates the race: Alexandra, through her relationship to the land, and Antonia, through motherhood. It has been noted previously that of Miss Cather's heroines, Alexandra feels the closest to nature. Reinforcing her archetypal significance, one critic suggests that Alexandra's relationship to the land is sexual, with her role the masculine one as she initiates the cultivation of the land.<sup>48</sup> Antonia, on the other hand, embodies the fertility myths as she moves through the cycle of physical woman come to flower, the endurance of woman eternally wronged, and finally, woman fulfilled.<sup>49</sup>

For both heroines, the movement through the life cycle is a symbolic one: the protagonists are not allowed to reveal themselves fully and directly, thus becoming symbolic of what

---

<sup>48</sup>Randall, p. 72.

<sup>49</sup>Miller, p. 480.

the reader desires.<sup>50</sup> Both Alexandra and Antonia become earth goddesses, individuals who are able to make the wild land bear fruit because of the identity they feel with it. In addition, they are able to impose civilization upon it, creating a giant garden from the prairie. Of Alexandra Bergson Miss Cather says:

When you go out of the house into the flower garden, there you feel again the order and fine arrangement manifest all over the great farm; in the fencing and hedging, in the wind-breaks and sheds, in the symmetrical pasture ponds, planted with scrub willows to give shade to the cattle in fly-time. There is even a white row of beehives in the orchard, under the walnut trees. You feel that, properly, Alexandra's house is the big out-of-doors, and that it is in the soil that she expresses herself best.<sup>51</sup>

While Alexandra symbolizes the earth goddess who can establish order upon the land and make it flower, Antonia possesses a dual role--that of "founder of a prosperous farm and progenitor of a thriving family." In this role, "she becomes the very symbol of fertility."<sup>52</sup>

She lent herself to immemorial human attitudes which we recognize by instinct as universal and true. I had not been mistaken. She was a battered woman now, not a lovely girl; but she still had that something which fires the imagination, could still stop one's breath for a moment by a look or gesture

---

<sup>50</sup>Daiches, p. 44.

<sup>51</sup>Pioneers!, p. 84.

<sup>52</sup>Randall, p. 142.

that somehow revealed the meaning in common things. She had only to stand in the orchard, to put her hand on a little crab tree and look up at the apples, to make you feel the goodness of planting and tending and harvesting at last. All the strong things of her heart came out in her body, that had been so tireless in serving generous emotions. . . . It was no wonder that her sons stood tall and straight: She was a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races.<sup>53</sup>

Both heroines gain much of their symbolic significance from Miss Cather's personification of the land. Always, the land is a distinct force, at times benevolent, at times antagonistic; at times creative, at times destructive: "John Bergson had the Old-World belief that land, in itself, is desirable. But this land was an enigma. It was like a horse that no one knows how to break to harness, that runs wild and kicks things to pieces."<sup>54</sup> Conversely, "the brown earth, with such a strong, clean smell, and such a power of growth and fertility in it, yields itself eagerly to the plow; rolls away from the shear, not even dimming the brightness of the metal, with a soft, deep sigh of happiness. . . . There is something frank and joyous and young in the open face of the country."<sup>55</sup> In both respects, the land provides a test for the courage and endurance of the pioneer, becoming the base

---

<sup>53</sup>My Antonia, p. 353.

<sup>54</sup>O Pioneers!, pp. 21-22.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

for Miss Cather's framework of ethics. On yet another level, the land is a manifestation of divine authority. The man who is closest to nature is closest to the infinite. Jim Burden expresses this form of mystic primitivism in My Antonia:

Alone, I should never have found the garden--except, perhaps, for the big yellow pumpkins that lay about unprotected by their withering vines--and felt very little interest in it when I got there. I wanted to walk straight on through the red grass and over the edge of the world, which could not be very far away. The light air about me told me that the world ended here: only the ground and sun and sky were left, and if one went a little farther there would be only sun and sky, and one would float off into them. . . .

