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Willa Cather's Journalism and Fiction: Romancing the Facts

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WILLA CATHER'S JOURNALISM AND FICTION:
ROMANCING THE FACTS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirement for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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This four-part study of Willa Cather's journalistic and fiction writing examines the interplay between the two and argues that Cather applied the methods and characteristics of literary journalism or "New Journalism," a form of journalism that merges fact-based reportage with narrative style, decades before the terms were defined in the 1960s and 1970s.

This long overdue stylistic study analyzes and historicizes the author's early professional newspaper and magazine writing and fiction writing. It shows how Cather employed narrative style and literary theories to her newspaper writing to render it more colorful and interesting and how she used journalistic principles and reportage to create the framework for her literary writing. This study asserts that Cather's journalism proved integral to her fiction in that she merged elements from both genres to create new, more complicated forms to address reality, aesthetics, and a rapidly changing, turn-of-the-century American society.

The methodology of this study involves an analysis of Cather's newspaper reviews and columns to determine what narrative and literary elements she chose to incorporate therein. In turn, it examines her fiction and finds evidence of reportage techniques and journalistic principles. This analysis includes an examination of Cather's "novel démeublé," or unfurnished novel; it asserts that her theoretical model is a compromise between the two genres, one which

enabled her to merge reportage principles and journalistic reduction methods with literary writing.

The study concludes that Cather's journalism heavily impacted and informed her fiction. She fused and synthesized journalistic facts and principles with literary style and imagination to create complex forms. Viewed as early literary journalism, her work serves as a template for new, innovative writing forms that attempt to define reality and present a vision of the world in both journalistic and literary disciplines.

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INTRODUCTION: WILLA CATHER: 'POET REPORTER' AND NOVELIST

Nearly half a century before the term literary journalism was defined or the “New Journalists” saturated themselves in the societal rumblings of the 1960s and 1970s, a writer from Red Cloud, Nebraska engaged in an experiment. First, she took elements of literary style—description, scene-setting, and fine writing—and applied them to her reportage. Then, she took journalistic principles—factual reportage, immersion, and research—and applied them to her literary writing. Few people noticed. Once the social critics of the 1920s and 1930s categorized Willa Cather as simplistic and nostalgic, her destiny was to be neglected in favor of what they considered more “pertinent” work (Middleton 20-21).

The early critics were wrong in labeling Cather’s work as simplistic; her work and evolving experimentation in combining elements of two seemingly distinct genres and distilling the essence, is pertinent to studies in both journalism and literature. First and foremost, her work shows the potential for fluidity rather than rigidity between established genres and serves as a model for further experimentation in combining elements of different genres to create new structures and forms to deal with current literary realities. It offers an alternative view of romance and realism, fact and fiction, journalism and literary writing, and serves as a map of sorts to study and research literary anomalies, or works that defy genre categorization.

Cather’s writing, in both theme and form, mirrors a conflict with the transition from an agrarian to industrial society. The conflict continues as “contemporary

technologies and sciences have created an evanescent reality which at best can only be partially described but cannot be analyzed and compressed into a total pattern of cohesion and meaning” (Zavarzadeh 20-21). New means of expression, new journalistic and literary forms may be needed to present and examine this reality, and Cather’s work serves as an early model. How did Cather compress journalism and literary writing to present her vision of reality in an emerging American culture? What does this selection and simplification process reveal about the relationship between the real and imaginary worlds? How does Cather’s method compare to techniques later used by literary journalists and the New Journalists? Rooted in the theory of literary journalism, this historical analysis identifies the ways in which Cather’s literary career was informed by journalistic theory, technique and practice, and it offers a means for exploring alternative journalistic and literary forms that combine factuality and aesthetics in efforts to define reality.

Here, the case is made that Cather applied the methods and characteristics of literary journalism decades before the term was defined. Cather is recognized by some critics as a modernist, and examining her writing through the lens of literary journalism sheds new light on her work and the experimental formats she enlisted in her novels. Her writing demonstrates an overlapping and blurring of the genres, which contributes to difficulties in categorizing her novels and, in a larger, multidisciplinary sense, difficulties in categorizing and defining writing that combines elements of journalistic and literary style and meshes fact with fiction. The significance of this study lies in the area of overlap between the two genres, the blurring of fact and fiction, and in the taxonomy of

writing that encompasses elements of both. Its multidisciplinary approach is significant to both forms of writing. Journalistically, it offers an optional lens for viewing “literary journalism,” a form of nonfiction writing using narrative style. From a literary standpoint, it offers an optional interpretation of artistic selection and deletion for aesthetic purposes. Cather’s selection, layering, and blurring of factual journalism and fictional literary writing is evidence that the space between the two genres is fluid, flexible, and easily crossed.

In the February 1900 issue of the *Atlantic*, Gerald Stanley Lee wrote that while most daily journalism did not extend beyond the facts reported, occasionally a “poet reporter” would emerge, “a journalist who is more of an artist than the artists, an artist who is more of a journalist than the journalists” (237). Willa Cather would have begged to differ. She made clear the distinction between her journalistic writing and her fiction. “One does not wish the egg one eats for breakfast, or the morning paper, to be made of the stuff of immortality,” she writes in her essay “The Novel Demeublé,” adding, “If the novel is a form of imaginative art, it cannot be at the same time a brilliant form of journalism” (36, 40). Separation of the two genres was key, and the hierarchy was clear to Cather: Journalism written for mass-audience consumption was ordinary breakfast fare, and literary writing composed for her readers was a banquet to be remembered and savored years later.

Her contempt for her early journalistic writing is clear. Biographer James Woodress records her criticism of early columns published in the *Nebraska Journal*: “I was paid one dollar a column, which was certainly quite all my highstepping rhetoric was

worth” (64). At the turn of the twentieth century, the focus of journalistic writing and news articles was centered on the newspaper rather than the reporter or writer. The author or reporter was considered to be relatively insignificant. It wasn’t until the 1930s that bylines became the norm at newspapers. Cather’s journalistic work included articles with and without her byline and others with pseudonyms. Another nonfiction work, S. S. McClure’s *My Autobiography*, ghostwritten by Cather, includes only a short note of indebtedness by the magazine publisher to Cather “for her invaluable assistance to the preparation of these memoirs” (33). There is no other indication of her authorial contribution to the book. Cather’s use of pseudonyms may be an indication of her reluctance to be identified with her early journalistic work. In her memoirs of Cather, longtime companion Edith Lewis writes of the pseudonyms as “an indication . . . of how valueless this sort of writing can be for an original writer” and of how “destructive” it could be to talent (42). Cather’s mentor Sarah Orne Jewett warned Cather in a letter that her magazine work at *McClure’s* was a hindrance to the maturation of her literary writing: “Your vivid, exciting companionship in the office must not be your audience, you must find your own quiet centre of life, and write from that to the world that holds offices, and all society, all Bohemia; the city, the country—in short, you must write to the human heart, the great consciousness that all humanity goes to make up” (246-50).

Cather defines fact-based journalistic writing and fiction-based literary writing as distinct, separate genres differentiated by function or use—daily consumption by a mass audience or enduring absorption by a literary audience; and style—factual and formulaic

or imaginative and aesthetic. She draws a firm line between her journalistic writing and her fiction writing, which she defines as “art,” reinforcing a Western metaphysical binary that establishes the two as opposing genres with a hierarchal component that positions fiction, or art, as a higher form. Additionally, the characteristics of accuracy and facts in journalistic writing and imagination and fiction in literary writing form a conjunctive binary that further serves to define and separate the two genres. Through the delineation of the genres of fact-based journalistic writing and fiction-based literary writing, these forms are alienated from each other, and fiction is elevated to “art.” Cather’s letters, columns, and essays, particularly those included in *On Writing: Critical Studies on Writing as an Art*, stress the distinctions and hierarchy between the two. Although Cather was professionally dedicated to journalism, acknowledged its function as a mass medium, and thrived in the excitement and quasi-celebrity nature of the field, she viewed it as “lesser than” literary writing and certainly as a business for profit in corporate America. “Writing ought either to be the manufacture of stories for which there is a market demand—a business as safe and commendable as making soap or breakfast foods—or it should be an art” (*On Writing* 103).

The path that Cather followed to becoming a novelist was a relatively common one for writers who wanted to practice and improve their writing and, at the same time, earn a living. This is true during Cather’s lifetime and in later years. Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, and Ernest Hemingway are general examples on a list predominated by male reporters and writers who comprised editorial staffs at mainstream newspapers during these years. There were female journalists in newsrooms during this

period, but the percentage was low. In 1900, the U.S. Census reported that of the 30,098 journalists in the United States, 2,193 were women (“Women Deadlines”). There were other female journalists, including Elizabeth Cochrane (Nellie Bly), Ida Tarbell and others, who wrote nonfiction but did not become novelists. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps wrote novels, and some of her work was published in *McClure’s* magazine. In addition, she wrote and published essays and feminist articles dealing with the economic and emotional plight of women and their roles in traditional marriages. More than two decades after Cather’s departure from the field, Meridel Le Sueur’s style of reportage journalism was developed by the Left in the 1930s. This type of “three-dimensional reporting” was intended to make readers see and feel the event. Many of Le Sueur’s pieces were called both reportage and fiction because they contained elements of each (Le Sueur 10). Much of Le Sueur’s journalistic writing was undertaken to effect societal change, a topic which will be addressed along with the concepts of muckraking, advocacy and public service journalism in Chapter 3. In contrast, Cather viewed her journalism as an economic and professional means to live independently and establish herself as a writer with the goal of one day being able to support herself through the creation of her literary “art.” Many literary journalists and novelists in the latter part of the twentieth century followed the same career course as Cather. Journalism and feature writing, writes Thomas Wolfe in *The New Journalism*, was “the motel you checked into on the way to becoming a novelist” (5).

Cather’s biographers and critics generally view her journalistic writing in much the same manner and also, in a chronological sense, as a stepping stone to her literary

works. While Cather's journalistic writing has been collected and researched, most studies of her work concentrate on her short stories and novels. The research that addresses Cather's journalism and early writing generally views it in a contributory sense or as an origin for her later writing. In the preface to *The Kingdom of Art*, Bernice Slote writes that while working on another project and reading 1895-1896 issues of the *Nebraska State Journal*, she discovered the unexpected—Cather's weekly column on the arts. Additional research led to the discovery of more articles, but because Cather chose to focus on her later work and was reluctant to speak about routine publications and separated her two careers, the articles remained a part of newspaper archives until Slote discovered them and recognized their significance. Slote writes:

As she saw it, one's several careers could be separated and only the chosen be remembered; yet in the work she did first—especially the journalistic writing of 1893-1896—are important elements that redefine her total achievement. In the perspective of history, the world-renowned novelist that Willa Cather became must be joined with the young Nebraska newspaperwoman. (*Kingdom of Art* 3)

In the Editor's Preface to *The World and the Parish* (1970), William M. Curtin writes that he has included more than half of the 520 works listed in his bibliography to bring together a representative selection of Cather's articles and reviews dating from her first decade as a professional journalist and author. He lists three main objectives for his selection and organization process:

(1) to enable the reader to trace Willa Cather's development as a writer; (2) to group the material so that the reader interested in a particular subject—the theatre, or music, or literature, for example—can readily locate pertinent selections; and (3) to provide a context sufficient to relate these pieces to Willa Cather's life and to the times, and to suggest some of their connections with the body of her work. (xix)

Curtin's collection of Cather's early writing avoids a theoretical approach, but provides an invaluable research tool in the form of a catalog of dated and sourced articles and reviews, which otherwise are accessible in the original publications. *The World and the Parish* includes articles or excerpts of articles preceded by biographical notes supplied by Curtin.

A similar attempt to catalog Cather's journalistic work has been undertaken by the *Willa Cather Archive*, a product of a partnership among the Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Center for Digital Research in the Humanities, University of Nebraska Press, and the Cather Project at the University of Nebraska. The archives was initiated in 1997 to create an accessible Web site for the study of Cather's life and writings. One of its endeavors, the Cather Journalism Project, is an effort to edit the complete journalistic writings of Cather and to offer an electronic version of the original published texts at the site.

Slote's and Curtin's collections of Cather's early writing and journalism hint at the process through which one becomes a novelist. Biographers include Cather's journalism as a step along a chronological path from Red Cloud to Lincoln and the

University of Nebraska and on to Pittsburgh and New York, with journalistic stints at the university *Hesperian*, *Lincoln Courier*, *Nebraska State Journal*, *Home Monthly*, *Pittsburgh Daily Leader*, *McClure's* and other newspapers and magazines along the way. Woodress marks the turning point in Cather's career as November 4, 1911, when she sent off the manuscript for *Alexander's Bridge* to the publisher, but he writes that she did not end her relationship with *McClure's* until the middle of 1913. She wrote four articles that year. "A fifth article on drama, not written until 1914, ended her assignments for the magazine, and the for the rest of her life she wrote principally novels and occasionally short stories" (146-47). Sharon O'Brien cites the conflicts between Cather's commitments to journalism and fiction writing. "Cather's creative energies were sapped by newspaper and magazine work, and her letters to friends frequently mention feelings of exhaustion and depression. After a day at the office she was often too drained to work on her own writing" (227). O'Brien adds that commercial constraints, particularly at the *Home Monthly*, also took their toll on the author because she was forced to "conform to the mechanical requirements of popular fiction. . . . Producing 'pure and clean' entertainment for the publisher and promoting wholesome domestic advice for the reader, Cather was implicated in the distortion of writing for commercial and ideological ends that she herself criticized in her college journalism" (228).

These assertions by critics, biographers, and Cather herself are valid, but there are indications that the author's professional journalistic writing intersects and becomes intertwined with her fiction. While other critics have studied her journalistic writing, most have treated it in a biographical sense as part of Cather's development as a novelist.

Her journalistic technique, however, is more intricately interwoven in her fiction, as she experiments with integrating selected elements of the two genres in her work. Despite the constraints of commercialism and formulae in the journalistic world, Cather selectively borrowed elements from the literary sphere and incorporated them into her columns and articles, making her a “poet reporter” of sorts. In turn, she appropriated tools from the journalistic sphere and used them to build the framework for her literary writing. The journalistic writing served as more than a training ground and precursor to Cather’s literary writing, and the boundary between the two genres in her writing is flexible rather than rigid. The overall body of Cather’s writing between the two genres exhibits an overlap, a blurring of fact and fiction and a merging of journalistic and literary components. This flexibility between the two genres contributes to difficulties in categorizing her novels and, in a larger, multidisciplinary sense, difficulties in categorizing and defining writing that combines elements of journalistic and literary style and meshes fact with fiction.

In approaching Cather’s writing from the vantage point of literary journalism, the linkage between the two genres can be seen, and it is evident that a cohesiveness rather than a disunity exists between the two. This becomes apparent in examining the dual nature of literary journalism and the technique of combining elements of factual reportage with fictional style. The first part of this study addresses the importance of immersion, or real-life experience in Cather’s writing. It asserts that the author’s experience in Nebraska gave her an edge over other writers during the early twentieth century and that her immersion in journalism enabled her to hone skills of observation and description.

The second part shows how Cather applied the journalistic formula of the “5 W’s and the H” (who, what, when, where, why, and how) to create the skeletal framework for her fictional characters and narratives. The third part of this study addresses the public service aspect of advocacy journalism, which is not evident in Cather’s journalistic writing, but which emerges as a type of literary ideology in her fiction on subjects such as the exploitation of immigrants, class issues, anti-materialism and capitalism, and feminism. The fourth section of the study argues that Cather’s famous essay or model for writing fiction, “The Novel Demeublé” is her resolution to the conflict between her journalistic writing and fiction. In it, she defines the two genres, set boundaries, and then proceeds to selectively cross those borders, select elements from each, take them to a vacant landscape, unfurnished room, or uninhabited environment to create her own climate or artistic vision.

Previous criticism of Cather has shown little awareness of the integration of journalistic principles and literary style in her experimental techniques with both reportage and fiction. Criticism generally focuses on Cather as a novelist, and studies that include her early writing and journalism tend to treat it as biographical material and address it as a developmental stage of a writer. More significant is Cather’s acknowledgment of the interplay between the two genres and the resulting interaction and response between reader and writer or audience and artist/creator.

A vast number of studies have been done on Cather and her novels; many researchers and critics have chosen to examine the more fully developed writing of a mature author. Part of the reason for this is that Cather was reluctant to speak about her

early work, and even in later years rarely consented to publicly discuss her writing. In *The Kingdom of Art*, Slote notes: “It is ironical that the novelist who in later years made conspicuous efforts to discourage all inquiry into her apprentice work should leave behind one of the most complete and personal records of a writer’s desires, delights, and agonies we have in modern literature” (5). The “subtle, meticulous craftsmanship,” which Slote (4) identifies in Cather’s novels, her artistic sense of using layers, landscapes and symbols, and her ability to tap the memory sets of her readers open Cather’s fiction to a wide range of studies and theoretical views, which will only be noted and will not be enumerated here.

Biographers include Cather’s journalism when presenting chronological recounts of her life. Early biographer E. K. Brown, who died in 1951 just before finishing the authorized biography, which was completed by Leon Edel in 1953, was working on the book toward the end of Cather’s life. Restrictions on the use of letters and insufficient material, coupled with the incapacity for a complete retrospective, produced a favorable and official portrait of the author. Brown did have access to Edith Lewis’s memoir *Willa Cather Living*, written by the author’s friend and companion of forty years, but did not have the benefit of *The World of Willa Cather*, written by Mildred R. Bennett, a former school teacher in Nebraska who offers a wealth of information about Red Cloud, Cather’s early life and family. He also did not have access to Elizabeth Sergeant’s *Willa Cather: A Memoir*, an account by one of Cather’s writer friends that provides information about the author’s personal and professional life from 1910 through the 1920s. Woodress had

access to Slote's and Curtin's research and collections of the author's early writing and also to Cather letters housed in institutional collections. He says:

Although Willa Cather was obsessed with the desire for privacy and destroyed all of her letters she could, most of the friends who survived her seem to have saved her letters. Her will stipulates that none of her correspondence ever be published, but most of the three dozen libraries that own her letters make them available to scholars and critics, who are free to assimilate the information they contain or to paraphrase their contents. (xi)

Cather's letters offer her biographers various insights into both professional and personal subjects. To friends and editors, she defines and questions theories and views on writing, art, culture and society; to others, she reports on her life, travel, observations, and to a limited degree, her relationships with people. In the introduction to *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice*, Sharon O'Brien writes that Cather's letters to Louise Pound while both were at college convinced her that Cather was lesbian: "This important correspondence persuaded me that 'lesbian' did indeed capture Cather's self-definition and that my biography should consider the impact on the creative process of her need both to conceal and reveal her experience of desire" (6). O'Brien also writes of the difficulty of reconstructing Cather's relationship with Isabelle McClung Hambourg because letters between the two were destroyed when Jan Hambourg returned them following his wife's death. Although Woodress refers to Isabelle McClung as "the one

great romance of her [Cather's] life" and records a family battle at the McClung household prior to Cather's taking up residence there in 1901 (86), he avoids any fully developed theory of lesbianism in his biography. In *Willa Cather: A Life Saved Up*, British biographer Hermione Lee depicts Cather as a writer whose life and professional work were marked by conflict and suppressed desires. Her analysis renders Cather as an author with a great interest in the craft of writing but one with split identities and sexual conflict. Cather's struggles also come to the fore in *Willa Cather: The Writer and Her World*, by Janis Stout, who places the author as a modernist experiencing conflicts between home and travel, intellect and emotion, practicality and romanticism and gender.

Early critics, such as Louis Auchincloss (*Pioneers and Caretakers: A Study of Nine American Women Novelists*, 1965) and Josephine Lurie Jessup (*The Faith of Our Feminists: A Study in the Novels of Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow, Willa Cather*, 1965) either ignore or gloss over her journalistic background and approach her literary writing through New Critical methods of close reading and textual evidence. Auchincloss's comment that Cather wrote "shapeless novels, little decorated stories" (115), illustrates the theoretical inability of New Criticism to detect and critique the nuance, subtlety, and blank spaces in her writing. Later critics have had greater success using other critical literary theories or combinations of theories to examine Cather's writing. O'Brien offers a psychoanalytical/feminist perspective of Cather as a lesbian writer whose relationship with her mother prompted a conflict between the feminine domestic sphere and the masculine public sphere. In *The Voyage Perilous: Willa Cather's Romanticism*, Susan J.

Rosowski links the author with a late eighteenth-century historical literary movement that reacted against the scientific world and materialism. Using feminism and gender studies for her approach in “Willa Cather’s Subverted Endings and Gendered Time,” Rosowski asserts that the author’s series of endings identify men with progress and linear time and women with mythic continuities. In *Willa Cather’s Imagination*, David Stouck examines the broad scope of Cather’s writing and finds that her stories and novels are not limited to the confines of prairies, pioneer life and *My Ántonia*. His study asserts that her imaginative and fictive abilities had greater range and depth and extended beyond Midwest borders. He is correct, and this study shows the major role Cather’s apprenticeship in journalism played in this expanded scope by providing her with a vast range of experiences that she could adapt and apply to literary writing.

Other writers have chosen to use an ecological approach to examine the borders and landscapes in Cather’s writing, and an entire volume of *Cather Studies*, titled “Willa Cather’s Ecological Imagination” was dedicated to this concept, edited by Rosowski and published by the University of Nebraska Press in 2003. In the introduction, Rosowski explains that ecocriticism, following in the wake of gender, class and race studies, serves to reintroduce Cather as an author identified with the places that shaped her. In “Willa Cather: The Plow and the Pen,” Joseph W. Meeker writes that the prairie ecosystem, with its seasonal changes, plays the role of a character in Cather’s novels, interacting with the human characters and influencing their lives in powerful and subtle ways. Stout, in “The Observant Eye, the Art of Illustration and Willa Cather’s *My Ántonia*,” hones in on

Cather's specific, isolated details; the close focus of her vision, her tendency to isolate objects or presences and place them against a blankness to give them additional clarity. These ecocritical studies examine realism and nature in relationship to Cather's writing, but they narrowly address it in artistic and literary terms. The studies fail to consider the connection between the factual real-world quality of journalism and Cather's literary writing.

Cather Studies, published every three years from 1990 through 2006 and including a 2007 volume, represent the range of recent scholarly work on the author. The first three volumes, published in 1990, 1993, and 1996, are not thematically organized and include various studies. For example, Rosowski writes about "Willa Cather's Subverted Endings and Gendered Time," and David Stouck researches "Willa Cather and the Russians" in volume 1. Both studies present supportive evidence that Cather's literary writing incorporates journalistic technique. Rosowski's essay illustrates similarities in Cather's ending for her fiction and typical structures in journalistic style, and Stouck's study provides a supportive base for Cather's theory on art and design for unfurnished novel. Merrill Maguire Skaggs provides information on historical sources, which supports Cather's reporter-like insistence on factualness, in "Cather's Use of Parkman's Histories in *Shadows on the Rock*" in volume 2. Volume 4 focuses on "Willa Cather's Canadian and Old World Connections." An article in this volume, "Willa Cather: Reading the Writer through Biographies and Memoirs" by Helen M. Buss, supports the continued use of biographical material in determining the functions and

discourses of literary texts and proposes that future investigations of Cather view her as a family person. Environmental themes in Cather's writing are featured in volume 5; and volumes 6 and 7 are respectively titled "History Memory and War" and "Willa Cather as Cultural Icon."

This recent scholarship provides new insight to Cather's work, primarily her fiction, and it can be used in conjunction with older studies to examine the relationship of her journalism to her literary writing. Just as Bennett limited her biographical sketch of Cather to her family and Red Cloud, co-authors Kathleen D. Byrne and Richard C. Snyder focus on Cather's life, work, and associations in Pittsburgh. Their book, *Chrysalis: Willa Cather in Pittsburgh, 1896-1906*, was published by the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania in 1980 and includes biographical information, both personal and professional, on the ten years Cather spent in Pittsburgh. In the introduction, Jeanne A. Shaffer writes that the book provides a Pittsburgh portrait of Cather along with the author's portrait of the city (xiii). The book is rife with anecdotes about Cather, gleaned, interestingly enough, through letters Byrne received after an article was published in the *Pittsburgh Press* requesting that anyone who had known Cather while she was in Pittsburgh contact Byrnes. "Pittsburgh and its people became part of Willa Cather's emotions, intellect, and psychology. Never again was she to live with such intellectual and emotional freedom as she had in Pittsburgh," write Byrne and Snyder (95).

Cather's professional life as a newspaper reporter in Pittsburgh, as well as her journalism career in Nebraska and New York, have been researched primarily as biographical precursors to her literary career. Critics tend to view her writing during this period as developmental, but it proved to be integral to her later writing. As previously noted, Slote discovered archives of articles and recognized their significance in Cather's progress as a writer and the connection between the newspaperwoman and the novelist, and Curtin expanded upon the collection, organizing and cataloging early writings for the purpose of tracing Cather's progression as a writer, providing insight into her life and times, and grouping her material by subject. The Cather Journalism Project, under the auspices of the Willa Cather Archives, is developing an electronic archive of the original texts. These efforts concentrate primarily on the collection and publication of the articles with accompanying biographical, historical, and explanatory notes.

Other researchers and critics have addressed Cather's journalism using various theoretical methods. *In Different Dispatches: Journalism in American Modernist Prose*, David T. Humphries examines how popular and influential writers of the interwar period, including Cather, engage journalism in literary texts that address mass culture as well as cultural discourse. He considers the way in which these writers "coupled art and journalism as a means of negotiating the expectations of their critical readers and the demands of a popular audience" and asserts that they "call upon journalism's often implicit but always-powerful appeal to a common ground as a means of interrogating questions of community and addressing pressing social concerns" (5). He writes that

Cather draws on her own work as a columnist and editor and her later experience promoting her fiction to consider the role of the artist in shaping culture (5). Humphries identifies Cather as a “narrator-reporter” seeking to shape and transform a broad public audience. In this assertion, Humphries misidentifies both Cather’s purpose and audience for her literary writing. Cather was more of an ideologue than a muckraker; her purpose was to create something lasting in the form of art. Rather than in the strict journalistic sense of muckraking, she was not writing for immediate societal change or transformation, and she was not writing for a mass audience; she had a particular readership in mind: “Fine quality is a distinct disadvantage in articles made for great numbers of people who do not want quality, but quantity, who do not want a thing that ‘wears,’ but who want change, –a succession of new things that are quickly threadbare and can be lightly thrown away” (*On Writing* 36).

In *Willa Cather’s Modernism: A Study of Style and Technique*, Jo Ann Middleton doesn’t label Cather a modernist; instead, she notes affinities with modernism in the author’s work, particularly minimalism in the form of “selectivity and precision of diction (usually derived from Flaubert’s *le mot juste*)” (10). Cather’s experimental techniques are examined along with what the critic calls “Cather’s own particular form of minimalism, the *Démeublé* style” (21). For this study, Middleton borrows a scientific term, “vacuole,” and uses it to explain the means in which Cather manipulates readers through gaps or absences:

The vacuole's usefulness arises from its scientific doubleness—it appears empty but is not actually empty (though not full): as “empty” it allows a larger structure than might be expected, and as “not-empty” it performs such functions as storage and digestion, which is suggestive for the apparent absences in Cather's work that are nevertheless full of meaning. (11)

Middleton writes that Cather's use of these vacuoles is tied to her theory of reader response, one which has its roots in the Jamesian-Flaubertian concept of authorial intent coupled with the receptivity of the “fine” reader,¹ rather than the mass audience suggested by Humphries. While Middleton doesn't specifically refer to Cather's journalism in the study, one chapter of the book is dedicated to Cather's “Fusion of Craftsmanship and Vision.” The craftsmanship, or technical side, of Cather's creative writing involved defining limits and the economical use of words, components found in the basics of journalistic writing. Middleton notes that Cather's literary writing might be compared to her “more perceptive newspaper criticism,” but adds that none of the articles could “cross the line between the two kinds of writing” (34). However, this study argues that what Middleton perceives as a fusion of craftsmanship and vision is actually a fusion of journalistic and literary styles known as literary journalism and that the boundary between the two kinds of writing is less distinct than she asserts.

In Cather's professional life, the boundary between her journalistic and literary careers is more easily marked. Woodress and O'Brien set Cather's departure from and

last articles for *McClure's* magazine (1913-1914) as a turning point from a magazine editor to novelist. In his article “‘It’s Through Myself That I Knew and Felt Her’: S. S. McClure’s Autobiography and the Development of Willa Cather’s Autobiographical Realism,” Robert Thacker writes that the McClure autobiography, ghostwritten by Cather, signals a change in her writing and that the method used to write the book, an interviewing process that consisted of listening to McClure’s words and then composing them, served as a template for *Jim Burden*. While Thacker identifies a crossover point between genres, it also is evidence of a merger of factual journalistic reportage and narrative style. Rather than use the historical, chronological style typical of non-fiction, Cather uses a storytelling, narrative style to record the publisher’s life. In turn, she transposed the interview technique to let *Jim Burden* record the story of *Antonia’s* life.

In *Modern Women, Modern Work*, Francesca Sawaya uses a historicist/feminist methodology to define women’s struggles between the domestic and professional spheres and to identify discourses that enabled women to enjoy mobility between the two. Sawaya writes that Cather’s attempts to erase her early life records and writing in order to avoid sex and gender politics of the 1920s leave critics “with a biography, in which she seems to emerge directly from her childhood, an indigenous American genius” (80). In a chapter about Cather and fellow journalist *Ida Tarbell*, Sawaya focuses on the two women’s professional journalism, their concept of objectivity, and their engagement with consumer capitalism. She posits that their own self-interest in earning a living as professional journalists compromises their critiques of capitalism and that their adherence

to objectivity appeals to a “normative white masculinity” and results in them being read as a “lady journalist and a queer lady novelist.” She writes: “Against the subjective self-interest of capitalism they pose their professionalism, but paradoxically such professionalism depends on their personal integrity, on delineating their individual and subjective refusal to be bought. By the logic of their own analysis of the personal as self-interested, they thereby compromise and invalidate their own critiques. . . . Tarbell and Cather suggest how professionalism for women could as much reinforce the status quo as undermine it” (107). Sawaya incorrectly assumes that female reporters moving within in public spheres dominated by men and capitalistic interests was a process of assimilation rather than integration. Tarbell’s and Cather’s professional efforts impacted the male-dominated profession of journalism and the medium itself.

Forced binaries and slim evidence of the contradictory dynamic that journalistic objectivity directs readers to seek subjectivity and the personal in the author’s life also make Sawaya’s argument less than convincing. In her journalistic writing, Cather employed objectivity in a professional sense, adhering to a code of ethics that requires unbiased reportage of facts in articles designed to inform and educate readers. She abandons this objectivity in her fiction, replacing it with subjective ideologies and perspectives.

Catherine M. Downs also addresses the author’s early, lesser-known writing in *Becoming Modern: Willa Cather’s Journalism*, and argues that Cather’s early fiction was influenced by the muckraking culture in which she worked as a journalist. Downs defines

muckraking as a blend of sentimentalism and realism, when the term properly refers to a style of early twentieth-century investigative journalism used by reporters who were willing to dig into “society’s muck” to uncover a story (Campbell 601). Downs associates Cather with the investigative style through her affiliation with *McClure’s*, a magazine that specialized in articles on corporate, political, governmental, and institutional corruption, and other societal concerns, such as labor issues and lynching. While Cather was an editor at the magazine, she did not engage in this type of writing and, in fact, she expressed her disillusionment with some of the writers who embraced it:

When I first lived in New York and was working the editorial staff of a magazine, I became disillusioned about social workers and reformers. . . . The man who wants to get reforms put through does his investigating in a very different spirit, and the man who has a true vocation for imaginative writing doesn’t have to go hunting among the ash cans on Sullivan Street for his material. (*On Writing* 24)

Downs also associates muckraking with “yellow journalism,” a newspaper style that peaked in the 1890s when competing newspapers vying for circulation and readership published high-interest, sensational crime news and serious reports that exposed corruption in business and government (Campbell 607). The critic equates sensationalism with sentimentalism in Cather’s fiction, but the equation fails because the values and definitions differ.