The earth was warm under me, and warm as I crumbled it through my fingers. Queer little red bugs came out and moved in slow squadrons around me. Their backs were polished vermilion, with black spots. I kept as still as I could. Nothing happened. I did not expect anything to happen. I was something that lay under the sun and felt it, like the pumpkins, and I did not want to be anything more. I was entirely happy. Perhaps we feel like that when we die and become part of something entire, whether it is sun and air or goodness and knowledge. At any rate, that is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great. When it comes to one, it comes as naturally as sleep.<sup>56</sup>

The use of myth continues in the works of O'Neill, who, like Miss Cather, creates an earth goddess symbol which appears in many of his plays. In psychological terms, one critic suggests that O'Neill's Mother Earth represents man's id, in

---

<sup>56</sup>My Antonia, pp. 16, 18.

conflict with the super ego of the father which forbids expression of this natural love urge. Representing a kind of psychological primitivism, the playwright's Cybel, or Mother Earth, is the ideal mother for whom all men long.<sup>57</sup> Her prototype appears in Welded, where as the prostitute, she symbolizes the source of physical creation. In The Great God Brown, she is the Cybel who holds the secrets of life: "Always spring comes again bearing life! Always again! Always, always forever again!--Spring again!--life again! Summer and fall and death and peace again!--but always, always, love and conception and birth and pain again--!"<sup>58</sup> In Dynamo, Mother Earth is represented by Mrs. Fife, symbol of simple, amoral sexuality, while Abbie of Desire Under the Elms, possesses the same qualities. Finally, Nina of Strange Interlude and Mary Tyrone of Long Day's Journey into Night may be regarded as the perversion and the inversion of Mother Earth, no longer redeeming man, but devouring him.<sup>59</sup>

For one critic, this emphasis on sexuality provides the basis for interpreting O'Neill's works as exemplifying "life-giving" and "life-destroying" tension between father

---

<sup>57</sup>Falk, pp. 121-122.

<sup>58</sup>The Great God Brown, Act IV, Scene II, p. 322.

<sup>59</sup>Falk, p. 125.

and mother images.<sup>60</sup> More than suggesting tension, however, sexuality for O'Neill symbolizes not merely animal urge, but the human desire and spiritual need which could transform individuals.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, as idolized in the Mother Earth symbol, it suggests not love alone, but the wish for death as part of the great cycle of life. Particularly do the Mannons demonstrate the latter interpretation, for despite their ambivalence, Orin and Lavinia regard Christine as a mother symbol.

The vegetation myth used by Willa Cather, then, acquires greater scope in the works of O'Neill. At the same time, it is perverted from its archetypal meaning, for his Mother Earth symbolizes both man's desire and his failure to achieve a closeness to nature, and she never appears in the context of a natural world. Land, when a part of an O'Neill play, does not have the Cather duality, but is infertile, resistant to man's efforts to cultivate it.

The O'Neill symbol which contains the ambivalence of Miss Cather's land is the sea; for it, too, is at times benevolent, at times antagonistic. In the early one-act plays, the sea is portrayed as an antagonistic force;

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Edwin Engle, The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), p. 249.



nevertheless, it gives the characters their small degree of power: "it is their earth, their unacknowledged god."<sup>62</sup> For Chris Christopherson of Anna Christie, the sea is a "devil," waiting to overwhelm individuals with its power. Paradoxically, for his daughter, it is hope; for her, victimized by the land, whatever the sea can offer is better than her past. She acquiesces to the force of the sea, and in doing so, modifies its symbolism, so that for the later O'Neill characters, the sea becomes not only hope, but refuge from an unhappy existence. Robert Mayo views it as the answer to the promise of life, and for Edmund in Long Day's Journey into Night, it is "the peace, the end of the quest, the last harbor, the joy of belonging to a fulfillment beyond men's lousy, pitiful, greedy fears and hopes and dreams. . . ." <sup>63</sup>

As the sea gradually comes to symbolize man's desire to know the meaning of life, O'Neill formulates an opposing symbol. According to one critic, fog is O'Neill's first and last symbol of man's inability to know himself, other men, or his destiny. Fog surrounds the dying Yank in Bound East for Cardiff; it makes the force of the sea mysteriously ambivalent to the characters in Anna Christie; and it is the world

---

<sup>62</sup> Travis Bogard, "Anna Christie: Her Fall and Rise," O'Neill: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 64.

<sup>63</sup> Long Day's Journey into Night, Act IV, p. 153.

into which the Tyrones can escape from life in Long Day's

Journey into Night. As Edmund puts it:

The fog was where I wanted to be. Halfway down the path you can't see this house. You'd never know it was here. Or any of the other places down the avenue. I couldn't see but a few feet ahead. I didn't meet a soul. Everything looked and sounded unreal. Nothing was what it is. That's what I wanted--to be alone with myself in another world where truth is untrue and life can hide from itself. Out beyond the harbor, where the road runs along the beach, I even lost the feeling of being on land. The fog and the sea seemed part of each other.<sup>64</sup>

The struggle man experiences in attempting to realize his goal despite opposing forces is conveyed through a similar house symbolism used by both O'Neill and Miss Cather. The significant action of Desire Under the Elms takes place in the house built by Ephraim Cabot--his house is the most visible evidence of his conquest of the land. Likewise, the Mannon house symbolizes both the aspirations of and the curse upon the Mannons; built with the great pride of the Mannons, it becomes ultimately their tomb, just as Christine so aptly described it. The Forrester's home in Sweet Water, though not symbolic of an ancestral dynasty, is suggestive of a social and business equivalent. But it topples, like the house of the Mannons, because of the corruption which takes place within. In The Professor's House, Godfrey St. Peter's home is also destroyed,

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

but in this case, the destroyer is the materialism which renders old standards, old houses obsolete.

Both Eugene O'Neill and Willa Cather then, used symbol, myth, and allegory to provide the structure and emotional tone of the works. For both the playwright and the novelist, the idea was the thing; and while O'Neill's intellectual framework was psychology, and Miss Cather's nature, the two writers employed surprisingly similar attitudes toward the importance of emotional tone, and demonstrated a similar assignment of varied levels of meaning to their works via symbol, myth, and allegory. Their use of these techniques differed, but the authors' intention in both cases was the same--to create art which, in the words of Miss Cather, is a search for "something new and untried, where the values are intrinsic." Both Eugene O'Neill and Willa Cather were literary innovators to this end.

The innovations they made emphasized the meanings they wished to convey, and elevated their characters to a significance beyond the works in which they appeared in such a way that the works themselves become the record, not only of an age, a personality, or a land, but of man's universal struggle to know himself and the meaning of life. The characters of Eugene O'Neill and Willa Cather fail in their quest, but because of the technique of their creators, they fail nobly, so that they are twentieth-century representatives of the eternal tragedy of man.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE GIFT OF SYMPATHY

Against the background of the roaring twenties, few writers brought to American literature such diverse worlds as did the genteel lady of the prairie and the dissolute playwright of Broadway. In a period of literary renaissance, each stood apart from the ferment, one embracing traditionalism, the other modernism. Yet, despite these major contrasts, there appear a startling number of significant parallels within their works. And a study of these parallels suggests that Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill were two writers, of two worlds, with one theme.

First, the novelist and the playwright faced essentially the same problem--human responsibility in an impersonal universe--Miss Cather gradually coming to agree with O'Neill that man, by the creative force of his will alone, cannot prevail in a modern world; instead, he is helpless in a society whose values are foreign and antagonistic to his sensitivity. Second, Miss Cather and O'Neill approached this problem in a similar way, both viewing the story of man as the story of quest, a dual quest to find self-knowledge and life's meaning in a world of changing values. And finally, both authors reached the same conclusion: that twentieth-

century man is doomed to failure, for the replacement of absolutes by the new values of mechanization and materialism robs him of his spiritual, creative energy; in addition, this change renders man's idealistic goals incompatible with reality, making human relationships as inadequate as individual man himself.

To Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill, the advent of the century's science and technology brought not progress, but its reverse. They felt that the new technology was divorcing man from nature, the physical manifestation of a supreme will. It was this common dislike for their own time, then, which led them into a similar search for value, motivated them toward social criticism, resulted in their literature of pessimism, and propelled them into both a personal and a literary withdrawal from their age into the comparative serenity of the past and into the calmness of isolation.