Taking another approach toward journalists and novelists, Nicole Parisier examines theater and journalism in the writing of Theodore Dreiser, Edith Wharton and Cather in her dissertation “Novel Work.” Parisier focuses on *The Song of the Lark*, and while she does not go as far as O’Brien and others to label this material autobiographical, she argues that Cather imagined Thea Kronborg’s operatic career in terms shaped by the author’s experiences as a journalist (8). Parisier draws a parallel between Cather’s theater reviews and criticism and Thea’s quest to become an opera star: “In addition to creating a story of female artistic success, *The Song of the Lark* incorporates an idea connecting the art world and the journalism Cather first wrote about it: that the practice of criticism is necessary to the work of art” (115). Parisier’s comment further reinforces a correlation between Cather’s journalism and fiction.

Cather and other female writers followed a professional path from journalism to fiction. Jean Marie Lutes, herself a former journalist, takes a serious look at the role of newspaperwomen in *Front Page Girls: Women Journalists in American Culture and Fiction*. In analyzing women’s reportage, fictional portrayals of female journalists, and the literary careers of women reporters-turned-novelists, Lutes asserts that newspaperwomen “forged a vibrant tradition of sensation journalism that reverberated from grubby city newsrooms to exclusive literary circles” (5-6). She uses two forms of scholarship for her discourse on newswomen’s cultural impact: first, that literary critics have argued the importance of journalism to emerging forms of literary fiction and second, that journalism historians have recovered writings of early women reporters

whose work has been neglected (8). In the final chapter of the book, Lutes examines the work of Cather and two other writers who began their work as reporters, Edna Ferber and Djuna Barnes. The portion of this chapter dedicated to Cather, subtitled “Banishing the Reporter: Willa Cather,” details the author’s distinction between her journalism and literary writing and her obscuring of her reportorial beginnings and early writing. It concludes that Cather viewed her journalism as an impediment: “Journalism, especially as practiced by women reporters, was worse than irrelevant to her writing. It was painfully threatening, a force that could wear away the vibrant possibilities of artistic expression” (145). Cather, no doubt, felt the toll journalistic writing took on her time and recognized this as a deterrent to her literary writing; however, her adherence to journalistic principles and techniques throughout her literary career, indicated that she perceived it to be theoretically and stylistically relevant in her later writing.

In accord with other critics who compare journalistic and literary writing, Richard Keeble writes that the genres are too often seen as two separate spheres (one “low,” and the other “high”) and that the fact that journalism has provided writers with an income has reinforced its position as a sub-literary genre. His collection of essays, *In The Journalistic Imagination: Literary Journalists from Defoe to Capote and Carter*, shows how the two spheres “constantly overlap” (2). In an essay included in the collection, “A Work and a Purpose: Willa Cather’s Journalism,” Charlotte Beyer writes that Cather’s journalism could not be considered yellow journalism in that it was not sensational, and

she notes that it was not aimed at reform. She writes, “In some ways the strategies Cather used mirrored those of ‘literary journalism’” (78).

This study takes Beyer’s observation further by examining Cather’s journalism and fiction through the theoretical lens of American literary journalism, a body of writing that combines the information-gathering methods of journalistic reportage with the narrative techniques of realistic fiction. This distinct form emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century more than a decade after Cather’s death, with writers such as Norman Mailer, Gay Talese, Tom Wolfe, Truman Capote, Joan Didion, and Tracy Kidder experimenting with combinations of journalistic technique and narrative. The largely unrecognized prose tradition in America is evident in earlier writing by Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Upton Sinclair, and others. Willa Cather, whose novels are often viewed as impressionistic and romantic, is seldom listed among these writers, but she flexibly and capably uses components of narrative writing in her journalism and elements of reportage in her fiction.

Cather’s journalism and literary writing are perceived, by herself and most scholars, as two distinct genres, one formulaic and one artistic. In approaching Cather’s writing through the theoretical lens of literary journalism, this study explores Cather’s appropriation of elements or forms specific to the genres to create accurate journalistic articles designed for daily consumption by the mass public and imaginative literary works written for a niche audience that the author considered her true readers. To accomplish this, Cather’s writings are identified as early forms of literary journalism practiced by

later writers, such as Mailer, Wolfe, and others, who recognized writing that combined facts with fictive devices and realized its potential to elevate or energize journalistic writing. Examples from Cather's journalism and fiction are used to examine her selection and use of facts, historical and literary sources, composite characters, observation and description, advocacy and ideology and to support the concept that Cather's selection, layering, and blurring of factual journalism into fictional literary writing is evidence that the space between the two genres is fluid and flexible rather than rigid. Additionally, this evidence supports the case that Cather applied the methods and characteristics of literary journalism decades before the term was recognized. Some critics recognize Cather as a modernist, and examining her writing from the stance of literary journalism sheds new light on her work and the experimental forms she used in her novels.

In order to provide a cohesive framework for this study, the nature and scope of Cather's journalistic writing must be described, and definitions must be provided for the jargon and terminology peculiar to journalism, literary journalism, and creative non-fiction. To do this and to approach Cather's work from an angle of literary nonfiction, a number of secondary sources will be employed, including Edwin Ford's *The Art and Craft of the Literary Journalist* (1937); Tom Wolfe's *The New Journalism* (1973); Nicolaus Mills's *The New Journalism: A Historical Anthology* (1974); Mas'ud Zavarzadeh's *The Mythopoeic Reality: The Postwar American Nonfiction Novel* (1976); John Hollowell's *Fact and Fiction: The New Journalism and the Nonfiction Novel*

(1977); Shelley Fisher Fishkin's *From Fact to Fiction: Journalism and Imaginative Writing in America* (1985); Barbara Lounsberry's *The Art of Fact: Contemporary Artists of Nonfiction* (1990); Norman Sims's *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century* (1990); Thomas Bernard Connery's *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre* (1992); Lee Gutkind's *Creative Nonfiction: How to Live It and Write It* (1996); John C. Harsock's *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of Modern Literary Form* (2000); Norman Mailer's *Spooky Art: Thoughts on Writing* (2003); and others.

An attempt at bridging the binary of fiction and non-fiction is "Creative Nonfiction," a term coined by Lee Gutkind to define a genre that includes three subgenres—essays, memoirs, and literary journalism. Literary journalism couples the fact-gathering reportage methods of journalists with the storytelling, narrative style of literary writing. In defining this subgenre, Gutkind writes of the "5 R's," which include real-life (immersion), research, reflection, reading, and 'riting. Similar qualities or components of literary journalism are listed by other critics. Lounsberry cites immersion, scenes, dialogue, "exhaustive" research, and fine writing as components of literary journalism, emphasizing that the most critical of these elements is fine writing (xiii-xv). Wolfe, who uses the term "New Journalism" for literary journalism, cites four devices found in this style of writing: scene-by-scene construction rather than chronological or historical narrative; a full record of dialogue that establishes character; third-person point of view that permits readers inside the character's mind; and a record of everyday gestures,

manners, habits, customs, styles of furniture and clothing symbolic of status of life (31). Some critics, in attempting to define the subgenre of literary nonfiction, provide examples of writing that illustrate it. Hollowell uses articles and stories by the new journalists of the 1960s and 1970s, such as Mailer, Wolfe, Hunter S. Thompson, and Joan Didion. In the introduction of her book, Fishkin names Cather, Stephen Crane, Eudora Welty, Jack London and others among the poets, dramatists, and novelists whose careers began in journalism, but she focuses specifically on earlier examples in writing by Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Theodore Dreiser, Ernest Hemingway, and John Dos Passos.

Critics define the same concept using many different terms. Stephen Minot labels literary non-fiction as the “fourth genre,” listing the other three as poetry, fiction, and drama. After completing *In Cold Blood*, Truman Capote announced he had created a new genre and ambiguously called it the “nonfiction novel.” Ford referred to it as the “Twilight Zone” between actual reportage and literary fiction, with the reportage being ephemeral and the fiction more permanent. Zavarzadeh uses the term “Mythopoeic Reality” to describe a form of writing that resulted in the interim between the Industrial Age and the Information Age, when text became less linear and more nonlinear with electronic technology, the Internet, and hypertext. He cites the difficulty of taxonomy with the subgenre and asserts that the binary and bipolar aspect of fact and fiction contributes to the various categories and labels (51).

The chasm between fact and fiction contributes to the difficulty of defining and classifying literary journalism. Generally speaking, journalistic writing or reportage

involves the publication of factual information to a defined audience, whether mass or niche. The factual information is presented in the newswriting formula or skeletal framework of the 5 W's and the H. In the basic structure, the information is arranged in what is called the "inverted pyramid," a form originating during the days of the telegraph, when words and space were limited and every word counted. In this structure, the most important of the 5 W's and the H are written in descending order of importance, with the most important information first and the least important last. This form enabled readers quick access to important information, and it also enabled editors to easily cut and edit for space. The technique has been adapted as a predominant form for media home pages on the internet, where summary blurbs direct readers to complete versions of stories or articles. In contrast, the structure of narrative style is more of an upright pyramid with a beginning and middle that lead to a conclusion. Point of view is also a distinction between journalistic and literary writing. While some forms of journalistic writing, for example "soft news" such as features and columns, may include a point of view or authorial, first-person presentation, "hard news" is to be fact-based and unbiased. These articles are written in third person, with no opinion, few adjectives, and little description in an effort to present a fair and unbiased report to readers. While news writing formats have varied somewhat through the years and have been interpreted and adapted by different publications and media, the basic style for fact-based reportage and its role in democracy of providing facts to the public is an enduring ideal of journalistic writing.

Literary writing or fiction, on the other hand, is assumed to be “made up,” created or imagined rather than real. It may be based on facts or include facts, and it may be realistic, but it is not designed to be perceived by the reader as factual. It may be meant, designed, or created to represent a world, universal concept, or real life or to reinforce an ideology, but it is fiction and based on the imagination and creativity of the author rather than a real-life event. The dilemma here, and one that extends to literary journalism, is the combination of factual and fictional elements in writing. Zavarzadeh writes:

The information revolution also expands the range of the probable to the extent that it blurs the boundaries of fact and fiction with the ultimate effect, as far as the conventional novel is concerned, being that the contemporary reader feels uneasy entering the world of the totalizing novel rooted in the dualistic epistemology of the actual and the imaginal. (7).

Cather, who preceded the information revolution, wrote in the time frame that spanned the agrarian and industrial eras, but her methodology is prescient in that she experimented with this dualistic epistemology of fact and fiction. Zavarzadeh writes that facts are often included by fiction writers as either figurational or elemental components of their texts. Figurational facts, such as Hemingway’s appropriation of real people for his cast in *The Sun Also Rises*, the landscape, and historical period, contribute to his overall effort. In contrast, Theodore Dreiser used elemental facts, or actual court transcripts, to write *An American Tragedy* (60). Cather uses both figurational and elemental facts in her fiction;

she appropriates real people for her characters, and she includes elemental facts from letters and historical sources to give her literary writing what Henry James calls “an air of reality” (35).

Perceived as polar opposites, fact and fiction are judged by different criteria. The expectation of readers plays a part in this. Fishkin writes that from the mid-nineteenth century on journalists and imaginative writers were held to different standards and subject to different expectations on the part of readers: “The journalist’s facts must be verifiable; the artist’s truths must cohere into an aesthetically satisfying whole” (207). This becomes a problem in any analysis of literary journalism: what are the standards for judging it? In strict terms and by definitions provided by critics, literary journalism is a subgenre of creative non-fiction, and therefore is factual rather than fictional. However, the subgenre incorporates a storytelling or narrative style associated with fiction. Literary journalism can include a structure that builds a story line to a conclusion, the use of scenes, extensive dialogue, description, and a style that permits limited access of the writer’s perspective or an authorial voice. While literary journalism attempts to remain factual and unbiased, it is assumed that the event or information in the article is based on observations by the writer. In most respects, Cather’s journalistic writing conforms to this strict definition of literary journalism; her short stories and novels do not. In her fiction, however, Cather experiments with combining elements of journalistic writing with narrative style, and she uses her background and professional experience as a newspaperwoman and magazine editor to aid in the selection process for her literary work.

In addition to different standards for judging fact and fiction, there is also a distinction in “shelf life” between journalistic and literary writing. Journalistic writing, in its nature of being written in concert with events or cultural happenings, has a short, limited life that coincides with the day’s newspaper or a weekly or monthly magazine report. Television and the internet have shortened this life span even more with Web sites and continual updates. Conversely, literary writing, with its universal themes and aesthetic unity, has the potential for enduring value and a type of immortality as part of the literary canon. The basic structural format for journalism leaves little room for creativity and imagination. Journalists are encouraged to be creative but within a prescribed form and space. Literary writers can choose to enclose their writing in conventional forms or structures or to combine structure or even create new structures for their writing. A selection process ensues in which the writer must choose material to be included and excluded. In addition, journalists are often writing on assignment; they are not necessarily writing articles about topics that interest them or even those with which they agree or naturally believe. Novelists such as Cather have the freedom to invoke their own ideology in their writing.

As assistant telegraph editor for the *Pittsburgh Leader*, Cather was familiar with the inverted pyramid format and the 5 W’s and the H of news stories and, as an editor at *McClure’s*, she rewrote and modified muckraking investigative pieces for publication; however, her own journalistic writing took a different slant. Her newspaper and magazine writing, for the most part, included “soft news” or feature articles on the

theater, music, books, travel, and art, and profiles of the actors, musicians, authors, and artists who inhabited those domains. Both hard and soft news are inherently fact-based and unbiased with the goal of providing information to the public. In an effort to promote public discourse, many newspapers and magazines also publish “op—ed,” or opinion-editorial, pages, analyses, critiques, columns, and reviews. These articles must still adhere to factual standards, but they are not unbiased and are either located in a specific area of the publication or labeled so that readers do not mistake them for news reports. Much of Cather’s journalistic writing, particularly her columns and reviews, falls into this “opinion-critique” category. As a writer of reviews and columns, rather than front-page news, Cather could use her own voice in her writing and was not limited to the degree of objectivity required for hard news. In addition, narrative approaches are often considered acceptable in soft news or features, and Cather was able to polish her descriptive and storytelling skills in this section of the newspaper.

This four-part study examines the interplay between Cather’s journalism and fiction and attempts to connect and reconcile the spectrum that falls between the genres through the retrospective of literary journalism. Chapter 1 addresses “The Powers of Immersion, Observation and Description” using Cather’s newspaper columns and reviews, short stories, and novels as examples to illustrate the role “immersion,” or what some critics label as real-life experience or saturation reporting, plays in both her journalism and fiction. This chapter acknowledges Cather’s distinction between the two forms of writing but asserts that immersion is a common element—a type of press

pass—that granted her participatory roles as an audience member to write newspaper reviews and as a child in Nebraska and professional in Pittsburgh and New York to write short stories and novels. Other components of literary journalism, such as research, reading, fine writing, dialogue, and scene-setting—a technique frequently employed by Cather—are examined in this section to further define the empirical-based form of reportage written in narrative style and its commonalities with Cather’s writing. This chapter disputes Cather’s contention that the powers of observation and description are simply reportorial tools of the trade and labels the author as a “poet reporter” or a “romantic reporter” who reached into the literary realm, drew upon narrative writing, and incorporated it into her newspaper articles and columns. It asserts that evidence of immersion, scene-setting, observation, and description in both Cather’s journalism and fiction points to a convergence between the two rather than a gap, and it labels Cather as one of the early practitioners or pioneers in the field of literary journalism or new journalism.

Building on this premise, chapter 2 proceeds to address factual sources and the framework of the narrative through the use of the “5 W’s and the H” of the basic news story formula. Although Cather strove for a higher goal of creating lasting, literary “art” with her fiction, she employed traditional, factual journalistic reportage methods to form the skeleton for those works and then expanded upon and embellished them to flesh out stories and novels. With the exception of Cather’s earliest writing, much of the “where” comprises geographical places she knew best and the natural and social environments of

her early years and professional life. For the “who” and the “what,” Cather tended to rely on facts as a basis for her fiction, creating composite characters from real-life people and establishing plots and setting scenes based on actual events and historical sources. The “when” in Cather’s journalistic writing was based on actual events, time frames, schedules, and deadlines. Her literary writing was not bound by the same immediacy, deadlines, and timeliness, but she adhered to factual and historical time lines and events, many of them within her life span and the realm of her actual experience, for the “when” in her fiction.

The “why” in Cather’s literary writing is less tangible, as is often the case with journalistic writing when the result is evident at the time of the event, but the reason or cause cannot be explained until after the facts have been gathered, studied, and reviewed. This study asserts that Cather’s technique of simplification in her writing leaves space for readers to distill the “why” and form their own conclusions; however it also offers evidence that core values—faithfulness, honor, loyalty—in Cather’s writing direct readers to answer this interrogative. The sole “H” of the journalistic formula, the “how” of Cather’s literary writing is generally based on Cather’s vision of the elemental principles of life and the strength of the human spirit. How did Alexandra sustain herself as a pioneer in Nebraska? How did Thea Kronborg become a well-known opera star? Strength of the human spirit, bravery, perseverance—these were all traits that Cather admired, and she used them freely to accommodate the “how” in her fiction.

Downs associates Cather's early writing with the muckraking culture in which she worked at *McClure's*, but this study asserts that the author did not use the journalistic "why" as a springboard for social change and addresses this issue in Chapter 3. Although Cather worked approximately six years for *McClure's*, much of this time as an editor, the aspects of reform and public service are absent in both her journalistic and literary writing. Nellie Bly, Ida Tarbell, Jacob Riis, Upton Sinclair and others combined investigative reportage with narrative technique to focus attention on such societal issues as conditions in slums and institutions, labor practices, and government and corporate abuses of power; but Cather did not engage in this form of writing. Rosowski asserts that critics have long considered Cather an apolitical writer who did not write to effect special social changes ("Subverted Endings" 84). Stout writes that Cather was never active in the suffrage movement (30), and Slote notes that she did not aim for morality, propaganda, or reform in her work (50). Cather herself expressed her own disillusionment with social workers and reformers (*On Writing* 25), and she did not write investigative articles or engage in advocacy journalism, a tradition that dates to the early days of the partisan press and features the reporter actively promoting a particular cause or viewpoint (Campbell 594).

Any leanings toward advocacy in Cather's writing are transformed into a type of literary ideology, in which she addresses such issues as the exploitation of immigrant workers, class, anti-materialism, and feminism, not for the purpose of reform but as a way to show a dominant culture's attempts to mold the values of its time and a subordinate

group's strategies to subvert that power and exert its own. While Cather is not prompting direct action or reform in response to a particular social issue, she is, much like literary journalists of the 1960s who covered civil rights issues and anti-war rallies, providing an ideological lens for viewing interrelationships between the dominant culture and subordinate groups.

After establishing the links between Cather's journalism and fiction in Chapters 1 through 3, Chapter 4 addresses the author's essay "The Novel D  meubl  " as a reconciliation between journalism and literature, fact and fiction, reality and romance. In the essay, Cather defines the two genres, sets boundaries, and then proceeds to selectively cross those borders, choose elements from each, take them to a vacant landscape, unfurnished room, or uninhabited environment to create her own climate or artistic vision. In her journalistic writing, she uses a descriptive narrative style to report on factual events, and in her literary writing, she employs a simplification process similar to the one used in journalistic reportage to select the facts and information necessary to tell a story or communicate a message to readers. While Cather insists that the boundaries are distinct between journalism and fiction, she freely crosses them. In the essay, she argues that the novel is over-furnished with lists or catalogs of objects, explanations of mechanical processes, and detailed descriptions of physical sensations. As a good editor, Cather is adamant about weeding out the unnecessary items and simplifying the text so that an overall focus or story emerges and that all the elements included in the text, and those excluded, in the form of "the thing not named," contribute to a wholeness or unity

of the composition. In one sense, Cather's simplification method can be viewed as a form of modernism expressed in minimalism; in another, it can be seen as a journalistic formula of reduction necessary to render a story cogent and to fit it into a designated space. This chapter asserts that Cather's novel *Démeublé* is a compromise between the two genres, one which enabled her to merge the narrative skills of fiction into her journalistic writing and to carry a reportage tool—the process of selection or simplification—into her fiction writing.

This concept is carried a step further in the conclusion, which identifies Cather as an early practitioner or pioneer of literary journalism. This section examines Cather's writing through the theoretical retrospective of literary journalism, its critics, and writers who recognized writing that combined facts with fictive devices and realized its potential to elevate or energize journalistic writing. Zavarzadeh addresses the current theories of prose narrative and the restrictive taxonomy that positions them in fictional and factual categories, noting that critics generally have squeezed all prose narratives into these categories (51). Cather, too, appears to view her writing as *either* journalistic *or* literary "art." However, at times, it is both. Despite, or perhaps as a result of elaboration, embellishments, inclusions, and exclusions, *My Ántonia* is the story of Bohemian immigrant Ántonia Shimerda, based on Annie Sadilek. Is the story less real because Cather combined memory and imagination to write it, or is it closer to the truth than to fiction because she was immersed in the climate and culture, applied the principles of literary journalism, and drew readers in for a closer view?

Note

1. The Jamesian-Flaubertian concept of authorial intent involves narration, particularly the use of an observing narrator to tell the story. It combines Henry James's imaginative use of point of view through an indirect presentation by a character within the story who serves as observing consciousness and narrator with Gustave Flaubert's concept of objective narrative voice to present psychologically realistic fiction. Flaubert complemented this narrative technique with his use of "le mot juste," the precise word or phrase to describe a circumstance, situation, or sensation.

CHAPTER 1: THE POWERS OF IMMERSION, OBSERVATION, AND DESCRIPTION

Pittsburgh's Carnegie Hall, with its picture gallery, usher's dressing room, and music room, is neatly tucked into the opening pages of "Paul's Case," Willa Cather's best-known short story. So is another Pittsburgh landmark, the Hotel Schenley, opened in 1898 as a center for culture, art, and education. "Over yonder the Schenley, in its vacant stretch, loomed big and square through the fine rain, the windows of its twelve stories glowing like those of a lighted card-board house under a Christmas tree." The Schenley, with its marble, chandeliers and Louis XV architecture, became the place to stay or live in Pittsburgh's Oakland section for the well-to-do. "All the actors and singers of the better class stayed there when they were in the city, and a number of the big manufacturers of the place lived there in the winter," writes Cather, who, it is easy to imagine, may like her protagonist Paul have "hung about the hotel, watching the people go in and out" (*Troll Garden*, 115). Drawing away from the limelight, Cather describes Paul's residence on Cordelia Street as a "highly respectable street, where all the houses were exactly alike, and where business men of moderate means begot and reared large families of children all of whom were as exactly alike as their homes, and of a piece with the monotony in which they lived" (116).

It is difficult to perceive Cather writing this short story, or perhaps more pointedly, the scenes of the Midwest prairie and Nebraska she creates in *Oh Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia*, without having seen, lived in, or experienced the reality of the

geographical location and culture. Sharon O'Brien writes that Cather's move to Nebraska at the age of nine may have been beneficial for the author. Emigration to the frontier area gave her insight and experience to an American story that no other writer had. "Having experienced dislocation, loss, and resettlement herself, Cather could claim this dominant subject in American culture and literature as her own and envision the heroic leader of the pioneer venture as female," writes O'Brien (74). Moving from childhood in Nebraska to professional life as a journalist in Pittsburgh, Cather immersed herself in a different environment, one that serves as part of the scenes and setting for "Paul's Case." Working first as a writer and editor for the *Home Monthly* and a part-time drama critic for the *Pittsburgh Leader* and then later as the telegraph editor for the *Leader*, Cather absorbed the scenes and culture of the city at the turn of the century. Editing telegraph copy was rather dull, but it left her evenings free for the theater and writing drama criticism, for which the newspaper paid her extra. Biographer James Woodress writes that by the time she left the paper in 1900, the theater reviews she had written had lengthened into an informal history of the Pittsburgh stage (84).

Just as Cather's participatory role as an audience member enabled her to write theater criticism, other events in her life—her childhood and schooling in Nebraska and newspaper and magazine work in Pittsburgh and New York—provided her with experiential knowledge and abilities that granted her special access, or a type of press pass, to literary writing. This concept of real-life experience or immersion serves as a link between Cather's journalistic writing and her literary writing, two forms that she

defines as distinct and separate, with her newspaper writing overshadowed by her novels. In the sense that Cather perceived her journalistic writing as “less than” her fiction, it appears ironic that she uses experience and a reporter’s eye to create her works of literary “art”; in another, it seems only natural.

The real-life experience or immersion that serves as a framework for Cather’s writing is a commonality in definitions of literary journalism, a type of writing combining factual reportage techniques with narrative style that was identified and became popular in the 1960s and 1970s, more than a decade after Cather’s death on April 24, 1947. Critics have offered different names and labels for this form of writing: Ronald Weber calls it “literary nonfiction”; Tom Wolfe defines it as “new journalism”; Barbara Lounsberry uses “literary nonfiction” or “artistic nonfiction”; Stephen Minot refers to it as the “fourth genre”; and Truman Capote labeled his work *In Cold Blood* a “nonfiction novel.” These various labels indicate a difficulty in coming up with a name that identifies the genre and support Mas’ud Zavarzadeh’s assertion in *The Mythopoeic Reality* that “the current theories of prose narrative suffer from a restrictive taxonomy which distributes works of narrative into ‘fictional’ and ‘factual’ categories, according to the type of reality they contain” (50).

Regardless of the difficulty in finding a name that accurately defines literary journalism, critics list life experience or “immersion” as a common characteristic or quality of the genre. One of the constitutive features of this discourse is identified by Lounsberry as “documentable subject matter chosen from the real world as opposed to

‘invented’ from the writer’s mind” (xiii). Other features distinguishing literary journalism, writes Lounsberry, are exhaustive research, the scene, and fine writing, or a literary prose style. Lee Gutkind, who coined the term Creative Nonfiction and lists literary journalism as one of its subgenres, includes real life (immersion) as the first of the “5 R’s of Creative Nonfiction.” Following are “reflection, research, reading and ’riting.” As a writing teacher, Gutkind develops assignments that require students to participate or immerse themselves in the environment about which they are writing. In *The New Journalism*, Wolfe writes of the importance of immersion, participation, and what he calls “saturation reporting,” in which the writer’s involvement is evident in the published work. The life experiences of Steinbeck and Faulkner made them “credentialed” writes Wolfe. “You knew you were getting the real goods” (8). While Wolfe fails to list immersion or saturation as a defining quality or technique that underlies “powerful prose” or new journalism, he identifies four specific devices, all of them realistic, used in the genre: scene-by-scene construction, recording the dialogue in full, third person point-of-view, and recording of everyday gestures, habits, furnishings, clothing and other items that are symbolic of status of life (31). Wolfe’s vision of the merger of narrative style with factual reportage renders it capable of “taking journalism and raising it to a higher point—a new kind of novel” (29).

Cather, too, envisioned a higher point, an elevated and esteemed form of writing, but she didn’t see it as emanating from journalism: “If the novel is a form of imaginative art, it cannot be at the same time a vivid and brilliant form of journalism. Out of the

teeming, gleaming stream of the present it must select the eternal material of art.” She goes on to note that some younger writers are “following the development of modern painting” to offer an imaginative view of the material world (*On Writing* 40). Cather’s aim for the creativity and permanence of art is apparent, but there is evidence that she uses journalistic tools, including real-life experience and keen observation, to stabilize the canvas before she reaches for the brushes.

Just as Steinbeck’s and Faulkner’s experiences and upbringing in the environments of California and the South, respectively, provided credibility for their literary writing, Cather, too was credentialed, both by her emigration to the Midwest and first-hand knowledge of prairie and pioneer life, agriculture, railroad towns, and immigrants; and by her professional life in journalism, which afforded her entrance to the worlds of music, theater, and publishing. In her quest to create the “eternal material of art,” Cather relied upon the substantive facts of her own history, her own experience, her own immersion in a world that centered her writing in the Midwest but spanned Mid-Atlantic and Eastern states, Canada and Europe as well. In the notes and chronology for the Library of America collection of the author’s work, Sharon O’Brien records that Cather told a Lincoln, Nebraska, journalist in 1921, “All my stories have been written with the material that was gathered—no, God save us! not gathered but absorbed—before I was fifteen years old” (953). Cather relied on this personal history and experience for the framework of most of her writing.

Cather's literary writings are saturated, to use Wolfe's term, with her experiences, observations and the people she met. There are numerous examples of this, but one that crosses the boundary between Cather's journalistic writing and fiction and appears in both genres is the real-life artist Charles Stanley Reinhart, who becomes the prototype for the sculptor Harvey Merrick in "The Sculptor's Funeral." A precursor to the short story appeared in the *Nebraska Courier* on October 23, 1897 and is reprinted with notes by William M. Curtin in *The World and the Parish* (510-12). Reinhart, who was born in Pittsburgh and apprenticed at railroad and shipping offices there, left to study art in Munich. Curtin writes that Reinhart gained an international reputation as an illustrator for *Harper's Monthly* and then as a painter. His famous large painting, "Washed Ashore," was exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1887 and at the Chicago Columbian Exposition in 1893. Cather writes that she attended Reinhart's funeral and went a year later to a cemetery along the Allegheny River to see the stone erected on his grave:

There were not a hundred people at his funeral. Scarcely anyone here knows that he is dead or that he even lived. Yet he was one man from all those thousands who went out and made a world-wide name, who left great works behind him and a tangible memory in the minds of men. . . . I never knew the emptiness of fame until I went to that great man's funeral. I never knew how entirely one must live and die alone until that day when they brought Stanley Reinhart home. (512)

Reinhart's funeral was in Pittsburgh, a town Cather describes as "red the year around with the light of mighty furnaces, where crude iron is torn from the heart of the earth. . . . A town in which the war for wealth is waged to the uttermost. . . . It passes understanding, almost, that from such a city such a man should come" (Curtin 510-11). Cather changes the setting to a small town in Kansas for "The Sculptor's Funeral" and contrasts the artist's love for beauty with the sordidness of his boyhood. "'That is the true and eternal wonder of it anyway; that it can come even from such a dung heap as this,' the lawyer cried, with a sweeping gesture which seemed to indicate much more than the four walls within which they stood" (*The Troll Garden* 40). As she does in many of her newspaper articles and columns, Cather uses first-person narration in the article about Reinhart published in the *Courier*. For "The Sculptor's Funeral" however, she narrates the short story through the eyes of Steavens, the sculptor's pupil who accompanies the body to the Kansas town.

The conclusion to *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, a novel published in 1940 that draws heavily on Cather's childhood memories and stories of Virginia, also illustrates the impact of real life on Cather's writing and a blurring between the factualness of journalistic writing and the imaginative creativity of fiction. Cather concludes the novel with the escaped slave Nancy's return from Montreal to visit her mother, Till, in Virginia and one of Till's stories about memories of days past. Cather writes "The End" and then, in a form of reportorial attribution, adds a signed note admitting that she has used actual Frederick County, Virginia, surnames for characters. She merges, on a single concluding

page, journalistic technique with literary style. Rosowski writes that this is puzzling “only if we insist on separating fiction from reality, history from imagination” (“Subverted Endings” 86). Cather blurs the edges of both, incorporating her imaginative skills with factual reality and real-life early childhood recollections. In examining Cather’s writing through the discourse of literary journalism and its distinguishing feature of immersion, a cohesive link can be found between the author’s journalistic and literary writing.

Another illustration of the significance of immersion in Cather’s writing is the omission of its presence in her first novel, *Alexander’s Bridge* (1912). Woodress asserts that the story is more Jamesian than Catheresque, set in high society Boston and London with materials garnered during the author’s years at *McClure’s* and through business trips to London for the magazine. A news event, the 1909 collapse of a new bridge under construction across the St. Lawrence River at Quebec, also provided fodder for the novel. Woodress writes that Cather began disparaging the novel “almost as soon as she finished it” (142). In the essay, “My First Novels [*There Were Two*],” Cather calls *Alexander’s Bridge* a “studio picture [. . .]. Like most young writers, I thought a book should be made out of ‘interesting material,’ and at that time I found the new more exciting than the familiar” (*On Writing* 91). Soon after Cather finished the book, she went West to visit Arizona and New Mexico. Upon her return to Pittsburgh, she began her “other” first book, *O Pioneers!*, a story about her Scandinavian and Bohemian neighbors in Nebraska. “Here there was no arranging or ‘inventing’; everything was spontaneous and took its

own place, right or wrong. This was like taking a ride through a familiar country on a horse that knew the way, on a fine morning when you felt like riding” (*On Writing* 92).

In her memoir, Edith Lewis also writes of Cather’s harsh criticism of *Alexander’s Bridge*, and includes a portion of an introduction Cather wrote for a new edition of the book published ten years later by Houghton Mifflin:

When a writer once begins to work with his own material he realizes that, no matter what his literary excursions may have been, he has been working with it from the beginning – by living it. With this material he is another writer. He has less and less power of choice about the moulding of it. It seems to be there of itself, already moulded. If he tries to meddle with its vague outline, to twist it into some kind of categorical shape, above all if he tries to adopt or modify its mood, he destroys its value. In working with this material he finds that he need have little to do with literary devices; he comes to depend more and more on something else—the thing with which our feet find the road home on a dark night, accounting of themselves for roots and stones which we had never noticed by day. (77-78)

Cather’s mentor, Sarah Orne Jewett, encouraged her to write more about her life experiences. Both Woodress and Lewis quote portions of a letter written by Jewett to Cather (133; 67), encouraging her to find her “centre of life and write from that to the

world . . . in short, you must write to the human heart, the great consciousness that all humanity goes to make up. Otherwise what might be strength in a writer is only crudeness, and what might be insight is only observation; sentiment falls to sentimentality –you can write about life, but never life itself.”

What Jewett describes as “centre of life,” or Cather’s real-life experience and immersion in her world, performs a common function in both her journalism and fiction: it serves as a source and a framework for her writing. Cather’s immersion in books, theater, and music meshes in her journalistic writing, and traces of journalistic form and her professional editorial skills blend and blur in her fiction, offering evidence of connectivity between the genres. As both a journalist and a novelist, Cather recognized the importance of immersion in writing. In a letter to the editor of the *Commonweal* regarding her historical sources for *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, she writes: “Knowledge that one hasn’t got first-hand is a dangerous thing for a writer, it comes too easily!” (*On Writing* 11).

The scene, or scene-by-scene construction, another distinguishable element of literary journalism listed by Lounsberry and Wolfe, is frequently used by Cather in her literary writing. In terms of journalistic writing or reportage, Wolfe explains that by constructing scenes, the writer is not resorting to sheer chronological or historical narrative (31). S. S. McClure’s *My Autobiography*, ghost-written by Cather, is an excellent example of this technique. While the biography is in a sense chronological, it is written in a series of vignettes, stories, or scenes that tell the life story of the magazine

publisher. The biography is non-fiction but is presented in a conversational, reader-friendly, narrative prose form. Lounsberry notes that Wolfe was right to list the scene as the first characteristic of new journalism (xiv-xv) . Instead of reporting an event, the author of nonfiction recasts it in narrative form. “The remarkable effect of such transformation is that the moment is reprised; it lives again, yet with the subtle lights and shadings of the author’s vision,” writes Lounsberry (xv). It is in this recasting, or minimalistic scene-setting, that Cather finds her niche in modernism. In this sense, Cather’s writing appears more theatrical than literary; she *shows* rather than *tells* her audience. Rosowski writes that many critics view Cather as a poetic writer who could create scenes but not plots (“Subverted Endings” 68). The concept of setting or staging scenes was quite familiar to Cather, who as a college student at the University of Nebraska made a name for herself as an astute theater critic for the *Nebraska State Journal*, the leading newspaper in Lincoln.

In conjunction with the relationship of scenes in theater and scene-setting in journalism and literature, another theatrical evolution may have influenced Cather’s writing: a new realism and naturalism in acting was replacing the older emotional style. This school of acting stressed understatement rather than melodrama, and the subject matter was “more ‘real’—that is, plays which dealt with ordinary people” (Curtin 43). Cather, who immersed herself in the performing arts throughout her life, and who critiqued them from her junior year in college through her early professional years in journalism, would have been exposed to this change in acting styles. Since she often

compared her literary writing to styles of painting and other art forms, and since she experimented with a sparse, unfurnished style of novel, it is conceivable that Cather adapted these theatrical forms of realism and understatement and incorporated them in her literary writing.

Cather's interest in art, music, and drama gained her entrance to a specialized field of journalism, theater criticism. Here, Cather was able to hone her skills in observation and description. In her "Novel D meubl " essay, she denigrates the "power of observation" and the "power of description" and labels it a "low part" of a writer's equipment: "He must have both, to be sure; but he knows that the most trivial of writers often have a very good observation" (*On Writing* 36). Cather's and Lounsberry's critiques on writing and literary journalism intersect here, making the point that "fine writing" is a component needed to elevate fact-based reportage to literary journalism and detailed, descriptive writing to literary art.

Cather applied fine writing to her powers of observation and description, and this trait was evident even in her early writing. In the publisher's foreword to *The World and the Parish*, Virginia Faulkner calls attention to the quality of the writing and notes that only a small portion may be described as "apprentice work" (xiv). She notes that even before Cather graduated from the University of Nebraska, she was an experienced newspaper woman and was regarded as a leading drama critic throughout the Midwest. Labeling Cather a "chameleon journalist," Faulkner writes that the author could adapt her writing to any audience and any assignment:

While Willa Cather's journalistic writings deserve attention in their own right, undeniably their chief interest to the general reader and their peculiar value to the scholar reside in their manifold and crucial connection with her later work and in the unparalleled insights they afford into the process by which a gifted writer becomes a great artist" (xv).

The connection between Cather's journalism and later work is even closer than Faulkner asserts. Cather's experimental style in her fiction is heavily dependent on journalistic theories, principles, and practices.

Cather makes the distinction between these two forms, and it is evident that she viewed herself as working on at least two different levels: as a reporter writing journalistic articles and as an artist creating literature. However, there is more fluidity between the two genres that her distinction implies. The progression from journalism to fiction and literature is clear in terms of movement from a form of writing for pay to one of writing to create literature. Unlike many reporters and journalists who enter the profession and cover daily news events such as crimes, accidents, and deaths, Cather began her journalistic career writing feature columns. While there are many styles, structures and formats found in journalistic writing, a primary distinction within the genre is between "hard" news, or news that is considered more serious, timely, and deadline-oriented, and "soft" or feature news, articles of a less-serious nature with a more flexible time element. For example, "Lorain Steel Rumor/More Gossip of Johnson's Rivalry with

the Carnegies,” a “hard” news story hinting at corporate takeover or consolidation at a rolling mill on the south side of Lake Erie, ran on the front page of the *Pittsburgh Leader* on January 4, 1898, and the headline “Melba as ‘Rosina’/Excellent Company Presented/‘The Barber of Seville’” ran over a page 4 theatrical review, or “soft” news feature, signed “Sibert,” a version of Siebert, the maiden name of Cather’s maternal grandmother, that the writer sometimes used as a middle name. Unlike many reporters-turned-novelists, including Theodore Dreiser and Ernest Hemingway, who began their journalistic careers covering crime, accidents, and other “hard” news, Cather officially began her professional newspaper career writing a regular Sunday column for the *Nebraska State Journal* in November 1893. Sketches and vignettes of the local scene filled these columns; some of the details and the attitudes were carried over to her fiction, writes Curtin: “These first columns also forecast the direction of Willa Cather’s journalistic career, for their chief subjects—music, literature, and theatre—were the foci of much of her later newspaper writing” (*World and the Parish* 3-4).

While Cather was working for the *Home Monthly* and the *Pittsburgh Leader* in Pittsburgh, she sent her popular “Passing Show” column to Lincoln, first to the *Journal* and then to the *Courier*, engaging herself outside her regular job as an independent freelancer, composing one article, and then selling it to multiple publications. Since many of the theater performances, concerts, and shows included stops in New York, Pittsburgh, Lincoln, and Chicago on their tours, Cather also wrote reviews of performances she had seen, and these were published in newspapers in both Pittsburgh

and Lincoln. The articles differ from publication to publication, and the available column space in the newspaper on the publication date may account for some of the differences. While many of the same scenes and sentences are included, it appears that Cather also rewrote the articles, tailoring them for particular publications, audiences, and deadlines. For example, the “Melba as ‘Rosina’” article published in the *Pittsburgh Leader* was published January 4, 1898, the day after the performance, and is shorter than the article that ran January 29, 1898 in the *Courier*. “A brilliant and exceedingly conversational audience assembled at the Carnegie hall last night, where a somewhat limited stage and wobbly proscenium had been constructed. Throughout the evening the primitive stage appointments gave a somewhat parlor-theatrical air to the performance,” “Siebert” writes in the *Leader*. Assuming her Pittsburgh readers were probably familiar with the stage at the Carnegie and knowing her Nebraska readers were not, Cather describes the wobbly stage and curtain in more detail in the *Courier* article before reviewing Melba’s performance. Cather’s powers of observation and description as well as her ability to set scenes are strengths in her writing, and the minimalist technique that she experimented with in her novels has roots in journalistic technique and the concept of column inches as a commercial commodity. Wordiness was costly; every word needed to count. For example, in the article on Melba published in the *Courier*, she clearly, and with a humorous tone, describes an awkward moment for the artist in 170 words:

Of course the feature of dominant interest was the appearance of
Mme. Melba in *opera buffa*. Her reception was really very funny.

Her appearance on the balcony in the first act was cut because of the exceedingly unstable nature of the balcony. The balcony in the Chicago Auditorium fell down with Melba several years ago and almost precipitated her into Romeo's arms, so it behooves her to beware of them. She did not appear until the fifth scene, where you remember she enters alone to begin the famous chamber solo, dear unto the hearts of all coloratura sopranos. Well, it seems that the audience had not read the librettos carefully enough, for when she stepped upon the stage not a sound of applause or recognition was heard. She was made up like a Calve brunette which disguised her effectually, and I fancy most people thought she was only a maid who had come in to dust the furniture and incidentally to throw a little light on her mistress' love affairs. (*World and the Parish* 415)

Using journalistic technique, Cather focuses on Melba's performance and neatly condenses a history and review of the performance, description of the singer, and reportage of the incident into a short anecdote.

Cather's earlier journalistic writing, before she left Red Cloud and Lincoln for Pittsburgh, tends to be centered on the specific details and facts of a particular event. However, some of her columns reveal glimmers of an ability to observe and select specific, telling details and to use them to create a portrait of a person, place, or event. In

a column “Between the Acts” on page 13 of the April 15, 1894, *Journal*, Cather presents a vivid description of actress Madge Kendal without resorting to a physical description:

Among her many talents, Mrs. Kendal seems to have a remarkable faculty of calling forth the personal dislike and spleen of the public. As a rule the public accepts or rejects an actress or an artist, admires or dislikes her, as a woman, but it is seldom moved to strong personal feeling over her. The dislike of Mrs. Kendal seems to be universal, from her chambermaid to the people who sit in the largest boxes. The hotel people do not like her, all the dramatic critics in the country cordially detest her, and even the photographers refuse to take her pictures because she is so hard to please. (“Between the Acts”)

This offstage portrait, or snapshot personality profile, of the actress does not include descriptions of her hair, dress, height, weight or any other physical attributes. It does not include a stage biography of the roles she has played or reviews of her performances. Instead, Cather creates this compelling characterization by describing the actress through other people’s reactions to her. Cather’s skill at observation and description are obvious here, but it is also evident that the columnist is more than an observer; she is an insider, immersed in an environment or culture to the extent that she is privy to what people think and, in a sense, can see into their minds. Through what Lounsberry calls “fine writing,” Cather focuses on one detail—the negative reactions of people to the actress—to permit her

readers entrance to this environment and a personal encounter with Mrs. Kendall. Jo Ann Middleton suggests that Cather consciously controls readers' response through several techniques: drawing on a common intellectual background, experimenting with narrative point of view, and incorporating cinemagraphic techniques which "increase the probability that the reader will 'see' as she does" (71).

As the previous extracts reveal, Cather was a "new journalist" long before Wolfe defined the term. She practiced "saturation reporting," engaged in scene-setting, and recorded any gestures, habits, manners, customs, or reactions indicative of status of life or cultural ideology. Rather than cluttering her journalistic writing with unnecessary words and details, or over-furnishing her short stories or novels with expansive, elaborate descriptions, Cather often chooses a specific detail for her focus. Janis Stout writes that Cather "does not so much amass details as focus on a few specific details one at a time." Stout notes that in *My Ántonia*, one pale, frail green insect is singled out from the prairie grass and tucked into Ántonia's hair for safekeeping, and she cites other examples in which Cather isolates presences or details and sets them against a blankness ("Observant Eye" 129-130). In describing her concept for Ántonia to Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant before writing the novel, Cather placed a Sicilian apothecary jar filled with flowers in the center of a bare table and said, "I want my new heroine to be like this—like a rare object in the middle of the table, which one may examine from all sides . . . because she *is* the story" (149).

Precursors of this immigrant heroine can be seen in Cather's earlier journalistic writing. Some of her early columns, including "One Way of Putting It," published in the *Nebraska State Journal*, included short character sketches, in which the author honed her skills of observation and description. In one sketch, published in the column on November 12, 1893, Cather writes of her conversation with a "poor Swede workwoman" who had lost her sailor sweetheart, her job, and her health, but not her hope. The conversation drifted to books, according to Cather's article, and the woman was enthusiastic about a Swedish book, *Frithiof's Saga*, and its heroine Engborg. Cather quotes the woman: "'I like Engborg so much,' she said, her homely face flushing and her coarse, red hands flushing, 'she were so good and truly she love him so much.'"

The short, journalistic sketch foreshadows two aspects of Cather's literary writing: it offers a basis for her choice of immigrants and common people over celebrities and those of upper class status for her protagonists; and it illustrates her conflict between realism and materialism and romanticism and idealism, one of the recurring themes in her novels. The young newspaper columnist Cather bemoans the death of romance in the article and writes that even if it loses favor in academic and literary circles, it will "live in the hearts of the people" such as the Swede work woman, a lady's maid, and a dressmaker, she describes in the article:

It is almost pitiful, this great reverence the common people have for love; their faith is so strong, their belief so complete that perhaps they are the only ones of us who ever really experience

it after all. No, romance is not dead yet, we may be realists
and materialists, but our tailors and coachmen are always
romanticists and idealists. (“One Way”)

Parallels can be drawn between the descriptions of the poor Swedish woman in this newspaper column and the mature heroine, a “stalwart, brown woman, flat-chested, her curly brown hair a little grizzled,” at the conclusion of *My Ántonia*. Twenty years after his departure from Nebraska, Cather’s narrator, Jim Burden, returns to visit Ántonia: “I was thinking, as I watched her, how little it mattered—about her teeth, for instance. I know so many women who have kept all the things that she had lost, but whose inner glow has faded. Whatever else was gone, Ántonia had not lost the fire of life” (157-159).

In a strict journalistic sense, most of Cather’s columns do not follow the rules of unbiased, factual news reporting. Instead, these columns are a form of literary journalism, in which the writer inserts himself or herself into the article and becomes an actual participant in the event rather than an unbiased observer. For example, in the sketch about the Swedish woman and romanticism, Cather records her conversation with the woman, quotes her, and then proceeds to present her opinion, analysis, and observations about the meeting and conversation. It is not unbiased, factual reportage, but it is still a form of journalistic writing that takes a narrative approach. Elaborating on the basic elements of this sketch, which is based on a real-life experience, Cather recasts it in a longer narrative form. The story of the Swedish woman converges with the stories of other immigrant women who Cather knows; the ideals noted briefly in the column

become full-blown ideologies and, through Cather's vision, actual events are recast and transformed into a unified whole.

In examining the journalistic sketches of Charles Stanley Reinhart and the Swedish work woman and the literary versions of "The Sculptor's Funeral" and *My Ántonia*, a connection can be drawn between the genres in terms of real people and characters and observations and themes. In addition, some of Cather's journalistic writing, particularly the columns that offer sketches and vignettes of people and events, appear to be a form of notes or diary entries that were written and recorded by the author primarily for paid publication, but these columns also helped Cather hone her skills in observation and description.

Also noticeable is Cather's tendency to borrow and blur characteristics of journalism, such as observation and factual reportage, with qualities of literary writing, such as narrative style and point-of-view. In a memorial tribute to real-life artist Charles Stanley Reinhart complete with a concrete stone marker placed in an actual cemetery along the Allegheny River in Pittsburgh, Cather reaches into the literary realm to evoke a contrast between the industrial, commercial crudeness of the city and its inhabitants and the light and beauty of the world of art and the painter. While she changes names, setting, narrator, and even artistic profession from painter to sculptor in "The Sculptor's Funeral," Cather holds true to the basic skeleton or facts for the short story and expounds upon the themes in her 1897 newspaper article: society's fixation on commercial interests and materialism, its failure to recognize anything of aesthetic value, and the solitude and

emptiness that sometimes accompany fame. The distinction between truth and accuracy in the newspaper article are blurred with Cather's opinion and observation, and the fictitiousness of the short story is grounded on selected facts of a true story. In addition to showing that Cather used literary concepts in her journalistic writing and reporting techniques for her literary writing, the author's experiments, or incorporation of elements of both genres in her writing, indicate that she practiced a kind of literary journalism well before the concept gained popularity in the 1960s.

Similar observations can be made in comparing the sketch of the older Swedish worker, who believes in romance despite the lack of it in her immediate condition, and *Ántonia*, whose success is measured by simple values and her joy in life. Cather's journalistic articles mark her clear connection with and affection for the common working people she chose for her literary characters:

The maid who admits my lady's admirer every evening believes in romance, and she has a great reverence for the man as she takes his hat, because she believes he is the victim of a great passion, whereas God knows my lady has no awe of him. The dressmaker who makes my lady's wedding dress believes in love, and handles the white lace as though it were sacred, whereas my lady thinks only of its price per yard. ("One Way")

The notion that Cather blurred the genres and practiced a form of literary journalism is supported by critics who view Cather as a modernist, for example Jo Ann

Middleton and Janis Stout. Middleton views Cather's modernism in terms of minimalism. She uses the scientific term "vacuole" to describe discontinuities and gaps in the author's writing, and explains that reader response is required to supply information left by these voids (11). "Cather sees experimentation as integral to creation, and this attitude makes her modern," writes Middleton. The critic explains that Cather tries a new approach with each book: symmetry in *Alexander's Bridge*; subject matter and form in *O Pioneers!*, the "full-blooded method" and transformation of biography to art in *The Song of the Lark*; and point of view in *My Ántonia*, *A Lost Lady* and *One of Ours* (41). Stout, who notes that Cather's popular audience values her as "a writer who holds up in affirmation a sturdier, more wholesome America than our own," writes that she sees Cather instead as a conflicted writer and "participant in the uncertainties and conflicts of twentieth-century modernity" (xi-xii). Middleton's theory of Cather's experimentation and Stout's perception of the author as a conflicted writer lend credence to the idea that she culled elements from different genres and combined them to create a form of literary journalism or artistic reportage that offered a continuum between old world ideology and modernity.

In real life, and as a young woman facing modernity, Cather employed her writing skills and interest in theater and the arts as an independent journalist, earning her living by writing and editing articles assigned by others. The word "assigned" is significant; journalists learn to write on subjects that do not interest them, and they learn to write what they do not naturally believe. For example, Woodress writes about Cather's brief

tenure on the *Home Monthly* in Pittsburgh: “She reported that the magazine was going to be mostly home and fireside stuff about babies and mince pies. The financial outlook, however, was good, and she could stand writing about the care of children’s teeth for a while” (77). After Cather was hired as an assistant telegraph editor at the *Pittsburgh Leader*, the work wasn’t much more interesting; she edited wire copy and wrote headlines. Cather found a journalistic niche, however, that enabled her to write about subjects that interested her: freelance work and self-syndication of her theater reviews and columns. She directed her creative energy into these articles and honed her descriptive and observational skills in the process. Often she focused these skills on people and human emotions. Lewis writes that Cather had a gift—an “extraordinary sensitiveness to people” and an intense curiosity about them (23).

The troupe of people, including the Swedish work woman, in Cather’s November 12, 1893, column in the *Journal* are an unlikely group of down-and-out misfits. They are not identified by name in typical journalistic style, and there’s a noticeable absence of factual information. Cather employs her powers of observation and description here but also adds a literary element: she permits her readers access into her subjects’ minds and lets them know what the people are thinking—something no journalist can legitimately do. A journalist is bound by the facts of an actual event or person; if an article is to be considered factual and credible, a reporter cannot deviate from the facts, make assumptions, or place words in someone’s mouth or thoughts in someone’s mind.

In one column entry, Cather describes an unrepentant debtor staring at a notice of a bank that failed: “He was tall and powerfully built and his head was set squarely on his broad shoulders. He had on an old soiled summer suit and a mud bespattered overcoat.” This factual description could be written by a journalist who observed the man, but Cather deviates from facts and actuality in this column sketch and writes: “He owed money to every man he had ever done business with, except the police. [. . .] He would never pay any one a cent while he could help it, not he. He would take his living off the world till he was through with it, then he would take a town lot two by six over in Wyuka, on trust too” (“One Way”).

In the column, Cather also describes a rather hard woman who selects an ugly, economical tombstone for her recently deceased husband and then barter over the price. Here again, Cather provides a factual visual description of the woman and her mission: “She was a tall, lank brown woman, dressed in deep mourning, and she stood in a marble-cutter’s shop looking for a tombstone for her lord who was not.” At the conclusion of the rather disagreeable transaction, the woman tells the stonecutter to write her husband’s favorite scripture verse, a portion of Psalm 84:10 on the stone: “I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than dwell in the tents of the wicked.” Here, Cather abandons the journalistic technique of reporting only what is seen and heard by a reporter; she tells what the stonecutter is thinking and writes his unspoken words: “The marble dealer turned with a sigh to the ugly mass of stone that was to cover the grave of a man he had always honored, and wondered if doorkeeping paid” (“One Way”).

Cather honed her skills of observation and description in these early journalistic works, and they also illustrate a mutation from strict journalistic form to some hybrid genre that combined aspects of journalistic writing with literary style. Cather was not the only journalist experimenting with a fusion of factual reportage and literary style prior to the new journalists of the 1960s and 1970s, but she has not been acknowledged by critics as a practitioner of literary journalism, partly perhaps as a result of her own disregard for her early work and the later popularity of her novels. Thomas B. Connery writes that the possibility of an American nonfiction prose form that combined elements of fiction and journalism was recognized during Cather's lifetime (15-16). He records two examples: Lincoln Steffens attempted to practice "descriptive narrative" as a New York City reporter and later tried to implement the style as editor of the *Commercial Advertiser* newspaper (242, 317); and Gerald Stanley Lee wrote in the *Atlantic* that while most daily journalism did not extend beyond reported facts, occasionally a "poet reporter" would emerge (237).

The concept of a poet reporter is echoed seventy years later in Joseph Webb's term "romantic reporter." Webb argues that new journalism is a form of an avant garde movement in which journalists reject the traditional concepts of objectivity and faith in external facts and turn toward a romantic philosophy. He defines a romantic reporter as someone who finds:

reality is to be found by focusing on the internal, rather than external,
human processes and movements; that feeling and emotion are more

essential to understanding human life and activity than ideas; that a particular, unique perspective is to be sought in reporting more than the consensual one; and that human experience must be approached as a dynamic, organic phenomenon rather than as something which can be compartmentalized. (43)

Although Cather never rejected her faith in facts, she was the type of romantic reporter who used description and narrative devices to evoke emotional responses from her readers. She did not write merely to inform or to tell her readers about an event; she wrote to “show” them. Rather than simply reporting or telling the facts of a story, Cather uses a sensory narrative style to draw her newspaper readers emotionally into articles and to effect a type of immersion by proxy. Readers see and hear the people and events in these articles through Cather’s eyes. For example, in the sketch of the woman buying a tombstone for her deceased husband, Cather writes:

“When she saw that the dealer had lowered his price for the last time, she opened a stiff black pocketbook, which was of real leather, as its disagreeable odor left no doubt, and gave him the number of the lot in the cemetery. Then she repeated in a loud, high voice the text she wished cut upon it. (“One Way”)

Two of Cather’s contemporaries, Mark Twain and Theodore Dreiser, who were both newspapermen and novelists, asserted that the aspect of immersion associated with the journalistic profession gave reporters a broader, more panoptic, view of society,

which enabled them to become interpreters and, in some cases, judges of American culture and society. Twain noted, “Reporting is the best school in the world to get a knowledge of human beings, human nature, and human ways. Just think of the wide range of [a reporter’s] acquaintanceship, his experience of life and society” (Branch 2). Dreiser concurred and went a step further in his description of newspapermen: “They knew the world, and their opportunities for studying public as well as private impulses and desires and contrasting them with public and private performances were so great as to make them puzzled if not always accurate judges of affairs and probable events of any kind anywhere” (506). As a journalist, Cather took advantage of the professional opportunities to experience life and society and to observe and study people and their actions. Evidence of this can be seen in the short, descriptive accounts in her columns.

Like other writers, including Dreiser who frequented the Allegheny Carnegie Library when crime was at low ebb on the police beat he covered for the *Dispatch* in Pittsburgh (514), Cather also immersed herself in reading works of literary writers. Biographies describe her as a voracious reader who, even as a young girl, read through the libraries of friends and neighbors in Red Cloud. Biographers, critics, and Cather herself point to her affection for and modeling of Henry James. Stout, compiling a list of authors mentioned either by Slote or Rosowski, offers an impressive, but what she notes is not a comprehensive, list of authors read by Cather (46). She was particularly fond of French and Russian writers, such as Balzac, Mérimée, de Maupassant, Flaubert (Woodress 90, 103), Tolstoy, Dumas (both *pere* and *fils*), Turgenev, and Verlaine (Stout

46, 79). Dorothy Canfield Fisher once wrote that at the university Cather “made it a loving duty to read every French literary masterpiece she could lay her hands on” (7, 9).

In “The Novel Demeublé,” Cather refers to and critiques Mérimée, Balzac, and Tolstoy, as well as Hawthorne and D. H. Lawrence. She writes that Balzac “defeated his end” by overfurnishing his novels with material surroundings, but defended Tolstoy, noting that “the clothes, the dishes, the haunting interiors of those old Moscow houses, are always so much a part of the emotions of people that they are perfectly synthesized” (38, 39-40). These references provide examples of Cather’s immersion and experience with these writers and their novels and help to show the effect that literary immersion had on her own writing and experimentation with other styles such as the “unfurnished novel.” In Cather’s opinion, the novel had become over-furnished. Efforts at presenting “realistic” novels had resulted in catalogs of material objects and detailed descriptions of mechanical processes and physical sensations. Cather’s experiments, which employed journalistic and aesthetic techniques, aimed at eliminating unnecessary lists and excessive description and focusing on the essence of the writing.

Slote and others recognize that Cather examined the techniques and forms of French writers such as Mérimée, Flaubert, and Daudet and used these as models for transforming her writing into high art (*Kingdom* 37). David Stouck writes that many references to Russian literary traditions appear in Cather’s essays and letters and that when Cather gave examples of high quality in fiction, she invariably “cited Turgenev or Tolstoy or both.” He cites the existence of a kinship between the Russian steppe in

literary tradition and the American prairie in Cather's novels, as well as a relationship between highly cultivated gardens in Cather's work and her admiration for the French. Additionally, he notes that Cather had been reading Chekhov while she was writing *O Pioneers!* In a December 1912 letter, Cather encouraged Elizabeth Sergeant to read *The Cherry Orchard*. Stouck writes:

Although the mood of this play with its picture of an aristocratic world in decline is wholly different from that of the novel she was working on, it anticipates another aspect of Cather's sensibility that would emerge more clearly in *My Ántonia* (1918) and especially in *A Lost Lady* (1923)—a melancholy regret for a golden past that the protagonist has lost and that may never have existed. ("Russians" 10)

The symbol of the cherry orchard, Stouck adds, is resurrected by Cather in a similar motif in *Lucy Gayheart*, when the protagonist begs her sister not to cut down the old apple orchard to raise onions for commercial purposes ("Russians" 10).

Cather's early writing—for example, short stories in *The Troll Garden* and *Alexander's Bridge*—illustrate her regard for Henry James and her experiments in modeling him prior to finding her own voice and style. Her interest in French and Russian literature emerges thematically throughout her work, for example in the ending of "Paul's Case" and in the recasting of Marian Forrester in *A Lost Lady* as a Midwestern Madame Bovary. The aspect of literary immersion in Cather's life and her real-life

experience as a child in Nebraska as well as professional journalist in Pittsburgh and New York contribute to the forms and themes in her writing. As an avid reader, she gained knowledge and formed opinions of literary writers and their expansive styles and themes; as a child growing up in Nebraska, she lived in an environment that eluded other writers' experiential scope; as a journalist in Pittsburgh and New York, she worked in a profession that enabled her to study people and society and one that exposed her to the publishing world and gave her access to other writers. Cather's immersion in these areas granted her special access to literary writing. As she experimented with her short stories and novels, Cather selectively chose, borrowed, and blurred aspects of factual knowledge and fictional interest in her pursuit of literary art.

Rosowski writes that Cather is "profoundly identified with the places that shaped her and that she wrote about" (Introduction ix). The recurrence of the town of Red Cloud, Nebraska, in different forms and under different names in her short stories and novels is an example of the effect immersion had on Cather's writing. The real-life setting of Charles Stanley Reinhart's funeral in Pittsburgh becomes westernized as Sand City, Kansas in "The Sculptor's Funeral," and the railroad town is renamed Black Hawk in *My Ántonia*, Moonstone in *The Song of the Lark*, and Sweet Water in *A Lost Lady*. Cather's travels in the Southwest prompted the concept for *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (*On Writing* 4), and for "Tom Outland's Story," the book-within-a-book in *The Professor's House*; and Lewis recounts that a side trip to Quebec on the way to

Cather's summer retreat at Grand Manan sparked plans for a novel with a French-Canadian setting, *Shadows on the Rock* (153).

Similarly, her real-life experiences and immersion in journalism provided her with opportunities to hone her writing skills and also led to associations with publishers such as S.S. McClure, other writers, actors, artists, and musicians. Further, it afforded Cather, in her editorial capacity at *McClure's* magazine, the opportunity to see other places, such as New York, Boston, and Europe. She experienced and absorbed the people, scenes, and cultures of Red Cloud and Lincoln, Nebraska, and she wrote about them, first in newspaper articles and columns and later in her fiction. Her professional immersion as a journalist in Pittsburgh in the late nineteenth century is apparent in "Paul's Case." The descriptions of the city and its theater culture are historically accurate and astute. It is clear that Cather observed Carnegie Hall and the Hotel Schenley and is describing or "showing" these buildings to readers through her eyes, from her viewpoint. And it is clear that she had an understanding, or inside knowledge, of the newspaper business and its practices. In "Paul's Case," she writes:

On the eighth day after his arrival in New York, he found the whole affair exploited in the Pittsburgh papers, exploited with a wealth of detail which indicated that local news of a sensational nature was at a low ebb. [. . .] The Cumberland minister had been interviewed, and expressed his hope of yet reclaiming the motherless lad, and

his Sabbath-school teacher declared that she would spare no effort to that end. (*Troll Garden* 128)

Slow news days and sources for interviews were part and parcel of Cather's immersion in the professional world of journalism; and she relied heavily on these experiences, as well as her childhood in Nebraska, for her literary writing. As a journalist, she honed her writing skills and powers of observation and description, and as a "poet reporter" or a "romantic reporter," she reached into the literary realm, drew upon narrative writing, and incorporated it into her newspaper articles and columns. Evidence of the influence of immersion and scene-setting in both Cather's journalism and fiction points to a convergence between the two, rather than a stepping stone from reportage to literary art, and it labels Cather as one of the early practitioners of literary journalism or new journalism. Building on this assertion, Chapter 2 will proceed to address factual sources and the skeleton of the narrative, particularly in the author's fiction. Although Cather strove for a higher goal of creating lasting, literary "art" in her fiction, she employed traditional, factual journalistic reportage methods to form the skeleton of those works.

CHAPTER 2: THE FIVE W'S AND THE H

I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who.
I send them over land and sea,
I send them east and west,
But after they have worked for me
I give them all a rest.

Poem after “The Elephant’s Child” in *Just So Stories* by Rudyard Kipling

Rudyard Kipling was one of Willa Cather’s contemporaries and early literary idols. Sharon O’Brien labels him a “heroic warrior” artist who served as a “more aggressively, narrowly masculine” model derived by Cather from her reading of epics, sagas, and romances (147). This assertion rings true, for in one of Cather’s *Journal* columns, she scolds Kipling for his marriage and attempt to live a family life in Vermont. “It would be more encouraging to hear that he had taken to opium or strong drink or that he had married a half-caste woman and was raising vermilion hordes out in India. Go back to the east, Mr. Kipling” Cather advises (*Kingdom of Art* 317). In her first month of working for the *Home Monthly* in Pittsburgh, Cather had the opportunity to meet and talk to Kipling for forty-six minutes (Woodress 77). Additionally, S. S. McClure published most of Kipling’s best fiction in *McClure’s* magazine, where Cather worked as an editor from 1906 to 1912.