Despite their contrasting worlds, the two writers portrayed characters possessing a similar degree of sensitivity. Robert Mayo, Claude Wheeler, Yank, Paul--all are lost souls, alienated from the world by their desire to find "something splendid" in life, frustrated by their inability to penetrate the distant horizon, and doomed by the discrepancy which exists between their goals and their achievements. These characters, in particular, are alike in their dreaming and in their striving to know themselves. With the Cather characters,

the struggle is primarily with the ignorance and antagonism of others; with the O'Neill characters, the struggle is primarily a psychological one, in which the conflicting aspects of personality war for dominance. Other characters--Professor St. Peter, Dion Anthony, Marian Forrester, Reuben Light, Marco Polo, Myra Henshawe--are also lost; but they assume another dimension, illustrating the conflict which exists between artistic sensibility and exploiting materialism. In some cases, these characters surrender to a life of meager joy and much endurance; in others, they become themselves the propagators of the new values.

✓ The characters of O'Neill and Miss Cather are alienated not only from the world, but from love as well. The marriage relationships portrayed by the two writers are generally in the process of disintegration. In One of Ours, Welded, The Iceman Cometh, My Mortal Enemy, and A Lost Lady the misery rather than the joy of love is emphasized. Several other works--All God's Chillun Got Wings, O Pioneers!, and Strange Interlude--illustrate the destructive power of love. Family relationships fare no better; most reveal patterns of escape and hate. The apparent conclusion here, then, is that human relationships offer no pathway to the meaning of life, and that the reality of love cannot achieve the joy of the ideal.

Society at large reveals another area of frustration and alienation for these characters. Both Willa Cather and

Eugene O'Neill felt that modern society, with its mass production and its materialism, was destroying man's individual integrity. To this end, they established a dichotomy of present and past values as a means of criticizing contemporary society. Both esteemed the absolute standards they felt to be characteristic of past civilizations. Miss Cather venerated these standards in her frontier novels, first attesting their existence, then chronicling their decline and eventual disappearance. In contrast, O'Neill wrote of a world in which these values are already lost; his degenerates are simply the products of the sickness of his day. While some of Miss Cather's characters become weak and mourn their loss, others become corrupted by it; the ones who come closest to a fulfillment of their quest are those who are able to compensate for the value loss through the substitution of art or profession. O'Neill's characters, on the other hand, are less successful in their substitutions, experiencing total failure. For both authors, the failure of contemporary man to establish new standards is caused to a great extent by his altered relationship to nature, modified by the substitution of the machine for man's creative desire. The characters are lost between the pioneer and contemporary orders; unlike their creators, they cannot retreat to an earlier age, nor can they experience hope in the present one.

The characters of Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill, then, are truly lost souls, for in their desire to know themselves and to learn the meaning of life, they make their quest on three levels: within their own souls, within their human relationships, and within society at large. And in every instance, they fail to find answers to the eternal questions of man. Their glorious dreams, the failure of love, their dehumanization as a result of science and technology--all contribute to the failure they experience.

And their struggle is not simply that of the artist, the pioneer, or the dreamer, but of man universal, for the personal identity of these characters is subordinate to the larger theme of their authors, and it is made universal by the techniques of allegory, myth, and symbol. Despite the differences in their orientations (O'Neill is now considered primarily a symbolist, while Miss Cather is usually regarded a moral realist), the idea of their works is the important thing, and to that end, both authors constructed an intellectual framework upon which to base various levels of meaning. For O'Neill, this framework became the psychological theories of Freud and Jung; for Miss Cather, it was man's relationship to nature. Obviously, then, this framework determined their uses of myth and allegory, O'Neill, for the most part, employing classical myth to reveal modern psychological tragedy, and Miss Cather contrasting her historical ideal