While biographers note the literary affiliations between the contemporary writers, it’s more likely that Cather encountered the journalistic skeleton of the “5 W’s and the H” through her immersion in the newspaper business than through the interrogatives, or “Six

honest serving-men” in Kipling’s poem. The who, what, when, where, why, and how are the basic elements used to structure a news story. Upon entering the editorial office of the *World* in New York, Theodore Dreiser reports that he saw printed cards pasted on the walls which read: “Accuracy, Accuracy, Accuracy!; Who? What? Where? When? How? [. . .] I knew what those signs referred to, especially the second. It epitomized the proper order for beginning a newspaper story” (625). Dreiser doesn’t include the “why” in his equation, but it’s possible that the fifth “W” wasn’t included on a card on the wall or that the “why” constituted the explanatory body of the story rather than the beginning. In any case, journalists of Cather’s day were familiar with the standard news formula that required answering these questions, in ascending order of importance, for newspaper readers. For example, if the President of the United States was assassinated, the “who” and “what” would be considered most important; if a fire destroyed a business or a city block, the “what” and “where” might have more significance for readers.

Although Cather strove for a higher goal of creating lasting, literary “art” with her fiction, she employed traditional, factual journalistic reportage methods to form the skeleton for those works. In her literary writing, Cather relies on the “5 W’s and the H,” employing them first as facts and then embellishing them with her imagination and writing skills. The “where” is geographically grounded in the environments Cather experienced during her childhood and her professional life; the “when” is most often located within the realm of the author’s lifetime, but in some novels, for example *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock*, she uses historical sources. In terms

of these historical sources, the “what” for the author’s framework sometimes coincides with the “when.” Immigrants helped build the railroads and settle the Midwest; French missionaries expanded the Catholic Church in the Southwest; soldiers sacrificed their lives in World War I. The “who,” or the characters in Cather’s novels are based on real people, their characteristics, and Cather’s observations of them; however, these characters are composites, tailored to fit the context of a fictional situation. The “why” and the “how” in Cather’s literary writing are less tangible, as is often the case in journalistic writing when the result is clear, but the reason or cause is not immediately explainable. It’s evident that Cather, an editor at *McClure’s*, a publication noted for muckraking, did not use the “why” as a springboard for advocacy or reform, yet her novels yield messages and viewpoints on such issues as immigration, feminism, and materialism. It’s possible that Cather does not heavily focus on the “why” and the “how” and uses their absence as a technique to engage readers; the two interrogatives could be components of “the thing not named” and excluded purposely to create an imaginative form of higher art.

In her literary writing, Cather expands and elaborates on the “5 W’s and the H,” using her powers of observation and description, experiential knowledge, scene-setting abilities, and storytelling style. Edith Lewis writes that the people of Red Cloud make up the gallery of characters in Cather’s books, despite the fact that they weren’t really any more interesting than people in other small American towns:

Perhaps the greatest single indication of her artistic gift was her extraordinary sensitiveness to people—her intense curiosity about them,

the depth of her response to them, the way their individuality, their personal traits and behaviour, cut deep into her consciousness, so that years afterward she could summon them up, not as pale shades, but with all their living colours, their insistent humanity, to be recreated and given lasting existence through her transforming art. (23-24)

Lewis writes that certain people and situations came together as compositions for Cather. “When it became necessary to change them in order to carry out her composition, she did so, much as a modern painter alters, modifies, suppresses, certain features in his subject to suit his conception and his style” (24). She adds that *Ántonia* in *My Ántonia* and Mrs. Forrester in *A Lost Lady* are closer to the actual people than any of Cather’s other characters. *Ántonia* is based on Annie Sadilek, who worked as a hired girl for the Miners, a family of Irish Catholic descent who were neighbors to the Cathers. Mrs. Forrester is based on Mrs. Lyra Garber, the wife of Nebraska ex-governor Silas Garber, who founded Red Cloud. Lewis writes that the conception for the novel came shortly after Cather saw Mrs. Garber’s obituary in a local paper forwarded to New York (25).

It should be noted that the use of composite characters rather than actual people in journalistic writing is acceptable only in limited circumstances and only if it is made perfectly clear to the reader that the character is a composite and not a real person. For example, a reporter might use a composite character to depict a typical college student, an average middle-class consumer, typical hospital patient and use a “John or Jane Doe” identification signifying that the illustration is not a real person. In fiction, it’s assumed

that the characters, with the exception of historical figures, are either “made up” or composites. Literary journalists Mailer and Talese have different philosophies on the use of composite characters and blurring the lines between fictional and real characters. Lounsberry writes that Talese is opposed to both fictitious names and composite characters. In writing *Thy Neighbor's Wife*, he briefly considered making Harold Rubin and John Bullaro one composite character, but he rejected the notion (29). Mailer writes that readers sometimes have problems with authors who mix real and fictional characters, but he isn't bothered by the merger. “As far as I'm concerned, it's all fiction,” he writes, explaining that both novelists and historians are “making an attack on the possible nature of reality” simply because of their perspectives (154-55). Mailer also addresses the issue of young novelists who draw on family and friends for their material, as Cather does. “How, goes the question, do you manage that without making these near and dear people too recognizable?” he asks (91). Mailer notes that he has never written directly about his parents or his sister, but he has used real-life experience with his family in his writing:

I characterize these fundamental and primary experiences as *crystals*

The crystals can be simple or extraordinarily developed. But provided you don't use them directly, you can sometimes send a ray of your imagination through the latticework in one direction or another and find altogether different scenarios. [. . .] So long as you don't use the core of your experience, you will be in command of many possibilities.

But if you are determined to get it all accurately on paper, then at a given

moment you will have to face the fact that you are going to hurt people who are close to you. (92)

Cather never read Mailer's warning, but she heeded it when it came to Isabelle McClung Hambourg. The author's friends and critics do not mention Cather's most intimate and beloved friend, as one of the real people on which she based her fictional characters. Many critics and biographers, including Woodress, O'Brien, Stout, and others, address the probability of a lesbian relationship between the two, but Isabelle married violinist Jan Hambourg shortly after her father's death in April 1916, and neither she nor Cather publicly acknowledged any relationship other than a lifetime friendship. Cather's letters to Isabelle McClung were destroyed when Jan Hambourg returned them after his wife's death (O'Brien 236). Following Isabelle's death in 1938, Cather wrote to her friend Zoe Akins: "I think people often write books for just one person, and for me Isabelle was that person" (*Later Novels*, 958). O'Brien writes that this acknowledgment and Cather's dedication of two books, *The Troll Garden* and *The Song of the Lark*, indicate the connection between Cather's writing and her love for Isabelle: "Writing a novel was thus an act of communication as well as self-expression, a letter she was sending to Isabelle, her muse and ideal reader" (238). Cather, a former journalist with a keen sense of audience and readership, had no desire to hurt her ideal reader and the closest person in her life by including her as an identifiable composite character in a novel.

While Cather avoided Isabelle as a prototype for a fictional character, many of the others in her stories and novels were composites. They were close to the core of her

experience and often recognizable. In essence, Cather did not invent her characters; they were factual people, whose traits and characteristics she embellished and altered to fit her fiction. Just as real-life artist and illustrator Charles Stanley Reinhart became the model for sculptor Harvey Merrick in “The Sculptor’s Funeral,” other real-life acquaintances, friends, and family of Cather became the characters in her fiction. The Wieners, a Jewish family in Red Cloud, became the Rosens in the short story “Old Mrs. Harris,” Dr. McKeeby, one of the medical doctors in Red Cloud, became Dr. Archie in *The Song of the Lark*, and a favorite cousin became the model for Claude in *One of Ours*. In retrospect, Lewis writes, “Of course, in the end it is the imaginative conception which triumphs—which usurps the memory of the other” (26). However, within Cather’s lifetime and the lifetimes of her characters’ real-life counterparts, the composites were often identifiable.

In one instance, Cather’s tendency to use real-life people in her writing resulted in an interrupted friendship. Stout writes that Cather lampooned Roscoe Pound, the brother of her friend Louise, in a series called “Pastels in Prose” in the March 10, 1894 issue of the *Hesperian*, the campus newspaper at the University of Nebraska. “A bitter and unnecessary experience, it might have taught her to doubt her initial impressions and to exercise discretion when sketching actual persons in her writing, but does not seem to have done so” (36). Curtin notes that Roscoe Pound, the future dean of the Harvard Law School and world-renowned authority in the field of jurisprudence, was on the Nebraska

campus, serving as a graduate instructor while working on a doctorate in botany, when Cather wrote:

He called everything by its longest and most Latin name, and the less his victim knew about botany, the more confidential he becomes [. . .] In his early youth he was a notorious bully, and all the very little boys in the neighborhood used to be afraid to go past his home. Now he bullies mentally just as he used to physically. He loves to take rather weak minded persons and browbeat them, argue them down, Latin them into a corner and botany them into a shapeless mass. (*World and Parish* 122)

Stout writes that another temporary severance of friendship was caused when Cather based another character on a real-life person in a story that was to be published in *The Troll Garden*. Dorothy Canfield, whom Cather also met as a student, asked Cather to delete a story called “The Profile” from the collection of short stories. The female character described in the story, a friend whom Canfield had introduced Cather to in France, would be recognizable as the character with the facial scar and would be devastated by having her deformity further displayed in print. When Cather refused to pull the story, Stout writes, Canfield and her parents went to S. S. McClure’s offices to argue the case. The story was deleted; in its place a disparaging portrait of Dorothy’s mother, “Flavia and Her Artists” was published (*Writer* 37).

However, not all the real-life people recognizable as characters in Cather's fiction were dismayed with their published portraits. Thea Kronberg, Cather's protagonist in *The Song of the Lark*, is a composite of Olive Fremstead, a Swedish-American opera singer who also grew up in the Midwest. Woodress writes that Cather was worried about the Wagnerian soprano's reaction to the published book. The concern was unwarranted, however; Fremstead loved the character. "When she met Fremstead in Lincoln, the singer embraced her and exclaimed that she could not tell where Thea left off and she began" (170). While the character is to an extent based on Fremstead, critics and biographers, Woodress included, note that Thea Kronberg is also "unmistakably Willa Cather, with Cather's home town (though moved about three hundred miles to the west,) her attic bedroom, traces of her mother, her younger sibling, her friendly town doctor, her determination, even her acquaintance with a railroad man killed in a wreck" (Stout 120). O'Brien writes that Cather's admiration for female opera singers culminated in her friendship with Fremstead and sparked the concept for a novel that combined and celebrated her own artistic birth and Fremstead's vocation (167). O'Brien calls *The Song of the Lark* a "veiled autobiographical novel" inspired by a trip to the Southwest and a meeting with Fremstead (447).

The meeting occurred when Cather, who was doing an article on opera singers for *McClure's*, made an appointment to interview Fremstead. When the singer arrived, she was tired, looked old, and her voice was "only a whisper" (Woodress 163). Cather agreed to reschedule the appointment, but that evening she, Isabelle McClung, and Edith Lewis

attended the opera and witnessed Fremstead giving a dazzling performance. “In portraying Thea’s fatigue after a major performance and the quality of steel that has entered her soul as a corollary of her commitment to her art, Cather is examining the cost of her own commitment to her writing” (Stout 120).

The journalistic “who” that connects real-life people in Cather’s world to the characters in her fictional sphere also includes narrators of her works. For example, Jim Burden steps in for Cather to tell the story of Antonia, or Annie Sadilek; Niel Herbert takes Cather’s place as one of the children at the picnic described in the opening chapter of *A Lost Lady*. In telling these stories through her own eyes and casting herself as the narrator of the novels, Cather is employing the concept of immersion as a participant in the story. While new journalists, such as Mailer, Wolfe, and Capote, were participating authors using narrative style in nonfiction, Cather experiments with authorial immersion in fiction based on a factual framework. For example, the orphaned Jim Burden makes the trip to Black Hawk in much the same way the displaced Willa Cather made her trip to Red Cloud; the young Cather gets an impression of Lyra Garber at a picnic, recalls it years later when she reads about the former Nebraska governor’s wife and recasts her as Marian Forrester, as seen through the eyes of Niel.

Cather’s literary mentor, Sarah Orne Jewett, who wrote to her praising the short story “On the Gulls’ Road” shortly after its publication, noted that she thought the lover was flawed, but the character was done as well as it could be by a woman writer. Jewett wrote that it is a masquerade for a woman to adopt a man’s point of view in fiction

(Woodress 132). Mailer echoes Jewett's comments nearly a century later. He writes that while all subjects are possible, certain choices present more obstructions. "It would be harder, as an example, for a male novelist to learn about the small irritations of a woman's day than to imagine what her sex would be like. [. . .] Which is why I say it's easier—if you are going to write about those of the opposite gender—to limn them sexually than attempt to get into the nitty-gritty of their daily life" (131). While Cather valued Jewett's advice and preceded Mailer's, she was not disposed to heed it and successfully employed a male narrator in both *My Ántonia* and *A Lost Lady*.

Cather's notation about her use of actual Frederick County surnames at the conclusion of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* is another way in which she inserted the journalistic "who" in her literary writing. Another more striking example that connects Cather's journalism to her novels is found in *My Mortal Enemy*. In the short novel, Myra Henshawe, an elderly woman, considers possible careers for the character Nellie Birdseye. "Why not journalism? You could always make your way easily there." Nellie replies, "Because I hate journalism. I know what I want to do, and I'll work my way out yet" (562). Critics have interpreted the comment as Cather's disavowal of journalism, but Nellie's name recalls the famous journalist Nellie Bly, who began her journalistic career at the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* and gained fame by feigning insanity, going undercover at the Woman's Lunatic Asylum at Blackwell's Island, and writing reports for Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*. David T. Humphries notes that the lasting importance of journalism in Cather's life is evident in this characterization (15). So, too is Cather's use

of the journalistic “who” and her reliance on real-life people as the basis for composites for her fictional characters.

Just as the “who” for Cather’s fiction is made up of actual friends, family, neighbors, and acquaintances, the “where” comprises geographical places she knew best and the natural and social environments she inhabited. While the people of Red Cloud make up the gallery of characters in Cather’s fiction, the infrastructure of the Nebraska railroad town is a recurring backdrop for scenes in her stories and novels. It becomes Sand City, Kansas for “The Sculptor’s Funeral,” Black Hawk in *My Ántonia*, Moonstone in *The Song of the Lark* and Sweet Water in *A Lost Lady*. This railroad town often serves as a hub connecting the outlying Midwest prairie landscape in Cather’s novels.

After the publication of *Alexander’s Bridge*, which is set in Boston and London, places Cather had visited but did not know intimately, the author turned to her Nebraska roots as the locale for *Oh Pioneers!* The title, taken from a Walt Whitman poem, distinctly focuses on the “where” as an unsettled, somewhat primitive American landscape rather than a heavily civilized European one. In *On Writing*, Cather notes that “The ‘novel of the soil’ had not then come into fashion in this country. The drawing-room was considered the proper setting for a novel” (93). She writes that *Oh Pioneers!* interested her because it was about the country and people that she loved. “But I did not in the least expect that other people would see anything in a slow-moving story, without ‘action,’ without ‘humour,’” without a “hero”; a story concerned entirely with heavy farming people, with cornfields and pasture lands and pig yards—set in Nebraska, of all

places! As everyone knows, Nebraska is distinctly déclassé as a literary background” (94).

Joseph W. Meeker asserts that the Midwest plays a role, acts as a character, and serves as the center of Cather’s artistic spirit. He writes that the books with Nebraska settings include vivid descriptions of prairie landscapes and the seasonal changes that affect the inhabitants. “The prairie ecosystem is the setting upon which these stories unfold. The Nebraska prairie also acts as a character in these novels, interacting with all the human characters and influencing their lives in powerful and subtle ways. The land is often referred to as if it were a person” (78). Meeker points out this characterization is further marked by the first two chapter titles in *Oh Pioneers!* The chapters, labeled Part I and Part II, are titled “The Wild Land” and “Neighboring Fields” and focus directly on the “where” of the novel. The book begins with a description of:

the little town of Hanover, anchored on a windy Nebraska tableland
[. . .] trying not to be blown away. A mist of fine snowflakes was
curling and eddying about the cluster of low drab buildings huddled
on the gray prairie under a gray sky. The dwelling-houses were set
about haphazard on the tough prairie sod, some of them moved in
overnight, and others as if they were straying off by themselves
headed straight for the open plain. (9)

Part II opens on a similar note: “On one of the ridges of that wintry waste stood the log house in which John Bergson was dying” (17). Cather’s elevated importance of the

“where” in *Oh Pioneers!* shifts to the “who” in *My Ántonia*, however, when the chapter titles, here labeled books, focus on the people—“The Shimerdas” and “The Hired Girls.”

Cather considered journalistic factuality and accurate portrayals of both the “who” and the “where”—the people and the land—as primary components of her novels. “What has pleased me most in the cordial reception the West has given this new book of mine, is that the reviewers in all those Western States say the thing seems to them true to the country and the people. That is a great satisfaction,” Cather told a reporter following the publication of *Oh Pioneers!* (*Kingdom of Art* 449).

While Cather is often conceptualized and sometimes stereotyped as a novelist who wrote about the Midwestern landscape, pioneers, and the harshness of prairie life, many of her short stories and novels are set in other locales, which are often places she visited. The Southwest is used for “Tom Outlands’s Story,” the middle section and story-within-a-novel, or what Cather calls a “*Nouvelle* into the *Roman*” (*On Writing* 30), in *The Professor’s House*. The bookend chapters, I and III, locate Professor St. Peter and his house in Hamilton, Michigan, within sight of Lake Michigan. In a letter to a friend, which she permitted to be published during her lifetime in *On Writing*, Cather explains that she juxtaposes the “where” of Professor St. Peter’s house in Hamilton and the “where” of Tom Outland’s Blue Mesa in New Mexico for creative purposes—to contrast multiplicity with simplicity and American materialism with traditional values:

In my book I tried to make Professor St. Peter’s house rather
overcrowded and stuffy with new things; American proprieties,

clothes, furs, petty ambitions, quivering jealousies—until one got rather stifled. Then I wanted to open the square window and let in the fresh air that blew off the Blue Mesa, and the fine disregard of trivialities which was in Tom Outland’s face and in his behavior. (32)

Cather conducts a similar experiment with the “where” in *One of Ours*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1923. News of the death of a favorite cousin in the battle of Cantigny sparked the idea for the book, and continued contact with a former high school student at an Army post in New York and enlisted friends fueled research (Lewis 118). About two-thirds of the novel is set in Nebraska, on a farm with a meandering stream called Lovely Creek near the town of Frankfort. A transition chapter, “The Voyage of the Anchises,” takes farmer-turned-soldier Claude Wheeler to France. Lewis writes that Cather had completed two-thirds of the novel when she decided she must revisit France before writing the remainder (119). While critics disparage Cather’s descriptions of battle and interpretation of the war, the weight she placed on the “where” of the novel, casting more than half of it in a Nebraska setting, indicates that the war itself was not her overall theme; she was writing about a young Nebraskan seeking his place in the world.

In some instances, the journalistic “where” prompted a concept for a story or novel. *Death Comes for the Archbishop* was written following repeated visits to the Southwest and Cather’s observation that one of the most interesting aspects of the region was the history of the Catholic Church. *Shadows on the Rock* was conceptualized after a

side trip to Quebec on the way to Cather's summer writing retreat at Grand Manan. The author's birthplace didn't become a setting for her literary writing until later in her life. Lewis writes that Cather had been urged to write a novel set in Virginia, but she didn't attempt it until after her parents' deaths. While writing *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, Cather traveled to Winchester in the spring of 1938 to revisit her former home and the surrounding countryside (182-83).

In addition to using the journalistic "where" as a geographical locator for regional settings and landscapes, Cather also employs it as a cultural locator often situated in gardens and home spaces, particularly kitchens. O'Brien writes that women's private spaces were regions Cather later referred to as the "kingdom of art" in her novels: "Kitchens and gardens are the spaces where nature is transformed into culture, rituals created, and order established" (17). This notion, O'Brien goes on to explain, originated with Cather's female relatives who respected the importance and dignity of women's roles in an agrarian society:

Willa as a child was surrounded by older women whose arduous tasks—tending the vegetable garden, raising animals, sewing and quilting, preparing and preserving food, managing the household, child-bearing and rearing—were as vital to the family's survival as their husband's farming duties. Her forbears practiced the sexual division of labor common in rural societies, however, with men taking the farm, women the home and garden, as their province. (17)

In writing about the endings of Cather's novels, Rosowski suggests that the domestic "where" of Cather's gardens and kitchens with their repetitive rituals offer an alternative to the modern notions of progress. "Is there, after all another major American writer whose novels so often end in a kitchen?" Rosowski asks. "Jim Burden returns to *Ántonia's* kitchen; Mahailey thinks of Claude as directly over the kitchen stove (*One of Ours*); Niel Herbert's final disillusionment occurs as he looks at Marian Forrester, standing before her kitchen sink (*A Lost Lady*). In *Shadows on the Rock*, where the kitchen is the center throughout, the ending tells of preparations to go to dinner" ("Subverted Endings" 76). O'Brien notes that Cather's Epilogue to *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* suggests the kitchen was the most memorable room because of its association with food and storytelling. "Our kitchen was almost as large as a modern music-room, and to me it was the pleasantest room in the house, –the most interesting" (934). O'Brien adds that structure, space, and landscape, the "where" in Cather's fiction, is always significant. "To understand how her characters shape and are shaped by the worlds they inhabit, her readers must always consider the house, the kitchen, the parlor, the attic, the garden, the prairie, the rock, the mesa" (63).

Much of the "where" in Cather's writing falls into the realm of her experience, the spaces and places that she knew best. She uses it as a good journalist guide—weighted in importance and significance with the other W's and the H. In *Oh Pioneers!* the land is so crucial to the story that it becomes a character; in *My Ántonia*, the protagonist has the central role, but she has to co-exist with the "where." Sometimes the geographical

locations are historic and serve as backgrounds for Cather's stories. In other cases, the "where" is less important and acts as scenery in front of which Cather's characters perform. In all cases, she determines the value and function of the "where" and its relationship to the other 4 W's and the H in her literary writing and employs it accordingly. "The land provides a background for her stories of human growth and development, but it is not loved and studied to find its own integrity and value, let alone its own story," writes Meeker. "The land is raw material in the hands of Cather's Muse, and it is the setting where the plow and the pen come together" (88).

The "when" in Cather's journalistic writing was based on actual events, time frames, schedules, and publication deadlines. Theatrical and musical reviews were written on performances in Lincoln, Pittsburgh, and New York, and reviews were published immediately afterward. Curtin writes that in 1896, Pittsburgh had seven important theaters, and generally the Sunday *Leader* announced the weeks programs in advance:

On Monday or Tuesday—usually, but not always—two or three columns of notices appeared, covering every company although not reviewing each one of their offerings for the week. This explains why Willa Cather sometimes mentions in her 'Passing Show' columns plays that she had seen but did not review in the *Leader*. Most of her *Leader* reviews were signed 'Sibert' and very quickly 'Sibert' became the byline on the lead review" (*World and Parish* 420).

Cather's journalistic writing was based on actual events, dictated by publication deadlines, and directed toward a mass audience. Her literary writing was not dictated by the same immediacy, deadlines, and timeliness, but the "when" in her fiction adheres to factual and historical time lines. Just as the "who" in her literary writing comprises composites of actual people, the "when" is based on actual times and events, many of them within her life span and her realm of actual experience.

In this respect, Cather is an early literary journalist. Like the new journalists of the 1960s and 1970s who participated in news events and used a narrative style to write about them, Cather was also a participant—in growing up on the Midwest prairies, befriending opera stars, and losing a cousin in World War I. Even in undertaking narratives with stories dating prior to her birth, she relied on factual historical events and sources and immersed herself in the geography and culture before proceeding to write. Norman Sims outlines the work of literary journalists: "Reporting on the lives of people at work, in love, going about the normal rounds of life, they confirm that the crucial moments of everyday life contain great drama and substance. Rather than hanging around the edges of powerful institutions, literary journalists attempt to penetrate the cultures that make institutions work" (*Literary Journalists* 3). In creating her "art," Cather confirmed that everyday life—in particular the everyday life that she lived and experienced—contained drama and substance. She employed the factual "when" of events and actual times, much as the new journalists did, to create a cultural "when" that depicts the time periods in her short stories and novels.

The intrinsic “when” of Cather’s writing is found in her Prefactory Note to *Not Under Forty* in which she writes, “The world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts, and the persons and prejudices recalled in these sketches slid back into yesterday’s seven thousand years” (v). Cather sets the period after World War I as a dividing point between agricultural, pre-technical America and industrialized, materialistic America, and she makes her affection for the former and conflict with the latter clear in her writing. At the conclusion of *My Ántonia*, Jim Burden ponders his return to Black Hawk and his reunion with Ántonia: “I had the sense of coming home to myself, and of having found out what a little circle man’s experience is. [. . .] Now I understood that the same road was to bring us together again. Whatever we had missed, we possessed together the precious, incommunicable past” (175). Cather’s nostalgia for the past is also evident in the contrast she presents between Thea’s life in Chicago and her interest in the southwestern “Cliff Dwellers” in *The Song of the Lark* and Professor St. Peter’s house and Tom Outland’s Blue Mesa in *The Professor’s House*. “I wanted nothing but to get back to the mesa and live a free life and breathe free air, and never, never again to see hundreds of little black-coated men pouring out of white buildings. Queer, how much more depressing they are than workmen coming out of a factory,” says Outland on his return from Washington, D.C. (236).

David T. Humphries acknowledges a distinct split in time in Cather’s writing: “In her early work Cather most often depicts journalists and immigrants as helping artists shape popular taste and change existing conceptions of culture, while in her later works

she depicts journalism as nothing more than a form of advertising and immigrants as narrow-mindedly pursuing financial success” (13). This critique of materialism and industrialism, Stout writes, can be viewed as “a defining trait of the nineteenth-century romantic artist” (77). In *The Kingdom of Art*, Slote writes that Cather’s writing from the mid-nineties reveals her as “a romantic and a primitive” (31): “No reader can escape the nostalgic aura of some of her greatest novels. Did she then, even at the beginning, look back with regret to a past of vanished glory?” (33). Lewis writes that Cather had a gift for imaginative historical reconstruction: “She could make the modern age almost disappear, fade away and become ghostlike, so completely was she able to invoke her vision of the past and recreate its reality” (119-20). In this imaginative historical reconstruction and re-creation of reality, Cather doesn’t abandon the factual journalistic “when”; she combines it with her own narrative style and recasts past events as she views them. Actual events and historical sources before and directly after “the world broke in two” are the basic time line for Cather’s fiction.

Rather than create a time, place or event, Cather relied on factual and historical sources for the skeletons of her narratives and then elaborated on the framework. Unlike a fiction writer who creates or “makes up” characters and a setting, Cather collected the materials for her short stories more as a journalist would: She relied on real people, places, and actual events—either those current with her lifetime or historical—for her short stories and novels. The “what” in her writing is often based on an event, either public or personal. For example, a news event, the actual collapse of a new bridge under

construction across the St. Lawrence River at Quebec in 1909, provided a notion for Cather's first novel *Alexander's Bridge* (Woodress 139).

As a former journalist, Cather realized that the use of facts in her literary writing lent credibility and made it believable, creating what her literary idol Henry James called "an air of reality" (35). While she criticizes Daniel Defoe in her essay on "The Fortunate Mistress" for being "a writer of ready invention but no imagination—with none of the personal attributes which, fused together somehow, make imagination" (*On Writing* 78), she praises his use of information gained first-hand in *Robinson Crusoe*:

The material for *Robinson Crusoe* Defoe came upon by chance—by one of those chances which are always happening to the born journalist. He met Alexander Selkirk at the house of a friend in Bristol, and got the story of the shipwrecked man's adventures from his own lips. Selkirk afterward declared that he had handed over his papers to this sympathetic listener. Defoe's literal method never worked out so well again as in *Robinson Crusoe*—at least not for readers of our time. (*On Writing* 76)

Although Cather might refute the term "born journalist" as applied to herself, she adhered to many journalistic conventions, including research and the gathering of facts, before undertaking a novel. Cather, like Defoe, also found some of her material by chance. In taking a new route to her Grand Manan retreat the summer of 1928, Cather and Lewis visited Quebec, and Cather fell in love with the city. "She was overwhelmed

by the flood of memory, recognition, surmise it called up; by the sense of its extraordinary French character, isolated and kept intact through hundreds of years, as if by a miracle, on this great un-French continent” (Lewis 153-154). While in Quebec, Cather turned to historical sources, such as Francis Parkman’s histories of Canada and other histories, which she later used as the framework for *Shadows on the Rock*. Merrill McGuire Skaggs writes that Cather “pounced on Parkman’s histories, with which she was already familiar, that she found in the Hotel Frontenac library.” Skaggs asserts that Cather mined Parkman’s histories and appropriated aspects of historical characters, images, events and themes in the novel. For example, Cather relied strongly on Parkman’s interpretation for her description of Jeanne Le Ber, and the image of Mother Juchereau telling stories while making artificial flowers is taken from Parkman’s record of the nuns of the Hotel-Dieu making artificial flowers for altars and shrines under Mother Jucherau’s direction (143, 148-49).

The “what” for *Death Comes for the Archbishop* was conceived through a combination of trips to the Southwest, an interest in the story of the Catholic Church and missionaries in the region, and the discovery of an historical source, a book of *The Life of the Right Reverend Joseph P. Machebeuf* by William Joseph Howlett, a priest who had worked with Machebeuf. The convergence of these actual experiences and accounts prompted Cather, a Protestant, to write about a subject that she had previously believed “was certainly the business of some Catholic writer, and not mine at all” (*On Writing* 7). Machebeuf’s biography, in particular, proved to be the key that nudged Cather into

writing about the Catholic Church and its missionaries in the Southwest. The author had known his subject from early youth and had obtained other information from Machebeuf's sister, who provided letters from Machebeuf about the details of his life in New Mexico. "Without these letters in Father Howlett's book to guide me, I would certainly never had dared to write my book. Of course, many of the incidents I used were experiences of my own, but in these letters I learned how experiences very similar to them affected Father Machebeuf and Father Lamy" (*On Writing* 8-9).

Cather also used her own journalistic writing as fodder for her fiction. An article published January 27, 1895, in the *Journal* comments on operatic singer Helena von Doehhoff's upcoming marriage and also foreshadows Thea Kronborg's single status in *The Song of the Lark*. "Not only is it true that married nightingales seldom sing, but this nightingale will even retire from the stage. She may wish to, but there are other contraltos in the world . . ." (*World and Parish* 176). A description of Thea in the dining car on her way from Chicago to Moonstone is similar to one Cather wrote in a July 20, 1901 column in the *Courier*. In the article, Cather describes a woman's story about a trip to Colorado and a subsequent railroad trip, complete with fresh linens and competent services. "After weeks of roughing it and wagon travel the sudden transition seemed to have something of the black art about it and seemed altogether unnatural. There were fresh white fish hundreds of miles from water and on the tables great bunches of La France roses, gathered from no man knew where in this brown windy sweep of blossomless lands" (*World and Parish* 838). In the dining car experience in *The Song of*

the Lark: “The linen was white and fresh, the darkies were trim and smiling, and the sunlight gleamed pleasantly upon the silver and glass water-bottles. On each table there was a slender vase with a single pink rose in it” (188). The column sums up Cather’s affection for western railroads and her admiration for men like Captain Forester in *A Lost Lady* who “dreamed the railroads across the mountains” (45).

A childhood picnic and the obituary notice for Lyra Garber spawned the “what” for *A Lost Lady*, and the death of a favorite cousin on a battlefield in France prompted *One of Ours*. Cather’s journalistic skills are evident in this novel; she interviewed a number of soldiers while writing it, and she fictionalized a real-life incident of an influenza epidemic on a troop ship and used this narrative as a transitional device to relocate Claude’s story from Nebraska to France. Lewis writes that while Cather was writing the novel in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, she came down with a severe case of the flu and was treated by a local physician. On one of his visits, she learned he had served on a troop ship during an influenza epidemic and had kept a diary of the ordeal. Cather borrowed the diary and from it she wrote “The Voyage of the Anchises” in *One of Ours*. Lewis adds that the physician later was relating his epidemic experience to a friend, who admonished the doctor, “That isn’t a true story. You took that from Willa Cather’s book!” (119). Here, Cather’s reportorial use of a factual source for fiction blurs the distinction between the two. The actual story in the doctor’s diary is transformed into Claude’s fictional wartime experience in the novel.

Although Cather won the Pulitzer Prize for *One of Ours*, critics and other writers panned her coverage and description of the war. When the action in the book moved into the combat scenes, Woodress writes Cather was “hopelessly out of her element,” and that Ernest Hemingway identified Claude’s death scene as a stereotype of the battle scene in *Birth of Nation*. “Catherized. Poor woman [,] she had to get her war experience somewhere” (193). Sinclair Lewis, asked to write a criticism of the novel for the *Literary Review* of the New York *Evening Post*, noted the introduction of the “great war is doubtful” (Lewis 121). More than half of the “what” of Cather’s focus in *One of Ours* is the unfulfilled life of a Nebraska farm boy, a topic the author had experienced first-hand, although from a female perspective. The other portion of the “what” focused on the war, a subject about which she had no first-hand experience, and this is where the negative criticism about the book is directed. Later critics, such as Stout, dispute the notion that war is essentially a masculine topic:

Such a narrow definition of war writing make no sense. Not when bombs and artillery shells fall on civilians far from the battlefield, but *war* includes a whole complex of social experiences, from the manufacture and delivery of material and the resulting shortages of domestic goods to the displacements suffered by the refugees to the medial and relief work required by families whose sons and daughters are wounded or killed. . . . War also entails moral and

intellectual dilemmas about which women are fully as qualified to write as men” (*Writer* 171).

Stout writes that an abundance of female characters makes *One of Ours* an unusual war novel, and she notes that Mahailey, a domestic servant, is the last voice heard in the novel.

The absence of immersion, or Cather’s lack of real-life battleground experience, contributes to the criticism of the novel. Norman Mailer writes that if you believe in fiction, all subjects are possible; however, he notes some topics present more obstructions than others. He identifies war as a more difficult subject for female writers because it is ‘essentially a male invention.’ However, he notes that women and men can write equally well about bravery because it’s in the realm of their experience. “In a certain sense, we all know this—we know what constitutes brave action. So a woman can certainly write about brave soldiers” (131-32). The notion that war was essentially a masculine subject was even more prevalent in 1922, when *One of Ours* was published. O’Brien writes that after completing the novel, Cather suffered the “critical attacks she half expected for venturing into such masculine territory” (384). However, the territory may not be as problematic as the fact that Cather had no real-life experience, no saturation, no immersion, no participation in or around the battleground during the actual war. She spoke with soldiers; she visited the battleground and her cousin’s grave, but as Sims asserted this resulted in “hanging around the edges” of the institution of war (*Literary Journalists* 3). Cather, due to limited access and because of gender, failed to penetrate

the institution. She fared better in her fiction when writing about the journalistic “what” within her realm of experience. These subjects include the Midwest and Southwest; cluttered houses and open spaces; art, theater, music, books, and drama; history and culture; and families and strong women—all subjects that fall within the journalistic scope of “Lifestyles and Entertainment” in the journalistic world.

The “why” in Cather’s literary writing is less tangible, as is often the case with journalistic writing when the result is evident at the time of the event, but the reason or cause cannot be explained until after the facts have been gathered, studied, reviewed. Cather gathers these facts for her readers, selects those she considers most pertinent, and then presents them as a whole to her readers. The conclusion is not foregone; Cather leads her readers, prods their memories to direct them, but she does not include a definitive “why.” Why did Alexandra stay and farm the land rather than sell out like her brothers? Why was Antonia’s life one to be envied? Why did a Midwestern farm boy enlist in the Army and die on a battlefield in France? Why did Thea Kronborg dedicate all her time and energy toward her musical career? Cather’s technique of simplification in her writing leaves space for readers to distill the “why” and form their own conclusions. Susan Rosowski writes about this experience in reading *A Lost Lady*:

While I am reading I am engaged on quite another level. I experience Marian Forrester; I help to create her. And in realizing this, I have come to believe that Cather’s achievement in *A Lost Lady* was that she did precisely what she set out to do. She wrote about the experience of the

thing and not the thing itself, the effect of Mrs. Forrester and not the character. (*Voyage Perilous* 116)

In reaching beyond the “why” of each story or novel, Cather’s overall purpose in her literary writing is the creation of art. In her essay, “On the Art of Fiction,” she explains that a process of simplification, “of sacrificing many conceptions good in themselves for one [. . .] better and more universal,” is necessary to write a “first-rate novel or story.” In seeking this universal concept, Cather insists the writer cannot compromise or give in to popular opinion or market demands. “Writing ought either to be the manufacture of stories for which there is a market demand—a business as safe and commendable as making soap or breakfast foods—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” (*On Writing* 103).

In the foreword to *On Writing*, titled “The Room Beyond,” Stephen Tennant writes about the core values exemplified in Cather’s work. Faithfulness, he notes, was her “preferred climate. Even when she is not dealing directly with loyalty or fine character, solidarity or honesty, she has a way of reminding us that these form the cornerstones of her spiritual edifice” (xiv-xv). Cather stood firm on these principles and used them in her earlier journalistic writing. In her columns and reviews she praised an actor or actress for that “old and deep knowledge” of the “few elemental facts of human life; or the use of the primary, universal themes of birth and death, love and hate; or the deep passion which

informed his art,” writes Slotte (*Kingdom of Art* 47). Cather insisted that the subject of art must be humanity. An artist’s subject should be the “fundamental, underlying forces of life” (*Kingdom of Art* 47-48). The “why” in Cather’s writing is based on these universal values, the basic themes of humanity recognized by all people. Universal themes are also components in journalistic writing, especially in feature writing, in which a writer or reporter may develop an article with such a focus to attract a widespread audience of readers. In an effort to be timely and fulfill market demand, the themes for these articles sometimes reflect what Cather calls “standardized values” or popular values within society or culture rather than “intrinsic” values. Other times, they may represent fundamental elements of mankind. For example, new technology articles may cater to human desire and have a universal appeal, but there is no intrinsic value. In contrast, stories about an actor or actress who perseveres despite some physical illness, or a soldier with no legs returning from war who starts his own business and supports his family, do exhibit these essential values.

Love for family, loyalty to friends, respect for the land—these core values and others are at the heart of Cather’s writing and compose the “why” of the story framework. Although strong female characters lend a sharp feminist perspective to her work, and other characters, such as Ivy Peters in *A Lost Lady* and Professor St. Peter’s son-in-law Louie Marsellus in *The Professor’s House*, offer comments on the power of money, society and American materialism, Woodress writes that Cather took a dim view of literature that had a message (123). Cather did not use the “why” as a springboard for

advocacy or reform. Other writers, such as Meridel Le Sueur, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Upton Sinclair and Jacob Riis, wrote about labor, unions, factory conditions, women's issues, the meat-packing industry and tenement slums in a direct effort to effect reform and change, but Cather, despite her apprenticeship at newspapers and affiliation with one of the most prominent muckraking magazines in the country, did not. Woodress writes that she was indifferent to politics (70), and Cather herself expresses disillusionment with social workers and reformers (*On Writing* 25). Cather's goal was not to reform or change society; her goal was to create art. Any leanings toward advocacy or public service in Cather's writing are transformed into a type of literary ideology, in which she addresses such issues as the exploitation of immigrant workers, class, anti-materialism and feminism, not for the purpose of reform but as a way to show a dominant culture's attempts to mold the values of its time and a subordinate group's strategies to subvert that power and exert its own. The components of muckraking, advocacy and ideology in Cather's writing will be addressed further in Chapter 3.

The sole "H" of the journalistic 5 W's and the H, the "how" of Cather's literary writing is generally based on Cather's vision of the elemental principles of life and the strength of the human spirit. How did Alexandra sustain herself as a pioneer in Nebraska, tame the land, and cope with the death of her brother Emil? She used intelligence, hard work, and accepted the reality of death as part of the cycle of life:

After you once get cold clear through, the feeling of the rain on you is sweet. It seems to bring back feelings you had when you were a baby.

[. . .] Maybe it's like that with the dead. If they feel anything at all, it's the old things, before they were born, that comfort people like the feeling of their own bed does when they are little. (*O Pioneers!* 156)

Cather's application of the journalistic "how" follows the same course in her other novels. How did Thea Kronborg, a small-town Midwestern girl, rise to become a well-known opera star in *The Song of the Lark*? The story is Cather's own fictionalized autobiography of becoming an artist, and she attributes Thea's success, and her own, to talent, hard work, dedication, perseverance, and the elimination of any diversions that might get in the way of attaining the status of artist, whether operatic or literary. How did a Bohemian immigrant girl become a heroine in a novel? Despite her status as an immigrant, poverty, and lack of English, she never loses the "fire of life" (*My Ántonia* 159). Humphries writes that Cather generally follows a Progressive path in defining American identity and culture as an ongoing process rather than a defined set of features: "From this perspective, immigrants do not assimilate to existing values but assist in shaping them (19-20). How did Rachel Blake prevent Martin Colbert's rape of the slave girl Nancy in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*? She did it through bravery and knowledge that slavery was wrong. Thinking about her mother's treatment of the slaves, Blake says, "No, it ain't put on; she believes in it, and they believe in it. But it ain't right" (900). At this point in the novel, Cather uses historical sources such as the Fugitive Slave Law and the Underground Railroad to provide a way for Blake to assist in Nancy's escape to the North and on to Canada.

Strength of the human spirit, bravery, perseverance—these were all traits that Cather admired, and she used them freely in her fiction to accommodate the “how” in her stories. The actual process, or “how” Cather wrote is a combination of both journalist and artist. She used the 5 W’s and the H as the framework, and she combined them, embellished them, and elaborated upon them with her imagination to create a stew of both fact and fiction with the ingredients still recognizable but simmered together to form a new entity. The recipe for this stew, or tips for aspiring literary writers can be found in Cather’s own writing. Present a scene by “suggestion rather than enumeration,” she advises young writers in “The Novel D  meubl  ” (*Not Under Forty* 48). The prescient notion anticipates literary journalism and the use of scenes but cautions against any extensive record keeping of everyday gestures, habits, manners, customs, styles of furniture, clothing or decoration that Wolfe suggests might be indicative of status of life. For Cather, selection is key; one habit, characteristic, or piece of jewelry is all readers might need to make their own discoveries. For example, in *A Lost Lady*, one of Cather’s least-furnished novels, she chooses to focus on Mrs. Forrester’s earrings during a dinner party. “A man bought them for his wife in acknowledgment of things he could not gracefully utter. They must be costly; they must show that he was able to buy them, and that she was worthy to wear them” (41-42). The economy of Cather’s writing, her ability to whittle a description down to basics, has its origins in journalistic reportage, and the acuity of her selection process reveals a sharp editor’s hand. She was willing to sacrifice good ideas, writing, and description for the best idea, writing, and description. “The

essence of such writing is not to hold the note, not to use an incident for all there is in it—but to touch and pass on” (*On Writing* 9).

Cather’s notions of suggestion and simplification leave gaps, or what Middleton labels “vacuoles” (11), in the text that require a reader to either know or supply the missing information. “Intrinsic to this approach to literature is the questions of reader manipulation,” writes Middleton (70). Woodress observed, “The trick was to make the reader’s consciousness supply the material suppressed and cut away” (201). Middleton suggests that Cather controls the response of a reader through four techniques: drawing on the common intellectual background that she assumes exists between herself and the reader; experimenting with the narrative point of view; incorporating “cinematic techniques,” which will increase the probability that the reader will “see” as she does; and using juxtaposition or the “side-by-side placement of any two elements of her work and the vacuole between them” to elicit an emotional response from the reader (71). The first three techniques share a commonality with literary journalism, but the fourth does not. A literary journalist is writing for a particular audience, whether mass market or niche, and must take into consideration the intellect and interests of that audience. Literary journalists are often participants in or spectators of events, and the point of view may vary accordingly. In addition, scene-setting, rather than a chronological retelling of the event, is a characteristic of literary journalism. Cather’s technique of using juxtaposition with gaps or vacuoles, however, deviates from journalistic writing. Any “holes,” or information missing in a journalistic article, must be filled or supplied so that readers do

not make assumptions or reach incorrect conclusions. Still, literary journalists strive for emotional responses in readers. In *The New Journalism*, Wolfe writes:

The most gifted writers are those who manipulate the memory sets of the readers in such a rich fashion that they create within the mind of the reader an entire world that resonates with the reader's real emotions. The events are merely taking place on the page, in print, but the emotions are real. Hence the unique feeling when one is absorbed in a certain book, "lost" in it. (49)

As many other writers do, Cather manipulates the mind sets of her readers through the use of symbolism, legends, and universal experiences. Images of gardens, snakes, blinded birds, cluttered houses, open spaces, fresh-baked cookies, *chile colorado*, light and shadows prod readers' memories and evoke emotional responses. Imaginative, creative, and artistic abilities are employed to achieve this manipulation, but Cather is bound by an insistence on reality. In "Light on Adobe Walls," an unpublished fragment included in *On Writing*, Cather concludes:

Every artist knows that there is no such thing as "freedom" in art. The first thing an artist does when he begins a new work is to lay down the barriers and limitations; he decides upon a certain composition, a certain key, a certain relation of creatures or objects to each other. He is never free, and the more splendid his imagination, the more

intense his feeling, the farther he goes from the general truth and general emotion. (123)

Cather was bound by reality—the facts of human life and universal themes of birth, death, love, and hate. Once her factual framework was established, she was free to elaborate or embellish, but she could never deviate too far from reality and the “general truth.” The limitations and boundaries Cather experienced in fiction writing were predicated on her journalistic background, her insistence on reality, her dependence on actual people and events for the 5 W’s and the H. In this respect, Cather shares a common bond with literary journalists, who are bound by the facts of a story but free to embellish through narrative voice and writing style.

CHAPTER 3: IDEOLOGY VERSUS MUCKRAKING

Although Cather worked approximately six years, much of this time as an editor, for S.S. McClure at a magazine known for its muckraking articles, the aspects of reform, advocacy, and public service are absent in both her journalistic and literary writing.

Woodress writes that Cather “must have wondered what she was doing there. She had absolutely no interest in muckraking, found social reformers very dull people, took the dimmest possible view of literature that had a message” (123). He adds she was “indifferent to politics” (70) and that William Jennings Bryan, a fellow Nebraskan whom she met on a streetcar in Lincoln, was the only politician she wrote about in an essay. She did, however, write an article for the *Courier* about President William McKinley’s visit to Pittsburgh to award prizes at the Founder’s Day exhibition of the Carnegie Institute Art Galleries (*World and Parish* 517), but in essence that article is more of a colorful, descriptive society feature than a political news piece. In assessing Cather’s literary art, Slote writes that it was not “a vehicle for the teaching of morality, for propaganda or reform, or for the giving of information” (*Kingdom of Art* 50).

Muckraking, however, was a vehicle for reform and change. This style of early twentieth-century investigative journalism was used by reporters who were willing to dig into “society’s muck” to uncover a story. *McClure’s* magazine specialized in articles on corporate, political, governmental, and institutional corruption, and other societal concerns, such as labor issues and lynching. Although she worked at *McClure’s*, Cather

did not write investigative articles or engage in advocacy journalism, a tradition that dates to the early days of the partisan press and features the reporter actively promoting a particular cause or viewpoint (*Campbell* 594). Her leanings toward advocacy journalism extended to support for literature, theater, and art, rather than political or societal concerns. However, others such as Nellie Bly, Ida Tarbell, Jacob Riis, and Upton Sinclair applied muckraking, which combined investigative reportage with narrative technique, to focus attention on societal issues that included conditions in slums, mental hospitals and other institutions, labor practices in factories and mines, unsanitary practices and fraudulent claims in the food and drug industries, and political, government, and corporate abuses of power. In some instances, the term muckraking is associated with Yellow Journalism, a form of sensational tabloid style of writing popular at the end of the nineteenth century when newspapers were vying for readers and circulation. Cather did score a national scoop with an interview of Adelaide Mould, a 17-year-old runaway actress with political ties, but she expressed her distaste for such reportage in a February 19, 1898 column in the *Courier*. “I don’t like that sort of business . . . You can’t do it with any shade of self-respect. It means trading in personalities. But this was an unusual case, and I felt I rather owed a trial at it to the chief. Then, of course, the prospect of such a ‘scoop’ was alluring. The men rather threw out a challenge and I took it up” (*World and Parish* 528).

Likewise, other journalists took up challenges. Bly feigned insanity, gained access as a patient, and exposed the poor conditions and treatment available to the

economically disadvantaged mentally ill in her “Ten Days in a Madhouse” series for the *New York World*. Her successful masquerades as marginalized women inspired imitators, writes Jean Marie Lutes who, along with other critics, labels these female writers “girl stunt reporters.” They “visited opium dens, joined workers who rolled tobacco for cigarettes, went begging on the streets in rags, sought illegal abortions and fainted on the street to gain admittance to public hospitals” (13). She adds that this type of reporting formed a lowbrow niche for women in newsrooms in the 1880s and 1890s. “While Bly and her followers were often scorned by more ‘traditional’ journalists (including well-known muckrakers such as Ida Tarbell), they were the first newspaper women to move, as a group, from the women’s pages to the front page, from society news into political and criminal news” (14). While Bly’s major series was sensational and targeted the poor conditions available to the less-affluent mentally ill at Blackwell’s Island asylum, Tarbell’s investigation of John D. Rockefeller’s business practices was fastidious and critiqued *The History of the Standard Oil Company*. Her famous investigation was published as a series in *McClure’s* magazine in 1902 and 1903 and issued as a book in 1904. Lutes writes: “Her early love of microscopes presaged her scrupulous attention to detail as a reporter; she rarely used the first person, scorned sensational tactics, and made a point of corroborating her personal observations by consulting other sources” (4).

Other writers and reporters used forms of muckraking and advocacy journalism to address needs for social change and reform. Ida B. Wells’s crusade against lynching began in the black press and extended to the white press after she substituted for Frederick

Douglass on a 1893 speaking tour of England, where her anti-lynching articles, *Southern Horrors* had been republished under the title *United States Atrocities: Lynch Laws* (Lutes 53). When American newspaper editors saw British news reports about Wells's lectures, they took notice of her crusade. She was hired by a white newspaper, the *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, to make a second tour of England, becoming the first African-American foreign correspondent for a daily newspaper in the United States (Lutes 54).

Meridel Le Sueur, whose journalistic writing spans a time frame about three decades after Wells, Bly, Tarbell, and Cather, covered such topics as strikes and labor issues, working conditions for women, unemployment and the drought in the Midwest, which incidentally affected Cather, too, whose literary financial success at this point in her life enabled her to make "generous gifts to a great many people: —old women out on Nebraska farms, her family, her friends" (Lewis 149). Le Sueur's journalism was far more political than Cather's columns on the arts and theatrical and book reviews.

Articles such as "I Was Marching," an account of her participation and immersion in the Minneapolis truckers' strike of 1934, and "Women on the Breadlines" evoked a special kind of reportage, "journalism with a perspective," developed by the Left in the 1930s. This "three-dimensional reporting," much like the new journalism of the 1960s and 1970s, was intended to make readers see and feel the event (Le Sueur 10). Le Sueur's articles were called both reportage and fiction, and many were published in *New Masses*, an American Marxist magazine, and *The American Mercury*, which originated as a literary magazine whose primary emphasis soon became non-fiction and satirical essays,

rather than the mainstream press (135). Le Sueur, who was blacklisted as a communist during the McCarthy era, also wrote experimental prose, novels, and children's books, in which she interwove history and regional lore. Unlike Cather's journalistic writing, much of Le Sueur's reportage had a sense of political urgency. However, some of Le Sueur's prose subjects, particularly immigrants and strong women, share a commonality with the characters in Cather's fiction.

In the traditional sense, Cather's newspaper and magazine writing was not investigative reportage or muckraking, nor was it advocacy journalism, designed to sway mass readership to a particular view or to effect social change. However, viewed in retrospect and as a body of work, her columns and reviews present a cultural and historical portrait of music, theater, literature, and art of the time. Likewise, her fiction was not directly aimed at immediate political or social reform. Instead, any leanings toward advocacy or public service in Cather's writing are transformed into a type of literary ideology, in which she addresses such issues as the exploitation of immigrant workers, class, materialism, and feminism to illustrate the relationships between dominant and subordinate groups in American culture. Rosowski writes:

Critics have long considered Cather an apolitical writer, and certainly she did not write to effect specific social change. She was intensely concerned with the ways in which ideologies are codified, however: a dominant culture attempts to mold the values of its time; a subordinate culture attempts to subvert that power and assert its own.

In this broad sense Cather was political throughout her writing and especially in her last two novels, *Lucy Gayheart* and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. In both [. . .] Cather came full circle, writing devastating critiques of the cultural myths central to women's economic, social, and political lives: in one book, a critique of salvation through courtship and coupling; in the other, of salvation through motherly love. ("Subverted Endings" 84)

In essence, the ideologies expressed in Cather's fiction are offered as critiques of American society and its values rather than direct propagandist tools to effect change. There is no overt political or societal urgency in Cather's writing, no call for immediate reform or change and, with the possible exception of Ivy Peters blinding the woodpecker in *A Lost Lady*, no "shock value" scenes to coerce a reader into taking some action. Instead, there is a sense of nostalgia and a yearning for the past and a return to traditional values or the core values of faithfulness, loyalty, fine character, solidarity, and honesty identified by Tennant in his foreword to *On Writing* (xiv-xv). Cather uses symbolism rather than sensationalism or muckraking in her writing to embrace these ideologies. Instead of delving into the "muck" of society to reveal and expose society's ills and political and corporate corruption for the purpose of reform, Cather used her power of observation and keen descriptive skills for a self-imposed, loftier goal—the creation of art. Her fiction writing focuses on creating an aesthetically satisfying whole for her readers

rather than promoting a particular cause to the mass public. Instead of using reality for reform, she *re-imagined* reality for art.

Cather herself decried the use of fiction for reform, claiming that the “method of the pamphleteers” should be used. “Only by that method can these subjects be seriously and fairly discussed,” she writes. “And the people who are able to do anything toward improving such conditions will read only such a discussion: they will take little account of facts presented in a coating of stock cinema situations” (*Not Under Forty* 23). She continues:

When I first lived in New York and was working on the editorial staff of a magazine, I became disillusioned about social workers and reformers. So many of them, when they brought in an article on fire-trap tenements or sweat-shop labour, apologetically explained that they were making these investigations “to collect material for fiction.” I couldn’t believe that any honest welfare worker, or any honest novelist, went to work in this way. The man who wants to get reforms put through does his investigating in a very different spirit, and the man who has a true vocation for imaginative writing doesn’t have to go hunting among the ash cans on Sullivan Street for his material. (23-24)

It’s obvious that Cather’s intentions in her fiction writing were not directed toward reform. However, ideologies emerge in her fiction that critique American society

and culture in a way that encourages her readers to think rather than take action. In particular, the journalistic “who, where and when” of Cather’s writing—most notably pioneers, the Midwest, and the turn of the twentieth century—offer a historical portrait of the dominant culture in America and its relationships with subcultures. This picture is much like the mixture of reportage and narrative the new journalists offer sixty years later. While Cather did not write directly to effect social change, she offers views and scenes of dominant culture that address immigrant workers, class issues, industrialization, materialism, and feminism. These views include depictions of strong female characters, such as Alexandra in *Oh Pioneers!* and Thea Kronborg in *The Song of the Lark*, who can prevail outside the traditional domestic sphere; the immigrant Antonia cast as the central character in a novel; and comments on the destructive power of money and society in *One of Ours*, *A Lost Lady*, and *The Professor’s House*. These portraits and scenes enlist an ideology rather than a plea for advocacy or reform. For example, early in *The Professor’s House*, Louie Marsellus describes the magnificent Norwegian manor house he and his wife are building with monies inherited by Rosamond from her deceased fiance Tom Outland, who discovered a vacuum that revolutionized the aviation industry. After explaining that Outland was killed in Flanders while fighting with the Foreign Legion, Marcellus notes: “He had no time to communicate his discovery or to commercialize it—simply bolted to the front and left the most important discover of his time to take care of itself. [. . .] Outland got nothing out of it but death and glory. [. . .] Our house we want to have as a sort of memorial to him. [. . .] at Outland they will find his books and

instruments, all the sources of his inspiration.” To which his brother-in-law murmurs, “even Rosamond” (41-42). Here, Cather juxtaposes the values of originality and honor with commercialization and materialism to show her readers the influence of a dominant culture rather than telling them about it. While she is not prompting direct action, reform, or response to American materialism, she is much like literary journalists of the 1960s and 1970s who covered civil rights issues and anti-war rallies, and provided an ideological lens to view interrelationships between the dominant culture and subordinate groups.

The relationships and subjects Cather addresses include those in which she has been immersed and has experienced or observed conflict: gender and feminism, immigration and class, industrialism, and materialism. Issues of gender and feminism posed conflicts for Cather in terms of her own personal identity and also as a female journalist and novelist. O’Brien, Stout, Hermione Lee, and others have addressed Cather’s lesbianism and its influence on her life and writing, and Woodress, Slote, Byrne and Snyder, and others write about the conflicts she experienced working in the male-dominated journalism profession. As a girl growing up in Nebraska she was privy to the treatment of immigrants and conscious of class status regarding founders and owners of railroads, workers, shopkeepers, and farmers. While working in Pittsburgh, the hierarchies of class and economic status and the divisions between Presbyteria and Bohemia, i.e. religion and art, became clearer as she was introduced to the world of the Carnegies, Fricks, and Mellons. Cather’s notion that the world “broke in two in 1922 or

thereabouts” (*Not Under Forty* v) sets the tone for her ideology and thoughts on industrialism and materialism in American culture. She preferred the past to the modern and the simple to the complex. She was conflicted by these issues, and her resolutions emerge as ideologies in her writing. Stout writes: “Her popular audience [. . .] seems to have valued her chiefly as a voice of reassurance, a writer who holds up in affirmation a sturdier, more wholesome America than our own” (*Writer* xi). The critic adds she sees Cather as a “deeply conflicted writer [. . .] who *therefore* structured her writing in such ways as to control her uncertainty and project a serenity she did not, in fact, feel” (xi). Rather than urging reform, Cather offers reassurance: The core values of humanity—honesty, faithfulness, diligence, and truth—may not always prevail, but they are idealized in Cather’s world.

The strong female characters and feminist leanings in Cather’s novels can be viewed as a reconciliation of her personal and professional conflicts with gender that can be traced to her early years in journalism. Cather’s adolescent adoption of male dress and other modes of self-presentation are detailed by numerous critics. While O’Brien identifies this gestures as a sign of Cather’s emerging lesbianism, Stout views these as the markings of a New Woman of the late nineteenth century, who sought education, careers, and suffrage, although Cather never became active in the suffrage movement (30). In an effort to separate and distinguish herself, Cather set herself apart from female stereotypes in her mode of dress and also by employing anti-woman rhetoric in her early writing. In her October 28, 1894 column in the *Journal*, she attacked female literary clubs by chiding

their efforts at “self-improvement” through studies that did not “mix well with tea and muffins” (*World and Parish* 115). Stout writes that one of her columns about women writers is quoted so often that it is sometimes “taken as the essence of her literary judgment” (39). In “The Demands of Art,” Cather writes:

I have not much faith in women in fiction. They have a sort of sex consciousness that is abominable [. . .] . There are so few, the ones who really did anything worth while; there were the great Georges, George Eliot and George Sand, and they were anything but women, and there was Miss Bronte who kept her sentimentality under control, and there was Jane Austen who certainly had more common sense than any of them and was in some respects the greatest of them all. Women are so horribly subjective and they have such scorn for the healthy commonplace. When a woman writes a story of adventure, a stout sea tale, a manly battle yarn, anything without wine, women and love, then I will begin to hope for something great from them, not before. (*Kingdom of Art* 409)

From a literary angle, this early critique can be viewed as disparaging to female novelists, but considering Cather’s dogged insistence on reality and her journalistic background, it can be interpreted differently. Objectivity and fact-based reportage are goals of journalistic writing. In this essay, when Cather derides women’s subjectivity and scorn for the ordinary, she may not be imposing a masculine viewpoint; it may be a journalistic

observation based on her background and the principles of objective, fact-based writing. O'Brien writes that Cather's early journalism "shows her retelling patriarchal myths and reinforcing the stereotypes that denied women individuality, complexity, and power" (125), but it can be argued that Cather was supporting journalistic principles and continued to use principles and tools from this field that worked to her advantage as a literary writer. In fact, she employed many of the tools of a literary journalist—immersion, fact and reality, description, scene-setting—to break the stereotypical roles of women with characters such as Alexandria, Antonia, Thea, and both Mrs. Blake and Nancy in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. O'Brien writes that Cather began to resolve her beginning writer's conflict between gender and vocation during her years in Pittsburgh. "Her success in the male world of journalism strengthened her separation from her mother and the feminine role she embodies, and this process, supported by her love for Isabelle McClung, in turn made it easier to attribute positive values to female experience, to risk self-exposure in her fiction, and to create more complex and sympathetic women characters" (219).

During her last two years of college and through most of her twenties, Cather earned her living as a reviewer and theater critic, and her journalism was primarily concerned with theater and the arts. Stout writes that the performance of gender is at the center of Cather's journalism and that by writing about women's roles as performing artists, Cather continued a process of self-definition. "We should read her theater reviews in particular, then as serving a wider range of needs and purposes than merely that of

fulfilling an assignment. They are directly pertinent to her thinking about women writers and women's writings" (*Writer* 58-59).

The scene in *The Song of the Lark*—based on a real-life meeting between Cather and opera singer Olive Fremsted—in which a fatigued Thea finds the strength to summon a brilliant performance, offers a conclusive resolution in terms of commitment to art for both the character and the author. This novel, often viewed as a veiled autobiography of Cather's own artistic struggles and sense of identity, is preceded by earlier journalistic writings in which Cather examines the roles of gender and feminism in terms of performance. In some of these theater reviews and columns and in common with the forgoing quote about women in fiction, she eschews sentimentality in the performances, opting instead for a sense of reality. She also frequently uses the word "power" to describe some positive aspect of an actress's performance.

In a February 7, 1894 article in the *Journal* about the performances of husband-and-wife actors, William and Madge Kendal in *The Ironmaster*, Cather invokes the concepts of realism and power in describing Mrs. Kendal's performance. "Her rendering of emotional roles is like that of no other living actress [. . .]. She had none of their jarring exaggerations; her vehemence is all softened by grace; her realism is of the sort that prefers to see beautiful truths . . . She combines the gentleness and sweetness which make Modjeska universally beloved, and the power and passion which make Clara Morris fearfully and horridly great" (*World and Parish* 34). Cather employs the same concepts in a cutting critique of Julia Marlowe published March 4, 1894 in the *Journal*. "Miss

Marlowe is the embodiment of beauty and good taste and good spirits, and she is very little more. On the stage she lives too beautifully to live very hard, dies too gracefully to die very effectively. This is all very winning and beautiful, but it is not the highest kind of art. The greatest art in acting is not to please and charm and delight, but to move and thrill; not to play a part daintily or delightfully, but with power and passion” (*World and Parish* 36-37). The themes of power and passion reverberate throughout Cather’s theater reviews, and she repeatedly casts forms of sentimentality in a negative light. In a March 4, 1894 *Journal* review of Sarah Bernhardt’s new play *Izeyl*, she writes: She is never sentimental, it is all too sudden, too unrestrained, too violent for that. Her bursts of passion blind one by their vividness. Afterward you cannot remember how she looked or what she did. It is like lightning, gone before you see enough of it, and indescribable in its brilliancy” (*World and Parish* 39).

These examples are glimmers and indications of Cather’s thoughts about women, their identities and roles, and their performances in both the theater and in American culture. It is clear, even in these early journalistic writings, what feminine characteristics Cather valued and sought—passion and power. Although she is reviewing the actresses’s work, it is evident that Cather also values a sense of reality in these performances. She takes these characteristics and elaborates on them in her novels, developing strong female protagonists such as Alexandra and Antonia from the basis of their real-life counterparts.