with contemporary dissolution. To the latter end, Miss Cather made archetypal figures of her pioneers, thus merging them into the old vegetation myths, much as O'Neill sought to unite the Dionysus myths with Christianity in The Great God Brown. Interestingly, the nature of these myths brought Miss Cather and O'Neill to a similar symbol--that of the earth goddess, who for Miss Cather is embodied in her pioneer heroines' singular identity and success with the land, and who for O'Neill symbolizes the source of love, creation, and the secrets of life. Additional symbols which demonstrate similar usage are Miss Cather's land and O'Neill's sea. These nature symbols occur throughout the entire canon of each author's works, and for both Miss Cather and O'Neill, they are ambivalent--at times benevolent forces, at times antagonistic ones. Simultaneously, the sea and the land offer both hope and threat to mankind.

A more significant parallel in the techniques of the two authors appears in their criticism of contemporary novels. Both O'Neill and Miss Cather felt that the literature of their day was overwritten, and both called for economy of structure and attention to emotional tone. As Miss Cather put it, the true artist must find "what conventions of form and what detail one can do without and yet preserve the spirit of the whole."<sup>1</sup> Her novels, then, particularly A Lost Lady and The

---

<sup>1</sup> Cather, see note 32, Chapter V.

Professor's House, may be seen as masterpieces of economy, structured in scenes similar to those of a play. With a similar objective, O'Neill attempted to put more substance within his concentrated dramatic structure than did the other playwrights of his day, and felt himself essentially a novelist.

Both Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill, then, wrote of similar characters who share similar goals and similar defeats; of more importance is that both authors, by way of allegory, myth, and symbol, elevated the stature of their characters to that of man universal. Consequently, the failure of their characters transcends its literary context and suggests that Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill were creating tragedy.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, tragedy was O'Neill's foremost goal, and in aspiring to its creation, he gave the American drama its greatest significance. And though Miss Cather did not profess tragic intent, her works indicate that her conception of man's position in the universe was, indeed, that which is characteristic of tragedy. The works of the two authors exhibit both optimism and pessimism, again characteristics common to the tragic view; for the pessimism of

---

<sup>2</sup>It is important to note that tragedy as discussed here is the genre not in its narrow, critical sense, but in its most general one, involving the characteristic spirit, struggle, and failure.

Miss Cather and O'Neill came from their idealistic vision of the potentialities of man, and was demonstrated by their concern for the man who dreams of the horizon beyond.

Both Willa Cather and Eugene O'Neill, unlike as they appeared, had the same goal: to create art with intrinsic values. They achieved this objective--within different worlds, yet via similar themes and techniques. Of the writer, Miss Cather stated: "If he achieves anything noble, anything enduring, it must be by giving himself absolutely to his material. And this gift of sympathy is his greatest gift; it is the fine thing in him that alone can make his work fine.<sup>3</sup> O'Neill, like Willa Cather, possessed this gift of sympathy. There can be no doubt but that both he and Miss Cather gave themselves absolutely to their material. They lived with their characters, they struggled with them, and they suffered with them, ultimately admitting the same defeat, defeat which caused them to withdraw personally from their worlds as they portrayed them.

---

<sup>3</sup>Cather, see note 33, Chapter V.

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### PRIMARY SOURCES

- Cather, Willa. Alexander's Bridge. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1912. Reprinted as a Bantam Classic Edition, 1962.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Five Stories. ed. George N. Kates. New York: Vintage Books, 1956.
- \_\_\_\_\_. A Lost Lady. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1923.
- \_\_\_\_\_. My Antonia. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1918.
- \_\_\_\_\_. My Mortal Enemy. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1926.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle," These United States. Printed in Nation, CXVII (September 5, 1923) 237-238.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Not Under Forty. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1936.
- \_\_\_\_\_. On Writing. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1949.
- \_\_\_\_\_. One of Ours. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1922.
- \_\_\_\_\_. O Pioneers! New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1913.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Professor's House. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1925.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Song of the Lark. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1915.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Troll Garden. New York: McClure, Phillips and Co., 1905. Reprinted as a Signet Classic, 1961, by The New American Library of World Literature, New York.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Writings from Willa Cather's Campus Years. ed. James R. Shively. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1950.