Cather’s women, particularly in her early novel, tend to be “doers,” writes Marilee Lindemann (ix). She inserts these female protagonists into a quasi-Western genre

dominated by masculine characters, but she doesn't simply feminize the stories as she accuses Elizabeth Cady Stanton and co-editors of the *Women's Bible* of doing in an April 8, 1898 book review in the *Pittsburgh Leader*. "Ruth, Deborah, Bath-sheba and Esther are each taken up and idealized and romanced about and fondled and wept over, much as Juliet and Rosalind are in Mrs. Jamison's book on the *Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines*." In particular, the journalist Cather finds fault in the research methods and factuality of the revised text. "Theologians have not ceased to marvel at the temerity of these estimable ladies, who, without scholarship, without linguistic attainments, without theological training, not even able to read the Bible in the original tongues, set themselves upon a task which has baffled the ripest scholarship and most profound learning. [. . .] Most of the remarks about these Hebrew ladies are entirely without actual foundation and frequently irrelevant" (*World and Parish* 539). Stanton and her co-editors were attempting to expunge sexism from the Bible by challenging religion's representations of the feminine, and Cather's book review at first may appear as a tirade against these feminists. However, Cather is not taking a masculine role in critiquing the *Women's Bible*, she's taking a journalistic position in questioning the credibility of the work. Francesca Sawaya writes that Cather insisted on professional authority as a means to stabilize the opposition between domesticity and professionalism (16-17). In essence, Cather isn't attacking feminists, she is guarding the integrity of her profession. However, this adherence to journalistic codes, traditionally associated with a male-dominated field, tends to be misinterpreted. In writing about Cather and Tarbell, Sayawa asserts: "These

women's claims to professional authority are undermined by their own construction of their expertise, demonstrating how professionalism for women could as much reinforce the status quo as undermine it" (17).

Cather held fast to her professional and journalistic standards in both her reportage and literary writing. Her female protagonists are based on factual foundations and personal observations. As Lindemann writes, Cather inserted female characters into the traditionally male plots of doing and becoming (viii), but she did it by adhering to facts and information gained through immersion and observation, thereby embodying the works with credibility and a sense of reality. Cather situates *Oh Pioneers!* within the historical and economic transitions that occurred following the Civil War when railroads provided transportation for marketable goods from East to West. Alexandra's entrepreneurial success parallels that of the railroads. Her intelligence and willingness to take risks leads to her success. In addition, Cather's critique of the romance plot in the novel ensure her protagonist's sense of self-identity. Alexandra did not become a successful, wealthy landowner through marriage.

Antonia is a different type of heroine, one who remains more in touch with the domestic sphere than Alexandra. Cather uses a mythic, earth-mother approach with Antonia who, like Alexandra, must cope with her father's early death and learn to farm a hard, unsympathetic land. Antonia is also a "doer" but one who undertakes difficult, physical work rather than managerial work. "Oh, better I like to work out of doors than in a house! . . . I care not that your grandmother say it makes me like a man. I like to be

like a man” (*My Ántonia* 68). Ántonia successfully crosses between the feminine and masculine spheres throughout the novel, but Cather guides her to the domestic realm at the conclusion in a gender-balancing move that signifies something Cather may have observed by reviewing theatrical performances: people’s abilities and natures suit them for different roles. At the conclusion of the novel, Jim Burden and Willa Cather make this assessment: “As I confronted her, the change grew less apparent to me, her identity stronger. She was there, in the full vigor of her personality, battered but not diminished” (*My Ántonia* 157).

O’Brien calls *The Song of the Lark* Cather’s “novel celebrating her own birth as an artist” (157). She adds that in the autobiographical first section of the novel, Cather describes the acquisition of her own bedroom as “the beginning of a new era in Thea’s life” (53). The small, unplastered, slope-ceilinged room provided Thea (and Cather) a place to find her own voice. In the novel, Cather allows Thea to make a decisive choice for art and rewards her with success, but the achievement is based on Thea’s intelligence, talent, hard work and dedication, rather than luck or status, and it doesn’t come without sacrifice, especially in terms of finding time to spend with her family or time for a personal life. After Thea’s father died, her mother went into a decline and expressed a wish to see her daughter again. Dr. Archie wrote a letter to which Thea replied: “She wanted to go to her mother more than she wanted anything else in the world, but, unless she failed, –which she would not, –she absolutely could not leave Dresden for six months. It was not that she chose to stay; she had to stay–or lose everything” (342).

Lindemann writes that Thea is “both shrewd and exceedingly disciplined in her management of her life and career. She takes advantage of opportunities that come her way and holds out for a big contract [. . .] having calculated that in a consumer culture in which her voice is a commodity as well as an art, ‘anything good is—expensive’” (ix). Cather, too, took advantages of opportunities that came her way, including the chance to examine the roles and performances of women in her journalistic work. At the conclusion of *The Song of the Lark*, Aunt Tillie picks up a newspaper. “In the Sunday paper there was always a page about singers, even in summer, and that week the musical page began with a sympathetic account of Madame Kronborg’s first performance of *Isolde* in London. At the end of the notice, there was a short paragraph about her having sung for the King at Buckingham Palace and having been presented with a jewel by His Majesty” (414).

Gender and journalism also play a role in Cather’s endings. Rosowski asserts that Cather’s endings “made dramatic the contrast between two principles with which she worked. One was that of linearity, a story organized by a beginning, a middle and an ending and emblematic of a traditional and often patriarchal order; the other was that of simultaneity, with its assumption of symbolism and its positing of alternatives to tradition by creating a new and often female order” (“Subverted Endings” 68). She adds that Cather identified men with progress, change, linear time and an “ending determined imagination,” and she identified women with mythic continuities (75).

The concept of continuity also exists in journalistic writing in which news reports are perceived as historical records of events. Writing about nonfiction novels and noting that he's not specifically dealing with "closure" in the fictive novel, Mas'ud Zavarzadeh asserts: "Any ending in such narratives will be to a certain degree 'false,' since an ending is an arbitrary and artificial but required imposition of a medium on the uninterrupted flow of life, whose movements the nonfiction novel follows" (124). More simply put, any ending is false because life, society, and culture is continuous. The basic format for a journalistic news story, the inverted pyramid, avoids a linear presentation that builds to a climax or ending and presents the important news first. While articles may end with the least important fact, there are two other formats for ending articles that exhibit continuities—the circular ending, which refers to the lead or beginning of the article, and the future ending, which indicates the next step or phase in terms of action, time, or direction. *A Lost Lady* features a circular ending; the novel begins with a description of Sweet Water and concludes with Niel revisiting the railroad town. In *Oh Pioneers!* Cather uses a future ending. After the trials of establishing herself as a successful businesswoman and farmer and the murder of her brother, Alexandra reunites with and agrees to marry Carl Linstrum. Although Woodress cites the ending as an example of Cather's romanticism (159), it's not exactly a fairytale ending: "I think when friends marry, they are safe. We don't suffer like—those young ones. Alexandra ended with a sigh." There is, however, a sense of continuity that Alexandra will forge

ahead and the country will go on “in the yellow wheat, in the rustling corn, in the shining eyes of youth!” (170).

Cather replaced heroes with heroines in traditional male plots, establishing a feminist ideology in her fiction, and she also inserted immigrants, most notably *Antonia*, as protagonists and ancillary characters in her early novels, establishing them as a subculture with the potential to shape society and culture during the agricultural era. Rosowski has written that Cather was “the first to give immigrants heroic stature in serious American literature (*Voyage* 45). The statement holds merit, but this selective and sympathetic vision of immigrants in Cather’s Nebraska novels dissipates in her later life and works. While in a 1921 speech, she criticized the English-only policy in the United States (Stout, *Writer* 118), in the 1930s she was complaining about the influx of immigrants in her private letters (Stout, *Writer* 162). When Cather writes “the world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts” (*Not Under Forty* v), it marks a transition between the agricultural era and the industrial age and a transition in Cather’s ideology about immigrants. A possible explanation for this is that Cather wrote from the perspective of a literary journalist immersed in these two time periods, a participant who reported her perspective of an event or time. Much like the new journalists, Cather often wrote about people, events, and times that she observed first-hand. In her early years, she observed an agricultural society in which immigrants labored to establish America and themselves as productive citizens of the country; in later years, she observed an industrial society,

increasing commercialism and materialism and an accompanying influx of foreigners eager to reap financial benefits.

Growing up in a Midwestern railroad town, Cather observed the influence the immigrant subculture exerted on the country, and she was aware of the prejudices it endured. She addressed an unlikely literary subject in *O Pioneers!* She wrote about Nebraska farmers, and they weren't only farmers; they were Swedes. "At that time, 1912, the Swede had never appeared on the printed page in this country except in broadly humorous sketches, and the humour was based on two peculiarities: his physical strength, and his inability to pronounce the letter 'j'" (*On Writing* 95).

Her use of immigrants in novels not only coincides with an influx of foreigners seeking work and new lives in the United States, it also follows the evolution of newspapers, the penny press era and a rise of literacy in the United States, particularly in the middle and lower classes. By the late 1820s, newspapers cost six cents a copy and were sold through yearly subscriptions of \$10 to \$12, figures representing a week's salary for most skilled workers. As a result, most newspaper readers at this time were affluent. Cheaper paper, increased literacy, and technological breakthroughs allowed penny papers to flourish along with middle- and working-class readership (Campbell 273). Cather stresses the importance of literacy and its extension to those less-affluent, especially immigrants, in *My Ántonia* when she has Mr. Shimerda take a bilingual book from his pocket and show it to Jim Burden. "He placed this book in my grandmother's hands,

looked at her entreatingly, and said with an earnestness which I shall never forget, ‘Te-e-ach, te-e-ach my *Ántonia!*’ (16).

Critics, however, point out the vision of American inclusiveness in *My Ántonia* may not be as simple as it appears. Stout writes that Cather’s sympathetic attitude toward immigrants was extended within a selective range of ethnic origins and a hierarchal vision of them as a lower class who held menial positions of labor. The immigrants were present and liked, but they were not considered equal (*Writer* 161-62). For example, men in the town have convenient sex with immigrant girls, but they marry the local girls. Jim and his grandparents like the Shimerdas, but they still approach them as “others.” “My grandmother always spoke in a very loud tone to foreigners, as if they were deaf” (*My Ántonia* 14). And although Jim tells *Ántonia* he would have liked to have her as a sweetheart, he leaves for the university and an upper-middle-class lifestyle at the first opportunity. “His statement that she is ‘really . . . a part of me’ is America’s assertion of its (selective) absorption of European peoples in the melting-pot process that denied their separate identities and value” (Stout 162). Stout also notes that the “shadow of the displaced Indian” falls across Cather’s Midwestern and Southwestern novels; the ethnic group had a large presence in the region. “To ignore them and to ignore the history of their displacement in novels that avow their historical foundation is a major distortion” (Stout, *Writer* 157).

Humphries establishes a relationship between Cather’s journalism and immigration by tracing the transformative potential of each. In Cather’s early work, he

finds that she depicts journalists and immigrants as positive influences on popular taste and culture, and in her later work, he writes that she depicts journalism as a form of advertising and immigrants as narrow-mindedly pursuing financial success. “She addresses the larger question of whether American culture should be seen as an inclusive enterprise characterized by a sense of possibility or as a closed marketplace already bound by existing values” (13).

Cather’s warmth for immigrants in her early novels cools in her later ones, and Stout identifies journalistic and historical influences that may have contributed to the ideological deviation. While working as managing editor at *McClure’s Magazine*, she either acceded to or actively participated in a series of articles written by fellow editor George Kibbe Turner, which expressed hostility toward certain immigrant groups, specifically Italians and Jews. In writing a muckraking article on urban corruption, Turner repeatedly targeted Italians and Jews. He identified Italians as a cause of social disorder and named Jews as the organizers of prostitution in New York. Stout, who cites McClure as an unlikely proponent of exclusionist policies due to his Irish background, adds that the November 1909 issue of the magazine featured an editorial diatribe of ethnic hostility carrying his byline. Noting that Cather often spoke for McClure and that she assumed his voice in ghostwriting his autobiography, the critic writes that it is possible Cather either wrote or edited the article. A cautiousness about “foreigners” invading American society and culture also affected Cather’s position on immigration. Stout writes that both McClure and Cather became active in the public outcry that resulted in

the Johnson-Reed Act, or Immigration Act of 1924, a law that ended unrestricted European immigration and excluded most Asian immigrants. The uncertainty over national security during World War I made it possible for Congress to pass this act. The war fervor also provided an incentive to Cather to de-emphasize Germans in her portrayal of the Nebraska landscape (*Writer* 156).

Humphries writes that Cather follows a Progressive stance in her vision of American culture and identity as “an ongoing process rather than a defined set of features [. . .] . From this perspective immigrants do not assimilate to existing values but assist in shaping them” (19-20). This idea, combined with Cather’s concept of the world splitting in two, lends itself to an evolving view on immigrants but does not explain the shift in her ideology. If, however, Cather is viewed as a literary journalist and her writing is examined as a type of fictionalized reportage of a particular time and event, the changes in her position fit the context of the times and serve as an illustration of contemporary politics and the debate over immigration. Stout writes that Jim Burden is drawn to immigrants through commonalities; they are both newcomers and they are also white— “a term that then meant not only not-black, but also not-Italian, not-Asian, not-Jewish. Besides reflecting personal memories, Cather’s tributes to Nebraska’s immigrants reflect fairly accurately the prevailing preferences in the United States at the time at which she was writing” (*Writer* 154).

Just as new journalists’ reports during the civil rights and Vietnam War era present the writers’ views of the events at that specific time, Cather’s writing—both early

and later—present her vision of those regions and periods. In rural Nebraska, she observed displaced immigrants, associated them with herself, and awarded them status in her literary writing. In an industrial society, such as Pittsburgh, Cather's vision changes along with the setting. In "Pittsburgh's Mulberry Street," an article intended to remind readers of the works of Jacob A. Riis who portrayed the downtrodden of New York, Cather, writing under the pseudonym of Henry Nickelmann, describes the people in the urban setting:

On the day that I took possession of my quarters, a colored preacher's wife had a dispute with a female lodger as to whether the rent was or was not due, and bit off the lobe of the woman's ear. [. . .] I took good care to be deferential to my Italian landlady. [. . .] I was awakened every morning by the heavy groans of the master of the house. He was an Italian stone mason, and it took half an hour of sleepy profanity to get him awake. As soon as he was dressed [. . .] he took a heavy drink of whisky, nearly twice as much as an ordinary whisky glass holds. [. . .] Such breakfasts as those people eat! Fried meats of every sort, onions and potatoes and chunks of rye bread. (*World and Parish* 870)

The stereotypes continue in the article, which was published December 8, 1901 in the *Pittsburgh Gazette*, well before the 1913 publication of *O Pioneers!* and the 1918 publication of *My Ántonia*. Cather describes women at the market as "most likely to be

Hebrews or Negroes; if neither, then they are sure to be either Italian or German.” She describes a “Hebrew” butcher’s wife who weighed three hundred pounds and “could eat five pounds of raw beefsteak for breakfast any morning” and “colored women [. . .] exceedingly informal about their dress” (*World and Parish* 872-873).

Cather’s ideology on immigration fluctuates based on her observation, experience, and immersion with different ethnic groups. In the rural Nebraska landscape, she finds commonality with select immigrants and advocates melting pot America; in urban, industrial settings, she finds differences and employs stereotypes that correspond. In *The Professor’s House*, she contrasts the two with Tom Outland, a self-made American entrepreneur and inventor, and Louie Marsellus, a Jewish industrialist who arrives on the scene after Outland’s death, marries his fiancé, and develops the vacuum Outland patented. Outland is portrayed as the hard-working, principled American, and Marsellus appears as an outsider and opportunist who benefits from Outland’s efforts simply by his arrival on the landscape. Cather, working from an experiential perspective much like a literary journalist participating or immersing himself or herself in a news event, sees herself as the hard-working American. Her attitudes and ideology about immigration fluctuate with her experience and the debate on the issue in the United States. Overall, her early and later writing, both journalistic and literary, is a mirror of the conflict of immigration existing during her lifetime, a conflict that continues to exist in the changing American landscape.

Cather's social vision also exhibits conflicting hierarchies. Stout writes: "Raising questions of whose America this is, both politically and in the sense of actual possession or ownership, she seems to give generally conservative answers. Yet the frequency with which her fiction leads us to these questions indicates that she was herself uncomfortable with such answers" (*Writer* 222). The critic notes that in *A Lost Lady*, Cather presents a vision of "white America controlled by a stable upper middle class, at the moment of its lapse into instability." In the hierarchal structure, the Forresters are at the top as long as they have money. She writes that the lower middle classes exemplify the volatility of American society and its definition by external material possessions, but she notes that Cather's attitude isn't entirely negative because it includes the notion of "possibilities the unstable American system affords for the rise of the exceptional" (222-23).

In the Midwest, Cather observed an agricultural society and the effects of the railroad boom, and in Pittsburgh, she experienced an industrial society impacted by steel manufacturing, big business, and the domination of wealthy men named Frick, Carnegie, Mellon, and Westinghouse. This mass of wealth in the hands of a few men also posed conflict for Cather because portions of this money were being used to make the city a cultural center and to promote a theatrical and artistic environment. The city was being endowed with concert halls and libraries. Cather writes: "Everything 'swell' here is called either 'Duquesne' or 'Carnegie'—clubs, theatres, parks, lakes, hotels, everything that is big and expensive" (*World and Parish* 505). However, four years later, while Cather was on a break from teaching in Pittsburgh, visiting Red Cloud, and serving as

guest editor for the *Courier*, she writes that the clubs and libraries established to benefit steelworkers are almost absurdities. She writes that the library building, which includes a music hall, gym, billiard and smoking rooms is “full of good things that no one has leisure to enjoy” (*World and Parish* 856). In editorial columns about the steelworkers strike at Homestead published in August 1901, she writes that the average mill man works twelve-hours shifts and “wants no music or books or athletics, but all the sleep he can get before four-thirty the next morning” (*World and Parish* 856).

Cather, who visited Homestead in March of 1898, describes the town, its inhabitants, and the social hierarchy in the columns. She notes that Homestead is “neglected and unlovely in appearance, like most manufacturing towns, and the residences are built to eat and sleep in rather than to live in.” She notes that the skilled workmen—chemists, testers, draftsmen—are paid well and enjoy a higher standard of living than unskilled laborers. Most of the men work twelve-hour shifts; and if they need to take a day off for a marriage or funeral, they ask a “buddy” on the following shift to work for them. “There are plenty of cases on record where a substitute has stood his ground for sixty-four hours without sleep and with few breathing spells. It would seem that Mr. Carnegie’s sense of humor must be deficient when he supplies Herbert Spencer and Wagner for these men” writes Cather (*World and Parish* 856-857). She adds that the most objectionable aspect of the steel town is “Pottersville,” an area comprised of sixty or seventy hovels that served as dwellings for nearly two thousand mill workers—“Huns, Slavs, Poles, Poles, Italians, Russians and Negroes [. . .] . One six-room boarding house

reported seventy inmates, some of the rooms accommodating twenty lodgers. This, of course, is only made possible by the twelve-hour shift system. Every bed does double duty [. . .] . As soon as one set of men get up and go to work, another set, tired and dirty, creep into the same sheets and go to sleep” (857).

These columns could be considered muckraking; however, they were not published in Pittsburgh but in Nebraska, where readers would be interested in the events but not affected so much by the political or social urgency of them that they would be compelled to take action. If published in Pittsburgh, such reports could be detrimental to a newspaper’s circulation and advertisement-based commercial interests. Theodore Dreiser, who worked as a reporter in the city for six months in 1894, describes one editor as “an excellent judge of news [. . .] plainly holding his job not so much by reason of what he put into this paper as by what he kept out of it [. . .] there was a necessity for conservatism here which was not common to at least some papers in most other cities” (*Newspaper Days* 495). He quotes one business reporter: “The papers won’t use a thing unfavorable to the magnates in any of these fields. They won’t even publish all the news if you give it to them, especially where it’s favorable to the miners or workers” (508).

Cather’s writing exhibits contradictions and an apparent conflict with the social structure, and much of this is observed through the eyes of a middle-class literary journalist. She has the professional mobility to both ascend and descend the hierarchal social structure and to present a record of her observations. On a firsthand basis, she benefitted from cultural resources the steel magnates bestowed on Pittsburgh; and on a

firsthand basis, she saw the poor economic conditions of the lower classes who contributed the backbreaking labor that made the existence of these libraries, music halls, and museums possible. Thea Kronborg in *The Song of the Lark*, has a similar experience. Her singing instructor, Harsanyi, “lost his eye when he was twelve years old, in a Pennsylvania mining town where explosives happened to be kept too near the frame shanties in which the company packed newly arrived Hungarian families” (159). Yet Thea attains success as an opera singer through the cultural environment established by the same wealthy families whose labor practices blinded her early music instructor. Cather is, as Hermione Lee asserts, both “a democrat and an elitist” (16). This elitism extends to her readers, as well. Cather expects her readers to be intuitive, imaginative, and somewhat intellectual. The sparse writing, scene-setting, and use of “vacuoles” or lapses of time in her novels require a certain level of literacy and intimacy with her subjects. In an article on Sarah Orne Jewett, a portion of which was published as a preface to a two-volume collection of Jewett’s stories published by Houghton Mifflin in 1925, Cather writes:

Imagine a young man, or woman, born in New York City, educated at a New York university, violently inoculated with Freud, hurried into journalism, knowing no more about New England country people (or country folk anywhere) than he has caught from motor trips or observed from summer hotels: What is there for him in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*? This hypothetical young man is perhaps of

foreign descent: German, Jewish, Scandinavian. To him English is merely a means of making himself understood, of communicating his ideas. . . . It is a surface speech: He clicks the words out as a bank clerk clicks out silver when you ask for change. For him the language has no emotional roots. (*Not Under Forty* 92-3).

Language had to have roots for Cather, and she found them through her own experiences in pre-technical and industrial spheres. She followed the advice given to her by Jewett, quoting it in her 1922 preface to a republication of *Alexander's Bridge*: "One must know the world so well before one can know the parish." In her immersion in both the world and the parish, Cather found contradictions, and these emerge as ideologies and critiques of American society. She pits the new world against the old and modern society against the past and finds shortcomings. Rosowski and other critics label Cather a romanticist. As such, Cather participated in what has been seen as a defining trait of the nineteenth-century romantic artist, the critique of industrialism, asserts Stout (*Writer* 77).

Humphries writes that as a journalist Cather encountered conflicts with modernism—"the nostalgia for a pre-modern, pre-technological world of human presence and the enthusiasm for technology and change made possible by modernization." He writes that both Cather and Hemingway "consider journalism as a developing institution whose status as a technologically and commercially driven business and profession influences literary languages and forms and challenges the existing roles of fiction writers" (10).

Cather was challenged by the industrialism, commercialism, and materialism of this new era. Socially, economically, and culturally, she reaped its benefits, but professionally—as a journalist and writer/artist—she was exposed to the disadvantages and problems it posed to American society and its emerging art and literature. One of the themes emphasized particularly in later novels is the destructive power of money in a society that worships wealth. Woodress cites the concluding portrayal of defeat and death in *My Mortal Enemy* as Cather’s final comment on the subject. “What began mildly in *One of Ours*, [. . .] stepped up in tempo with the savage portrait of Ivy Peters in *A Lost Lady*, and went on to annihilate psychologically Professor St. Peter, finally destroyed Myra Henshawe and her husband” (216).

In these critiques of consumerism, however, Sawaya asserts that Cather employs journalistic objectivity as a means to mediate the issue. In *The Professor’s House*, Augusta serves as a “balancing factor” who opens the window and permits Professor St. Peter to escape “literal and metaphorical asphyxiation” (106). The positioning of a book-within-a-book, “Tom Outland’s Story,” can also be viewed as effort to obtain objectivity or balance in the novel. By making it a separate narrative, Cather offers two visions or landscapes to her readers: the professor’s over-furnished house and Tom’s Cliff City on the mesa. While she makes her preference clear, there’s no muckraking involved, no urgency or pressure for readers to decry industrialism, commercialism, and materialism, but there is an ideology and a message—improved consumerism. “To St. Peter this plain account was almost beautiful, because of the stupidities it avoided and the things it did

not say. If words had cost money, Tom couldn't have used them more sparingly" (*The Professor's House* 262). Sawaya notes the similarity between Tom and the artist in "The Novel Demeublé" and writes that Tom's spare, to-the-point language is an indication of his preference for simplistic quality rather than excessive quantity. "Similarly, the novel points us structurally and thematically toward the austere and stoic balancing of conflicting opinion by the narrator. In the end of the novel what remains for us is to respect a narrative and narrator that map out with stoic asceticism a balanced account of a world compromised by commercialism. It is a narrative that refuses to invest in any one interested interpretation or another" (106-7). Following the path her mentor Jewett took in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, Cather often uses an "observing" narrator, one who is present in the fictional environment but who does not affect change in it. The narrator plays a journalistic role by observing and recording the story without affecting the outcome or conclusion. Jim Burden in *My Ántonia* and Niel in *A Lost Lady* are examples of narrators who serve in this function.

The balancing structure and journalistic objectivity exhibited in *The Professor's House* also serves as an illustration of Cather's continuing position regarding the place of morality, muckraking, or advocacy in aesthetics. The evolution of this position can be traced to her college journalism. In an article Cather edited in the November 1891 *Lasso*, she makes clear that social reform had no place in art. The article states that Tolstoy would have been a "better writer" if he had not thought it was his "especial mission to reorganize society and reconstruct the universe" (*Kingdom of Art* 377). Stout writes that

throughout her career, Cather continued to espouse the belief “that morality, taste, honesty, and art are interrelated, but that it is not the business of literature to reform society” (76). In a 1936 letter to the *Commonweal*, reprinted as “Escapism,” she writes: “When the world is in a bad way, we are told, it is the business of the composer and poet to devote himself to propaganda and fan the flames of indignation.” She notes that the world is habitually “in a bad way [. . .] and art has never contributed anything to help matters—except escape.” She further adds that industrial life needs to work out its own problems (*On Writing* 18-21). The 1936 letter indicates that Cather’s views on combining her literary art and reform remained constant throughout most of her life. E. K. Brown, in his biography of Cather, quotes the last paragraph of a September 23, 1894 *Journal* column as the “most explicit statement of her conception of art” (66). Earlier in the column, however, is an actual reference to muckraking. “Every great work of art should teach, but never preach. [. . .] An artist should have no moral purpose in mind other than just his art. His mission is not to clean the Augean stables; he had better join the Salvation Army if he wants to do that.” (*Kingdom of Art* 405-6).

Cather’s writing, both journalistic and literary, cannot be considered muckraking in the strict journalistic sense. It was not investigative, and it lacked any sense of political urgency. Rather than serving as a vehicle for reform or change, Cather’s writing functions as a rest area along the road—a place to stop, reminisce about the past and evaluate the present. Her writing cannot be de-historicized. In addition to dispersing information, operating as commercial interests, and serving in watchdog roles to balance

government abuses of power and corporate corruption, newspapers also provide a historical record of events. As an early literary journalist and a novelist, Cather combined literal fact with artistic representation and permitted readers a view of a real world. Her journalism and fiction offer a historical portrait of the dominant culture in America and its relationships with subcultures. She was conflicted by a society making the transition from agriculture to industry, and she was immersed in a culture struggling with issues of immigration, feminism, and class. Despite her attempts at objectivity—or perhaps because of them and the resulting contrast—her assessments of these issues emerge as ideologies in her writing. Immigrants and strong women help shape America; hard work, discipline, and traditional values triumph; and art has a special place in the kingdom. These ideals contributed to Cather’s discomfort with industrialism and modernity and the accompanying aspects of conformity, commercialism, and materialism. Her response to industrialization and the excessive, overfurnished society it created emerged as a form of journalistic reduction, a method of simplification she calls “The Novel Dêmeublé.”

CHAPTER 4: “THE NOVEL DÉMEUBLÉ”:

RECONCILING JOURNALISM AND ART

*“L’art de choisir parmi les innombrables traits que nous offre
la nature est, après tout, bien plus difficile que celui de les observer
avec attention et de les rendre avec exactitude.”*

Prosper Mérimée (*On Writing* 37)

In one sense, Willa Cather’s method of literary simplification outlined in her essay, “The Novel Démeublé” can be viewed as a form of modernism expressed in minimalism; in another, it can be seen as a journalistic formula of reduction necessary to render a story cogent and to cast it into a designated space or medium. Cather fuses the two in her writing experiments with literary methods and journalistic styles. In a highly selective process, she combines aesthetic minimalism with factual-based reportage to create novels that are simple in their style and form, complex in their depth and ideology, and realistic in their portrayal. In her continuing quest to define and create art, Cather struggled with modernity and industrialism and the accompanying aspects and excesses of conformity, commercialism, and materialism. Forced to consider these same characteristics in her writing, she engages in a selection process that relies on aesthetic principles and basic journalistic tools. The Novel Démeublé is an experiment in writing, a compromise of sorts that merges aesthetic minimalism and journalistic reduction to

achieve artistic reality. As an artist, Cather selects her subject and chooses an approach or a view; as a journalist, she establishes a hierarchy of information aimed at eliminating the unnecessary while still engaging the reader.

In terms of both aesthetics and journalism, the technique of photo cropping serves as an apt analogy to Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant's account of Cather's placement of a Taormina jar in a clear space on a table to define her intended treatment of *Antonia* (149). "In this anecdote illustrating the visual nature of Cather's thought processes, the concrete image of the jar established in the reader's mind become emblematic of the abstract idea of the heroine's centrality in the novel" (Stout "Observant Eye" 130). By placing the jar in a clear space, Cather focused on an essential component in a photograph and cropped the non-essential elements. Readers or viewers visualize ranked significance from the photographer's perspective, but they acknowledge a more extensive landscape and are free to imagine its scope beyond the cropped borders.

Cather's guideline for writing the perfect novel is a compromise between literary aesthetics and journalism, fiction and fact, reality and romance. In the essay, she defines journalism and literary writing as two separate genres, sets boundaries, and then proceeds to selectively cross those borders, choose elements from each, take them to a vacant landscape, unfurnished room, or uninhabited environment and reassemble or re-imagine them to create her own climate or artistic vision. In her journalistic writing, she uses a descriptive narrative style to report on factual events, and in her literary writing, she employs a simplification process similar to the one used in journalistic reportage to select

the facts and information necessary to tell a story or communicate a message to her readers.

The editor in Cather comes to the fore as she states her goals in “The Novel D  meubl  ”: Excesses must be deleted to reveal the core theme. Novels are overfurnished, she writes. The importance of material objects has been over-stressed. She takes her editing pen in hand and strikes the non-essential trappings, explanations, and details, but she does so selectively, focusing on a few specific details that serve as representative examples. Stout writes, “Critics have often noted that these specific isolated presences gain a luminous significance. They also gain visual clarity from being set alone against a blankness” (“Observant Eye” 139).

Grounded in her conflicts with industrialism, commercialism, and materialism, Cather eschews novels, newspapers, and other products manufactured for mass consumption in a throw-away society. She values quality and esteems art and literature with longevity or “immortality.” She devalues quantity and scorns trends and journalism with limited durability. Despite this distinction, Cather is a shrewd consumer; as she sets her sights on the creation of literary art, she clings to journalistic tools. As noted and examined previously in this study, she ably assembles the journalistic Five W’s and the H and determines a focus—the “what and where” of prairie farms in *Oh Pioneers!* and the “who” of a Bohemian immigrant female in *My   ntonia*. She is painstaking about historical accuracy and facts and grounds her writing in immersion and observation rather than imagination. She experiments with stripped-down forms and bare-bone writing,

favors scenes instead of plots, uses time lapses to fast-forward and rewind to the past, and defies genre classification with novels such as *Death Comes for the Archbishop* by interweaving history and fiction.