O'Neill, Eugene. The Plays of Eugene O'Neill. 3 vols. New York: Random House, 1954.

\_\_\_\_\_. Long Day's Journey into Night. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Memoranda on Masks," The American Spectator Yearbook. ed. George Jean Nathan, Ernest Boyd, Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, James Branch Cabell, Eugene O'Neill. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1934.

## SECONDARY SOURCES

### Books

- Aldridge, John W. In Search of Heresy: American Literature in an Age of Conformity. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956.
- Bennett, Mildred R. The World of Willa Cather. Revised edition. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961.
- Bentley, Eric. The Playwright as Thinker. New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1946.
- Bloom, Edward A. and Lillian D. Willa Cather's Gift of Sympathy. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962.
- Boulton, Agnes. Part of a Long Story. Garden City: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1958.
- Bowen, Crosswell, asst. Shane O'Neill. The Curse of the Misbegotten: A Tale of the House of O'Neill. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959.
- Boyton, Percy. The Rediscovery of the Frontier. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931.
- Broussard, Louis. American Drama: Contemporary Allegory from Eugene O'Neill to Tennessee Williams. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962.
- Brown, E. K. completed by Leon Edel. Willa Cather: A Critical Biography. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953.
- Cargill, Oscar. Intellectual America: Ideas on the March. New York: The MacMillan Co., 1941.
- Clark, Barrett H. Eugene O'Neill. New York: R. M. McBride, 1927.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays. New York: Dover Press, 1947.
- Daiches, David. Willa Cather: A Critical Introduction. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1951.
- Downer, Alan. Fifty Years of American Drama. Chicago: Regnery, 1951.

- Recent American Drama. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1961.
- Dusenbury, Winifred L. The Theme of Loneliness in Modern American Drama. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1960.
- † Engel, Edwin A. The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953.
- 4 Falk, Doris V. Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1958.
- Gagey, Edmond M. Revolution in American Drama. New York: Columbia University Press, 1947.
- Gassner, John. The Theatre in Our Times. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1945.
- Geismar, Maxwell. The Last of the Provincials: The American Novel, 1915-1925. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1947.
- Gelb, Arthur and Barbara. O'Neill. New York: Harper and Bros., 1962.
- Glicksberg, Charles I. Tragic Vision in Twentieth Century Literature. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963.
- Goldberg, Isaac. The Theatre of George Jean Nathan. New York: Simon and Shuster, 1926.
- Hartwick, Harry. The Foreground of American Fiction. New York: American Book Co., 1934.
- Hazard, Lucy Lockwood. The Frontier in American Literature. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell and Co., 1927.
- Herron, Ima. The Small Town in American Literature. Durham: Duke University Press, 1939.
- Hewitt, Barnard. Theater, U. S. A. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1959.
- Hicks, Granville. The Great Tradition. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1933.
- Hoffman, Frederick J. The Modern Novel in America: 1900-1950. Chicago: Regnery, 1951.

- \_\_\_\_\_ . The Twenties. New York: Viking Press, 1955.
- Jessup, Josephine Lurie. The Faith of Our Feminists. New York: R. R. Smith, 1950.
- Kazin, Alfred. On Native Grounds. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1942.
- Kinne, Wisner Payne. George Pierce Baker and the American Theater. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954.
- Krutch, Joseph Wood. The American Drama Since 1918. New York: Random House, 1939.
- Lewis, Edith. Willa Cather Living. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1953.
- Lucas, F. L. Tragedy. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1928.
- Mandel, Oscar. A Definition of Tragedy. New York: New York University Press, 1961.
- Miller, Jordan Y. Eugene O'Neill and the American Critic. Hamden: Archon Books, 1962.
- Morris, Lloyd. Postscript to Yesterday: America: The Last Fifty Years. New York: Random House, 1947.
- Myers, Henry. Tragedy: A View of Life. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956.
- Nathan, George Jean. The Intimate Notebooks of George Jean Nathan. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1932.
- \_\_\_\_\_ . The Theatre of the Moment. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1936.
- O'Connor, William Van. Climates of Tragedy. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1943.
- O'Neill: A Collection of Critical Essays. ed. John Gassner. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964.
- O'Neill and his Plays. ed. Oscar Cargill, N. Bryllion Fagin, William J. Fisher. New York: New York University Press, 1961.
- Overton, Grant. The Women Who Make Our Novels. New York: Moffat, Yard and Co., 1922.
- Peacock, Ronald. The Poet in the Theater. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1946.



- Porter, Katherine Anne. "Reflections on Willa Cather," The Days Before. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1952.
- Rapin, Rene. Willa Cather. New York: R. M. McBride Co., 1930.
- Sergeant, Elizabeth Shepley. Fire Under the Andes. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1927.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Willa Cather: A Memoir. New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1953.
- Sievers, W. David. Freud on Broadway. New York: Hermitage House, 1955.
- Skinner, Richard Dana. Eugene O'Neill: A Poet's Quest. New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1935. Re-issued 1964.
- Slochower, Harry. No Voice Is Wholly Lost: Writers and Thinkers in War and Peace. New York: Creative Age Press, 1945.
- Smith, Henry N. Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950.
- Snell, G. D. The Shapers of American Fiction. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1947.
- Spiller, Robert E. The Cycle of American Literature. New York: MacMillan Co., 1955.
- Spiritual Problems in Contemporary Literature. ed. Stanley Romaine Hopper. New York: Harper and Bros., 1952.
- Trilling, Lionel. "Eugene O'Neill," After the Genteel Tradition. ed. Malcolm Cowley. Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1959.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Liberal Imagination. New York: Viking Press, 1950.
- Tennant, Stephen. "The Room Beyond," Foreward to Willa Cather's On Writing. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1949.
- West, Rebecca. The Strange Necessity. Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1928.
- Whipple, Thomas K. Spokesmen: Modern Writers and American Life. New York: Appleton, 1928.

- Wilson, Edmund. Shores of Light. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Son, 1952.
- Wintner, Sophus Keith. Eugene O'Neill: A Critical Study. New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1961.
- Wright, Edward A. A Primer for Playgoers. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1958.

### Journals

- Alexander, Doris M. "Psychological Fate in Mourning Becomes Electra," PMLA, LXVIII (December 1953), 923-934.
- [An interview with Willa Cather] The Omaha Daily News (Oct. 29, 1921), Sec. C, 1, 8.
- Anderson, June. "Willa Cather's Sanctuary," Descant, III (Spring 1959), 22-30.
- Baum, Bernard. "Willa Cather's Wasteland," South Atlantic Quarterly, XLIII (October 1949), 589-601.
- Bennett, Mildred R. "Catherton," Prairie Schooner, XXIII (Fall 1949), 279-280.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "How Willa Cather Chose Her Names," Names, X (March 1962), 29-37.
- Bloom, Edward A. and Lillian D. "Willa Cather's Novels of the Frontier: The Symbolic Function of 'Machine-Made Materialism'," University of Toronto Quarterly, XV (October 1950), 45-60.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Willa Cather's Portrait of the Artist," University of Toronto Quarterly, XXVII (April 1958), 273-288.
- Bowron, Bernard R., Jr. "Realism in America," Comparative Literature, III (Summer 1951), 269-273.
- Boynton, Percy H. "Willa Cather," English Journal, XIII (June 1924), 373-380.
- Bradford, Curtis. "Willa Cather's Uncollected Short Stories," American Literature, XXVI (January 1955), 537-551.