Predating her use of journalistic tools for fiction, Cather applied literary principles to her newspaper writing. Woodress writes that the *Nebraska Editor* described her in 1885 as a “young woman with a genius for literary expression.” Her descriptive literary skills and use of narrative were also recognized when she was asked to deliver a paper titled “How to Make a Newspaper Interesting” at the Nebraska State Press Association in January 1895 (72). Cather’s application of descriptive literary narrative to factual reportage is evidence of her status as an early literary journalist, a female whose name should be included on the male-dominated list of reporters-turned-novelists who experimented with and used the same techniques later defined by the new journalists in latter twenty-first century America. Cather applied the methods and characteristics of literary journalism decades before the term was recognized, and later she infused the genres further, permitting factual reportage, research, and other journalistic principles and style to serve as the framework for her fiction. Cather clearly identifies her journalism and literary writing as separate genres based on commercial and aesthetic criteria, but she blurs this distinction in terms of form, style, and principle. While she insists there are boundaries, she freely crosses them. In this respect, Cather’s description of the perfect form for a novel, *Démeublé*, can be viewed as a reconciliation and compromise between the two genres. Her simplification method is both a form of modernism expressed in

minimalism for aesthetic purposes and a journalistic formula of reduction designed to coherently present a story in a specific medium to a particular audience.

Cather's journalistic writing served as a springboard for her fiction, and while she found its form largely compatible with her literary writing, she found its function incompatible. In her essay, "On The Art of Fiction," she warns writers about the "obstacles" of journalistic writing. "The whole aim of that school of writing was novelty—never a very important thing in art. The especial merit of a good reportorial story is that it shall be intensely interesting and pertinent today and shall have lost its point by tomorrow" (*On Writing* 101-2). She points out the same concept in "The Novel Demeublé" when she writes that people don't expect breakfast foods and daily newspapers "to be made of the stuff of immortality" (*On Writing* 36). Art, she writes, 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 that one has suppressed and cut away is there to the reader's consciousness as much as if it were in type on the page" (104). With little deviation, Cather's quote is also applicable to journalistic writing. Reporters gather information, review it, and determine an angle for a story. They then sort through the information and determine which details are necessary to tell the story in its entirety and render it cogent to readers. In journalism, the spirit of the whole is preserved.

Basically, the simplification methods Cather uses to edit, strip, and pare both her journalistic and literary writing are similar. The printed words on the page emerge

through the same process. The real difference between Cather's journalistic and literary writing involves the information, material and details she *has not* included as text. Jo Ann Middleton's term, "vacuole," describes the way Cather uses these absences to manipulate her readers. "The vacuole's usefulness arises from its scientific doubleness—it appears empty but is not actually empty." Functioning as storage or digestive space, vacuoles offer an explanation for the "absences in Cather's work that are nevertheless full of meaning" (11). Cather refers to this element in her fiction as the "thing not named." She writes, "Whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there—that, one might say is created" (*On Writing* 41).

In a strict journalistic sense, reporters are not free to create material. Creativity is limited to language, description, and narrative technique. Articles should be objective and factual; information may be presented from a particular angle or view, but it may not be created. Writer John Hersey, whose journalism includes reportage on the bombing of Hiroshima, published first in the *New Yorker* and later as a book, expressed his concern that a writer might try to pass off creative material or fiction as factual reportage in an article in the *Yale Review*:

As to journalism, we may as well grant right away that there is no such thing as objectivity. It is impossible to present in words "the truth" or "the whole story." The minute a writer offers nine hundred ninety-nine out of one thousand facts, the worm of bias has begun to wriggle. The vision of each witness is particular. Tolstoy pointed

out that immediately after a battle there are as many remembered version of its as there have been participants. Still and all, I will assert that there is one sacred rule of journalism. The writer must not invent. (2)

In conjunction with factualness, all elements necessary to tell a story must be included to provide an accurate report to readers. Only details, facts, and information considered unnecessary may be excluded. No “holes” or “vacuoles” –absences that might lead a reader to speculate, assume or assign factuality to some aspect of an article—should exist in journalist writing. In a visual comparison, journalistic writing is similar to a photograph in its view of the world; it duplicates reality. Literary writing is more like a painting or an illustration in which an artist distorts reality to various degrees to offer alternative views. With her adherence to facts and insistence on a sense of reality, Cather leans more to the photographic end of the spectrum. From that perspective, her editor’s hand unhesitatingly crops unnecessary elements to present a stark picture with a focus or essence recognizable to viewers or readers.

The basic news writing story form is the inverted pyramid, so called because the most important or interesting information is contained in the lead, or beginning of the story, and the remaining elements of the article are arranged in descending importance. This story form can be traced to the telegraph and payment by the word for transmission. Words are used sparingly and with precision. Ten pages of reporter’s notes might translate into ten column-inches of copy or even a three-paragraph news brief. Journalists

are trained to condense information and to write clear, concise text. In order to do this, they review their research, observations, and interviews and select the best, most interesting information based on the qualities of newsworthiness—timeliness, impact, conflict, celebrity, or oddity. A theme or focus is selected, and the five W’s and the H are used as a skeletal frame for the article. The simplification process involves identifying the newsworthy information and the facts accompanying it and eliminating information that is not immediately applicable. Considerations include credibility of sources, accuracy of information, and relevancy of quoted material.

As a newspaper and magazine editor, Cather was familiar with the journalistic reduction process, and she quite naturally adapted it for her fiction. Expanding on this, she saw art and literature as a higher process, one that both intensified life and at the same time harmonized it, writes Slotte. “These views of the relation of art to the ordinary world are not necessarily in conflict. In the first, art is to intensify, to counter the world of fact. In the second, art is to simplify, to counter to the world of confusion. But these divisions involved intricate juggling of values and considerable simplification” (*Kingdom of Art* 67). Cather, in the form of both editor and creator straddling the real and aesthetic worlds, chose the best elements from each and experimented with combinations.

In an essay citing the influence of nineteenth century Russian authors on Cather, David Stouck uses the term “fusion” to describe the author’s reconciliation between the real world and art. Noting similarities between Cather and Ivan Turgenev, Stouck writes: “For both writers, there is the absolute importance of selection and simplification; for

both, art is the fusing of the physical world of setting and actions with the emotional reality of the characters” (“Cather and the Russians” 6). In a reference to Tolstoy in “The Novel Demeublé,” Cather uses the terms “fusion” and “synthesis” to juggle and justify the Russian author’s use of material articles and furnishings in his work. “But there is this determining difference: the clothes, the dishes, the haunting interiors of those old Moscow houses, are always so much a part of the emotions of the people that they are perfectly synthesized; they seem to exist, not so much in the author’s mind as in the emotional penumbra of the characters themselves. When it is fused like this, literalness ceases to be literalness—it is merely part of the experience” (*On Writing* 39-40).

In her effort to fuse reality and art, Cather first used a journalistic touch and eliminated the unnecessary elements—details, furnishings, cataloged lists and technical descriptions. To achieve an aesthetic balance, she then selected one or two representational elements to illustrate and support her theme. In a letter to the *Commonweal* responding to questions about her sources for *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, she writes: “The essence of such writing is not to hold the note, not to use an incident for all there is in it—but to touch an incident and pass on” (*On Writing* 9). Rather than advocating a complete historical retelling, Cather favors a minimalist, journalistic, almost theatrical approach. “How wonderful it would be if we could throw all the furniture out of the window, and along with it all the meaningless reiterations concerning physical sensations, all the tiresome old patterns, and leave the room as bare

as the stage of a Greek theatre. The elder Dumas enunciated a great principle when he said that to make a drama, a man needed one passion, and four walls” (*On Writing* 43).

This fusion and synthesis of reality and art further mark Cather as an early literary journalist who blurred the edges of reality and art in her writing. During Cather’s era, other journalists-turned-novelists, mostly male, are categorized as early literary journalists. In her book *From Fact to Fiction: Journalism & Imaginative Writing in America*, Shelley Fisher Fishkin lists Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Theodore Dreiser, Ernest Hemingway, and John Dos Passos in this category. Dos Passos, who was insulated by family wealth and had no need for a full-time journalism apprenticeship, wrote freelance articles for magazines. In an essay titled “Against American Literature,” which he wrote for the *New Republic* in 1916, Dos Passos advocated “a literature which was concrete, tangible, solid and rooted in American ‘soil.’ America needed its artist, he wrote, to help it transcend its ‘inane matter-of-factness.’ While the artist must accept the challenge of dealing directly and concretely with the world of fact, his art must transcend that world and help its inhabitants to see themselves” (Fishkin 170-1). Literary journalist and novelist Norman Mailer also advocates a form of artistic realism as viewed through the eyes of the writer:

I enlisted then on my side of an undeclared war between these modes of perception called journalism and fiction. When it came to accuracy, I was on the side of fiction. I thought fiction could bring us closer to the truth than journalism, which is not to say one

should make up facts when writing a story about real people. The real premise of journalism is that the best instrument for measuring history is a faceless, even a mindless, recorder. Fiction, is then that reality which does not cohere to anonymous axes of fact but is breathed in through the swarm of our male and female movements about one another, a novelistic assumption, for don't we perceive the truth of a novel as its events pass through the personality of the writer? (178-9)

In contrasting journalism and fiction, however, the writer and his or her world are not the sole influences. The medium and the audience must be considered. Cather was well acquainted with the characteristic of timeliness in newspapers and periodicals, and she was adept at writing and editing articles for mass audience consumption. Old news has no market value, no past and no future, only a significance in the present. Fiction and art were not hampered by limited durability and requirements for immediate consumption. Fiction and art had longevity and the potential to be eternal. Cather was also aware of the differences in audience or readership between the two genres. Newspapers and mainstream magazines aimed at the widest circulation possible within the American public, and literary writing attracted audiences with special interests, niche readers who, in Cather's rather elitist opinion, possessed above-average intelligence, sophistication, aesthetic sensibilities, and even an "ear" for the language. In "Miss Jewett," an essay about Sarah Orne Jewett's sketches, Cather writes:

A taste for them must always remain a special taste, –but it will remain. She wrote for a limited audience To enjoy her the reader must have a sympathetic relation with the subject-matter and a sensitive ear. [. . .] He must recognize when the quality of feeling comes inevitably out of the theme itself; when the language, the stresses, the very structure of the sentences are imposed upon the writer by the special mood of the piece. (*On Writing* 92).

Cather has a preferred reader in mind for her fiction—one who has sympathy or an attachment to the work, one who will interact with the writing. Middleton describes the audience for whom Cather writes as the “fine reader,” one who can distinguish between “quality” and “popular” (67). This reader must encounter the art on some personal level for the mutual endeavor to come full circle. “The artist or the work of art succeeds if something works—if there is a response,” writes Slote (*Kingdom of Art* 46). The concept of reader response, codified in the 1970s, can also be found in Cather’s writing and expectations of her readers. “She establishes the mutual responsibility of reader and writer in the creation of art: the writer must use language so carefully and choose detail so specifically that the reader will respond in the expected manner. The reader must bring to the work of art an openness to suggestion, an appreciation of the subject matter, and a capacity for feeling,” writes Middleton (69).

This ability to connect with her audience, whether it be a detached mass public newspaper audience or the sympathetic “fine reader” of novels, was one of Cather’s

special talents. Virginia Faulkner labels Cather a “chameleon journalist” who “with no apparent effort could adjust her sights to any audience and any assignment. Cather’s selection and simplification process—the elements included in and excluded from her work—is based on journalistic and aesthetic theories and the medium for which the article or story is intended. Writing about the nonfiction novel, Mas’ud Zavarzadeh asserts that since durational realism is impossible, a nonfiction novelist must omit segments of his observations. “The act of omission implies selection, but a selection which is medium-imposed, not interpretively motivated” (44). Cather also addresses this subject in her discussion of “realism” in her essay. She notes that some writers believed they were capturing realism in documenting material objects, mechanical processes, and physical sensations. “But is not realism, more than it is anything else, an attitude of mind on the part of the writer toward his material, a vague indication of the sympathy and candour with which he accepts, rather than chooses, his theme?” (*On Writing* 37). Zavarzadeh’s conclusions coincide with Cather’s. He asserts that the nonfiction novel has two fields of reference: the “experiential and the imaginal.” He writes:

The in-referential elements of the nonfiction novel constitute the imagined frame or design through which the verbal matrix articulates the phenomenal world of the out-referential domain.

The effectiveness of the writer’s technique is to be judged by the way he explores, discovers, and expresses the unique inner shape of the narrative generated by the actual situation itself. This means

that the nonfiction novelist, like all other practitioners of the verbal arts, exercises an artistic selectivity, which, of course, implies that he occupies a vantage point and chooses the details of his narrative according to a pattern. This pattern is medium-imposed rather than interpretively shaped. (76-7)

Cather also relies on these two fields of reference—the experiential and the imaginal. Her reportage, while significantly more medium-imposed, included a literary journalistic style that favored narrative and interpretation. Her fiction was interpretively shaped, yet it was constructed or “patterned” on an experiential frame. For example, the experiential is the basis for the framework of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. Cather’s Grandmother Rachel Seibert Boak, whose husband died in Washington, D.C., while serving as an official of the Interior Department, is the prototype for Rachel Blake (Woodress 21), and many of the descriptions of spring flowers and scenery in the novel were refreshed during a 1938 spring trip to Winchester, Virginia (Lewis 182). The plot for the book comes from Cather’s childhood memory of the reunion of a household servant and her daughter, who had escaped from slavery before the Civil War. Cather’s experiences, including her memories and family stories, are one field of reference; the other is her imagination. However, she was a child when the reunion occurred and had no firsthand knowledge of the events leading up to the slave’s escape. Cather created and imagined a situational setting, chronological history, characters and interpersonal relationships that explained the reunion she experienced at the conclusion of the novel. She took the memory of an actual childhood event and imagined the situation that preceded it. The novel emerges as

an experimental blend of journalistic reduction of factual information and aesthetic selection of imagined material.

Cather establishes a template for the perfect novel in “The Novel Demeublé.” She defines this ideal as art rather than commodity and argues that the novel is over-furnished with lists or catalogs of objects, explanations of mechanical processes, and detailed descriptions of physical sensations. Cather objects to the enumeration of details and information from several different stances—as an anti-materialist, a journalist, and an artist. As a writer with attachments to “old forms, old ideas old delights” (*On Writing* 104), Cather found fault with industrialism and the subsequent materialism and conformity it produced. “The novel manufactured to entertain great multitudes of people must be considered exactly like a cheap soap or a cheap perfume, or cheap furniture. Fine quality is a distinct disadvantage in articles made for great numbers of people who do not want quality, but quantity,” she writes (*On Writing* 36). In addition, Cather viewed dehumanization as a product of industrialism, and she perceived long descriptions, or laboratory studies, of the behaviors of people or characters as reducing them to “mere animal pulp” (42). Cather’s ideal novel defied scientific examinations and assembly-line production; it was created, rather than manufactured, as a quality product for a select audience who preferred art over amusement.

As a journalist, Cather objects to a proliferation of non-essential details and explanations because the abundance of text, or information glut, forces readers to sort the information themselves. As a result, readers may not be able to easily distinguish between the essential and non-essential information, or worse, they could become

confused and bogged down by excessive details and abandon reading altogether—a potential dilemma for mass market publications depending on readership and circulations for economic sustenance. As a former newspaper writer, Cather knew that clarity, specificity, and conciseness are essential in presenting a message to a mass audience. The message has no value if readers have difficulty locating it in the midst of related but non-essential facts. Cather writes: “Is the story of a banker who is unfaithful to his wife and who ruins himself by speculation in trying to gratify the caprices of his mistresses, at all reinforced by a masterly exposition of banking, our whole system of credits, the methods of the Stock Exchange. But are the banking system and the Stock Exchange worth being written about at all?” (*On Writing* 37-38). Weeding out extraneous information was second nature to the editor in Cather. In “The Novel Demeublé,” she writes of Balzac burying his themes in literalness and material surroundings, and notes that readers’ eyes glide over the long the long, descriptive passages. “Stevenson (Robert Louis) said he wanted to blue pencil a great deal of Balzac’s ‘presentation’ –and he loved him beyond all modern novelists. But where is the man who could cut one sentence from the stories of Mérimée?” (39). Cather acknowledged the value of journalistic clarity and conciseness and adhered to the practice; she only used eleven paragraphs to define “The Novel Demeublé.”

Cather’s artistic temperament dominates the simplification method outlined in her essay. First, she makes it perfectly clear that she is discussing novels created as art rather than amusement, but she acknowledges that the real world is the foundation or pedestal for the work. It is not her objective, however, to fit the real world in its entirety on the

pedestal, as she points out some other novelists, including Balzac, attempt in their work. “To reproduce on paper the actual city of Paris; the houses, the upholstery, the food, the wines, the game of pleasure, the game of business, the game of finance: a stupendous ambition—but after all, unworthy of an artist” (*On Writing* 38). Instead, she seeks an emotional, human essence—a mood and theme distilled from the real world that she can share with like-minded readers who appreciate an enjoyment of art. The process must be reciprocal; a response is needed for the artist or art to succeed. As an artist creator, Cather experienced pleasure in selecting the elements for her writing. In the “Tom Outland’s Story” section of *The Professor’s House*, she writes: “Something had happened in me that made it possible for me to co-ordinate and simplify, and that process, going on in my mind, brought with it great happiness. It was possession” (250-251). Cather, as an artist, delighted in the simplification process that enabled her to sort through the stuff of life, select the finer points, write about them, and make them her own.

In the act of coordinating and simplifying, Cather experimented with different forms. One of these, a stage technique adapted perhaps from her interest in theater arts, is scene-setting. In an effort to reduce full-blown, over-furnished, historically chronological plots, Cather set a scene, closed the curtain, and then opened it on another scene. Only the characters, costumes, objects, furnishings, and sets necessary and important to that particular scene are included. If the setting is the kitchen, the whole house is not described or visible; if costume is a key factor, the entire wardrobe is not described. Cather selects one or two symbolic items to make her point. For example, she uses a “crimson parasol” to accentuate a scene of Marian Forrester in *A Lost Lady*:

Captain Forrester himself, a man of few words, told Judge Pommeroy that he had never seen her look more captivating than on the day when she was chased by the new bull in the pasture. She had forgotten about the bull and gone into the meadow to gather wild flowers. He heard her scream, and as he ran puffing down the hill, she was scudding along the edge of the marshes, like a hare, beside herself with laughter, and stubbornly clinging to the crimson parasol that had made all the trouble. (6)

The scene, while concise and clear, is open to interpretation; readers are free to imagine the size of the bull, color of the wild flowers, and the tone and type of laughter to complete the picture. Cather could have fleshed out the scene with details and descriptions, leaving nothing to the imagination, but she reduced it to its essence, encouraging readers to respond with their own visions, their own interpretations or “possession” of the literary moment. The scene is also a characteristic of literary journalism. Tom Wolfe lists it as the first device of his “New Journalism,” a method that permits the writer an alternative to sheer chronological/historical narrative (31).

Lounsberry notes that the scene is the trait by which literary nonfiction is most readily recognized. “Instead of ‘reporting’ or ‘discussing’ an object or event, the artist of nonfiction recasts it in narrative form. The remarkable effect of such transformation is that the moment is reprised; it lives again, yet with the subtle lights and shadings of the author’s vision” (xiv-xv). Cather and literary journalists share this use of scene-by-scene construction, but there is a critical difference. In a concerted strategy, Cather excludes

details and information that she expects readers to supply with their imaginations. In presenting fact-based reportage, literary journalists do not want readers to imagine reality or make assumptions; they exclude information that is considered to be non-essential and least germane to the story. In journalistic fashion, Cather stripped non-essential details from her fiction, and she artfully chose to withhold certain information from readers, not to create an element of suspense in her novels, but to encourage her readers to participate or immerse themselves in the story.

Rosowski writes that critics often view Cather as a poetic writer who could do scenes but not plots (“Subverted Endings” 68). This implies that scenes are easier and simpler and plots are more complicated and complex; however, the reverse is often true, as many writers, especially journalists, know. It’s more difficult to write “short.” As Edward and Lillian Bloom observe, “the ability to simplify is not easily acquired, for it comes only with time and a stringent determination to cast out anything that does not contribute to the spirit of the whole” (181). Less space in the medium and limited word counts require that the necessary elements to tell the story are intact and that the most precise, concise words are used to convey the meaning. Plots are intact in Cather’s fiction, but full sequences of events are not in the text or on the page; and it is this quality of her writing that requires readers to participate or become immersed in the literary thought process. Middleton likens the process to that of film-making and finds similarities between film audiences and readers. In Cather’s theory, she writes, “Readers also count for more and more, because they bring to the work the coordinating and unifying consciousness” (82).

Cather puts a great deal of thought and effort into creating a mood and effect for her readers, and she uses a theatrical term, *mis-en-scene*, to describe the stage-setting process she advocates for novels. In “The Novel D  meubl  ” she cites Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* as an exemplary model for writers. As a former teacher familiar with the early American romance, she notes that students could not use it as a source for manners, dress, and other information on Puritan society. “The material investiture of the story is presented as if unconsciously; by the reserved, fastidious hand of an artist . As I remember it, in the twilight melancholy of that book, in its consistent mood, one can scarcely see the actual surroundings of the people; one feels them, rather, in the dusk” (*On Writing* 41).

While Cather uses a journalistic frame for the actual text of her novels, she chooses an aesthetic technique for the material that does not appear on the page. She does not provide a step-by-step journalistic formula for achieving tone or mood; instead, she proceeds with a definition of “the thing not named.” She writes: “Whatever is felt on the page without being specifically named there—that, one might say, is created. 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” (*On Writing* 42). It’s obvious here that this theory and technique of exclusion is directed outward toward the reader rather than inward toward the writer. “The writer counts for less and less, and the writing for more and more,” notes Middleton (82). The overtone must be divined by the “reader’s” ear, and the mood and emotional presence must be felt by the reader.

O'Brien agrees that words such as "overtone" and "verbal mood" suggest realms of experience difficult to capture in text; however, she asserts that Cather's phrase, "the thing not named" has an altogether different connotation: "an aspect of experience possessing a name that the writer does not, or cannot employ" (126). O'Brien asserts Cather must have been aware of the similarity between the central phrase of her literary theory and a phrase used at Oscar Wilde's trial: the "Love that dared not speak its name." The critic continues, "From one perspective, Cather in 'The Novel D  meubl  ' is the modernist writer endorsing allusive, suggestive art and inviting the reader's participation in the creation of literary meaning. But from another, she is the lesbian writer forced to disguise or to conceal; the unnameable emotional source of her fiction, reassuring herself that the reader fills the absence in the text by intuiting the unwritten subtext" (126-127). O'Brien's interpretation of the phrase is arguable for several reasons. First, Cather writes about the absence on the page as an action or process of creation rather than a state of being or the existence of sexual preference. Second, O'Brien appears to confuse the audience for Cather's essay. Cather's literary aesthetic or theory, in principle, is a design or model for other creators and writers, not necessarily her readers. While sophisticated writers might interrelate the phrase from Wilde's trial with Cather's catchphrase, her readers most likely would not. In addition, Cather is very clearly talking about the art or the writing and not the artist or the writer. In "The Novel D  meubl  ," the focus is on the work or the art, and any suggestion of an underlying authorial conflict is speculative. Finally, as a journalist, Cather knew that facts must be verifiable; she knew the destruction of her letters to Isabelle McClung would remove documented evidence of a

lesbian relationship. Why then would she re-address this issue through a veiled phrase in the statement of her literary aesthetic? No, the “thing not named” is a literary device, not a subliminal message.

Cather uses the device in several ways. Stout notes that the exclusions or vacuoles in Cather’s text indicate gaps in both time and uncertainty. “These vacancies fracture the text, opening it to indeterminacy and leading us to ask questions for which answers are not supplied. They are perhaps the most visible manifestation of Cather’s affinity with modernism, and they would become more insistent with each successive novel” (*Writer* 192). She notes that Cather employs the technique as a device for the passage of time in *Oh Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia*. In both instances, the technique functions on the same level as scene-setting. Readers or audiences have access to the on-stage action but are not privy to anything that happens off-stage or between the scenes. Cather’s use of vacuoles differs, however, in *One of Ours*. Stout writes, “the emptiness is not so much a matter of gaps of time as gaps in perspective and a refusal to clarify the relation between the authorial point of view and Claude’s” (192).

In using the scientific term “vacuole” to explain the gaps and vacancies in Cather’s writing, Middleton writes: “In animal cells, the vacuole often performs functions such as storage, ingestion, digestion, excretion, and expulsion of excess water; plant cell vacuoles also serve to expand the plant cell without diluting its cytoplasm, thus enabling the plants themselves to attain a large size without accumulating the bulk that would make metabolism difficult” (54). The process could also be compared to digital processes that code and compress information for electronic storage and transmission

purposes. In this process, large amounts of information are electronically coded to reduce its size and the amount of storage space or “memory” needed for storage. The material can be electronically decoded and accessed in its entirety through the use of computers and other digital transmission devices such as televisions and cameras. In this respect, Cather’s readers act as transmission devices that receive the encoded, compressed information, decipher the code and access it in its entirety. Middleton employs the scientific term vacuole in the same manner. “Its usefulness derives from its potential to identify structural absences that, in fact allow for a fuller story than should be technically possible; the excisions themselves vary widely in size” (55).

One of the most prominent is the two-year gap between Part One and Part Two of *A Lost Lady*. Part One ends with Niel asking questions: “What did she do with all her exquisiteness when she was with a man like Ellinger? Where did she put it away? And having put it away, how could she recover herself, and give one—give even him—the sense of tempered steel, a blade that could fence with anyone and never break?” (84). Two years later, in Part Two, Marian Forrester remains an enigma. Niel returns to Sweet Water for summer vacation and finds a deteriorating state of life for the Forresters. He meets Ivy Peters and asks about Captain Forrester. Ivy replies: “He’s only about half there . . . seems contented enough . . . She takes good care of him, I’ll say that for her. . . . She seeks consolation, always did, you know . . . too much French brandy . . . but she never neglects him. I don’t blame her. Real work comes hard on her” (89). Even the ellipses used between phrases in this passage indicate gaps where readers are expected to fill in the unspoken meaning in the conversation.

A skilled editor, Cather selected the text on the page and the excluded subtext in relationship to the unity of the whole novel. In describing the author's approach to *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, Edith Lewis notes: "In writing the story, it was the flooding force of a great wealth of impressions that she had to control. She could have written two or three *Sapphiras* out of her material; and in fact she did write, in her first draft, twice as much as she used. She always said it was what she left out that counted" (183).

Middleton views Cather's juxtaposition of the text as a critical route for readers to follow in tracing the "aura of the fact or the thing or the deed" not expounded on the page (51). While the juxtaposition of information can be aesthetic, it is more often journalistic in that it involves the presentation of essential details and information that enable readers to understand and to create their own visions to fill the gaps and vacancies. In *Willa Cather's Imagination*, David Stouck writes that *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, "moves then, not in familiar chronological sequence but through the juxtaposition of episodes and narratives which are loosely associated with the ideal of saintliness, and which offer an edifying or emotional contract to each other" (133). Cather employs a similar technique in ghostwriting S.S. McClure's autobiography. Rather than a chronological retelling typical of biographies, she used short narratives or vignettes about the publisher's life to tell his story. For example, she describes the origination of McClure's concept for syndication with a short anecdote: "I remember some hunters once camped for the night on our place. I went over to their camp the next morning after they had gone, and found that they had left several old paper-backed novels and a few tattered magazines. These were a great find for me. Years afterward, the idea of forming

a newspaper syndicate first came to me through my remembering my hunger, as a boy, for something to read” (80). Woodress notes that the narrative was simply stated and “consistent with McClure’s personality and speech, but it also suggested that the ghost-writer was putting into practice her theory that the essence of art is to simplify” (162). However, the autobiography is non-fiction and more consistent with the writing techniques of literary journalism than fiction. Cather used a journalistic reduction method to simplify the factual material and then employed a narrative style to write the profile of the publisher.

Cather compresses factual information into scenes or vignettes in the autobiography, and she combines both factual and fictional elements in the “episodes” in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. Various structures for condensing information into scenes are employed throughout her work. In *Shadows on the Rock*, Cather uses scenes and juxtaposition in the Canadian setting of Quebec to move between Old World traditions and New World culture, the civilization of town and the outlying wilderness, and historical fact and literary fiction. These scenes are cast in chapters, or what appear as books in this novel. For example, in the third chapter, “The Long Winter,” Cather writes about Monseigneur de Saint-Vallier, “clad in a black cassock with violet piping, and a rich fur mantle” (*Later Novels* 538), his visit to Auclair’s the apothecary shop, and issues relating to Canadian government and clergy. In the next chapter, Cather follows a pattern but evokes contrast; Pierre Charron, “a slender man in buckskins” and “hero of the fur trade,” visits the Auclairs (571).

Within these scenes are significantly placed tableaux with meaning that extends well beyond the boundaries of the page. The tableaux are numerous throughout the book, but Cather prods readers' emotions and sentiment on various levels with the short tale of Cecile's fatherless friend's contribution to the Christmas creche. "When she took off the paper, she held in her hand Jacque's well-known beaver." Cecile, perplexed, hesitates to place the non-traditional animal in the manger scene, but Madame Pommier encourages her. "Certainly my dear, put it there with the lambs, before the manger. Our Lord died for Canada as well as for the world over there, and the beaver is our very special animal" (535). The incident addresses the subject of cultural inclusion on personal, religious, national, international and even global terms. Another tableau, which also uses short dialogue, encourages readers to question aspects of modernity. Looking about the pharmacy, the Bishop notes that Auclair is advanced in his medical theories. "On the contrary, I am very old-fashioned. I think the methods of the last century better than those of the present time," responds Auclair. "Then, you do not believe in progress?" asks the Bishop. To which Auclair responds, "Change is not always progress" (539). Admittedly, Cather's authorial preference and nostalgia for the past is integral, but the exchange also addresses modernity and its implications on science, medicine, business, and culture.

Lewis's comment about Cather's work to compress the material for *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* is understandable. Cather, who moved from Virginia to Nebraska at the age of nine, was working with the story itself, her childhood memories and impressions of Virginia, information and stories that had been told to her, and observations and

information gained on a return visit to the region prior to writing the novel. At first glance, the most noticeable deletion is the twenty-five years she cut between the eighth chapter and the epilogue, which leaves a wide gap for reader improvisation. In this novel, she also uses the chapters as scenes with gaps in either time or location between them. For example, in a short, five-page chapter at the beginning of the novel she introduces “Sapphira and Her Household” around the breakfast table at the Colbert house. The location of the scene changes, but the time frame remains the same in the second chapter as she moves to introduce Rachel Blake. In the next chapter, the scene changes time sequence, going into the past to present a history or biographical sketch of Sapphira. Moving from one location to another or from one time period to another, the short scenes change rather rapidly in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. The first sentences in three successive chapters in Book II, illustrate passing time and its relationship to the scene. The first chapter begins, “On Thursday morning two leather coach trunks were brought down from the garret, and Nancy was allowed, for the first time, to pack them, under Till’s direction” (*Later Novels* 810). The next chapter starts, “On the evening after Mrs. Colbert’s departure for town, Till felt lonely and downcast” (816). Following this, the first sentence of the third chapter notes: “As his wife was always in Winchester for Holy Week, the miller customarily took his Easter dinner with his daughter and granddaughters” (821). Time moves or flows with the scene changes, and intervening gaps are left to the reader’s imagination.

Cather heavily applies the journalistic “when” and “where” in these scene changes. She also notably employs another journalistic technique in *Sapphira and the*

Slave Girl that permits readers an insight to characters without a full explanation or description—short quotes and dialogue. Part of a conversation between Sapphira and her husband, Henry, sums up his character and status in the marriage and household. “Don’t you put on with me, Sapphy. You’re the master here, and I’m the miller. And that’s how I like it to be” (807). Readers know Henry’s stance from these two sentences and have a general idea of what his actions and role will be throughout the remainder of the novel. The quotes permit readers to hear the character’s voices rather than the narrator’s, and they also reduce the necessity for long explanations and descriptions. In fact, Cather manages to simplify characters’ responses to the institution of slavery in a two-sentence soliloquy delivered by Rachel Blake. “No, it ain’t put on; she believes in it, and they believe in it. But it ain’t right” (900).

Cather takes her effort to create an artful, minimalist novel almost to extremes with *A Lost Lady*. A great deal of audience participation is required. Even the ending is indeterminate; the resolution to the story is left to the reader’s imagination and interpretation. Again, Cather adeptly sets scenes, using time and location to juxtapose events and history. In this particular novel, her method of simplification follows Flaubert’s concept of “le mot juste.” She sparingly selects precise words to create a *sense* of disillusionment rather than a *story* of disillusionment. The word “lost” in the title has various connotations; the reader must choose among them. Is it actually the lady, or Marian Forrester, who is lost? Does it apply to Niel’s lost innocence, the passage of youth or beauty, the decline of the American frontier, all or none of the above? “Beginning with the title itself and the numerous meanings of the word *lost*, the reader brings so

many conscious and unconscious association to its details that we have several different novels arising from the same seemingly simple story,” writes Middleton (61). Cather chooses a deliberately ambiguous word so that readers, who bring their own life experience to the literary work, can immerse themselves and interrelate. Character names, too, although somewhat stereotypical, provide readers with an immediate visual impression. Poisonous, clinging plant-like attributes and phallic symbolism are attached to Ivy Peters; speculation over German immigrant status in America hover over Rheinhold and Adolph Blum; and a regimental dignity, formality, heroism, and quasi-aristocracy preside over Captain Forrester.

In addition to scene-setting and precise word selection, Stout writes that Cather combines vacancies of time with partial narrative disjuncture in *A Lost Lady*. She writes:

It is this state of partialness, this simultaneous identification with and skepticism of her flawed male center of consciousness, that keeps her own perspective so elusive. Because her detachment from Niel’s point of view is not complete, so that even while she reveals the limitations caused by his naivety she nevertheless shares his regretful yearning, it may be that we perceive ironies she did not consciously intend. She moves back and forth across a space of narrative indeterminacy without resolution, partly sharing Niel’s feelings, partly showing their tensions and inadequacy. (*Writer* 192)

Stout’s assessment of the elusiveness of Niel’s point of view is correct; however, Cather’s intentions seem clear in the gaps or text that does not appear on the page. She presents

the slim novel as a painting or piece of art, one that has many meanings. The experiential knowledge that each reader brings to the text and the variables for interpretation allow for multiple readings. Cather did not want a concrete, sharp focus for the novel; she wanted it blurred, almost impressionistic so that readers could *see* and *not see*, feel someone's touch and not be able to identify the person who touched them. She fully intended ironies, but did not name them. Captain Forrester's toast, "Happy Days!" is one example. "It seemed a solemn moment, seemed to knock at the door of Fate; behind which all days, happy and otherwise, were hidden. Niel drank his wine with a pleasant shiver, thinking that nothing else made life seem so precarious, the future so cryptic and unfathomable, as that brief toast " (*A Lost Lady* 41). Readers can attach a sense of nostalgia to the phrase, interpret it as a simple dinner invocation in the present, or a sense a foreboding about the future. Multiple meanings are implied, but not specifically stated.

The material on the page, especially in *A Lost Lady*, is proportionately less than the possibilities that exist in the margins. The excluded material is significant to Cather, and its absence causes readers and critics to seek points of entry or direction into these vacuoles. Stout writes: "What Cather was groping for does not seem to have been the clearest way to convey a particular effect or emotion so much as the clearest way to convey the impossibility of knowing what the lady's effect was" (*Writer* 193). That impossibility and the knowledge that it would force readers into different directions and cause them to create their own visions of the lady was Cather's goal. Otherwise, she would have described and defined Marian Forrester more fully. In this respect, it is easy to understand why Cather disliked a 1925 film version of the book, starring Irene Rich

and George Fawcett in the title roles; it put a face on the lost lady, appropriated a visual likeness, and defined her in absolute physical terms. Cather wanted the image blurred; she wanted her readers to play a part in creating the character Marian Forrester.

The image of Cather's lost lady is similar to an illustration of a cat described by Joan Didion during a 1976 lecture at Berkeley. Lounsberry writes that the cat with a shimmer around it was drawn by a patient suffering from schizophrenia and published in introductory psychology books. Didion, a writer often listed among modern-day literary journalists for her combination of facts and literary style, commented: "Writing is the attempt to understand what's going on in the shimmer. To find the cat in the shimmer, if the cat is the important thing, or to find what the shimmer is" (Lounsberry 107-8). Cather cast Marian Forrester in a similar shimmer in an effort to coax readers to look at both the woman and the circumstances, environment, and culture impacting her.

Critics failed to see this complexity in Cather's work. They praised *A Lost Lady*, but they also included comments on its brevity. Edmund Wilson called it "a charming sketch performed with exceptional skill," and Joseph Wood Krutch labeled it a nearly perfect novel but thought it was "too short and slight to be called great" (Woodress 204-205). The critics equated text length and complexity with importance and greatness and failed to recognize the skillfulness required to eliminate the unnecessary and retain the unity of the whole. These superficial reviews, while commenting on Cather's artistic integrity, failed to recognize the scope and breadth of the experimental technique and its relationships to both art and journalism. These same comments extended into the realm of literary criticism. Middleton writes, "Once the social critics of the 1920s and 1930s

categorized Cather as simplistic and nostalgic, her destiny was to be neglected in favor of what they considered more ‘pertinent’ work” (20-21). The nearsightedness of these critics prevented them from seeing beyond the text on the page and to realize the significance of the excluded information. More importantly, they failed to identify a new form of writing that combined elements of aesthetic minimalism and journalistic style with literary writing.

Part of the reason for this may be that journalists and literary writers are generally judged by different standards and are subject to different expectations on the part of readers. Fishkin writes: “The journalist’s facts must be verifiable; the artist’s truths must cohere into an aesthetically satisfying whole” (207). She suggests the 1920s as the decade when the line was most clearly drawn between the two, and the 1960s when it began to blur, but notes that there have been exceptions:

Whitman, Twain, and Dreiser all admit having invented stories on slow days (while usually providing their readers with clues that the story was not to be taken at face value). These inventions were the exception, however, and not the rule. Whitman, Twain, Dreiser, Hemingway, and Dos Passos all accepted the notion that the journalist should traffic in the world of fact, and that it was their job as journalists to cover that world as accurately as they could. They respected the role newspapers could play in a democracy by laying the facts before the public. (207)

Cather, too, respected journalism's goal of presenting factual, accurate reportage of real-world events and, as early as 1896, she recognized it as a harsh, realistic training ground for writers. "Journalism has its faults and they are many, but it is considerably near to the living world than a university and it has this great merit, that it speedily kills off inferior talent and brings the real article to the front" (*Kingdom of Art* 68-69). Journalism didn't kill off Cather's talent; in fact it enriched her technique by providing general guidelines for the inclusion and exclusion of factual material, honed her powers of observation and description, and enhanced her ability to effectively condense material and edit scenes in her work.

Cather blurred the boundary between journalism and literary writing at a time when the line between the two was clearly drawn. In either/or genre categorization, critics failed to recognize the nuances of Cather's fiction, and the author's own disparagement of her early writing and journalism displaced its importance in her body of work. Critics evaluated her work as simplistic and nostalgic when, in fact, it was innovative. Cather crossed borders and boundaries when it was unpopular to do so. She merged the narrative skills of fiction into her journalistic writing and carried a tool for reportage—a process of simplification—into her fiction writing. She viewed her fiction as innovative, detailing the method in "The Novel *Démeublé*," but failed, at least publicly, to acknowledge the debt she owed to journalism.

Cather's novel *démeublé* is a journalistic- literary fusion—the same synthesis she finds in Tolstoy's work—one that is part of the experience. "Once the artist has observed and absorbed, however, his or her task is to choose, to select, to arrange," writes

Middleton (112). Cather takes her own immersion, her own experiences and observations, builds on a journalistic framework, and then applies both journalistic and aesthetic principles to simplify and create her vision. In this respect, “The Novel Demeublé” is a reconciliation or compromise between journalistic and literary theories and principles. Cather takes the best elements from each to achieve an overall effect. There is, however, one critical difference, and that is “the thing not named.” In Cather’s journalism, the information not included in the text is non-essential and unimportant to the reader’s understanding of the article. In Cather’s novels, however, “whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there” has relevance, and readers are asked to look a little deeper—immerse themselves between the lines, in the margins, and in their own experiential realms to find or create meaning.

CONCLUSION:

CATHER: PIONEER LITERARY JOURNALIST AND INNOVATOR

Fact or fiction? Despite drawing a distinction between the two, Willa Cather clung to both throughout her writing career. Aesthetic aspirations and theories led her to seek ways to make newspaper articles and columns more colorful and interesting through the use of descriptive writing and narrative style, and journalistic principles and techniques routed her toward embedding facts and using reportage formulas and reduction methods to create the framework for her fiction and to simplify its form. Her journalism intersects not only with her literary writing; its path intertwines along the course of her body of work. Rather than serving as a stepping stone or springboard to her literary writing, as many critics claim, Cather's newspaper and magazine work proved integral to her fiction in that she merged elements from both genres to create new forms to address reality, aesthetics, and a rapidly changing, turn-of-the-century society or, what she saw as a "world broke in two."

This experimental aspect of Cather's work, conducted during the transition to a technological society in America, is particularly relevant in the current Information Age as journalists and literary writers seek styles and forms that stand out amidst the barrage of both print and electronic text; address audience needs for information and expectations for amusement and literary art; and communicate larger, more expansive ideals that comment on reality, society and culture as a whole. Writers today are experimenting with blogs, electronic books, hypertext, and what Mas'ud Zavarzadeh labels a "supramodernist

narrative with a zero degree of interpretation. The mistrust of the epistemological authority of the interpretive novel is mainly caused by the multifarious pressures of contemporary America which render all interpretations of ‘reality’ arbitrary and therefore at the same time both accurate and absurd” (3).

Preceding these structures, the label New Journalism was coined in the latter half of the twentieth century to describe a form of writing that combined authorial immersion and narrative style with factual reportage to provide readers with a historical yet humanized view of societal upheaval and change. Writing about American social realism in 1966, Norman Mailer said it “was a literature which grappled with a peculiarly American phenomenon—a tendency of American society to alter more rapidly than the ability of its artists to record that change. [. . .] The American phenomenon had to do with the very rate of acceleration. It was as if everything changed ten times as fast in America, and this made for extra-ordinary difficulty in creating a literature” (*Cannibals and Christians* 95-96). Even earlier, Cather, who experimented by mixing variables from two genres to present a vision of reality, was working under the same conditions and precepts. Viewed as early literary journalism, her work serves as a template for new, innovative writing forms that attempt to define reality and present a vision of the world in both journalistic and literary disciplines.

Cather’s writing demonstrates an overlapping and blurring of the genres, which contributes to difficulties in categorizing her novels and, in a larger, multi-disciplinary sense, difficulties in categorizing and defining writing that combines elements of journalistic and literary style and meshes fact with fiction. Other American writers, such

as Mark Twain and Herman Melville, have employed facts and actuality in their novels—descriptions of the Mississippi River in *Huckleberry Finn* and accounts of whale hunting in *Moby Dick*, for example—but segments or chunks of the “real” portions are recognizable in these lengthier texts. The threads of fact and fiction are tightly woven and more difficult to distinguish in Cather’s sparse, unfurnished novels. While Twain and Melville used pens for expansive storytelling, Cather fused a pen and a paintbrush to create story pictures. In a scene in *Lucy Gayheart*, when the two main characters reach an exhibit of French impressionists, Harry comments that the figures are not drawn correctly, and Lucy responds:

“I don’t know anything about pictures, but I think some are meant to represent objects, and others are meant to express a kind of feeling merely, and then accuracy doesn’t matter.”

“But anatomy is a fact,” he insisted, “and facts are at the bottom of everything.”

“[. . .] Are they Harry? I’m not so sure.” (702)

The characters’ debate over realism versus impressionism and Lucy’s hesitation to make a decisive choice between the two, to some degree, represent Cather’s approach to journalism (reality) and literature (imagination or impressionism). She acknowledges the functions and attributes of the genres and tests various combinations in her writing to create styles and forms that encompass both.

In her newspaper writing, Cather humanized the facts and put a face on them. It wasn’t simply: “A Pittsburgh actress provided shelter and warmth Tuesday to a tenement

toddler.” It was an article about a “wonderful baby, positively the best I ever saw on any stage” published March 18, 1899 in the *Courier*. Cather writes:

It was just a poor little waif from the slums with a stupid, half-starved mother, who had a whole troupe of children and a husband out of work. [. . .] Well, on one of those fearful cold nights when the weather man hung sinkers on the thermometer and the mercury dipped way below zero, Mrs. Collier (Lizzie Hudson) discovered that this poor little waif lived somewhere down in the tenement district, and that its mother proposed to take her home thinly clad as she was through the biting cold. Mrs. Collier didn't do a thing but bundle the baby up and take it over to her room at the Hotel Duquesne and keep it all night. [. . .] As for the baby, it had a milk toddy and a hot bath and was wrapped in soft, silky things and tucked into the leading lady's bed and was warmer and happier than it had ever been in its life before, and perhaps than it will ever be again. (*World and Parish* 547-548)

Cather recognized the concept that literary style and technique could elevate and energize journalism. Just as Tom Wolfe saw that the devices of scene construction, dialogue, point of view, and the recording of everyday gestures and habits could be applied to reportage to raise it to a higher level (29), Cather viewed description and narrative storytelling as enhancements to her newspaper columns and reviews. She uses a friendly, conversational tone and tells, rather than reports, the factual story to her readers.

She uses well-chosen phrases like “stupid half-starved mother, who had a whole troupe of children and a husband out of work,” “milk toddy,” and “soft silky things” to let readers visualize the life of this baby. Her turn-of-the-century newspaper writing is similar to present-day newspaper and magazine feature writing, in that these articles frequently use anecdotes, description, quotes and dialogue, and an authorial/observing narrator point-of-view.

To some degree, Cather’s journalism played a developmental role in her literary writing, but it wasn’t a simple progression or movement from one level to another with firm departures at each point. Cather never closed a door on the past; she found solace in its simplicity and traditions and extolled its virtues. And she never completely disconnected from her journalistic background. Cather owes a debt to journalism, and the same holds true for other journalists-turned-novelists. Writing about male counterparts Whitman, Twain, Dreiser, Hemingway, and Dos Passos, Fishkin asserts: “The early apprenticeship in journalism exposed each writer to a vast range of experience that would ultimately form the core of his greatest works. It forced him to become a precise observer, nurtured in him a respect for fact, and taught him lessons about style that would shape his greatest literary creations. It taught him to be mistrustful of rhetoric, abstractions, hypocrisy, and cant; it taught him to be suspicious of secondhand accounts and to insist on seeing with his own eyes” (4). These same experiences shaped Cather’s writing, but her name is seldom listed among early American literary journalists. There are several reasons for this. First and foremost, she was a woman working in a male-dominated field, and her interests in theater, music, and the arts placed her writing in the

“soft news/feature” category and relegated it to the inside pages of newspapers. “Hard news,” or more serious articles gained prominence and significance from front-page placement. In addition, early reviews of Cather’s work praised it, but weighted its significance and seriousness in terms of its length. The absence of Cather’s name from the list of early American literary journalists, the significant impact of journalism on her writing, and her experiments to merge journalistic, literary, and aesthetic elements to find textual forms to address reality in rapidly changing times, testify to the importance of this long-overdue examination of the connections between her journalism and literary writing.

Cather’s insight into audiences and readers plays a critical role in her literary writing. It began when the young, impressionistic student wrote and edited university publications read by both students and faculty, and continued in her role as drama critic for Nebraska and Pittsburgh newspapers where, Woodress writes, her “bright, lively, hard-hitting” (66) reviews gave theatergoers reason to buy tickets or not and actors and theater companies reason to rejoice or cringe. The *Home Monthly* aimed at “the half million firesides within a hundred miles of Pittsburgh,” and while there Cather’s writing was directed toward a domestic audience that had babies and baked pies (Woodress 77).

Her comprehension of readership and audiences was greatly expanded through her professional relationship with S. S. McClure and his magazine. McClure, a pioneer and entrepreneur in the American publishing field, led the muckraker movement with his magazine, discovered and published literary talent, and established a syndicate for the distribution of articles to other newspapers and magazines. A journalistic super-hero of

sorts, McClure advocated fact-based reporting and viewed the print media as a forum to expose corporate and political corruption and social ills. But there was another side to McClure and his magazine—a literary side. Woodress writes, “McClure not only had the talent for directing the work of great reporters [. . .] but he also could sniff out good fiction” (123). He published the work of Rudyard Kipling, Stephen Crane, Jack London, Mark Twain, and others. Working closely with the publisher at *McClure’s*, Cather learned about readership and the market for muckraking and social reform. She also became knowledgeable about the audiences for fiction. In addition, Cather’s perception of the scope and range of audiences was expanded during her stint at the magazine. Previously, she worked at regional levels with readerships based in those areas; at *McClure’s* the audience was much more expansive, ranging from regional to national and even international.

Experience with readership and audiences is critical to the development of Cather’s literary writing style. Her readership shares some characteristics with the one she described for Sarah Orne Jewett’s writing: “a limited audience” with “a special taste” (*Not Under Forty* 92). Cather’s sparse, unfurnished style required an intelligent, yet curious reader, one who would notice the absences and gaps and question their significance. It also necessitated a degree of involvement or immersion; she prodded her readers to become participants in her novels, interpreting and sometimes even creating the overall picture or effect. This knowledge of readership and audience, combined with other journalistic qualifications—respect for fact and first-hand information, skill in observation and description, mistrust of rhetoric and bias, concept of style—was

incorporated in Cather's literary writing. Her journalistic career and her life gave her a vast range of experience. She could write about Nebraska farmers and Bohemian immigrants because she knew them, studied them, heard them speak, watched them work, and she could write about families, lawyers, doctors, as well as government officials, businessmen, actors and actresses for the same reasons. Coupling first-hand observation with research is second-nature to journalists, and this enabled Cather to reconstruct the story of the Catholic Church in the Southwest in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* from personal observations and letters in the biography *The Life of the Right Reverend Joseph P. Machebeuf*. She used much the same process to write *Shadows on the Rock*, incorporating observations and research during visits to Quebec with information gained through Canadian histories written by Francis Parkman.

In some respects, Cather's technique compares to that of Tom Wolfe and his "New Journalism." Cather was not as flamboyant as Wolfe in terms of either personal or literary style. Rather than focusing on seedy, sensational subjects—underground movie queens, topless dancers, drug users to portray decadence in society—Cather chose to pose subcultures, such as women and immigrants, as positive forces influencing the dominant culture, and she invited her readers to inspect the view. Critics' attacks on Wolfe's style of writing, however, offer an introspective into Cather's merger of journalism and literature. In the *New York Review of Books*, Dwight MacDonald labeled Wolfe's style, "parajournalism, a bastard form, having it both ways, exploiting the factual authority of journalism and the atmospheric license of fiction" (3). However, in an *Atlantic* article, Dan Wakefield compares Wolfe's writing with Truman Capote's and asserted that both

writers had synthesized reportage and fiction. This personal style of reporting combined the empirical virtues of journalism with the imaginative insights of the novel, wrote Wakefield (86-90). Cather had no interest in exploiting fact and fiction; the two forms of writing were entirely separate in her opinion, but not in her writing. Her distinctions between the two genres and her knowledge of reader expectations make it evident that she was not trying to delude the public or her readers by combining forms. She didn't create facts for her journalism, and she didn't limit herself to factual reality for her art. But she did synthesize the genres in both her journalism and literary writing.

In doing this, Cather merged the factual and fictional into forms that Zavazadeh labels "fictual." In *The Mythopoetic Reality*, the critic argues that the polaristic theory of categorizing prose narrative as either fiction or non-fiction is insufficient. He writes:

Not all works of narrative, however, are mono-referential. Another mode of narration, responding to a more complex reality, explores more than a single circle of reference and orchestrates, in movement between the allegedly antithetical poles of art and life, the aesthetically justified truth of the fictional and the experientially valid truth of the factual. This manifold narrative mode exercises both the aesthetic control associated with the fictional mode and the analytical approach characteristic of the factual mode. It is, in other words, simultaneously self-referential and out-referential and is modally more complex and sophisticated than either

form of the mono-referential narratives. In contrast to the mono-referential mode, this mode of narration is bi-referential. (56)

Zavarzadeh's statement resonates the same ideals and characteristics found in Cather's writing, and his use of the word "orchestrated" is appropriately applied to her technique and style. Cather the artist, who loved theater, music, art, and literature, and Cather the reporter, who recognized the values of immersion, research, and accuracy, selectively composed her fiction using elements from more than one point of reference. When early critics equated the brevity of Cather's writing with simplicity and nostalgia, they failed to see the complexity and sophistication involved in the convergence of the two forms.

Cather realized that new means of expression were needed to define reality in the world that she saw breaking into two parts—an agrarian past and an industrial present. How did she compress journalism and literary writing to present her vision of reality in an emerging American culture? Cather methodically worked from the two spheres of reference she knew best to merge principles and devices of journalism and literary writing into valid, medium-specific narrative forms. The first—an early form of literary journalism—employed observation, description, and narrative style to humanize objective factual reportage. The articles remained factually accurate, but they were soft feature stories rather than news stories and had a more conversational tone. The second form employed some of the structural styles and principles of journalism and the devices of literary journalism—immersion, scene-setting, dialogue, research—and integrated them with a minimalist, aesthetic, imaginative vision of reality. Unlike the first journalistic form, which did not require interaction by readers, Cather's literary form required a

response from readers and was designed to be participatory—a type of immersion by proxy.

Cather's readers come to her fiction as expectant audiences, not so much for amusement, but for enjoyment and enlightenment. They don't expect comedy, humor, punch lines, car chases, action, or sensational cliffhangers; they expect a good story, human drama, and theatrical presentation. Cather meets these expectations by using a journalistic sorting process that follows the guidelines of what journalists traditionally have called news values or qualities—aspects of a story that make it worth knowing or reading. These values include prominence or celebrity, timeliness, proximity, impact, importance or magnitude, conflict, oddity, and emotional impact or human interest.

First, she searches her memories and observations and finds the best—or most newsworthy—stories based on such factors as importance and timeliness. For example, she focuses on immigrants shaping society and culture in *My Ántonia* and the effect of war on a Midwestern farm boy in *One of Ours*. She finds the most interesting people for her characters, based on the qualities of celebrity and human interest. Lyra Garber, the wife of Nebraska ex-governor Silas Garber, who founded Red Cloud, becomes the prototype for Marian Forrester, and Swedish opera singer Olive Fremsted is the model for Thea Kronborg. The sorting process continues as she researches her subject, theme, or event. Because the audience for her fiction is national and even international, proximity or the physical relationship of the story locale to the reader, is relatively insignificant. Red Cloud stands in for any railroad town in America, and cityscapes are representative of various urban areas. More important is her use of universal themes focusing on forms

of love, honor, and success, all countered by some type of conflict. Emotional impact and human interest figure into the sorting process at this point.

After processing information into basic who, what, when, where, why, and how categories and determining the significance of each, Cather enlists the devices of literary journalism to organize and write her fiction. Long before Lee Gutkind wrote about the “5 R’s of Creative Nonfiction” (real life, reflection, research, reading and ’riting) or Wolfe identified the four devices of New Journalism (scene-by-scene construction, recording dialogue, third-person point-of-view, and recording everyday gestures and habits), Cather was using these same techniques in her writing. She used the four constitutive features of literary or artistic nonfiction listed by Lounsberry—documental subject matter, research, the scene, and fine writing—in both her reportage and fiction.

In terms of immersion, her childhood memories and experience as a drama critic are embedded in the body of her fiction. Sketches and descriptions of events in newspaper columns set the stage for scene-setting in her fiction. Research and documentation was critical for her novel about early missionaries in the Southwest and French culture in Quebec. Cather recognized that dialogue helped readers “hear” the characters in their own words and that an observing narrator could provide a more expansive view than the protagonist could with first-person narration.

Cather was a master at recording everyday gestures, habits, clothing, and decorations. She chose sparingly and well. She knew exactly what item to accentuate to achieve a particular effect. Of all the artifacts discovered in Cliff City by Tom Outland in *The Professor’s House*, Cather chose to focus on the mummified body of one of the

original cliff dwellers, Mother Eve. Roddy didn't just sell items—pottery and jewelry—for commercial gain, he sold humanity. "I'd as soon have sold my own grandmother as Mother Eve—I'd have sold any living woman first," says Tom Outland. Another novel, *A Lost Lady* offers numerous examples of Cather's ability to hone in on a specific detail or item to give it significance. For instance, Cather uses cherries in whisky cocktails to show readers the male-female dynamics during a party at the Forresters. Frank Ellinger offers Miss Constance the cherry in his glass. On a second round of drinks, her glass is not filled, and he offers her a dish of cherries. "No, I don't want those. I want the one in your glass. [. . .] I want it to taste of something," she says. Later, Mrs. Forrester asks Niel to give Constance the cherry from his drink. "She took it with her thumb and forefinger and dropped it into her own, —where, he was quick to observe, she left it when they went out to dinner" (37-38). Cather avoids lengthy, detailed explanations or chronological histories to explain the interaction among the characters. In this short tableau, she uses a drink garnish to make readers aware of the behind-the-scenes interplay.

Fine writing, Lounsberry's fourth feature of literary or artistic nonfiction, plays an important role in both Cather's journalistic writing and fiction. Lounsberry explains that factual subject matter and research substantiate the non-fictive, journalistic, or realistic side of the writing; the narrative form shows the writer's artistry, and fine writing or polished language reveals a literary goal. "Call it what you will, care for language can be used as a strainer to separate *literary* nonfiction from the glut of nonfiction written in pedestrian prose" (xv). Cather recognized this early in her journalism career and began

experimenting with combinations of journalistic and literary writing to express her aesthetic vision of reality in the emerging American culture. Because Cather sticks so closely to fact-based values, some of her novels, or parts of them, can be perceived as either history or travelogues. For instance, she uses her actual experiences for her Midwestern pioneer and prairie stories, and those can be viewed as historical. She strives for accuracy in her scenes of the Southwest, and the sections of her fiction that describe actual places are comparable to nonfiction travel articles in newspapers and magazines. Newspapers function as historical record keepers because they document important events within a community, region, or nation. In relying heavily on facts and literary journalism techniques—especially immersion—Cather’s fiction emerges as a type of historical-cultural record of life in America at the turn of the twentieth century.

Cather never lost her editor’s idiosyncrasy for details and facts. She was “always painstaking about her facts—she intensely disliked being careless or inaccurate, and went to much trouble to verify them,” writes Edith Lewis, adding that some mistakes slipped by the author. “In the short story, *Two Friends*, she spoke of the ‘transit of Venus,’” and several astronomers wrote her that it could not have been a transit of Venus at the date, and must have been an ‘occlusion of Venus.’ [. . .] In the *Archbishop* she described the water at Arroyo Hondo as running up-hill in open wooden troughs, and was reproached for it sadly by one or two engineers” (161). In one instance, when the type was already set for *Shadows on the Rock*, Cather noticed a critical error. “I got a telegram from her, saying that throughout the story *Archbishop* Laval and *Archbishop* de Saint-Vallier must be changed to *Bishop* Laval and *Bishop* de Saint-Vallier. It must have been through pure

absent-mindedness that she made this mistake, for she knew the correct titles and had seen them hundreds of time in print [. . .] But she had got used to writing the word Archbishop,” writes Lewis (162).

The blurring and juxtaposition of fact and fiction, the real and the imaginary, journalism and literature supplies evidence that Cather did not rely on one point of reference and found validity in both forms. The essence of her novels was achieved by combining them. Mailer’s *The Armies of the Night* and Wolfe’s *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* can be cited as similar examples. Zavarzadeh writes that they are self-referential narratives with the aesthetic control associated with art, but they are also out-referential because they are externally verifiable. “The ultimate meaning of these books, however, lies neither in their internal aesthetic shape nor in their correspondence to the actualities of the empirical world, but in the fictuality which emerges out of the counterpointing of fact and fiction through their bi-referential mode: an acting out of the contemporary experience which defies being labeled as fact or fiction and interpreted in terms of any single metaphysical framework” (57). The critic goes on to explain that tension or conflict between fact and fiction or journalism and literature is required to create this alternative narrative form. “For without this tension, the fictuality of the narrative is reduced to the factuality of a document (*The Armies of the Night* becomes history) or the fictionality of a novel (*In Cold Blood* becomes a crime story)” (57). As a former journalist and aspiring novelist, Cather experienced this conflict and recognized the tension and its possibilities for fusing the credibility of facts with the poetry of literature.

In experimenting with a narrative that combined elements from both forms, Cather was highly selective. Journalism and facts validated her work; literature and fiction elevated it. The author's selective merger reveals that the borders of fact and fiction are flexible and that polarities and binaries aren't fluid enough to accommodate prose and narratives that attempt to define reality, particularly during times of rapid change in society and culture. For example, hypertext and the internet present opportunities for nonlinear prose forms. As opposed to print publications, which follow a linear format with readers going from a beginning to a middle and an end, online publications are nonlinear. Hypertext links make it impossible to guarantee the order in which a reader will approach a narrative. The reader may start at the beginning, or he may have linked into a later part of the text and be forced to go back to the beginning. He may link to other articles or information before reaching the end. As a result, readers create their own narratives by piecing together fragments via links. This aspect of online technology is prompting journalists and writers to adapt current forms and to explore new structures for narrative writing.

Cather's merger of journalism and literary writing enacts the same principle. Just as hypertext links function to encourage interactivity with readers, Cather's unfurnished novel, with its gaps and vacuoles, prods reader participation in the narrative process. Readers play a role in the creation of the story. This seemingly prescient characteristic of Cather's fiction, resulting from her experiments to merge journalistic, literary, and aesthetic elements, offers another reason to study her writing as a model of prose that combines fact and fiction.

Literary journalists and the new journalists experimented with the same overall concept—finding a better way to communicate reality. However, to maintain the journalistic integrity of the writing—its credibility and verifiability—they needed to stick to the facts. Nothing could be created, but that was not to say that the facts could not be written using a creative, literary style. While working on *The Executioner's Song*, a factual novel about convicted murderer Gary Gilmore's refusal to fight his death penalty, Mailer said he came to the realization that "God is a better novelist than the novelist. The story was not only incredible, but it most certainly had happened. If I had conceived it, the work would have been more dramatic but less true" (90). If Mailer had written it as fact-based, unbiased reportage, it would have remained true, but it would have been even less dramatic. An option is to tell about the factual event using "fine writing" or a literary style to make it more a story and less a history or a document.

New journalism and literary journalism offer an imaginative approach to factual reportage that allows the writer to participate in the narrative. Traditional journalistic writing is associated with the medium—an article in the *New York Times* or *The Washington Post*, for example. New journalism or literary journalism is more authorial, more attuned to the writers (Mills xvi). Hollowell writes that the most important difference between the new journalism and traditional reporting is the writer's changed relationship to the people and events he depicts. "Traditionally, the straight news article is based upon an 'objectivity' that requires a commitment to telling both side of the story, and an impersonality on the part of the journalist characterized by the lack of value judgments and emotionally colored adjectives" (22). The voice of the new journalist is

more subjective and exhibits personality at least in terms of writing style. While unbiased reportage is a standard principle of journalism, the concept of total objectivity doesn't exist. When a reporter chooses to quote one witness rather than another because the statement is more coherent; when a writer selects one anecdote from several available because that narrative appears more representative; or when one photograph is chosen from a dozen to be published with an article, there is bias in the selection process.

Cather used this selection process in her journalistic writing and appropriated it for her fiction by creating composite characters and scenes. Although Cather preceded the literary and new journalists, she recognized the significance of the writer's relationship to the people and events/characters and plot of the story. Bernice Slote writes that the crux of Cather's art is not only about the receiver or the reader, it's also about "the creator who must himself have looked on the real thing" (*Kingdom of Art* 46). Cather and literary journalists looked on the "real thing," and found the traditional genres for writing about it to be insufficient or inadequate. They realized new forms and structures of writing were needed to describe, explain, and define reality as its perspective changed during industrial, technological, and informational phases. They relied on past successes—the tried-and-true principles and theories of journalism and literature—as standards, and then they experimented. Some experiments worked better than others. In Cather's case, critics overlooked the major role journalism plays in her fiction—the monumental fusion and synthesis of facts, principles, theory, and style with her fiction. They failed to recognize how heavily journalistic practice impacted and informed Cather's fiction, how it shaped her writing into works that make sense of reality in an

emerging American culture because she based them on real facts and real-life experiences. And they failed to take a serious look at her newspaper writing, one that would have revealed innovative techniques that predated the new journalists and an astute intuition about readership and audiences.

Cather was an early literary journalist, one whose voluminous body of work offers numerous opportunities for studies in literary journalism, literary writing, and emerging forms of narrative prose. Her expansive vision into the possibilities of both genres and her ability to selectively grasp theories, principles, and styles in each to form a complex structure, capable not only of defining reality but giving readers a part in defining reality, is astonishing. Her view was expansive, her writing was experimental, her technique was innovative, and she always told a good story.

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