- Brown, E. K. "Homage to Willa Cather," Yale Review, XXXVI (Spring 1946), 77-92.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Willa Cather's Canada," University of Toronto Quarterly, XXII (January 1953), 184-196.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Willa Cather," Literary Opinion in America. ed. Morton Dauwen Zabel. Third Edition, Revised. Vol. 2. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.
- Bryden, Ronald. "The American Sublime," Spectator, CCI (May 26, 1961), 767.
- Bullock, Flora. "Willa Cather: Essayist and Dramatic Critic, 1891-1895," Prairie Schooner, XXIII (Winter 1949), 393-401.
- Dahl, Curtis. "An American Georgic: Willa Cather's My Antonia," Comparative Literature, VII (Winter 1955), 43-51.
- Edel, Leon. "Willa Cather's The Professor's House: An Inquiry into the Use of Psychology in Literary Criticism," Literature and Psychology, IV (November 1954), 66-79.
- Ferguson, Francis. "Eugene O'Neill," Literary Opinion in America. ed. Morton Dauwen Zabel. Third Edition, Revised. Vol. 2. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.
- Fiskin, A. M. I. "The Basic Unity of Eugene O'Neill," Writers of Our Years, ed. Fiskin. Denver: The University of Denver Press, 1950. (Studies in Humanities, I)
- Fleischmann, Wolfgang B. "Willa Cather's The Professor's House and Anatole France's Le Mannequin D'Oedir," Romance Notes, I (Spring 1960), 92-93.
- Footman, R. H. "The Genius of Willa Cather," American Literature, X (May 1938), 123-141.
- Forman, Henry James. "Willa Cather: A Voice from the Prairie," Sewanee Review, XLVII (Spring 1962), 248-258.
- Gerber, Philip L. "Willa Cather and the Big Red Rock," College English, XIX (January 1958), 152-157.
- Hicks, Granville. "The Case Against Willa Cather," English Journal, XXII (November 1933), 703-710.

- Hinman, Eleanor. [An interview with Willa Cather] The Lincoln Sunday Star (Nov. 6, 1921), 1, 2.
- Hinz, John P. "A Lost Lady and The Professor's House," Virginia Quarterly Review, XXIX (Fall 1953), 70-85.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Willa Cather: Prairie Spring," Prairie Schooner, XXIII (Spring 1949), 86-88.
- Jones, Howard Mumford. "Willa Cather Returns to the Midwest," Saturday Review, XII (August 3, 1935), 7.
- Krutch, Joseph Wood. "Eugene O'Neill, the Lonely Revolutionary," Theatre Arts, XXXVI (April 1952), 29-30.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "O'Neill's Tragic Sense," American Scholar, XVI (Summer 1947), 283-290.
- Mahoney, Eva. [An interview with Willa Cather] Omaha Sunday World Herald (Nov. 27, 1921), magazine section, 7.
- McNamara, Robert. "Phases of American Religion in Thornton Wilder and Willa Cather," The Catholic World, CXXXV (September 1932), 641-649.
- Miller, James E., Jr. "My Antonia: Frontier Drama of Time," American Quarterly, X (Winter 1958), 476-484.
- Miller, Arthur. "Tragedy and the Common Man," Theater Arts, XXXV (March 1951), 48-50.
- Parks, Edd Winfield. "Eugene O'Neill's Symbolism," Sewanee Review, XXXXIII (October-December 1935), 436-450.
- Rous, J. W. "Willa Cather's First Published Story," American Literature, XXIII (January 1952), 493-494.
- Schriftgiesser, Karl. [An interview with Eugene O'Neill] The New York Times (Oct. 6, 1946), Sec. 2, 1, 2.
- Sergeant, Elizabeth Shepley. "The Roots of a Writer," Saturday Review, XXXVI (April 1953), 50-72.
- Trilling, Lionel. "Willa Cather," The New Republic, LXXX (February 1937), 10-13.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Willa Cather," After the Genteel Tradition. ed. Malcolm Cowley. Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1959.

- Wagenknecht, Edward. "Willa Cather," Sewanee Review, XXXVII (April 1929), 221-239.
- White, George L., Jr. "Willa Cather," Sewanee Review, L (January 1942), 18-25.
- Winston, Archer. "In Defense of Willa Cather," Bookman, LXXIV (March 1932), 634-640.
- Zabel, Morton Dauwen. "Willa Cather, Tale of Time," Craft and Character. New York: Viking Press, 1957.

Unpublished Materials

- Amberg, John Bernard, S. J. Willa Cather: Forethoughts and Eventualities. Unpublished dissertation, Loyola University, 1935.
- Bash, James Richard. Willa Cather: A Study in Primitivism. Unpublished dissertation, University of Illinois, 1954.